

# Zen & The Art of Legal Networking

INSIGHTS & COMMENTARY ON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS NETWORK

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### Client Development 101 for 2011 & Beyond with Cordell Parvin - a LexBlog Webinar Re-Cap

Being a part of the LexBlog network means I'm fortunate enough to participate in the webinars that they host. Today's webinar was with the fabulous [Cordell Parvin](#), a [nationally recognized career and client development coach](#). According to LexBlog's invitation, Cordell "is a lawyer himself [and] his 37 years of practice set him apart from other client development experts. He has actually done what he teaches and coaches; he knows the challenges lawyers face and helps provide solutions."

No greater testimony to Cordell's expertise can be found than from one of his attorney clients, who said "Nothing my firm has ever done for my development matches the investment that Cordell's program has made in my maturation as a lawyer, leader and person."

With those kinds of accolades, I knew we were in for some valuable information!

Cordell began by saying that his presentation was designed to give young lawyers a road map to get started, and remind senior lawyers of the things that they need to be doing. He said that the managing partner of a firm that he works with wanted to know who the best candidate for coaching was in the firm - Cordell answered that the lawyers who get the most out of it have an open mind, are passionate about becoming a better lawyer, and are willing to get outside of their comfort zone.

He played a short audio clip from one of his clients, who said that she saw that a lot of her colleagues had reservations and were skeptical about Cordell's coaching. He asked them to push themselves and do things that weren't comfortable. She said she tried to repress those feelings and make a whole-hearted effort to do everything he asked them to do, even when she wasn't sure where it would lead. She threw herself into the program, and feels that's why she's so successful.

#### Four Eras of Lawyer Marketing

Cordell then talked about his four eras of lawyer marketing:

1. First era: Do good work, get a Martindale AV rating, and wait for the work to come in.
2. Second era: Unsolicited contact - sending brochures, email alerts, and other mass mail to people, regardless of whether they want to receive it.
3. Third era: Websites and branding.
4. Fourth Era: Cordell used Seth Godin to illustrate this, saying that it's not what you know, it's not who you know, it's who knows what you know. He emphasized that attorneys need to be *remarkable*, *extraordinary* and *memorable*. The market is very crowded, clients are no longer local or loyal, so lawyers have to search for ways to be more valuable to their clients.

Cordell said there is a progression to how lawyers get hired:

1. Be visible: clients have to know who you are.
2. Build your profile: you have to be credible; people have to know what you do, and that you do it well.

3. Relationships: the first two can lead to relationships. Cordell said that every matter he was ever hired to do came because of someone who was a "weak tie" relationship recommended him. These first three steps are objective, and Cordell said there is much more expansion from weak tie buzz.
4. Recommendations.
5. Client meetings.
6. Trust and Rapport: Does the client trust you? Do you have a rapport with them?
7. Getting hired.

## Planning

Cordell next went into a discussion of planning, saying that he had done this program for four law firms towards the end of 2010, and he asked them how many of them had a written business plan for 2011 with written goals. He was always surprised to find that so few lawyers have a plan.

He shared a quote from Jim Cathcart - "Most people aim at nothing in life and hit it with amazing accuracy" - to illustrate that a plan helps you to focus. Steve Jobs is a great example of the idea that "Super achievers think optimistically and plan purposely." Cordell said that the lawyers who are the most successful embrace this philosophy by thinking big, thinking optimistically, while planning almost down to every single day.

### *Why have a plan?*

Cordell said that the two most valuable resources we have are time and energy. So it's important to focus on those things that are going to bring the biggest return for the investment of time and energy. Today, there are so many potential ways to develop business, that a plan will assist you in making better choices on where to expend your efforts.

With options such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, blogging, webinars, podcasts, and more, having a plan can help narrow down where your clients are. Cordell said that he's on Twitter, but if he were still practicing construction law, he doubts that any CEO of the construction companies who were his clients would be on Twitter. He would still spend some time there, because construction associations, magazines and others are on Twitter, but he wouldn't be connecting with the CEOs of his clients there.

