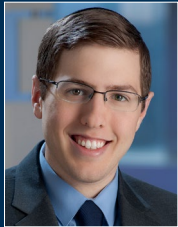


SCOPE OF PRACTICE

PRACTICING WITH PURPOSE—PRO BONO



Yoni Levy



Camille Bachrach



Jesse Vreeken

**Yoni Levy:** Welcome to *Scope of Practice*, a podcast that opens the window for an inside look at different practice groups and the lives of attorneys in those groups here at Ropes & Gray. I'm Yoni Levy, a partner in our asset management group based in Boston. On this episode, I'm joined by Camille Bachrach, an associate in litigation & enforcement, and by Jesse Vreeken, an associate in the private capital transactions group, both based in New York. In this episode, we're going to explore the [pro bono practice](#) here at Ropes & Gray after we hear a bit more about Jesse and Camille's primary practice areas. Hi, Jesse and Camille—thanks for joining. I think everyone will be excited to hear about the pro bono opportunities and what you've worked on, but before we get into that, why don't we open with a bit of background about yourselves, your practice group at Ropes & Gray, and how you landed in that practice group?

**Camille Bachrach:** I'm Camille—I'm a third-year associate in LEPE, which stands for "litigation & enforcement practice group." I mostly work on internal investigations and government enforcement work, which includes interfacing with the DOJ, SEC, FTC, and other government regulatory bodies following a subpoena or request for documents. I also work on private equity deal teams with diligence regarding anti-corruption matters and international risk. And most recently, I've had the opportunity to work on SEC exams and the enforcement work that can sometimes come out of those exams.

**Yoni Levy:** Interesting. Jesse?

**Jesse Vreeken:** I'm in the private capital transactions group, which houses three busy teams: private equity transactions, capital solutions, and leverage finance. My practice is equal parts regular-weight private equity transactions and capital solutions, so that's dealing with distressed companies, special situations, etc. It's all corporate work on my end.

**Yoni Levy:** How did you wind up in that group?

**Jesse Vreeken:** Prior to joining Ropes, I worked primarily in capital markets in Canada actually. I always found that private M&A that I did to be much more interesting, so when I was looking to move to New York, I focused on private M&A at Ropes and ended up landing on the team I'm on today.

**Yoni Levy:** Did you work at a law firm in Canada, or were you on the business side?

**Jesse Vreeken:** I worked at a law firm in western Canada for about a year before I moved out this way.

**Yoni Levy:** Nice—that's great. Camille, how about you? How did you wind up in your subset of litigation work?

**Camille Bachrach:** I was a paralegal for two years at another law firm before going to law school. I was a paralegal in the litigation department, so I had exposure to the kind of areas that I was interested in. I decided to join the litigation department after law school, after my summer experience was filled with a lot of good litigation matters that I really liked, and I just wound up in government enforcement work by nature.

**Yoni Levy:** Thanks for sharing that interesting background. It seems that you're in two pretty different practice areas, but you're here as guests together clearly to talk about a project

you're working on together. So, why don't you tell us a bit more about that project?

**Jesse Vreeken:** Camille and I both work together on [BlueCheck Charitable Organization](#). BlueCheck Charitable Organization is a pro bono matter that came to the firm in 2022 and is a 501(c)(3) and public charity, so it was organized to rapidly deploy grants to local aid organizations on the front lines of humanitarian disasters. Its current focus is on Ukraine, Turkey, and Syria, and it plans to expand further as needed. So, a little bit of extra background about BlueCheck: It was formed in early 2022 by, frankly, a heavy-hitting board of directors, which includes Liev Schreiber, the actor and activist, and a number of other experienced professionals in the international aid space. They asked Ropes to help out, particularly given Camille's team's expertise with international diligence, but also our corporate team's expertise, our deep bench strength, and our ability to coordinate and assist the organization with scaling up quickly. Our pro bono coordinator sent a group email asking for assistance—I got the email and answered the call, and the rest is history.

In terms of scope, the work in BlueCheck is broad, so a little bit of background on what BlueCheck is trying to solve. Some of the most pervasive issues challenging international aid organizations are both insuring grantees are verified and trustworthy and also deploying aid rapidly with minimal overhead and administration cost—so, how to donate money quickly and cost effectively. BlueCheck's model solves for both these issues with Ropes's help. As an example, Camille's litigation team, as she'll discuss in a moment, verifies grantees, and the corporate team, where I'm located, supports BlueCheck's operations, expansions, and corporate governance in a way that ensures that their overhead can be kept very low. So, for instance, our corporate team acts as the central point of contact and coordinates all things BlueCheck. We worked with a specialist to incorporate the entity, to obtain its 501(c)(3) status, we set up its corporate governance structure, and we continue to navigate its corporate relationships and partnerships. Things are moving quickly, the organization's growing rapidly, and things are exciting. As an associate (and as associates generally) on pro bono matters, we have a lot of responsibility early on. I've had the chance to work with teams all across Ropes from tax,

trademark, IP, debt finance, and, of course, Camille's team, which very importantly gives BlueCheck the tools to “blue check” their grantees, which I'll let Camille explain.

