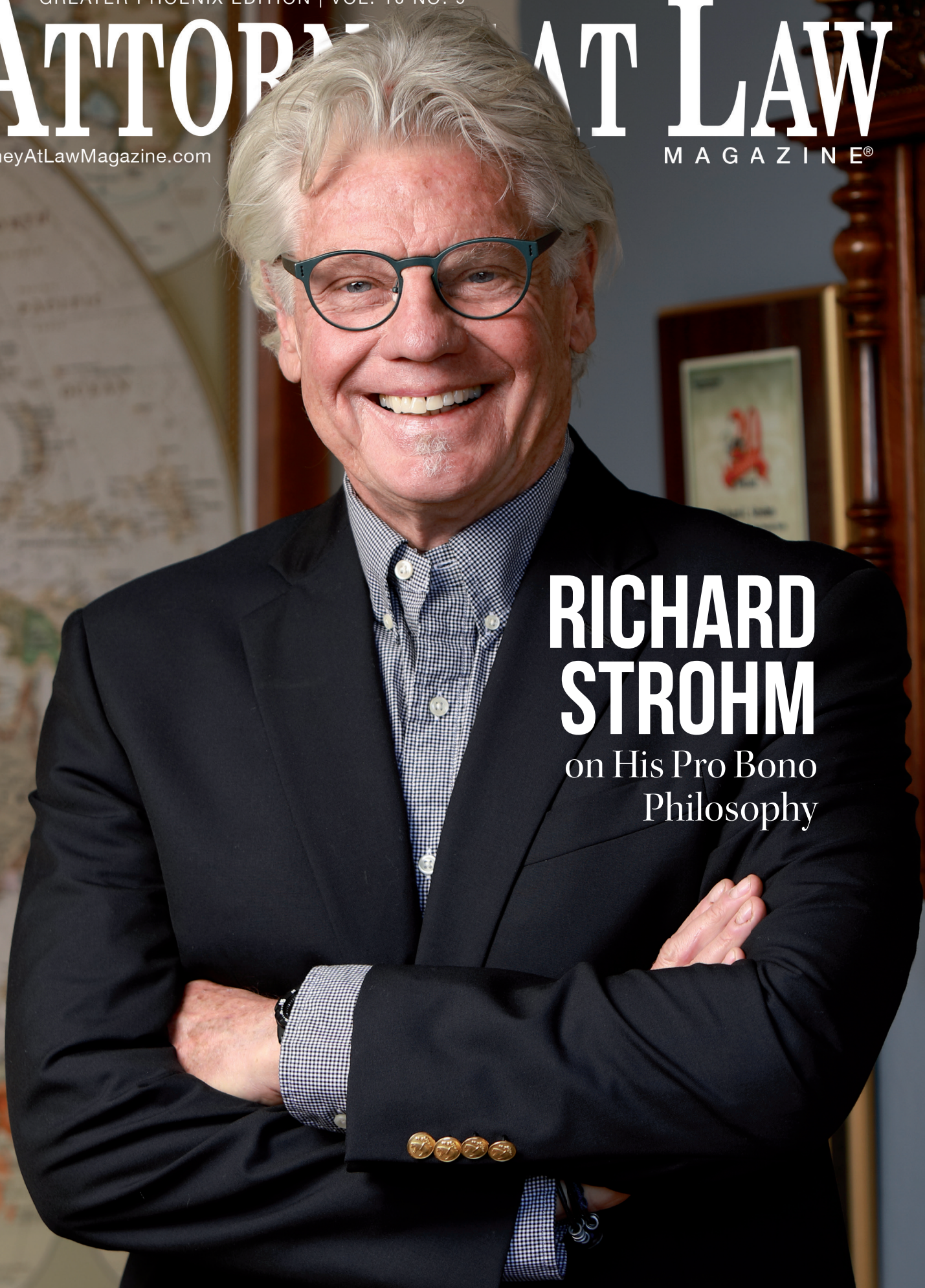


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# ATTORNEY AT LAW

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A portrait of Richard Strohm, a middle-aged man with grey hair and glasses, smiling and wearing a dark suit jacket over a checkered shirt. He has his arms crossed. The background is a blurred office setting with a map on the wall.

**RICHARD  
STROHM**  
on His Pro Bono  
Philosophy





# RICHARD

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# STROHM

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on His Pro Bono Philosophy

“

After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, and so on - have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear - what remains? Nature remains.”  
- Walt Whitman

“Work hard, detach from outcome, and accept the consequence.”

hroughout the births, deaths, divorces, health challenges, financial good times and bad, the single constant in my life has been the practice of law. I am 69 years old, and have been practicing continuously since 1976. I started as a prosecutor in Tucson, became an associate at one of the biggest firms in Phoenix (not bragging—I was eventually fired) then a name partner in several small firms in Scottsdale. Today, I am a solo practitioner with a tiny office in Sedona. I take what comes in the door and sometimes get paid in tamales or twelve packs.

