



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*

Volume 9, Issue 17

August 10, 2015

Giving Up Fruitless Pursuits. When lawyers persist in pursuing prospective new clients even when the efforts seem fruitless, they usually give two reasons. One is that they do not want to appear to have “failed” when they have listed the prospect on a business plan or year-end self-evaluation. The other reason is that they have invested too much time and effort to let go. In many cases, people persist too long because they don’t have criteria to evaluate whether it makes sense to continue. If you are ready to assess which prospects are still viable, here are some criteria to evaluate whether continued pursuit is justified:

- Are the prospects in a position to hire you or refer work to you? If not, are they in a position to at least introduce you to the right people in their company?
- Does the company send a significant volume of legal work to outside counsel?
- Have they ever given you a signal that they will retain you?
- If the relationship is primarily social and you have struggled to transition to discussion of business, is anything likely to change to enable you to do so?
- Have you set a limit on how much effort you will invest before you are ready to move on such as the number of times you will reach out to the prospect in what period of time?
- Is there an objective milestone on the short-term horizon, like a review of approved counsel?

Example: A corporate partner enjoyed a cordial relationship with a senior person at a company which did a lot of transactions. The partner viewed the company as a potential trophy client and listed the company on a number of business plans. However, the partner knew that the company had used several other firms exclusively for many years. The senior person was always willing to get together but had never given any indication to the lawyer that he was likely to hire him. The partner decided it was time to bring the courtship to a close. He invited the senior person to lunch and told him that he understood that his company had had great experiences with their other firms and that he did not expect his friend to push the company to switch firms. The friend said that he was relieved. He said that he had always felt badly that he had not had an opportunity to work with him but that he could not justify a recommendation to change firms. But he said that they were about to divest one of their business units and that management of that unit needed its own lawyers and that he would recommend his firm. He also offered to introduce the lawyer to some other companies in the industry and invited him to be his guest at a charity event supported by many people in the industry.

If you need to refresh your prospect list, start with an honest evaluation of your current prospects using clear criteria. Give yourself permission to walk away from unlikely prospects. But don’t just give up, go away and let prospects go dormant. If instead you let prospects off the hook with the truth, you may find that new opportunities may surface.

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