

25 Great Lessons I Learned Practicing Law

Posted by [Cordell Parvin](#) on June 14, 2011

As you know, I began my law practice in 1971. I believe 2008 was the last year I billed any time as a lawyer. So, I had 36 plus years to learn lessons practicing law. In the hope you will not learn what I did the hard way, here are my 25 lessons I learned:



1. The greatest asset a lawyer can have is clients.
2. Real learning began after I finished law school and passed the Bar exam.
3. The importance of doing what I was passionate about.
4. The people who helped me were incredibly important.
5. The people who worked for me were not necessarily motivated by what motivated me.
6. The more narrow I made my niche, the easier it was to be noticed and for my expertise to be recognized.
7. Writing and speaking were the best ways for me to build my profile and reputation.
8. Repurposing my material. Briefs and memos became articles. Articles became presentations. Presentations became guides.
9. My client representatives had different personality types, meaning I needed to speak with them differently.
10. If I did not create a written plan with written goals, I did not use my non-billable time wisely.
11. In order to make the plan effective, I had to break down my actions into smaller components.
12. Planning my week around my roles including my personal roles.
13. That I had to actually make time for client development and my own development.
14. That learning about my client's work and industry was at least as important as developing my legal skills.
15. The importance of making client development a habit.
16. The importance of focusing on existing clients.
17. That clients wanted me to understand their industry, their company and them.

18. That while some lawyers may have natural people skills that make client development more natural for them, client development is an acquired talent.
19. In client development, little things made the biggest difference.
20. Every person is a potential client.
21. The importance of asking good questions and actively listening.
22. Actively listening is more than hearing what is said.
23. To effectively communicate with a jury, I had to find something they would care about.
24. If I was to be successful trying cases, I could not fear losing.
25. I had to be able to rebound from failing or losing to be successful.

Cordell M. Parvin built a national construction practice during his 35 years practicing law. At Jenkins & Gilchrist, Mr. Parvin was the Construction Law Practice Group Leader and was also responsible for the firm's attorney development practice. While there he taught client development and created a coaching program for junior partners. In 2005, Mr. Parvin left the firm and started Cordell Parvin LLC. He now works with lawyers and law firms on career development and planning and client development. He is the co-author of *Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout* and other books for lawyers. To learn more visit his Web site, www.cordellparvin.com or contact him at cparvin@cordellparvin.com.