

## Inside Out > column



By Christina Martini  
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By David Susler  
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## Setting priorities, creating balance

**H**ere is a portion of the conversation. An extended version is at [www.chicagolawyer magazine.com](http://www.chicagolawyer magazine.com).

**What does work-life balance mean and how do you achieve it?**

**Tina Martini:** I think work-life balance means different things to different people. I think even when you are talking to the same person over the course of a few years, there may be a different answer to that question, depending upon where they are at in life. For me, in terms of the work part of the equation, it means having a full-time, vibrant legal practice in an area I really love practicing in and with clients I love working with, in an area in which I have a reputation. In order to be an effective adviser and advocate for my client it's important that I have other things that make me a well-rounded professional and individual. Separate and apart from developing skills that make me a good lawyer, I like having opportunities to do other things and develop a skill set that I might otherwise not have. For example, I really enjoy leadership development, diversity initiatives, women's initiatives, as well as community outreach. ...

These activities enable me to learn things about myself, as well as to connect with people both professionally and personally in a way that I might not otherwise be able to. Some of the deepest relationships I have with people are ones that cross that work-client relationship into some of the more personal of the professionally based things that I do. ... Work-life balance is when you can look at your life and say, "I love what I do and I believe my life is an accurate reflection of who I am and what I value." Regardless of what that looks like to other people, if you can sit back and say pretty consistently that this is what my life looks like, then you've successfully achieved that.

**David Susler:** I would say work-life balance means an ability to have both a fulfilling work life and a fulfilling personal life. Of course that means determining how much of both you need to have a satisfying life. Is it possible to achieve a balance? Probably. But it's not easy. My father, who was also a lawyer, used to say as I was growing up that the law is a jealous mistress and it will take over your life if you let it. I think he is 100 percent correct about that and it's certainly been how I've felt throughout my entire career.

To achieve a balance you need to determine what is important to your life, what are your work goals and what are your nonwork goals in life? For me, I've made a number of sacrifices in my personal life over the years for the sake of my career. Now, more recently, I've reached a point where I know what my passions and commitments are and I've learned how to fulfill them in many ways, similar to what Tina said, by melding those commitments with my professional life. For example, sitting on the board of the directors of the [Association of Corporate Counsel] Chicago Chapter. I'm on the Leadership Council of the Posse Foundation — Posse Chicago. Those organizations take up a tremendous amount of my personal time, however they also allow me to fulfill my personal commitments and passions. ...

**How do you figure out which legal organizations to join?**

**Martini:** I think the answer to that question depends on who you are and where you are in your career, what you are hoping to achieve and how much time you have. For example, if you are a more junior attorney who is looking to meet people in a more social setting and to get some more information and education around certain substantive areas, you may decide to join a bar association. ... If you're a more

senior attorney whose priorities have shifted and you want to, for example, develop your book of business, then you might end up trying to target your efforts toward a trade association where you are more likely to have touch points with people who are in a position to give you business. ... If you are an in-house attorney who is looking to meet other people who are similarly situated you might consider a bar association like the Association of Corporate Counsel. ... Regardless of where you spend time, I think it is important to take a step back and look at how much time you have, where you are at in your career and what you are hoping to achieve from the time you invest in the organization and through the networking it affords. ...

**Susler:** Because you have a limited amount of time, you need to determine what you hope to get out of the organization. Are you looking for substantive practice information, networking or social outlets? Determine what your needs are and then you can find the right organization. Since I've been in-house, I've become more aware of what my needs are and what my focus is. I want an association that provides substantive practice-related information as well as networking and social.

As a generalist, I regularly encounter new areas that I've never handled before. I want substantive resources that I can access quickly and easily that will allow me to handle a matter very quickly. I like the opportunity to meet other in-house attorneys with whom I can discuss issues that arise in everyday practice. Find out how they handle it, and get their perspective. ... You need to know what your needs are and that they are going to change. ... ■

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