



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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Finding Your Professional Groove

This issue is dedicated to women lawyers. Last week, [Working Mother Media](#) and the [ABA Journal](#) published the results of their joint #metoo survey. Among the notable findings, 68% of the women respondents, mostly lawyers, had experienced sexual harassment at work and only 30% had reported it.

This week, Working Mother will release its 2018 Best Law Firms for Women list. These are 60 firms with a strong commitment to retaining and advancing women. Watch for the release [here](#). Congratulations to the firms on the list!

Aside from working in a firm with great policies and a strong commitment to diversity, what are other critical factors for career success for women lawyers? Why do some careers take off a lot faster than others? Is it having mentors? Is it getting quality assignments? I conclude there is no one critical factor. I had the privilege of looking at a dozen women partners in a leading US law firm to identify their critical success factors, so the firm could share that information with women associates to help them accelerate their own careers. Here are the most significant factors I found in the partners' career paths:

- **Taking initiative.** As associates, several partners attracted attention by boldly taking initiative. One came up with the key defense theory; another found major flaws in the opposition's case.
- **Adaptability.** Half of the women made lateral moves to get to the firm. Several also changed their practices mid-career. Willingness to correct course was crucial.
- **Early success.** The partners had early success as associates which propelled them forward.
- **Mentors.** Many of the women partners had significant mentors, some male, some female — and the women who had mentors themselves became mentors to other women.
- **External validation.** The women partners enjoyed a lot of external validation of their success by being named to lots of lists like Best Lawyers in America, Super Lawyers, and Rising Stars.
- **Specialization.** Virtually all the women used specialization as a powerful career strategy.
- **Clarity of vision.** Many of the women forged new paths, such as creating permanent part-time arrangements and starting new practice groups.
- **Passion and commitment.** Across the board, the partners were passionate about their work.

Since career success is often determined early, one of the most critical questions is whether firms are creating cultures and opportunities in which young lawyers — men and women — can stand up and stand out.

Example: A firm prided itself on staffing matters leanly, often with one partner and one associate. At the beginning of a transaction, a partner took an associate to meet the client. The partner emphasized that he had picked this particular associate because of her experience and good judgment, and encouraged the client to communicate directly with the associate while making clear that he would supervise closely. With the partner's encouragement, the associate took charge as much as possible. She helped the partner and the client get comfortable with her "take charge" approach by reviewing everything with the partner and letting the client know that the partner had blessed her actions. The associate also tried to anticipate issues so she could review them in advance with the partner. As a result, the associate got a lot of responsibility and experience dealing with the client and with more senior lawyers on the other side.

In planning for the long-term success of lawyers in your firm and the sustained profitability of the firm, are you allowing junior lawyers — of every stripe — the opportunity to grow and to shine?

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