

## Importance of confidants

### Getting second opinion sometimes can make a difference

**W**hat does having a confidant mean to you?

**Martini:** It means having someone whom I completely trust, deeply respect and admire both professionally and personally, and who is intellectually very wise and who also has a healthy dose of street smarts.

They are someone who is consistently in my corner and who always has my best interests at heart. Given the nature of the relationship, I feel comfortable bringing my biggest issues to them to get their sage counsel. There is typically mutuality to the relationship, meaning that I serve as a confidant to him or her as well.

**Susler:** A confidant is someone you trust deeply enough to talk with about certain important matters that you otherwise would not discuss with anyone else. A confidant can be distinguished from a trusted adviser, someone whose advice you trust but to whom you may not reveal your most personal thoughts or sensitive information, as you might to a confidant.

**Do you have confidants and how do you pick them?**

**Martini:** I do have a few confidants. My relationships with them have evolved over the years. I did not just wake up one day and say, "Now you are my confidants."

Rather, it was a gradual process over time. It starts with my observing the qualities about them that I mentioned above and then becoming increasingly comfortable with them and seeing our relationship evolve. I find that I am able to pick their brains on matters of great importance to me and that I am a significant value add for them as well.

**Susler:** Yes, I have confidants. I think you develop such relationships over time more than simply pick them. When I think of my confidants, I certainly include Tina and a few long-term close friends. These are people with whom I have developed close and trusting relationships such that I feel comfortable discussing some of my most closely guarded thoughts, and it goes without saying that I can trust them to maintain my confidence without the need to say so, question or worry about it.

**What types of issues do you discuss with them?**

**Martini:** This can be a delicate dance. Typically, I like to feel my way through my decision-making process and do not like asking for help. That being said, there can be difficult issues whose complexity is caused by a politically or emotionally charged set of circumstances.

Getting the input of someone you deeply trust and admire can be



#### Inside Out

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is 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.com](http://chicagolawyer.com). To submit a question for future columns, e-mail [questions.insideout@gmail.com](mailto:questions.insideout@gmail.com).

extraordinarily helpful in those situations. Each of us wears a set of blinders to a certain extent. Confidants help us see around the corners so to speak.

**Susler:** In true lawyer fashion, I have to say it depends. I might talk to a confidant about both personal and professional matters but it probably depends on who I am talking to. Some things

are too personal to discuss with anyone other than Tina.

When it comes to professional or career or business issues, I have a few close friends that I am lucky enough to feel comfortable confiding in. Similar to Tina, situations arise from time to time when it is helpful to be able to discuss certain issues with someone whose opinion you value and whose confidence and discretion are essential, especially when those questions involve very deep and personal information or values.

**In what types of situations do you decide not to consult with your confidants and, instead, proceed on your own?**

**Martini:** There are certain decisions that are so personal that you may not get much, if any, benefit from seeking someone else's input, particularly if they are not able to truly understand the detail and nuance of the situation.

Second, I am mindful of not involving my confidants in situations where the very act of confiding in them may compromise them in some way. Depending on the situation, the confidant may not be able to see where this can happen until much later — so it is incumbent upon me to try to flag the potential for that happening as early as possible and to act accordingly.

**Susler:** Not everyone has a confidant, and that is OK. Those who are fortunate to have one or more may decide some things are just not appropriate to share with anyone else or perhaps no one other than your spouse.

There are some things that professional ethics or politics dictate are simply inappropriate to share with anyone, including a confidant. I think the reason confidants tend to be few and far between is that these are people with whom you may discuss very sensitive issues that may involve office politics and careers.

This is why, as Tina suggested, these tend to be decisions we each make on our own, being careful not to draw others into a maelstrom they do not expect or deserve. ■

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