



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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## Does Partnership Status Make Business Development Easier?

The question of whether partnership status makes business development easier comes up in many contexts. Associates and counsel sometimes attribute their lack of success in attracting clients to not having the title "partner". Partnership status is an appealing incentive offered by recruiters and new firms and many laterals make a lateral move for upward mobility to partnership status in another firm. Many new partners' business plans assume that partnership status will accelerate client development.

In fact, the answer to the question is complicated. On the one hand, some clients and prospective clients may have more confidence in a lawyer who has earned a partnership designation. On the other hand, large numbers of associates and counsel attract and retain clients while they are in the early stages of their careers. In some cases, the belief that you must be a partner to attract clients is overblown and self-limiting.

If you are an associate or counsel committed to generating clients and work, here are some ideas to consider:

- Do not assume that because you do not have the title of partner that you cannot bring in clients and work. Clients and prospective clients are sizing you up for your problem-solving skills, not your title.
- Make sure to identify clients who want to know that someone more experienced has blessed your advice and then follow up. Be sure not to ignore or assume that clients know of your interaction with a more senior lawyer. Your seeking confirmation of your recommendations with a more senior lawyer will show that you are responsive to their needs.
- Look to work with partners who encourage you to be client-facing and take responsibility, who assure the clients that they trust your judgment but also provide oversight and feedback.
- Ask partners to share their own experiences of bringing in clients or work from existing clients when they were associates or counsel. Their stories may be helpful to you and will also reinforce their comfort in giving you more authority.

While you are on the way to partnership status, keep in mind that the primary qualities that lead to new clients and new work are your interest in solving clients' problems and your experience and success in handling similar situations. You do not have to wait to be a partner to attract clients with these qualities. Waiting may not get you there.

**Example:** When the lead partner reported to a client team on a complex new issue that had arisen in one of their matters, a senior associate on the team volunteered to take responsibility for the issue. She informed the team leader that she had successfully handled a similar issue for another client. She offered to draft an email for the partner to use to introduce her to the clients to explain why the partner was entrusting the work to her. The partner used the email to inform the client about her assignment, attaching a favorable ruling the senior associate had obtained on the other client's behalf. The senior associate was then able to take the lead with the client on the issue and went on to develop a close relationship with the client. She routinely cc'd the partner on her client communications so both the client and the partner could see that the partner was in the loop for oversight even if not active. When the client heard about another company with a similar problem, they recommended that the other company call the senior associate directly. When the senior associate was under consideration for partnership, the partner cited this example.

Are you letting assumptions about the importance of having a partnership title hold you back from deepening client relationships and attracting new clients and work?