

President's Award Presentation

2013 Pro Bono Institute Annual Dinner – November 7

Remarks from David Williams, CEO of Deloitte Financial Advisory Services LLP

Thank you so much for this special honor. On behalf of Deloitte and our people, I can't tell you how humbled we are to be recognized for our work by the Pro Bono Institute, an organization that is a "giant" in our eyes when it comes to transforming the way we all look at pro bono.

With a small staff, and fearless mentality, you have energized us to do more, to rethink what's possible, and to connect more broadly with one another to create positive change in our communities. It's fair to say that the courageous work of the Pro Bono Institute has been a tremendous source of inspiration for all of us in this room and many outside of it.

Before I share a little about Deloitte's pro bono journey, I have to start with congratulations of my own, and that's to recognize Esther, who was named one of American Lawyer's "top 50 innovators" in August.

It's a huge distinction and, Esther; all of us who have worked alongside you understand how deserving of it you are. For me personally and for Deloitte, partnering with the Pro Bono Institute has been a standout opportunity. And we're better for it.

I also want to congratulate each and every one of you for the great work that you continue to do to advance the field of pro bono. You are the leaders that we look to when we need inspiration.

Because you are committed to pushing the limits on what we can achieve, great things are happening. Look at the examples being set by Alston & Bird, Morgan Lewis, and HP -- It's inspiring.

This night is about celebrating all of our accomplishments. It's also about talking about what we can get done when we put our best thinking to the challenges.

We know how steep those challenges are.

The world is reeling from poverty and inequality. Many have limited access to education, justice, basic human rights. Some go each day without clean drinking water. In too many cities, the "nearby park" where kids can climb, run, and swing isn't nearby.

In the face of these issues, it would seem the odds to make a real difference are flatly against us.

Do you remember Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal journalist slain by terrorists? His wife, Mariane, had every reason to believe that the ability to effect real change was hopeless.

But here's what she said: "The world belongs to us, and it also belongs to us to change it."

That statement is about hope, courage . . . and something else. Responsibility. A responsibility to do something important, to get something done. This quote really resonates with me because it's very much how we approach pro bono at Deloitte.

When I think about our journey, what I am most proud of is the decision we made a few years back to put pro bono on par with everything else that we do. To make it truly a part of our business and how we operate. To bring the same level of leadership to pro bono that we bring to the market.

We realized that organizations trust us to solve their toughest problems and help them succeed every day. And that, if we brought that same focus to our pro bono work, there was no telling what we could accomplish.

Since launching our vision, the journey has been phenomenal.

Our pro bono work has taken us into classrooms, and into Congressional briefings to end child hunger. We've used our geospatial analytics to help build playgrounds in Washington D.C., our forensic capabilities to help organizations stem global corruption, and to help Haiti rebuild. We've helped disadvantaged students get to -- and through -- college. And veterans re-enter the workforce.

There are so many great stories, and so many great stories yet to write. And we understand we can't write them alone, not if we're going to take on the big issues in a big way.

As a colleague put it, "Any individual company can make a difference -- but 500 companies working side by side can change entire communities." And so, another cornerstone of Deloitte's pro bono program is collaboration. And, the result has been a number of innovative partnerships, including with many of you in this room.

One great example is the work we're doing with the Pro Bono Institute, Merck, WilmerHale, and others to create a measurement framework that will be used by in-house legal departments and law firms to evaluate the social and business benefits of pro bono services.

Another is a project with the National Center for Access to Justice to build a "Justice Index" that we believe will go a long way in crafting a response to breakdowns in the system. We are joined in this effort by Pfizer, Skadden Arps, UBS, the University of Pennsylvania Law School, and the Cardozo Law School.

I can't speak more highly of what partnership can do in expanding what's possible. And, then there's the most powerful resource of all in our ability to make a difference. And that's, our people.

It's true -- you save the best for last. We have some of the smartest, most caring and dedicated people that I have ever had the privilege to work with and know.

They are out in the field in those community-based organizations giving it their all. They are the ones building confidence in a better tomorrow.

And, none of them, I can tell you, thinks we're anywhere near done in terms of what we can do.

I'm honored to be joined by some of my colleagues this evening. It is on their behalf, and on the behalf of all of our professionals at Deloitte who are taking the lead every day, that I thank the Pro Bono Institute for this incredible honor.