

Client Development

Position Yourself for Success



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Cordell M. Parvin

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Giving Your Personal Best

Are you someone who wants to give your personal best to client development as you have done to other aspects of your career and personal life? If so, how can you know if you are giving your personal best? Here's my thought: A defining ability is the willingness to get outside your comfort zone to be comfortable being uncomfortable. If you are emotionally comfortable, it keeps you from being as creative as you might be.



I owe a great deal of the success and enjoyment of my law practice to being creative and willing to take risks and believing I could be Joe Montana with two minutes to go in the Super Bowl and 80 yards to cover to win the game. If you can make it to the edge of your personal or professional abilities, then you know you are giving your personal best.

The Will to Prepare to Win

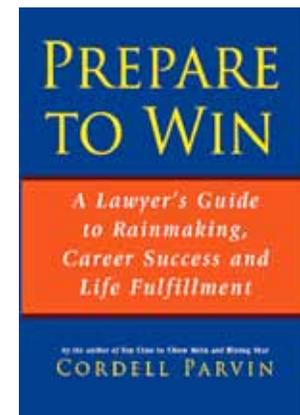


In 2010, Nancy and I celebrated our 40th anniversary. I practiced law for 37 years. I can't remember life without Nancy's love and support, or life when I was not thinking about the law.

Plenty has changed in the law practice during those 37 years, but I know one thing that has not. I have never met a lawyer who is inspired and excited about getting their hours. Getting billable hours is a requirement the firm puts on a lawyer, and while it is something we all need to do, it does not motivate us.

What does motivate many of us is getting, retaining and expanding relationships with clients. Many of us became lawyers, less because of "the law" and more because we could use our knowledge and skills to help our clients achieve their goals.

If getting, retaining and expanding relationships with clients motivates lawyers, why aren't more lawyers doing what it takes to have that opportunity? As you know, I wrote a book titled *Prepare to Win*. I picked the title based on a quote I had seen many times attributed to various famous coaches. The essence of the quote is: "Most people have the will to win, but only a few have the will to prepare to win." Many lawyers have the will to get, retain, and expand relationships with clients but only a few have the will to do the hard work that makes getting, retaining and building relationships with clients easy.



I am willing to bet that at least 80% of lawyers have no written plan for their career, no written goals, no method of holding themselves accountable, and make no concerted effort to build their profile or build relationships. I am further willing to bet that 80% of those lawyers are questioning why they became a lawyer in the first place. I sincerely hope you are not one of those lawyers.

Regardless of your law school, your class rank, your family situation, your age, your firm, your boss, your firm's clients, you and only you are responsible for your success and only you can define what success is for you. Over time you will also have to inspire yourself, motivate yourself, hold yourself accountable, stick with it when it is challenging and pick yourself up when things do not go as you had hoped.



Dave Walton is an outstanding young partner with Cozen O'Connor I coached for 18 months. While I am sure I have helped Dave, he has been successful because he motivates himself and creates systems that enable him to hold himself accountable. He is continually striving to get better. Dave presented a Webinar for all the lawyers I coach in which he shared how he prepares to win.

Watch this Video Clip
Client Development In The Billable World

Click on the video to the left to watch a clip from the webinar. You may view the entire webinar by going to the [Learning from Each Other](#) website.

Motivation: How to Become Passionate About Client Development



In August 2009 I posted a blog about Jodi McDougall, a partner with Cozen O'Connor, who shared with me that she is "majorily in the zone." I mentioned that one reason I thought she was in the zone was because she is intrinsically motivated more than extrinsically motivated.

After posting the blog, I have been reading more materials on motivation. I read a blog post and article in Success Magazine by Shawn Phillips. Shawn included a comparison of *Training vs. Exercise* that I found helpful.

He noted that athletes do not go to exercise camp, they go to training camp where they are focused on achieving specific results, fueling an intense drive and motivation.

Aren't the differences between those who are successful with marketing and client development much the same? The lawyers I coach who are most successful are intrinsically motivated. They are clearly training, not exercising. They are highly motivated, focused and in the zone. They are not making client development efforts in response to a need and they are not bored by their efforts.

