

Making 2007 Your Best Year Ever

By Cordell Parvin

Introduction

I have spent a lifetime studying why some people are very successful and why others are not. Interestingly, many of the people who are truly successful also have a great personal life and are very family oriented. How can this be so? Put simply, they understand their priorities and use their time wisely.

I am coaching two junior partners. They are both women. They are both in about the same size firms. They both bill about the same number of hours. Christy, who has two children, is incredibly successful and will become even more successful. Samantha is incredibly bright. She is a graduate of an Ivy League school. Yet, she feels overwhelmed and like she is burning out. What are these two people doing differently and how can you apply it to make 2007 your best year ever?

Attitude

It begins with attitude. We all talk to ourselves and we sometimes convey our attitude about things when we talk to others. When I meet with young lawyers I am listening to what they say to learn what they are likely saying to themselves. To borrow a quote from Winston Churchill, less successful lawyers see the problem in every opportunity and successful lawyers see the opportunity in every problem. Less successful lawyers frequently say: "Yes, but." Successful lawyers say: "Sure, how." Less successful lawyers say: "My problem is." More successful lawyers say: "My opportunity is." Less successful lawyers say: "I need to . . ." More successful lawyers say: "I want to . . ." Less successful lawyers say: "I am not willing to be successful if it means . . ." More successful lawyers

say: "I can be successful and . . ." Less successful lawyers say: "I will try my best to . . ." More successful lawyers say: "I will achieve . . ." Less successful lawyers find something wrong with any new idea. More successful lawyers figure out how they can use the new idea. So, the first step to making 2007 your best year ever is to listen to yourself talk and if necessary consciously make a change in what you are telling yourself.

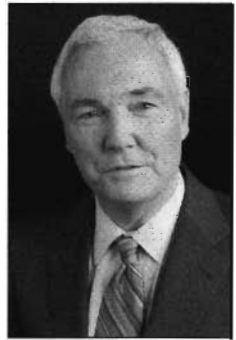
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Clear Idea of What You Want

Second, successful lawyers like Christy have a very clear idea of what they want to accomplish. They know where they want to be five years from now, maybe even 20 years from now. Having clarity on what you want to accomplish with your career actually enables you to have more time for your family. How do you suppose that happens? Put simply, lawyers with clarity on what they want to do with their career do not waste lots of time. Lawyers without clarity do waste time and frequently are spinning their wheels and frustrated by it. Clarity about what you want also gives you energy.

In my case, in 1978 I decided I wanted to be the best transportation construction lawyer in the United States. In Christy's case, she wants to become the best long-term care

attorney in the United States. She also has a very clear idea of what she wants to do in her personal life. One way to gain clarity on what you want is to write down what you are doing and what your life is like five years from now.



Setting Goals

Really successful people set goals and have a plan to achieve them. Years ago I was giving a presentation at my firm's orientation for new partners. I was teaching them how to prepare a Business Plan. I asked how many had set goals for that year. Not one of them had set goals. It caused me to wonder why young lawyers do not set goals. Here are four reasons:

- They don't see the value in it
- They don't know how
- They are afraid of being criticized by someone
- They are afraid of not achieving them

There is a quote I like. It is "Most people aim at nothing and hit it with amazing accuracy." There are scientific studies showing that people who have written goals achieve far more than those who do not and they are happier with their careers and life. Why is that? I think it is in part because they feel they have more control of their destiny. They also are going after something. Some of you have already set goals for 2007. For those of you who have not, let me show you how to set goals you will actually achieve.

