

## How has Big Law/in-house changed over the course of your careers?

**Martini:** Much has changed in Big Law since I first started practicing in the mid-1990s. Technology has transformed the legal industry, starting with email and the internet in the mid- to late-90s. Today, there is artificial intelligence, ChatGPT and everything in between. This evolution has changed how we do our work and who does it.

Additionally, the current state of Big Law is a byproduct of globalization and consolidation in the market. The substantive and geographic expanse of Big Law firms did not exist when I first started practicing law. As in many industries, Big Law continues to evolve at an accelerated pace, which enables the industry to keep up with the evolution of the business world and helps ensure firms remain competitive.

**Susler:** Both Big Law and in-house have changed tremendously since I started practicing in 1987. How each exists today would be unrecognizable back then.

Throughout my career, the in-house world has been on an upward climb in terms of size, prestige and sophistication. In contrast to 1987, many lawyers today think about eventually moving in-house and general counsel roles are considered prestigious destination career goals. Over the past decade, the quantity and sophistication of work handled by in-house departments has increased tremendously, and general counsels are an integral part of a company's executive leadership.

Simultaneously, the depth of partnership between in-house lawyers and their outside counsel has also grown. While much of the day-to-day legal work of a company is now handled in-house, outside counsel provides important and specialized assistance. It helps increase the depth of expertise in specialty areas such as litigation, mergers and acquisitions and other specialized work like Tina's role in safeguarding and leveraging IP on a global basis.

### If you could start your career over, what would you do differently?

**Martini:** There is not all that much that I would do differently. But I would definitely put myself out there earlier to develop more client relationships. I also would have plugged into business development resources at my first firm earlier to give myself a jumpstart in developing my client base as a young attorney.



## WHICH PATH TO FOLLOW?

Careers in Big Law or in-house legal departments are unique

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

**Susler:** I would have gotten involved with bar associations earlier in my career and maybe I would have started out focusing on commercial litigation. However, my career has led me to where I am and made me the lawyer I am today. I would not change that.

### Advice for attorneys starting out in Big Law or in-house?

**Martini:** There are a number of tips I recommend to attorneys starting their careers in Big Law. Remember that you only get out of an experience what you are willing to put into it. Law is best learned through mentoring and guidance from others who are experienced. You should make an effort to attain training and knowledge from your peers and create conditions that maximize the effectiveness of mentoring.

Also, learn as much as you can as quickly as possible. It's important to develop relationships, both with clients and coworkers, and keep an eye toward carving out a niche that sets you apart from others on your team. Also, don't wait until you are a senior associate or a junior partner to work on business development. Make an effort to develop relationships that attract business as early in your career as possible. It is the foundation upon which a partner practice is built and critically important for a long-term career in Big Law.

**Susler:** To attorneys planning to transition

from in-house to Big Law, my first piece of advice is to check your ego at the door. When you were employed by a law firm, you were a revenue generator and thus the most important person in the room. When you're working in-house, you are a cost center and a service provider to the business and sales teams.

But developing relationships is as important for success in-house as it is in Big Law. Make time to get to know your business and your colleagues; learn what your company does and how it does it; learn what your business colleagues do and how they do it.

Build relationships and become a confidant and trusted advisor to business leaders. This will ensure your success within the organization, as well as enhance enjoyment of your practice. [CL](#)

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