

## [20 Essential Client Development Skills Every Associate Should Be Learning](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on January 21st, 2014

I contend that rainmakers are not born that way. I certainly wasn't. I loved trying to development my skills. I thought of that effort yesterday when I saw a blog: [No-one Was Born Great](#). I recommend reading it and seeing how it applies to your client development efforts.

Are you and the other young lawyers in your firm developing your client development skills? If not I want to to help you. I wish you could come to Dallas and have a coaching session with me, or I could spend a day with you and your law firm. But, if that isn't going to happen, I will do my best to help you here.

One of my primary tasks if I was coaching you, would be to help you figure out what will work best for you. That includes figuring out what you enjoy, what you are good at doing and what will give you the greatest return on your time investment. If you do not enjoy client development, you will likely not stick with it.

I would also urge you to get comfortable outside your comfort zone. Many lawyers I coach have said:

I have learned that client development is something I can enjoy doing and do well.

Recently, I was asked by the [Texas Young Lawyers Association \(TYLA\)](#) to write an article that might help young lawyers get started. I wrote [Practical Tips on Client Development for Young Lawyers](#). Since the article was published, I have been asked by three bar associations to speak on the topics in the article. Take a look and share it with young lawyers in your firm or community.

In addition to the TYLA article, I have written several client development posts aimed at associates. Here is a sample:

[Are You Teaching Your Young Associates to Think Like a Client](#)

[You are Never Too Young to Become a "Go To" Lawyer](#)

## [5 simple ways young, energetic lawyers can compete for business with more experienced lawyers](#)



At the risk of repeating some of what I have already said, here is a list of 20 skills I believe every associate should be learning. If you are not an associate, please share this with associates in your firm. You (or they) should learn how to:

1. **Develop good habits**-Over the years, the habits you develop will become your activities and your activities will determine your level of success.
2. **Take control of your career**-When you feel you have control and are responsible for your success, you will be more engaged, and likely find what you are doing more enjoyable.
3. **Set goals and prepare a development plan**-People who set goals and have a plan feel more in control of their future. You will also. Here is a [2014 Development Plan Template](#) you can use.
4. **Use non-billable time wisely**-Time is your most valuable asset and should be focused on priorities.
5. **Dress for success**-Clients make snap decisions based on first impressions and your clothing is a part of it.
6. **Display the appropriate business etiquette**-This is another item that will be part of the first impressions.

7. **Make your senior lawyers raving fans**-After all, as a young associate, senior lawyers are your clients.
8. **Effectively network in person and on-line**-Effective networking can build word of mouth referrals. (This was one I had to get comfortable doing because it was outside my comfort zone.)
9. **Remember names**-This is the starting point for effective networking. You would be amazed at the value of remembering names.
10. **Create a good elevator speech and elevator questions**-This is the second step in effective networking.
11. **Develop active listening skills**-This is the third step in effective networking and essential for building relationships. They don't teach listening in law school.
12. **How to follow up after meeting someone new**-This is the fourth step in effective networking.
13. **Create systematic ways to keep in contact with people you know**-Staying in touch with your contacts should be planned not random lunches when no one else in the office is available. Social media has expanded the ways to stay in touch.
14. **Use tools for client development**-There are many tools to use including "Google Alerts," Website bios, social media, and others.
15. **How to write articles, blog posts and guides for business clients**-Your writing style for these client development pieces are different than a brief you would submit to a court.
16. **How to make a presentation to a business industry group**-Your slides, your body language, your content and structure to engage and connect with your audience.
17. **Put yourself in a position to get selected by a potential client**-You need to know how clients select their lawyers so you can be effective in your client development efforts.

18. **How to prepare for and conduct a meeting with a potential client**-This includes what to do before, during and after a meeting.
19. **Provide what clients want and expect**-Understanding results and service from the client's perspective is key to having a satisfied client.
20. **How to write and speak concisely**-Your clients, potential clients and senior lawyers in your firm do not want to know the history of Swiss Watchmaking. They just want to know the time.

Suppose your law firm, or your local bar association asked me to come speak to your young lawyers. What would you choose for the topic? What are three questions you would want to make sure I answer?

Suppose you had a coaching session with me. What would you put on your agenda for us to cover in an hour?

**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).