

[How “Grease is the Word” Made a Dull Presentation Extraordinary](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on July 2nd, 2013

I think all of you who know me, know that I love my work with you. Sometimes I love it more than others and the story I will tell you today is one of those times.

How can you take an important topic you know your audience will find boring and turn it into an extraordinary presentation, that your audience will both value and remember?

Last week, I received an email from [Ayse Dalli](#), a [McCarthy Tétrault](#) Montreal partner I coach. She had that issue and had come up with an idea to make a presentation on the new Code of Civil Procedure tied to the movie Grease, and even end the presentation with John Travolta singing Summer Nights. Ayse Dalli, McCarthy Tétrault



She was a little concerned that it might be too “cheesy.” Over the next hour we exchanged emails on how to introduce the movie theme into the presentation and make it memorable. Ayse pulled it off and I asked her to share her story with you.

I was recently “voluntold” that I would be presenting on the new Quebec Code of Civil Procedure to a 75 representatives of key firm client. While the Code is important and appealed to me, I suspected the audience would rather be anywhere else, but listening to me talk about a dull subject on a summer day.

I brainstormed and enlisted some of our summer students to come up with ideas. That was great fun. They inspired me to make an interesting twist: make the new Code of Civil Procedure like a teenage summer romance. Though the idea was a stretch, it was exactly the kind of spark I needed to get my creative juices flowing!

As I was enjoying a glass of sangria on my back porch and listening to songs on my iPad, I heard a distantly familiar voice and there was no turning back: “Summer Nights”. Before I knew it, Danny Zuko and Sandy were inspiring me to write about new rules of discovery and expert evidence in Quebec.

I had never thought that summer flings and alternative modes of dispute resolution went hand-in-hand. “Grease” has always been one of my all-time favourite movies and making the presentation about something I was so nostalgic about made it feel like an art-form and no longer like a burdensome task. I found myself giggling at random thoughts I had about the presentation, and getting carried away with the wave of ideas that kept on rolling in.

My pre-speech butterflies were much less jittery because I was actually looking forward to my address! The presentation went off even better than I had hoped and was an absolute blast to give. I ended the talk with one last indulgence, playing the last line of “Summer Nights” where John Travolta hits that particularly high note. It was a great way to wrap things up and end on a high note!



[Summer Nights](#)

This experience reactivated a side of me I had lost touch with: the creative soul who used to have fun with work! It allowed me to let go of certain insecurities and just go with it! Though the preparation was long, required me to take a risk and step outside of my comfort zone, it was worthwhile and invigorating.

I received wonderful feedback from key client representatives. They enjoyed the presentation as much as I did. The jokes and Grease references continued throughout the event and created a memorable reference point for all participants. I even heard groups of representatives break into song and recall their favourite parts of the movie. I created quite the buzz!

Making connections between subjects that have nothing to do with each other can set off so many fireworks and have electrifying results, both externally and within. It is also useful not to assume that the audience expects a certain approach.

I learned I could set the tone and manage expectations with a few introductory remarks that set the stage for future overindulgences, albeit brief ones. If you call for Grease lightning in your weather forecast, the audience will be attentive and less shocked by the strike.

After such a revelatory experience, Barry Gibb's lyrics, sung by Frankie Valli, are resonating even more with me than ever before:

I solve my problems and I see the light
We got a lovin' thing, we gotta feed it right
There ain't no danger we can go too far
We start believing now that we can be who we are.

Grease is the word.

There are many wonderful lessons here. First, you can and should make a boring presentation more interesting. Second, pre-warn your audience on where you will be taking them. Third, summer students can be the source of great and creative ideas. If you would like more ideas on making a boring presentation interesting, read: [How to deliver an exciting speech on a dull topic](#).

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.