

[When Hiring Laterals: Get the Right Lawyers on the Bus](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on December 31th, 2012

A couple of months ago the Wall Street Journal Law Blog posted: [Report: Expect More Lateral Hires](#). As the blog reported:

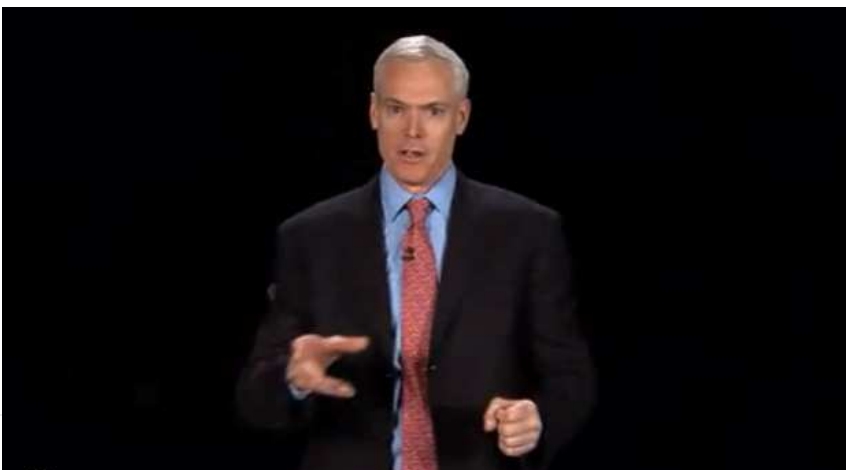
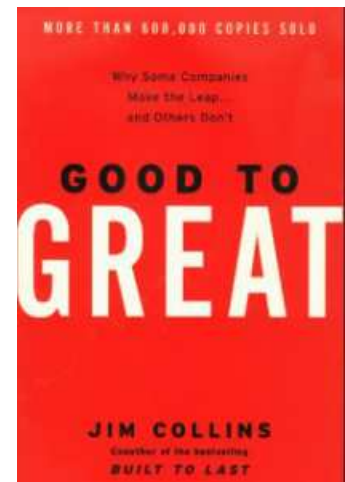
The findings are surprising, given that only 28% of respondents said that hiring laterals had been “very effective” over the past five years, and 10% said the practice was either neutral or negative.

Several years ago when I was our construction law practice group leader, I developed a vision and strategic plan focused on building a national construction law practice. In the plan I outlined where we would add lateral partners and the number. Then, I went out and searched for the lateral partners. In some cases I selected well, but in others, including right here in Dallas, I picked the wrong laterals.

I later learned I had made a big mistake. I was focused on “what” before I focused on “who.” I believe law firms expanding make that mistake frequently.

In his well known book, [Good to Great](#), [Jim Collins](#) said his research team expected to find that good-to-great leaders would begin with vision and strategy. Instead the researchers discovered the leaders:

first got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats—and then they figured out where to drive it. Watch this: [First who, then what](#)



You are likely wondering how you determine the right people for your firm. I read the HBR blog: [Who Are the “Right” People to Invite on Your Bus? Tammy Erickson](#) suggests:

the right people are the ones who are predisposed to like what you realistically and consistently offer.

So, if you are building your firm by adding lateral partners, don't just add them to increase revenue. Instead, make sure to select the lawyers who are self-motivated and striving to become the best they can be. Your firm or practice group could have the best vision and strategy in the country, but it won't matter if you select lateral partners who are not the right ones for your firm.

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.