

Volunteer Attorney: Kenneth Hallett



Attorney Hallett currently practices at Quarles & Brady in the Corporate Services Group, focusing his practice primarily in the area of securities law (including offerings, continuing compliance, and corporate governance), with a related practice in mergers and acquisitions. He also practices on their Financial Institutions Team, focusing on financial institution acquisition and expansion transactions. He represents clients in numerous industries, including the manufacturing, technology and financial services sectors. Mr. Hallett was recently named one of the 2014 Leaders in Law by the Wisconsin Law Journal.

How did you first get involved with the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic?

My firm, Quarles & Brady, has partnered with the MVLC for the Spanish-speaking clinic since it began in 2008. I was not one of the original volunteers for that effort, but a few months after it began, Lars Gulbrandsen, one of my litigator friends here who has worked with the clinic from the beginning, asked me if I'd like to participate. As I recall, his ever-so-smooth invitation was something along the lines of, "It's so straightforward that even a corporate attorney like you can handle it." With a challenge like that, how could I say "no"? Seriously, though, the MVLC is a great opportunity for someone like me whose practice (public company securities compliance) does not readily lend itself to traditional pro bono work such as representing an indigent person in court or filing an appeal. While at the clinic I'm regularly thrown into questions and situations with which I'm not familiar, I still am in a much better place than the clinic's clients and can usually help them find answers or at least resources.

Why did you choose to continue to work with the MVLC?

As I said, this is a good pro bono opportunity for me, given my practice. I fondly refer to my shifts at the clinic as my "monthly lessons in humility". Humility is a virtue. Working at the clinic is humbling for me in two primary ways: First, it helps me be grateful for the opportunities I've had, and that I haven't found myself in the dire situations with which many of the MVLC clients need to cope. I have a lot to be thankful for. And, second, it reminds me that there a lot of things that I don't know much about, so I ought not pretend I do.

Has your work at the MVLC been of any assistance to you professionally?

I think that any opportunity to exercise lawyering skills helps one improve them, and using them in a new or unfamiliar context can help hone them further. But, I can't say that I've had much of a chance to use my SEC expertise nor have I gotten any new public company clients through the clinic.

What advice would you give to students in law school?

Find your passion, or at least a passion, and follow it. Life is too short, and your working life will be too long, to not like what you're doing. Also, when you start practicing, keep a client focus. In other words, concentrate on what your client needs and wants from you, not what you want to, or think you can, provide your client. And, maybe most importantly, don't take yourself too seriously.

What do you wish someone had told you about entering the law profession after getting your JD?

I'm a "first generation" lawyer - the first in my family, and I'm really not sure how many lawyers I even knew or had met before going to law school. But, I was very fortunate to have many people (lawyers, law students, and many others) who, whether I realized it at the time or not, mentored me, raised my sights, gave me invaluable information and insights, and generally helped me navigate some very unfamiliar paths. So, I benefited more than I knew at the time, and more than I can even recall or fully appreciate now, from what people told me, and more importantly showed me, about heading into the legal profession. So, I'm grateful for that, and I really can't really say that there is something else I wish I had received from them.

But, looking back on the almost [ahem]ty-four years since I graduated from law school, if you had told me then how much the practice of law would change over my career, I'm not sure I would have believed you. Maybe this is an "old guy's" lament, but the technology of practice, the expectations of our clients, the expectations of our colleagues, and the very communities and economy in which we practice are in some ways hardly recognizable as compared to

what they were when I started in my career. So, don't assume that your career and the practice of law will continue to look like what it does today. Be ready for change, and be nimble with it when it comes.

Why is it important for lawyers to do pro bono work?

We all have benefited much from the community around us. It's important, it's our duty, to give back to the community. Whether that is through pro bono or other community service, it's a simple matter of sharing with others, helping the less fortunate, and making this a better place to live because of us. That's important for everyone, not just lawyers, but even more so for lawyers who may have the training, means and platform for doing that effectively.

How, if at all, has your experience with the MVLC enriched your notions of justice?

Interesting question. My experience certainly has reminded me that there are people out there who, for all sorts of reason, are essentially outside the legal system and don't have effective access to, or understanding of, the justice system that we all take for granted. It's sobering to see how even language barriers or a lack of familiarity with the court system can inhibit people's ability to seek remedies for their situations. Conversely, sometimes gives them an inflated view of what "justice" may mean or the ability of a court to remedy every perceived wrong. But, sometimes those we serve just need someone to listen to them. Maybe we can't solve the total overall problem, but helping address this need one person at a time is yet another good reason for our pro bono service.