

# Practical Success

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**Cordell M. Parvin**

## Making 2012 Your Best Year Ever

I have spent a lifetime studying why some people are very successful and why others are not. Interestingly, many of the people who are truly successful also have a great personal life and are very family oriented. How can this be so? Put simply, they understand their priorities and use their time wisely.

### Attitude

It begins with attitude. We all talk to ourselves and we sometimes convey our attitude about things when we talk to others. When I meet with young lawyers I am listening to what they say to learn what they are likely saying to themselves. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, less successful lawyers see the problem in every opportunity and successful lawyers see the opportunity in every problem. Less successful lawyers frequently say: “Yes, but....” Successful lawyers say: “Sure, how?” Less successful lawyers say: “My problem is....” More successful lawyers say: “My opportunity is....” Less successful lawyers say: “I need to....” More successful lawyers say: “I want to....” Less successful lawyers say: “I will try my best to....” More successful lawyers say: “I will achieve....” So, the first step to make 2012 your



best year ever is to listen to your self-talk and, if necessary, consciously make a change in what you are telling yourself.

### Clear Idea Of What You Want

Second, successful lawyers have a very clear idea of what they want to accomplish. They know where they want to be five years from now, and maybe even 20 years from now. Having clarity on what you want to accomplish with your career actually enables you to have more time for your family.

### Setting Goals

Really successful people set goals and have a plan to achieve them. Years ago, I was giving a presentation at my firm’s orientation for new partners. I was teaching them how to prepare a business plan. I asked how many had set goals for that year. Not one of them had set goals.

There is a quote I like: “Most people aim at nothing and hit it with amazing accuracy.” There are scientific studies showing that people who have written goals achieve far more than those who do not and they are happier with their careers and lives. Why is that? I think it is in part because they feel they have more control of their destiny. They also are going after something.

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Here is how you might get started. Write down 10 goals for 2012. Now that you have written down 10 goals, go back through and prioritize them. In other words decide which is the most important and so forth. Next, answer why achieving each goal is important to you. Here is the reason to do that. If you do not have a good answer to the why question, then your goal will be like a New Year's resolution that you give up on achieving the first time there is a roadblock. You have to have a good answer to the "why" question to motivate you, energize you and cause you to have the discipline and commitment to achieve the goal.

Next, write down as many actions as you can think of to achieve your goal. Now that you have your list, write down for each goal something you can do in the next week to get started. We need to get the train out of the station.

### Getting Better

There is a commonly heard phrase that if you are not getting better, you are actually getting worse. That has never been more true for lawyers than it is today because there are so many changes going on in our profession. Take one area of your practice to focus on getting better in 2012. It might be communication skills, drafting skills, or a particular legal topic. After you pick the one area, find every book you can on the topic, read articles, attend CLEs, listen to mp3s and actually practice what you are trying to learn.

So, what do you want to do in 2012 to improve your skill? What is the one area that you want to focus on?

### Use Your Time More Effectively

Time is our most valuable resource and we cannot afford to waste it. If you have a clear idea of what you want in your career, have goals and have decided what you want to learn in 2012, you are

well on your way to not wasting time because you can see whether a potential activity advances you towards your goals or not.

Make a circle and put 168 in the middle. That represents the number of hours in a week. Next make a rough sketch pie chart. The first piece of the pie is how many hours you sleep. If you sleep 8 hours a night, that would be 56. The next piece of the pie is the number of hours you work a week that are billable. You might record 40 billable hours a week. If so, fill in that number. The next piece of the pie is your non-billable time that you are using to invest in your career. This could be firm administrative activities, time you plan to spend for your own development, and time you plan to spend for client development.

I urge you to spend at least 10 non-billable hours a week investing in your career. If you do, that leaves 62 waking hours for your personal life including:

- Being a good father/mother, husband/wife, son/daughter, and brother/sister;
- Exercising;
- Being involved in church activities;
- Being involved in community activities;
- Being involved in other personal activities.

I like to tell lawyers that how well they plan and execute the 10 hours a week they invest in their career will determine the quality of their careers and how well they plan and execute the 62 waking hours of personal time will determine the quality of their lives.

### Conclusion

How can you make 2012 your best year ever? It is really not that complicated. Make 2012 your best year ever by taking control of your future, deciding what you want, and then creating and executing a plan.