

[How One Lawyer Greatly Enriched Her Law Practice and Pursued a Dream](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on May 22nd, 2014

A few years ago I coached [Ana Badour](#), a Toronto based [McCarthy Tétrault](#) Financial Services partner. I loved coaching Ana because of her strong desire to learn.

During the time we worked together, the firm started its [Canadian M&A Perspectives Blog](#) and Ana was a major contributor. I frequently bragged about Ana's blog posts because I found them easy to understand and valuable. To get the idea, take a look at her post: [A Graceful Exit](#). I like how she gives 5 main items that should be considered in the process of paying out an existing credit facility.

Last fall, Ana went back to school to pursue an LL.M. She is now completing her work and I asked her to share with you how what she learned will enable her to be more valuable to clients. It takes a special lawyer to put aside her career for a year to become a better lawyer and it takes a special law firm to encourage her to do it.



There are some dreams that stay with you, nagging at you in the back of your mind. Mine had always to go back to school and complete my LL.M. However, with every year of experience accumulated practicing law, stepping aside from my existing legal

practice to pursue that dream felt more and more difficult. The fear of falling behind by stepping away from the traditional career path, the financial cost of foregoing a year of salary, the impact on my family life and the comfort of the status quo were powerful motivators against pursuing that path.

However, in the words of Sheryl Sandberg, “careers are a jungle gym, not a ladder” and the more rewarding career path may not always be linear. With that view in mind, after more than 10 years in private practice as a transactional banking lawyer, I decided to bite the bullet and move from Toronto to Boston to complete a specialized LL.M. in Banking and Financial Law at Boston University.

This program would provide me with in-depth knowledge of regulatory banking law, an area I was interested in moving into, and to gain a solid understanding of the legislative changes and ongoing policy issues arising out of the financial crisis, many of which had cross-border impact into Canada. When I announced to colleagues and clients that I would be taking a temporary leave from my firm to complete this program, the reaction was overwhelmingly positive. I was particularly surprised by the number of other lawyers, some of whom were very senior and established practitioners, who told me they had the same dream, but never pursued it and continued to see it as a lost opportunity.

Going back to school was more challenging than I expected, but also in many ways more rewarding. I had to start anew and prove myself to a new peer group on my own without the team support that I was so used to relying on as a partner in the firm environment. I certainly missed the help of associates and students when I had to spend hours Bluebook-ing legal footnotes!

The process of starting over humbled me in many ways. I was constantly impressed by the depth and breadth of knowledge of my classmates, who originated from a total of 29 different countries. After having practiced in the Canadian financial services legal community, a relatively small legal community, I was very much enriched by having the opportunity to work and study alongside a broad range of regulators, in-house

counsel, consultants and other lawyers from all over the world, and to learn from immensely talented and diverse faculty. I also had the privilege of attending and assisting with a conference co-hosted by the university for the 150th anniversary of the Office of the Comptroller of Currency featuring speakers that included Christopher Dodd, Barney Frank and Sheila Bair, among others.

Applying the knowledge I acquired in my studies to my existing legal practice, I find that I now see many new opportunities that I had previously failed to see. Even perusing the syllabus for certain classes and seeing how such a class was organized opened my eyes to links between different practice areas that I had not seen before. Perspectives offered by regulators in the class challenged my biases as a private practitioner.

As I prepare to return to private practice, I emerge from the experience greatly changed and enriched. Even as an established lawyer, I feel that I grew exponentially during the short 10-month period that I was back in school. I see the world of banking law and banking itself under a very different lens than I did before, a much wider lens informed by a more global perspective and a much more solid grounding in the policy considerations and theory behind banking law. I very much look forward to applying this new outlook and seeing where it takes my practice going forward.

Just think how Ana's work over the last 10 months will benefit her firm and its clients. As she said, she is able to see links between different practice areas she had not seen before. She now has a global perspective she did not have before and better understands the policy considerations behind banking law. I am also sure she has made lifetime friends from the US and countries around the world. I would love to be in Toronto Ana's first day back. I am sure she will have many great stories to share with her colleagues.

Cordell Parvin Blog

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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.