### *Who is your target market?*

Cordell suggested beginning the plan by asking "who is your target market?" He added that he reads a number of blogs on LexBlog, and is regularly thinking "who is this writer trying to attract? Who are they targeting this post to?" So it's important to being with your target market, and narrow this down. He said that if you market to everyone, you market to no one.

### *What do you want your target market to hire you to do? How can you become visible and credible to that target market?*

The next question to ask yourself is "What do you want your target market to hire you to do?" Then, "How can you become visible and credible to that target market? Where are they hanging out?" Cordell said that when he was practicing law, he had a column, and was able to speak at national and state construction meetings over many years. For him, this helped him to become visible and credible. For other attorneys, it will vary - it depends on what you do.

### *What associations should you be a part of?*

Next, ask yourself "What associations should you be a part of? What associations is your target market a part of?" This may be school alumni associations, local charities, industry associations, bar associations, etc.

### *Who will be your referral sources?*

Cordell said to ask yourself "Who will be your referral sources?" Using the example of the construction industry, this would be executives of those associations, but also bankers, insurance agents, accountants, equipment dealers and others. Include this list in your plan in order to be focused on spending time with those referral sources.

Showing a graphic, Cordell said he goes from goals to hours, and from hours to goals - to do this, figure out how many hours to spend on business development, and then figure out how your going to spend it. He emphasized that putting this down on paper is key, and said that he has a template for a business plan, which Kevin O'Keefe will be sharing as part of his blog (link to follow when available).

This template is all-encompassing and includes everything that Cordell could think of for attorneys to do with non-billable time to use as a starting point for their own planning.

When he's coaching, Cordell said he'll ask his client to write down ten things that they could spend their time on. Then he'll ask them if they could only do one of those things, what would it be and why. This enables the client to focus their time and attention.

As to how much time to spend on business development, Cordell suggested 500 hours of nonbillable time a year - this breaks down to 100 administrative, 300 client development and 100 personal development.

Larry Bodine later asked whether ten hours a week is really reasonable for a busy lawyer to spend on business development. Cordell said that he didn't spend two hours a day on it - mostly it was 6-9am on Saturday and Sunday mornings, while his daughter was still asleep. He added that when he was working on something billable, he was also looking at how he could use that to help other people - he was frequently re-purposing. Cordell said that 10 hours was the average over a year - when he was in trial, he would be spending

12+ hours a day on that, and might spend only 20 minutes on client development. But after the trial was over, he might spend a whole day of nonbillable time visiting a client. He agreed that sometimes less is more, as long as the person is focused.

### *Divide Your Time*

Once you have your plan, Cordell said it's necessary to divide it - identify how much time will be spent on profile building, on relationship building? The internet has given us new tools, but even with these, it's more important than ever to get out from behind your computer and visit your clients in person.

### *Goals*

Look at your goals and figure out why they're important. Cordell said that if he doesn't have a good answer to why he wants to accomplish something, he's far less likely to do it. So it's essential to figure out why it's important and meaningful. If you don't have a good answer, it's not a particularly great goal.

### *Obstacles*

Another important part of planning is looking at the challenges you'll face in achieving a particular goal and identifying who can help you to achieve them, both in and out of your law firm.

### *The Breakdown*

Cordell recommended breaking down the plan into 90-day increments. He said that every time he meets with a client, they come up with a game plan for the next 90 days. Breaking it down into these smaller parts makes it more likely you'll actually do it.

Then, take it one step further and plan each week. Sit down and ask yourself (maybe on a Sunday), what am I doing, how long will it take, when am I doing it? Then put this on the calendar, just as if you were scheduling a meeting with a client.

Cordell showed a pie chart of time in an average week;

- 56 hours of sleep
- 40 hours case work
- 62 hours of free time
- 10 nonbillable work hours

He said that how you spend your free time determines the quality of your life. And how you spend the 10 nonbillable works hours determines the quality of your career.

### *Have a "fitness partner"*

Cordell recommended getting a "fitness partner" who you're accountable to. He played an audio clip from Keith McMurdy, who said you get the most out of coaching when you're accountable. He said he was initially skeptical of this, and thought he didn't need to be told these things because of his level of experience. But he found that having someone to check in with, having fellow team members was very stimulating for him, because he felt like he had someone to answer to.

