

[What Every Lawyer Should Learn From President Obama's August 8 Speech](#)

Posted by [Cordell Parvin](#) on August 9, 2011

I was 13 years old. I watched the Nixon-Kennedy debate. Like many who watched the debate, rather than listened on the radio, I thought Kennedy had clearly won. I believe that was the first time I focused on how well a political speaker communicated a vision.



Later I studied President Reagan and President Clinton. I was far less interested in their political views and far more interested in how well they connected with the people. I even made videotapes of the debates between President Clinton and Senator Dole.

In 2008, I recorded a Democratic debate because I wanted to study how candidate Obama connected with the audience. Like many of my friends, I greatly admired President Obama's speech in Tucson earlier this year. I thought the speech was inspiring and an effort to bring Americans together.

Yesterday was a different story. Did you watch or see clips from President Obama's speech? You likely know that the Dow Jones average went down an additional 200 points after the speech. I listened to it and later saw clips from it. I confess. I wished for the sake of my 401K that President Obama had asked President Clinton to speak in his place.

When [Washington Post](#) opinion writers, liberal [Dana Milbank](#) and conservative [Charles Krauthammer](#) both slam a speech, you have to conclude that President Obama was not at the top of his game yesterday. Milbank wrote [The most powerful man on Earth?](#) and [Krauthammer blasted Obama as 'weak, plaintive and small'](#).

What can you learn about practicing law and client relationships from the speech? Read Dana Milbank's column and here are some conclusions I think you will reach:

- Sometimes saying nothing is better than saying something. (Obama's original plan was to not comment on the downgrade.)

- The most articulate lawyer in the world, eventually has to take actions. (How many times has President Obama addressed the nation. The public wants leadership and actions.)
- Clients want you focused on solving their problems not raising revenue for your firm. (People who pay attention know that Obama is raising record funds and was off to two fundraisers Monday night.)
- Clients want you focused on them when there is a problem and they want you to look them in the eye. (Obama seemed detached and pivoted head from side to side reading the teleprompter.)
- Clients expect lawyers to own up and take responsibility. They do not admire lawyers who blame others. (Obama once again blamed the other side. A person I assume is a conservative wrote a blog "[Obama blames...fill in the blank](#)".)
- Clients expect lawyers to come up with concrete ideas to solve problems. (The only ideas in Obama's speech yesterday were extending unemployment and spending more on infrastructure.)
- Clients expect lawyers to work on their problems now, not go on an extended vacation while the matter is going in the tank. (Obama said Congress could look into it when they return-in five weeks.)
- Clients expect lawyers to be confidence inspiring and lead on the legal matter. Clients resent vague exhortations. (Obama said things like "markets rise and fall" and "this is the United States of America." Those vague exhortations were hardly confidence inspiring.)

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.

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