

[What is The Tipping Point on Client Development?](#)

Posted by [Cordell Parvin](#) on August 11, 2011

In 1996, I met a potential client that was a joint venture of three large companies. I knew one company client representative and I was meeting the other two for the first time. It was interesting. Within five minutes, I knew I would not enjoy working with the one company representative and immediately “connected” with the other.

Bob, the client representative with whom I immediately connected, has been one of my best friends ever since. Our wives are also friends and we have vacationed together several times. Later, his company became a client and we achieved a very successful result in what I hope was my last trial.

Rapport and connection are vitally important in client development. Yet, for the most part it is overlooked and not studied. In a world where lawyers and law firms look alike and your competitors are as qualified as you are, establishing rapport can be the tipping point for getting hired and for expanding the relationship with existing clients.



What is rapport? The Merriam-Webster definition is “relation marked by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity.” I see it as connecting with another person. There are many scientific studies on how and why rapport occurs. There seems to be three essential components of rapport.

1. Mutual attentiveness, which means having an intense mutual interest in something.
2. Positivity, which means friendliness, caring and warmth.
3. Coordination, which means balance, harmony and being in sync with one another.

So what do these three components mean to you? To establish mutual attentiveness, you need to have mutual interests. Obviously the potential legal matter creates mutual interests. But, I believe you can gain further rapport by finding common personal interests. It could be your children, an interest in a hobby or activity, being graduates of the same college, or simply having read the same book or seen the same movie.

To establish positivity, you need to be friendly and genuinely care about your client and your client representative. You need to put the client's and client representative's interest ahead of your own. Sometimes this means telling the client representative that you are not the best lawyer to handle a matter, or advising the client representative that they could save money by doing the work in-house and that you would be happy to help out.

More than anything else coordination is about understanding personality types ([The DISC Personality System](#) is one way), and how your client representative receives information and non-verbal communication.

What are you doing to build rapport? What are you doing to learn how to build rapport? If you want to get started learning, read a 2008 [New York Times Health Section](#) article [You Remind Me of Me](#).

Cordell Parvin Blog

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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.