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How Your Law Firm Can Give Back to the Community This Holiday Season

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Tis the season for law firms to give back and expand on their charitable endeavors! For some firms, this may be a one-time holiday event, while others may choose an initiative that continues into the new year and beyond. Whatever the case, giving back helps firms solidify themselves as members of their communities with a vested interest in their people and their wellbeing, and also provides a powerful brand-building tool.

Let's explore the various aspects of law firm humanitarianism, including the benefits of giving back and some ways that law firms can serve their communities in the holiday season and throughout the year.

Why Give Back?

It should go without saying that the best reason for giving back to the community is helping those in need. Legal professionals should take an interest in the communities in which they work and the people they serve, which includes taking steps to address unmet needs. A charitable spirit is a perfect reason to give back, but it is far from the only one.

A 2019 [Forbes](#) article discussed the value of corporate philanthropy. It talks about the "do-good renaissance" currently taking place within the business world, where brands increasingly seek ways to do good in the world. This expansion into community giving is partially due to the industry pressure of keeping up with their competitors, but it also occurs in response to consumer expectations.

Consumers want to patronize businesses positively impacting the world, and that includes law firms. They appreciate when companies take on these endeavors as their responsibility.

This is particularly true among younger consumers who see their patronage as an indirect way of also giving back, so they choose businesses that engage in charitable ventures towards social good and actively support causes they also care about. **Giving back helps firms increase client and lead engagement.**

Community involvement also helps law firms to:

- Promote a strong firm culture by encouraging employees to get involved in the community service process. Firm members should be asked for their input as to which initiatives the firm

will pursue. They should also be encouraged to actively take part in the planning and execution of the project. These activities build stronger workplace relationships that translate to positive firm culture. Firmwide community projects can promote teamwork, communication skills, and problem-solving. The firm will collectively experience a sense of pride and satisfaction in having done something that benefits the community and assists their neighbors.

- Gain free publicity as local media covers the event and reports about it to the public at large. To encourage media coverage, firms can send out press releases that announce the event and include important firm details. In addition to media coverage, a successful community event can also result in the type of valuable word-of-mouth buzz that money cannot buy.
- Improve website performance through the increase of traffic to the website, especially if the event requires participants to register on the firm website. In addition, as the firm publishes information about the event on the site, search engines will recognize the increase in content pertaining to the local area. This strengthens local search engine optimization (SEO) so that firms rank higher in the results when potential clients search for law firms within their particular geographic area.
- Grow the firm's professional network by partnering with organizations that have already established themselves as community resources. For example, if your firm decides to participate in a holiday food giveaway, you may partner with the local food bank. In doing so, your firm leaders may meet and engage with other community leaders who also partner with the food bank. These connections can prove to be valuable opportunities for business growth.

Implementing a Charitable Plan

When developing and implementing a community service plan, your law firm should consider some important factors. First, take a serious look at your community to identify opportunities to provide assistance. For example, is there a large homeless population in need of assistance? Perhaps childhood hunger is a major concern, or the local sports league needs sponsors. You should evaluate your practice and employee strengths and interests, then select activities that capitalize on them.

Once a community need is identified, you can establish a goal and get firm employees invested in the plan. It's easy to write a check and walk away, but law firms benefit much more by involving employees in the giving back process.

By providing employees with an opportunity to give, law firms promote morale and collaboration among the team. For a single event, firms can divide tasks among firm members. For an ongoing initiative, firms may set aside a certain number of hours for employees to volunteer annually.

An important part of execution is sharing the charitable plan with your law firm's clients and the public at large. These stakeholders want to see the impact of your community investments, so make it easy for them to find it. Include a page on your website that highlights the firm's commitments. It could display the number of volunteer hours donated by firm members or the number of people helped through firm initiatives. Some firms choose to highlight the amount of money donated throughout the year.

This promotion may feel a bit unethical and against the charitable spirit, but the more profitable a law firm becomes, the more it can give back to the community. Highlighting the firm's impact on the world helps to attract new clients and satisfy current ones. It all comes full circle, your firm should not shy away from sharing its work within the community.

Ways to Give Back

Every law firm brings different skills and passions to the table, so it's important to find initiatives that fall within your practice culture. Here are some ways that law firms can make a difference within the communities they serve:

- **Pro Bono Work**

This is probably the most common form of law firm community investment. Many firms maintain a system for choosing and handling pro bono cases. Some do so through legal volunteer organizations that specialize in a specific practice area, while others allow their members to take on pro bono cases internally within their firms.

- **Monetary Donations**

Most nonprofits and community organizations need monetary donations to keep their operations running and continuously providing services, so a check is always greatly appreciated. Your firm may choose to identify a single organization for a donation or it may choose a particular cause and give donations to multiple agencies working within that space.

You can also sponsor a fundraiser with all proceeds going to a nonprofit. For the active members of the firm, a charitable sports tournament or race could be a great way to raise money while promoting teamwork. Your firm could also offer to match monetary donations that firm members individually make to their favorite nonprofits.

- **Volunteering**

Pro bono work is not the only form of volunteerism available to attorneys. Every community has organizations that need volunteers in order to maintain their operations. Firms can encourage members to find a cause that they personally care about and allow them to use a set number of firm hours each month to further that cause. Alternatively, the firm can identify one collective cause or organization for members to volunteer with on a regular basis or at a designated firm "day of service." Both options provide law firm members with an avenue for volunteering their time to the community.

- **Mentoring**

Law firms can provide valuable guidance to young people through mentoring programs. This may look like time devoted to school-aged children's programs or college student internships. Firms may also develop mentoring programs that assist adult community members, such as resume writing workshops or life skills training courses.

Community members look up to legal professionals and many would welcome an opportunity to learn from a law firm partner or associate. Through mentoring programs, law firms can give back to the community in the short term while positively impacting participants for years to come.

Authentic Community Giving Helps Law Firms Meet Two Needs

Whatever endeavor a firm undertakes, it must be done with a spirit of authenticity. Clients are

savvy, especially within today's environment, and they can easily recognize actions that are done for the purpose of furthering a firm's agenda rather than uplifting the community. No matter how big the effort, a lack of sincerity can result in a negative pushback. The greater visibility that results from a law firm's community actions are added benefits, but marketing should not be the driver behind community engagement.

Community engagement helps law firms meet two important needs: contributing to making the world a better place and strengthening the firm's reputation while bringing in more business.

Especially during the holiday season, law firms should embrace a charitable mission and craft a plan for giving back.

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