



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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Is Peer-to-Peer Coaching the Only Way for Partners to Go from Knowing to Doing?

Hugh Simons, former COO of Ropes & Gray and senior partner at The Boston Consulting Group, recently wrote a brilliant [essay](#) in *American Lawyer* for law firm partners on the path from “knowing” to “doing.” Simons sees coaching as a key ingredient to help partners set goals and be accountable to themselves. His definition of coaching is inspiring: “Coaching centers on goals one sets for oneself and on helping you achieve them through support, advice, concrete door-opening and encouragement — its focus is on development and growth.” His advice on how coaches should operate is also superb. “The coach will check in periodically in ways that are low-key and personal. The coach is informed, talks about the other person, is not critical, focuses on to-dos, projects confidence, and where they can, offers tangible help (makes introductions, reviews material and more) and is reliable (does what they say they’ll do).”

I wholeheartedly agree with Simons on the importance of coaching for lawyers to go from “knowing” to “doing” and on Simons’ analysis of the components of good coaching. See [Why Coaches Matter: The Difference Between Knowing and Doing](#). We differ in only one significant respect. Simons recommends against outside coaches and advocates exclusively for partners’ coaching other partners with one exception. He acknowledges that firm leaders may need outside coaches to obtain candid feedback. I recommend that partners consider seeking help more broadly from successful rainmakers, firm leaders, from organizing groups of other lawyers, or from outside coaches. Simons’ recommendation of peer-to-peer coaching is terrific but there are many reasons an outside coach may be desirable. Consider whether you are facing one of these issues:

- Your firm does not have a culture of reciprocal coaching in place
- You would prefer to keep your personal investment in coaching support private
- There are sensitive political issues in the firm to be addressed
- You just made a lateral move and don’t know who a suitable peer coach in the firm would be
- If partners coach each other, you worry that the lack of diversity will create an echo chamber

I fully agree with Simons that coaching, whether from a peer or from an outsider, or both, is a strategy that drives professional development and satisfaction. Obtaining support does not have to be a choice between peer support or outside support. The best solution might be to do both.

Example: A partner was weighing whether to make a lateral move to a firm which provided many opportunities for career progression. But her current firm was familiar, secure, and filled with partners who were very collaborative. The partner had been the beneficiary of sustained and valuable peer-to-peer coaching support from practice group leaders and other partners in the firm. The new firm held itself out as having the same type of collaborative culture, but the lateral candidate was concerned that she would be giving up high quality and known support for the unknown. When the lateral candidate shared with her recruiter that she put great value on the culture of peer-to-peer support she enjoyed at her current firm and expressed reservations about making a move, the recruiter made a recommendation and an offer. The recruiter recommended that she discuss with the new firm whether there was someone who could serve as a peer coach, especially during the integration process. The recruiter also recommended that she consider an outside coach to provide support to the lateral candidate during her transition, offered to help her find one, and even offered to pay the cost.

If you are committed to continuing to develop professionally, have you tapped support from inside or outside your firm, or both, to help insure that you are fully on the road from “knowing” to “doing”?