

Developing trust

Top priorities: Be honest, straightforward and authentic

What does it mean to be a trusted adviser?

Martini: Being a trusted adviser means that you are a client's go-to person to discuss a wide array of issues, both within and outside of your practice area.

You are a confidant, so that when concerns arise and decisions are being made, you are one of the first people that your client wants to consult. You are an invaluable partner and resource with a high level of credibility and trustworthiness. In addition to having the requisite book smarts and education, you also have a very practical wisdom that enables you to understand the overall context of an issue or problem from various angles.

You are also caring and empathetic, and while you revel in your client's successes, you are also often up at night worrying about the matters which matter to them.

Susler: It means you have built a level of trust and confidence with your client so that they not only seek your advice but rely on you as a go-to consultant/adviser/sounding board before they move forward on a particular project or decision.

To be a trusted adviser means you are known for having particularly strong judgment, credibility and trustworthiness, and others come to you for advice and consultation as a result.

Why is it important?

Martini: Everyone wants a trusted adviser, especially clients who are often called upon to make complex, multi-faceted judgment calls at lightning speed.

They appreciate being able to call upon lawyers with industry knowledge whom they trust implicitly and who can draw from a breadth of relevant personal and professional experience to assist in their decision-making process.

Having this type of dynamic enables a more effective flow of information and allows for a greater level of candor and understanding which helps ensure optimal decision-making. Being able to develop and maintain a trusted adviser relationship is also significant in differentiating yourself from other lawyers in the marketplace.

Susler: Being a trusted adviser is one of the hallmarks of being a lawyer and is essential to one's success in the profession.

I think those with the reputation of being a trusted adviser enjoy the greatest career success — this could mean in terms of money and titles,



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.com. To submit a question for future columns, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com.

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but what I am referring to is more about the issues of career and personal satisfaction and fulfillment.

Generally speaking, lawyers like to help people and to make a difference for others. Being a trusted adviser is emblematic of success in achieving those goals.

How do you become one's trusted adviser?

Martini: Becoming a trusted adviser requires skill, commitment and time.

You have to be good at developing relationships with clients, and there is a certain level of rapport that is essential before a client will let you in. You must have an innate understanding of the client as a professional and as a person and what makes them tick.

You have to have their best interests at heart and make their problems your own. No matter how challenging a situation may be, clients always have to find a solution which optimizes a number of competing interests — rarely will the answer "it can't be done" work, so your suggestions need to take this reality into account.

It is also critically important to remember that all clients are people with strengths, weaknesses, fears, responsibilities and opinions of their own and that they are trying to do their best in any given situation.

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Susler: There are many different paths, elements and traits to becoming a trusted adviser. You must possess strong judgment, ethics and morals.

Gaining a depth of knowledge is critical, not simply about the relevant law but also about your client's business and the issues you are working on with your client. It is also essential to know your client as a person.

This is yet another example of where emotional intelligence comes into play and is so important.

To become one's trusted adviser, you have to develop a close bond. This does not require friendship — that helps but is not required — but it does require developing a relationship built on mutual trust and respect. Impeccable honesty, judgment, credibility, reliability and authenticity are traits that enable one to become a trusted adviser for others. ■

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