



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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On the Journey to Partnership. Summer law clerks have already arrived at many law firms. They will be evaluating whether their summer employers are firms where they would like to become partners or at least firms where they will get good training to launch their careers. The summer clerks may also start forming relationships which will be critical to their long-term success. It is not too early for law firms to start sharing information to help law students decide if they are in the right place. Here are some of the topics that are top of mind to summer associates:

- What does it take to be a successful associate in this firm and get promoted through the ranks?
- What does it take to make partner and how long does it typically take?
- If there are two partnership tracks, does everyone go through the non-equity track first?
- What kind of professional development training is available in the firm?
- Is business development or business development potential a criterion for partnership?
- Does the firm provide business development training to associates?
- Are associates encouraged to seek out mentors?
- What role do mentors play in partnership decisions for associates with whom they work?
- At what stage does the firm assign associates to a department or practice group?
- How supportive is the firm of associates who choose to start families?
- Is the summer program representative of life in the firm?

In many firms, it will take associates a decade to reach the ranks of equity partner. Deciding where to spend a decade is a huge career and investment decision. In addition to wining and dining summer law clerks, are you feeding them with the kind of vital data they need to make those decisions?

Example: A summer law firm program tried to expose each clerk to projects with several lawyers so the firm could get multiple perspectives on each summer associate. But a few summer associates got assigned to a fast-moving pro bono matter involving the threat of an imminent deportation. The summer clerks ended up spending all their time on the one matter with one partner. They had a memorable experience and at the end of the summer, the partner strongly advocated for each to get an offer from the firm. When other partners questioned making offers to clerks who had only worked with one partner, another partner noted that the firm often confronted the same situation in partnership decisions. On many occasions, the firm had partner-candidates who worked exclusively with just one partner who was a fierce advocate for partnership for that associate. If the partner was highly respected and valued, his or her recommendation usually was accepted. By contrast, some associates who were up for partnership who had worked for a broader range of partners but did not have a passionate champion fared worse. The firm concluded that even though the summer clerks had only worked with one partner, they had had enough exposure to other lawyers in the firm at social events that the firm was comfortable in extending offers to them.

Is it clear in your firm what it takes to get an offer of permanent employment or partnership? Do you need more than one powerful champion? Can you afford to rely on just one champion? From the firm's standpoint, if a law clerk or associate has only one main advocate, is there a way to fill the information gap?