

Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

Forty Important Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me When I Was a First-Year Lawyer

What do I wish someone had told me when I was a first-year lawyer? What do you wish someone had told you?

Here is my current thinking on what I wish someone had told me. Note: we did not have computers or social media when I was a first-year lawyer, so some items in the list below are updated to today:



Career Development

1. You may think your education was completed when you finished law school. In truth it has only begun and you are moving into a more important and challenging phase of learning.
2. Passing the bar and later when you make partner are events. Being an outstanding lawyer and outstanding partner are achievements.
3. Find your purpose for being a lawyer, your passion, and your core values.
4. Never be content. Always strive to get better.

5. Find something you love to do just for your own enjoyment. You will be serving clients, your family, and others. You will only serve others effectively if you also serve yourself.
6. Get and stay healthy. Your career is a marathon, not a sprint.
7. Develop your strengths instead of obsessing about your weaknesses.
8. Keep in mind the three P's: Patience, Persistence, and Perseverance.

Career Planning

9. Figure out your priorities, plan your time, and live your life based on those priorities. There is no such thing as perfect balance, but you can focus on your priorities.
10. Think optimistically and plan purposely.
11. When you know the “what” and the “why,” the “how” comes easy. When you know what you want to accomplish and why it is important, you will creatively think of how to do it.

Cordell M. Parvin built a national construction practice during his 35 years of practicing law. In 2005, Mr. Parvin left the firm and started Cordell Parvin LLC. He now works with lawyers and law firms on career development, planning, and client development. You can subscribe to his Blog at <http://www.cordellblog.com/>, connect with him on LinkedIn at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/cordell-parvin>, join his Facebook Fan Page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Cordell-Parvin-Lawyer-Coaching/222291473905?ref=ts>, and follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/cordellparvin>.

12. Create a plan each year that includes what you want to learn.
13. Determine your top five strengths using StrengthsFinder and use those to develop your plan.
14. Break your plan down to 90 days to be more accountable.
15. Think big and act small. Believe you can achieve great things and work on the small things to get there.
16. Think long-term, act short-term. Figure out where you want to be in five years. Then plan what you will do next month to begin your journey to get there.
17. How well you plan and spend your non-billable time will determine the quality of your career and how well you plan and spend your personal time will determine the quality of your life.
25. You only get one chance to make a first impression. Think about that and remember to dress for success.
26. Focus as much, or more, on what your clients do, as you focus on what you do.
27. Learn to ask good questions and listen intently.
28. Don't buy into the myth that you are too young to develop business, or at the very least, learn how to develop business.
29. Also, don't buy into the myth that the only way to develop business is the way some senior lawyer did it. Figure out what will work for you.
30. Learn to become comfortable outside your comfort zone.
31. Make client development and building relationships with clients, a part of your everyday habits. There should be no such thing as random client development events.
32. Build your network of "weak-tie" relationships as broadly as you can. Make sure, without coming across as a salesman, that your weak-ties know what you do and that you do it well.
33. Learn how to use the social media tools to build and expand your weak-tie relationships.
34. Become focused on your best contacts. Spend eighty percent of your time with the top twenty percent of your contacts.
35. Make sure your clients know how much you care. Never take a client for granted.
36. Get out from behind your computer. Sitting in front of your computer all day will exhaust you and will prevent you from effectively building relationships with your clients, potential clients and referral sources. Client development is a contact sport. You have to stay in touch with clients, potential clients, and referral sources.

The People in Your Office

18. Your trusty assistant is a great resource.
19. Treat everyone in your office the same way you treat your best clients.
20. The senior lawyers for whom you are working are your first clients. Make them raving fans of your work and responsiveness.
21. To be successful you will have to learn to lead, delegate, and supervise. You can't make rain by yourself.
22. Pay it forward. Always help younger lawyers develop their careers, as other lawyers have helped you to develop yours.

Client Development

23. The only security you will ever have practicing law in a law firm is to have clients.
24. Clients want to hire lawyers with "confidence inspiring" personalities. They want to feel confident you will handle their matters.

37. Be indefatigable in figuring out what might impact your clients and do it before other lawyers and your clients see it coming.
38. If you market to everyone you market to no one. Narrow your target market.
39. Having “elevator questions” planned is at least, if not more, important than having an elevator speech planned.

40. “Cross-serving” is far more effective than “cross-selling” because it focuses on what is in it for the client rather than what is in it for you.

One more thing: Find a way to do an act of kindness each and every day with no expectation of getting anything in return. I think you would be surprised by how energized you will feel.

To purchase the online version of this article—or any other article in this publication—go to www.ali-cle.org and click on “Publications.”