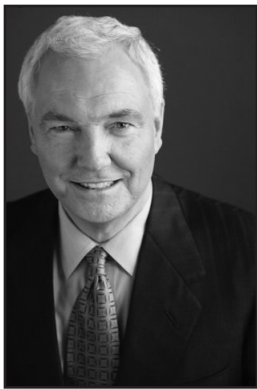


Building The Next Generation Of Rainmakers



Cordell 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 Chow to Ciao Mein: Conquering Career Burnout" and other books for lawyers. To learn more visit his website www.cordellparvin.com. or contact him at cparvin@cordellparvin.com.

Cordell M. Parvin

Good rainmaking doesn't require a "personality type"; it requires planning, mentoring, and a continuing effort by the firm and its lawyers.

RECENTLY I WAS ASKED to give a presentation at the ABA Annual Meeting on building the next generation of rainmakers. As I thought about what I would tell the audience, it occurred to me that most of the rainmakers in law firms are or will be at retirement age within the next 10 years. That may be fine if a firm has institutional clients, but most firms I know are more entrepreneurial. As a result, building the next generation of rainmakers is critical.

As I prepared for my presentation, I thought of David Letterman's "Top 10" list. I have always had a "Top 10 scary things I have heard law firm partners say about client development." My number 10 has always been: "We just want our associates to do good work." In other words, the last thing on earth we would want our associates to do would be to build relationships with clients and potential clients.

THE CASE FOR TEACHING CLIENT DEVELOPMENT TO THE NEXT GENERATION • What is the problem with just having associates do good work? When brand new associates finish law school, generally the best that can be said is that they have been taught through the Socratic Method "to think like a lawyer."

They have not been taught what it is like to be a lawyer and certainly have not been taught to “think like a client.” Yet, everything we do as lawyers, even dull and boring document reviews, is being done for a client.

I tell law firm leaders that when I was growing up I played baseball every day during the summer. I played all the way through college. I have not swung a baseball bat in 25 years or more, but even if I could not hit a ball in a batting cage today, I know I would not think about the technique of my swing. On the other hand, I have never played golf well or often. As a result, when I stand over a golf ball, I am thinking about all the things I need to do—technique. Client development is the same way. The earlier we can work with lawyers, the sooner client development and people skills will not be a matter of technique. Instead it will come naturally to them.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RAINMAKERS • Before considering how to build the next generation of rainmakers, it is important to understand what makes rainmakers different. I believe rainmakers generally have high levels of emotional intelligence and likely have different personality types than most lawyers. My premise seems to be supported by a couple of articles by Dr. Lawrence R. Richard, who is now a Hildebrandt consultant. Based on his and my own findings on the subject, I believe most rainmakers have a strong ego drive. In part, they define themselves by the recognition they receive and by the sense of accomplishment they feel when hired by a new client. Most rainmakers are empathetic, meaning they have great ability to understand the world from their client’s perspective. Rainmakers typically exhibit high ego strength/resilience, meaning they are able to bounce back from criticism/rejection or defeat in a trial. Rainmakers are more likely to be sociable, outgoing, and extroverted. They are comfortable with people either individually or in groups. Rainmakers typically set high goals for themselves and have

a plan to achieve them. These are all examples of high emotional intelligence. But I think rainmakers exhibit other characteristics:

- They really care;
- They expect more of themselves than others do;
- They have high energy;
- They inspire confidence;
- They have a passion for their work and their clients;
- They differentiate themselves by having a “unique selling proposition” based on an understanding of their clients’ needs, business, and industry.

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION:

THE BASICS • So what do the characteristics of rainmakers tell us about creating future rainmakers? I think it tells us several things:

- Rainmaking will be natural for few and a challenge for many;
- We need to focus on raising the level of emotional intelligence;
- One size does not fit all (we need to customize our training to the individual);
- We need to teach associates to set goals and prepare a plan;
- Client development training should be interactive and experiential;
- There must be follow-up individual coaching—one-shot programs do not work;
- Programs for first- through third-year associates should be vastly different than programs for more senior associates and partners.

