



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*

Volume 14, Issue 13

June 22, 2020

Affinity Groups and Conflicts Referrals: A Combined Business Development Strategy for Diverse Lawyers

To insure the success of lawyers of color in law firms, they need to generate business. One standard strategy for diverse lawyers is [participation in affinity groups](#). There are all kinds of affinity-based professional groups based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other categories, inside and outside of law firms. In outside affinity groups, law firm lawyers compete heavily among themselves for access to build relationships with in-house lawyer members who obviously have the power of the purse to help them. Using affinity groups to build relationships with lawyers in other law firms can be an equally valuable strategy. Even if they are competitors, they and their firms regularly have conflicts to refer to other firms. To use an affinity group to create a powerful conflicts referral network from lawyers in other firms, consider these steps:

- In your affinity group, organize a “conflicts committee” with lawyers from various firms who agree to look for opportunities to refer work to one another
- Commit to learning about the specialties of each lawyer on the committee including practice areas, industries, and geographic scope
- Have each member of the group commit to learning how their firm handles conflicts referrals. Are there any centralized data bases? Is there a process in which a firm leader is involved? Are there any requirements to report referrals to other firms to practice group leaders? Are there key rainmakers who control a lot of conflict referrals? Who gets notice from the administrative staff when they find conflicts?
- Each group member should inform their firm leadership about the affinity group’s conflicts committee emphasizing that you and the group will only be successful if you have matters to refer to other members of the group
- Ask your firm leadership to commit to help you identify opportunities to refer work to other members of the group
- Inform other lawyers in your firm, particularly rainmakers, that you will help them refer work to qualified lawyers on the conflicts committee when the firm has a conflict; repeat the reminders periodically. You want to become known as a [“go-to” lawyer](#) for conflicts
- Notify firm leaders every time you get a referral from a member of the affinity group’s conflicts committee to reinforce the value of the strategy
- Do your best every time you get a referral to [reciprocate](#) in some way

Example: The firm’s managing partner met with a new Black partner and asked how the firm could help him. The new partner was prepared with a laundry list focused on help in building his practice. He asked for the firm’s financial support of a Black lawyers’ affinity group in which he was active. The managing partner readily agreed and offered to host the group’s annual meeting. The new partner also described the affinity group’s “conflicts committee” which he had organized. The managing partner agreed to encourage several firm rainmakers to steer conflicts to him to refer to other lawyers on the affinity group’s conflicts committee. The managing partner then arranged for the firm’s conflicts staff to alert her about unresolved conflicts so she could connect lawyers with conflicts to the new Black partner. The managing partner also obtained the names and firms of other members of the affinity group’s conflicts committee and contacted each of their managing partners to share her commitment to support referrals to the group’s members and encouraged them to do the same.

In your affinity groups, have you overemphasized the value of in-house lawyers and overlooked the potential value of law firm lawyers to provide you with a pipeline of conflicts referrals? Is this a time when you can garner the support of your firm’s management to implement a diversity-oriented conflicts referral strategy?

The next issue of *Monday Monday* will be published on July 13. Enjoy your July 4th Holiday!