



Tikkun Olam: When public service is a sacred obligation

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"Tikkun olam," or the "repair of the world," is a sacred obligation for Jews and one that Jonathan Baum, senior counsel and director of pro bono services, took seriously from a young age. Raised by activist parents, Jonathan was exposed to the importance of standing up for what's right, whether that was his mother chaining herself to a tree to prevent it from being bulldozed or his father protesting the Vietnam War.

In an *ABA Journal* "Your Voice" column, Jonathan writes about how his early exposure to activism shaped his legal career, leading him to balance private practice with public interest work and ultimately to his role leading Katten's pro bono program. Jonathan proposed the then-novel approach to large law firm pro bono management over 30 years ago. At the time, such positions were rare, but today, there are hundreds across the country.

In his column, Jonathan acknowledges that the opportunity to engage in public interest work as an attorney is often constrained due to a lack of full-time public interest jobs and the low pay associated with these roles. He warns against the tragedy of law graduates abandoning their idealism and neglecting public service work when they can't secure full-time public interest roles.

Jonathan believes pro bono work can and should be a part of a legal career. For new attorneys, he recommends asking about a firm's pro bono commitment during interviews, identifying pro bono mentors within the firm and maintaining good standing in their billable work. Katten encourages and facilitates pro bono work by providing billable hour credit for pro bono work, engaging in "matchmaking" to align attorneys with pro bono opportunities that match their interests, providing training, and celebrating those who render pro bono service.

Through his pro bono work, Jonathan has had the opportunity to make a difference in numerous ways, from securing asylum for refugees to representing victims of hate crimes. His hope is that future generations of attorneys will integrate pro bono work into their practices, fulfilling their obligation of "tikkun olam" through their legal service.

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