

[Lawyers: Plan Your Career Like a Designer and Contractor](#)

Posted by [Cordell Parvin](#) on August 10, 2011

A law firm recently asked me to speak to the firm associates on career planning based on my book [Prepare to Win](#). (Now available for your [Kindle](#) or [Nook](#)). When I speak to the associates in September, I will suggest they plan their career like a construction project is planned.

During my long career as a construction lawyer, I learned that design and construction of a magnificent project is similar to the approach taken by successful people to build their careers.



In construction, someone has to take responsibility for the project and decide what is wanted and how it will be designed and constructed. Likewise, you must take responsibility for your career. Only you know what you want and what you are willing to commit to achieve your aspirations.

When architects or engineers design a project, they actually start their work with a vision of the completed work. They focus on what purpose it will serve, what it will look like and how it will function. You should approach your career and personal life the same way. Think about what you really want. What are the things most important to you? Write why those things are most important to you. Trying to answer the why question will help you determine if you have identified what is really important to you. You will be able to better understand your life purpose and how your career fits with that purpose.

Once the design of the construction project is completed, the construction contractor takes over. The contractor will establish goals for the project, including profits and schedule milestones. Contractors who do this by the seat of the pants are generally not successful and do not stay in business very long. As the old saying goes: "Proper planning prevents poor performance." The same is true in your life and career. Once you know what you really want, it is time to set goals and work on a plan. Carefully think about it and write down a list of goals. Some may be quantitative and others qualitative.

Once contractors establish their goals and before they begin construction, they develop a plan and schedule. Many begin by listing activities they must do to successfully build the project; then they prepare a schedule and sequence of those activities. When you have established your goals, write down a list of what you must do to achieve each goal. Then prioritize your list of activities and put them in a sequence. This forms the basis of your written plan.

Once construction begins, contractors constantly review where they are or how they can improve. They typically break their schedule down into two to three week look ahead schedules. You should also review your plan, what you have accomplished, get feedback and look for areas where you can improve. As events take place during the year, it is okay to make changes in your plan. You should also break your plan down into smaller components. If you are a regular reader you know that the lawyers I coach break their plans down into 90 Days Action Plans. You should also.

I loved working for the construction industry. My clients were people who took responsibility for what they wanted, established goals, prepared a plan and were flexible enough to make changes to accommodate unexpected events.

I love working lawyers who approach life and their careers in the same way. I have helped many shape their careers in this way and witnessed their enthusiasm and success. Give this approach a try and I can assure you from experience you will be prepared to win.

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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.