

# *Client Development in a Nutshell*



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## Stop Selling

Are you surprised that I would tell you that one secret of client development is to “stop selling.” In many ways client development is counterintuitive and this is one of them.

Think about buying a car. Are you more likely to do business with the dealer who is trying to sell you a car or the dealer who is trying to help you find a car? I hate doing business with someone who is selling me something, but I frequently do business with someone who is helping me.

My life improved immensely when I changed my mindset from marketing and selling myself to finding ways to help my clients and potential clients. Yours will also. Selling and marketing yourself is about what is in it for you. Finding ways to help your clients is about what is in it for them.



Most lawyers I know are uncomfortable asking for business. It's understandable because they fear how they will be perceived and do not like the feeling of being rejected.

So how do you ask for business? Try this: Next time you are at the point where you are thinking about asking for business, say: “I would love the opportunity to work with you and help you on this.” Before you are at that point consider saying: “If there is anything I can do to help you, please call me.”



## In a Nutshell

I made a presentation on client development for new partners in a large international firm. My presentation was an overview and was filled with lots of information. In fact, I thought I had overwhelmed the new partners with too much information. So, while I waited to catch my plane back to Dallas, I sent the new partners an email that captured the 10 main points we discussed. They found what I sent helpful and I thought you might as well.

Watch this Video  
Client Development in a Nutshell



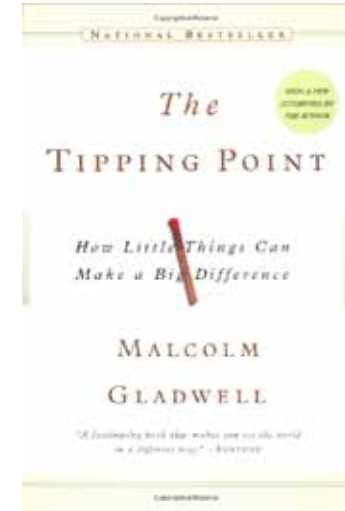
1. Client development has changed. It is more focused than ever on the client, becoming a remarkable lawyer in the client's eyes and in building a relationship based on trust. You can no longer just do good work, get a Martindale A-V rating, be active in the Bar and wait for the phone to ring. You can also no longer rely on who you know. Instead, with way more lawyers and way less time to choose, it is more important who knows you. So, you have to narrow your target market and become visible to them.
2. Your clients expect you to understand their industry, their company and them individually. Read what they read, go to the industry meetings they attend and get out from in front of your computer and go visit them.
3. By reading what clients read and belonging to organizations they belong to, you are best positioned to identify their problems, opportunities, internal and external changes that require legal help. Give them advance notice of what is going on that will create legal problems or opportunities for them.
4. Prepare a business plan with goals to focus your attention and not waste time. When preparing the plan, do not focus so much on a flurry of client development activities. Instead, focus on changing your lifestyle habits. Plan long-term by figuring out where you want to be in five or ten years and then act short-term by identifying what you will do each week, how long it will take and when you will do it.





5. To become a “go-to lawyer” in the eyes of your clients and potential clients you have to become visible. One of the best ways to become visible to your target market is by writing and speaking on their problems, opportunities, internal changes and external changes. I decided that writing articles and speaking gave me the greatest return on my investment of non-billable time. Today, creating a Blog or Podcast that benefits your clients will be the best return on investment for many of you.

6. Connectors are best suited to become visible and get business by being active in the Bar and/or community and building as many relationships with diverse groups of people as possible. Are you a connector? To see, take the test in Malcolm Gladwell’s book *The Tipping Point*.



7. Client development is a contact sport. Be purposeful about staying in touch with your contacts. You should not be having random lunches with clients and referral sources when you can’t find anyone in your office with whom to dine. When you make contact do so in a way they will find value rather than perceive you as trying to sell your services.



8. Clients hire lawyers more than law firms. You get considered based on your profile as a “go-to” lawyer and you get hired based on how well you build trust and connect with the decision maker.

9. Clients are not satisfied with the level of service they receive. Surveys show that most Fortune 1000 General Counsels’ would fire their law firm if they thought another firm would do better. They are less concerned about billable rates than they are concerned about responsiveness, innovativeness and efficiency. Focus on their definition of service and then exceed their expectations. Think of ways you can enable the client representative to do his or her job more effectively.

10. Make client development a habit and try to do something, no matter how small, each and every day. Think Big, Act Small!

## Have You Answered the Why Question on Client Development?

Time management is the most frequent agenda item for lawyers I coach. More specifically, I am asked how to find time for client development when the lawyer is busy with billable work and wants quality family time. Do you also wonder how you can find the time?

You might think this is a time management issue. Way more often than not, it is really a self-motivation issue. Donald Latumahina wrote an interesting [post on self-motivation](#).

His first suggestion for building self-motivation is to “Have a Cause.” He says: “While other causes could inspire you temporarily, a cause that matters to you can inspire you indefinitely.”

His third suggestion is to “Be Hungry.” He says: “To be truly motivated, you need to have hunger and not just desire. Having mere desire won’t take you through difficult times since you don’t want things badly enough.”



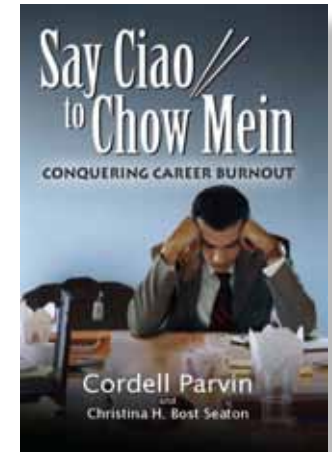
If you are struggling to make time for client development ask yourself the “why” question. Write down why developing a client base and book of business is important to you; it will help you get a cause. Let me share my answers with you. Developing a client base and book of business would:

- Provide security for my family
- Enable me to help clients achieve their goals
- Make my work more interesting

If you find it challenging to make time for client development, you might want to read *Rising Star*, which I co-authored with Kristi Sebalj. Here is some of what I said in the introduction:



This is the second book I have written about Tony and Gina Caruso. In **Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout** Christina Bost Seaton and I focused on Tony, who after finishing his first year as an associate in a large Texas law firm is burned out and struggling to find meaning in his career. **Rising Star: The Making of a Rainmaker** is about Gina, who is now a partner in a mid-sized firm. She is the talk of the firm, having brought in \$1 Million of business. Yet, she feels like a one-hit wonder because her success was a result of one big case from one big client.



