



Steven Wernick of Wernick & Co. Courtesy photo

Unsung Heroes: Steven Wernick Highlights How Pro Bono 'Elevates' Lawyers

"Firm leaders should help lawyers connect with organizations and causes that are meaningful and fulfilling, not simply a managing partner's pet cause," Steven Wernick said.

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Awards



Raychel Lean

Steven Wernick leads Wernick & Co.

Law practice is often a team endeavor. What has been your experience with teamwork in the law?

Teamwork in the law isn't easy. It requires trust and collaboration, while lawyers are taught to solve problems independently. The Wynwood Norte Neighborhood Revitalization District legislation required ultimate teamwork between our small team of attorneys working at Wernick & Co. on behalf of the Wynwood CEA, we had to work in concert with the City of Miami Planning Department and the Law Department to research best practices, draft legislation implementing zoning solutions consistent with the city's comprehensive plan and ensure the legislation met all state and municipal requirements.

What types of work done at law firms and other organizations are commonly underappreciated?

Educating stakeholders in the community has become a critical part of my practice. There are times clients don't appreciate this work and even flag it as not billable and outside an

attorney's scope of work. Some clients fail to realize that giving people a voice is powerful and that helping give a voice to others builds a stronger and more resilient community. You create pride and ability in others. You become a respected figure and trusted adviser, which contributes significantly to the overall goal.

What must firms do to ensure that lawyers remain engaged with pro bono work, their communities and their families?

Firms should recognize and credit meaningful pro bono efforts and the value it brings to both the lawyer and the firm. When lawyers take on a lead role in a pro bono matter, they elevate their confidence and independence and flex their problem-solving muscles in new ways. This work helps promote the firm. Firm leaders should help lawyers connect with organizations and causes that are meaningful and fulfilling, not simply a managing partner's pet cause. In addition to giving billable credit to pro bono hours, I'm a believer in encouraging attorneys to take family leave once per year, whether for the birth of a baby or taking care of a sick loved one or being a caregiver to an aging grandparent.

What professional lessons did you learn from the COVID-19 pandemic?

The business of law is requiring more specialization in delivering tangible value to clients. As technology makes routine lawyers' tasks obsolete, lawyers must provide valued counsel. Clients are looking for an attorney they trust and one who knows how to identify and solve their problems. Legal professionals that understand their value proposition and can articulate solutions will have enormous potential to thrive. The business of law also means getting more multidisciplinary. Like with Wernick & Co., firms will benefit from strategic partnerships across law, design, engineering and consulting to elevate the coordination of services being delivered to clients.

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