

## [How to Sell Yourself Without Acting Like a Salesman](#)

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

I bet you are uncomfortable selling yourself and potentially acting like a salesman. I know that I am. Let me share a story of a partner who paid me what he thought was the ultimate insult.

When I was the Construction Law Practice Group Leader there were two partners who, to put it kindly, were not on the same page with me. They helped me understand the meaning of the phrase: "Leading lawyers is like herding cats."

One year we held a practice group retreat at a ranch outside Dallas. After dinner and a few beers, one of the partners paid me what he believed would be the ultimate insult. He said: "Cordell, you are not a real lawyer, you are nothing but a salesman."



You could have cut the tension with a knife. Other partners waited for my response. I wanted to say something like: "Interesting that someone who is a 'real lawyer' like you generates 1/10th of the amount of business I generate." I decided nothing could be gained from pointing this out. Instead, I just let his insult pass.

Later, I thought about his point. I hate any sentence that includes the words sales and lawyers. I hate to be sold anything and I know my clients and potential clients hated lawyers selling their services.

Many lawyers who struggle with client development tell me that they did not go to law school to become a salesman. I didn't go to law school to be a salesman either. Yet, we are salesman. In the end, we are always selling ourselves and our firm.

When you meet with potential clients, they are judging whether they can trust you to handle their legal matter and what it will be like working with you. They are also judging whether you are putting their interests ahead of your own. So, the question is: How can you instill trust, serve and build a relationship without coming across as a "salesman?"

1. Build your profile or brand. If possible become the "go to" lawyer in some niche practice or some targeted industry market.
2. View everyone you meet as a potential client. Treat them respectfully and become sincerely interested in them.
3. Work on building relationships and serving, not on getting business.
4. Think of ways to serve, help and add value at no charge.

I stay at many [Ritz Carlton](#) hotels throughout the United States. I stayed at the Philadelphia Ritz Carlton recently. When I checked in the person behind the desk asked: " Mr. Parvin would it be ok with you if I gave you a room upgrade to a larger room with a view of city hall?" I think that is a pretty effective sales approach. After all, who would say no to that?

What do you suppose your best client would say if you asked: "Fred, would it be ok if I gave your company a day of my time at no charge?" Do this at the risk of someone saying: "You are not a real lawyer, you are nothing but a salesman."

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**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](http://www.cordellparvin.com) or contact him at [cparvin@cordellparvin.com](mailto:cparvin@cordellparvin.com).