I have known Tony's and Gina's throughout my 35 years practicing law. Their characters are a composite of lawyers who have worked for me and lawyers I have been blessed to coach and mentor. Many of those lawyers have caused me to study and examine differences between lawyers who are successful and happy and lawyers who are not.

As you read *Rising Star*, think about what you really want in your career and how you can most effectively and efficiently achieve it. That will be a good starting point to motivate you to achieve your goals.



## Making Time for Client Development: Manage Your Time and Energy

The first step to make time for client development is to answer the question: “Why is client development important to you?” In this post, I will share with you three noted experts’ approach to time management.

Noted author Carl Sandburg once said: “Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how will it be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.” He wrote that long before the Internet, email and other current potential distractions.

I do a program called “Time Management: Making Time for Client Development.” In the program we discuss time and energy management and I share ideas I learned from books by Stephen Covey, David Allen and Jim Loehr. Each author approaches the subject in a slightly different way. I have read their books and listened to their presentations. I have found each approach valuable. Recently I found a [report on the effectiveness of coaching programs](#) using each approach. I plan my week around my roles as Stephen Covey suggests. I use David Allen’s approach to next actions. I set physical/economic, mental/learning, emotional/relationship, and spiritual/value goals based on Jim Loehr’s four sources of energy. Take a look and decide which approach will work best for you.



One final thought, one way to make time for client development is to eliminate wasted time. How much time do you waste each day on things that really do not matter? You might be opening and responding to unimportant emails, doing things that could be delegated, searching for things in your office. If you saved just 30 minutes a day, that would be 182 ½ hours a year. Suppose you used that time for client development or your own development, what do you think would happen to your career?



## Tools For Your Tool Kit

**Your plan** - it is not the plan itself that is so important as the planning that goes into it. Time is a precious asset. Planning will help you use it wisely.



**Monarch stationary and/or cards** - use these for handwritten notes. I had both firm ones and personal ones.



**Google alerts** - you can set up a google alert for your clients (put names in quotes) and topics (for me highway construction, bridge construction, etc). I use Gmail to get them so my office email is not cluttered.

**Your website bio** - clients look at this. Is your photo current and are you happy with it? Can a client download articles you have written or presentations you have given. Update often.



**What your clients read** - find out what they read and subscribe (e.g. all my construction clients read *Engineering News Record*).

**Getting Things Done** - a book by David Allen that will provide ideas for you to save time. (I actually saw my wood top desk for the first time in 20 years.)

**Trusted Advisor and Clients for Life** - two must read books. Unless we are lawyers who are like heart surgeons and handle only one matter for a client, we all want to be trusted advisors for clients for life. Consider making these two books a “book club” reading activity.



**Accountability** –pick someone in your firm to brainstorm with and to help make you more accountable (this is like having a fitness partner).

**YouTube** - I am able to find short videos done by authors of my favorite business books.

**Blogs and Podcasts** - these are the marketing tools for your generation. Great way to become more visible to your target market.



**Your target market** – I coined a phrase “if you market to everyone you market to no one.” One of the biggest changes to my legal career has been the move to more specialization. Seek to become the “go-to” lawyer for a narrow market.



**Sticky messages (taken from the book: *Made to Stick*)** - Your clients do not care about what you do. Your ability to anticipate your clients' problems, opportunities, internal changes and external changes before your competitors and even before your clients is a great predictor of success. (This is also a reason to narrow your market.)



**Presentations** - using PowerPoint that does not put the audience to sleep. Go to any all day CLE with panels of lawyers and you will typically see presentations with lots of words and bullet points. There is nothing worse than a lawyer presenter reading lots of words or bullet points on a slide. Learn presentation skills and make your presentation different. Have your trusty assistant read *Beyond Bullet Points* by Cliff Atkinson.



**Elevator speech and elevator questions** - you will inevitably be asked what you do. Have several answers on the tip of your tongue. Don't just say I am a litigator. It is also important for other lawyers in your firm to have a clear idea of what you do so they can think how you might help their clients. Have elevator questions ready because, being candid, people do not care about what you do and they love to tell you what they do.



**Remembering names** - why are we so bad at it? There are tricks you can practice and use.



**Getting outside your comfort zone** - the world's greatest at anything practice outside their comfort zone. That is how they get better.

**Focus on your most important contacts in a systematic way.** I use an excel spreadsheet and rank my contacts three ways so I focus on the most important ones.



**Follow up** - many lawyers lose out on opportunities by not following up.



**Listening skills** - this is the most important and most overlooked skill for us. Most lawyers are already thinking about how they will respond while their client or contact is talking. Learn to listen.

**Holiday cards** have become a modern day version of spam. Do something unexpected.



**Never appear to be greedy or needy.** Clients can see it in our eyes. Put the client or potential client first. Think of the long-term relationship not just the matter.

**80/20 rule.** Don't talk about yourself or your firm until you are asked and even then tread lightly. Learn to ask questions and listen. You are well served if the client or potential client is talking 80% of the time.



**Be patient and persistent** - most lawyers give up if they do not get results right away. Do not get discouraged.



**Do something no matter how small each day.** One group I coached made a list of 33 potential things they could do each day. One lawyer I am coaching created his own list.



**Have fun** - have an insatiable desire to learn and follow your passion. Those lawyers who have gotten the most from the coaching programs I have done have been those who had the most fun doing it and the greatest desire to become better at client development.



## Principles

### **There are a wide variety of ways you can become successful**

One size clearly does not fit all.  
Figure out what will work for you.

### **Make time for client development**

If you try to find time, you never will.

### **Identify your major definite purpose**

The intersection of your passion, talent and client needs.



### **Think big, act small**

Believe that you can accomplish more than you ever dreamed and then take small steps each and everyday.

### **Create a plan with goals**

The thought process going into the plan will make it more likely that you will achieve your goals.

### **Identify your target market, who you want to hire you and what you want them to hire you to do**

If you market to everyone, you market to no one.

### **Find ways to hold yourself accountable**

Your plan has no value if you do not act on it.

