

## Inside Out > column



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## Valuing innovation in your career

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

**What does the word innovation mean to you with regard to the legal community?**

**Tina Martini:** There are a number of ways to answer that question, depending on the individual or organization offering the legal services, the recipient of those services and the general context in which the legal services are being offered. Being innovative can mean offering legal services in a better, improved way — more streamlined, more cost-effective and more value-based than previously. For some, innovation maximizes both the quantity and quality of the legal services being offered while at the same time minimizing the effort and expenditure of resources associated with those offerings. Innovation can also mean that problem solving takes into account a myriad of other considerations beyond just the legal issues and includes such things as business, economic and moral factors. Finally, innovation can mean doing that which has never been done before. Sometimes this means doing something others have thought of but have been unable to implement and other times it means accomplishing something that others have not even thought of. Innovation means progress, growth and creativity.

**David Susler:** The word itself means the introduction of something new, a new idea or method. The theme is moving forward in a positive way. Innovation in the legal community includes new ways of partnering between law firms and clients, in ways that benefit both the substantive provision of legal services and ways to improve the profession. A good example of recent and on-going innovation in the legal community is the re-engineering of the attorney/client relationship to reconnect

value and billing, increase efficiencies and strengthen long-term relationships between firms and clients. Another area of innovation involves ongoing efforts to make the bar as inclusive and truly reflective of society as possible, including such initiatives as pipeline projects and internship programs that incorporate a strong mentoring component.

**Why should a good lawyer be innovative?**

**Martini:** Being innovative helps ensure that you are growing, maturing, progressing and staying relevant as an attorney and as an individual. It helps set you apart from others. Both as a profession and a society, we are encountering new and unique issues now more than ever before, which means that lawyers need to be able to adapt and approach problem solving with a fresh, creative perspective. Being innovative also gives you an edge with respect to client service and business development. By taking unique, effective approaches and following the proverbial roads less traveled, clients will view you as an invaluable part of their team. This is particularly true when you can help them frame their issues in unique ways and when you lead them to discover needs they did not even know they had. There is a Steve Jobs quote which sums this up nicely. When asked whether he conducted market research for a particular product, Jobs responded, “No, because customers don’t know what they want until we’ve shown them.” That is the ultimate success in innovation.

**Susler:** Tina nailed it. If you want to continue to be successful and relevant, you must innovate, you must change and grow with the times, with the law, with your clients. If you don’t, you will be left behind.

**How do you encourage your firm or company to think outside the box?**

**Martini:** Thinking outside the box is now

the new normal for the legal profession. Clients not only want it but expect it of their outside counsel and innovation is one of the ways they differentiate their service providers from each other. It is a critical part of staying competitive, both on an individual and collective basis. Organizations looking to stay at the top of their game should think of ways to incentivize innovative and creative efforts and behavior, especially when it drives desired results. On a more personal level, thinking outside the box keeps you more mentally engaged and pushes you to learn, grow and stretch beyond your limits. This generates excitement about your career.

**Susler:** I agree completely. The question then becomes how can one go about implementing these new ideas, which may include process changes and, almost as a necessity or by-product, changing the culture of your firm or company. To effectuate change, to successfully implement your outside-the-box thinking, you must have a good understanding of your organization’s culture as it is, as well as the ways that various leaders within your organization think. This will enable you to approach the appropriate people, in the right order and in the right way, to speak so that they hear you, so that they will jump on board and work with you to implement your innovations. Moving individuals is one thing, moving an entire organization is quite another and you have to be able to first build a team of leaders who are on board with your innovations and then motivate the team to help spread the ideas and the change throughout. It may take time and perseverance, but it can be ultimately rewarding and, in the process, will likely lead to further innovation. ■

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