Over the next two minutes list 10 things you want to achieve in 2007. Leave some space in between each item. They should be specific and measurable so you will know if you achieved them. They might be:

- Bill ____ hours
- Originate \$ ____
- Obtain ____ new clients
- Expand existing business with _____
- Speak at ____ industry meetings
- Write _____ articles and get them published
- Contact ____ law school classmates
- Meet with ____ contacts
- Add ____ to my web page bio

Here are some goals I had in 1999:

- Originate \$3 million in business
- Bill 1,800 hours
- Speak at 6 construction industry meetings
- Visit 8 construction clients
- Write the second edition of my Transportation Construction Claims Book
- Conduct 4 in-house client workshops
- Conduct 3 workshops on Innovative Contracting
- Have a client roundtable meeting in Dallas

Now that you have written down 10 goals, go back through and prioritize them. In other words, decide which is the most important and so forth. Next, I want you to answer why achieving each goal is important to you. Here is the reason to do that. If you do not have a good answer to the why question, then your goal will

be like a New Year's resolution that you give up on achieving the first time there is a roadblock. You have to have a good answer to the why question to motivate you, energize you and cause you to have the discipline and commitment to achieve the goal.

Now that you have answered the why question, write down any obstacles you have to achieving the goal. The obstacles can be internal or external. In my experience most of them are internal. In other words, I have to do something different than I have been doing. My greatest obstacle is usually staying focused and not wasting time.

Now that you have identified obstacles, identify any people who can help you achieve your goal. Here is an interesting thing to consider. When you are not taking responsibility for your career success, no one wants to help you. But, when you are taking responsibility for your success, you will find people who do want to help you, both inside and outside your firm.

Now I want you to write down as many actions as you can think of to achieve your goal. Using one of my goals as an example, for my goal of conducting 4 in-house workshops I need to:

- Determine which clients
- Identify a topic that would give them value
- Prepare written materials
- Prepare presentation materials
- Establish dates and locations (at client's facility or elsewhere)
- Conduct the workshops

Ok, so make your list of activities you will do to achieve your goal.

Now that you have your list, I want you to write down for each goal something you can do in the next week to get started. We need for the train to get out of the station.

Let's stop there for a minute. My experience has shown me that if you write down your goals and develop a plan of activities to achieve them, you will be one of about 3% of the lawyers and you will be far more likely to achieve them. So, you have made the first step to achieving your own definition of success.

I have always had lifetime goals. Recently, I put my lifetime goals into four categories:

- Physical/Economic
- Mental/Growth
- Emotional/Relationships
- Spiritual/Core Values

I share my lifetime goals with lawyers I am coaching and I am sharing them with you. Many of the lawyers I am coaching have developed their own lifetime goals and shared theirs with others. Christy shared hers with all the associates in her firm. Here are a few of them:

Physical/Economic

- Be the best Long-Term Care Attorney in the country.
- Make Baker Donelson the best firm in the southeast.
- Sleep 8 hours a day.
- Eat healthy.
- Buy a beach home.

Mental/Growth

- Learn Yoga.
- Live in the moment.
- Learn to scuba and dive the Great Barrier Reef.

Emotional/Relationships

- See my three best friends in person every year.
- Be there every time my children need me and most times when they want me.
- Be a mentor and role model for other lawyers.

Spiritual/Core Values

- Raise children who love God and respect others.
- Be grateful.
- Live each day apportioning time to my core values: spiritual, family, health, work.

So, consider thinking about your own lifetime goals in those four categories. If you want to share them with me for my thoughts I would be happy to take a look at them.

Getting Better

Really successful people are constantly getting better. Tiger Woods is a great example. Last year he was interviewed by Ed Bradley on *60 Minutes*. Ed Bradley asked Tiger Woods why he had completely changed his golf swing when he was the number one golfer in the world. Tiger Woods answered: "I knew I could get better." There is a commonly heard phrase that if you are not getting better, you are actually getting worse. That has never been more true for lawyers than it is today because there are so many changes going on in our profession. In my top 10 tips I suggest that you take one area of your practice to focus on getting better. It might be communication skills, drafting skills, a particular legal topic. When I pick that one area I find every book I can on the topic, read articles, attend CLEs, listen to CDs and actually practice what I am trying to learn.

So, what do you want to do in 2007 to improve your skill? What is the one area that you want to focus on?

