

# CHICAGO LAWYER

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## INSIDE OUT

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### WHAT DOES PEER MENTORING MEAN TO YOU IN THE PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT?

**Martini:** For me, peer mentoring means looking to contemporaries, both at your place of employment and outside, to provide you with the support, guidance, different frames of reference and overall help you need to develop professionally. Just as important, peer mentoring provides you with the opportunity to fill that role for others as well. As you get further in your career, it often becomes more difficult to find what I call the more traditional mentors — those who are “older and wiser” and with whom the traditional lines of teacher and student are clearly drawn. Peer mentoring provides an opportunity for learning to continue for each of us, albeit in a context that recognizes our depth and breadth of experience while at the same time acknowledges the importance of continuing to learn and grow.

**Susler:** In the in-house context, it is important to look to your business colleagues, in addition to other in-house lawyers. I think it is also important to remember that these relationships can be both formal and informal. You can learn a tremendous amount by having conversations with different business leaders and others within your company and you can learn at least as much simply by observing the way they conduct themselves in different situations and with different people.

### WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF PEER MENTORING?

**Martini:** First, there is a lot of wisdom and guidance that we can all glean from those around us. Getting this type of coaching from others can be particularly helpful when they have encountered similar situations, successes and obstacles, and when those experiences are at least somewhat contemporaneous with ours. There are significant advantages to sharing these types of stories and anecdotes with peers both within and outside of our organization. There is also the intel gathering aspect to peer mentoring, which includes learning helpful information about other businesses. Finally, peer mentoring is a terrific exercise in building relationships and can often lead to meaningful networking.

**Susler:** In order to be the best we can be at our jobs and in life, we must constantly strive to learn and to better our skills, both substantively and interpersonally. Gaining insights from your professional colleagues, both business and legal, is one of the best ways to accomplish this, as well as to remain current with what is happening within your company and your industry.

### HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT DEVELOPING A CIRCLE OF TRUSTED PEERS?

**Martini:** There are organizations that are created for this very purpose — to provide mem-



## PEER MENTORING

How to find and nurture peer feedback

By CHRISTINA L. MARTINI and DAVID G. SUSLER

bership opportunities to professionals who wish to formally become part of such a circle. But for those who wish to develop this type of circle more organically, I believe that it requires a combination of focus, strategy and serendipity. Focus comes from thinking carefully about what you're looking to accomplish professionally through a peer circle and being determined and willing to put in the hard work to get there. You also need to be strategic in figuring out how best to get there and not leaving fulfillment of your goals to chance. Serendipity often comes in when, for example, you see that old acquaintance who happens to know someone you really want to meet or by landing a speaking opportunity with a trade association that has many representatives from companies you would like to meet. But remember — you have to be alert and open-minded to notice when serendipity is working its magic in your life.

**Susler:** The most significant trade group in my career has been the Association of Corporate Counsel. I joined when I first went in-house in 1999, primarily for the substantive CLEs available. I remain active because of the professional and personal relationships I have made. I am able to bounce not only substantive legal questions off of them but also obtain career and situational advice. Volunteering with not-for-profits is another avenue that can help develop a circle of trusted

peers and also provides an opportunity to learn from others outside the legal profession. For example, my work with the college access and youth leadership development program, the Posse Foundation, exposes me to other board members from numerous business sectors who are at similar stages in their careers, and also to Posse scholars, who are either in college or young professionals. While they may look to me for career advice as someone who is older and more experienced, I gain at least as much by interacting with the next generation of leaders, which is an excellent opportunity for intel gathering. [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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