

Wearing different hats

Don't be afraid to try something new; it will make you better

Why should lawyers take on different roles and responsibilities during the course of their careers?

Martini: I am a strong advocate for people wearing different hats over their careers. Taking on different roles enables you to round out your skill set in a way that staying in the same role does not. It also helps you to figure out what you really like and want for your career. Sometimes you have no idea that you like something until you have the chance to try it. Moreover, what you want and need from your job changes over time as you grow and mature. Wearing different hats allows you to explore different aspects of yourself while at the same time meeting new people and gaining a better understanding of various facets of your employer's organization and the business world in general.

Susler: Taking on different roles and responsibilities helps you become a more well-rounded person, which helps you become a better lawyer. Taking on a variety of roles over time enhances your facility to handle a variety of situations and issues you will undoubtedly encounter in your career, which in turn enhances career advancement. It also helps add variety and fun to your life, which leads to greater overall fulfillment in both your career and life generally. You may not realize how much happier you can be until you try something else, as I discovered when I moved in-house.

What are some examples of different roles you have had over the course of your career?

Martini: Before I went to law school, I worked at several record stores and as an industrial engineering intern in the microcircuits factory at Motorola. In law school, I worked as an intern in the legal department at Baxter Healthcare. Since graduating law school, I have been at the same law firm for my entire career. I have worn a number of different hats while there, including leading different client teams; working on-site at two clients for about a year; leading the Chicago office hiring team for five years; having a leadership role within my practice group; being on the steering committees for the firm's diversity and inclusion and women's initiatives; being a member of the firm's executive and policy committees; and being a legal and business columnist for a number of publications over the past several years. Each of these roles has played an invaluable part in who I am today as a professional and as a person — even those jobs which you would not think immediately translate into a career in the law.

Susler: I began my working career at age 15 cleaning floors in a lamp



Inside Out

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist.

She is vice chair of the Chicago intellectual property practice group at DLA Piper and sits on its executive committee. She focuses on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, Internet, advertising and unfair competition law.

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.

shade factory and then worked at a restaurant during college. Since graduating from law school, I have been a new associate/first-year lawyer; I mention this because it is important to remember that is where we all started. I worked at four different law firms before going in-house, handling both defense and plaintiff's personal-injury and complex tort cases. Since transitioning to in-house, I have worked at three different companies. I began my in-house career as the first in-house lawyer for a startup consulting company in the technology sector, creating both the legal and human resources departments from scratch. From there, I went to a small electronics manufacturer where I was again the sole in-house attorney. I am now one of two attorneys for a family of companies in the steel and aluminum manufacturing sector, doing business all over the world. I have been a board member for different nonprofit organizations, including a homeless services agency and a bar association, both of which included holding various officer positions, including president.

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What advice do you have for lawyers who are looking for new possibilities?

Martini: I would recommend a few things.

First, be creative about the options you are considering, but also be realistic, particularly about the amount of time that is required to take on a new role. You should also be strategic about the roles you explore — think about the skills that you have and those which you are trying to develop and how best to acquire them. It is also important to give full consideration to whether your employer can offer you the opportunities you seek and whether they would otherwise be supportive in your efforts to acquire these skills. Getting new/different experience does not necessarily mean that you need to find another job. Sometimes you can take on different roles with your current employer or by working with an outside organization such as a trade association.

Susler: That is excellent advice to which I would add: Do not be afraid to try new things. If you don't try, you may well miss out on something you truly enjoy. My career is a good example. After doing personal-injury litigation for a number of years and essentially burning out on it without a backup plan, I jumped in head-first to become an in-house generalist without any prior experience, only to learn that I both love and excel at it. I think most lawyers find their specialties by serendipity rather than intention. Trying new roles is one of the best methods to accomplish this. ■

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