



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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Avoiding Clients' Lateral Fatigue. Clients are showing signs of lateral fatigue as the frenzied pace of law firm mergers and lateral hiring continues. Lateral fatigue manifests itself in many ways. Clients grudgingly let laterals take existing matters to a new firm but don't send new work. Clients scrutinize bills to insure they are not paying new people to get up to speed on their matters. Clients resist laterals' efforts to introduce them to new practice groups. The challenge for laterals and law firms is to handle mergers and lateral hiring in ways which enhance and do not jeopardize client relationships. Here are some "do's" and "don'ts" to consider:

For Laterals:

- Don't tell clients you are making a move for their benefit unless you can back up the claim. Has your work been hampered by your current firm? Does the new firm fill a gap in your services?
- Don't encourage clients to move their work to your new firm unless it benefits them. [Click here to read more](#) on this subject
- Don't expect new colleagues to burden clients with requests to meet you; have lawyers find occasions when they are meeting with clients to bring along new lawyers.
- Do offer to indemnify clients from any expense resulting from a move or merger. Police your own bills and inform the client of write-offs. Make sure the new firm factors such costs into your projected revenues and profitability.

For Acquiring Law Firms:

- Do analyze existing clients' needs and verify that client relationship partners will open doors to laterals before recruiting new talent. Make integration planning part of the recruiting process.
- Do bring new laterals to targeted, existing clients with a clear message of how each new lateral will serve and enhance the firm's ability to help in specific areas of need.
- Do a rigorous analysis and discuss conflicts with affected lawyers before extending offers to laterals. Avoid surprises and difficult discussions with clients about conflict waivers.
- Do insure a smooth integration process for laterals' clients as well as the laterals themselves. Every lateral should have an integration plan and a mentor or coach who is responsible—and accountable—for insuring that the necessary integration steps take place.
- Do make sure that laterals and the firm communicate effectively with clients about the new firm, including billing, staffing, firm intranets, pricing, discounts and any other relevant policies.
- Do insure that laterals communicate with the firm about all relevant client policies, particularly billing, staffing and pricing policies. Ask for the outside counsel guidelines for each client.
- Do take the high road on all issues of conflict with laterals' former firms. Clients find it highly distasteful to be the subject of a fight between law firms.

To avoid clients' lateral fatigue, apply this litmus test to all aspects of mergers and lateral moves: will clients continue to see their lawyers as trusted advisors who put the clients' interests first? Clients' trust is hard to build and harder to recover.