

Justice or Profits; Which is most important to you?

Justice and profits are two key themes that are often debated within the area of pro bono legal work and hence played a large role in my understanding of the area. My initial understanding was that solicitors either completely avoided pro bono work or took on a few cases periodically in order to look altruistic, and gain social credit. Hence, as an outside looking in, it seemed that pro bono work was of very little importance due to the lack of financial gain. However, since working through the open justice activities, it has become clear that my preconceptions were wrong, and that in fact pro bono work has huge moral value that should not be overlooked.

This dilemma is not solved simply, and as I continued in my research and understanding I found it encompassed a range of different themes. A key theme is professional identity. This refers to how legal professionals view themselves, 'Do members of the legal profession see themselves as public servants with a passion for justice? Or are they becoming more like business people, focusing on maximising profits?' Extract 1. This was one of the questions that was posted on my Open Portfolio, as I thought that it was critical to this debate and refers back to my initial stereotypical view of pro bono work and social gain.

Through my ongoing participation throughout our pro bono project, which explained the employment rights for workers outside of trade unions, I have extensively broadened my knowledge surrounding the reality of legal industry. I found the number of cases in which employers were abusing their employees through the denial of basic employment rights, shocking. Some particular examples I learnt about were; dismissal due to pregnancy and being paid under the national living minimum wage. Without the support of a trade union these employees are left unable to get access to justice, due to their lack of capital to fund a claim. It was at this pivotal moment where I began to query the fundamental issue of pro bono work, the financial reward of being victorious in a regular case, and the ethical duty one has to seek justice for another who would otherwise be left hopeless.

Initially I thought that law was there as a means to provide business. This led to my mindset centring around the need for legal professionals to maximise profits as this would increase cash flow for their company. This gave me confusion as to the need for professionals to even consider taking pro bono cases. However, it was upon the completion of my pro bono project, as well as the work from my team members, that led to my own professional identity changing. Moral integrity is not something that can be bought, and is something that legal professionals must maintain. One way they achieve this is through the combat of justice through pro bono cases.

To conclude this project has exposed me to many elements of pro bono legal work that I had not previously considered. The pro bono system is an essential pillar within the legal system that should not be overlooked. This project has made me appreciate that pro bono is more than just free legal help. The aim of the British constitution is to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equally, and that everyone should have access to justice, regardless of how much money they have. Consequently, I think both financial gain and moral justice should be treated equally within the legal system as without one you cannot have the other.

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