

[Being Number 1, Career Dips and Quitting](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on June 9th, 2015

Did you watch the race? Nancy and I had a dinner reservation for our 45th anniversary, but we couldn't leave until we saw the [Belmont Stakes](#).

I had seen [Secretariat](#), [Seattle Slew](#) and [Affirmed](#) win the triple crown, but like many I wondered if I would ever see a triple crown winner again. I suspect that for less than three minutes, everyone in America came together cheering for American Pharaoh.

So, thank you to American Pharaoh. See: [American Pharaoh Wins Belmont Stakes and Triple Crown](#) for an article about the win.

[American Pharaoh wins the Triple Crown - 2015 Belmont Stakes \(G1\)](#)



As I watched the pre-race and the race, I wondered if thoroughbred horses get nervous before a big race. American Pharaoh looked pretty calm and collected, so maybe not.

I did some research and found: [Stable Goats Help Calm Skittish Thoroughbreds](#).

Not that they have much of a choice, but do those horses ever want to just quit? Owners get to make that choice and that is currently a topic for American Pharoah. [After American Pharoah's Runaway, Pondering Whether to Quit While Ahead](#).

Would it surprise you to know that I thought of quitting a few times in my career?

The first time was when I was a first year law student. During the first semester I worked very hard and had no idea how I was doing. I thought to myself: "Who needs this?" I'll just quit law school and fulfill my active duty commitment to the Air Force.

Well, I didn't quit and at the end of the first semester I was third in my class, which is where I finished when I graduated.

In 1980 I tried a case in West Virginia. One issue in the case was the reasonable cost of completing a construction project. I argued \$130,000. The contractor's lawyer argued \$30,000. We had jury interrogatories with the specific question: "What was the reasonable cost to complete the project?" The jury answered: "0."

I was devastated. I asked the judge to send the jury back. After all, the amount had to be somewhere between \$30,000 and \$130,000. He refused. On my way back home, I thought to myself that maybe I was not cut out for this stuff. But, what else could I do. So, I stuck with it again.

Several years ago Seth Godin wrote a 78 page book: *The Dip: A Little Book That Teaches When to Quit (and When to Stick)*. I just looked and you can get it on your Kindle.



I liked it because it focuses on the importance of being number one—"the go to person" in your field. Godin says that to be a superstar it helps if your niche has a steep dip—the barrier between those who try and those who succeed.

He points to Microsoft as creating a dip so deep and wide that its competitors quit before catching up. He also points to Apple which at the time had done the same for iTunes and the iPod. Fast forward and I think Apple has done the same with the iPad.

I believe I created a steep dip with my writing and speaking on transportation construction. No other lawyer created the content I created or made the number of presentations to highway contractors that I did.

Godin notes that every project starts out to be exciting. Later there is a dip.

Less successful people quit or decide it is OK to be average. Many successful people quit fast, quit often, and quit without guilt based on the priorities in their life. They commit to beating the right dips for the right reasons. They actually seek out dips and realize the bigger the dip, the greater the reward for getting through it.

One of the questions Seth Godin is frequently asked is how do you know when it is time to quit. He suggests that it is time to quit when you realize you have been settling for mediocrity or when you see no measurable improvement and no way to change how you measure it.

Seth Godin says the worst time to quit is when the pain is the greatest.

Thankfully, I never quit when the pain was the greatest. But, I did quit after I had my most successful year practicing law. I decided at that point I wanted to start over and get that feeling of excitement again. Now after coaching lawyers for 10 years, business is very slow and I am stuck in that “dip” again.

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.