

# CHICAGO LAWYER®

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## INSIDE OUT

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### WHAT DOES A STRONG RELATIONSHIP MEAN TO YOU?

**Martini:** Strong relationships have a few key components, whether they are professional or personal. First, there has to be mutual respect for what the other person brings to the relationship. As part of that, empathy and appreciating the other person's point of view are critically important. Second, having common goals and interests is key, particularly as it pertains to the relationship itself and what each hopes to get out of it. Third, freedom of expression is essential, meaning each person feels they can be open and honest in sharing their thoughts and feelings with the other person. In the client context, the best relationships I have seen are those where the attorney and client are both friends and effective business partners. The attorney feels comfortable enough to tell it straight to the client, and vice versa, even if it is something the other may not want to hear, because honesty and integrity form the foundation of the relationship and drive it forward.

**Susler:** Well said. A strong relationship involves people who maintain a high level of respect for each other and, especially in a work context, collaboration, trust and cooperation as well. There must be room for disagreement and debate; the relationship survives because there is a mutual agreement for rational discourse and a respect for the other's opinions and feelings. In a purely personal context, a strong relationship and a close friendship go hand-in-hand. In a business/work context, however, it may be more complex and nuanced. I think it important to understand that strong relationships can be between co-workers, attorney-client and with opposing counsel. Working with opposing counsel who respect and trust each other, who conduct themselves as professionals, are among the most satisfying matters to work on and typically yield the best results for clients.

### HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU HAVE A STRONG RELATIONSHIP?

**Martini:** When you have a strong relationship, you have the other person's best interest at heart. You're not in it just for what you can get out of it — there is a desire to selflessly help the other person and enable them to achieve whatever they have set their sights on. I know from personal experience that when a good business partner or friend is going through a tough time or is struggling with an issue, their problem becomes mine as I try to help them figure it out. You also know when you have each other's backs through thick and thin. Whether it's sharing information, insights or lending a helping hand, having that level of trust with another person is very special and should never be taken for granted.

**Susler:** I would add having a comfort and ease in working together; when you look for opportunities to not only work together but also to



## THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP

Having strong relationships a key to success in practice

By CHRISTINA L. MARTINI and DAVID G. SUSLER

spend time together even if you are not currently working on anything together.

### WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT GROWING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS?

**Martini:** Truly strong relationships are not easy to come by. When we are younger, we tend to have more in common with a larger group of people and we can often have a lot of good friends. However, as we get older, we follow a certain path in life and our frames of reference are driven by our experiences. As a result, we generally become much more discerning of whom we allow into our inner circle and we tend to have only a select few who rise to the level of being truly close to us. These relationships need to be nurtured and treated like the gold that they are. I have also learned over the years that sometimes the best relationships we have are with those people with whom we have the strongest disagreements, because these are the people from whom we tend to learn the most. To me, that is an incredibly healthy thing because I learn so much and become a better person in the process. Finally, I have come to learn that the best people for us tend to show up at just the right time in our lives, whether they are clients, close friends or both. There is a serendipity to these types of people crossing our paths and leav-

ing an indelible mark on us.

**Susler:** Sometimes you click with someone and have an instant bond. More often, a strong relationship builds over time. Either way, they are built on mutual trust, respect and rational discourse, all of which requires work to build and maintain. Having strong relationships is important. Let's face it, we work in a tough profession. It is so much more enjoyable to work through the difficult matters when you actually like and respect your client, outside counsel or colleague. When you do outstanding work together and enjoy each other's company, you are going to be more successful for your clients and yourselves over the long run. **[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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