

Developing your own style

Knowing what works, what doesn't is the key

What are the key ingredients to a lawyer's style?

Martini: There are a number of key factors in defining our individual style. The most obvious is our outward appearance, including how we dress and present ourselves. Our demeanor is another critical component, and it transcends how we look and drives how we come across to others.

Our demeanor refers to those qualities and characteristics which others notice when interacting with us and what they would say when describing us. It is a critically important aspect of our style, and there should be alignment between how we think we come across and how others actually view us.

Disconnects in this regard can often be tricky to navigate and can have significant consequences. Indeed, our demeanor is inextricably linked to our overall effectiveness with other aspects of our style, including how we perform at the type of work we do and in our approach with clients as well as with business development efforts. Our style often makes the difference in our ability to land that new client or to resolve a difficult case.

Susler: When thinking of style, I think first of one's demeanor, their IQ and EQ (emotional intelligence) and the balance between them. For example, some attorneys are all business, direct and to the point, while others are more friendly and personable. Some lawyers have a commanding presence, while others are more demure. One might be a strong strategist, while another more a tactician. Ultimately, your style must be true to who you are.

Why is it important to have your own distinct style?

Martini: We can all learn a lot from watching others and seeing what works and what doesn't. But we must then take stock of those qualities and characteristics which resonate the most, tweak them and carry them forward into the world.

Developing a style that works should give us a level of comfort, confidence and self-assurance which then optimizes our interactions with others and enables them to feel like they know us and what we are all about. Predictability is key, and is all about balance and nuance.

We need to be authentic but also act within acceptable bounds based on our environments and audiences. While we all want to meaningfully distinguish ourselves from the crowd, we should be sure to stand out



Inside Out

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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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for the right reasons rather than the wrong ones.

How important is style when you hire outside counsel?

Susler: Before hiring outside counsel, I analyze not only the type of matter and legal issues involved but also our goals and who the stakeholders are within my company. I then consider outside counsel's approach, the way

they work, their personality and demeanor.

I consider not only whether a particular style is a good match for me but also whether it aligns with my company's style and goals. I also assess whether the attorney is a good match for opposing counsel.

Style is often highly influential when choosing outside counsel and can make the difference in deciding between attorneys A and B.

How has your style changed over time?

Martini: When I was a junior lawyer, my primary objective was to fit in with the other attorneys and general culture of my firm. I worked with many people and learned about different styles of practice.

I figured out the type of lawyer I wanted to be, the type of practice I wanted to have and the people with whom I wanted to work. Now that I am 20 years into my career, I must have my own style. I strive to be a great technical lawyer with a healthy dose of creativity and pragmatism, who is collaborative and has a strong client service orientation, with an interesting and unique professional and personal background.

I am not the typical lawyer and, while I pride myself on thinking outside the box to bring an interesting perspective to clients and their problems, I still manage to color within the lines, so to speak.

Susler: Like Tina, as a young lawyer, I observed other attorneys to learn their styles. Over time, I developed my own. To some extent, my style today was always part of me, but I did not have the same confidence to let it shine through as a young attorney. I began my career as a litigator, in depositions and court most days, whereas now I am an in-house generalist — two very different practices.

Finding the practice that best suits my personality and interests lends itself to having the confidence to allow my own style to shine through. I also think my style continues to evolve by always learning and growing as an individual and as an attorney. ■

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