

Appreciating each side



By David Susler
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By Christina Martini
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Here is a portion of their conversation. An extended version is available at chicagolawyer.com.

What are you envious about the other side's position in the legal practice — Tina being a law firm lawyer and David being an in-house lawyer?

David Susler: That's a tough one because I love what I do and I don't want to go back to private practice. However, sometimes when talking with outside counsel, like Tina, for example, I get a bit envious of their depth of knowledge and expertise in their field. That being said, I enjoy my specialty of being an in-house generalist and don't want to trade it in for anything else.

Tina Martini: The one thing I'm envious about with respect to in-house lawyers is that they interface so closely with their business colleagues on a regular basis.

This results in a level of understanding of their client's business that you ordinarily do not achieve in private practice — the business' needs, desires, pressure points, strengths, weaknesses and its long-term strategies and goals. This enables in-house lawyers to partner with their clients in a deeper, more meaningful way.

Often times, in-house lawyers are also able to wear other hats within their organizations, which enables them to get exposure to different aspects of the business that are not only interesting but which also provide tremendous learning opportunities outside of what one generally finds in private practice.

I believe it would be a lot of fun to have those types of experiences.

What biggest lesson have you learned about yourselves and each other as lawyers?

Susler: I've learned a few things about myself.

One is that I love being an in-house generalist, which is a far cry from what I thought I wanted to be when I was growing up.

I've learned that life takes you places you never would have imagined before you get there and that your dreams, desires and goals change as you go through life — and that it's much easier and more enjoyable to embrace that change than to fight it.

I've learned that I enjoy handling new matters that I've never handled before or, as I often describe it, I enjoy working outside of my comfort zone.

I've also learned that I have good instincts, that I can and should trust them and that I do best when I rely on them.

About Tina, I've known her since she was a second-year associate and I've had the pleasure of watching her grow and mature as an attorney and become a leader both in her practice and in her firm.

I've been a client of hers, so I know just how good a lawyer she is.

Through it all, and especially through working together on this column, her passion, her drive, her commitment to excellence and unwavering integrity never cease to amaze and inspire me. No matter what obstacles may be thrown in her way, she overcomes them, moves past them and becomes that much stronger as a result.

Martini: I've learned that there are a myriad of ways to define yourself as a lawyer and to carve out a career path that is most meaningful to you.

When I look at the choices that David and I have made with our respective careers, they could not have been more different. David is now the happiest he has ever been in his career and I believe he is very well suited to having a generalist practice.

It really fits his personality and his professional interests and goals. I have learned a lot about him personally by watching him develop as an attorney and observing the professional setting in which he flourishes the most — which is to closely partner with his business colleagues and to deal with a wide variety of legal issues.

With respect to myself, I have learned that I am an experiencer, meaning that I enjoy having a variety of roles.

My No. 1 priority is delivering top-notch legal services to my clients and being their trusted adviser.

That is the most important thing I can do for them and for my firm.

I have spent my career honing my legal skills so as to be effective in that role. There are a variety of other responsibilities I have had over the years at my firm that have enabled me to develop a unique skill set beyond just being a lawyer.

I have had numerous leadership roles in various contexts, including within my practice group, hiring, pro bono, diversity and professional development.

These roles have helped me to grow and develop as a professional and as an individual. They have also taught me that I can accomplish whatever I set out to do and that I can create a career that is unique to me and about which I am passionate and committed. ■

David and Tina are not only lawyers who practice on different sides of the table, but they are also married to each other.

If you have any topics that you want them to discuss or if you have questions for them about this column please e-mail them or editor@lbpc.com.

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