



AMTA Alumnus Uses Skills to Pay His Bills...and Yours

By Devon Holstad

Mock trial skills transcend a career in law, a truth to which Ben Kurland (Tufts, 2015), attests. Kurland never gave a passing thought to going into law, despite spending over four years competing in mock trial during college and high school. “I enjoyed mock trial because it was with people that I liked, and it was something that was fun and intellectually engaging,” Kurland said. His brother, Julian, became a lawyer, though Kurland notes that “we both took different paths but ended up in the same place.” After college, Kurland dabbled in graphic design before moving home to Nashville with his brother to found their company, BillFixers.

BillFixers is a company that aims to help consumers save money in negotiations with service providers. “We just sort of stumbled into it,” Kurland explained of how the business started. “My brother used to call Comcast and negotiate down his rates, and after his roommate moved away he called and asked my brother to do it for him.” After the friend offered to pay for the service, Kurland’s brother called him and suggested they start a business together. Kurland “thought it sounded like fun,” and after a year and a half the company continues to grow. “So far we’ve saved people about \$400,000,” he estimates.

The business might seem a bit unorthodox. Kurland and his team of about six people sign up customers who want to negotiate lower payments to their service providers. Kurland or one of his employees will then call the service provider and begin negotiating. “It involves a fair amount being argumentative, similar things that helped in mock trial,” Kurland said, “we call up [service providers] and use the same skills as witness.” “You have to be charming,” he added.

Kurland admits there are some that are skeptical about the business, including a reporter who wrote about BillFixers in the New York Times. “He actually contacted the SEC and the Consumer Protection Bureau, but they apparently said it was ok,” Kurland described. “Literally no one else has done this,” he said, “and we help people. It’s a win-win.” After receiving press in the Times and NBC, the business signed up a couple thousand people, virtually overnight. “Since then we’ve been working on making things a little more efficient” on the business side of things, Kurland added.

Kurland got used to wearing different hats competing in mock trial, something he now does on a daily basis. “I go from talking to press, to clients, and to business development.” He likened the business experience to a mock trial team that “plays up or down” depending on the competition. He explained, “as we gain more responsibility and higher expectations, we have to grow to meet them. We have been successful in that so far. We can’t hire anyone with experience in this field because there is no field, so the mock trial skills come in handy.” Unlike mock trial, though, “you are not facing someone trying to slip you up. Thankfully you are acting with customer service representatives, someone actually being paid to be nice to you.”

Kurland added that, just as in mock trial, BillFixers is “trying to win in a friendly manner, which is the whole spirit of AMTA.” He notes that “whenever people ask for a tip, the first thing I say is to be really friendly about it. That’s the experience I had in AMTA – everyone I competed with and against were people having a good time and enjoying this weird activity. Trying to win without the cost of being mean to anybody.”

Kurland’s favorite part of mock trial was developing backstories and adding depth to characters, though he noted with pride that he once won a perfect attorney award on a Regional bye-buster team. He spent the majority of his career competing as a witness, winning an All-American Award in 2015 while helping his Tufts team finish fifth in their division at the Cincinnati National Championship Tournament. His greatest moment was on the stand as Buttons Conroy when he started singing Secret Agent Man. “I still get grief for that from my former teammates,” he said, adding that “one judge gave me tens, the other gave me twos.”

Even though Kurland didn’t enter the legal field, the skills he gained and honed during his years competing in mock trial have stuck with him. “In my case,” he stated, “mock trial is one of the first things that I put a lot of time and effort and energy into. It’s the same thing here, working with a team of people that I like and having fun.” He constantly relies on his leadership skills, “a skill I picked up doing mock trial,” and looks forward to the future of BillFixers with the growing responsibility of people relying on him. “We’re sort of figuring it out as we go. You never want to count your chickens before they hatch, but it’s definitely growing pretty quickly and we’re enjoying it,” he said. “The goal is to have a good time and grow as big as we can while helping as many people as we can.”

For more information about BillFixers, visit their website [here](#).

Editor’s Note: Devon C. Holstad is a Candidate Member of the AMTA Board of Directors and a Litigation Associate at Cahill Gordon & Reindel LLP in New York. Holstad has helped coach his alma mater, Loyola University Chicago, where he was a four-year AMTA competitor.