

[Client Development: How Teaching High School Sunday School Helped Me](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on July 13th, 2015

You are likely wondering how in the world teaching High School Sunday School could possibly help me with client development. I understand. When I started back in 1976, I had no idea how that teaching might help me.

If you are a regular reader you likely remember that, after four years as an Air Force JAG, in July 1976, Nancy and I showed up in our AMC Gremlin (ugliest car ever) in Roanoke, Virginia where I began my career in a law firm.

Shortly thereafter, Nancy and I joined the [Second Presbyterian Church](#). I am not positive why we picked Second Presbyterian, but I am fairly certain is because we loved the assistant minister, Frank Mayes, who was also a neighbor.



When I researched while writing this, I discovered that Frank has passed away. Here is an article with a photo: [In Memory of Frank Mayes](#). And, here is an article written by a Second Presbyterian Church member: [“Remembering Frank Mayes”](#) It begins with this:

Have you ever considered how many people you come in contact with during a lifetime? It could be in the millions but a more interesting question is how many, excluding family, have been life-benders or life-menders for us. That number would be very small. You can think of teachers, mentors, physicians, and ministers, among many others. A few of these touch our lives in an unforgettable fashion, but when such a person dies, there remains the influence they had on us.

Frank was that kind of guy. He reached Nancy and me because he made us feel he was like us: Just an ordinary guy who decided to become a Presbyterian minister. Six years later when Jill was born prematurely and Nancy struggled to recover, Frank Mayes was there with us every step of the way.

About two weeks after we started going to church at Second Presbyterian, the Director of Christian Education approached us and asked if we would take charge of the senior high youth group and teach high school Sunday School. We both agreed to be youth group leaders and I agreed to teach Sunday School.

To be honest, I agreed in part because of Frank Mayes. I told him that what I knew about the Bible I could put in the thimble. He said to go ahead anyway because teaching would force me to learn more.

So, how did teaching Sunday School for 20 years (11 in Roanoke and 9 in Richmond) help with my client development? It helped me in so many different ways.

1. **Persuasion:** I am not sure if I ever taught a high school student who actually wanted to come to Sunday School. Some came because their parents made them. Many could choose whether to come or not. Most clients would prefer to never have to hire a lawyer and when they are forced to, they have many choices.
2. **The importance of Listening:** In order to persuade, I had to build a **trust based relationship**, which meant I had to actively listen. The same is true with clients. To build a trust based relationship you have to actively listen.
3. **Homework and Preparation:** I can't begin to tell you how many hours I spent reading the Bible and also reading various interpretations of the Bible passages. When you meet with a client, they expect you to have done your homework and prepared.
4. **Communication Skills:** I had one hour a week to connect with a reluctant group and make a subject they had already decided would be boring, more interesting. I'm not sure when started to do it, but I started creating VHS clips and finding a way to tie the video to the the biblical passage. I also remember a controversial subject was when we took the high school students

in 1985 to see [The Breakfast Club](#), and then discussed the movie. Clients expect you to be able to communicate your ideas both clearly and concisely.

The kids I taught in Roanoke from 1976 to 1987, are now between 46 and 57 years old. I haven't seen many of them since Nancy and I moved from Roanoke.

I recently made a presentation as part of a panel, which featured a lawyer who I had taught at Second Presbyterian when he grew up in Roanoke. He practices law in Jacksonville, FL now. That brought back many wonderful memories.

Are you doing something in your church or community, that is making you better at building long lasting, trust based relationships?

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