**Camille Bachrach:** Where the litigation associates come in is we help vet the organizations that BlueCheck wishes to donate money to in order to ensure that they are legitimate, that they actually use the funds in the way that they say they will use them, that they have individuals leading the organizations that are reliable (not on any sanctioned list or otherwise politically exposed, as that's where typically bribery and fraud concerns come in), and we generally assess entities for any red flags or adverse findings that we think would be important for BlueCheck to know before they send money to the organization. As Jesse said, I initially also got started with this specific matter because at the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Ropes pro bono team sent an email blast, and I raised my hand along with Jesse.

**Yoni Levy:** Great—that's fascinating. Can you tell us a little more about what attracted you in particular to this project? Do you think it was the subject matter? Was it the type of work? Were you particularly interested in helping in the situation in Ukraine? What made you dive into this project?

**Camille Bachrach:** As a summer associate, I actually was involved in a lot of pro bono. I still pride myself on winning the Pro Bono Award during my summer, and I wanted to take that with me when I joined Ropes as an associate with an emphasis on my billable matters, of course, but also making sure that I dedicate the free time that I had to pro bono matters. When Russia invaded Ukraine, we got a call to action with the pro bono team, and I responded raising my hand and was willing to help in any way possible. Since then, it's been a great experience in being able to help on a day-to-day basis and feeling like I am actually giving back to people in need and being able to balance my day-to-day work with knowing that I'm making an impact.

**Jesse Vreeken:** I echo Camille. 2021 and 2022 had been very busy years at the firm—there was a lot of corporate work, and I was really looking for a way to also work on some pro bono matters where I felt like I was giving back in a very tangible, interpersonal way. I actually grew up with a large number of

Ukrainian immigrants to Canada and also have some friends who live in Ukraine, so I really felt the impact of the invasion. I felt really moved by the opportunity to get involved and do something very tangible in addition to the corporate work that I'm doing, so when the email came across, I immediately jumped on it and tried my best to make sure that I could get involved. And it's been really rewarding to see. Recently, we assisted BlueCheck in sending out some grants, and in the actual grant agreement, they'll list the initiatives and the things that are occurring in Ukraine, where the money's going, and what's happening with it. There are shelters built and there are tons and tons of food being delivered to folks who are displaced, so it's a really rewarding experience and I am glad that I got involved.

**Yoni Levy:** You mentioned a bit, Jesse, in your last answer about having more hands-on responsibility in pro bono matters. Can you expound a bit on what partner involvement is like, what more senior associate involvement is like in pro bono matters generally or in BlueCheck Ukraine specifically?

**Jesse Vreeken:** Certainly. I think from a corporate perspective, at a big law firm, you have certain roles at each level that you work at, at each year of call, and you know those roles and you perfect them—that's how the system works. It's a fantastic system to learn, and it's a fantastic system to ensure that teams work seamlessly together. What pro bono brings to someone who's in that system is a lot more autonomy at an earlier stage. I suppose I'm a junior mid-level—I'm at a fourth-year level. Now, with BlueCheck, I'm responsible, to a large extent, for coordinating most of the work streams, ensuring that work and questions go to the proper specialist group. I'm responsible for coordinating with the clients and ensuring the partner—who is involved, but very busy—that they know what's going on and that they're signing off on the things that need to be signed off on. At the same time, I have that autonomy to draft documents, get involved, make decisions and judgment calls, and become a trusted advisor for a client. And while you are a trusted advisor at mid-level/junior mid-level within the firm from a billable work perspective, to be able to be a trusted advisor at a higher level on the pro bono side is really rewarding. It also queues you up to be able to take the next step as you move each year up in terms of responsibilities for your billable work.

