



THE NEW ELLIS GROUP

Monday Monday

Connecting the Dots with Karen Kaplowitz



*Helping you create and reinforce the habits of successful career building,
gleaned from my work as a business development strategist, trainer and coach*

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Business Development: Not a Confidence Game. Lack of confidence holds back a lot of people from implementing their otherwise well-conceived business development plans. If you assume that successful rainmakers have more confidence than you do or you have refrained from communicating with potential clients until you feel more confident, your focus is in the wrong place. Clients are not sizing you up based on your confidence. More often, they are evaluating whether you have the capacity to listen to them with a sincere concern and understanding of their needs. Clients want answers to questions which relate to whether their needs will be met, like these:

- How good is your overall track record?
- Have you handled similar problems?
- Have you gotten good results on a predictable cost basis?
- Is the process of working with you easy?
- Do you come recommended by a trusted source?
- Is your “brand” good enough that if they pick you and the result is poor, their choice won’t be second-guessed?

Instead of concentrating on what you don’t have, the best preparation for a discussion with a client or potential client is to be aware of what you do have to offer in these areas. Be ready to weave into the conversation examples of your success or your firm’s success in similar situations. Have the names of clients who would be willing to vouch for you to a prospective client. Most critically, be prepared to ask the questions that will help you discover which factors are most important to the client’s selection process.

Example: You have served on a non-profit board with the general counsel of a significant company for two years. You interact regularly with her on a board committee and get good feedback from her on your advice to the group. You have held off trying to “pitch” her for business because you assume that you are too junior to be considered seriously. Other lawyers in your firm are chomping at the bit for you to help them get access to the general counsel but that does not feel comfortable either.

One day you and the general counsel arrive at a board meeting early and sit down for coffee. She shares with you that she nearly missed the meeting because of a new lawsuit against her company. You politely ask the nature of the suit, the severity of the problem and the scope of the potential risk to the company. You ask deft questions because you have handled a similar matter. When your questions confirm that the lawsuit is akin to one your firm just concluded successfully, you suggest introducing the general counsel to the team of lawyers who handled the matter. You also offer to call your colleagues on the spot to set up a meeting, if the general counsel considers the situation urgent. Despite your lack of confidence and unease, you have opened a significant window of opportunity for your firm.

Are you letting misplaced attention to your own feelings of ease or lack of ease about business development get in the way of listening for and seizing new opportunities?

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