

Looking back and looking forward

After five years, challenges and rewards remain intriguing

It is hard to believe that it has been five years and 55 columns since we began in April 2010. We have covered numerous topics dealing with the business of law, have had a lot of fun and learned so much.

Thank you all for being so supportive over the years. We thought it apropos to revisit the questions *Chicago Lawyer* asked us when we first kicked off the column. Enjoy!

Why do you stay as an in-house or outside lawyer?

Martini: I just celebrated my 21st anniversary at DLA Piper. I have been at the firm my entire career — nearly half of my life.

Quite simply, I stay because I love what I do, where I do it and who I do it with. It never gets stale, and I have been able to carve out a career filled with experiences and opportunities that are a reflection of who I am and what inspires me.

My practice and clients are top priority, and I am blessed to work with extremely talented people with whom I share a long history and have wonderful professional and personal relationships.

Being in private practice enables me to pursue a wide range of interests, including various leadership and media opportunities that serve the firm and which give me great personal satisfaction.

Susler: Because I love it and I am well suited to it. I have now been in-house for 16 years — more than half of my career — and with National Material for more than eight years.

I feel truly lucky to have found a professional home where I am able to engage in a practice I love with very smart people with whom I enjoy working. I am still learning and growing professionally and personally. I have been with my company long enough to have built strong relationships with many people, including top leadership across all of our operating companies.

As our business continues to grow and evolve, I have a seat at the table helping to both lead and support those efforts. I also have the ability to engage in volunteer activities outside of work, primarily through leadership roles with the Association of Corporate Counsel and the Posse Foundation, including mentoring high school, college and law students and young lawyers. Being able to do that helps balance out work and maintain my interest in being a practicing lawyer.

What is the biggest challenge that you face in your positions?

Martini: Keeping all of the balls in the air.

There are so many responsibilities to juggle any given day, and my personal life often takes a backseat to everything else.



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.

But when I look at everything I like to do and how much I get out of these experiences, I realize that a calmer existence would mean giving up things that mean a lot to me and which have been instrumental to my development.

They are in addition to, rather than in lieu of, my day job. I am not willing to give those things up, at least not right now, particularly since

these experiences help differentiate me in a profession that continues to reshape and redefine itself. It remains to be seen how the law will continue to evolve and who will come out on top and who will be left behind.

Susler: There are two. The first remains having enough time to get everything done that I both need and want to accomplish.

A second major challenge is compliance and keeping up with the fast-paced changes and the scope expansion of different types of compliance. This presents the challenge to continue learning and improving my skill set, which leads back to why I said I enjoy practicing in-house.

What do you wish each side — inside and outside counsel — understood about your job?

Martini: I have always viewed being a lawyer as so much more than just a job — it is my calling and my vocation. I take it very seriously, and I put

my clients' and firm's interests before my own. My priority is how to best serve both, and their problems and issues become my own.

I constantly strive to be both the best substantive lawyer I can be and to consistently work within the framework of knowledge I have developed over the years by learning my clients' businesses and having seen a multitude of different scenarios play out.

Leveraging this body of knowledge and experience to the betterment of my clients while also delivering top-notch client service are my passion and are what drive me to work as hard as I do.

Susler: I have mentioned in previous columns that I am a practicing lawyer with a varied general practice; I am not a business manager, though I do help manage a number of businesses.

A few months ago, I had a conversation with a lawyer in private practice who said he enjoyed his job but that being a lawyer was not his "soul's work." It struck me in that moment that being a lawyer is my soul's work; it is an integral part of who I am. It informs how I approach my practice, which is to treat everyone I work with as a client with the goal of making their jobs easier in some way and to leave them with a positive impression of the legal profession. ■

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