

Get multi-dimensional

Diversify yourself, form better client relationships

What does it mean to be a multi-dimensional lawyer?

Martini: Being multi-dimensional means that you bring qualities, talents and attributes to the fore, which enable you to tackle numerous issues and myriad matters with aplomb. You are able to analyze situations from different points of view

which are appropriate for the circumstances. You are able to communicate, strategize and execute wearing a variety of hats. You are resilient, flexible and nimble.

Susler: I would add that it includes drawing upon a combination of legal knowledge, business knowledge, emotional intelligence, as well as an understanding and awareness of other areas such as culture and current events. The ability to do this is facilitated by having multiple and varied interests in life generally. You might look at it as the diversity within you.

Why is being multi-dimensional important?

Martini: It is invaluable from both client service and leadership perspectives. It enables you to be more out-of-the-box and non-linear in your thought process and gives you the ability to be more effective in your problem-solving. It provides different lenses through which to observe the world and the ability to empathize with clients and colleagues so that you can avoid having tunnel vision. Being multi-dimensional enables you to work with many different types of clients with ease and to work with the same client across many different situations. It is not so much about being the subject-matter expert across distinct legal areas as it is having a heightened awareness and sensitivity that enables you to meaningfully contribute in various situations and to address the relevant issues quickly and effectively, either on your own or with the assistance of others you choose to bring in. We live in a world where lawyers need to differentiate themselves, and this is one way to do just that.

Susler: The broader your interests and curiosity, and the more you are open to new experiences, the better equipped you will be to approach client matters from different angles and to advise your clients not just on black-letter law but within a context that makes a practical difference for their needs. Being multi-dimensional makes it easier to form relationships with different types of people, which not only leads to being a better and more successful lawyer, but also leads to more fulfillment in life generally. For example, I think most attorneys will agree



Inside Out

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Martini's husband, **David G. Susler**, is associate general counsel with National Material L.P., a manufacturing company primarily engaged in steel processing and aluminum extrusion. He has a general practice, providing advice, counseling and training to all business sectors and operation.

Watch them talk more about this topic with the Better Government Association's Andy Shaw at chicagolawyer magazine.com. To submit a question for future columns, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com.

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that the excitement of contract drafting tends to wane after drafting hundreds of them. Boredom can lead to mistakes.

So, I find ways to maintain my interest and thereby sharpen my focus on what is truly important in the contract. I like to take the 50,000-foot view and understand what the contract means in the larger context

of my company's business, our customer's business, even the economy as a whole. This helps me understand the broader benefits and pitfalls beyond the document in front of me, which leads to better lawyering and greater career satisfaction.

How do you balance being multi-dimensional with being a specialist?

Martini: It is a delicate balance which requires frequent evaluation and recalibration. The right balance is highly dependent on where you are now and what you want to achieve in your career. If your goal is to have a thriving, prolific practice, you must be a great lawyer, stay on top of new developments, continuously look for ways to perfect your craft, make yourself known and to differentiate yourself in the market. If your objective is to be in leadership, there are skills you need to develop and hone that go far beyond just being a respected practitioner and typically involve some level of executive coaching and management training that will help you develop your skills. Striking the right balance requires you to be strategic and to prioritize what is of greatest importance to you. It is a highly personalized exercise.

What is the interplay between being a generalist and being multi-dimensional?

Susler: As a generalist, I handle many different substantive legal matters that arise across all of our business sectors, involving myriad factual scenarios. Being multi-dimensional helps me to understand and give advice that better meets the overall goals and needs of my clients. It also helps me work well with many different people at all levels within our companies and with our customers and vendors. I think it is also why I thrive on the variety and breadth of my practice and the rapidity with which new matters come to me every day, enabling me to constantly be learning and growing as an attorney and as a person. Being multi-dimensional is a key ingredient to succeeding in such a practice. ■

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