



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*

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Client Pressure for Law Firm Diversity. The most potent pressure on law firms to diversify clearly comes from clients. Other possible pressures don't seem to cause as much change. For example, law firms are bringing in high percentages of first year women lawyers but not retaining them. At the recent 2016 Working Mother Best Law Firms for Women awards luncheon in Chicago, Working Mother's Subha Barry noted that even among the 50 Best Law Firms for Women, women constitute 46 percent of all associates but only 20 percent of equity partners. (for more, read here: <http://bit.ly/2dNrvYO>). When women and other diverse lawyers leave law firms before they become partners, law firms lose their significant investments in training those lawyers and don't have them available to meet clients' demands for diverse teams. Law firms also do not automatically offer their clients diverse teams even when the composition of their clients has become more diverse. For example, when a Fortune 100 company recently appointed a woman as general counsel, she was surprised that one of the company's regular law firms sent an all-male team to handle a new matter. She specifically asked the firm to send a different, diverse team. When clients require that law firms provide diverse teams of lawyers, law firms ignore diversity at their peril. If you are interested in insuring that you are meeting your clients' expectations with respect to the diversity of their legal teams, here are some questions to consider:

- Does the client have guidelines requiring diversity in staffing its matters?
- Has the client specifically encouraged you to use diverse staffing on its matters?
- Is the client a member/leader of any organizations which encourage diversity on legal teams like the [Leadership Council on Legal Diversity](#)?
- Would the quality of the client's work be affected by a lack of diverse perspectives on the team?
- How diverse is the client's law department and management team?
- Has your client spoken or written about the importance of diversity?
- Have you shared information on your clients' diversity policies and preferences with practice group leaders who are handling staffing of your matters?

If your clients are serious about the diversity of their legal teams, you cannot be competitive unless you take responsibility for communicating on staffing issues within your firm.

Example: Last year, a partner was proud to have landed his firm on an approved law firm list for a large company. This year, he attended the company's annual meeting of approved law firms and broadened his network of contacts within the client's law department. He stayed in touch with his contacts in the company with relevant substantive information and arranged to do a CLE program for the law department at which he met more lawyers. Nonetheless, he was disappointed not to receive any major assignments from the company. He finally asked his main contact at the company whether there was a problem. His contact explained that the meatiest assignments were coming out of one unit of the law department which was headed by a woman lawyer. He said that the only clue that he could offer was that the woman had commented after the CLE program that she was surprised that the only lawyers from his firm that he had brought to the annual meeting or the CLE program were men. The partner urged his contact to help him stay on the approved law firm list for another year and assured his contact that he would diversify his team going forward.

Are you doing what it takes to promote diversity routinely in your law firm particularly in connection with staffing of matters for clients who have stated diversity policies? When your clients' leadership is itself diverse, are you sensitive to presenting a legal team which reflects comparable diversity? Can you afford not to?