Got a question? Here’s someone with the answers — and opinions

Welcome to the inaugural column of the Court of Common Sense, a question-and-answer advice column. Got a thorny ethics question that you are afraid to ask? Wondering about proper etiquette in certain business situations? Wonder no more! Send your burning questions to kristencourt.of.commonsense@gmail.com to get them answered.

What makes me qualified to give advice? Well, for starters, I have lots of opinions, and I’m not shy about giving them. And, as principal and general counsel at Chuhak & Tecson P.C., I regularly provide legal advice on risk management, professional responsibility, insurance coverage and commercial litigation.

As for the etiquette piece, I grew up in the American South, which pretty much makes me qualified to speak on everything (or at least that is what we Southerners believe), but particularly on food, clothes and what you are supposed to do and when you are supposed to do it.

With summer in full swing, and associates and law clerks buzzing about the office, I kick off this first column with questions from our young lawyers.

Although these answers are geared to the less experienced lawyers among us, we can all use reminders in these areas.

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Q: What type of pro bono work can an associate perform?
A: Great question! The short answer is any kind you want. Licensed lawyers can perform any type of pro bono work they are competent in under Illinois Professional Rule of Responsibility 1.1. The comments to this rule reveal that a lawyer “need not necessarily have special training or prior experience to handle legal problems of a type with which the lawyer is unfamiliar.”

Indeed, Comment 2 to the rule specifically states, “A newly admitted lawyer can be as competent as a practitioner with long experience.” So, don’t let your inexperience hold you back.

That said, engaging in a new practice area as a new lawyer (or an experienced one) can be scary, tricky and fraught with peril. The good news is that most legal aid organizations have staff to walk you through the intricacies of particular practice areas.

For example, Chicago Volunteer Legal Services, or CVLS, offers legal services to the Chicago area’s working poor. With a vast array of training and support materials, CVLS’ dedicated and knowledgeable staff can help you develop into a pro bono superstar. More information and details on the next orientation can be found at cvls.org/volunteer.

Another great option is Illinois Legal Aid Online, or ILAO. Associates can join ILAO’s team of subject-matter experts. As one of these experts, associates volunteer their time and knowledge on doing pro bono work is a personal decision. Don’t let your inexperience hold you back.

The preamble to the Illinois Rules of Professional Responsibility reiterates that it is our responsibility to provide services in the public interest for which compensation may not be available. To monitor and increase delivery of pro bono legal services, the

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