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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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The Unexpected Benefits of the Virtual Work Environment

As firms and lawyers consider how to adapt to the continuing pandemic, I invited Paula Zirinsky, an accomplished chief marketing and strategy officer with extensive experience in professional services organizations, to share her perspective on the unexpected benefits of virtual work environments.

Work-from-home and the virtual work environment has been a game changer. Beyond firmly establishing new ways to visually connect and communicate – Zoom, Teams, FaceTime, to name a few – it's forced business developers to get creative with a broader range of potential prospects.

The real, not virtual backgrounds, the children, the pets, the furniture, the "what's for dinner tonight" or "where are you working from" conversations would never have happened prior to March 2020. From a business development perspective, this is all a good thing. It has helped to establish warmer, more personal, and engaging relationships based on information now being shared between participants.

And, importantly, it isn't just with those from outside the firm. It's also been about working 'inside-out,' and this is where work-from-home has perhaps been most valuable. Think about all the people from inside the firm who you now know – that you barely knew before. With efforts to keep a firm's community and culture active and alive, smart rainmakers have profited by establishing relationships, new relationships, based on those now being seen, not just heard, across the firm. Almost two years in, we've learned far more about these new work colleagues than might have ever been revealed during normal in-office or conference room meetings.

Case in point:

After dialing in a bit early to a Zoom call, a partner heard a colleague he barely knew but wanted to work with comment on how they missed a specific food item and how difficult it was to get it without traveling, something they were hesitant to do. When the holidays rolled around, a box arrived at that colleague's home – inside, on dry ice, was the delicacy. The recipient was amazed and appreciative. Not just because of the package, but because he got a feel for how the other lawyer would listen and then engage with clients and prospects. This led to a business pitch collaboration and ultimately a new shared client.

Careful listening was a game changer starting with the primary business cultivation target internal to the firm.

It's also all about really watching what you see. Not just what you hear. And to selectively use both to establish a bond, and a reason to keep the conversation going.

Case in point:

One partner tells a story about a Teams call they had with a potential new client. Asking for business was difficult for the caller and the conversation was difficult – but got a little easier when it briefly shifted to an incredible piece of art hanging in the prospect's office. After commenting and asking about it, she learned more about the prospect and her family in five minutes than ever expected. More importantly it broke the ice and humanized the conversation which then enabled making the ask a bit easier, much easier. Had the conversation been office to office, this would never have happened.

One of the unexpected benefits of working from home was actually seeing someone's home ... and cleverly using what they saw to their advantage.

Those who make good use of virtual interactions will be in a better position to resist future demands that they transition back to the office. Now is the time to activate and cultivate your network, prove it can be done remotely, and avoid second class citizenship should you continue to work from home when others are back in the office.

Getting to know people personally can win business. Now I ask, how many of you have taken advantage of this with your clients? Or with colleagues at your firm with clients you'd like to add to your roster? Maybe transitioning from a 'one-dimensional' phone call to a 'with video' Teams call might just reveal more – and get you more – than you ever anticipated. Banish your blurred background and engage in 2019 dinner conversation but in 2021's work-from-home style.

Embrace the unexpected benefits of the pandemic's virtual relationships. You have everything to win.

Paula Zirinsky is an accomplished chief marketing and strategy officer, now consulting. Her marketing, communications, brand-building, business development, and technology platform expertise, and ability to create infrastructure and growth opportunities is extensive and spans professional services, risk-advisory consulting, legal marketing, and well-known companies in consumer-packaged goods, fragrance and cosmetics, home furnishings, and the automotive industry. She can be reached at paulazirinsky@gmail.com