



## *When giving something away makes sense...*

I really love cold weather... The colder the better. When the days start getting shorter and the leaves on the trees start to turn, I am happiest, knowing that my favourite months of the year are on their way... Winter.

Nearly everybody I know thinks I'm crazy. What's to look forward to at this time of year? It's cold, dark for longer, it rains and it seems the sun forgets about rotating over this part of the world for a few months... You like that???

Absolutely.

Apart from the recharge I get from sucking in lungful's of cold air, I also think of winter as a time of renewal.... A time of giving back. Even nature seems to get into the spirit of giving.... Trees lose their leaves, allowing them to breakdown and enrich the soil. Squirrels are allowed the nuts the trees have grown and nurtured over the previous six months. In short, nature rests and recharges before the onslaught of spring with all of its vigour and activity.

So too it is with business. We typically go through periods of intense activity, and periods of rest and recovery. But all too

often we forget about the period of giving back...

Quite often at this time of the year thought turn to how much profit our businesses have generated over the last 6 or 12 months. The calculator comes out and the spread sheets are generated as we look to what has to happen and what we plan over the next 6 to 12 months to sustain or improve performance.

We think about opportunities that exist - whether it is a new client or more business from

*At this time of year many start to think about profits, and potential clients who couldn't afford our services, even if they needed it.*

existing clients. Just occasionally, we also think about those clients which you could have worked for, but they could not afford your services. We even might think about people who could not even afford to ask, but who could have benefited from our assistance.

In most businesses there is an ability to support those who are struggling. Either in cash or in kind, there are avenues available to give a hand to somebody who really could do with your expertise or assistance.

Pro bono. Charity. Freebees.

It's a sad fact that despite living at a point of time where there is more wealth in the world than any time in history (despite Greece and the GFC) we are also at a point in time where governments, businesses and individuals are giving less than ever before to those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

Often we think that the only way that we can give back to the community, be that our business community or the community at large, is by giving money to recognised charities. Whilst this is important and encouraged it is not the only way.

Those that have a talent within business that is a saleable commodity often consider given a portion away Pro Bono per annum as a charitable act. There's a saying which you have probably heard. "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he'll be able to

eat for life and feed his family”. The exact same principal should be considered when thinking about Pro Bono work.

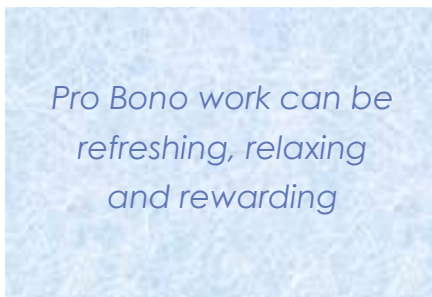
In most industries, you know of people who might need a hand up to the next level. You can see how they would benefit from being pushed along a little. Inside your business are the skills, resources or capabilities to help them. It can be as simple as the one-off use of your meeting room to a business trying to get on its’ feet or “lending” a person who has a particular expertise for a day to help an individual or organisation through a problem... the opportunities are endless.

Pro bono or freebees have several benefits:

- An individual or business who receives your help will be in a better position than they would have been without your intervention
- You can build a strong relationship with another company or individuals
- You and your employees benefit from being challenged by a situation which quite often is different from the norm, pushing you to get a result in a different way.
- Finally, you and your employees can feel more connected with the society in which they

operate by the simple act of giving back, without strings attached.

You should never underestimate the value of pro-bono work on you and your employees.



I recently stumbled across a case of pro bono work which blew me away; not because of the quality of the job, but because of the enduring nature of the relationship which had been established. A lawyer had decided to give up one day a week, every week to work with a farmer. What had started as a once-off opportunity had developed into a 4 year long association. I asked the lawyer why he kept coming out to the farm. His response was simple. I find the work refreshing, the lack of legal complexities relaxing, and most of all I enjoy using my hands. As a result I am more effective the other days of the week when I am doing my ‘other’ job.

Interestingly, the farmer told me how much he benefited. “I get more done those days, I am more relaxed and I’ve even learned some law. You know,

people now even pay me on time – it’s like having a big dog protecting your interests all the time”.

While not every pro-bono piece of work will end this way, in many instances friendships can develop which benefit both businesses, allowing an informal network of people who can help each other out to be built. While this sort of business network is not the primary objective of pro bono, it can be a beneficial outcome.

So how do you start? There are several groups which will help you understand how pro bono can work for you and your business. They can help you create a program which suits your needs. The other way which often works better for small business is to simply allocate a certain number of days a year (usually 2 or 3) and then be on the lookout for opportunities that come across your desk where you might be able to make a real difference. It might be packing Christmas hampers or volunteering some time for free legal work at a seniors centre. It might even be charging out materials but not labour on a building job, or it could be letting a struggling business use your board room.

The key is to start. Do you pro bono?