Reading on Success, Client Development

In addition to improving my skills as a lawyer, I have always been an avid reader of books I thought would improve my skills on client

development, help me use my time more effectively, leadership, teamwork and a variety of other topics. I have provided you with a suggested reading list for 2007. At my old firm, we had a group who would read the same book and we had people assigned to discuss chapters and give practical examples of how what was in the chapter could be applied.

I learned long ago a way to read business books. I first skim the book. In that process I decide what is important that I want to go back and read in detail.

Use Your Time More Effectively

Time is our most valuable resource and we cannot afford to waste it. If you have a clear idea of what you want in your career, have goals and have decided what you want to learn in 2007, you are well on your way to not wasting time because you can see whether a potential activity advances you towards your goals or not.

There are 168 hours in a week. I want you to make a rough sketch pie chart. The first piece of the pie is how many hours you sleep. If you sleep 8 hours a night, that would be 56. I sleep less than that and you may as well. The next piece of the pie is the number of hours you work a week that are billable. You might record 40 billable hours a week. If so fill in that number. If it takes you longer because you have to write off time, then put down the higher number. The next piece of the pie is your non-billable time you are using to invest in your career. This could be firm administrative activities, time you plan to spend for your development, time you plan to spend for client development. When I was a young lawyer, I tried to spend at least 10 hours a week investing in my career. So, I would have 10 on my pie chart. If I slept 56 hours a week, billed 40 hours a week, spent 10 hours a week on my career, that would leave 62 waking

hours for my personal life including being a good father, husband and son, exercising, being involved in my church and community and any other personal activity. I like to tell lawyers that how well they plan and execute the 10 hours a week they invest in their career will determine the quality of their career and how well they plan and execute the 62 waking hours of personal time will determine the quality of their lives.

Stephen Covey suggests that we have four quadrants of activities:

1. Urgent and Important
2. Not Urgent, but Important
3. Urgent, but not Important
3. Not Urgent and Not Important

The real key for a successful career and for a fulfilling life is to focus on the quadrant 2 activities.

Christy is doing that. She plans based on her priorities and she plans her personal time, and her career investment time the same way she plans her billable time.

Let's look at her calendar for December.

Keep in mind that you have to make choices both in your non-billable investment activities and in your personal time. Christy was a deacon in her church. While her church is really important to her, being a deacon took her away from her family. She decided to give up being a deacon and started the children's choir. Now, she is both doing a church activity that is important to her while at the same time spending that time with her children. Interestingly enough she also added a marketing activity for her law practice.

Christy also is very good about delegating things that her assistant is better equipped to do. Here is a list of some of the things Christy delegates:

- Book a flight
- Calendar deadlines
- Register me for conferences
- Research opposing counsel on the internet
- Type letters
- Put together seminar packets
- Add information in my contacts
- Address firm Christmas cards
- Order client Christmas gifts

Pareto's Principle— The 80/20 Rule

I am coaching a young partner named Pam. She is a truly outstanding lawyer and is very well known in her city. She is working to a frazzle on client development activities and not achieving the results she desires. Why is that? She simply has not distinguished between really good opportunities and those that border on being a waste of her time. When I am with Pam I keep telling her: "Focus, focus, focus" and I tell her that for her "less can be more." She will become way more successful by not doing everything, but instead doing a few things really well.

In the early 1900s a gentleman by the name of Pareto did a study in Italy and found that 20% of the people owned 80% of the wealth. That led to many others finding the same principle applied to their own field. There are a variety of ways this might apply to us. It might be that 20% of our clients produce 80% of our fees. It might be that 20% of our time spent on client development might produce 80% of our business. The point is simple.

Face Time

We have gotten to the point that email and instant message are our main ways of communicating. I get emails all day and I am sure you do also. But, you do not connect with

people by email and you do not build trust by email.

Jackie is a banking lawyer I am coaching. Her office is in the same building as her firm's largest banking client. Before meeting me, if there was a conference on a deal she was working on, Jackie's client representatives would be gathered in a conference room and Jackie would participate on the call at her desk. I suggested that Jackie actually go down and be in the conference room when these calls occurred. Interestingly, the first time she did, she came away with a new piece of business. Out of sight is truly out of mind.

