

[Client Development Coaching: Give Me Lawyers with a Burning Desire to Get Better](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on September 24th, 2014

Do you know which lawyers in your firm will get the most out of client development or career coaching? After coaching well over 1000 lawyers in the US and Canada, I can usually tell after one meeting with the lawyers.

Suppose for a moment I asked your lawyers for their reaction to the following: “Client Development has never been more difficult than it is today.” I would likely be able to tell from their response whether they will be a good candidate for Client Development Coaching.

Fixed or Learning Mindset

Why? Put simply, it might tell me if your lawyers have a fixed mindset: “Lawyers either have the ability to get business or do not have the ability to get business,” or a learning mindset: “I can learn to get better at client development.”

Lawyers with a fixed mindset believe that effort is for those who are not talented. Their greatest fear is really trying hard to develop business and failing at it. As result, they will not make the effort to learn how to do client development and will give up if they do not have immediate success.

Lawyers with a learning mindset will keep striving to learn more and get better even if they were fairly successful when they started the coaching program.

Do You Have Lawyers Like This One?

When I told one of the lawyers I coach that client development has never been more difficult, her response was:

That’s fantastic because very few lawyers will be willing to pay the price to really get good at it. I plan to be one of those lawyers who will pay the price.



A Law Firm Management Committee Question

Several years ago, I met with a large well known law firm management committee about my client development coaching program. Near the end of the meeting, a senior partner asked me to describe the ideal candidate for my coaching program. I quickly replied: "Tiger Woods."

He said: "Tiger Woods doesn't need a coach." I told the group: "Leave aside that Tiger Woods actually has a coach, I am referring to his desire to get better rather than his great talent."

Why I Chose Tiger Woods as the Example

At the time I had watched Ed Bradley interview Tiger Woods. During the interview Bradley asked why when Tiger was the number one golfer in the world, he changed his swing. Tiger responded: "To get better."

Bradley reminded Tiger that he was doing pretty well with the old swing. Tiger once again said he knew he could get better. Bradley then pointed out that Tiger changed his swing a second time and asked why. By now anyone could guess that Tiger answered once again "to get better."

Even in this short interview on the Golf Channel, Tiger Woods talked about working every day "to get better."

Tiger Woods on Working to Get Better



If you have even the slightest interest in golf, you have watched the dramatic shot on the 16th hole at the Masters. That is the shot Nike loves because the “swoosh” on the golf ball was visible for a full two seconds before the ball rolled in and CBS announcer Verne Lundquist exclaimed: “In your life have you ever seen anything like that.”

Tiger Woods - The Masters 16th hole 2005

Tiger Woods - The Masters 16th hole 2005



Lessons from Stanford Professor Dr. Carol Dweck

On July 6, 2008 the New York Times published an article titled: [If You're Open to Growth, You Tend to Grow](#).

The writer describes three decades of research done by Stanford psychologist, [Carol Dweck](#) on why some people reach their creative potential in business while equally talented others do not. Dweck believes it is how people think about intelligence and talent. Those who believe their own abilities can expand (get better) over time. They “really push, stretch, confront their own mistakes and learn from them.”

The writer concludes that, while talent is important, people with the growth mind-set tend to demonstrate the kind of perseverance and resilience required to convert life's setbacks into future successes.

If you are a regular reader you know I frequently recommend Carol Dweck's book: [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#). Her studies are amazing. You can also find many important articles on her website [Mindset](#).

In the first chapter she refers to a study she did early in her career. She brought grade school children in one at a time and gave them a series of puzzles to solve, each one getting increasingly more difficult.

She watched the reactions of the students and saw something she never expected. One ten year old boy when confronted with hard puzzles, rubbed his hands together, smacked his lips, and cried out: “I love a challenge.”

Others with growth mindsets had similar reactions. They did not see themselves as failing. They believed they were learning and getting smarter. Those young children with fixed mindsets believed they could not learn to do the tough puzzles and didn’t try to do them.

So, give me the lawyers in your firm who have a burning desire to get better. You may not think some of those lawyers need coaching, but I can assure you they will get the most out of it, because they will put the most into it.

Even lawyers for whom client development is anything but natural get a lot out of the coaching if they have the learning mindset. After all, there is great energy around trying to get better.

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.