I really like what Shawn Phillips said at the end of his blog post. I want to paraphrase, what he said, changing his references from training to client development:

If you're committed to growing beyond the carrot and stick to a truly sustainable form of motivation then you must learn to fall in love with client development and marketing itself and not just the results. Patience, commitment and persistence are all essential ingredients; however, ultimately you must aim for joy and you'll discover, in the least expected of moments, Mastery.

As you discover how to love becoming more valuable to your clients, leading you to the goals that matter most, you will transform discipline into freedom, struggle into grace, and willpower into passion.

Getting Comfortable Outside Your Comfort Zone



You have probably been told you need to be networking and you need to go to networking events. Likely you have not been told what to do when you get there and you may not be comfortable introducing yourself and striking up a conversation with people you do not know. If you feel that way, you are not alone.

Apple Sulit-Peralejo is an Atlantic City Family Law lawyer I coached. She is vibrant and expressive and she lights up the room when she enters. Yet, when I first met Apple she was uncomfortable going to networking events and meeting new people.



During our coaching, that changed. Apple shared with me what had happened. Here is what she said.

During my legal career, I have frequently attended bar functions, “marketing” or “networking” events. I went to these events because I needed to go, not because I wanted to go. Even though I attended many events, I never seemed to develop business contacts, clients or referral sources and for a long time I wondered why.

I finally figured out the problem during our coaching. Even though I attended many bar and community events, I only mingled with the handful of people that I already knew. I stayed mostly within my comfort zone. Even when I met someone new, there was only a brief introduction followed by brief interaction.

During our coaching sessions, I realized I was missing the opportunity to meet new people, develop new relationships and develop deeper relationships with new contacts. I realized that I had to work on meeting and developing relationships with people I did not know. That meant I needed get comfortable outside my comfort zone.

Working up my courage, I tried a new approach when I attended social events. Instead of looking for people I knew, I approached people I had not met before. As important, I also made a conscious effort to avoid “business talk” or have the “hello interaction”. I stayed away from “business talk” because it is much easier to have a conversation with someone and to get to know that person by finding something we had in common - - travel, children, sports, news, etc. I realized that the “hello interaction” is the easy thing to do, because all you do is say “hello,” make small talk, say “nice to meet you” and then move away.

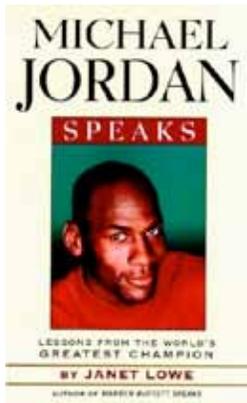
At first, I felt awkward not being in my comfort zone, but it has gotten easier for me. More importantly, I no longer dread going to these events. I actually look forward to going because it is now enjoyable. The icing on the cake is that I am promoting my business while having fun!

I have read that the world’s greatest athletes, artists, musicians and others get better by practicing and focusing on what they don’t do well rather than what they do well already. That is what Apple is doing and I know it will enable her to become more successful. What can you work on to get better?



Being in the Zone

Even if you are not a sports fan, you likely would enjoy watching Michael Jordan play in the NBA championship or Wayne Gretzky play in the Stanley Cup Championship. These two great athletes made it look effortless and were at the top of their game when their team needed it the most. I loved watching them because they were so focused on what they needed to accomplish.



In the book *Michael Jordan Speaks* by Janet Lowe, Michael explains what it means to be in the zone on the court. “Once you get into the moment, you know you’re there. Things start to move slowly, you start to see the court very well. You start reading what the defense is trying to do. And I saw that, I saw that moment.” Wayne Gretzky was once asked the difference between a good hockey player and a great one. He reportedly answered “A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.”