Programs For Junior Associates

When I do programs on client development for first- through third-year associates, I focus on a variety of things, but the main focus is on people skills, career development, and reputation building. I try to make workshops with them interactive. I ask them what they think a first- through third-

year lawyer should do about client development. I show them several photos with names and then show just the photos and ask them for the names. Then I show them how to remember the names. I ask them what they do and when many say: “I am a litigator...” we go over better answers to that question. I also role-play being seated next to them on an airplane and ask how they would strike up a conversation.

I begin every session by making clear that their primary task at this point is to become the best lawyer they can possibly be. I encourage them to be a sponge and to set specific learning goals: “At the end of my first year I will have learned to...” I also let them know that their supervising attorney is their client and that they need to practice their “people skills” on her. What is her personality type? Is she a driver, analytical, amiable, or expressive? What difference does that make in working with her? These are the type of people skills topics we discuss. I encourage them and show them how to establish and maintain a contacts list and when they are invited to functions to learn the names of people they meet and “work the room.” It is never too early to learn these skills. I speak to them on the importance of “dressing for success.” If possible, I have someone video the associate sitting across the table speaking to me as a prospective client. Many times they are amazed at how they come across in the video. I suggest that they look at their practice group web site and offer to improve it. Finally, I show them how to convert a legal memo into a potentially publishable article.

I can’t emphasize enough the importance of “learning by doing”. I am reminded of a quote from famed Duke basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski: “You hear, you forget. You see, you remember. You do, you understand.” The challenge is that it takes way more time to create an experiential learning experience than it does to just have someone come in and lecture.

Programs For Senior Associates

My program for fourth- through seventh-year lawyers is more advanced, but if they haven’t previously done the work described above, we will do it with their group. With this group, I tend to focus more on relationship building and team building. Once again the program is interactive. I ask that each give me in advance something they have written that they believe would make a great article. I ask for volunteers and we go over what they have written and I show them how to change it with the mind of building a reputation and getting hired. Next, we focus on presentation skills. I have them imagine they have been asked to speak on a legal topic at an industry conference. I ask each participant to get up and give the first couple of minutes of the presentation and then give an outline of the remainder of it. We then turn to how clients hire lawyers and I divide the group into smaller groups and hand out scenarios for them to discuss and present. Then we have scenarios for starting a new assignment for a new client and scenarios for follow-up after an assignment. I ask the small groups to present their ideas on what clients want and what causes them to change lawyers or law firms. I show them the survey information from the American Corporate Counsel Association.

I advise senior associates that it is time for them to get known as an expert in something. I ask what work they are passionate about, perform exceptionally well, and that serves a client need. (If you are a fan and champion of agricultural law but are located in a major industrial area, you may wish to develop another expertise or relocate.) I encourage senior associates to consider focusing on industries as much as they focus on what they do. We also take a look at their bios on the firm website to see what kind of message it sends to a client or potential client.

These are two basic workshops designed primarily to capture the associates’ attention and give them the basics. If these are successful, then more advanced materials and more focused individual

items can be added. There are several approaches to make the workshops more effective. First, whoever is doing the training should try to get to know the associate participants in advance. Meeting in person is obviously the best way to get to know them, but a short questionnaire can also be used. Second, find areas to let associates do part of the teaching. For example, senior associates can teach part of the program for junior associates. I encourage partners to attend. They can offer great ideas and valuable insights on what has worked for them. At the end of each session I ask each participant to write down three things they plan to do to implement the ideas we discussed and I encourage them to email the ideas to me. Finally, I believe it is important to have follow-up, one-on-one coaching sessions; otherwise it is just a nice learning experience that is not implemented.

