



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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Clients are the Only Thing. Do you know lawyers who were managing partners, practice group leaders, or recruiting partners who were eased out of their firms when their leadership roles ended? Firms often say they put a high value on things other than rainmaking but the way firms treat leaders who end their terms without a client following belies such representations. If you think you are safe from pressure to be a rainmaker as long as you contribute significantly in another arena, think again. To protect yourself from becoming obsolete while devoting enormous effort to firm management, consider these strategies:

- Check that you are not deluding yourself that you are excused from normal standards for business or billable hours because of your management role.
- Make an agreement with the firm that when your leadership role ends, you will have a multi-year transition period to resume your practice.
- Maintain your key client relationships at a high level even if you give up the day to day responsibility.
- Tell clients that you have entrusted their work to great lawyers, that you will keep tabs on their work and remain responsible for its quality.
- Tell other lawyers your expectations of their reports to you about significant clients. If you are not giving up the relationships, be explicit.
- Think twice about taking management responsibility that interferes with clients.

Example: When a US firm merged with a UK firm, the management committee asked one of the most respected lawyers in the firm to take on the role of managing the integration of the two firms, including moving to London and giving up day to day responsibility for client work. The lawyer concluded that taking the job full time would severely disrupt several significant client relationships in the US. Instead, she proposed that she continue some client work and share the management responsibility with another US partner whose financial services clients had a strong presence in London so he could use the time in London to extend those relationships, too. She also met with each client and her senior lieutenant to discuss the arrangements for the two years in which she agreed to co-manage the integration process, including the responsibilities she would continue in each case, her confidence in her lieutenant and their team, and her firm's commitment to hold the client harmless from costs resulting from her move.

The arrangement needed tweaking along the way. When one of her lieutenants failed to report the progress of a major matter and a problem arose, the partner did two things. She told the client that she still had confidence in her lieutenant and would not have entrusted the matter to him if she didn't, allowing the lieutenant to sort out the problem, but she also insisted on better reporting from the lieutenant going forward. At the end of two years, the system worked well enough to allow the partner to extend her stay in London for an additional year.

If you have a significant management role in your firm, is it clear that you are relieved from generating business or billing hours? Do you have a clear enough understanding of what happens when that role ends? Can you maintain important client ties to preserve your ability to resume your work as a practicing lawyer and avoid obsolescence?