**Yoni Levy:** That's great. Camille, has your experience been similar?

**Camille Bachrach:** Absolutely. I can say that, on BlueCheck and my other pro bono matters (which we'll talk about later), I've been able to get direct exposure to not only the client but also to just be on a leanly staffed matter with me and the partner, where I'm coordinating workflow directly with the client, giving my advice or opinions directly to the client (of course with partner approval), but having more exposure on a day-to-day basis, moving the matter forward, and being able to have more autonomy, as Jesse said, to brainstorm the next steps and how we can get there without so much oversight as my other billable matters, which of course, as Jesse also said, the structure works and it makes a lot of sense as you go up in your years at the firm to have designated responsibilities. I think the thing that's nice about pro bono work at Ropes is that you're able to level up very quickly and assume a more mid-level senior role where you otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity for a few years on your billable matters—you're able to hone in on those skills early, so when you do bump up to that senior role, you're really ready with all the great things that you learned from the pro bono team.

**Yoni Levy:** Thanks. I'll just chime in with my experience. I'm also involved in pro bono work, though not in BlueCheck Ukraine specifically. I do a lot of work with the [Dorchester House](#) initiative where we provide support to patients at the Dorchester House on a variety of housing, immigration, and family law matters, where they're referred to us by physicians or others who work in the Dorchester House for the fact that they might have legal issues that they need help with. My experience there, which sounds like it is similar to yours, is that the more general lawyering skills that you get to apply in the pro bono sense facilitate an earlier, more active role and a more management role. You're making the decisions more on pro bono matters, and because of that, I think it also allows you to explore areas that are a bit different from what you're doing in your regular practice. As listeners know, I'm in the asset management group. I mostly do private equity funds-related work, but it's interesting for me to get to think about litigation and housing matters when it comes to my Dorchester House experience, and I get to think about court filings in a way that I don't ever really do on my day-to-day

side. I'm sure, Jesse, you're having the same experience with the overlap between what you're doing for BlueCheck Ukraine on the corporate side, but there also are other pieces that I heard you mention—501(c)(3) analysis, which is tax work—and it sounds like there's a really interdisciplinary play on a lot of this work.

**Camille Bachrach:** Absolutely—I agree with you. A great example from a few weeks ago: Jesse and I, with my other colleague [Sean Adessky](#) on BlueCheck, were working very closely to draft contract agreements and make sure that was all buttoned up from both the corporate perspective and the litigation perspective, which allowed me to step into Jesse's role and vice versa in terms of figuring out what terms we needed to include, talking with the client (which we both did directly), and relaying those answers and questions straight up to the partner instead of having them be the intermediary. So, that ties both the interdisciplinary work and also the exposure together.

**Jesse Vreeken:** Yes, and these are real-world skills too—these are things that people come to you as friends to ask questions about. One example I'm thinking about is, early on with BlueCheck, there was a phishing website set up to phish donations that should've otherwise gone to BlueCheck. We were able to deal with that pretty quickly, but it's a complicated process and it can take a long time. We have expertise internally, and we were able to tap into that, but drafting letters, contacting the ISP, and getting them to take down that site were steps that would be very unlikely you would deal with in your corporate work. You learn those things and it's helpful to know, and people will come to you asking those questions in the future, so there's real skills that you learn here.

**Yoni Levy:** A lot of times I get asked why the firm even cares to do pro bono work. We're a for-profit firm, so why does the firm have a focus on pro bono work? All the things you've said so far are part of it, and they all make up component pieces, so it gives you the opportunity to flex your more general legal muscles and keep developing skill sets that would be helpful in your regular practice but that you might not have opportunities to flex. Of course, we're part of the community, we care, and we're people, and so it's good for people who

work here because we all feel better working on these kinds of pro bono matters, and also, we genuinely care and want to be part of the community. As part of that, Ropes gives full billable credit for pro bono hours, so your pro bono hours really are just treated like any other legal time, even though the firm isn't getting paid. We also have a pretty robust infrastructure around pro bono matters. I'm not sure if one of you could speak a bit more to the team that we have that does pro bono, and how pro bono opportunities are shared within the firm?

**Camille Bachrach:** Yoni, thanks for bringing that up. I think that Ropes's pride in pro bono is actually one of the things that first drew me to the firm. And I think a great thing, as you also mentioned, is that Ropes credits 100% of our pro bono hours towards your billable credit. That being said, I think Ropes's pro bono team is a very robust team. We just actually hired a new attorney to spearhead different kinds of pro bono matters. New matters are created constantly in response to events and crises that happen around the world, from the crisis at the Texas border under the Trump Administration, George Floyd's murder, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Dobbs decision, to the vast amount of school shootings that occur constantly. Ropes is always partnering with amazing organizations around the world that help us spearhead internal pro bono teams and gives us the opportunity to work on matters that we care about and affect our day-to-day lives. As we've previously mentioned, they send out listservs and email blasts after every crisis or big event that happens that people will want to volunteer for, and they get an overwhelming amount of people that volunteer for each mission and each pro bono matter. So, that's also been a thing that I've been enjoying a lot at Ropes, is that I feel like I'm at a place that has the same values that I do and gives me the opportunity to work on a day-to-day basis towards those values in addition to my other billable matters.

