

## [Relationship Building: One Key Ingredient](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on August 27th, 2012

How many times has a more senior lawyer told you that client development is about building relationships?

I heard that throughout my career and likely you have also. I recently saw a [Maya Angelou](#) quote that I believe sums up one key ingredient in building relationships:



I posted a blog about a year ago that touched on this point: Lawyers: [To Attract Clients Should You Be Interesting or Interested?](#) If you have an extra minute, I urge you to read that post again. You will find the famous [William Gladstone](#) and [Benjamin Disraeli](#) story there. Both were prime ministers during Queen Victoria's reign in the late 1800s.

As you might recall the story is about a young woman who sat next to each gentleman at dinner on consecutive nights. After the two dinners she reportedly said:

When I left the dining room after sitting next to Mr. Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man in England,” she said. “But after sitting next to Mr. Disraeli, I thought I was the cleverest woman in England.

I want you to picture the dinner conversation each night. I wonder how many times Gladstone began a sentence with the word “I.” Do you think the young woman actually got a word in during the conversation? If she said anything, do you think Gladstone actually listened, paid attention and responded?

I suspect Disraeli approached the conversation entirely differently. I suspect he frequently used the word “you.” I bet he asked many questions in order to get to know the young woman. As important, I bet he actually listened intently and took what he heard to further the conversation.

Lawyers tell me they do not want to be thought of like a used car salesman. I would never want a potential client or contact to think of me that way. Suppose you are meeting with someone for lunch, are you talking about:

- You
- Your firm
- Your last case or transaction
- Anything else about you, you you

Instead are you asking questions about:

- Him/Her
- His/Her Company
- The company’s issues
- What you read about the company

Are you truly listening? Are you making eye contact? Are you smiling and warm? I will leave you with a quote attributed to Disraeli:

The greatest good you can do for another is not to share your riches but to reveal to him his own.

# Cordell Parvin Blog

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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).