



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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Selecting the Best Mentors

There is no debate about the importance of mentors to professional career development. But not all mentors are equally effective or valuable. Many successful mentor/mentee relationships evolve organically from people working together. Other mentor/mentee relationships are based on matching done by firms in a structured way. There is also room for you to seek out mentors or cultivate relationships with people who are the most likely to provide the kind of support you need to advance in your career. Regardless of the origin of the relationship, if you hope to establish relationships with the best mentors for your career, it is important to be self-reflective about what kind of support you need from a mentor and to be thoughtful about whether potential mentors have the qualities you need. In choosing among potential mentors, here are questions to consider:

- Have they mentored other lawyers who have become partners?
- Have they built client teams or industry teams?
- Do they include junior lawyers in meetings with clients?
- Do they readily share credit for successes with other lawyers?
- In court appearances and presentations, do they share or yield the stage?
- Are they paying attention to professional development milestones and looking for assignments which will fill their junior lawyers' skill gaps?
- Do they monopolize lawyers they value or encourage them to work with other partners?
- Do they identify themselves as mentors and see that professional development role as part of their responsibility in the firm?
- Do you have strengths that would be valuable to them, like social media skills, that would help foster a two-way relationship and do you communicate to mentors that you expect the relationship to be reciprocal?

You won't always be able to choose your mentors, but you may be able to make the process less random by considering what qualities you are looking for and seeking out mentors who have them.

Example: At her fifth-year review, an associate was told that she was highly regarded by the partners with whom she worked closely for a major client but that she needed to be known and trusted by a wider circle of partners to make partner. She also needed to broaden her skill set including business development. She asked the partners with whom she worked for guidance in identifying other partners with whom she should work. She said that she wanted to acquire more business development skills and handle more matters on her own. They agreed to limit their own use of her time and recommended several partners. She asked which of the other partners was likely to value her strengths including project management and social media. She then sought out a partner who was known to guide the professional development of lawyers on his team, who delegated responsibility freely and was not adept at social media. When they met, she said that he had been recommended as someone who delegated responsibility to senior associates and someone from whom she could learn business development skills. She also put on the table that she hoped she could offer him support in social media. He said that he would be delighted to work with her and brought her along to meet several prospective clients. He then delegated their work to her. By the end of the year, she could report that she had broadened her circle of supportive partners and learned new skills.

Have you reflected on what you need from mentors and sought out the people who can help you fill those gaps? Can you be more intentional in cultivating mentors in your firm?