

[You Need to Learn “People Skills”-Here’s How I Did It](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on July 5th, 2012

Client development is about becoming a “go to” lawyer and developing relationships. For many of you, becoming a “go to” lawyer is much easier than developing the relationships. After all, if you bill 2000 hours a year in your niche, over time you will know your legal specialty well.

How many hours a year are you spending developing your people skills? How can you learn and practice those skills? First, you need to have an intense interest in people. Only through having that interest will you focus on learning about them, understanding their needs and listening with a sensitive ear.



In my own case, long ago I decided to teach senior high Sunday School at our church. One reason I volunteered was teaching would force me to read and understand the Bible. A second reason was I wanted to get to know the teenagers, most of whom had no desire to get up Sunday morning and come to class, and then figure out ways to make the lessons meaningful from their perspective rather than my own.

I really worked hard to understand what it was like to be a teenager in the early 80s. I met with them and listened. I read books and searched for different ways to reach them. Each week I wrote handwritten letters to each one of them, letting them know I missed them if they had missed the last class, or letting them know I enjoyed our time together if they had attended the last class.

I think more than anything else, I conveyed that I cared about them. I cannot describe how valuable this experience was for me. Because the mindset of teenagers was so different from my own, understanding the mindset of my construction clients was less a challenge.

I tried other experiments to develop my people skills. Since I traveled by myself on business, I took opportunities to talk and mostly listen to strangers I met while flying or while eating my dinner by myself at the hotel bar. I purposely engaged them in conversation and asked open ended questions without making judgments or offering unsolicited advice. I tried to develop my emphatic listening skills.

What are you doing to learn and practice your people skills?

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.