Rusty is a labor and employment lawyer. He was just completing a really difficult employment case for a client that was headquartered in Chicago. Rusty is in the southeast. He asked me what he should do at that point. I told him he needed to go to Chicago and meet with the two founders of the company and give them an in-person report. I told him he should also tell them he wanted to learn as much as he could about their company. I told him not to go up there to sell them anything. I suggested he bring only one "prop" with him: A map with an overlay showing where the company's plants were located and where Rusty's firm has offices. Making a long story short, a few months later the client had a small lease matter in a state where Rusty's firm has an office. They called him from Chicago and he got one of his partners to work on it. The lease matter took only a couple of hours and Rusty and the partner decided not even to charge for it. A few months later the company was sued in a class action labor matter in that same state. Once again, the founders of the company called Rusty and Rusty was able to get the same partner involved in the case. This all resulted from a trip to Chicago to meet the founders.

Rusty began visiting other clients. He visited two clients in Florida. He conducted workshops

on hiring and firing for each. Those workshops resulted in additional work for Rusty and his firm in putting together company employment manuals and policies. While learning about the companies he discovered that one company could actually provide a valuable service to another of the firm's major clients. So, Rusty set up a meeting of the two companies. Both companies were so grateful that they are both sending more business to the firm. This all came from getting out of the office and meeting in person.

Why Should I Hire You?

I want you to pretend for the moment that I can refer business to you. I want you to provide me with the information I need to recommend you to a potential client. In 25 words or less tell me about you, your practice, what makes you unique and why a client should hire you.

How to Stand Out in Any Crowd

If you look at law firm web pages, most firms look alike. They are "full service" "represent small and large companies." They are "client focused" and so forth. As lawyers we all are alike in many ways. We all went to law school, we use the same statutes, regulations and case law. Obviously we have to do top notch legal work or we would have no clients

I subscribe to a magazine *Selling Power*. As you would expect, it is for salespeople and sales managers. Yet, each and every issue I find something of value to lawyers. It only costs \$27 for one year (6 issues) and is well worth it.

In the November/December issue the cover story is "How to Stand Out in Any Crowd." Seth Godin talks about marketing, change and work. I was fascinated by the article and plan to apply some of Godin's points myself.

According to the article Seth Godin likes to give things away and has built his career on it. I have long advocated that lawyers find things of value to give away. Whenever I write an article, I am anxious to give it away. When Godin wrote his first book he offered a third of its contents online at no charge. He got 175,000 responses requesting the free third of the book. Most of the 175,000 who received the free third of the book clicked the link built into the page and bought it, making it a year-long best-seller. Guess what I am planning to do with the three books I have written?

Later in the article, Godin talks about three kinds of people. I will put it in the context of clients:

1. Clients who don't need the services you or your firm offer.

2. Clients who need the services you or your firm offer, but are using another lawyer or firm.
3. Clients who are ignoring you.

Godin says you can't market directly to the second and third group. "Instead, have them come to you." How do you suppose you can get them to come to you? Godin suggests you have to create something "remarkable."

I like to tell young lawyers that I owe a great deal of my success to one sales principle. I frequently created something remarkable, was first to market and I gave it away. For example, I have two books on my law firm web page that potential clients can download at no charge.

I have taught others to do the same thing. Jennifer is a labor and employment lawyer I am coaching.

She created the "Easy Guide" which is a compilation of labor and employment laws on laminated cards which an HR person can attach to his or her monitor. Jennifer has the clients in the second and third category coming to her.

I urge you to implement some of the ideas and let me know what you are doing to make 2007 your best year ever.

Cordell Parvin has practiced law for 36 years. In 2005 he left his law firm to focus his work on helping young lawyers with career and client development. He is the author of *Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout* and two other books on law careers and client development. To learn more go to his website www.cordellparvin.com.