### **It is not who you know or what you know, it is who knows what you know**

Clients have way more choices and way less time to select their lawyer.

### **Build and raise your profile to become visible to your target market**

Write and speak to become known for your work or become active in your community and/or the Bar.

### **Learn to become comfortable outside your comfort zone**

Focus on what you do well and also focus on expanding what you do well.



### **Don't sell like others sell you**

Clients do not want to do business with lawyers who are needy or greedy.

### **Make your friends your clients and your clients your friends**

All else being equal clients want to do business with lawyers they like and trust.

### **Know your client's industry, company and individual needs**

Clients want their lawyers to understand the business context of the legal work they are doing.

### **Develop your unique selling proposition**

Be able to explain why clients should hire you or your firm.

### **Ask good questions and listen**

Lawyers generally talk too much; you will do better if your client is talking 75% of the time.

### **Search for ways to add value**

Clients appreciate the unexpected value they receive.

### **Seek to become better each and every day**

Never become complacent and believe there is nothing else to learn.

### **Be persistent, patient and persevere**

Most lawyers quit before they become successful business developers.



### **Focus on your clients' problems, opportunities and changes**

Your clients do not care about what you do, they only care if what you do helps them solve a problem, successfully achieve an opportunity or deal with a change.

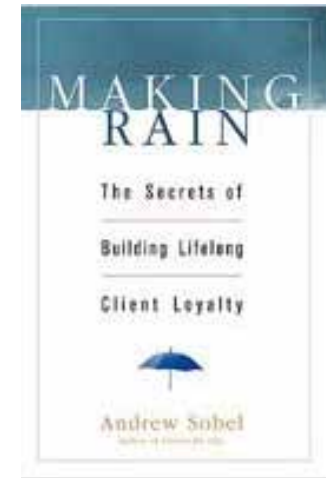
### **Stay in touch**

Find ways to stay in touch with clients and referral sources that they will value.



## The Power of Observation

Simple observation can be a powerful client development tool. In his book *Making Rain*, Andrew Sobel tells a great story about his son's interview with the head of admissions at a college to which he was applying. Sobel describes that at the end of the one-hour interview, his son said to the admissions director, "I notice you're wearing an Outward Bound pin. Are you a graduate?" "Oh, yes," she beamed. "This past summer I finally took one of their adult courses—it was something I had wanted to do for years." As Sobel points out this story illustrates how you can break through when you make an emotional connection with someone. What does all this mean to lawyers? Put simply, observation and doing your homework can be a powerful client development technique because it allows you to connect with the client on a personal level.



Here are some ideas on applying those techniques. Before you meet with a client or prospective client do your homework. Prepare for the meeting by finding out as much about the person and the company as you can. Where did the client representative go to college and law school, where did he work before joining the client? Has he written any articles? When you arrive at the office, take a look at the coffee table books and magazines in the reception area. They may be industry magazines or may be books about the city or state of the business. Whatever they happen to be, they convey the client's interests or values.



Meetings in the client's office provide ample opportunity for observation. What is on the wall and shelves? Are there sports pictures, pictures of his or her kids, works of art? What books are on the book shelves? Is the office neat and tidy or kind of messy?

With the information you gather by observation you can find ways to connect with the client. You can subscribe to trade publications, send things you find that will be of interest to your client and read some of the books that interest you.



## Practical Tips



### **Breakdown Your Plan**

Create 90 day or monthly goals.

### **Plan and Schedule Client Development Activities Each Week**

Decide what you plan to do, estimate how much time it will take and then schedule it on your calendar.

### **Keep a Client Development Journal**

Keeping track makes it more likely you will actually do the activities.

### **Have a Client Development Partner**

Like a workout partner, a client development partner makes it more likely you will do the activities.

### **Join Industry and/or Community Associations/Organizations and Seek Leadership Positions**

Join just a few organizations and be active to raise visibility.

### **Stay in Contact and Build Relationships**

Use multiple means (notes, calls, lunches, coffee, blogs, email, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other social media).

### **Conduct Workshops, Seminars and Webinars for Clients**

(Get CLE credit if doing it for in-house lawyers).

### **Put Links to Published Articles on Website Bio**

You want perspective clients to read what you have written.





### Create a Blog

Blog posts are shorter than articles and they are picked up by Google.

### Create a Guide

This can be a handout at industry presentations. Make it short and concise.

### Create Google Alerts

For clients and for your specialty.

### Read What Your Clients Read

Find out their industry publications and subscribe to them.

### Identify Referral Sources

Referral sources expand your network to perspective clients.

### Write Thank You Notes

Let clients know you appreciate the opportunity to serve them.

### Get to Know Assistants

A client representative's assistant can be a great source of goodwill.

### Joint Venture Programs with Client Representatives

They will enjoy being asked and working together will help build the relationship.



### **Become Involved in Your Clients' Favorite Charities**

This is another way to build the relationship and let the client know you care about what is important to them.



### **Return Phone Calls and Emails Promptly**

Clients do not want to wait.

### **Build Database of Information on Your Clients**

Include spouse's name, children's names and ages, hobbies etc. This helps you find reasons to be in contact with clients.

### **Go to Events You Would Rather Skip**

You never know where you will run into opportunities.

### **Have Your Elevator Speech Ready**

Create several so you can use the appropriate one.

### **Have Your Elevator Questions Ready**

People want you to be interested more than they want you to be interesting.

### **Call, Email and Write Clients**

Just to see how they are doing.

### **Do Something No Matter How Small Each and Every Day**

Make a list of potential things you can do each and every day.

### **Read Books About Sales and Service**

Figure out how other businesses do it effectively by reading about them.



## Good News / Bad News



When I spoke at a firm's associate retreat on client development, I began by telling them that I had good news and bad news. The associates chose to hear the bad news first. The bad news is that client development has never been more complicated. The good news is that a very small percentage of lawyers will actually do the activities that will enable them to build their client base. Some lawyers will never start developing business and others may start and then quit when they hit a dip or simply get bogged down doing billable work.

