

# The Many Benefits of Bar Service



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Join a committee or workgroup, and enjoy the ride. I promise you won't regret it.

In this issue of the *Michigan Bar Journal*, my friend, colleague, and soon-to-be successor Rob Buchanan implores you, our fellow Michigan attorneys, to join a State Bar committee or workgroup. Why should you consider doing this? Let me count some of the ways.

First, if you haven't already done so, do yourself a favor and reread at least the Preamble to the Michigan Rules of Professional Conduct. At first glance, the rules appear to some as merely a set of instructions, or even admonitions. But they are so much more. They embody a set of ideals. They provide an important perspective on who we are and what we do as lawyers. Indeed, they are inspirational. And I hope you'll find that perspective to be helpful as you consider Rob's invitation.

The Preamble begins by noting, "A lawyer is a representative of clients, an officer of the legal system and a public citizen having special responsibility for the quality of justice." It goes on to explain that "[a]s a public citizen, a lawyer should seek improvement of the law, the administration of justice and the quality of service rendered by the legal profession." And "[a]s a member of a learned profession, a lawyer should cultivate knowledge of the law beyond its use for clients,

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employ that knowledge in reform of the law and work to strengthen legal education." (Emphasis added.)

So, as *public citizens* who are members of a *learned profession*, we have a special responsibility to serve the public. Providing legal services to clients is, of course, an important way that lawyers serve the public interest every day. Providing pro bono assistance to those who cannot afford legal services is another way. However, these are not the only ways. I submit that answering Rob's call to bar service is another really good way to satisfy your responsibilities as public citizens.

As a national innovator in moving the legal profession into the future, our State Bar provides countless outlets for lawyers to help shape the future of their individual practice areas and the legal profession as a whole. Our committees and workgroups focus on public policy affecting the administration of justice and practice of law, professional ethics, public education and outreach, and much more.

Beyond the public-service aspects, engaging with the State Bar in these activities can be tremendously rewarding for the lawyers involved, both professionally and personally. The opportunity to engage with other active and civic-minded colleagues in your practice areas helps you remain on the cutting edge of the law and grow your own practice. Contact with other lawyers across the spectrum of practices and specialties will inevitably widen and deepen the pool of prospective referrals for the work you do. Bar service also helps build your credibility

with peers, judges, and members of the broader community, all of whom will know you are committed to the important work of enhancing our profession, serving the public, and fighting the ever-present battle of helping to ensure that all those we serve have access to the justice they deserve. In short, by offering an opportunity to become a better *public citizen*, bar service also provides the opportunity to become a better and more effective attorney.

If my personal experience is any guide, perhaps the most rewarding aspect of bar service will be the relationships—indeed, the deep friendships—you will develop with so many bright, engaged, and generous public servants. The volunteers I've worked side by side with over the years have been some of the most remarkable attorneys and human beings I've ever known. As an officer of the State Bar and as a public citizen, I am enormously grateful for the privilege of seeing firsthand such a consistent level of care and commitment provided by lawyers serving their clients, the public, and their communities every day.

We all know that the practice of law can at times be a difficult and demanding way to make a living. As the old saw goes, "The law is a jealous mistress." But it can also be exceptionally rewarding, both on a professional and a personal level. One of the primary reasons it can be so rewarding is the public-service aspect of what we do. So, for your own sake, and for the sake of the public we serve, I implore you to give it a try. Join a committee or workgroup, and enjoy the ride. I promise you won't regret it. ■