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"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth," said Stan Levy, quoting Muhammad Ali. Levy, a lawyer and a rabbi, helped start several legal nonprofits and now oversees pro bono activities at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips.

## Veteran Lawyer Lists Tips for Starting a Pro Bono Operation

By **Amelia Hansen**  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

After graduating from UCLA Law School in 1965, Stan Levy's career path was guided by a securities law professor and a legendary prize fighter.

The professor, Levy recalled, urged the recent grads to think about not just making a living, but what they could give back. The fighter inspired by talking about philanthropy in philosophical terms.

"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth," said Levy, who came across Muhammad Ali's famous quote on a calendar he'd received.

Levy has dedicated a good part of his personal and professional life to serving others.

An ordained rabbi, Levy helped establish three of Los Angeles's biggest nonprofit legal organizations. He was one of the first four attorneys at the Western Center on Law & Poverty, a legal advocacy group for low income individuals. He served as executive director at Public Counsel, now the largest pro bono public interest law firm in the world.

Levy also co-founded the Jewish-based legal nonprofit for the poor, Bet Tzedek — which means "The House of Justice" in Hebrew.

These days, he is a senior attorney at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips in Los Angeles where he practices complex litigation and is chair of the firm's pro bono committee.

Earlier this year, Manatt announced Levy would serve as the volunteer national director for Bet Tzedek's pro bono program for Holocaust survivors. Created in response to a German government financial reparation program, the Bet Tzedek program offers free legal assistance for survivors who need help filling out applications and making declarations.

Levy said hundreds of attorneys have volunteered at survivor clinics around the country.

"This is clearly one of the most important things I have ever done and I am very grateful to be able to do it," Levy said.

Of course, not all of Levy's clients are freebies.

After his early years in public interest work, Levy decided to join the private sector. He had a young family to support and

wanted to earn a better living.

Levy worked as a general litigator for two small firms before being hired as general counsel of jeans maker Guess? Inc. in 1992. Four years later, he was appointed by President Clinton to a White House panel tasked with developing labor standards for the footwear and apparel industries. Levy joined Manatt in 1998 and now represents numerous corporate clients including Adidas, USA, McDonald's and Toyota.

Levy understands the importance of paying clients and the challenges of founding your own organization. He is, nevertheless, encouraging of attorneys interested in starting their own legal nonprofits — as he did some 40 years ago.

He does not invoke Ali's words as advice, but uses his own.

"Be imaginative, creative and passionate about your own pro bono program," Levy said. "Believe and have faith in what you are doing and communicate that to others whom you want to get involved."

Levy's top five recommendations for how to do it:

- 1. Think through your infrastructure.** Choose your governing board carefully. Make sure members buy into the same basic philosophy and that everybody is rowing in the same direction. Members should not just be people who will give or raise money, but who are sensitive to the issues and can provide the micro as well as macro view. Consider law professors, college professors and community organizers. Build alliances.
- 2. In the beginning, set clear, attainable goals.** Long-term goals may be different, but it's important to have success at the beginning.
- 3. Look carefully at funding sources.** There may be strings attached — and you may not want those strings.
- 4. Network with your courts, churches and community organizations.** Make sure you are listed as a pro bono referral source.
- 5. Make sure there's payoff for everyone involved.** Make sure the person you've helped feels good about it and the lawyer feels like they're learned a lot and helped someone.

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