



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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Encouraging Associates in Business Development. Although more firms are encouraging associates to participate in business development, with training, mentoring, and occasionally financial incentives, many associates still face mixed messages. While their firms make client development, or the “potential” for client development, a condition of partnership, the firms do not help associates learn the ropes. In the worst cases, associates who do bring in business find themselves competing with partners for the credit and don’t get the recognition they deserve. If you are an associate with rainmaking aspirations, consider these options:

- Tell partners you know are rainmakers that you want to learn from them by supporting their efforts with clients, prospective clients and in organizations. Then remind them periodically of your interest and find other people who can advise and help you.
- Join firm or practice group committees that are devoted to business development.
- Ask a trusted partner or firm leader to clarify the business development expectations for partnership.
- To insure you get credit for your efforts, make a record in a tasteful way of your contributions to business development initiatives. For more on this subject, [click here](#).
- If the firm does not provide associate training, meet with other like-minded associates to share ideas and opportunities and invite partners who are strong rainmakers to meet with you.
- Attend bar association programs on business development.
- Find senior lawyers to help you when you have good contacts but may not have the gravitas or experience to bring in the business on your own.

Example: After no one in their group made partner for two years, several senior associates formed a “Business Development Study Group”. They agreed to meet weekly for a brown bag lunch to pool their knowledge and contacts. They started by creating a database of law school friends and peer-level clients, with a focus on former clients who had moved to new companies and classmates who had gone in-house. They consulted the firm’s Director of Marketing who said the firm had a database for partners to designate their marketing targets and offered to screen their database against that list so they could avoid competing directly with partners. They readily agreed to focus on prospective clients who would be brand new to the firm. Once a month, they invited a partner to speak about a successful marketing initiative, preferably one in which an associate was involved. To avoid work that would not meet the firm’s criteria, they invited the head of the new matter approval committee to talk about the approval process for new clients and matters. When they attracted clients who could not pay the firm’s rates, they referred them to appreciative law school classmates in smaller firms. When the first associate in the group brought in a new client who was approved by the firm, they ordered beer and pizza and celebrated.

If you are an associate, are you taking initiative to learn critical business development skills? If you are a firm leader, are you matching the resources you provide to your stated expectations of associates?