

As seen in The Bottom Line

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Promoting Your Practice Through Non-Profit Organizations by Robert N. Kohn and Lawrence M. Kohn

Becoming active in non-profit organizations is for many people one of the most fulfilling experiences. It brings the personal satisfaction of helping others in need. And it creates a meaningful connection to a community of friends.

However, in addition to personal satisfaction and connection, non-profits can be instrumental in promoting your practice. Here is why.

1. Non-profits provide opportunities to meet and interact with potential clients and referral sources. Non-profits often attract successful and well-connected leaders of a community.
2. When you do a good job for a non-profit, you simultaneously advertise your skills as a lawyer. For example, if in the course of carrying out your duties for the non-profit you are seen as being organized, efficient, trustworthy, intelligent and compassionate, then it is naturally assumed that you'll demonstrate the same qualities in your role as a lawyer.
3. Members of non-profits are by nature generous and appreciative. It is highly customary for members for non-profits to help each other. And a common way to be helpful is to refer business.

Clearly, there are significant reasons why non-profit involvement is beneficial for promoting your practice. However, there are also many reasons why professionals may feel that using a non-profit for practice promotion is inappropriate or impractical. Here are a few.

Insincerity

It is common for professionals to feel that their intentions in using non-profit organizations such as charities for personal gain are insincere. This feeling is understandable, particularly when personal gain is the sole objective. The solution to the obstacle of feeling insincere is to find a cause that you are genuinely concerned about. When your efforts to contribute value are sincere, you should feel more comfortable about receiving some personal benefit in exchange.

Time

Becoming active in non-profit organizations requires a sacrifice of time. More and more, non-profits are finding that young professionals are less inclined to make this sacrifice. This trend away from non-profit activities makes your participation even more valuable. Deciding whether or not to participate in a non-profit requires a reevaluation of priorities. This means analyzing its value in comparison to your other activities. You may also find that non-profit activities can be fun and involve family and friends. You may actually come to prefer it over some of your current past-times.

But be careful. Once you make a time commitment to a non-profit, make sure that you follow through. A failure to live up to commitments can easily backfire and leave the negative impression of being untrustworthy and irresponsible.

Money

With the cost of dues, events, and cash contributions,, it can be very expensive to participate in non-profit organizations. One technique for minimizing the cost is to make your contribution in the form of doing work. In fact, if you are not capable of making the cash contribution that you feel is expected, you might actually explain that while you are not comfortable making the cash contribution, you could contribute your skills and resources to help in some other capacity. For example, instead of donating money, you could help **raise** money. Or, you could help to find new members. Or you could volunteer the services of your staff for specific tasks.

Another pitfall of helping a non-profit is the issue of reciprocal contributions. There is the risk that when your friends make a contribution to your cause, they will think that this obligates you to contribute to their charity. The solution to this obstacle is to be firm in the conviction that your are not obligated to donate money to everyone who contributes to your cause.

Tips for maximizing success

Once you have made the decision that participating in non-profits for promoting your practice is both practical and appropriate, then the next step is to identify techniques for increasing the likelihood of success. Here are three important marketing tips.

1. Choose the right group

One of the greatest obstacles to marketing in non-profit activities is selecting a group that does not provide good networking opportunities. While there are many

fine causes worth supporting, not all of them are suitable for the purpose of practice promotion. Ineffective targeting can be emotionally defeating and lead to the conclusion that non-profits are a waste of marketing time. So, if one of your goals in selecting a non-profit is practice promotion, then try to find organizations that attract members who have needs for legal services, and who can afford your fees.

To find the right group, ask people you know – your clients, friends, and partners. You probably know several people who are currently aware of quality non-profits. And many of your contacts may be willing to invite you to a meeting and introduce you to some of the members. It is much easier to join a non-profit as a friend of a friend, than as a stranger.

2. Be a leader

Once you have selected a non-profit, then the next step is to develop a strategy for building relationships. The most effective strategy is to accept a leadership role such as joining, and ultimately even chairing a committee. There may also be speaking opportunities and publishing opportunities. Leadership in a non-profit organization will give you the maximum exposure to its members.

Leadership in a non-profit has the added benefit of helping you develop your personal selling skills. This is because as with leadership, selling requires the ability to publish, do public speaking, organize people and events, and inspire others to take action.

3. Recruit allies

Another tip for promoting your practice through non-profits is to recruit allies to join boards and committees. Recruiting allies such as clients and referral sources helps you to cement those relationships. And, if your allies believe in the cause, then they will feel inspired to recruit **their** friends and business contacts, who in turn you can meet.

So, promoting your practice through non-profits is a good deal all around. You help promote your practice, you help build the non-profit, and you do good deeds for others.