



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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Creating Soft Landings

It is a fact of life that most associates who work in major law firms will not become partners in those firms. For the firms, there are several objectives including getting the maximum value from associates while they are at the firm and helping those who leave to do so on good terms. If you are tasked with helping to ensure that lawyers who leave do so with warm feelings toward the firm, here are some questions to consider:

- Does the firm track whether every associate is assigned work that allows them to hit all their professional development milestones?
- Does the firm have a system to solicit feedback from associates including feedback on whether they feel that they are being treated fairly?
- Does every associate have a mentor who reports periodically on the quality of the associate's experience?
- When the firm concludes that an associate does not have a long-term future with the firm, does the firm provide transition counseling for the associate?
- Does the firm facilitate associates' leaving to work with firm clients through secondments or otherwise?
- Does the firm invest in creating positive "alumni" relationships before associates leave the firm, whether they are leaving by their own choice or at the firm's request?
- Does the firm have relationships with legal recruiters to whom they can turn for opportunities that might be suitable for associates who are not going to become partners?

Since it is inevitable that most associates will not become partners in their firms, it is clearly incumbent on firms to develop strong professional and personal relationships with associates who may leave so that the firm preserves the possibility that they will become clients or sources of referrals.

Example: A firm made a fundamental change in its strategy when it decided that it would no longer handle commercial real estate. The firm concluded that too much of their real estate work had become commoditized and did not command the same rates as the firm's other more profitable practice groups. As a result, the firm encouraged the commercial real estate practice group leaders to find a new law firm or to spin off. The bulk of lawyers in the real estate practice group stayed together and were acquired by another firm. For a transitional period, the firm retained some senior real estate partners and a few senior associates. The expectation was that the senior real estate partners would handle the transition period and then ultimately retire from the firm. During this period, the managing partner of the firm received an inquiry from a legal recruiter who described an opportunity for a talented senior associate with commercial real estate experience to join a mid-sized firm which needed a promising commercial real estate lawyer to be groomed to be the successor to a real estate partner who did not have a successor in his pipeline. The firm's managing partner was pleased to have another option to offer one of the senior associates who had remained with the firm for the transition.

Are you creating soft landings for talented associates for whom there is no realistic partnership opportunity in your law firm?

Thanks to Lois Weiner of [Lois R. Weiner Consultants, Inc.](#), a seasoned New York legal recruiter, for her focus and insights which were the basis for the concept of soft landings and for the example in this piece.