Client Development Coaching For Junior Partners

Most lawyers my age never had coaching on client development when they were junior partners. So, naturally many ask why it is important for lawyers now. There are several reasons. First, developing business now is way more challenging than it was 25 years ago. The competition is greater, client expectations have increased, and the time available for business development has decreased. Second, many senior associates and junior partners are in the transition stage of their careers and they are moving from being solely service providers to being responsible for building client relationships and developing new business. For many young partners, client development is a mystery. To the extent there is any effort at all, it is unstructured, unfocused, and ultimately unsuccessful. They procrastinate, are undisciplined, have no plan and ultimately little or no execution. Mentors within the firm can balance the current situation with both institutional firm knowledge and their own experience, but they do not have the time to focus on the business de-

velopment of more junior partners. This program is designed to assist junior partners in their client development efforts, providing both a benefit to themselves and to their firm. Like working with a fitness coach, participants will learn what activities will provide the greatest benefit to them and then will have regularly scheduled sessions with the coach to report on activities and learn more. As discussed below in this program, young lawyers will:

- Develop a business plan;
- Determine both group and individual goals that will challenge and stretch them;
- Determine what activities to undertake to meet their goals;
- Learn how to write articles and give presentations that will enhance their reputations and increase their chances of getting hired;
- Develop a focused contacts plan;
- Become more client focused;
- Be held accountable.

Program Success

The client development coaching program involves both group activities and individual one-on-one sessions. It involves both teaching—giving the right answers and coaching—asking the right questions. The program is tailored both to what makes the firm unique as well as what makes the individual lawyers unique.

The two main criteria for program success are selecting the right people to participate and having the support of firm leadership. The lawyers selected should have a strong desire to develop business, expand client relationships, and develop their reputations. They should be open to coaching and trying new ideas. They should be comfortable getting outside their comfort zones. Second, to be successful, firm leadership must support the program and ensure it is supported by lower level leaders in the firm. In this way it can be a win-win for the selected lawyers and for the firm. I suggest law firm leaders clearly articulate the following:

- *Purpose.* Firm leaders need to clearly articulate the purpose, focus, or mission of the project and it must be aligned with the participants' personal wants and needs. This might include providing maximum opportunities for them to develop their individual practice and to work synergistically as a team;
- *Challenge.* Participants need to set challenging individual and team goals that stretch them;
- *Camaraderie.* Participants should feel like a team, get to know each other well, learn from each other and think synergistically;
- *Responsibility.* Participants must take responsibility for their own success and the team's success;
- *Growth.* The program should include learning and growth. If participants feel they are moving forward, learning new concepts, adding to their skill base, and stretching their minds, motivation will remain high;
- *Leadership.* Firm leadership must create an environment for participants to motivate themselves and to execute their plans.

Structure

The program, which usually lasts 18-24 months, is structured to include both team activities and learning, and individual one-on-one coaching. Workshops on client development without the follow-up of one-on-one coaching usually do not provide the desired benefits. The first step is for the coach to get to know the firm and the participants. That is accomplished both by the coach visiting the firm to meet individually with the participants and the participants filling out a questionnaire describing their practice, their client development activities, their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis). Junior partners have told me that answering the questions was enlightening for them.

One of the essential aspects of the program is for each participant to prepare a business plan.

I have a template for a business plan, but as one young partner told me: "The form of the business plan is not important, but creating a plan is."

Next, a mini-retreat is held to introduce the program. The retreat is usually a dinner followed by a half-day workshop the next day. If possible, the dinner should be held in a private room where the group can interact freely and get to know each other better. I typically start the workshop by dividing the participants into three subgroups. I tell them that the firm has decided to compensate the group on the basis of how well the group does bringing in new business and expanding business with existing clients. Typically, if young partners were compensated based on their own numbers, they would make a fraction of what they are currently making. So, this exercise is designed to have them think about what they would do if their family depended on their success as a group. Group A develops a list of action items on what they would do now that would produce business for the firm immediately. Group B develops a list of action items of what they would do now that would produce business for the firm in one to three years. Group C produces a list of action items on what they would do now that would produce business for the firm 3 years and beyond. Inevitably the ideas generated by each group are outstanding. I then ask, "Is there anything preventing you from doing all these things now?"

The workshop also includes:

- Group goal-setting;
- List of activities for the group and individuals to undertake to meet the group goals;
- Creation of individual business plans;
- Individual goal-setting;
- Time allocation;
- Teaching and discussion on reputation building and relationship building;
- Discussion of the focused contacts concept;
- Discussion of what will follow.