**Jesse Vreeken:** Yes, I totally agree, Camille. I think that most attorneys would agree that we have a moral imperative, given how fortunate we are to be where we are and do what we do, and our ability to solve issues and to get involved. It's great that Ropes really fosters that, where you can both do your corporate work or your litigation work (the work that you were hired to do), but then also be able to give back from the

same desk and not have to split your attention—you can do it right through the Ropes system and do real impactful work. Roz Nasdor and her entire pro bono management team are incredible, and they continue to encourage us to get involved. There's always something to do, whether it's a large project like BlueCheck (which we've been talking about and will continue to expand into new crises as they unfold), or smaller, one-off things that you can do with a couple of hours of time if you are busy.

**Yoni Levy:** I know that there's been pretty widespread enthusiasm for pro bono work at the firm, so it's not just that there are these policies and infrastructure in place, but there's been real uptake. I know we had 100% participation from the summer associates, but even more generally, I think in 2022, we had something like almost 1,300 attorneys who spent more than 20 hours each on pro bono matters over the course of the year, so it's pretty widespread. Despite what we said about the opportunities to get more involved as a more junior associate, you really see attorneys across the whole spectrum pretty heavily involved in pro bono work, which is really fantastic to see. Jesse, you mentioned being able to take the pro bono work at the same time as your billable work. Have you had any challenges trying to balance that? Or how does that work out in terms of marrying the two sets of obligations?

**Jesse Vreeken:** It certainly can be a challenge—there's no doubt about it. Working a lot, regardless of what type of law you work in, is challenging because of client demands. You're in a client-facing environment, whether it's pro bono or otherwise, and so you're reacting many times to these requests. It is hard to carve out time for pro bono work (it can be), and so that goes to my earlier comment about there being opportunities for pro bono work that can be one-off of initiatives where you spend three-four hours and then you're done, but you can also balance larger pro bono projects like BlueCheck by delegating and working with your team, and so that's a skillset that you learn, as well.

**Yoni Levy:** I think, to the point that time allocation is difficult, that's part of why it's so critical that you get billable credit for it and that there's a really strong emphasis in reviews and in your general progress that you be part of the pro bono

process, because inevitably, as an attorney, there's a million things pulling on your time, and it's just hard to prioritize something if it feels like this is time you could spend on billable matters and get credit for. I've had it brought up in almost every review I've had, that I'm active in the pro bono matters and the firm appreciates that, and that goes a long way towards making me want to do it. Obviously, like Jesse said, there's a moral imperative and I feel strongly about doing it, but sometimes, even grandiose, larger concepts can be hard to, in practice, materialize into actual time allocation when there's so many things pulling on your time. And so, it's critical that the firm shows its attorneys that it values the pro bono efforts just as much as it values billable efforts.

**Camille Bachrach:** I agree with you. I also think it helps as a more junior associate going to the middle overall with time management to have more on your plate, even if it will be a little busy and overwhelming, to be able to learn from a young age, so to speak, how to balance your billable paying clients with your pro bono clients and be able to allocate your time as needed and figure out how all the pieces are going to fit in your day-to-day puzzle. It helps you as you grow to the senior mid-level role and hopefully to the partner role in how to manage all your matters.

**Yoni Levy:** Yes, and I think that's a good point generally that, when you're junior, in particular, it's a great time to put a bunch of pro bono items on your plate, just because of time allocation constraints for other people. So, when you first join the firm, it will take time to ramp you up—people will want to ramp you up, and you'll want to be ramped up, but it will just naturally take time—whereas pro bono projects have the ability to be more discrete and they roll in more regularly, and so, it's easier to just pick up a bunch of pro bono time to fill out your hours. Of course, like we've been saying, it's important to keep doing pro bono throughout. I'm a partner now, and I still do pro bono work, and it still matters to me, but it was easier when I was a junior and I had more time, and so, I just picked up more pro bono work then. And I think that that's part of why it feels like you can really get hands-on experience pretty quickly, it's because those matters can be taken even when you're a first-year and you, as a newly graduated lawyer, still know more about helping than the alternative options available to the clients.



It was really interesting hearing more about our work with BlueCheck Ukraine, but as I mentioned, the firm is involved in many other pro bono initiatives, as well. Several people in my practice group are pretty heavily involved in the work we do at [Rosie's Place](#), where we help try to get credit relief for women at a homeless shelter here in Boston. Are you two involved in any other pro bono projects that are particularly meaningful to you?

