

[I Am Not Asking You to Be a Role Model](#)

Posted by [Cordell Parvin](#) on August 23, 2011

I was in Philadelphia recently and while walking on Market Street, I saw a woman who clearly did not have much to give, stop and give money to a homeless person who clearly needed it. For her, giving was a personal sacrifice. Her sacrifice made a strong impression on me.



Just last week I came across a [HBR Blog Are You a Role Model?](#) by [Tony Schwartz](#). It really resonated with me and I hope it will with you. He wrote about Warren Buffett's op ed piece, which was the subject of my blog: [Warren Buffett, the Super Rich and What Motivates Law Firms and Lawyers](#), and [The Giving Pledge](#) that Warren Buffett and Bill Gates have created. Then he said:

Deep generosity — generosity that requires personal sacrifice — is something else altogether. It's the \$15-an-hour worker who puts \$10 in the collection plate every week, or lends money to a friend in even greater need, and therefore has less money available to put food on the table for his family.

A few years ago, my daughter Jill, who teaches special education was teaching sons and daughters of poor single working mothers. Not one of her children had a father in the home. I listened to Jill tell me stories about the challenges her children faced each day and I went to her class and spoke at her school's "career day."

Working poor single mothers likely go unnoticed, but they face many challenges we do not immediately see. They live pay check to pay check. Many cannot afford a deposit on a decent place to live, so they live in weekly rental places at a higher cost. They need transportation, but the cars that are available to them are not reliable, and some car dealers and repair shops take advantage of them. Many have poor credit so they cannot get a bank account. I could go on, but you get the idea.

After I mentioned the working poor, a friend gave me the book [Nickel and Dimed: On \(Not\) Getting By in America](#) by [Barbara Ehrenreich](#), the story of her trying to survive working as a waitress, hotel maid, house cleaner, nursing-home aide, and Wal-Mart clerk. If you don't have time to read the book, you can read an interesting [student essay](#) about the book.

Nancy and I have been trying to help a young single mom and her son. I admire this mom because she is trying so very hard to make a good life for herself, and more importantly her son. She wants to go to school and become an LPN and maybe an RN. She has started school twice and run out of money both times. She has worked two jobs, been laid off from work, been robbed and been taken advantage of by a car dealer. She cannot get a bank account because of her credit history.

The transmission on her car recently gave out for the second time in 18 months. Nancy and I decided to help her get a reliable car and we purchased a used Toyota Corolla. She wants to pay us, and I hope she can afford to make some small monthly payments.

I would prefer to find a way for her to take what she would pay us and put it in a savings account. In that way she build a cushion for unexpected expenses and save to get her LPN and get a steady job in nursing. As some of you know, I am donating the proceeds from the sale of my three books to an account to help her. Even though I have let my friends on Facebook, my contacts on LinkedIn and the people who follow me on Twitter know, we have only sold one book. (Makes me wonder if my books are not valuable for lawyers).

I am not asking you to sacrifice and be a role model as described in the HBR blog. (After all, I have put my books on sale for \$8.95, \$9.95, and \$15.95.) I am simply asking you to buy my books and, if you don't want them, give them to a young lawyer in your firm or to your law school placement office. I

am also asking that you let your friends who are lawyers know about my mission. You can order them on my [website](#).

P.S. As you become more acutely aware of the challenges faced by the working poor, you can more easily identify them. On a recent trip, I discovered that the 30 something year old mom who waited on me at the restaurant was working her second job that day. Like many, she was just thankful to have both jobs.

I tell my daughter frequently that she cannot save the world, but if she helps her special needs children in some small way to live a more productive life, she is making a difference. Each of us can help someone striving to make a better life for his or her family.

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.