

## Turning points

Every change opens new avenues, gives you new vistas

**W**hat are some of the major turning points in your career?

**Martini:** There have been a number of inflection points as a working professional. The first was while I was working as an engineering intern in a microcircuits factory at Motorola during college. It was a terrific job as a student and offered a glimpse of what my

life would have been like as a full-time engineer. I realized it would have been interesting and well within my sweet spot but not enough to enable me to stretch and grow the way I wanted — so I chose law school.

Other significant turning points include transitioning my practice from real estate to intellectual property my second year of practice; making partner at my firm; my first significant leadership position at DLA Piper, which was as the Chicago office hiring partner; and when I joined the firm's executive committee. Each of these experiences have started a new chapter in my professional development and have provided the opportunity to meaningfully diversify my skill set.

**Susler:** The first was when I switched from defense to plaintiffs' personal injury, finally embarking upon my life's goal. The next major inflection points were realizing that I did not enjoy plaintiffs' PI work and then taking a leap of faith and going in-house. This required completely re-engineering my career to become an in-house generalist, which I discovered I love doing. Another important point was joining the Association of Corporate Counsel Chicago Board of Directors. I have not only learned many valuable skills and made good friends, I have also been able to become a leader in the in-house bar in Chicago and make a positive difference for my colleagues, something I did not initially set out to do but am greatly honored to have been able to accomplish.

**If you could do it all over again, what would you do differently?**

**Martini:** In large part, I am very happy and fulfilled with the decisions I have made over the course of my career. If I could turn back the clock, I would have found time to finish the master's degree in safety engineering I started while I was in college. I would have also started developing my professional network earlier. Being an introvert by nature, it was hard for me to come out of my shell until I was forced to do it.

**Susler:** I can think of many things, such as going to a smaller college and taking business courses in college. However, the reality is that I would not be the person or the lawyer that I am today had I done



### 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](http://chicagolawyer magazine.com). To submit a question for future columns, e-mail [questions.insideout@gmail.com](mailto:questions.insideout@gmail.com).

anything differently. I am one of the lucky ones because I like who I am today, where I am in my career and have a fulfilling life. So I would not change a thing.

**What is some advice you wish others had given you along the way?**

**Martini:** There are a few lessons I have learned along the way that I wish I had been told earlier. First, while

a career in the law can be very rewarding, it can also be all-consuming, and it is important to pursue outside hobbies and interests too so that you can be a happier, better-balanced person.

You also need to consistently look for ways to stretch and grow as a professional. While many lawyers often equate this with learning different areas of the law and taking on a wide variety of work projects, it is also just as important, if not more so, to develop your soft skills. People who are truly good at both can be hard to find and are the ones who tend to find more professional and personal success and satisfaction in the long run.

**Susler:** I actually received some outstanding advice along the way, particularly from my father. What I truly wish I had done is follow his advice. I now get it and follow it, at least what I still can. My father's advice actually is the bulk of the advice I now pass along to others.

**What is the best advice you have ever received?**

**Martini:** I have been the beneficiary of a lot of great advice over the years. One thing that immediately comes to mind is when I was told to channel my interest and proficiency in math and science into studying engineering in college. Having this background has been a game-changer for me, even though I did not ultimately have a career as an engineer.

It has enabled me to look at the world and its perplexities through a very different, more discerning lens, which gives me the opportunity to bring something unique to the table. I am also a firm believer in the importance of following your passion, which was some great advice I was given a number of years ago.

**Susler:** Two pieces of excellent advice from my father were to treat everyone well and as your equal, because they are and because you can learn from everyone. Also, keep an open mind and learn as much as you can about as many different topics as possible, as everything affects the practice of law, in ways you cannot necessarily anticipate. It will help you be a better lawyer. ■

[questions.insideout@gmail.com](mailto:questions.insideout@gmail.com)