The law is challenging. I am still nervous every day that what I do not know will hurt somebody. The deadlines still loom as they have for 42 years, and my stomach still churns working to make the required filings, or to ask the right questions at depositions, or to make the most persuasive arguments in court. I hope to God whatever I do will help, not hurt, my client. Despite the stressors, I will not stop practicing so long as I can think. Partly this is because there is enormous need for lawyers to help real people. Single moms, the addicted, those devastated by a shifting economy are at sea without drinking water. The entire catalog of human misery is played out in our legal system, and there are very few lawyers willing to represent those who need help and cannot pay hundreds of dollars per hour.

But, mostly I cannot leave the law because serving clients makes me happy. And a better, more compassionate human. The practice of law is a service business and if you do it right you end up being the one served. I am enriched by helping others, doubly enriched if I help bring about a good outcome. Over the years, representing clients has caused a major shift for me--- a new way of experiencing life. Service to others continues to overturn the selfishness that rules so much of my life.

I serve best not only when advocating my client's legal interest, but also when counseling against the impossible, the unethical, the unfair. Even in righteous cases, there is an inherent paradox in litigation. We must manage expectations simultaneously using every permissible tool to achieve the client's goals.

Service to me means sharing the burden of what

my clients fear most so that the pressure is on me, not them. The juice is in the intellectual challenge of calculating how to achieve the best result, in the shortest time, as inexpensively as possible. All without getting sidetracked or personally annoyed by opposing counsel, delay, unrealistic expectations.

Litigation, which is what I do most, is a zero-sum game. There is a winner and a loser. Even ADR outcomes are this way despite all the enthusiasm for it. So, in order to be effective serving others, we trial lawyers must protect our hearts and humanity while serving. We need real tools to help us shrug off the inherent rough grind of the adversary system and leave it behind when we get home.

The Buddhist principle of detachment from outcome is helpful. The idea is to fight like hell--do everything the system allows--then let it go. Work hard, detach from outcome, and accept the consequence. I am not saying ignore or accept incorrect rulings or results. I am talking about a way of living, not a legal strategy. Detachment and acceptance have kept me sane. I can't help with the deeper, more fundamental social problems like poverty and ignorance that often play significant roles in legal trouble.

Lawyers are privileged. We are members of a pedestal profession, usually insulated from the insults endured by others in the workforce. If I focus on being that guy who is privileged to speak for another, rather than whether my bill will be paid, or where my next case is coming from, my reward is the kind of quiet inner joy that comes from doing the right thing. Like helping a kid ride a bike, returning a lost wallet packed with 50's or speaking my truth despite my beloved colleagues thinking me a fool. Feels just like winning a big verdict.

**BIO:**

Richard L. Strohm is most proud of his son Christian and daughter Brooke who live in the San Francisco Bay area. He has been an Av rated attorney for over 25 years and enjoys the highest rating from AVVO. In addition to practicing law, he spends a month almost every year overseas. He teaches a non-credit course in Yavapai County entitled "An Insider's Guide to Understanding Our Legal System." He is an amateur triathlete having competed in Miami, Hawaii and Malibu triathlons. Find his CV at [www.strohmlaw.com](http://www.strohmlaw.com).



# RESOURCES

# ABOUT SERVING

Aurelius, *Meditations*. Stoic Roman Emperor discusses his rules for living a rich life including tips on serving others, conquering obsessive thinking and accepting life's difficulties without complaint.

Boorstein, Sylvia, *It's Easier Than you Think*. Many spiritual teachers are lousy writers. Boorstein is an exception. She is funny, chatty and inspiring. Feels like coffee at Starbucks with a friend just returned from volunteering in India.

Brach, Tara, *Radical Acceptance*, Getting out of our own way and helping others is not only productive, it leads to a deeper way of seeing. Also, try [www.tarabrach.com](http://www.tarabrach.com) for guided meditations, lectures on overcoming self obsession and managing suffering and desire.

Camus, Albert, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, An existentialist's take on happiness, despair and how service amplifies our love for life.

Chodron, Pema, Numerous books on the importance of serving others. The Pema Chodron Foundation (<https://pemachodronfoundation.org>) is dedicated to preserving and sharing the efforts of groups and not-for-profit organizations who serve people in need.

Duhigg, Charles, *The Power of Habit*. A well-known, credentialed business reporter offers keys to unlocking areas of "stuckness" in our lives—service to others is a big one.



Frankl, Viktor, *Man's Search for Meaning*. No matter how difficult our lives, circumstances have only the meaning we give them. We usually cannot control what comes our way but we always have the choice of how to react. Mindful service is helping without judging "good" or "bad."

Kabat Zinn, Jon *Full Catastrophe Living*. Primer on the importance of developing an understanding of the oneness we share with all living beings and shifting from reaction to response based on such an appreciation. Circumstances do not matter, our choices do.

Kornfield, Jack, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*. Getting outside the false self (ego) requires focus on others.

Shojai, Pedram, *The Urban Monk*. Doctor, Taoist monk, filmmaker, environmentalist. A straightforward, common sense program, including service and volunteering, built on Western Science and Eastern wisdom. Superb.

“ I serve best, not only when advocating my client's legal interest, but also when counseling against the impossible, the unethical, the unfair.”