



# 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 15, Issue 3

February 8, 2021

## **Career Risk Mitigation Strategies**

The pandemic has led all of us to much more awareness about identifying and managing risk. If you are an associate or a newer partner and you were concerned about your exposure to any of the twenty risks on the checklist of career risks set out in the January 25 [newsletter](#), this issue is devoted to risk mitigation strategies. The starting point is to do an assessment of where you are vulnerable. The checklist addressed three major buckets of risk: risks relating to the source of your work; risks arising from a lack of visibility; and risks relating to the strength of your firm.

The most common source of risk for most associates and newer partners is that something will happen to their primary source of work. It is not unusual for associates and junior partners to work with one primary partner. COVID-19 has simply magnified the risk of relying on any one person as a source of work. If you depend on one person, even if that person is powerful and devoted to you, you are still vulnerable if that person gets sick, makes a move, or retires. Here are some steps to consider:

- If you have been the beneficiary of steady work from a supportive sponsor, accept that you may need to leave your comfort zone and work with other people, take on more responsibility in the relationship, or be prepared to take over if necessary.
- Start with a candid discussion with your primary source. Although you cannot leave your source in the lurch in the middle of a major matter, discuss to whom you can delegate some of your work to free you up for assignments from other partners for other clients. You can emphasize that expanding your team will also protect your client in the event you get sick.
- If your primary source has health challenges or is nearing retirement, evaluate what additional responsibilities you can offer to handle. Do not be shy about volunteering to be part of the succession planning process. If you need more client contact to be effective, ask for it.

The second most common source of career risk on the checklist is a lack of visibility. If you are not client facing, well known outside your office or practice group, or being recognized for your success and designated "high potential", you need a strategy. Consider these options:

- Do not pass up any opportunity to talk about successes. Volunteer to do a client alert or presentation on a recent success at a practice group meeting, for clients, or an outside bar or industry group.
- Update your bio to include successful work and reference the client by name if possible.
- Send individual notes to any other firm lawyers who may have clients who could benefit from your experience.
- Keep a running tally of your successes to prepare for end of the year self-evaluations.

The third most serious risk is that you are at a firm which is suffering from defections, declining profitability, or not well suited to the clients or practice you are developing. It is harder – but essential – during the pandemic to keep up with law school classmates, to be active in bar groups, or to make time to talk to recruiters who pepper you with calls. You have already had to adapt to online meetings for client work. Using the same tools to maintain your network and to stay abreast of your firm's performance and the state of the legal market will mitigate your risk.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that paying attention to risk and being proactive in managing and mitigating risk are essential skill sets for COVID-19 and post COVID-19. And while you are managing career risks, be sure to continue wearing masks and social distancing until we are all vaccinated and safe!