



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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Achieving Peer Status. The easiest starting point from which to build a professional relationship is as a peer, a person of equal standing with your clients or prospective clients, whether internal or external. Everything is easier as a peer; your ideas are more readily accepted and your schedule is more likely to be respected. By their nature, law firms tend to be less hierarchical than most corporate environments however there are also strategies you can employ to accelerate the process of being perceived and treated as a peer. To achieve peer status, consider these approaches:

- Be prepared in group discussions to offer your ideas and stand up for them.
- Act respectfully but do not defer to others just because they have more seniority.
- When you propose solutions to problems, also offer to take responsibility for following through on the matters.
- Volunteer to take charge of the communications channels in any group activities.
- Act like a peer, not a subordinate.
- Get involved in activities in which you are a peer to more senior people, such as firm committees, bar committees or business or community organizations.
- Practice acting like a peer in safe environments such as with people of equivalent seniority in your firm, or among your clients.
- Seek out people to work with who are respectful of you regardless of your age, seniority, gender, race, or other characteristics.
- Model the behavior you expect from more senior people in your interactions with people who are junior to you.

Example: A transactional matter was staffed by one of the firms involved with just two lawyers, a partner and a third year associate. The partner and associate had a close working relationship in which the associate often interacted with other counsel and with the client on her own, conferring before and afterwards with the partner as appropriate to get his approval of her positions. The opposing party's counsel, a partner in another major firm, regularly acted in a condescending manner toward the associate who simply stood her ground.

On one conference call to negotiate a section of the agreement, the associate was the only lawyer from her firm on the line, along with an in house lawyer from her client, and opposing counsel. In the course of the negotiations, the associate raised an issue on which she believed opposing counsel had made a serious error which would result in disastrous tax consequences for both parties. She had come thoroughly prepared to challenge the issue and did so in a firm but constructive way. The opposing counsel was clearly embarrassed to have erred on a critical provision and grudgingly backed down. The associate's client was so impressed that he not only called the partner to report on her skill but he also insisted that she work on all of the client's subsequent transactions. The experience validated the partner's confidence in her and helped propel the associate forward in her career.

Are you taking advantage of opportunities to behave like a peer of your clients, opponents and colleagues in ways that enhance your career?