

## **What Does “Giving Back” Really Mean?**

What does the idea of "giving back" really mean? This was the topic of conversation during a networking session with CAPIC members last week. Answers to this question ranged from donating money or services, to volunteering in the community, or simply giving back something to someone. We discussed the idea of “giving back” in the context of the profession, with clients, and the world at large. Some noted that "giving back" is part of our DNA, and we should all give back to the world in some small way, whatever that might be. Others however, pondered on this idea and spoke of the significant need to ensure that their own needs be met before they can effectively give back to others. There was a robust discussion on how to service clients who may not be able to pay promptly for services, and how arrangements can be made to accommodate such clients. Many suggestions came forth, however, the idea of "not being taken advantage of" due to your desire to give back was also emphasized. Some spoke of their experience in providing generous payment arrangements, lower fees charged, and extraordinary service provided. Most indicated that this type of arrangement often works, while others noted that there are those clients who do not often abide by the arrangements. In other words, these are clients who keep "taking, taking, taking". We thus asked the question, where do you draw the line? In addition, many shared stories of feeling great gratitude and immense happiness in helping those in extraordinary need, whether it be professionally or in their private lives. Below are snippets of our conversation, and some thoughts on the topic. We hope that you find them interesting and useful. Know that the service you provide already, even if paid, is one of great importance in providing competent, thoughtful, and diligent service to those who wish to make Canada their home, whether temporarily or permanently.

**The following points are listed in no specific order:**

1. Consider doing at least one pro-bono case a year. Understand that even if you are providing a free service, the client deserves the same treatment and counselling as a paid client. In fact, it is mandated in the Code.
2. As humans, we should work to have empathy and compassion in our lives.
3. Work to be objective within the framework of compassion.
4. Ensure that you are properly set up to serve your pro-bono client. Do you have sufficient time? The proper knowledge? Resources? Are you able to afford pro-bono services? Consider these questions before taking on such client.
5. Giving back is a wonderful thing, but it is important that you look after yourself as well. Taking on a complex pro-bono case can often be very stressful.
6. Protect your physical and mental health, especially when dealing with sad situations and vulnerable clients. Go for a walk, meditate, or seek professional help if you are struggling.
7. Have discretion when deciding to "give back". Ensure that your client is genuine and legitimate. As much as the client may be doing due diligence on you, do your homework as well!

8. Giving back can occur in many ways—it is not always a money donation. You may decide to offer settlement services, be part of a group of sponsorships, or be a mentor to a new immigrant. You may also consider being part of immigration clinics that offer free advice.
9. Many practitioners struggle in deciding to do free consultations or not. Value your time and know you have a service to offer.
10. Giving back can be immensely rewarding and good for the soul. It can also have tangible benefits, in terms of getting referrals and new clients.