## **Building Visibility and Credibility**

Cordell moved on to talk about how attorneys can build visibility and credibility:

- **Website bio:** Are you updating it? Your bio needs to be updated, and have the ability for visitors to download articles you've written, presentations you've done, etc. Cordell said that clients will look at your website bio as a starting point. So if it's not up to date, you're missing an opportunity.
- **Connect:** If you're a connector, you should be active in the community, never eating alone, constantly meeting people.
- **Writing and speaking:** For this, Cordell had three main points to increase your visibility and credibility to the greatest number of weak ties:

1. *Valuable Content:* He said he's often asked where you can find this. On his Google page, he has a news page with the Wall Street Journal, CNN Small Business, Business Week Small Business, etc. He peruses these looking for business articles that will impact clients from a legal standpoint in the future. The idea is to try to see the future of what's going to be important to clients - that's where you'll find valuable content.

Cordell said when you're writing, if it's not "sticking" then it's not worth writing. To be sticky, you must address clients' problems, opportunities, internal and external changes. When writing a post, you must be able to answer why a client will care about it, or it's not worth spending your time on.

2. *Presented/Written Well:* Once you've found valuable content by reading what clients are reading, and what they're not reading, and seeing what other people don't see - then present and write it well. Cordell warned that clients will read the headline for your blog posts and then decide whether to read further, so you only have a short amount of time to connect with them. If you write well, clients will read or listen to you.

3.. *Wide distribution*: In the current environment with the internet, blogging, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other social media tools, there has never been such great opportunity for wider distribution. Cordell said that he'd posted a blog a couple of weeks ago, and it took him five seconds to put it in a group on LinkedIn. Another member of the group commented on it, and now he's up to 37 comments on that particular post - 36 or 37 people have read his material who had never seen what he'd written before.

Another audience member asked about the best ways to use LinkedIn to foster those weak tie relationships, and build relationships in business. Cordell answered that the most important thing is to have a well-done profile, including a photo. He said that he's also enjoyed being a part of the groups on LinkedIn, where he's had the opportunity to meet people from all over the country who are experts in client development for law firms.

Cordell talked a little bit about writing blog posts - he said that when he wrote his monthly column, if something were to happen today, it wouldn't be published for a few months. But if he's blogging, he can write about it and publish it today. Blogging has forced him to be a better writer, to care about the things that his clients care about - his antenna is always up looking for things that his clients will find valuable.

He emphasized that in-house lawyers are looking at blogs, and judging whether a lawyer is right for them in part because of what they're writing. He showed the audience a picture of the [ABA journal post](#) and [Kevin O'Keefe's post](#) which illustrate that in-house counsel are increasingly using blogs in making hiring decisions.

Cordell said that he's also a believer in writing guides and e-books. He said that when he was a lawyer, he used to write far longer and more in-depth guides than he would today - today's in-house counsel want something quick, no more than 10-12 pages. If it's an e-book, have some visuals. Make it easy for the client to get through - you can always link to more in-depth detail in the guide.

*Speaking:*

In terms of speaking, Cordell said that when he goes to hear lawyers speak, he always hopes they're getting better. Unfortunately, generally speaking, they need a lot of work - they have too many slides, and too many words on the slides. They don't realize how people receive information. Additionally, they need to practice presenting - body language, eye contact, and tone of voice are really important.

He suggested being like Tina Turner in Wembley Stadium - start strong, finish strong, and make them want an encore.

Cordell said that in the first 90 seconds, the audience will decide if they're going to pay attention - they want to know what's in it for them. Some common presentation mistakes include:

- Slides: too many, with too many words. The audience will fall asleep reading words off of slides. The speaker loses their attention because they're trying to read and digest the information on the slide instead of listening.
- Closing by asking "Are there any questions?" Cordell recommends saying instead, "Before I conclude, are there any questions?" Then you can control the conclusion, have a call to action and offer a takeaway.
- Not thinking outside the box: Cordell recommends re-purposing materials, saying that when he does a live presentation, it becomes a webinar and vice versa. He puts his materials up on slide share - this lends itself well to the wide distribution opportunity that Cordell mentioned earlier in his presentation.

