

Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

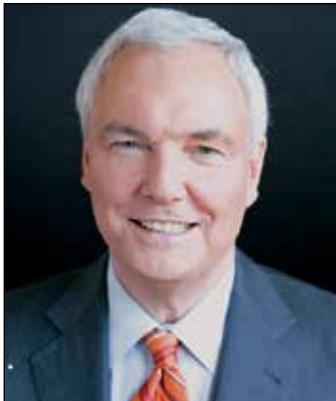
Client Development Coaching: The Psychology

Have you ever been in a situation where you knew what you wanted, you knew what to do to get it, and you still didn't do what it would take to accomplish what you wanted?

When I worked downtown, I woke up each morning at 4:30, got on my athletic gear and arrived at Cooper Aerobics at 5:00 a.m. to work out. It was my habit. I really didn't think about it, I just did it. When I finished working out, I drove to the office and arrived between 7:00 and 7:15. That was also a habit.

Now, I work close to my home. I belong to a workout facility two blocks from my home. I know I need to work out to stay fit. I just find it more difficult because it is no longer a habit.

For most young lawyers I coach, client development is not a habit. They can rationalize reasons not to be actively doing what is needed to build a book of business or expand relationships with existing clients.



The most common thing I hear is: "I have been so busy with billable work that I have not been able to..." Thus, I have to find ways to get those lawyers to do something they do not regularly do and create an environment that will most likely enable or

facilitate the lawyers to keep up their client development efforts, even when they are not seeing immediate results.

When I coach a group of lawyers in a firm, we set a group goal and decide on 25 action items to achieve the goal. Each member of the coaching group sets individual goals and prepares a plan to achieve them.

Members of the group share their plans with me and in some cases with the other members of the group. Each month, each member of the coaching group reports on what he or she has done that month.

From the beginning I work on developing a personal relationship with each lawyer I am coaching. I want to know about his or her family, interests outside of work and what motivates him or her.

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/cordellparvin>, 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>.

I need that kind of relationship to have a better idea of what buttons to push to best enable the lawyer to achieve more success.

My approach is based on both my own experience, and more importantly, scientific studies on what is most likely to encourage people to actually take actions on client development, work together as a team and have fun in the process.

In his well-known book titled: “Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion,” Robert B. Cialdini outlines the six principles of persuasion. They are:

- Reciprocation;
- Commitment/consistency;
- Authority;
- Social validation;
- Scarcity;
- Liking/friendship.

I apply all these principles in the coaching process.

The principle of reciprocation is that people are more likely to respond to people who have given them something. I teach the concepts I have learned and I am always looking for ideas, book suggestions, articles and other suggestions I can offer.

The principle of commitment and consistency is extremely important in the coaching process. Studies show that when we set goals, write them down, establish a date to complete them and share all of this with another person, we are way more likely to actually do what it takes to achieve the goals.

I want each of the lawyers I am coaching to make commitments and to hold himself or herself accountable. I am also there to help hold them accountable and there is the less obvious accountability to the team. The principle is also more powerful when the lawyers make a commitment to a team goal and team action items. In that case they do not want to let the team down.

The principle of authority is that we are more willing to follow the directions or recommendations from someone we perceive to be an expert. To successfully coach a group I must not only demonstrate I have been a successful rainmaker myself. I must also show I know how lawyers with different practice areas, or different personality types can also be rainmakers.

I do this by showing actual examples of what have done and what lawyers I have coached or mentored in other practice areas have done.

The next principle is called social validation. We are way more likely to take action when we see others, especially those who are similar to us, taking the same action.

I always recommend that the members of the coaching group be at a similar stage of their career. That is the first step in applying the social validation principle. Next, I encourage the lawyers I coach to report their client development activities each month. Those reports are collected and distributed to the entire group.

The principle of scarcity works if the coaching program is promoted in a way that lawyers in the firm want to be part of it. This principle works particularly well if the first coaching group has been visibly successful in the firm.

Some firms have lawyers apply to be part of the coaching program. Other firms require the lawyers to pay for some usually small amount for their participation in the program.

Jennifer is a young partner I coached a several years ago. I asked her to describe to the lawyers in another firm who were just starting the coaching program how to get the most out of it. Her thoughts capture some of the principles discussed above:

- Consider your participation in the program a gift/an extra benefit the firm is offering that you should squeeze the most out of that you can;

- Open up, don't be ashamed of where you are or what you think your limitations are, let Cordell get to know you;
- Participate in all parts of the program, even when you don't really understand how they could benefit you;
- Do something *every day*, even if it's small, that helps you reach the goals you set;
- Don't get discouraged, seeds take time to grow;
- Share what you learn with others in the firm, particularly newer lawyers;
- Have someone keep you accountable (either Cordell or someone else in the group); and
- Have fun! The relationships you build in the program with other lawyers in your firm will be invaluable as you move forward in your career. They will raise the level of your personal fulfillment and of your professional commitment. They will be life-long friends.

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