How can you increase your chances of doing the activities that will ultimately develop business? Here is my suggestion:

I often say: "If you know what you want (not need) to do and have a good answer to the why question (why it is important to you) you will far more likely have the commitment and discipline to do it even when you hit a dip." There is one other really important thing that will make you far more likely to do something. Many studies have shown that people are far more likely to do something if they in advance identify specifically WHAT they intend to do and WHEN they intend to do it. So anything you decide you want to do, you will far more likely do it if you also identify when you will do it rather than leaving that ambiguous.



## How the Very Best Lawyers Keep Getting Better

In my career I have been blessed to work with some really outstanding lawyers and I have also worked hard to be outstanding myself. So, I have ideas you can implement to keep getting better and take it to the next level.

1. They are never content with their achievements and are always striving to get better.
2. They focus on what they do not know and are willing to reinvent themselves if the situation requires it.
3. They regularly do things that others do not enjoy doing.
4. They are focused on the long term.
5. They persist until they succeed.
6. They are intrinsically motivated and do not get caught up in comparing themselves to others.
7. They strive to become comfortable outside their comfort zone.
8. They are comfortable under pressure.
9. They have set and achieved hundreds of goals and have confidence they will achieve more.
10. They focus on the processes that produce the end results rather than the end results themselves.
11. They know their health is essential to their success and make time to stay healthy.
12. They are focused on their priorities and do the most important things each and every day without getting distracted.





13. They genuinely enjoy their clients and their work.
14. They anticipate their clients' and potential clients' legal problems, create a solution and call them.
15. They work at becoming both an outstanding lawyer and trusted advisor.
16. They think optimistically and plan their non-billable time purposely.
17. They have healthy paranoia, which causes them to focus more intently on adding value for their clients.
18. They view everyone they meet as a potential client.
19. They are always playing to win.



20. They share credit and build their team as a result.
21. They look for other work the firm can do that their clients will value.
22. They help their associates succeed in their own right and are constantly rebuilding their team.
23. They are willing to fail and they rebound from disappointments or setbacks.
24. They are on the cutting edge of change, including technology changes.
25. They are always seeking new ideas and feedback from coaches and mentors.



## Hold Yourself Accountable

One of the most interesting things I have learned coaching lawyers is the importance of finding a way they can hold themselves accountable. One lawyer I coach created a scoring system for his 90 days goals. For example, he gives himself 2 points for each meeting with a client outside the office and gives himself 20 points for an article he gets published. Another lawyer I coach keeps a handwritten journal of her activities by date. Several lawyers I coach report monthly to their coaching group, their firm leadership and me.



Several other lawyers share with me their weekly plan and a report of what they did the previous week. Rob and Suzanne, a husband and wife team I coached here in Dallas recently began sharing their weekly plan/report with me. Suzanne sent me this email:

Cordell, really like the weekly list idea, it helps keep me on track! Just called my one client for the day and got a new case!

I can't assure you that holding yourself accountable on a weekly basis will result in a new matter, but I can assure you it will increase your chances of getting one because you will be more purposeful and focused on client development.

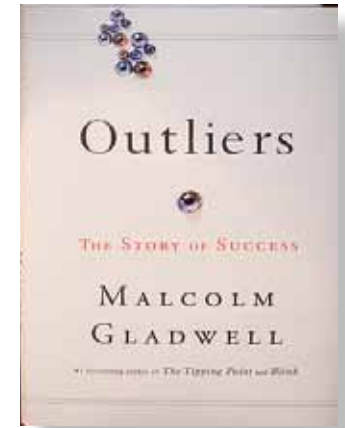
## Making Rain: Prepare Like the Beatles



Many Americans have this notion that the Beatles arrived in America from Liverpool and were an instant sensation. Few know how much work the Beatles did before they made the trip across the Atlantic. Your efforts to become a rainmaker require that same kind of work.

Malcolm Gladwell discussed how the Beatles became successful in his book *Outliers* and talked about the Beatles in a short video. Gladwell describe that at the beginning, the Beatles were playing two or three long sets a day in a Hamburg club, making a few pounds if they were lucky. The Beatles worked on their music in these clubs for years. What are you working on

now to make yourself more valuable to your clients?



In his blog “When did the Beatles Become THE Beatles?” Seth Godin says that as the Beatles got more traction they were marketing in every direction. After you have done your homework, then you will work at becoming visible by writing for industry publications and speaking to as many industry groups as possible. Before you get there, consider writing for and speaking to Bar groups. Even though you are not likely to be hired by competing lawyers, this stage will provide opportunities to become a more effective writer and presenter.

Seth Godin says the transition stage was brief but essential. When people started noticing them, the Beatles didn’t stop marketing. Instead they poured it on. At this point they shifted from being the chasers into being the chased. During the transition stage, organizations notice you and ask you to write for their publications or speak at their meetings. That is the time for you to “pour it on” to gain momentum.

After all the years playing in clubs and developing their skills, the Beatles came to America. Seth Godin says that many reach this stage and stop. When you feel you have “arrived,” have some healthy paranoia. That means continuing to learn, continuing to figure out what impacts your clients and writing and speaking on those subjects. It also means continuing to focus on building relationships with each of your clients and becoming their trusted advisor.

At this stage, the Beatles became THE Beatles and you will become THE Rainmaker.

## Start with Something Small



I think that many young lawyers find client development daunting. I gave a presentation to new partners at a firm who at the end were likely overwhelmed. Their firm had given me two hours to give an overview. By the end I am sure many in the audience wondered where to start.

Are you in that same position? If so, do what star athletes do - train by learning one thing at a time and begin by taking small steps so you feel you have accomplished something. One thing I suggest to lawyers I am coaching after our first session is to go back and look at their plan and look at their goals. Is there anything we discussed that has changed their thinking? Then I suggest that they do

something, no matter how small to get started. It might be as simple as calling someone and asking them to lunch, sending an article with a handwritten note, or setting up Google Alerts for their clients.

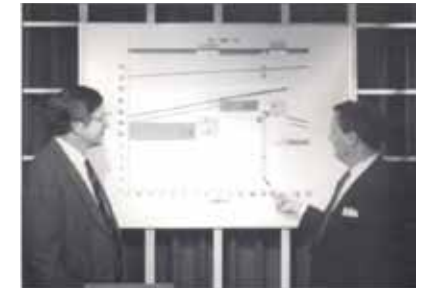
Don't feel like client development is climbing Mt. Everest. Take just one small step and get started.