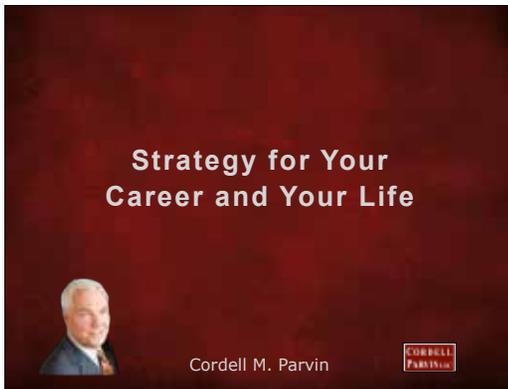
What then is the lawyer equivalent of being in the zone? I think first it means being in the moment. The best lawyers I know work when they are working and are focused on what they are doing. For many of us we are so very easily distracted by emails or someone coming in the office to chat about the weekend.

What is the lawyer equivalent of playing to where the puck is going to be? I think it is anticipating our clients’ needs before they have expressed them. We can really differentiate ourselves from other lawyers when we are looking ahead in that way.



Success and Fulfillment: Get in the Zone

In August 2009 I received an email from Jodi McDougall, a Seattle lawyer I coach. She said: “Just wanted to let you know I’m seriously in the zone today. Almost as good as Tiger was this weekend!”



I love getting emails from lawyers who are really enjoying what they are doing. What did Jodi mean when she said she was “seriously in the zone?” It is a term more often used to describe athletes, musicians and artists. I describe being in the zone in a 2006 blog post and in my e-book [Strategy for Your Career and Your Life](#).

Being in the zone is when you are so involved in what you are doing and the experience is so enjoyable that nothing else seems to matter. You love doing it for the sheer joy of doing it.

Think back when you were a child. When you were playing, you were likely in the zone because you were absorbed in what you were doing at the time. You were intrinsically motivated. As you grew up you likely began to focus on extrinsic motivation, including rewards from doing something and the approval of parents, teachers and others. As a young lawyer, you may still be driven by extrinsic motivations, salary, bonus, promotion and approval of senior lawyers.

Think about how you can get back in the zone. Set some goals that challenge you and keep track of how you are doing. Focus on what you are working on and try to eliminate distractions. Identify 1-3 things you can do to gain control of your career, your life and your future. If you do those three things, you will feel like Jodi.

Thinking About Success...Again

When I was billing 2000 hours I did not have time to study or understand why some lawyers are successful and have a great family life and why others are not. I also did my client development instinctively and some things worked very effectively, while other things did not work quite as well. I didn't have time then to sit down and analyze why.

Now, that I am coaching and working with lawyers, and researching and writing, I have a much better idea of the attributes of the most successful lawyers who also have a family life and I understand better why certain client development efforts work more effectively than others. While each lawyer I know has unique talents, weaknesses, ambitions and practices, and there is no magic pill or formula, there are principles that I urge you to think about and try. In an article published by [Marketing the Law Firm](#) I mention some of these principles.

It all begins with our attitude. When you talk to yourself do you say:



“My problem is,” or do you say: “My opportunity is”

“I am too busy to...” or do you say: “I can...”

“I need to” or do you say: “I want to”

Next, we must have clarity on what we want in our career and life. Our time and energy are our most important assets. If we do not have clarity by having a written plan and written goals, we waste precious time. Next, we need to focus on what our clients need. They do not want to be sold. They do not care about what we do. They hire us to solve problems, help them achieve opportunities or deal with internal or external changes. If what we do does not address those issues, the client will not hire us, no matter how good we are.



We need to build our profile. Over time it really helps to focus on a niche and become the “go to lawyer” in that niche. It should be something clients need and you are passionate about. One lawyer I am coaching sent me her revised plan. She identified clients and potential clients, what she could do for them, two specific areas she wanted to focus on and become the “go to lawyer” and a game plan to become recognized by the clients she wants to serve.

Building our profile gives us the opportunity to build relationships with clients and potential clients. At the end of the day, we get the opportunity to be considered based on our reputation and recommendations, we ultimately get hired based on how well we connect with our clients and build trust and rapport. Assuming we do high quality work, we keep those clients by understanding their industry, their business and their personal needs. I also say that I want my clients to be friends and I want my friends to be clients. So, the personal relationship we develop really does matter.

