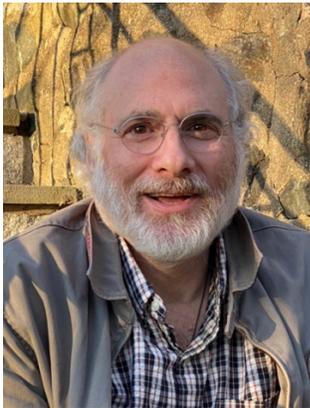


## Public Interest Profile

David Ebert, Co-Founder of Animal Defense Partnership



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### Career in Brief

**Experience:** 2016–present: Animal Defense Partnership, Co-Founder; 1989–2019: Ingram Yuzek Gainen Carroll & Bertolotti, LLP, Litigation Partner; 1986–1989: Shea & Gould, Litigation Associate.

**Education:** 1986: J.D., New York University School of Law; 1982: B.A., University of Pennsylvania.

#### *Organization's Mission and Geographic Focus:*

Our mission is to provide excellent legal services to animal protection non-profits at no cost. We're working to build an enduring institution, the goal of which is to remove the legal function from animal protection non-profits to the greatest extent possible. By taking over these matters, we enable the organizations and advocates to devote more of their time and resources to doing what they do best to accomplish their mission — protecting and saving animals, while we do what we do best to accomplish ours — lawyering.

Our clients are all over the country. To the extent work is required in jurisdictions in which none of us is admitted, we have a strong network of lawyers and firms throughout the country who can assist us.

***What led you to found Animal Defense Partnership (ADP)?***

A lifetime of despair over animal suffering coupled with an adulthood of despair over my inexcusable neglect and failure to do anything about it. (For anyone interested in the full catastrophe, including the life events and experiences that ultimately led me to co-found [ADP](#), an overview can be found [here](#).) In 2016, as I was heading toward retirement, I wanted to get involved in some form of animal work that I could continue after I retired. At my very wonderful wife's urging, I looked at several organizations and was unable to find one that felt like a fit, which led me to want to start my own.

In taking stock of the skills and experience I had to offer, lawyering was the obvious choice. While considering possible approaches, I was speaking to a friend about starting a non-profit devoted to animal protection. She mentioned that Joel Litvin, a lawyer and the former President of League Operations of the National Basketball Association, was also interested in this work. Joel and I live in the same town and coached against each other in our daughters' recreational basketball league, so we were acquaintances but did not know each other well. We began meeting at our local diner to work through various possibilities and eventually co-founded what's now ADP.

***On what types of issues does ADP generally focus?***

We provide *pro bono* legal services to animal protection non-profits. We're essentially outside general counsel to each of these organizations and handle their legal needs, which are mostly the same as the needs of for-profit entities. We don't practice animal law. We practice commercial law for animal protection non-profits.

Our services include, without being exhaustive, contract negotiation, drafting, and review; social media; intellectual property clearance; privacy protection; corporate governance; employment best practices and human resources; conflict avoidance; non-profit formation, structure, and compliance; and on and on. We don't handle litigation. 33 years of fighting was 33 too many. Our goal is to equip each of our clients with a legally sound foundation to put them in the strongest possible position to avoid litigation altogether.

ADP is a “capacity builder,” a term of which I was unaware until a funder told me that’s what ADP is. There’s a growing number of capacity building organizations cropping up and providing other services to animal protection non-profits. These services include, in addition to ADP’s legal work, technology and website builds, media, research, photojournalism, organizational and workplace consulting, and animal protection career placement.

The greatest current unfilled needs are bookkeeping and accounting, something that we’re working with funders to try to address. As funders increasingly recognize the value of these services — which we’re providing to many of their own grantees — they’re substantially stepping up their funding.

I don’t know whether capacity building is “a thing” or pursued in other non-profit industries, but there’s no reason lawyers couldn’t use the same model to provide *pro bono* legal services to non-profits in other areas. It’s something lawyers interested in non-profit legal work may want to explore.

### ***What does your current role entail?***

It turns out that free, high-quality legal work is an easy sell. We became very busy very early on and managing the work coming in and going out consumed much of our time and energy at the outset.

Initially, we provided our services by enlisting the help of volunteer lawyers and the *pro bono* departments of more than a dozen New York national and international law firms. As we grew and became more skilled and successful at fundraising, we were able to slowly build a team of in-house lawyers. We recently brought on an Executive Director, Jaclyn Leeds (who is also a lawyer), and a Director of Legal Services, Jennifer Buesser (one of my former law partners), both of whom are exceptionally capable and good at what they do.

I stopped doing legal work altogether when I retired from practicing in 2019 and I’m less involved in the day-to-day workings of ADP now. But I remain part of our extremely active and strikingly harmonious board of directors, which keeps me quite busy. I also work on bringing in new clients, communicating with existing ones, refining and further developing ADP’s long-term vision, and identifying special projects for which we directly advocate.

