

CHICAGO LAWYER®

INSIDE OUT

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HY IS IT IM- PORTANT TO DO THINGS OUTSIDE OF WORK?

Martini: It's important to have extracurriculars for a number of reasons. First, if these activities are chosen mindfully, they can enable you to have professional experiences that you may not otherwise have. You can also develop certain skills, be exposed to new types of situations and gain different knowledge that you otherwise would not acquire in your everyday job.

They also help you gain a different perspective by exposing you to different organizations and professionals through activities outside of work. They will keep you from getting bored, which can often happen when you are solely focused on your job.

Susler: Whether they are hobbies such as coin collecting, painting, mentoring or volunteering for a nonprofit, extracurricular activities provide a multitude of important benefits.

They help you learn new things and perspectives, and possibly enable you to meet new people and broaden your horizons. They can help you learn or hone leadership skills. Perhaps most importantly, they provide a break from your daily job. They help to maintain mental sharpness, enhance creativity and sustain interest in your career.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS TO ACCOMPLISH WITH EXTRACURRICULARS?

Martini: It is important that you participate in activities that are meaningful to you, where you think you can contribute in a significant way and you believe you will be better for having the experience. Also, be sure that you meet as many people as possible so that you can make the most of the networking aspect of your extracurriculars.

In addition, be sure to "connect the dots" before you say yes; think through whether the activity is likely to help you to accomplish your professional goals and to leverage your skills, contacts and interests such that one plus one ends up equaling three. And be sure to revisit all of these activities periodically to confirm that your participation still makes sense over time and think through stepping out of them if they no longer serve their purpose.

Susler: For me, extracurricular activities are an opportunity to do something beneficial for others. Engaging in activities with other people can enhance the diversity of your world, provide the opportunity to meet new people and to learn different perspectives and even new approaches to



AFTER-WORK ACTIVITIES

Extracurriculars are important, but be selective

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

problem-solving. You can also take what you learn outside of work and bring it to work to help improve your performance in your primary career.

WHAT ARE THE DO'S & DON'TS WHEN CHOOSING EXTRACURRICULARS?

Martini: Before committing to extracurriculars, ask enough questions to evaluate whether they are the right activities for you right now. Be clear on what you are trying to accomplish. Is this for professional growth and advancement? Or is it just for fun? You also should get clarity about what the time commitment is and whether there are requirements like hosting meetings or events. This may tip the balance regarding your participation.

Finally, make sure that you are going to enjoy yourself. Any time that you commit to something beyond your job, it is important to ensure that you find it worthwhile enough to outweigh the costs of participation. These costs can be in terms of dollars as well as time spent away from your family, along with other trade-offs you may be making.

Susler: Take the opportunity to engage in activities that are meaningful to you. Learn new things, such as cooking, playing an instrument or speaking another language. Engage in family-oriented activities such as coaching a youth sports team. Focus on things you are interested in and don't be afraid to stop if you discover you're not interested in it or if you don't enjoy it any longer;

take the opportunity to try something else.

My extracurricular activities have been serving on nonprofit boards of directors and mentoring law students and young attorneys. I served on two different boards, one for a homeless shelter and the other the Association of Corporate Counsel Chicago chapter. I remain passionate about the causes and the organizations, however, 15 years is a long time on one board.

It is important to recognize that burnout can start to set in, and also that there comes a time to make room for others with new ideas. It is also important to recognize when you just need a break from doing organized extracurricular activities.

After years serving on boards, I needed a break. I took two years off. Now, I'm ready to join another nonprofit board. The break let me recharge. It also allowed me to consider what I can bring to this board by building on my experience. CL

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.

Martini's husband, **David G. Susler**, is associate general counsel with National Material L.P., a manufacturing company primarily engaged in steel processing and aluminum extrusion. He has a general practice, providing advice, counseling and training to all business sectors and operation.

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