



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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Building Relationship Capital

The importance of building relationship capital at every stage of one's career was driven home in a recent [report](#) by the Working Mother Research Institute on the gender gap at the top of corporate America. The [report](#) cited the gap in relationship capital as one of the four factors keeping women out of C-suites. Building relationship capital is equally critical for lawyers, women and men. To evaluate the strength of your strategic network, consider these questions:

- Do you have trusted peer mentors who will share the unwritten rules of your firm's culture like what to wear when the invitation to a summer firm event says "casual"?
- Do you have people who will tell you when you need to do better and how to do so?
- Do you have mentors or sponsors who provide career advice?
- Are there people with whom to confer on whether your assignments are rounding out critical skill sets or how to turn down an unwelcome assignment?
- Do you have people with whom to discuss firm politics, like when and how to press for origination credit or how to get on a pitch team for a matter or a client?

Make sure that you are not too restrictive in your choice of mentors and sponsors.

- Your mentors do not have to be senior or powerful to be helpful. Peer mentors can be invaluable sources of support and intelligence.
- Mentors do not have to look like you. It is helpful if you are a person of color to have guidance from earlier lawyers of color but if you are breaking new ground, that may not be feasible.
- Don't overlook sources with relevant if not identical experience. A partner who is an immigrant or first in his family to go to college may have a lot of empathy for diverse lawyers.
- Organic mentoring relationships, derived from working together, are great but also consider mentors or sponsors who are offered in formal firm programs. Assigned mentors and sponsors may provide different perspectives and may also be more committed to their roles, especially if the firm is evaluating their success and holding them accountable.

Building a strong strategic network is the key to building relationship capital to advance your career.

Example: To navigate the road to partnership, a new partner had relied on a partner with whom she had worked closely who had sponsored her for partnership and several partners, a few years ahead of her, who had provided guidance and encouragement to her as a senior associate. When she became a partner, she was keen to learn how to manage her new status especially the need to generate clients of her own. She took several steps. She invited the other new partners in her office to meet once a week for breakfast just to compare notes. She quickly learned that they were all concerned about meeting their billable hour requirements because they were getting fewer assignments from other partners. They agreed to look for opportunities for one another and to provide candid feedback to one another. She also took advantage of a new formal sponsorship program in her firm and began a relationship with a partner who was a very successful rainmaker. He offered to review her business plan and to help her strategize to get more visibility in the firm and in some key professional groups.

At each stage of your career, are you as intentional as you could be in expanding your strategic networks and building relationship capital to advance your career? Can you afford not to be?