**Camille Bachrach:** Yes, I'm involved in a few asylum matters. I actually joined one of these that is still ongoing my first week at the firm, and it's been continuing on with success for the client. Now, we've expanded representation to try to get success for the rest of the family, as well, and that's been a really meaningful and impactful matter. I'm fluent in Spanish, so I can actually talk to this client, in particular, in his native tongue. It's been a very good learning experience for me, not only to get exposure to how our work is so impactful for real families, but also to be able to communicate directly with the client (only updating the partner as needed), and really being able to lead this case on my own and being able to just hear directly from the client how amazing and helpful the Ropes pro bono team is in making a life-changing difference for his entire family. So, that's a matter that's near and dear to my heart. I also help oversee a few other pro bono asylum matters, as well.

**Yoni Levy:** That sounds really rewarding. Is there a resolution in sight on that matter that's been going on for three years?

**Camille Bachrach:** We've been able to get a permanent status for the client and one of his daughters. He has three other children and his wife that have come over, so we're working on that, as well. We're very hopeful, but, of course, the asylum process and the process in immigration takes a very long time. So, I'll probably still be working on it continuing into 2024, but it's looking good so far. It brings me a lot of joy to be able to see the happiness that it can bring to a family to have a stable life here in the United States.

**Yoni Levy:** Yes, that's fantastic—I totally echo that. I think it's really important that we get involved in a wide array of pro bono matters, because the BlueCheck work, the things we've done for same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights, and

all those things are fantastic, especially the policy-level type work is great, but it can also be super rewarding to just help a real person that you can see in front of you who's having a real problem. And that's what I personally love about my work with the Dorchester House folks, is that it is fairly indigent clients who sometimes don't even understand what their legal rights are, who are having immigration, education, or housing issues, or need an IEP for their child, and it can be unbelievably rewarding when you're able to just step in and help out. Sometimes, the help is just having a lawyer's mind and writing a letter to their landlord explaining the situation, and because you're separated enough and you're able to just clearly express what the issue is, getting resolution for your client because they're in the right (they're just not good at expressing themselves), it's just hugely rewarding when you have that feeling, and it's a real win-win for everyone, I think.

**Camille Bachrach:** Absolutely—I think it's rewarding, and it also puts things in perspective. It's easy to lose sight of our purpose in this world, but also just in the day-to-day life sometimes when you're running from calls and meetings and long nights working on other matters. It really puts things in perspective when I pick up the phone and talk to a client that expresses so much gratitude for a small thing in your day that you've been able to do but it really made an impact in their whole life. So, I really thank Ropes for setting up all these opportunities for us, and I'm also really glad that I get to do it on a day-to-day basis.

**Yoni Levy:** Great, thank you for that. Why don't you tell us what else you like to do on a day-to-day basis? What do you do in your spare time outside of work?

**Camille Bachrach:** I actually recently took up biking around the city. I was very scared and apprehensive to be a city biker in a busy, rumbling city, but I took it up. I've now gone to Central Park, across the Brooklyn Bridge into Prospect Park, and my goal this summer is to do a bike cookie tour around the city.

**Yoni Levy:** That sounds awesome. I'm scared to walk in Manhattan, so riding a bike there seems frightening. How about you, Jesse?

**Jesse Vreeken:** Like any true western Canadian, I love to ski and snowboard. I actually just got back from visiting family and skiing in Canada in the Rockies with my family, so that was great. I have a young daughter, as well, which keeps me very busy. I think some of my hobbies and things are going by the wayside to take care of my daughter, but I'm happy to report that she was on her skis last week and she's doing great, so I'm sure she'll race by me in the next couple years.

**Yoni Levy:** How is she at hockey?

**Jesse Vreeken:** She hasn't been on skates yet. Actually, that's not true... she was in Bryant Park once on skates, so she's doing well. She loves skates and skis, so a true Canadian at heart, but more and more of a New Yorker every day actually.

**Yoni Levy:** Thank you, Camille and Jesse, for joining us. It's really been a great pleasure listening to you and your enthusiasm for our pro bono work. And thank you to our listeners—we hope you found this to be a helpful and insightful episode. If there's a specific practice group or area you'd like us to cover in a future episode, please reach out to me directly, I'd love to hear from you. If you're a law student or recent graduate who'd like to learn more, please visit our website at [www.ropesgrayrecruiting.com](http://www.ropesgrayrecruiting.com) or check us out Instagram [@ropesgray](https://www.instagram.com/ropesgray). You can subscribe to this series wherever you typically listen to podcasts, including on [Apple](#), [Google](#), and [Spotify](#). Please look out for future episodes and share with your friends. Thanks again for listening and see you on the next episode.

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