

LEADING WITH PURPOSE: HOW BOARD SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERING ELEVATE LEGAL CAREERS AND COMMUNITIES

By Katherine Tapp



**"SERVICE TO OTHERS IS THE RENT YOU PAY
FOR YOUR ROOM HERE ON EARTH."**

— MUHAMMAD ALI

Board service and non-profit volunteer work present exceptional opportunities for attorneys to further their careers while contributing positively to their communities. Engaging in these activities not only aids in personal and professional development, but also underscores the role of lawyers as vital contributors to societal welfare. The journey of involvement in these capacities can be enriching, enabling attorneys to leverage their unique skillsets, and while there are ethical considerations to keep in mind, the overall benefits are substantial.

Getting involved in board service or non-profit volunteer work requires a proactive approach. Attorneys should start by identifying organizations that align with their personal values and professional interests. This could include local non-profits, community organizations, or larger national entities with local chapters. Networking within the legal community can also open doors to volunteer opportunities. Attending bar association events, legal conferences, and community meetings can help attorneys meet like-minded professionals who are already engaged in such work and can provide recommendations and introductions. Additionally, many bar associations and law schools maintain lists of volunteer opportunities, making them excellent resources for those looking to get started.

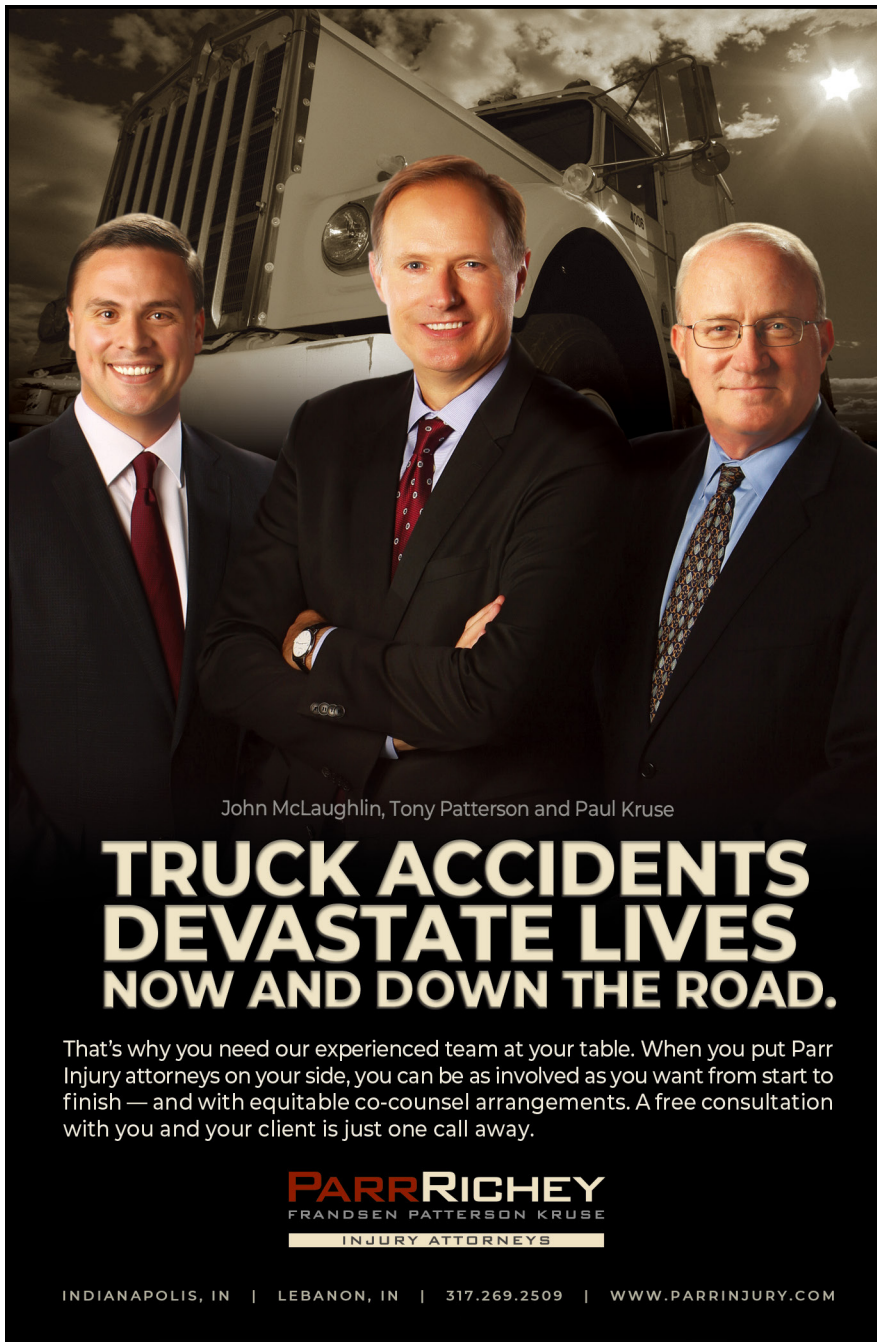
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Once an opportunity is identified, the next step is to offer one's services. Lawyers should present their legal expertise as a unique asset to the organization. This involves reaching out to the organization's leadership, expressing interest in their mission, and highlighting how their legal skills can support the organization's

