

[Any lawyer can be successful when everything goes as planned](#)

Many years ago, I tried a case for a very difficult client. You may know the type of client:

- They tell you they want a document on Monday, forcing you to work all weekend and then on Monday you find out they won't look at it until Wednesday.
- They think they know more about law than you do, and want to tell you how to handle their matter.
- They want your advice, but only if it agrees with their preconceived opinion.
- They want to argue over something in each invoice you send them.

If you are a regular reader, you have met [Leila Rafi](#), a [McCarthy Tétrault](#) Toronto Business Law Partner. She has written three guest posts here: [Want to be More Focused about Your Contacts? Don't just say: "Thank You"](#) and [One Lawyer's Ideas Gained from an Inspiring Video Clip](#).



Recently, when she was having a particularly challenging weekend of work, she shared this quote with me.

Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm. [Publilius Syrus](#)

I asked Leila to share her thoughts on what she and all of us can learn from the quote. Here are her thoughts.

This quote was recently given to me by a client who is also a friend and it resonated.

Why?

Firstly, it reminded me of a book I recently completed: [How Will You Measure Your Life?](#) by [Clayton Christensen](#). In the book, he describes how many times, management of a company hires an individual with an impressive CV but questions what makes the CV impressive (put another way, what makes the 'right stuff' on a CV?).

A senior executive who has always managed a successful company does not have the same ability to maneuver through struggles and identify risk (and the related repercussions of a failure to identify risk) the same way someone who managed a start-up does. It is the experience one gathers in rocky times that really makes a person and builds strength and character.

In our society, pedigree and prestige stand ahead of cool hard experience and this results in many capable individuals losing opportunities. This is not to say that senior executives have never had experiences where they faced struggles or adversity but rather, it shines the light on who does and doesn't in the hiring process.

The quote also reminded me of the challenge we face as lawyers when we are helping a challenging or difficult client, or when we are across the table from another lawyer making resolution of the matter difficult. Any lawyer can be successful when the matter goes smoothly, and the client and other party are agreeable. It takes a special lawyer to deal with a difficult matter, a difficult client or a difficult lawyer representing the other side of a deal.

A lawyer's ability to navigate unreasonable demands and deadlines and structure advice in a way that makes a difficult client accept it, rather than dismiss it, are noteworthy accomplishments. How one manages people when faced with fundamental challenges is what distinguishes successful people. If you don't believe me, read about Publilius.

I like the quote that Leila shared. Here is another one I also like:

The truth is that our finest moments, more often than not, occur precisely when we are uncomfortable, when we're not feeling happy or fulfilled, when we're struggling and searching. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers. [M. Scott Peck](#), *The Road Less Traveled*

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.