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INSIDE OUT

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HAT DOES DIVERSIFYING YOUR SKILL SET MEAN?

Martini: Diversifying your skill set means

expanding your capabilities to go beyond what you do on a daily basis. It can take a number of different forms, including developing substantive legal knowledge in additional areas beyond the primary focus of your practice so that you become adept across several different areas of law. It can also mean acquiring and honing skills in other areas such as leadership, client service or business which may not directly contribute to your bank of legal knowledge but which are nevertheless important from the standpoint of making you a better lawyer, professional and person.

Susler: It means constantly learning, growing and expanding your experiences and abilities in order to handle myriad of substantive legal matters, business issues and leadership. Personally, as an in-house generalist, not only do I deal with a breadth of issues across a wide range of legal and business issues, I also work with a number of different people from the C-suite to the factory floor and must be able to navigate all those different businesses, personalities and styles.

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT DIVERSIFYING YOUR SKILL SET?

Martini: I recommend being thoughtful and strategic in how you go about diversifying your skill set. While there is a little if any downside to proactively seeking out new and different opportunities, it is important to guard against being too scattershot in your approach. There are only so many hours in a day, and a self-improvement plan needs to be carefully balanced against the demands of your job and other facets of your life. You need to take a step back and think about your high-level goals and objectives and why you are interested in developing certain skills and what the best way to go about doing so is given the realities of your schedule and existing commitments. All of this being said, when you are open to new and different work experiences, you become well-positioned to diversifying your capabilities, which enables you to learn and grow.

Susler: I think that is a good approach. For me, diversifying my skill set is a requirement in addition to a personal choice, as I regularly work



DIVERSIFY YOUR SKILL SET

Grow your capabilities to grow your practice

By **CHRISTINA L. MARTINI** and **DAVID G. SUSLER**

on matters and substantive issues that I have never handled before, thereby gaining new experience and skills along the way. Practically, I approach this by researching, asking questions and observing others and attending CLE programs.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Martini: Diversifying your skill set is important for a number of reasons. It can help you to more adeptly handle a wide array of tasks and to do a better job of issue-spotting. To the extent you are looking for a new job, it can help you to more effectively differentiate yourself, which will make you more marketable. It can also contribute to your overall job satisfaction and help keep you from getting bored.

Susler: A diverse skill set is important for success in today's world; it is critical as an in-house generalist in a small legal department. Given the breadth of matters I deal with during any given day or week, including working with different

operating companies that operate in different markets with different risk portfolios as well as with different people depending on the matter, I must have a diverse skill set in both substantive law and in interacting with many different people, work and leadership styles in order to succeed in my job and on behalf of my client. CL

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is chair of the Chicago intellectual property practice group and the national hiring partner of associate recruiting 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.

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