goals. For example, an attorney might offer to help with legal compliance, draft policies, review contracts, or provide general legal advice. By articulating specific ways they can contribute, attorneys can demonstrate their value and commitment to the cause, making it more likely they will be invited to join the board or volunteer in a meaningful capacity.

Using legal skillsets in volunteer work not only benefits the organization, but also helps attorneys hone their skills in real-world scenarios. Legal expertise can be particularly valuable in ensuring non-profits operate within the legal frameworks governing their activities. For instance, attorneys can assist with navigating regulatory requirements, ensuring proper governance, handling employment issues, and protecting intellectual property. These tasks require meticulous attention to detail and a deep understanding of the law, skills that attorneys already possess and can further develop through hands-on experience. Moreover, volunteer work often involves working closely with diverse groups of people, enhancing an attorney's ability to communicate complex legal concepts to non-lawyers, which is a critical skill in any legal practice.

However, attorneys must also consider ethical risks when deciding where to volunteer their time. One primary concern is avoiding conflicts of interest. Lawyers must ensure that their volunteer activities do not interfere with their obligations to their clients or law firms. This includes being mindful of situations where the interests of the non-profit might conflict with those of a client or the attorney's own practice. For example, representing a non-profit in a legal matter



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that opposes a client's interests could create a significant conflict. Attorneys should conduct thorough conflict checks and seek guidance from their firm's ethics counsel or bar association if any potential conflicts arise.

Another ethical consideration is maintaining professional independence. Lawyers must ensure that their volunteer work does not compromise their ability to exercise independent, professional judgment. This means being cautious about becoming too personally involved in the organization's operations or allowing personal relationships to influence their legal advice. Attorneys should maintain a clear boundary between their role as a legal advisor and any personal involvement with the organization to ensure they can provide objective and unbiased counsel.

Confidentiality is also a crucial ethical concern. Attorneys must safeguard any confidential information obtained during their volunteer work, just as they would with client information. This requires implementing robust confidentiality practices, such as using secure communication methods and ensuring that any documentation is appropriately protected. Breaching confidentiality can not only harm the non-profit, but also damage the attorney's professional reputation and result in disciplinary action.

Despite these ethical considerations, the rewards of board service and non-profit volunteer work are significant. For attorneys, these roles offer a chance to make a tangible difference in their communities, build leadership skills, and expand their professional networks. The experience gained can translate into enhanced career opportunities,



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greater professional satisfaction, and a deeper connection to the community. Moreover, demonstrating a commitment to public service can enhance an attorney's reputation, making them more attractive to potential clients and employers who value community involvement and ethical practice.

In sum, board service and non-profit volunteer work provide a dual benefit for attorneys, enabling career advancement while contributing to the greater good. By taking proactive steps to get involved, leveraging their legal expertise, and navigating ethical considerations with care, attorneys can maximize the impact of their volunteer efforts. This engagement not only enriches their professional lives but also underscores the vital role of attorneys as

leaders and advocates within their communities. As the legal profession continues to evolve, the contributions of attorneys to non-profit organizations and community initiatives will remain an essential aspect of professional identity and legacy. ☎

Katherine Tapp is a dedicated civil rights and appellate law attorney practicing at Wicker / Brammell, PLLC, in Indiana and Kentucky. With a commitment to professional excellence and community service, Tapp serves on the Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program (JLAP) Committee and co-chairs the Indiana State Bar Association's Leadership Development Academy. As president of the Indiana Falconer's Association, she combines her legal expertise with her passion for falconry. Tapp is also a proud supporter of Floyd County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and the Community Action Alliance of Southern Indiana, demonstrating her deep dedication to advocacy and community involvement.