

# Chicago Lawyer®

Volume 34 Number 12/Volume 35 Number 01 • [chicagolawyer.com](http://chicagolawyer.com)

## Inside Out > column



By Christina Martini  
DLA Piper



By David Susler  
National Material L.P.

## Strong emotional intelligence

**H**ere is a portion of the conversation. An extended version is available at [chicagolawyer.com](http://chicagolawyer.com)

**Why is high emotional intelligence important for a lawyer to have?**

**Tina Martini:** High emotional intelligence (EQ) is what can transform a good lawyer into a great one and what effectively distinguishes lawyers from each other. Great client service is in large part attributable to a high EQ.

Strong EQ is a successful balance between one's intellect and intuition, both about one's self and one's environment. It can provide extraordinarily helpful information, not only with respect to substantive lawyering, but also in understanding the context of a project, the client's organization, its business, who the key decision-makers are and what they value, how they make their decisions and how they define success. These issues, and many more, most often require lawyers to feel their way by using their EQ skills. Often, the answers are not readily apparent and cannot be logically reasoned. Strong EQ is a fundamental part of effectively navigating these waters and ultimately achieving the desired results for clients.

**David Susler:** We all acknowledge the important role emotions play in decision-making. Based on your experiences, you develop gut feelings or intuition about what to do or what the answers are to certain questions. This is EQ — as Tina said, a balance between one's intellect and intuition. This can also be described as the ability to discern or find the root of the matter. You can learn to use your instincts or intuition in combination with your intellect to find the best option for your client and organization.

In today's world, success in large part is built upon strong relationships — for example, in

the in-house context, between in-house attorney and business colleagues, with other lawyers in the legal department and with outside counsel to serve the company as a whole. EQ helps you build trust and confidence with others and to understand the interrelationships between different people in your organization. This, in turn, helps you deliver appropriate advice, which ultimately leads to career and organizational success.

**What is the biggest misconception lawyers have about emotional intelligence?**

**Martini:** Emotional intelligence is a relatively new concept, and it is subjective, intangible and “right brain.” This often leads to the misconception that EQ is not as important as one's technical lawyering skills or that it is largely irrelevant. This view does not recognize the significant changes the legal profession has undergone over the past few years, particularly during the most recent recession. These changes have had a significant impact on how clients define professional excellence. Clients are really looking for trusted advisers who are able to see beyond the issue at hand and can connect the dots in a unique, meaningful way that brings value to the relationship. This goes far beyond just being a technically proficient lawyer. It requires a higher level of awareness, dedication, perspective and savvy, both in the subject matter at issue as well as with respect to relationship management. All of these qualities are inextricably linked to EQ.

**Susler:** Another misconception is that it is all about touchy-feely emotions. EQ includes such concepts as self-awareness, perceiving and understanding emotions and interpreting emotions to facilitate thought. These are tools that help you improve in areas such as client service and creative problem-solving.

**How can lawyers use strong emotional intelligence to better assist their clients and better work with their colleagues?**

**Martini:** Strong EQ enables lawyers to be more self-aware, which gives them the ability to more accurately assess their strengths and weaknesses. This enables them to better assess the optimal way to substantively serve their clients' needs. High EQ attorneys are also better able to perceive and understand their own emotions and those of others, how they react to certain situations and people, as well as regulate their own behavior and manage their relationships with clients and colleagues. A high social awareness enables lawyers to proactively address issues by observing both verbal and nonverbal cues and by effectively practicing the art of listening. Ultimately, lawyers can better serve their clients and colleagues by having strong relationship skills.

**Susler:** Say you are having a difficult day and a client walks into your office and asks what you think is a stupid question. EQ allows you to do several things to ensure a positive outcome rather than saying something you will later regret. First, through self-awareness, you recognize your foul mood, then put it aside and interact with your client professionally. This enables you to actually listen to your client and discern what she is truly asking. You may realize that what you thought was a stupid question was, in fact, a request for assistance and support in handling pushback she is getting from her superiors. If you have relationships with her superiors as well, you will understand the interconnectedness among the players and to the organization, leading you to not only have a positive meeting but also to rendering appropriate advice. ■

[christinamartini.insideout@gmail.com](mailto:christinamartini.insideout@gmail.com)  
[davidsusler.insideout@gmail.com](mailto:davidsusler.insideout@gmail.com)