

Making Pro Bono Worth Reading About

By Melanie G. Lammers

Every legal professional seeks to find ways to make his or her resume stand out from the rest. Sometimes it can feel a lot like applying for college all over again. You may ask yourself, "Do I have enough volunteer work? Do I show knowledge and experience in a variety of areas? But do I still look focused and dedicated to my line of work? Most of all, does what I have come across as impressive enough to make an employer take interest?"

Ladies and gentlemen, every single experience is worth mentioning if you spin it the right way.

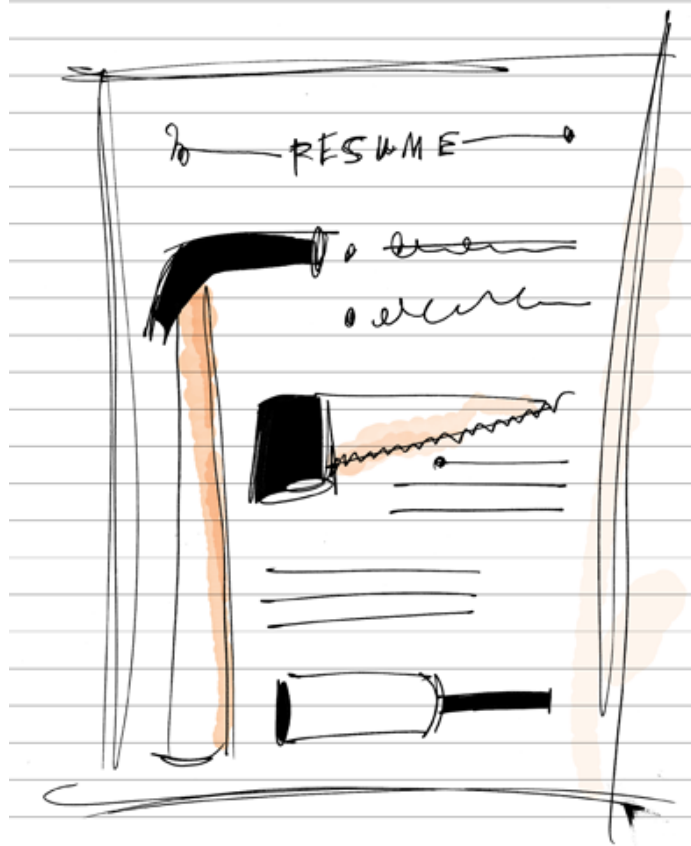
We have discussed in the past that every little detail of your life does not necessarily need to appear on the page. In fact, your bowling lessons and four-year-old son probably shouldn't show up at all. At the end of the day, though, anything that is remotely related to your field of work can be construed as something even more compelling if you take the time to frame it advantageously.

For instance, if I say I feed the homeless once every week with a church group, it sounds like volunteer work, but it also sounds like some kind of religious meeting. On the other hand, if I state in my resume, "Served as member of local team

feeding homeless weekly, educating on street survival methods, and advising on health issues," all of the sudden, I appear to have a heart of gold.

Also, memberships in prestigious organizations are perfect details to mention in a summary of qualifications section or as additional involvements at the bottom of the page. The Lions and Kiwanis clubs, for example, are usually very involved in local youth and fundraising events. These organizations, over time, have developed the misconstrued reputation of being for old, retired people, but anyone can contribute and make a difference if willing.

Participating in youth events and groups is actually a great way to give something back if you are not comfortable working with lower-income adults or perfect strangers. Many professionals—including parents and non-parents—volunteer with youth organizations like The Boys and Girls Club of America, the YMCA, the YWCA, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, local teen centers, or community parks and recreation programs, all of which offer good options for contributing to something beyond your profession.



ATTORNEY RESUME

The obvious pro bono work is the stuff that the firm you work for has labeled and supported as such, but even this can be livened up with the correct terminology. Do not forget to call yourself a “volunteer” or the organization a “nonprofit” whenever applicable. This may seem to be a given at first glance, but each mention can serve as an impressive push-button for employers specifically looking for people who are involved in the local community. Employee involvement reflects well on a firm, and its overall support of your efforts makes it appear more philanthropic-ergo, everybody wins.

As mentioned above, the best place to make reference to these involvements is in a summary of qualifications at the top (if they apply directly to your professional field) or in an additional involvements section at the bottom of the page.

The important thing to remember is that your volunteer work is only as impressive and meaningful as you make it sound. Listing organization after organization could mean that you have simply enrolled in each program and paid some dues. However, giving a short-but-sweet description of the work you have done to date and, perhaps, how it affected those involved will not only allow you to demonstrate that you made a more lasting impact on those in the program but will also give you the opportunity to make a lasting impression on employers.