## Find Success by Risking Failure

I saw a short Blog post by Seth Godin. He said: “The only thing worse than starting something and failing... is not starting something.” Have you ever not started a client development activity because you were afraid of failing? Don’t let fear of failing stop you. I have had many client development failures. Let me share one with you.

When professional video first gained acceptance, I decided to create a video for contractors. I spent days creating the script and two days in front of the camera with Dr. Michael Vorster at Virginia Tech. I was confident I had created a masterpiece and I decided to market the tape along with a book on linear scheduling at a price of \$495. I believe I sold at most 20 sets of the tape and most of those were to my mother and her friends. (I still have boxes of tapes in my garage.)



When I realized that my attempt to become a paid movie star was not working effectively, I came up with Plan B. I went back to the editor, paid him more money and created a one-hour summary of the eight-hour tape. I decided strategically to give the one-hour tape away and offer a special price for the full eight hours to those contractors who were intrigued enough to see more.

There came a point when I just wanted to give the tapes away. By then, I laughed at myself, picked myself up off the stage and pressed on with other ideas. Later I mentioned using linear scheduling in one of my *Roads & Bridges* monthly columns [\*A Limit on Unlimited\*](#) and found it was a better way to reach out to my target market.

Just to show I am willing to take another chance, I began shooting 50 short 5-10 minute [client development coaching and teaching videos](#). I got the idea from reading studies that people do not learn a subject and change from one long session. The scientists have concluded that learning occurs when there are short, concise points that can actually be implemented. I am reminded of the Chinese proverb: “I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.” I am hopeful these interactive video clips will provide opportunities for you to learn by doing.

So, what is something you haven’t started because you fear you might fail? If you try something that doesn’t work. Don’t fret about it. Instead, think of it as successfully learning what didn’t work.

## What Makes the Biggest Difference?

Recently I was eating dinner with a group of lawyers I am just starting to coach. One asked me what I thought was the most important thing I had done to become a rainmaker. For me the answer was easy. I narrowed my focus and developed a niche for which I could become a “go-to lawyer.” After that I asked each person in the group to identify what they believe is the most important thing to do. No one was permitted to use something that had already been stated. Here is the list my coaching group identified.

Develop a plan and execute

Build relationships with your clients and business referral sources

Do the highest quality work

Be more responsive than the client expects

Be persistent, client development takes time

Be passionate and enthusiastic about your work and clients

Put in the time to do client development

Focus on client development activities that work best for you

Become a better listener and better at asking questions to enable you to learn more about the client

Make raving fans of existing clients and then focus on staying in touch with old clients

What would you add to this list?





## You Are Never Too Young, Too Inexperienced, Too . . .

Frequently lawyers tell me they feel they may be too young, too inexperienced or too something else to be successful at client development. I often respond by suggesting they focus on the advantages they have being younger than the lawyers with whom they compete. I believe the 2008 Presidential primaries and election proved that experience is not the only factor the electorate considered when voting. Likewise, clients and potential clients consider more than just age and experience when picking a lawyer.



For a couple of years I have read a great deal written by “The Name Tag Guy,” Scott Ginsberg, known for wearing a nametag every day. Among other things I admire is what he has accomplished in a relatively short time. I also like many of his ideas. Scott posted a Blog titled: “15 Things You Are Not Doing Enough Of.” I believe this is a great list for young lawyers. You might find it valuable to create your own list first and then compare your list with Scott’s list.

What does all this mean to you? Well, there are plenty of older and more experienced lawyers who may be complacent about their client development. They may be content with where they are in their career. If you are hungry to become more valuable to your potential clients and if you are willing to do what older lawyers are not doing, you have a real opportunity. The name of the game is to become known by as many potential clients in your target market as possible. Frankly, the more people who know you and like you, the more likely you will get hired.

It is never too early to start building relationships. You are never too young, too inexperienced, too...to become visible, build relationships and begin your journey to success. What are you not doing now that you can begin doing?

## Become Entrepreneurial

I absolutely enjoy reading the [Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge web page](#). In February 2006 there was an article titled: *Turning High Potential into Real Reward*. The article was an interview of Professor Joseph B. Lassiter III involving his research of entrepreneurial marketing in high-potential ventures. Professor Lassiter describes entrepreneurial marketing “as a mindset and a process, one that involves gathering specific evidence that convinces a specific group of individuals to act and react, exploiting breakthroughs, and overcoming setbacks.”

In the interview Professor Lassiter is asked what the keys for success are for a new venture moving from product development to marketing and selling the product. The professor responded: “In these high-performance ventures, entrepreneurs leading the ventures look ahead and say, ‘Two or three years from now, this is exactly the customer and exactly the product, and this is exactly why they’re going to be compelled to buy.’” I believe client development begins in much the same way. As lawyers we need to ask:

1. Who do my clients need now?
2. What will my clients need in the future?
3. What do I have to offer them?
4. Why should they want to hire me rather than other lawyers?

I did that long ago. I decided I wanted to represent transportation (highways, bridges, airports and rail) construction clients. At the time I had experience handling government contract claims. Over time I gained experience in other areas. I thought they should hire me rather than other lawyers because I was so specialized that I understood their industry and the business and legal challenges they faced better than lawyers less specialized. I thought about all of this when the nation was focused on the bridge collapse in Minneapolis. In my career I have been called upon to help contractors and state DOTs when bridges have failed. Why did anyone think to call me in those instances? I was so focused on transportation construction that they believed I would be able to help them. “Being the best in the world is seriously underrated.” I love this quote from Seth Godin at the beginning of his book *The Dip*.

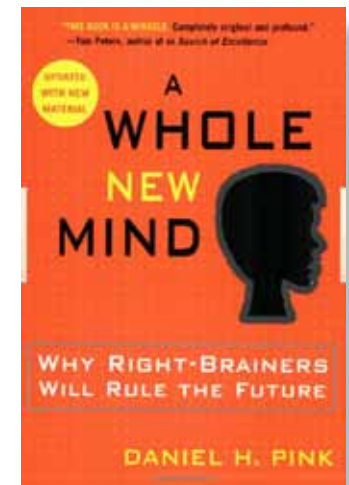


Ask yourself the four questions above and write down your answers. I hope you will become more focused in your client development efforts as a result.