In addition to Jennifer, we now have three full-time lawyers — James Honda, Kristin O’Neal, and Jillian Yakominich. Our truly excellent paralegal, Helena “The Glue” Bouchard, keeps it all together. We’re deathly afraid of her attempting to leave ADP to go to law school and I’ve already sketched out an epically awful letter of non-recommendation if she ever does. ADP has an outstandingly talented and devoted team, for whom our leadership is grateful.

***Did you know when you went to law school that this was the kind of work you wanted to do?***

Not at all. Throughout law school, I was pretty sure I didn't even want to be a lawyer. But as far as I knew or know, no one else was or is doing anything like what we're doing. There was no model for this.

Animal law, which is now taught in colleges and universities around the country, wasn't a recognized field when I was in law school. Although we're not practicing animal law at ADP, perhaps that type of work could have been an option for me to consider earlier in my career if not for student loans, an apparent lack of courage to take a different path, and quite a limited interest in non-profit work generally at that stage of my life.

***What is unique about working for a non-profit compared to other types of employers?***

For me, it's the opportunity to do personally meaningful work. Unsurprisingly, doing work that I profoundly care about is far more fulfilling than moving loads of money from one very deep pocket to another. Most of our 300+ animal protection clients have limited financial resources. Many of the people working at these organizations make considerable personal sacrifices, and I'm honored to work with them.

***What do you enjoy the most about your role? What are the greatest challenges?***

What I enjoy most about my role is that I enjoy my role, mostly. Without ADP, our clients would lack access to quality representation. Working to fill this void and seeing our clients' successes give me great satisfaction. Also, our work reduces animal suffering, albeit indirectly, and it's thrilling to be able to contribute in this way. It brings me a sense of purposefulness and contentment. (I'll confess that just being freed from recording billable hours and sending out bills each month is reason enough to be joyful.)

The greatest challenge undoubtedly is seeing and hearing on virtually a daily basis some aspect of the unimaginably horrific things that we as humans do to animals under the guise of sport, education, entertainment, companionship, conservation, and sustenance.

Factory farming, as one facet of our seemingly endless reserves of animal cruelty, is an atrocity. However terrible you may imagine it to be, it's much, much worse. Watching undercover footage obtained in a slaughterhouse that kills up to 1,100 pigs *per hour*, as one example, is beyond horrifying. Dairy farming is also an absolutely travesty. There's so much cruelty and viciousness, and seeing it day after day takes its toll. It changes a person.

Our awfulness knows no bounds. And we should be ashamed of ourselves. Just when I think I've seen or heard the most horrific act a human being can inflict on an animal, along comes something worse. Facing this every day is a formidable challenge. It can be — and certainly has been for me — traumatizing. Still, I intend to pursue this work for as long as I'm able.

Another significant challenge is raising from donors and foundations the many hundreds of thousands of dollars required each year to continue our work. The people and institutions that contribute to us are extremely generous and supportive. But much like building and maintaining a client base in a law practice, it requires constant care and attention.

***Are there particular skills or personality characteristics that are essential to your role?***

Mostly solid lawyering skills, common sense, and good judgment; the same qualities essential for success in a for-profit role. Additionally, it can be helpful to have a sense of compassion, which is far less important, if not a hindrance, in commercial practice.

***What advice would you give to an attorney considering becoming involved in this type of work?***

Pursue something that's personally meaningful to you. If you're not fully committed to the cause, the work will be hard to endure, particularly given the other opportunities you may have in for-profit work. And I urge lawyers starting out to go to the best law firm you can for a few years to (hopefully) get properly trained before going into non-profit law. You're unlikely to get that level of training working for a non-profit from the outset.

***Who or what inspires you?***

Our clients' devotion, selflessness, and commitment to doing something that's very difficult to do inspires me. I'm pursuing this work after a long legal career that enabled me to first build a life for my family. For the overwhelming majority of (non-lawyer) animal advocates, this is their entire career. They have no such opportunity or cushion. They give up so much to do this sometimes-brutal work.

One of our lawyers at ADP remarked recently, "this is my first legal job I'm proud to tell people about." This and similar sentiments inspire me to do everything possible to keep ADP going as an outlet for lawyers who may want to do this work.

Visiting Africa to see and spend time with animals there, particularly my hour with a family of the Rwandan mountain gorillas and my week at an elephant orphanage in Kenya, was transformative

and certainly greatly inspiring. Seeing those animals unencumbered makes it very difficult to passively tolerate what we do to them in captivity.

*How can legal volunteers get involved with ADP?*

Please email me at [david@animaldefensepartnership.org](mailto:david@animaldefensepartnership.org) and we'll go from there.