



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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Finding a Better Platform—Inside Your Own Firm. A major attraction for laterals is finding a “better platform” at a new firm. In some cases, a better platform is only available somewhere else. But in many situations, lawyers can find a better platform without leaving their firm. As you consider whether your own practice would be enhanced by a better platform, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you have working relationships with lawyers in other offices of your current firm?
- Have you identified categories of lawyers in your firm who could be of help to your clients? Lawyers in other jurisdictions where your clients do business or lawyers in different practice areas in which your clients do not already use your firm?
- Do you discuss with clients where they are expanding their businesses so you can make introductions of lawyers in those geographies to them?
- Would your practice benefit from more industry knowledge? If your firm does not have industry teams, have you tried to organize one that is relevant to your clients?
- If your competitors have bigger brands than your firm in your field, can you help build the brand?
- If your partners have not been collaborative with you, can you incentivize them, by referring work to them, introducing them to clients you control or offering to share origination credit?

There is no reason for you to defer evaluation about the strength of the “platform” available to you until you consider a lateral move.

Example: In several transactions, a lawyer opposed an adversary with a similar practice. The adversary worked in the same industry but the adversary’s firm had a bigger client base. In their transactions, the lawyer had relied on other firms for environmental and regulatory issues; the adversary’s firm had its own environmental and regulatory practice groups that did the work internally. The lawyer’s clients knew—and respected—the adversary from an industry trade association in which he was active. The lawyer wondered whether he would be in a better situation to build his practice in a firm like his adversary’s and considered raising the issue.

Upon reflection, he decided to first invest some energy in bolstering his current firm’s practice. He asked the firm’s marketing professionals to help him identify lawyers in other practice groups with clients in the industry in which he worked. He then invited those lawyers to form a firm-wide industry practice group for the purpose of enhancing the firm’s brand and market share. He found a few lawyers in other practice groups and offices who were very interested and helped him start an industry team. One topic on their agenda is whether the firm needed to have environmental and regulatory capabilities. He also got advice from his clients and his adversary on becoming involved in the leadership of the legal committee of the industry trade association. He continued his relationship with his adversary and was excited to learn a year later that he had left his firm to become general counsel of a significant client. His former adversary then became his number one prospect.

Before venturing into the lateral marketplace to find a better platform, have you exhausted the possibility that you can improve the resources available in your current firm by your own initiative and solid strategic thinking?