

[Is “Confirmation Bias” Holding You Back?](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on August 5th, 2013

What is confirmation bias? Let me provide the answer by telling a story.

A few years ago, a prominent New York based firm asked me to speak at their partners’ retreat on blogging and social media. I think younger partners wanted to use these tools and the older partners did not see the value and, actually believed the downside was far greater than the upside.

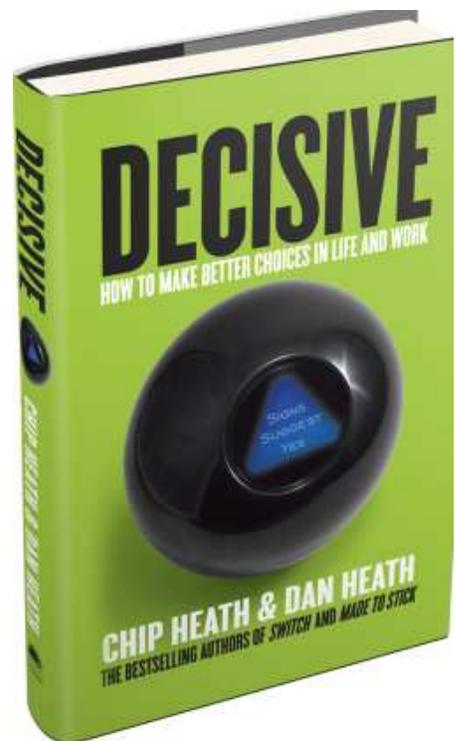
As the firm leaders worked with me on the presentation, they wanted to approve the slides I would use and they asked that I include examples of bad things emanating from lawyer blogs and social media posts. I researched and found many examples of bad PR lawyer bloggers had inflicted on their firms.

You know what happened, right? I gave only one presentation, but it was perceived vastly differently by the firm young partners and the firm leaders.

The young firm partners found all the examples in my presentation that supported their desire to blog. The firm leaders pointed to all the examples in my presentation that confirmed their belief that blogging might hurt the firm. The firm is still not blogging. So, I guess the firm leaders prevailed.

Both groups exhibited “confirmation bias.” Each decided my presentation supported their position.

I deal with confirmation bias all the time when I am coaching lawyers. Before I ever meet a lawyer, he or she has already decided if I can help or not. Those who think I can help get a great deal from our time working together. Those who think I can not help, waste their time and their firm’s money working with me.



[Dan and Chip Heath](#) mention confirmation bias in their book: [Decisive](#). Here is a short excerpt from the book to give you some of their thinking: [How to Make Better Decisions: Part II](#). In the book, they write:

When we want something to be true, we will spotlight the things that support it, and then, when we draw conclusions from those spotlighted scenes, we will congratulate ourselves on a reasoned decision.

How might your confirmation bias be holding you back? Here are some examples. If you believe:

1. You will never be successful attracting clients.
2. You will never be successful attracting clients because you are not like...(a rainmaker you know).
3. You didn't go to law school to become a salesman.
4. You don't enjoy writing.
5. You are not a good speaker.
6. You are not good at networking.
7. Planning and setting goals won't work for you.
8. Blogging and using social media is a waste of time.
9. You can't find time for client development.
10. The person working with you, (it could be me), cannot help you become more successful at client development.

One other thing to remember: You can also have "confirmation bias" when you believe you are the greatest lawyer in the world at client development. In that case, even when you strike out you don't think your efforts had anything to do with it.

Just curious: What are your biases on your ability to attract, retain and expand relationships with clients? If I started coaching you, would you be able to have an open mind?

P.S. Clients and potential clients also exhibit “confirmation bias.” That means it is very important that they are biased in your favor before you ever meet with them.

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.