An audience member asked whether in-house counsel are looking for blogs because of immediate needs, background information, or both. Cordell answered that it's both - we know that they're doing Google searches. He used the example of a client firm who is well known in a particular area of law. But when they went to Google and searched for that, they weren't listed on the first ten pages of results.

Cordell convinced them to start a blog, and now they're the second listing on the page, right after Wikipedia. Even those who aren't in-house lawyers are searching topics and want blogs to come up when the search results are listed.

### **Building Relationships**

As you know, this is one of my favorite topics - Cordell said that when he was practicing law, he used to like to say that he wanted his friends to be his clients and his clients to be his friends - it's all about relationship building.

Cordell quipped that in football, the first Green Bay Packers Superbowl was won by blocking and tackling. And the most recent Green Bay Packers Superbowl was won by blocking and tackling - the only thing that's changed is the playbook. It's the same for lawyers - it's all about relationship-building, and just the playbook has changed.

Clients want their lawyers to understand their business, their industry, and them. Cordell said that the first client audio testimonial he played for us was from a client who did so well with the business development program that one of her clients wanted her to come in-house. She said "We are looking for counsel that knows our industry, our business, and is an expert in the niche area we need help in. Cost is an afterthought."

You can demonstrate this knowledge by blogging, through podcasts, webcasts, etc.

Cordell looked at the universe of legal work and estimates that 30% is commodity work, where low price determines who is hired, 10% is "bet the company" work, where the best are hired, and 60% is where the real opportunity lies - this is where relationship-building comes into play.

He believes clients hire lawyers over law firms. Law firms are focused on creating teams, and that's great, but many times, clients come to a firm because of a particular lawyer at that firm. They screen them based on reputation (the first four steps he mentioned earlier), but they hire them based on trust and rapport. They make a judgment and it's subjective whether you're the right lawyer to hire for a matter.

Cordell said that lawyers need to learn how to ask questions - he admitted this is a weakness of his, saying that he has seven or eight books just dedicated to asking questions. He suggested that if you can only buy one, the best is [SPIN Selling](#) - SPIN stands for Situation, Problem, Implication, Need. When you do these things when interviewing a client, you're in a position to ask for the business in a positive way.

Another of Cordell's favorite books is [The Trusted Advisor](#). The formula in this book is that Trust is Credibility plus Reliability plus Intimacy, divided by Self Orientation. He said that in talking to you, clients get a sense of whether you're in this for them, or for yourself.

He said that one of the things that his firm did to show their clients that it was all about them was to create client service goals. They interviewed their clients to find out what they thought was important from a service standpoint - Cordell said that the quality of work is already expected. They were told:

- Responsiveness
- Expectations
- Industry knowledge and experience.

### *In Conclusion...*

Cordell left the audience with some action items for how to get started:

1. Prepare some kind of plan. Even if it's nothing more than listing ten things you can do, and rating them.
2. Come up with a fitness partner to become accountable.
3. Break down action items into 90 days, and plan next week.
4. Look at your target market and decide how you can become trusted and credible. Identify how you can build relationships.

Cordell said that starting somewhere will enable you to achieve client development and success in 2011 and beyond.

Kevin asked a final question, saying that a lot of managing partners and leaders who are pro-social media for building relationships are getting a lot of push back and questions from the top. He asked Cordell to comment on how this can be addressed, and how we can encourage the use of social media.

Cordell answered that law firm leaders want proof - lawyers have been trained to prove something. He used the example of Kevin O'Neil who got tremendous push back when he wanted to start his podcasts and radio show. Now, the leaders of his firm want to be interviewed on his show because they've seen his volume of business substantially increase.

One of the firms that he coaches has 29 blogs on the LexBlog network - they're so prolific that people are blogging about the fact that they're blogging. They're having record years because of the visibility and credibility of the lawyers who are reaching out to weak tie relationships. He added that those of us on Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, etc. can tell stories about people we've met solely through social media relationships.

He finished up by quoting Robert Kennedy, who said "Only those who dare to fail greatly achieve greatly." It's important to be willing to take a chance, to get outside the box, to do something that other firms or lawyers are not doing. Not everything you do will be a huge success, but be willing to try things and see if clients find them valuable. Because it's all about clients, not about you.

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