



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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## Why Teams Matter

The importance of a strong personal brand and reputation has never been clearer in a universe in which lifetime tenure in one firm is a rarity and multiple career moves are the norm. Even prominent partners in traditional lockstep firms like Cravath are making lateral moves. Listings like Super Lawyers, Best Lawyers, and the Lawdragon 500 emphasize individual achievement. While a strong personal brand is essential, it is not necessarily enough to attract premium clients and matters. When a general counsel makes recommendations to the company's board of directors about a "bet the company" transaction or litigation, they rely not only on the lead lawyers' track records but also on their law firms' brand and reputation and on the quality of the teams they offer. Having a great team is a key part of the personal brand of the most successful lawyers. To evaluate if you are building teams that will help attract the best work, consider these questions:

- Have you built a team of professionals with a strong — and sustained — track record of success?
- Does your team have the diversity and industry expertise that your clients require?
- Have you created security and incentives for members of your team including paths to partnership, good assignments, fair compensation, concern for their personal requirements, and client succession?
- Have you lost key members of your team to competitors?
- Can you guarantee clients that your team will hang together during the term of their matter and offer to bear the expense of any replacements?
- When you are brand building, are you as focused on your team's brand as your own individual brand? Do you have team-focused web pages as well as materials?

Planning a great career has a lot of elements: making good choices of law firm affiliations and building strong personal brands are essential. But earning the best reputation requires the ability to build and retain great teams which is challenging when your best team members have so many options.

**Example:** A firm suffered a major loss when a mid-level partner with strong ties to a key firm client left for another firm. The partner attributed his decision to the fact that the client relationship partner had refused to share credit for the client fairly. Firm management mobilized to compete for the work, turning to another partner who had worked for the client who had the reputation of building strong teams to lead the initiative. On teams she led, she set professional development milestones for each lawyer including client relationship skills. She regularly invited lawyers to participate — actively — in client meetings and pitches. She shared origination credit with everyone involved in pitches and on client teams and insured that each client team had a bonus pool that was allocated broadly. The original client relationship partner agreed to cede his leadership and to collaborate on the new strategy to retain as much of the work as possible. With the team's intense cohesive effort, the firm held on to much of the client's work.

Are you sufficiently focused on building strong teams to service your clients? Can you withstand competition — from your own colleagues and from other firms — without doing so?