

## [A Law Student Asked](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on October 19th, 2012

I recently spoke to 110 students at the [Baylor Law School](#). Prior to my presentation I asked for questions from students. A law student asked me for advice on getting and keeping a good job in the legal profession in the current economy. Here is my reply:

That is a really great question. I believe I can share some important things to consider:

I am sure every law student has been told numerous times how important their grades are. That has been always the case. Some big law firms will not consider students who are not in the Top \_\_\_% of the class. So, still work hard to get the best grades that you can.

But, in 2012 and beyond, law firms and other law employers are also considering “emotional intelligence.” Some of the questions they ask in an interview are designed to figure out whether a student “has it” or not. Legal employers have learned that emotional intelligence is a better predictor of success practicing law than grades alone. If students have not read anything on emotional intelligence, here is a link to an [ABA article](#) to give them the idea.

Second, students need to think about what makes them unique. It could be that they worked in a real job before they went to law school. It could be that they speak foreign languages (Chinese would be a good one now). It could be that they grew up in a family business. In my construction law practice group, I looked for lawyers who grew up in family owned construction businesses.

[Staci Riordan](#) is a Los Angeles lawyer with whom I worked. Staci grew up in her mother’s fashion business and now she is a [fashion lawyer](#).



- [Alison Rowe](#) is a Fort Worth lawyer with whom I worked. I have written about Alison many times. She grew up in Ellis County, where her family raised cattle and cotton for five generations. I met Alison when she was a summer associate at Jenkens & Gilchrist. During a lunch in 2004, after much discussion Alison shared with me that she wanted to become an equine lawyer because she loved horses and “horse people.” Since then equine law has been her focus and she is now a successful [equine lawyer](#).



- [Shawn Tuma](#) is a lawyer with whom I worked. He had a great computer background and now he is doing [Computer Fraud law and data privacy](#)



- [Travis Crabtree](#), is a lawyer with whom I worked who majored in journalism. In our second coaching session, he shared with me his passion for journalism. Now he is focusing his practice on [eMedia law](#).



I can give many other examples, but I hope these give you and your fellow students the idea.

Third, if you are planning to represent businesses, your potential clients will be less able to determine whether or not you are a good lawyer than they will be able to determine if you know

business, their industry and their business. So, while you are busy learning about the law you need to also learn about business.

Finally, some students think they have to get hired by some big firm in Dallas, Houston, Austin or San Antonio. When I was a young lawyer, I thought of practicing law in San Diego or Hawaii. I think I read somewhere that there are plenty of starving lawyers in paradise. Today there are plenty of starving lawyers in the big cities in Texas and other states.

When I graduated from law school I had a four year commitment in the USAF (it was during the Viet Nam War). While in the Air Force I got great experience trying government contract cases. I would sometimes look over at the other side and the lawyer my age was the “bag boy.” He carried the bags of the lawyers trying the case against me in and out of the courtroom.

When my Air Force commitment was completed I had many offers from large law firms. Because I had a sense of what experience young lawyers were getting in those firms, I decided against joining them even though the pay would have been better. I joined a small firm in Roanoke, Virginia (pop. 100,000), where again I had the opportunity to learn, experience and actually build what later turned out to be a national construction law practice. By the time I joined a large firm in Dallas, I had a very substantial practice.

I hope this helps you and your fellow students and gives you ideas we can discuss when I am there.

If you are a law student, professor or placement director at a law school, I invite you to take a look at my [slides](#) and the [Baylor Handout](#) from the program.

**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).