## Classes You Likely Never Considered

Want to take a couple of classes that will help you get better at client development? Suppose I told you that the two I would take would be Creative Writing and Drawing. What would your reaction be? My guess is that you would wonder what in the world either of those courses has to do with client development. The answer is those two courses will better enable you to see the big picture and better enable you to be empathetic and understand your clients' points of view.

I have been thinking about this for almost a year. I had read *Making Rain* by Andrew Sobel a few years ago. Then I read *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel Pink. Both books in their own way focused on the importance of synthesis or symphony. As lawyers we are taught to analyze things. Synthesis or symphony is about how well you assimilate the pieces of information affecting your client to see the bigger picture. Daniel Pink attended a week-long class in New York “[Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain](#).”



I look back now and realize that some of the best efforts I have made at client development came from assimilating pieces of information affecting my clients and seeing the bigger picture. Here are three examples:

1. In 1982 Congress enacted a statute funding highway construction that also quadrupled the required amount that was required to be expended with Disadvantaged Business Enterprises. Unfortunately there were not enough of those firms with resources and experience to do the construction and even though the program was supposed to be goal based it was a quota in most states. In early 1983 I wrote a guide for contractors on how to comply with the new law and thereafter I made presentations all over the country.
2. For many years highway construction was funded by the gas tax. Also, federal and state statutes contracts for highway construction were awarded to the low bidder. In the early 90s the Federal Highway Administration asked Congress for legislation that would enable “experimental” construction practices including design-build

and public private financing of road construction. I knew this was the first step towards changing funding and the process to construct highways, so I wrote two guides and made presentations throughout the country on design-build and public-private financing.

When Enron and WorldCom became news, I decided that the construction industry would face increased scrutiny and investigations. I wrote about corporate ethics and compliance and made presentations throughout the country. Sure enough, investigations, indictments, convictions and fines rose dramatically and ultimately contractors doing business with the federal government were required to have ethics programs.



I read a Harvard Business Review Blog and listened to a Harvard Business Review Podcast on MFA being the new MBA. In the Blog and her interview, Katherine Bell shared how she had left the business world for a time to study creative writing. She says she learned persuasion and empathy from writing fiction. She also mentions four lessons that she believes MBAs can learn from MFAs. I believe lawyers could learn these also:

1. How to take criticism.
2. What motivates people.
3. How to engage your audience.
4. When to let go of good ideas.

If you want to start thinking about the big picture, think about what is going on in the world and how it impacts your clients. More specifically, read your clients' industry publications and attend your clients' industry meetings.

## 10 Reasons Why Your Client Development Efforts Are Not Working

Over my career practicing law and now working with lawyers I have observed many lawyers who wonder why they have not been more successful building a book of business.

1. **You just do good work.** You bought into the notion that all you have to do is good work, get a Martindale AV rating, get to know lots of people and wait for the phone to ring.
2. **You have no plan.** You have no plan so you waste time on random lunches or on activities that will not bring in business.
3. **You fail to execute.** You use the excuse that you are too busy with billable work. Successful busy lawyers make time for client development.
4. **You try to sell.** You use the same selling techniques that have not worked when financial advisors or insurance salesmen have tried to sell you.
5. **You are not focused.** You spend as much time on things that don't matter as things that will result in attracting and retaining valuable clients.
6. **You do not focus on clients.** You are focused on what you do rather than on understanding your clients' industry, company and client representative needs.
7. **You are not visible.** You are not writing, speaking, active in the bar or community. So, even though you are a great lawyer, very few people know who you are.
8. **You stay in your comfort zone.** You are too content with where you are and what you are doing rather than striving to get better and get comfortable outside your comfort zone.
9. **You are not a team player.** You work by yourself while other firms have a team working to serve the client.
10. **You are not providing extraordinary service.** You are doing good work, but your client is not satisfied with the level of service you are providing. You have not taken time to figure out what your client values.



## Avoid Bush League Mistakes

When I was playing baseball we used to refer to those who were not at the top of their game as “bush leaguers.”

Here are some bush league mistakes lawyers make in client development.



1. They lack integrity and credibility.
2. They convey they are most interested in what they can get from the relationship.
3. They talk too much and don't actively listen.
4. They treat all clients or client representatives as if they are the same.



5. They don't know their client's business, its industry or what the client values.
6. They assume information they do not know.
7. They pay the same attention to long shots that they pay to clients and sure things.
8. They are unable or don't see things from the client's perspective.
9. They do not get to know the client representative on a personal level.
10. They over promise and under deliver.

In your client development efforts you never want to be viewed as a “bush leaguer.” The 10 examples above happen every day, yet they are simply common sense. If you put yourself in the client's shoes, you will avoid these.

## Construction Law and Toothpaste

When I was the Construction Law Practice Group leader in my old firm, one of the associates was reviewing her career development plan with me. I could tell from what I read that she had not given a lot of thought to what she wanted to accomplish and where she wanted to focus. Like many associate development plans, it basically said “I’m going to be everything to everyone.” It was then I shared with her why I recently looked to the toothpaste industry for career development direction.

When she picked her chin up off the floor, I explained.

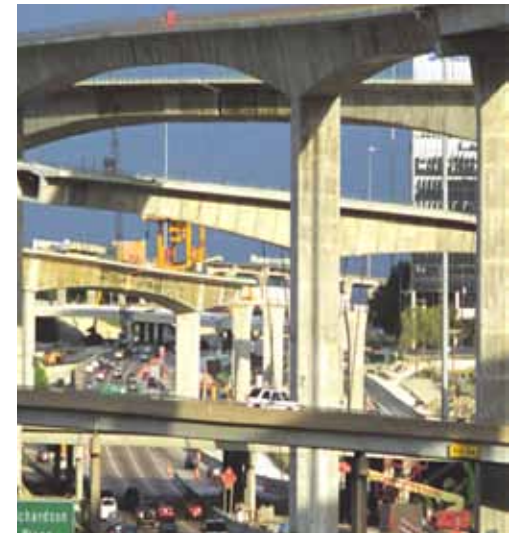
Early in my career, I thought, “if I try all kinds of cases in all kinds of industries, I’ll get all kinds of work.” I decided I was going to become the best litigator in my home town. So I worked on everything from criminal cases to government contracts. This approach didn’t work for me, and probably doesn’t work well for most others. I realized that trying to reach and connect within so many industries and to build relationships with so many people is time-consuming, expensive and for the most part, very challenging. When you try to market your services to everyone you usually end up marketing to no one. Less important to many, but very important to me, I ended up working within a lot of industries (mobile homes, coal mining) I just wasn’t passionate about and I wasn’t having very much fun.



