

Corporate Counsel's Finding: Pro Bono Work Feels 'Great'

BY JO BENNETT
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Anahaita Kotval apologizes when strangers enter her office at the investment banking firm RBS Greenwich Capital Markets. Every available bit of floor or desk space that isn't claimed by pictures of her family members is occupied by boxes and folders filled with the documents that are the lifeblood of her work as managing director and associate general counsel at the Steamboat Road-based company.

Kotval's office's window has a picturesque view of Indian Harbor, but she confesses that she doesn't have much time to gaze that way during the workday. She has the brisk walk and energetic demeanor of an athlete, and when asked about her off-the-clock pursuits, she mentions in an offhanded way, "I'm a second-degree black belt in karate." Two nights each week she teaches her sons' (10 and 11) karate classes in Tarrytown, N.Y. where she and her family lives. And oh, yes, when her "free" time isn't consumed by in-house litigation or regulatory inquiries, she's helping those in the nonprofit sector, through an organization known as Pro Bono Partnership.

Established in 1997 by members of The Corporate Bar Association, the Partnership links the resources of corporate legal departments with organizations serving the poor and disadvantaged populations.

"The feeling at the time was that while the Bar was helping nonprofits through fund-raising, it would be of even greater benefit if members used their skills sets for the benefit of the community," described Executive Director Rick Hobish.

Volunteer of Year Accolades

The organization recently selected Kotval as "Volunteer of the Year," said Hobish. "Through the hard work of people like Anahaita, we've been able to leverage every dollar contributed into providing many more dollars worth of legal services so community organizations don't have to divert their precious resources to address legal crises," he



Anahaita Kotval, managing director and general counsel at RBS Greenwich Capital, was recently recognized by the Pro Bono Partnership as "Volunteer of the Year."

explained.

Thrilled, but self-effacing in describing her contributions as just a "way to give back to the community," Kotval said it's not easy quantifying the amount of time she devotes to helping nonprofits through the organization. "I do a lot of litigation and employment law - that's my expertise," she said.

"I've done a lot of work with a women's shelter in Westchester, N.Y., and sometimes they just need someone to help steer them through an investigation where, maybe, an employee feels that [he or she has] been discriminated against in a termination.

Kotval first learned about Pro Bono Partnership three years ago through her superior, General Counsel Sheldon Goldfarb, who had received a letter from the organization inviting RBS Greenwich Capital to participate.

"Some [situations] involve just an hour on the phone where they just need counsel," she said of one organization, White Plains, N.Y.-based My Sisters' Place, a

nonprofit assisting victims of domestic violence, which she has volunteered the most time toward. "I'd rather see them spend that \$600 they would have spent on legal fees helping battered

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Other projects she's worked on, such as helping organizations revise their bylaws or writing personnel policy guides, are longer-term.

A desire to help others was the impetus that led Kotval to pursue

her profession. The granddaughter of a judge, she said she's been intrigued since her high school days by the idea of working in a role where she could help effect change. As a senior at Woodlands High School in Hartsdale, N.Y., she interned at the Legal Aid Society in White Plains. "I was just impressed with it," she said of the experience. "A person comes in with a problem and your job is to fix it. I really enjoyed it, and that was what eventually lured me into law school."

As an undergraduate at Brown University, Kotval did internships to ensure that the career track was a good fit, including working in a criminal public defender's office. Drawn to "the human side and the complex side of securities law," she graduated from Harvard Law School in 1991 with a J.D. degree, then landed a job with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

"I was attracted to government service, fighting people who have wealth and resources but still did bad things," she explained. "It

was public service, but muted from some of the high-need, high-emotion kind of work that can cause many people - people I have so much respect for - to maybe become very cynical, or very, very burnt-out."

She joined RBS Greenwich Capital in 1998, attracted by what she described as an "entrepreneurial, young, fun environment," which she credits for encouraging her "to do something that doesn't really benefit them in any way, but makes me a better professional and member of the community."

Never too Busy to Help

As for the organizations in the community Kotval has assisted, those affiliated spoke highly of the impact she has made on their daily operations. "She's been extraordinary in her ability to look at issues and help us with decision-making so we can continue forward with our mission," said Karen Cheeks-Lomax, general counsel with My Sisters' Place, during a phone interview this week. "No matter how busy she is, whatever she's doing, she always takes time out to help us."

Lawyers who donate time to the Partnership - more than 700 corporate professionals, who have assisted more than 600 area nonprofits since the organization was founded - work according to their own schedules and timeframes. "I thought it was so clever," said Kotval. "They're going to find the good deed and you just have to do it, as opposed to researching and finding a group that wants your help."

While giving back has been rewarding in itself for Kotval, she said the day she was given the award stands out in her mind. She described that moment in characteristically humble notes: Folks from Partnership called General Counsel Goldfarb to scout out the best venue for honoring Kotval's volunteerism. Goldfarb suggested an office luncheon. Afterward, she said, two of her colleagues attending the ceremony signed up as volunteers.

"And that made me feel great," she related.

SUCCESSING IN YOUR BUSINESS

BY CLIFF ENNICO



Forget Your Resume, It's What You 'Can Do' that Counts

When you write a column for nes in my area that are looking to 'out-source' IT functions to independent consul- 'have done,' not what you "can do." When you're out looking for consulting work,

very often they have lots of trouble finding ANYONE who's ever done them before, precisely because they are so new to the marketplace. In such an environment, people with experience in the field can, with a