



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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The Value of Affinity Groups. If you are trying to extend your network of potential clients, you need to know who matters. The profile of the best potential clients is clear: people who know and trust you and face the kinds of problems that you can solve. So the challenge is to find groups which will give you access to people who are likely to trust you and groups which will provide you with an opportunity for them to get to know you. Here is a list of potential affinity groups to consider:

- Alumni groups. Members often share common experiences, friends, faculty and status.
- Community groups. Members can showcase talents addressing communities' problems.
- Professional associations. Members share common purposes but also compete for attention.
- Religious groups. Members have common values and regular contact if they are observant.
- Political groups or campaigns. More common values, access to work for government entities and powerful people.
- Sports. Two types of affinity: common fan experience or activities, like golf.
- Ethnic/gender groups. Common values/experiences; common challenges can be a strong bond.
- Industry groups. Experience with common problems; clients may not want to share you with competitors.
- Charities. Like community groups, their problems allow members to showcase skills/judgment.

As you weigh the potential value of these various types of groups, consider too the amount of time they take, their cost, whether you can blend your professional identity and other purposes gracefully, and whether your membership will offend other potential clients.

Example: A lawyer who was an excellent golfer had become part of a regular group of golfers at his club. One of the members of the group was a senior executive at a major company of great interest to the lawyer. They were all serious golfers and very attentive to the quality of their games; the unspoken rule in the group was not to discuss business or politics on the golf course. The lawyer was frustrated not to have any easy entrée to discussing business with his golf friend. The lawyer had mentioned his specialty from time to time but had no sense if his golf friend had paid attention. The lawyer had flagged his friend's company with a Google alert and was following news reports on possible merger activity. The following weekend when they met to play golf, the lawyer was considering how to start a discussion about the merger when his friend took him aside. His friend said that he knew that the lawyer did antitrust work and that antitrust was an issue for his company's potential merger. But he said that he saw online that the lawyer was heavily involved in Republican politics and decided that was likely to be a barrier because the general counsel was looking for an antitrust advisor with close ties to the present administration. The lawyer explained that his firm's antitrust group included Democrats and Republicans and his friend agreed to try to make an introduction. The lawyer then went back to review the references in his bio to his Republican Party activities.

Affinity groups offer a lot of opportunities but also some risks. When you evaluate which affinity groups to join, be sure to consider both the positive and negative implications of your affiliations for potential clients.