I learned that when you focus your client development efforts within an industry, you build relationships much more easily and efficiently. You see the same people at your industry’s annual convention. You write columns for industry magazines that these same people read. You speak at industry conferences, to the same people. By focusing on an industry and your specialization within it, it’s easier to establish credibility and develop relationships. Also, when you have something to talk about of genuine interest to you and your potential clients, it’s not just “work” anymore.

A few years ago, I sat next to a very interesting gentleman on a plane. He was the first to create a \$6.00 tube of toothpaste. I don't remember the brand, but it was a huge success. He told me that today there are toothpastes for everything – toothpaste that stands up, toothpaste that the cap stays on, toothpaste with baking soda, toothpaste that will take care of your gums for life, smokers' toothpaste, whitening toothpaste, fresh breath toothpaste, toothpaste for attacking plaque, toothpaste for kids, even toothpaste for your dog. He told me that drugstores loved it because instead of losing money or barely breaking even on cheaper toothpaste, his brand was a significant money maker because the margins were significantly greater. I wondered how he had come up with a toothpaste product for which a group of consumers would be willing to pay 3-4 times more than other products. He had narrowed his market, created a product that was remarkable and stood out from the hundreds of other toothpaste brands.

Turning back to my discussion with my first year associate, I then said, "I'm going to pick a topic as an example, for the sake of discussion. But Jennifer, suppose, just suppose, that in this office building at 1445 Ross Avenue you were recognized as knowing more about design-build than any other lawyer in this building. Do you think people would come to you if they had a design-build issue? And then, suppose, just suppose, you knew more than any lawyer in the City of Dallas, and then the entire state of Texas? And then, just suppose over time you became known as the best construction design-build lawyer in the United States? You know Jennifer, in five years if design-build is still an important legal issue, you could be the leading "rainmaker" in our group with more work than you could possibly do in your entire career."



My traveling companion brought home to me that he understood the importance of reaching every person within an individual niche. By the way, after his toothpaste success, he developed a high-end shaving product that is designed to give closer shaves with the new high tech razors. Law is no different than toothpaste and shaving products. Focus on an industry and get known in that industry as a specialist or the "go-to" person in the type of work you want to do. Be the best at what you do in a niche for which you have a passion and for which there is a need. To me, this is the easiest way to ultimately develop relationships. Needless to say when you develop relationships getting business is a by-product. And if you pick a niche you're truly interested in, it's a lot more fun too.

## Presidential Debates and Law Careers

I don't know about you, but I hate watching presidential debates. First we all know they are not debates at all, but rather staged events where each candidate waits for the opportunity to get into his answer the sound bite his handlers have told him will sway the voters. I also don't like the tactics. Each candidate tries to convince the public that if the other guy is elected the voter and his or her family will be at great risk and suffer in some way, but if the speaker is elected the voter and his or her family will be safe and will gain great benefits from making the right choice. This approach is similar to advertising that attempts to convince consumers they will either reduce pain of some type or enjoy great pleasure from buying the product. Have you ever wondered why there are no overweight guys with beer bellies in the beer commercials?



Anthony Robbins, the great motivator, argues that ultimately everything we do in our lives is driven by our fundamental need to avoid pain and our desire to gain pleasure. He also argues we will do far more to avoid pain than we will do to gain pleasure. I am not sure if he is right about both his points, but I can see examples of them in each of us. When you were in law school, or even college, did you ever put off studying for an exam until the last minute? If so, why did you put it off and cram at the end? Well, I think you likely had other things you did that brought pleasure, like going out with friends or watching the football game. Shortly before the exam, the potential of great pain from not doing well on the exam took over doing well on the

exam took over and you crammed for the exam. When we each took the bar exam, we attended courses, took practice exams and studied hard on our own. It certainly was not because we gained pleasure from doing those things. Rather it was the desire to avoid the pain and embarrassment from failing and to realize the pleasure we would soon feel by being admitted to the Bar, starting a job and being a “real” lawyer.



How you handle your own career development likely focuses on avoidance of pain and the desire to gain pleasure. I look back now on my own career development and know I was motivated by these factors. I started my career wanting to feel accepted and wanting to feel independent. I wanted to be accepted, especially by clients and by the senior lawyers for whom I worked. As a result, I worked very hard to be the expert, “go-to” person on whatever legal matter I was handling. It was even more important for me to avoid the pain of disappointing a client or the senior lawyer. I also set goals and developed plans to achieve those goals. I wanted to avoid the pain in the long-term of being dependent on others for work. I also wanted to experience the pleasure of being a “rainmaker.” Early in my career I noticed rainmakers were accorded a higher level of respect, not to mention a higher level of compensation. My goals were usually aimed at obtaining business and my plans focused on how I would get the business. Not all my plans worked, and I changed my plans accordingly.



I have written several times about young lawyers not setting goals or having no plans to achieve them. I think it may be a result of the pain/pleasure principles articulated by Anthony Robbins. Many associates believe the only thing their firm values is billable hours. There is definite pain associated with not making the hours, including the loss of a bonus, no raise and, in some instances, being laid off. Setting goals is not easy. It actually takes time to set goals and develop a plan and we all know that takes time away from billable work. And, since young lawyers feel they must get their billable hours, it takes time away from their family. Who would want to do that? Setting goals requires more self-reflection than many young lawyers wish to undertake. It requires making choices and setting priorities. In each instance, a choice made is a rejection of another possible choice. Some young lawyers do not want to feel the pain associated with making a bad choice. Many young lawyers fear a senior lawyer they respect will be critical of their goals and plans to achieve them. They also know in many cases the senior lawyer has never had goals or a plan himself. The young lawyers experience no short-term pain by not having goals or a plan and they don't bother to look 5-10 years into the future to see what their careers will be like then.

