

# CHICAGO LAWYER®

## INSIDE OUT

### LOOKING BACK...DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS ABOUT YOUR CAREER?

**Martini:** Fortunately, I have few regrets about my career. I do wish I had finished my master's degree in safety engineering and that I had more carefully thought through the possibility of getting my doctorate in manufacturing engineering. I also wish that I sat for the patent bar and had become registered to practice before the patent office. I love my practice and don't see myself as a patent lawyer, but it nevertheless would have been nice to have that flexibility.

**Susler:** I try not to dwell on regrets because all my mistakes over the years have led me to where I am today. My biggest regret is not listening to my father's advice as I went through college and law school to learn as much as I can about everything, because you never know what you will need to know as a lawyer.

Contrary to his sound advice, I had tunnel vision about becoming a plaintiff's personal-injury attorney. Nine years into my career, I realized personal injury was not for me and I did not have a Plan B. I wish I got involved in bar associations earlier in my career. It was not until I joined the Association of Corporate Counsel when I went in-house that I learned how valuable associations can be for expanding your networks and leadership skills.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW EARLIER IN YOUR CAREER?

**Martini:** Today, I know a lot more about emotional intelligence, introversion vs. extroversion and the general human condition than I used to, and most certainly more than when I first started practicing law. Had I been more self-aware that I was an introvert back then, I could then have focused on 'flipping the switch' earlier so that I could have been more outgoing when I needed to be and more comfortable doing so. This would have enabled me to work on building my network earlier so that I would not have had to play catch up later.

I am sure we all wish that we had crystal balls so that we could know how the profession was going to drastically evolve over time. After practicing for 25 years and through three recessions, it's clear the legal landscape is completely different than when I graduated. Being a great lawyer is just the tip of the iceberg of what it takes to be successful in the legal profession today.

**Susler:** I wish I knew how much I would enjoy the business world and being an in-house generalist. After my career as a personal-injury lawyer,



## NO REGRETS

Heed advice, but blaze your own trail

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

I essentially backed into my current career as an in-house lawyer. Little did I know how quickly I would come to love the business world and working in-house. I also wish I had known how much business lawyers can do to make a positive difference for people and for the world at large.

### WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU HAVE DONE WELL DURING YOUR CAREER?

**Martini:** First, I believe the firm I chose and practiced with for nearly 25 years was the right firm for me while I was there. I also believe that I came to my current firm at the right time. It has been a positive change for my clients and for my career. Through making this change, I put my clients first and prioritized their needs rather than being swept in the current of what was known and familiar to me.

The two secondments I did as an associate to Kraft and Monsanto made me a much better lawyer and businesswoman. Furthermore, as I reflect on all of the other things I have done through the years, including thought leadership and my various leadership roles at my firms and beyond, I realize that I have developed a skill set and knowledge base that I otherwise would not have had by focusing solely on practicing law. I have learned a lot in the process of doing all these other things and it has helped me to strengthen my level of lawyer-

ing, leadership and professional profile.

**Susler:** Better late than never, I realized the wisdom of my father's advice. Soon after becoming an in-house attorney, I fully realized how much I enjoyed learning as much as possible about as many things as possible and broadening my horizons and worldview. I have done well using my position and experience as an in-house attorney to:

- 1) Make a positive difference for my client companies and individual employees, to ensure they are treated well and respectfully;
- 2) Leave my clients with a positive impression of lawyers and the legal profession;
- 3) Use my experience and networks to give back through mentoring some of the next generations of lawyers and leaders, primarily through the ACC Chicago's Diversity Summer Internship Program and the Posse Foundation. <sup>[CL]</sup>

**Christina L. Martini** is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is a partner with McDermott Will & Emery and focuses her practice on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, internet, advertising and unfair competition law.

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