



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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Building and Destroying Trust. Trust is one of the essential elements of relationships that lead to business. You are not likely to be hired by a client who does not trust you. As you meet people and get to know them, there are many opportunities, big and small, to build—or destroy—trust. To assess how well you are building trust among people you meet, consider these questions:

- When you meet people, do you often promise to take an action like sending them something, making an introduction, or calling them to have lunch? How often do you follow through?
- For phone and in person meetings, do you treat the time you are scheduled to begin as a fixed commitment or do you treat meeting times as “flexible”?
- In conversations, do you give people your full attention or are you looking over their shoulders for more promising arrivals or checking your phone for calls or email?
- When people ask you to do something, do you sometimes say yes, equivocate, or not respond at all because you are uncomfortable about saying no?

Don't just say “of course” or “of course not” to the above checkpoints. Often the best of intentions fall through the cracks due to the lack of a system to manage such commitments and actions. Have you developed a habit of noting your commitments at the time they are made? And do you have a backup, or fulfillment, system in place with an assistant to assure that you respond to people as you promised to do? If your actions do not match your words, especially in the early stages of a relationship, the relationship is doomed.

And the converse should be true too. For instance, if you require clients to deposit a retainer in your trust account a few days before a deadline to act on their behalf, going forward before you are paid is setting a bad precedent.

Example: At a trade association meeting, a lawyer met the owner of a business. In the course of their discussion, the lawyer learned that the business owner was facing a legal problem which was very similar to a matter one of her partners had handled successfully for a client of the firm. The lawyer seized the opportunity and offered to introduce the business owner to her partner and to try to provide him with materials from their earlier work. The lawyer not only promised to follow up promptly, but she even tried to reach her partner or her partner's assistant by phone to find a time the next day for a conference call or meeting.

When she got back to the office, she got a cold shoulder from her partner who did not respond to her emails or calls. When she finally tracked down her partner, she discovered that their matter had been resolved in a non-public arbitration and confidential settlement agreement. She was embarrassed and considered letting the matter drop. Instead, she called the business owner and explained that she could not follow up as she had promised because of the confidentiality of the firm's earlier work. The business owner asked whether that would prevent her from representing him. The business owner also said that he had been impressed with her initiative on his behalf, especially when they had just met for the first time. After she confirmed that there were no legal or business conflicts of interest, the business hired the firm.

Are you conveying to people that you are a highly reliable professional by doing what you say you will do and insuring to the extent possible that your promises and actions are consistent?