

Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

You Gotta Believe: Some Practical Ideas

Many of you are probably far too young to know where I got the line: “*You Gotta Believe.*” Tug McGraw coined the phrase about the 1973 underdog New York Mets and it applies to you as well.

I remember when I finished my USAF active duty and first joined a law firm. Early in my career, I arrived at work every day at 6 a.m. so I could spend time listening to the lawyer for whom I did the most work.

I made the coffee, grabbed my first cup, went to his office and sat across his desk with my coffee cup in hand. During our 10-15 minute sessions each day, he shared ideas, really gems, the kind you and I never learned in law school.

Several times he told me: “Cordell, clients want their lawyers to have confidence inspiring personalities. They want to believe you are the lawyer who can handle their matter better than any other lawyer.”



I have coached well over 1000 lawyers in the last 11 years.

What have I noticed? All lawyers have some self-confidence. They could not have made it through law school without it.

But many lawyers don't believe they can become a law firm leader or rainmaker. They might have bought into the misconception that they have to approach it the same way a senior lawyer did.

Once the lawyers I coach believe they can become rainmakers, they are able to accomplish great things. One lawyer I coached went from almost no clients to becoming a top rainmaker

in her firm simply by figuring out she could make rain, and she could do it her way.

So, what can you do to become more self-confident? Here is the advice I give to the lawyers I coach: You will only be as successful as you believe you can be. When you believe you are successful

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and the right lawyer for your potential client, you have more energy, you exude confidence and your body language reflects that confidence.

- **Dress for success and be aware of your body language.** Whether you like it or not, part of the first impression you make will be based on how you are dressed and how you appear. I once met an M&A lawyer whose shoes looked as if he had been on a playground. It's the only thing I remember about him;
- **You don't have to be an extrovert and life of the party to exude confidence.** It is far better to be "interested" than it is to be "interesting." Ask great questions, actively listen, and find a way to demonstrate you heard what was said;
- **Decide what you really want and focus your time and energy on it.** Time and energy are your two most important resources. Don't waste either. To do that, plan your non-billable time for your own development and client development as if it was as important as your work for an important client;
- **One size does not fit all. Do not compare yourself to others.** You have your own unique talents, dreams and challenges. Focus your time and energy on your highest priorities;
- **Find someone who encourages you and whom you trust so that you can be brutally honest about who you are and how you are doing and get feedback.** The better I know the lawyers I am coaching, the better I can identify their skills and enable them to use those skills. I sought feedback from people I trusted throughout my entire career. I remember one time I had a great idea and shared it with a colleague who told me that I needed to focus on finishing some of my other ideas before embarking on a new one;
- **Pay attention to your self-talk.** Instead of saying to yourself, "My problem is..." say, "My *opportunity* is..." Instead of saying, "I need to..." say, "I *want* to..." Instead of saying, "I'll try to..." say, "I *will*...";
- **Stay hungry, keep learning and always seek to become a better lawyer.** In his Stanford graduation speech Steve Jobs closed with a quote from The Whole Earth Catalog: "Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish." I totally agree. When I see superstar lawyers one thing they share in common is they are never content. They are always striving to get better;
- **Become the "go to" lawyer for your clients.** If you feel you are the "go to" lawyer, your confidence will show;
- **Focus on the journey (actions) and the destination (bringing in business) will take care of itself.** This idea taken from the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote worked very well for me. Focus on becoming more valuable to your clients and they will seek you out when they need you;
- **Work on small steps that get you outside your comfort zone.** Each time you make a step outside your comfort zone, you gain confidence;
- **Practice, practice, practice.** Practice speaking in public and one-on-one. Have someone video tape you and get feedback on your body language. Practice writing for clients. One way to do it is by blogging;
- **Be patient and persistent.** Making rain takes time. Don't get discouraged when you are not seeing results. When I first decided to focus my practice on representing highway, heavy civil construction contractors, it took well over two years before I saw any results;
- **Avoid distractions.** Technology has made our work easier to get done, while at the same time it has made it far more difficult to stay

focused. I watch people all the time now who are actually with another person, only paying no attention to that other person. I once saw a lawyer pull out his mobile device at a client meeting and type something under the table and send it;

- **One final thought:** Self-doubt is natural and it can be actually be healthy. I have had it my entire career. I called it my “healthy paranoia.” I used it to motivate me to be a better lawyer. You should, too.

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