



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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## Career Security at the Top

If you are a highly compensated partner in a profitable and stable firm, you are probably not looking to make a move, especially during the pandemic and its aftermath. But if something changed that forced you to consider a move, have you evaluated whether you could make a lateral move in which you would be treated as well or better than in your current firm? The most common circumstance that causes highly compensated partners to consider a move is the threat that their firm will force them to retire, de-equitize, or give up control of client relationships sooner than they are ready to do so. As a highly paid leader in your current firm, now may be the time to assess whether your current compensation and status would hold up if you needed to consider making a move to another firm. Rather than judging your security subjectively, ask yourself these questions:

- Can you substantiate the value you contribute to your current firm?
- Does your current firm use objective compensation standards that justify your current level?
- Are the standards used by your firm to set compensation commonly used by peer firms?
- Do you control key clients who rely on you and would be likely to move their work with you to a new firm?
- Is your current firm well positioned with a deep bench of next generation talent to compete for key client relationships that you currently control?
- Are the clients on whom you rely getting ready to retire? Do you have relationships with their likely successors?
- Is there culturally appropriate action you could take in your current firm to reinforce your control of significant client relationships?
- Are you positioned to negotiate an exception to your firm's retirement rules?

Have you become so comfortable as a highly paid leader in your firm that you have become vulnerable to firm decisions that it is time for you to relinquish control of client relationships you are not ready to give up?

**Example:** When his firm adopted new retirement policies, a longtime practice group leader with a strong client base initially assumed the firm would exempt him from the new policies. Then he observed the clumsy way in which the firm's new leadership handled a similarly situated rainmaker in the firm. Without prior notice to the rainmaker, the firm had informed a major client that a new, younger partner was being assigned as the client's relationship manager. When that triggered the rainmaker to make a lateral move, taking several other partners – and all his clients, the practice group leader decided it was time to act. He considered a lateral move but concluded he might have a hard time justifying his compensation at another firm. So, he invited the firm's chair to join him and one of his major clients for post-Covid drinks so the firm chair could observe the strength of the relationship. Afterwards, he proposed an agreement and timetable to relinquish his leadership role in the firm and equity status but to maintain a contractual relationship with the firm with substantial compensation for five years beyond the new retirement age. The firm agreed.

Has your comfort level with your status and compensation in your firm led you to ignore the potential risk of changes in firm leadership or policies that would undermine your career plans? Can you reduce the risk without being forced to take drastic action like making a late-stage career move?