



Tip of the Month December 2024

## **Volunteerism made easy in 3 simple steps!**

*by Muria Kruger, VLN Deputy Director*

Do you ever read the magazines in the check-out aisle of grocery stores? They have those quippy headlines that promise instant and great results, such as, “How to lose 5 pounds in 4 minutes while only eating cantaloupe,” or “Easy, three-minute meals your family will love made with only 1.5 ingredients.” Despite the ridiculousness of these headlines and the promises that they make, I am always drawn to them. And, they make waiting in line go faster.

So, in order to make your day more colorful and this article more engaging to read, here is my grocery store check-out line, headline grabber for you: “Volunteerism made easy, in three simple steps.” The colorful chart that would be included with this vibrant and entertaining article is [available here](#) or at [vlnmn.org/volunteer](http://vlnmn.org/volunteer) under “Volunteer Opportunities”. It lists all of VLN’s volunteering opportunities and the general time commitment for each. And, its short, so hopefully you can read it all before your ice cream melts.

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## **Volunteerism made easy in 3 simple steps!**

### **Step #1: Think deeply about what motivates you.**

Before deciding where you are going to spend any more of your precious time, think deeply about what motivates you. What issues, groups, or topics are so important to you that you want to spend time protecting or promoting them. Or, maybe you want to volunteer to develop a specific skill set or to expand your network in a specific community. All these are perfectly fine reasons to volunteer.

We all have limited time, but when we choose to do things that align with our energies, passions or goals, it becomes much easier to find time to do them. Volunteering for those things that are deeply important to us can become an opportunity, to quote a phrase often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, to be the change we wish to see in the world.

### **Step #2: Consider your schedule.**

Think about your schedule and how you work. Pick a volunteer commitment that matches with it. Do you have a reasonably predictable schedule where you can commit to a 2-hour clinic shift twice a month? Or, is your schedule a bit more chaotic, but you have blocks of time every once in a while? Do you prefer to do a pro bono task on an evening or weekend? Or, do you want to fit it in as your work day allows.

Full representation casework is generally better for an attorney with a less structured schedule, or for an attorney that may prefer to handle tasks outside of regular working hours. Regular clinic shifts (phone advice or in person) tend to be better for those who want to set-aside a specific block of time on a regular basis and limit the work to that block of time. It's also an opportunity to practice setting up boundaries to protect that time.

### **Step #3: Make a year-long commitment and strive for at least 50 hours.**

Gaak! Did I say that! A year-long commitment? 50 hours? That was bold of me, wasn't it. Did I lose you? I hope not. Please read further.

When you make an extended commitment to volunteerism, it creates efficiencies for everyone involved. You become more adept and skilled with continued practice in an area or law or a specific sub-group of clients. You might even help yourself enter into the magical area of work call "flow". And, with continued commitment, the work is then even more gratifying to you and your services to the client are better.

Fifty hours is also what our Rules of Professional Responsibility (Rule 6.1) proscribes, albeit in an aspirational way. There is a reason why we should be held accountable professionally to do this work. Lawyers are officers of the court. We know that people with lawyers fare better in court than people without lawyers, and lawyers are expensive. We cannot have a just legal system if only those that can afford a lawyer have access to one. It's our duty. We have created a system that demands that free or reduced-cost services are provided for much of our population.

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In conclusion, for those of you who already have an abundant pro bono practice, fabulous! Keep at it! For those of you who have been contemplating how to meet your pro bono professional commitment, I hope the above was helpful. A part of my new role at VLN is helping people plug into the volunteering role that works best for them. I'm happy to connect with anyone who has questions either by email at [Muria.Kruger@vlmn.org](mailto:Muria.Kruger@vlmn.org) or by phone at (612) 752-6647.