

## [Empathy: What It Is, Why You Need It and How to Develop More of It](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on August 28th, 2012

A few months ago the New York Times published a blog: [Can Doctors Learn Empathy?](#) It was written about doctors, but it could have just as easily been written about lawyers.

I found this interesting:

Greater physician empathy has been associated with fewer medical errors, better patient outcomes and more satisfied patients. It also results in fewer malpractice claims and happier doctors.

Wouldn't you agree that greater lawyer empathy would be associated with the same things for clients and lawyers? If so, what is empathy and how can you learn to be more empathetic?

According to [Wikipedia](#), Empathy is defined as is the capacity to recognize feelings that are being experienced by another. I like to say that it is the ability to walk in another's shoes.

For you as a lawyer it is the ability to look at things from your client's perspective. It is very important for you to understand how your client or client representative views the matter you are

handling and what is important to them. Keep in mind that for a business client your legal work is in the context of their business and for an individual client, your legal work is in the context of their life.

You are not born with empathy. You have to develop the skill and practice.

A few years ago I was working on a huge contract dispute that took me to Las Vegas every week. After working hard all day, I came back to the hotel where I was staying and ate at one of the many



restaurant bars. I struck up conversations with strangers at the bar and tried to listen and not judge or offer advice. I did not drink, but most of the strangers I met had been drinking.

I used phrases we should use as lawyers, like:

- Tell me more
- Help me better understand
- What was that like for you?
- How did you deal with that?

I paid very close attention to what each person told me and tried to put myself in their shoes.

Through this practice, I discovered I needed to try this more when meeting with clients. As an extra added bonus, some of the stories I heard will help me with R rated material when I write a novel.

So, when you are in a social setting, sitting on an airplane, or like me sitting at a restaurant bar eating by yourself, strike up a conversation, ask questions, sincerely listen, do not judge and do not offer unsolicited advice. Practice, practice, practice.

# Cordell Parvin Blog

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LAW FIRM RAINMAKERS

**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).