



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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The Role of Self Advocacy to Address Gender and Racial Pay Disparity. Major, Lindsey & Africa's 2016 survey on partner compensation revealed a dramatic, 44 percent disparity between the compensation of male and female partners. Average compensation was \$949,000 for male partners and \$659,000 for female partners. The 10 percent disparity between white and black partners was less stark. Average compensation was \$876,000 for white partners and \$797,000 for black partners. But the black partners had higher average originations than the white partners and still had a 10 percent compensation shortfall on average. Clearly law firm leaders have a responsibility to address whether there are gender or racial compensation disparities which need to be reviewed. Self-advocacy by individual partners is another option. Here are some questions to consider as you prepare to advocate for yourself in 2017:

- Have you taken full advantage of the opportunities in your firm's system to describe your accomplishments? For example, when you prepared prior yearend self-evaluations, did you take the time to draft a submission like you would a client filing? Did you ask a trusted advisor in the firm to review your submission before finalizing it?
- If you are a new partner because of promotion or a lateral move, will you seek out guidance on what is expected in yearend self-evaluations?
- Before your next review, will you gather all available data such as originations, billable hours, and working attorney receipts and compare yourself to peers in the firm?
- Are you prepared to discuss in detail any origination credits which you consider unfair?
- Have you sought information about compensation in other firms from recruiters or friends?
- If you are prone to understatement or uncomfortable about self-promotion, have you found mentors to help overcome your reluctance? If your firm offers training, have you taken it?
- Are you prepared to ask questions at your review about the current compensation decisions and your options such as bonuses if you do better than expected this year?
- Do you know the firm's process, if any, for appealing compensation decisions if you are unhappy or uncertain?

It is important to be culturally appropriate in self-advocacy, but it is essential to remember that self-promotion is often equivalent to self-preservation.

Example: A woman associate was a key part of a client team for several years. She did not receive any specific credit for her role in maintaining the client relationship because her firm did not assign origination credit to associates. She assumed that if she became a partner, she would begin to receive some credit. To her surprise, when she became a partner, she was taken off that client team and told that her partner rates would be too high for the client. Her work was assigned to a different associate. She considered whether to try to move to another firm and compete for the client's work since she had enjoyed a close relationship with the client for many years. She decided to stay put for the time being but maintained her relationship with the client. When she heard that the client was facing a new matter like one she had handled successfully, she advocated within the firm and with the client to be the lead lawyer on the matter. She hoped to receive a share of the origination credit for the new matter. Because she did not, she is reviewing her options including a discussion with her practice group leader and, reluctantly, a move to another law firm if the firm does not treat her compensation fairly.

Even though the subject of gender and racial pay equity is getting more attention from law firm leadership, individuals who are concerned about whether they are being treated fairly must be prepared to advocate effectively for themselves. Is it time for you to add self-advocacy to your plan this year?