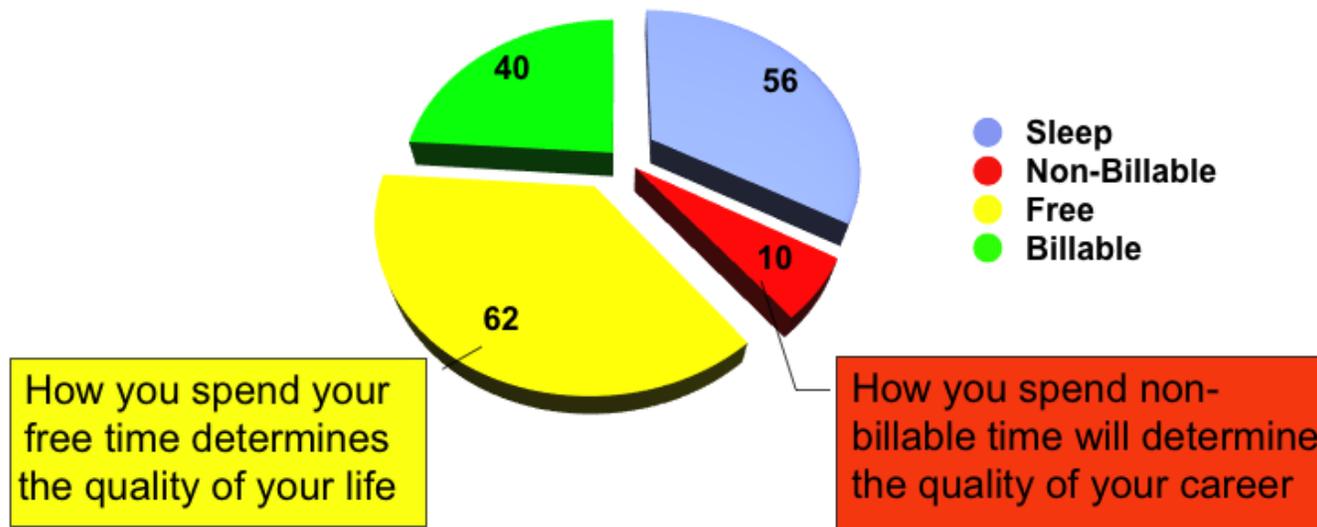




When we become more successful we need to build a team. Young lawyers who will later work with you will be thinking “what is in this for me to work with...?” We need to treat them as if they are as important as our most important client because without their help we will not retain our most important client. We need to align their goals with our own and our client’s goals, provide sufficient information in a timely way for them to do their work and then constantly give feedback.

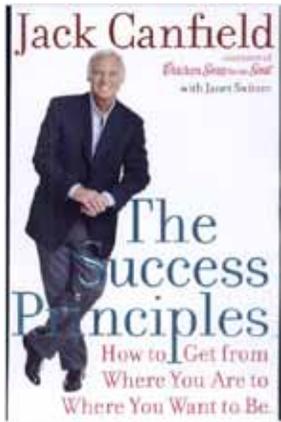
Finally, we need to plan our personal time at the very least as well as we plan our work time. For me, Saturday afternoon starting with lunch has always been Jill’s time. It is more challenging now that she is married, but we still try to spend that time together, now usually with her husband and my wife, Nancy, included. When we are with our family, we need to be in the moment, not answering blackberry emails. You will see in this [Boston Globe](#) article that my grown daughter brought that point home to me well.

How You Spend Your Time Weekly



I recently came across a report titled *How Superachievers Outperform Others* by Dr. Donald J. Moine. I found it very supportive of what I have learned and written about how super lawyers outperform others. You can find it on the [Selling Power](#) webpage.

Habits of Successful Lawyers



I recently read Jack Canfield's book *The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*. In the book he reports that psychologists tell us that 90% of our behavior is habitual. I absolutely agree based on my own experience. If that is true, what are your habits? Are they contributing to your success?

