

## Standing out from the crowd



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**H**ere is a portion of the conversation. To learn more about this topic visit [chicagolawyer.com](http://chicagolawyer.com).

**What does it mean to be a unique lawyer?**

**Tina Martini:** When you are unique, you stand apart from the rest. You have a skill set, attitude and approach that make you different. When people look at the totality of who you are — your personality, your talents, your clients, your actions and your contributions to the profession — they automatically know it is you, even if your name is not mentioned. There is a lot of self-awareness that comes with the territory and the ability to authentically embrace who you are as both a professional and an individual. You need to be able to own what makes you unique and you should not be afraid to follow the beat of your own drum.

**David Susler:** There are certain guitar players who you know just by hearing them play a song, such as Eric Clapton or Jerry Garcia, or just by hearing their voices, such as Bruce Springsteen or Bob Dylan. Now, in my opinion, that's a good thing; in Tina's opinion, at least for Dylan, maybe not so much. However, focus on their songwriting and most people, including Tina, will think both Springsteen and Dylan are outstanding songwriters.

Being a unique lawyer is similar in many ways. They are known for certain specialties or skills that instantly set them apart. Some lawyers are unique because they have a practice that few others share or they have developed a reputation for being distinguished among other practitioners in their specialty. Some lawyers are notable for doing things in a particular, ideally positive, way. Maybe you are known for your cross-examination or conflict resolution skills. Uniqueness may lie in superior writing talent or advocacy skills. You may

have a knack for relationship building or management skills. These are the things that differentiate lawyers, that set you apart when others think about you or that make others think of you when they are in need of a particular skill set.

**When should you blend in and when should you stand out in the law office?**

**Martini:** Oftentimes it is a delicate balance. You should stand out for positive, selfless reasons, such as doing a great job on a client project or on a pro bono case. It should not be intentional on your part and you should not be standing out for standing out's sake. When tooting your own horn is appropriate, it should be done thoughtfully, carefully and respectfully. For example, when doing business development, you should focus on those skills that make you valuable and unique and play up your strengths. This will help potential clients to distinguish you from your competition much more easily. You should always be respectful and avoid gratuitously criticizing your competition, since that is unseemly and unprofessional.

It is often better to blend in when, for example, you are working on getting a project done and out the door. That's when being collaborative and a team player are most important. Everyone on the team has an invaluable contribution to make. While there are certain team members who will inevitably stand out more than others, such as the team leader, they should not be forceful or overly assertive about it. It is important that everyone works well together and is collaborative rather than engaging in a power struggle.

**Susler:** You always want to stand out in a positive way so that others notice you and so that they want to work with you or retain you. Blend in by showing that you fit with the

organization's culture, mission and platform, but again, only so far as to ensure you don't stick out like a sore thumb and make others turn the other way. You want to blend in to the point that others consider you a team player. At the same time, you want to make sure you maintain your individuality and demonstrate that you are an impact player and making a positive difference.

**How can young lawyers stand out from the pack to their superiors/clients?**

**Martini:** Young lawyers need to focus on standing out for the right reasons. These include doing great work, working incredibly hard and showing maturity and wisdom. There is simply no substitute for having that fire in the belly and a willingness to go through a brick wall for clients. They should demonstrate that they are deep thinkers, highly intellectual and emotionally intelligent, and that they have a strong business savvy.

**Susler:** Again, Tina and I are thinking along the same lines. The best way to stand out is to produce outstanding work product. This will always get you noticed.

However, this alone is not enough. You must package it with that mix of getting along and standing out we just discussed. Young lawyers need to demonstrate drive, focus and integrity. Show that you are not afraid of the difficult work or long hours. Demonstrate perseverance, poise and determination when working on difficult assignments and under demanding circumstances.

It's also important not to complain about the long hours and hard work. That will get you noticed all right, but not in a positive way. Be a leader and speak up with solutions when there are problems. ■

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