

## Shake things up

### Stepping out of your comfort zone brings more growth

**W**hat does it mean to live outside your comfort zone?

**Martini:** I am a firm believer that you should never let yourself get too comfortable or complacent. Living outside your comfort zone means regularly engaging in activities which enable you to meaningfully stretch and grow. Another way of looking at it is being an “experienter” — someone who likes to go out and try new things, even when they are scary. There is a certain amount of self-confidence and fearlessness that come out of doing that, both of which are an important part of being successful.

**Susler:** In a single day or week at work, I typically deal with a broad range of issues across multiple substantive areas of law and business. They can be in the areas of contracts, employment, litigation, environmental and other regulatory matters, IP, international trade, real estate and more. While I cannot be an expert in each of these areas, I must be able to handle them all to achieve the results we need to run our business profitably and with minimal adverse risk exposure. After doing this for many years, I have developed a comfort zone for being outside my comfort zone.

#### Why is it important?

**Martini:** Living outside your comfort zone helps keep you from getting bored and enables you to diversify your skill set. You avoid being perceived as a “one-trick pony,” which is critical because it will open doors and tee up opportunities that may otherwise not be available to you. It also helps you build your stamina and gives you the ability to take on more duties and responsibilities. This is particularly critical when you are interested in pursuing leadership opportunities.

**Susler:** This is how we survive and excel as attorneys. Our clients do not call us for the easy, routine issues they can handle on their own. Rather, they are going to call you with issues that, at least once in a while, will initially stump you. You need to embrace the challenge, go outside your comfort zone, get creative and solve their problem. Issues do not come neatly packaged in readily identifiable and solvable single-issue boxes. There are always new and unique twists that are just different enough, and what we have done before may not work this time. You have to go somewhere new and different, outside your comfort zone.

**What steps can you take to ensure you continue to grow and develop?**

**Martini:** As you strive to be your very best, it is essential for you to be self-aware. By looking yourself in the mirror every day, you can assess



#### Inside Out

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Watch them talk more about this topic with the Better Government Association's Andy Shaw at [chicagolawyer.com](http://chicagolawyer.com). To submit a question for future columns, e-mail [questions.insideout@gmail.com](mailto:questions.insideout@gmail.com).

what you do well and what you need to work on, which will provide you with a foundation for figuring out which aspects of your skill set could most benefit from taking some risks. You will also be able to figure out when you are getting bored and in need of bigger challenges. You should be focused and strategic about the ways in which you decide to push be-

yond your comfort zone, and you should avoid being too scattered in your approach.

**Susler:** Put yourself in situations or positions that force you outside your comfort zone and in which you can learn new skills. For example, both writing this column and joining the Association of Corporate Counsel Chicago Board took me outside my comfort zone. When I first joined ACC, I was so shy that I actively avoided the networking portion of programs to avoid talking to people I didn't know. Fast-forward 13 years, and I was president of the board which comprised other very smart and talented attorneys who looked to me to lead this very successful 2,000-member chapter for a year. Being involved in activities like these helps to develop many skills, especially the soft skills essential to leadership and career success.

**Do you have any advice or lessons learned about pushing beyond your comfort zone?**

**Martini:** It is always important to take calculated, rather than reckless, risks. This requires a lot of thought and planning. That being said, do not underestimate the value of going with your gut when it comes to making important decisions about ways to stretch yourself. Pushing to the next level is not easy and can be very tiring and stressful. It can also force you to face your internal demons, which may sometimes be very uncomfortable. But when you come out on the other side of the fear, you are much better for it. Some of the best opportunities of my career have come from making myself do things I never thought I could.

**Susler:** Embrace it as a great opportunity. I feel like the luckiest person in the world because I am 28 years into my career and I still regularly do things I've never done before. This allows me to continue to grow professionally and to enjoy my job because I do not have the opportunity to get bored. Life is a journey that is going to take you where it takes you, regardless of how you may try to force it, so you might as well enjoy the ride. Stepping outside your comfort zone is scary at first but ultimately exhilarating and rewarding. ■

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