



ROPES & GRAY

TRAINEE INSIGHTS MATT MARTINDALE | PRO BONO PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



Kwasi Yeboah



Emilio Fabrizi



Matt Martindale

Kwasi Yeboah: Hi, my name is Kwasi Yeboah.

Emilio Fabrizi: Hello, and my name is Emilio Fabrizi.

Kwasi Yeboah: Welcome to a special episode of *RopesTalk London*, the new podcast about life as a trainee at Ropes & Gray in London.

Emilio Fabrizi: In this episode, we have connected again with Matt Martindale to ask him specifically about *pro bono*. So, Matt, we've got a question in here from one of the prospective candidates to Ropes, and it is: How can involvement in *pro bono* activities enable trainees to develop their skills as prospective lawyers?

Matt Martindale: Yes, I think it's a huge opportunity for trainees. I guess there's two main buckets of *pro bono* work that I've been involved in. One of them is where you might be reviewing contracts for charities and that kind of work that is more similar to the day-to-day work that I would be doing, and that as a trainee in private equity, something that you'd be doing—reviewing contracts and drafting. And so, the example there is very obvious, which is, you get to develop your drafting skills, you get to develop your client relationship skills, your communication skills. As you both know, that's a bit of an art. I remember it when I had to do my training contract—there's an art to how you communicate with clients and how you form emails, and you have to learn those things by practicing and the guidance that you get from your supervisors, and *pro bono*'s a great opportunity for that.

I guess the other thing is that there's also *pro bono* work that we are involved with—immigration matters—and I

actually think this is a really interesting one, because for trainees, it gives a really opportunity to learn from a little bit more of a level playing field. And what I mean by that is, day-to-day as a trainee, I remember being very, very conscious that everybody around me knew more than I did, and that's certainly how you feel when you're training. Whereas if you're advising somebody on an immigration matter, it's very likely that your supervisor isn't a subject matter expert on that point either, and you'll be working with somebody outside who's a subject matter expert, and you'll be helping to progress the case along. And so, it gives you a really good opportunity there to take the lead a little bit and try and dig into the research on the specific points, and liaise with the specialist counsel as to next steps, and really add value to a team.

When I worked on those types of matters with trainees, I've really noticed that coming to the fore, where they have taken the lead and they really feel like they can run the matter or the case or whatever they're doing. I think that comes from the fact that it is a bit more of a level playing field—they don't feel like they don't know what they're doing at that point, because everybody's in the same position, trying to get up to speed and consult with external counsel on those matters. And so, they can add great value to the client by communicating those things succinctly and developing more transferable skills in those types of scenarios. So, I think it gives you an ability to practice transferable skills. I think also timelines—it's often the things that we do in private equity are very fast-paced, and so it can be difficult as a trainee to really sit down and consider things in the way that you might feel like you need to. Whereas *pro bono* is often on a slightly slower timetable, and it really gives you that chance to practice that bit of drafting that you wanted to practice, hone that legal research, make it absolutely perfect, and I think it just gives you a really good variety as a trainee and just allows you to take even more responsibility, frankly. And the opportunities are, as you both know, pretty much endless, so it's just a really great opportunity to get to know other people at the firm and practice those transferable skills.

Kwasi Yeboah: I think there have been situations where I've been involved in a *pro bono* task and then move on to the main transaction and that same task has come up again, and because you've done it in a *pro bono* context you have a bit more of a grasp of what's going on. It definitely does increase your ability to manage projects. So yes, definitely agree with all of that. I think just in general then, it sounds like *pro bono* is something that is quite important to you in your practice. So, why would you say *pro bono*'s important to you? And would you say it's a big part of the culture at Ropes & Gray in general?

Matt Martindale: Yes—absolutely, on both counts. I guess I've always enjoyed the variety predominantly that *pro bono* brings. It allows you to interact with and help clients that are in different situations to the clients I would usually act for, so assisting charities or individuals with immigration concerns, etc.—it's very different in lots of ways to my day-to-day. And on a personal level, I've always really enjoyed those interactions, all the *pro bono* that I've done, whether it's very similar in subject matter, whether it's a business acquisition or whatever and I've done that before where it's similar to what I would do day-to-day, or whether it's completely different, it's just nice to be collaborating and assisting people that you wouldn't normally be working with. I think to be able to use your skills to help people who are perhaps less fortunate or in a difficult situation and wouldn't otherwise be able to access representation, I think it gives you a real sense of satisfaction that you're helping those people. It's a much more personal benefit to be helping people individually and really helping them reach their goals, as opposed to your day-to-day of maybe helping large corporates. And you have those personal relationships with those clients, but it brings a different angle to the practice, and a great variety, which I've always personally really enjoyed.

I think in terms of firm culture, the firm just has an unbelievably dedicated and incredibly active team that works to give a variety of *pro bono* opportunities to associates. I think it is

very obvious that it's important to the firm strategy to give back to communities where the firm is based and where the staff work and live. We have a 20-hour target—everybody in the firm is encouraged to provide 20 hours of *pro bono* advice a year. I think last year, it was 20 plus 20, wasn't it? "20 plus 20 for 2020" I think was the slogan, and I think that the uptake on that by all accounts was really great. I think that tells you all you need to know, that people are really willing to help where they can, and the firm is really busy providing a great variety of opportunities for people. I think most recently is the Windrush Compensation Project, and there are various others that the firm's involved in. So I think, coming back to the prior question about trainees, it's just a great opportunity as a trainee to get involved in some of those projects, to practice your skills and also to get to know people from other departments that you may not work with who are staffed on those matters with you. So, it's great opportunities all around.

Kwasi Yeboah: Yes, sure—that makes a lot of sense. I think a good way to I suppose summarize this episode and this discussion after is just adding value. And you, Matt, are definitely someone that adds value to us as trainees, having sat with you and obviously in the *pro bono* context as well.

Emilio Fabrizi: Everyone, we hope you enjoyed this discussion. Thank you very much to Matt for his time. Please follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), both @RopesGrayGrads. And feel free to get in touch with us via those social media handles if you have any questions or thoughts for future episodes.

Kwasi Yeboah: Yes, and hopefully we've given you some stuff to think about. You can also follow us on social media, as discussed. But that's it for today. See you for our next episode, where we'll be talking to more inspirational figures at Ropes & Gray and providing you insight into the firm's culture and how you can succeed as a trainee or junior lawyer.

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