



Why I Volunteer

By Robert A. Zupkus

There is no single answer to the question of why I volunteer. It is further difficult to sum up the feelings and emotions associated with volunteering. The one-word answer to the question is "rewards." Yet that word spawns more questions. Rewards for whom? What type of rewards? Are the rewards worth the risks?

In addition to bar association activities, I volunteer by teaching a trial practice class at the local law school. Yes, there is a tiny honorarium paid by the school. The payment hardly secures my

financial future, however, and it's not the motivation for my efforts. I teach because of the rewards.

The rewards flow both to me and, I hope, the students. When I attended law school, there was no organized trial practice program. I learned how to try a case the old-fashioned way: interning with more seasoned attorneys as their second chair at trial. I absorbed only their successes and mistakes. I completed my trial residency flying solo in the courtroom as directed by firm partners who did not sit through the case to evaluate my efforts. All along in the back of my mind, I thought there must be a better way.

Serving as a volunteer instructor, I am convinced there is a better way. There is now a wealth of organized educational material on trial practice, excellent case studies, and blossoming demographic and statistical information concerning trial input and outcome. Students who

have taken my course are no longer strangers in a strange land when they first walk into a courtroom.

In preparing for my classes and working with the students, I am rewarded by further educating myself. I also value the commonsense input of the students on how they view the trial process. I am further rewarded with the knowledge that I provide neophyte trial attorneys with more practice and self-confidence in the courtroom than I ever enjoyed as a young lawyer.

I believe that, in some small way, the rewards also flow to the community. My classroom message stresses the concept that a trial is the doomsday device to resolve a dispute. Trial represents additional cost and outcome risk to the client. Young lawyers need to learn early that the romance of a trial, perhaps as seen on television, is not always in the best interest of their clients. As lawyers become fully skilled in educating a client about mediation, ADR, and commonsense negotiating, the community is rewarded with lower-cost dispute resolution and an enhanced image of attorneys.

Volunteering does entail risks. Time spent in volunteer efforts does take valuable moments away from family, friends, and the business of earning a living. Without a doubt, one must be prepared and precise in volunteer efforts. One can under-perform even in a volunteer setting, exposing one to criticism or diminished reputation. However, the rewards of well-done volunteer efforts clearly outweigh these risks and provide immense personal growth and satisfaction. **GPSOLO**

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