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By Christina Martini
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By David Susler
National Material L.P.

Being a legal role model

Here is a portion of the conversation. An extended version is on video at www.chicagolawyer.com.

What makes a good role model?

Tina Martini: You obviously need to have great legal skills and good judgment ... Their clients have to view them as a trusted adviser. A good legal role model is also someone who gives back to the community.

That can take a bunch of different forms — being a great mentor and investing in the future generation of lawyers, and things like pro bono and diversity. Also, just trying to do the right thing. We are a profession bound by ethical obligations so obviously there is a need to always conduct yourself that way. But it is also about believing in paying it forward and believing it's a profession where people can't really succeed without also bringing others along ...

David Susler: I would add that a good legal role model should conduct himself or herself with honesty, integrity and professionalism. That includes ethics, fairness and civility. For me, I would add humor. I don't think that's a necessary quality to be a good role model, but I think humor goes far and is important to me. I would also add it's important to not only conduct oneself according to these attributes but also to treat others the same way.

If you had to name a few of your legal role models, who would you name?

Susler: My primary role model is my father, who is also an attorney. He is the consummate professional. He's always conducted himself and treated others with honesty, integrity and professionalism.

And he treats everybody equally. It doesn't matter who they are, what their job is, race or gender, economic status. ... He also taught me the true meaning of professionalism, that

we, as lawyers, owe society a fiduciary duty to conduct ourselves with honesty, integrity and professionalism. He also taught me the value of fighting for the underdog and how to be a really generous leader. ...

Another role model is my mother. She was a schoolteacher, but she called herself a professional volunteer because she was on so many nonprofit boards.

She really influenced my life, especially with regard to volunteerism because I've been on nonprofit boards and engaged in other volunteer activities both inside and outside the legal profession ever since I graduated from law school 23 years ago.

I'd also like to talk about some contemporaries, and I don't know if they are role models or just people I admire and who inspire me to remain true to myself, my goals and my principles. Some of these people are actually younger than me, which I mention because role models and mentors aren't only people who are your elders. They include Jason Brown, who just became the executive director and general counsel of NAMWOLF. Jason inspires me to strive to be the best I can be and to always approach life with excitement and laughter.

Also, my friend Dan Harper, who is the ACC Chicago Chapter president, who reminds me of the value of critical thinking, and of rational discourse.

Finally, I want to add my wife, Tina, because she inspires me and reminds me of the importance of remaining true to my core values, acting with integrity and to being open to growth and improvement.

Martini: My mother, who passed away when I was a senior in high school, was very much an inspiration to me. She was born and raised in Mexico City and was incredibly in-

telligent and well-educated. ... She taught me the importance of dreaming big, believing in and making something of myself and going out into the world and having the courage to do that.

Even to this day, and it's been over 20 years since she passed away, she's still an incredible influence on me and really inspired me to be the person I am today. ...

Another important role model for me is Mark Feldman, a partner at DLA Piper. I've worked with him for 16 years and he is the head of the Chicago intellectual property practice group. ... He's a brilliant lawyer. He's internationally renowned in the IP field and he took me as a very young 23-year-old out of law school and inspired me to get very excited about the law. He helped me develop both professionally and personally into the person I am today.

I know that I would not be where I am today if it wasn't for him. And it's because of his leadership, as well as his generosity in taking me under his wing and spending the time that he spent with me to make me a well-rounded attorney ...

Another person who has been an important influence on me is a friend and former colleague at the firm who passed away in 2004 and her name was Kathy Nooney. ... She was a devoted wife and mother, and an exceptional lawyer who was very dedicated to pro bono and was really all about making a difference to everyone around her and serving people. Her life purpose was public service. ... Even with everything she had going on in her life she was very humble and very generous. Those are all qualities that are important to carry forward into your career and your life. ■

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