

[One Great Differentiator: Become Your Clients' Best Listener](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on July 10th, 2012

I am frequently asked how a lawyer can differentiate herself in her clients' and potential clients' eyes. Given that in any city there are many talented lawyers in each practice area, the question is a good one. [Seth Godin](#) might ask: How can you be "remarkable" in your clients' and potential clients' eyes?

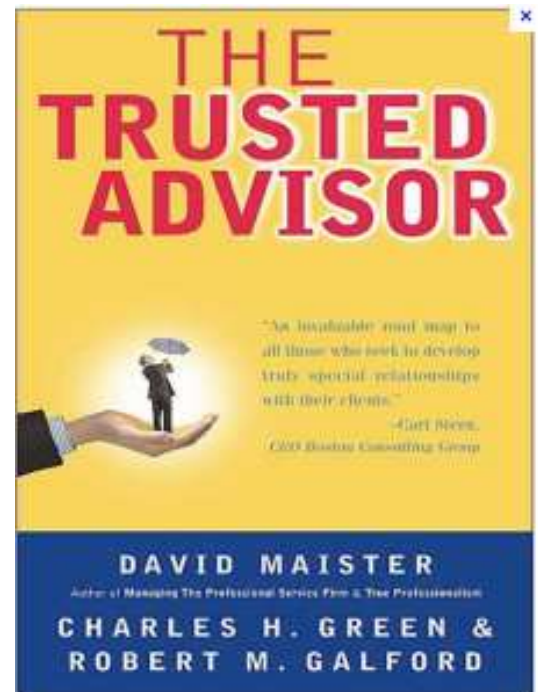
To be "remarkable," you must do things most other lawyers are not doing. Lawyers I coach are likely surprised when I tell them that the one skill that will easily differentiate them is how well they listen. Most lawyers don't do it very well. Just suppose your clients were out there telling their colleagues and friends that you listen to her better than any other lawyer, what do you think would happen to your practice?

I have written about the importance of listening and a few months ago my friend [Eric Fletcher](#) wrote a guest post for me titled: [Intentional Listening: How To Find Practice-Changing Opportunities](#). If you have time, go back and read what Eric wrote.

Recently I read: [Communications: Are You Listening?](#) I found that the Canadian Bar Association was focused on lawyers developing this skill:

The Canadian Bar Association's Task Force on Legal Literacy identified improving lawyers' listening skills as an important step toward improving the delivery of legal services to clients with literacy challenges. The average person spends at least 55% of the day listening. Why not do it more efficiently?

Take a look at the article because there are some good ideas on listening. I found a recent blog post titled: [5 Simple Ways To Be A Better Listener](#). If you actually commit to the 5 ideas, I am confident you will listen more effectively.



When lawyers I coach ask me for recommended books to read, one I frequently recommend is [The Trusted Advisor](#) by [David Maister](#), [Charles Green](#) and [Robert Galford](#). The book includes a great chapter on The Art of Listening. In an earlier chapter the authors identify two problems I see in many lawyers:

The prime obstacle to focusing successfully on the other person (in our experience) is the apparently common belief that mastery of technical content is sufficient to serve clients well...

Another major obstacle is the inability to focus concentrated attention on the client. In the midst of a conversation with a client, we are likely to find ourselves with thoughts like, “How will I solve this problem?” “How will I get the client to buy this idea?” “What am I going to say when the client finishes talking?” “How can I appear expert?”

I know the authors have it right. I have caught myself on more than one occasion having one or more of the very thoughts they describe.

At the end of their chapter on The Art of Listening, The authors list 23 things that good listeners do that make them good listeners and a second list with 10 things great listeners don't do. Both of the lists are well worth studying.

Ok, I have given you lots of potential reading on the importance of listening and how to do it more effectively. I want to hear from you. What are you doing to become your clients' best listener?

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.