



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 12, Issue 12

June 4, 2018

Partnership Strategy

Lawyers who hope to be on a partnership track must make many strategic decisions along the way. One of the most significant decisions is whether to work with multiple partners and hope some of them will be champions or whether to hitch your wagon to one powerful partner. Whether you are a senior associate, counsel, or non-equity partner, when evaluating your options, here are some questions to consider:

- What do you know about recent partnership decisions in your firm?
- Can you discern a pattern about the sponsor relationships that successful candidates have had?
- Do you have a strategy for developing relationships that may help you become a partner?
- Have partners with whom you work commented on whether you need more key relationships?
- Are there firm leaders or diversity professionals you can ask about what types of affiliations are most likely to lead to partnership?
- Have any of the partners with whom you work closely helped other lawyers become partners?
- If you are relying on a powerful partner to advocate for you, how strong is your relationship?

If you are a partner trying to help another lawyer achieve partnership, here are questions for you:

- Have you lost valuable lawyers when they did not make partner in your firm?
- Do you have sufficient clout on your own to help a protégé make partner?
- Have you monopolized any lawyers whose partnership prospects have been adversely affected?
- Do you need to encourage any of the lawyers on whom you depend to work with others?
- Are you so dependent on certain lawyers that if they don't make partner, you would consider leaving the firm, so you could continue to work together?
- Are you helping your protégés evaluate their chances and make good strategic decisions?

Example: A male partner in a firm of under 100 lawyers was strongly committed to creating better opportunities for women lawyers in the firm to become partners. He started paying close attention to the partnership dynamics. He observed that most of the women associates worked with multiple partners which he considered to be evidence of strong teamwork. But he also observed that the most likely associates to become partners were lawyers—mostly men—who worked primarily with one powerful partner who advocated for them when partnership decisions were being made. He saw that the women lawyers who worked with many partners often had no effective champion at the table when partnerships were decided. Even though he believed that young lawyers who worked with many partners received better training overall, he started recommending to women associates in his firm that they forge relationships with the most powerful partners available. He also observed that the firm lost many strong women lawyers early in their careers when they concluded that their prospects for partnership were not good enough to invest years of hard work as associates. The women often ended up in corporate law departments. Sometimes they steered legal work to their old firms, but they often were too junior in the law departments to be in position to refer work to former colleagues.

If you aspire to partnership or hope to sponsor another lawyer for partnership, are you paying close enough attention to the partnership dynamics in your firm? Do you have a strategy to protect yourself and your protégés as they navigate toward partnership?