

YOUNG LAWYERS

Nicole A. Cofer

Chairperson
Young Lawyer Section
The West Virginia State Bar



SERVICE IS THE ORDER OF THE DAY— BUILDING A MEANINGFUL EXISTENCE

The direction that we take in our lives and careers are shaped by many different factors, and often heavily shaped by those around us. Many circumstances, such as the choice of our parents, stem from incidents completely outside our control; and, others are shaped through decisions and associations that we have made throughout our lives from choices of friends, schools, organizations and affiliations. When I reflect on how I became an attorney in the public sector, I find that all roads led me right where I am. I am blessed with two parents who showed me by example daily the benefit of both hard work and service to others. My parents maintain that my career choice made perfect sense to them as I always fought for things to be just and fair, even as a little girl. In college, I decided to join Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated® and my graduate

chapter mentor, Rhonda Taliaferro, would tell me “service is the order of the day, every day.” This mantra and mentality have been continually reinforced throughout my life and resulted in me serving my home state of West Virginia first as an Assistant Attorney General and, currently, as the West Virginia Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor and an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney with Kanawha County.

You may be thinking, why is she sharing this with me and why should I care? I give you a snapshot of my story to help you understand my perspective regarding the importance of service to others. New York Times’ Best-Selling Author, Jack Canfield, said that “[w]hen your dreams include service to others — accomplishing something that contributes to others — it also accelerates the accomplishment of that goal. People want to be a part

of something that contributes and makes a difference.” Being a part of something greater than oneself and serving a greater good is not only personally fulfilling, but it also helps bring about change for others in our communities. If Muhammad Ali is correct that “service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth[,]” then each of us has a responsibility that extends further than just ourselves and our own personal desires and needs. Understand that I am not suggesting that you need to be a public sector attorney to substantiate your existence on this Earth. I understand that this life and lifestyle are not for everyone; however, the takeaway here is that each of us needs to find our way to insert service into our practice and our lives.

You may now be thinking, okay, but how do I do that? Acts of service can include a host of things, and

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—Muhammad Ali

it may not look the same to everyone. It can include working in the public sector, but it is not limited to that. Acts of service also include, but are not limited to, volunteering in a soup kitchen or a neighborhood clean up, volunteering at your local boys and/or girls club or making donations to the charity of your choice. Service can also include service to the Bar community and the practice. This can also include volunteering your time on any of the Bar’s more than 30 committees, being a part of the solution for access to justice issues by registering as a participating lawyer in the Bar’s lawyer referral system, volunteering two hours from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Tuesday evenings for the Tuesday Legal Connect, being a volunteer attorney in West Virginia Free Legal Answers post system or even taking on some court appointed cases. For the seasoned lawyer, consider volunteering your time or your ear to mentor a young attorney to help them grow in the practice of law. Sharing knowledge through mentoring helps to ensure that the young lawyers of today will continue the reputable practice of law in our state into the future. For our young lawyers, another option is contacting your district representative and joining fellow young lawyers in events across our state. The West Virginia Young Lawyers Section has taken on projects ranging from assisting flood victims in

Clay county, helping families in need during the holiday season, providing lunch and learn activities at the law school and donating lunches for furloughed employees.

In the words of our late 41st President George H. W. Bush, “[t]here could be no definition of a successful life that does not include service to others. Find something to do. Get off the bench. Don’t sit there, whining, sucking your thumb — get in the game.” This is in no way a mandate that you must follow a path like mine to be successful and fulfilled in life, as your metric for success and personal fulfillment may be different from mine; but this is a call to action encouraging all lawyers, both new and seasoned, to find an avenue to give back to our legal community and your home community. Find an activity or organization that gets you off the bench and in the game, to be a change agent for the better in our communities. In reflecting on the life and philosophies of his grandfather, George P. Bush offered “[t]he fulfillment of a complete life cannot be achieved without service to others[.]” and I am inclined to agree because, as a wise woman once taught me, “service is the order of the day, every day.” My responsibilities in this life are larger than just me and it is important to remember that some of our best work stems from our service to others. **WVL**