Each group I have coached has set a goal of at least doubling their collective volume of business

in the two-year period of the program. The first one-on-one coaching can also take place at the retreat site. This is an essential part of the program because it makes each member of the group responsible and accountable.

In the first workshop we go over general principles on client development. Thereafter, coaching sessions occur by telephone once a month and in person once a quarter. In those sessions we cover more specific aspects of client development. It is helpful if the participant prepares an agenda of items she wants to discuss. Sessions that are structured are the most valuable. Again, like the fitness coach, part of the coaching session will go over activities the participant has done since the last session and plans for the next month. Many firms require participants to email the coach each Friday with a list of what they have done that week and what they plan to do the next week. The firms and participants find reporting weekly forces participants to execute or risk being embarrassed for having done nothing.

If opportunities present themselves for further group sessions, such as during a firm retreat or if all the participants are in one office, then additional group sessions are held. During the additional group sessions, participants report to the group on what they have done and what has been successful.

Some firms create a team extranet. Among the many materials posted to the extranet are “best practices” in categories selected by the participants. In other words when a participant makes a connection with a client, publishes an article, goes to a networking event, or speaks at a conference, he or

she can share what worked. I have found that it is actually easier to just communicate successes and activities by email.

I suggest a debriefing of the group at the end of the program. Hearing in their own words what they got out of the program is very helpful for the firm leaders.

CONCLUSION • I am in the process of finishing coaching a group of young Baker Donelson shareholders. Baker Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz, PC is a southern firm with about 475 lawyers. The group I coached was aptly named BakerRain. They originally set a goal to double their business volume. They were so successful that they increased the goal to triple their original business volume. The energy created by the program was contagious because of the approach of the BakerRain members. They came together as a team. They learned from each other. They were each accountable to the team and did not want to let their fellow BakerRain members down. They truly are already becoming the “next generation of Baker Donelson rainmakers” and they are mentoring and teaching the newly formed BakerRain II group. There has been so much excitement about this group that Baker Donelson has initiated a new group called “20 over 40.” It is 20 lawyers over 40 who will work together in much the same manner as the BakerRain group.

What if all the rainmakers in your firm retired, and it stopped raining? Could your firm survive the drought? Act now to create a new generation of rainmakers.

PRACTICE CHECKLIST FOR Building The Next Generation Of Rainmakers

- Rainmaking programs for first- through third-year associates should focus on people skills, career development, and reputation building:
 - ___ Ask them what they think a first- through third-year lawyer should do about client development;
 - ___ Make clear that their primary task is to become the best lawyers they can possibly be;
 - ___ Encourage them to set specific learning goals: “At the end of my first year I will have learned to...”
 - ___ Explain that their supervising attorneys are their clients and that they need to practice their “people skills” on them. What are their personality types? Are they drivers, analytical, amiable or expressive? What difference does that make in working with them?
 - ___ Encourage them and show them how to establish and maintain a contacts list, how to make new contacts, and how to “work the room” at functions;
 - ___ Explain the importance of demeanor and appearance, and if possible videotape them so they can see how they present themselves;
 - ___ Finally, show them how to convert a legal memo into a potentially publishable article.
- Programs for senior associates should focus more on relationship building and team building:
 - ___ Ask for writing samples with the intention of turning them into articles for a wider audience. Explain how memos on specific topics can be turned into client alerts and how existing work can be used to reach more people;
 - ___ Ask each participant to imagine that he or she has been asked to speak on a legal topic at an industry conference. Have each participant get up and give the first couple of minutes of the presentation and then give an outline of the remainder of it;
 - ___ Discuss how clients hire lawyers and ask the small groups to present their ideas on what clients want and what causes them to change lawyers or law firms;
 - ___ Advise them that it is time for them to become known as an expert in something.
- Programs for junior partners should focus on:
 - ___ Developing a business plan;
 - ___ Determining both group and individual goals that will challenge and stretch them;
 - ___ Determining what activities to undertake to meet their goals;
 - ___ Learning how to write articles and give presentations that will enhance their reputations and increase their chances of getting hired;
 - ___ Developing a focused contacts plan;
 - ___ Becoming more client-focused;
 - ___ Being accountable for program success.