Canfield begins Principle 35 with a quote from Ken Blanchard. "There is a difference between interest and commitment. When you're interested in doing something, you do it only when it's convenient. When you are committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results." That is a powerful stuff. For years I was committed to my personal fitness. I woke up the same time every morning and went to the fitness club. Lately, I have only been interested, but not committed, in my physical fitness. I can find many excuses for not working out. Needless to say, working out is no longer part of my daily habits and I am not feeling as well as when it was. What are your commitments? Are you committed to becoming a better lawyer? Are you committed to providing extraordinary service to your clients? Are you committed to making client development efforts part of your every day habits?

I have been thinking about what the most important habits lawyers should have if 90% of our behavior is habitual. I am considering writing a book describing these habits and why they are important. Here are the habits I believe are important:

1. Healthy living
2. Positive self talk and attitude
3. Focus on learning and becoming a better lawyer
4. Goal setting
5. Planning non-billable time and using it wisely
6. Focus on relationships
7. Understanding client needs
8. Extraordinary client service
9. Leading, supervising, delegating and motivating lawyers and staff
10. Making and keeping commitments

Create a Group to Make Client Development 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, 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 with the other members of their group. Each month, the members of the coaching group report on what they have done that month. Some firms put the reports on a coaching group portal page and other firms send an email with the photo of each person in the group and his or her report by the photo.

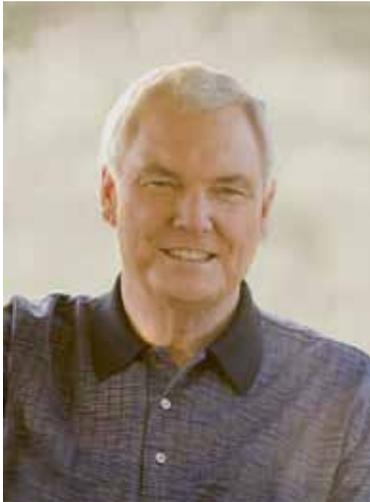


There is a psychological method in this madness. Studies show that when we set goals, write them down, establish a date to complete them and share them with another person, we are more likely to actually do what it takes to achieve the goals. We want our actions to be consistent with the commitments we have made. This principle is most powerful when we create the commitment ourselves rather than having someone else dictate the commitment to us.

The lawyers I am coaching make commitments to themselves, to me and to other members of their group. That commitment helps each lawyer hold himself or herself accountable. The principle is also more powerful because of the commitment to a team goal and team action items. The lawyers in the coaching group do not want to let the team down.

You do not need an outside coach like me to create the team environment described above. So, as Nike would say: Just Do It.

About Cordell Parvin



Cordell Parvin practiced law for 37 years and developed a highly successful national construction law practice. He advised clients who built many of the largest construction projects in the country. Cordell also wrote a monthly column for Roads and Bridges magazine for 25 years.

During his career, Cordell taught, mentored and coached young lawyers. At Jenkins & Gilchrist, PC, Cordell initiated and directed the firm's Attorney Development Program. He created a comprehensive program for associate development focused on career planning and enhancing skills through mentoring and shadowing. Cordell also developed a client-development, coaching program for the firm's young partners. His enthusiasm for helping lawyers achieve greater success prompted him to create a consulting practice.

Cordell earned his law degree from the University of Richmond and his bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech. He makes his home in Dallas with Nancy, his wife of 40 years and greatest supporter. While Cordell is proud of the work he has done for clients and, more recently, for lawyers, law firms and law students, he is most proud of his daughter, Jill, who follows her passion and teaches special education students.

Also by Cordell Parvin

Books

Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout

Rising Star: The Making of a Rainmaker

Prepare to Win: A Lawyer's Guide to Rainmaking, Career Success and Life Fulfilment

To purchase Cordell's books, please visit [Life Career Publishing](#).

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Cordell Parvin speaks at law firm retreats and conducts training and development programs on mentoring, client development, developing the next generation of rainmakers, and practice group leadership. He coaches lawyers on career and client development, setting goals, and rainmaking skills.

Cordell Parvin LLC
17300 Preston Rd.
Suite 310
Dallas, TX 75252
214-866-055
coaching@cordellparvin.com

Visit us on our Web site
www.cordellparvin.com

Books Referenced

Michael Jordan Speaks by Janet Lowe

The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be by Jack Canfield

[Cordell's Recommended Reading](#)