



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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Counsel: Caught in the Middle. If you are a “Counsel” in your firm, does that mean you are still on an upwardly mobile track with the potential to become a partner or have you reached the end of your professional climb? Most firms in which counsel tracks are a possible route to partnership use “Counsel” designations to evaluate incoming laterals or promising senior associates before either side makes the kinds of commitments partnership entails. To insure that being “Counsel” in your firm keeps you on an upwardly mobile track, consider these strategies:

- Request clarity on the firm’s requirements to be considered for partnership, and the timing. Is there a threshold for business originations you have to hit and does that threshold have to be sustained over a period of years? When will you be considered for partnership?
- Act like you are on an upwardly mobile track. Celebrate your promotion to Counsel especially when notifying clients and prospective clients of the news.
- Model the behavior of partners in the firm including volunteering for firm administrative responsibilities and practice group leadership. Act like you have a stake in the future of the firm.
- Take advantage of any resources the firm provides to accelerate your progress, such as mentoring, coaching, challenging or high profile assignments, or temporary placement in the law department of a significant client.
- In tasteful ways, broadcast your successes in the firm. See the discussions on getting the credit you are due and being visible in these newsletters: Getting Credit Where Credit is Due (Oct 2009) , Time to be More Visible (March 2010)

To move from counsel to partner status, it is critical to have a plan and to execute on that plan. If you find along the way that you can’t meet the firm’s expectations, you may need to adjust your direction to either accept long-term counsel status or to make a move to another firm.

Example: The senior associate felt like he did not have any choice when the partner with whom he worked most closely decided to make a move to a new firm and invited him to go along. The immediate effect was that consideration for partnership was deferred for at least a year. When the senior associate came up for partnership in the new firm, he was informed that he would be made a Counsel and would be considered again in two years. The lawyer decided it was time to make a series of adjustments. He started grooming several associates to take over the work he did to support the partner he came with so he could be free to work with other partners and seek out work of his own. He asked the partner to start allocating a portion of the origination credit on all new work that came from clients he had served, even if he was not going to work on their new matters. He sought out several of the other major rainmakers in his practice group to offer to work with them. He reached out to clients with whom he had worked in the past who were not current clients to reconnect. He became more active in a professional association that allowed him to broaden his network.

If you find yourself confined to a “Counsel” role, it is not a death sentence. Are you ready to muster the planning and execution you need to move from Counsel to Partner?

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