

## Inside Out > column



By Christina Martini  
DLA Piper



By David Susler  
National Material L.P.

## Dealing with stress

**H**ere is a portion of the conversation. To learn more about this topic see the video at our website, [chicagolawyer.com](http://chicagolawyer.com).

**What can be the most stressful part about being a lawyer today?**

**Tina Martini:** The most fundamental stress comes from the fact that the business world is evolving at a supersonic speed and there is no indication that it has or will slow down anytime soon. Law firms and their clients are businesses and, as a result, there is a lot of change in the legal profession and a lot of pressure to keep up. There is much uncertainty about where all of this is headed and what will happen if we cannot move as quickly as the rest of the business community.

The simple fact is that the demand for legal services is contracting, yet there are more lawyers now than ever before. The pressure for each of us lies in figuring out how to satisfy existing clients while at the same time creating opportunities with new potential clients, all with the end goal of establishing a steady pipeline of work and building a practice, while dealing with a shrinking market for our services. Gone are the days when work was falling from the sky. It is now about doing your best to understand what makes existing and potential clients happy and continuing to grow both professionally and personally so that you can be as nimble and resilient as possible in our profession's new normal.

**David Susler:** Practicing law is and long has been a demanding career. Depending on your practice, you often figuratively and, sometimes literally, have your client's life in your hands. Our decisions as lawyers affect our clients' financial health, their livelihoods, their liberty and potentially their lives. Such awesome responsibility can understandably be

quite stressful. If that is not enough, add to that the fact that modern technology has made practicing more of a 24/7, 365 days a year proposition, which only adds to the stress.

Despite all that, our profession and our responsibilities can also be exhilarating and empowering. We have many opportunities to positively impact the lives of our clients and society as a whole. While our profession can be stressful, it can also be quite enjoyable and fulfilling.

**How do you handle a situation when you haven't met your client's or boss' goals?**

**Martini:** Whenever there is a lack of alignment between your performance and expectations as to how you should have performed, it is critical to deconstruct what happened to figure out where the issues lie, not only to mitigate whatever consequences there may be, but so that you can also prevent similar misunderstandings from happening in the future.

For example, there may have been a lapse in communication by either or both parties; a lack of understanding of the substantive legal areas at issue; expectations for the project may not have been effectively communicated or understood; there may have been improper staffing of the project; a lack of follow-through; a lack of timeliness; or an inappropriate packaging of the results (e.g., the wrong deliverable). By talking through the situation openly and honestly and taking responsibility for one's shortcomings, a better understanding can be achieved as well as developing a constructive, proactive path for moving forward.

**Susler:** Everyone makes mistakes and falls short of expectations once in a while. When that happens, own it, take responsibility, fix it, communicate it and move forward. Communication is the key, with your clients and your

boss. Trying to hide it or pushing the blame on to others is the surest path toward disaster and the exit door.

**What tips do you have for leading a healthy life?**

**Martini:** It is very important to take care of your body as best as you can and to also do things that nourish your soul. Dealing with stress effectively is an important part of staying healthy, and on that front, I meditate regularly and exercise when I can. I also have hobbies, including being a journalist, which helps me to channel my passion for writing in a fun, creative way.

To me, the most important key to health and happiness is having passion for what you do and a zest for life. When you love what you do, and who you do it with, the pressures and long hours that inevitably come with the territory no longer feel as burdensome since you are following your passion. The excitement that you feel for your job feeds on itself and gives you the energy to keep going the extra mile and leads to better performance. This will generate a greater appreciation for your contributions and achievements.

**Susler:** I agree completely and would add that laughter is an essential component of a healthy life. Given the stress of our profession, a positive outlook on life and your job is also important. As we have discussed, and as Tina recently wrote about in her "Paradigm Shift" column in the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin*, it is important to pursue a career path that you are passionate about. If you are happy in your job, in your career, then you will likely be happier in your life generally, which likely will lead to a healthier life. And have a good laugh at least once a day. ■

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