

Inside Out > column



By Christina Martini
DLA Piper



By David Susler
National Material L.P.

Going global should be for everyone

To learn more about what attorneys Tina Martini and David Susler have to say about globalization visit chicagolawyer.com to see their video.

How are law firms and legal departments global entities today?

Martini: Both law firms and legal departments are invaluable partners in addressing both legal and business issues. Even if their clients' operations are primarily domestic in scope, given the global nature of the economy, the marketplace, politics and technological interconnectivity, nearly every business impacts others and is likewise impacted on a global scale.

Thus, it is inevitable that customers, legal and business issues, problem-solving processes and solutions and the consequences thereof will all be global as well. Given this reality, in order to effectively serve clients' needs, both law firms and legal departments need to be where their clients are, both substantively and geographically.

Susler: I agree. We live in a global economy — one needs to look no further than the current U.S. economic turmoil, fueled at least as much by economic troubles in Europe as here in the U.S.

This means that all businesses and their lawyers must think globally, even if they operate only domestically.

What are the challenges to being a global firm or business?

Martini: The biggest challenge is in striking that delicate balance among a variety of competing interests, all of which are important to the long-term success of the organization. This includes reaching an optimal solution to the legal and business issues which arise, particularly where the consequences

are international in scope. It is also a challenge to stay current, relevant and competitive in each of the critical marketplaces across the world.

A key ingredient to doing this effectively is to have seamless and open communication with your team members and clients across the globe. It is also vital to find ways to be proactive, forward thinking, innovative and a market leader, rather than being reactive and a follower.

Susler: A major challenge is knowing not only the laws, but the customs and culture of other countries you are dealing with. People conduct business differently around the world and you must be able to negotiate and bridge those differences successfully in order to practice in a global setting.

Other challenges include finding a common language in which to communicate and different time zones.

One cannot underestimate the challenge of finding mutually convenient times to talk with people living many time zones away. It may seem like a minor point, but for anyone who has dealt with this issue, it can be quite difficult and disruptive.

What skills should a lawyer have to help a global mission?

Martini: There are a number of very important skills that a lawyer practicing in a global environment should possess.

First, they need to be a great lawyer with a strong business sense and excellent interpersonal skills.

They must be open-minded and should be able to appreciate and see legal and business issues from a variety of angles.

They must also have a working understanding and sensitivity to other cultures,

customs and perspectives. To the extent that there is a gap in this type of knowledge, they should be willing to learn through work projects, study, travel and seeking advice from others with such experience. In addition, being collaborative and a team player is vital as well as having an understanding that legal and business decisions in today's global environment will often have a ripple effect beyond the matter at hand, so it is important to analyze issues from that perspective as well.

Susler: Flexibility and patience.

You cannot be too set in your ways of doing things because your counterpart across the globe likely does it differently. You need to be able and willing to compromise to find common ground in order to accomplish your goals in the international arena.

It is also important to know your own limitations and to retain appropriate outside counsel to help you navigate those areas in which you may not have the requisite skills or experience.

Each of these skills or attributes is necessary to success in any given situation but especially in the international arena.

You can always learn technical details and applicable law but being able to work successfully with people from different countries, different cultures, with different world views, requires a skill set that is more people oriented than substantive oriented. ■

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 related to the practice of law that you want them to address please e-mail them.

christinamartini.insideout@gmail.com
davidsusler.insideout@gmail.com