Anthony Robbins proposes a task-centered approach to change. The first task is to list four actions you should take right now to make your career meet your greatest desires. What is the pain associated with taking those actions that have prevented you from following through with them? He suggests writing them down. List any pleasures you get from not following through. Next, for each of the four actions describe what you will lose by not following through. As a lawyer, it is doubtful you will lose anything this week or this month or maybe even this year. The loss will occur down the road, so think about the future. Imagine, perhaps, the consequence of eating junk food for twenty years. If you've got a good metabolism, the painful effects might not present themselves for at least a decade – and the immediate pleasure of Krispy Kreme breakfasts and KFC dinners may be great. But failing to eat properly just like failing to properly plan your career will catch up with you. What are the benefits of taking the actions? How will it make your career more exciting and satisfying?



Finally, Anthony Robbins suggests that you change how you associate taking the actions. Instead of associating the actions with the effort and challenges to take them, associate the actions with eliminating the potential loss down the road and with making your career more exciting and satisfying.

The presidential debates – and the election – are over. But four years from now, we will be listening to another set of presidential candidates telling us what we will gain or lose by voting for one or the other. And beer commercials still will not feature overweight guys with beer bellies. Politicians and advertisers know what motivates -- knowledge of the pain or gain we will get from doing or not doing something. We make these determinations daily on even the simplest of matters. We owe it to ourselves to apply the same pain-pleasure principle to our careers.

## Answering Questions on Client Development/Marketing

**Question:** I thought it is most important to do quality work. Is that true?

**Answer:** Clearly you must do quality work or nothing else you do will matter. But, that is not enough. A friend of mine is one of the best litigators I know, yet he does not have a lot of business. How can that be? Well, his civil trials do not get a lot of coverage and generally the number of people in front of the rail exceeds the number behind the rail watching his trials. He is a great trial lawyer, but too few potential clients know that.

**Question:** If doing high quality work is not enough, what else do I need to do?

**Answer:** I think there are four main ways lawyers get business. First, some lawyers are the very best in their field. If you were thought to be the best civil trial lawyer, or corporate M&A lawyer or labor and employment lawyer in your city or your state, you will be at the top of the list for the “bet the company” cases and transactions. It is unlikely you would need to do very much marketing or client development. Second, you could be fortunate enough to represent a company that gets sued a lot if you are a litigator or does lots of deals if you are a corporate lawyer. That works well until your client is acquired by another company or your contact retires. The third way is to find a niche and become known for expertise in it. The fourth way is to become very active in the Bar or the community, so that everyone in your target market knows who you are and values you.

Client development involves building your reputation and building relationships. I believe clients still generally hire lawyers rather than hire law firms. I also believe that in most instances your reputation gets you considered while your ability to connect with the client representative and build their trust and confidence in you gets you hired.

The first thing you need to do to expand your client base is to have a plan with goals, an understanding of why the goals are important to you and a list of activities that are necessary to achieve your goals. Any marketing or client development activities must be driven by appropriate clients and potential clients, understanding their business drivers and being able to offer a solution to their issues.

**Question: I have very limited time. What is the most important thing I can do?**

**Answer:** I am frequently asked by young lawyers what to do with their limited time. There is no one answer that applies to everyone. If you want to become visible and credible to your target market, you should write articles for industry publications, or blogging for industry readers. If you want to become active in the community, pick one group that would enable you to interact with people in your target market and for which you can eventually assume a leadership role. If you have a stable of clients, spend time with the clients you already have.

**Question: Does a company executive care about getting a business card from a young lawyer?**

**Answer:** To be candid, the executive may not care about getting your card. Yet, you should want to get her card. You can gain a great deal from asking good questions and learning about the executive and her company and finding a way to follow up by “giving” something of value to the executive.

A few years ago, a young associate in my old firm went to a big social event where she met a gentleman in his sixties who was a leader in the industry. He is German but has lived in the United States for 30 years. The female associate spent a year in high school and a year in college in Germany. When she got back from the event she asked what she could do that would advance the ball. It turned out that a photographer had taken a photo of the two of them and a few other people. I suggested that she get a copy of the photo and send it with a handwritten note in German. I told her she could conclude by simply saying something about the work she is doing in the industry and how much she has enjoyed working with companies in the industry. She did it and she actually received a call from him thanking her for the card. Even if she never gets any work directly from this gentleman, I am confident he will not forget her.



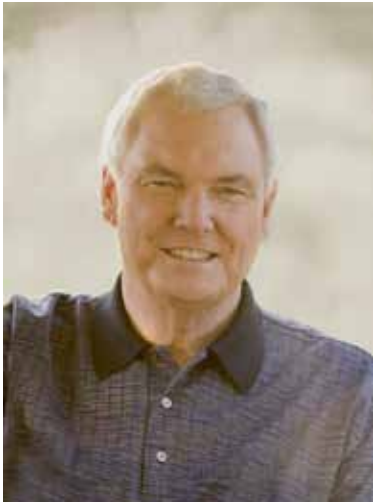
**Question:** I do not enjoy writing or speaking in front of groups, but I am active in my community. Will my community service provide me with an opportunity to get business?

**Answer:** I personally have never gotten any business from my involvement in my church or community, but one of my former partners built his career on his involvement in the community. He is a little older than me and first became active 30 years ago in a Los Angeles child care center for kids unable to cope with their family environment. He actually made friends and picked up some business from others helping at the center. As his civic activities increased, he found clients recommending him to other clients saying proudly that he was not only a good lawyer, but also a good person. Only years later did he realize that working with kids who needed a role model gave him a life purpose and took him away from the stresses of his work life.

**Question:** What final thoughts do you have on client development?

**Answer:** More than anything else, it is important to make client development a habit forming activity. Unless I was in a trial or getting ready for a trial, I always tried to do something to reach out to clients and potential clients each and every day.

## 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](#).

### eBooks

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### Services Available

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.

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### Books Referenced

*A Whole New Mind* by Daniel H. Pink  
*Beyond Bullet Points* by Cliff Atkinson  
*Clients for Life* by Jagdish N. Sheth and Andrew Sobel  
*Getting Things Done* by David Allen  
*Made to Stick* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath  
*Making Rain* by Andrew Sobel  
*Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell  
*The Dip* by Seth Godin  
*The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell  
*The Trusted Advisor* by David H. Maister

### Cordell's Recommended Reading