

[Law Practice 2013: Have You Figured Out The New World Yet?](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on February 11th, 2013

Have you seen the [Georgetown Law Center for the Study of the Legal Profession 2013 Report on the State of the Legal Market](#)? If you haven't, it might be the most important document you and others in your firm read this year.



It will be an “eye opener” for sure. Here is a small sample of what you will read:

The legal market today is an increasingly difficult and challenging environment, one that calls for clear thinking, strategic focus, and flexibility in addressing rapidly changing realities. To an unfortunate extent, however, many lawyers and law firms seem stuck in old models—traditional ways of thinking about law firm economics and structure, legal work processes, talent management, and client relationships—that are no longer well suited to the market environment in which they compete.

Is your firm still stuck in old models? Have you talked about the new reality and come up with a strategic plan for dealing with it?

Later in the report I read:

Many firms have continued to raise their expectations for economic performance by their partners and to weed out those who don't meet the new standards.

You likely have read here more than one time my view that the only security a lawyer has is his or her clients. The report indicates that rainmakers are in very high demand in law firms and they are doing quite well. Other partners are not doing so well and are at risk when expenses get cut further.

Still further I read:

Although obviously not true in all cases, clients increasingly make decisions to hire outside lawyers on the basis of how efficiently, cost effectively, and predictably they can deliver the services the client requires, with quality being taken as a given.

Put simply, clients control the market in 2013. They expect more of their law firms and they expect to pay less for it. I have believed for a long time that clients assume the law firms they hire will do quality work. Law firms can differentiate themselves by the client service items above. But, in addition, law firms can differentiate themselves by seeing what other lawyers and law firms miss.

So what are the take aways?

1. If you are a lawyer in a law firm, regardless of your experience, you must focus on client development and building relationships to secure your future. I have many "free" materials. I hope you read my blog and then actually implement some of the ideas I write that you think fit your practice. Just reading my blog and not making any changes is a waste of your time. I also have written [The Practical Lawyer articles](#) and I have [video on YouTube](#) and [slides on](#)

[Slideshare](#). I feel certain that if you want to coach yourself, you can find materials you can use.

2. If you are a law firm, regardless of size, you must consider how the changes in the market impact your firm. You must think outside of the traditional law firm models. It is more important than ever before to be strategically focused. I suggest doing a SWOT analysis to determine your firm's strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats. I also suggest you define your firm's "targeted (your target markets) differentiators (why your target markets should hire your firm.)
3. Finally, there seems to be good news in the report for mid-sized and smaller law firms because of their lower rates. If you are one of those firms, keep this one thing in mind: You have only one chance to make a good first impression.

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.