



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 16, Issue 8

April 11, 2022

Boomerang: Setting the Stage for Clients and Lawyers to Return

I recently [featured](#) a firm which collaborated with clients to invite partners who had left the firm to return for the benefit of their mutual clients. This week, I heard BNSF's CHRO Judy Carter comment during an ArentFox Schiff webinar on a similar phenomenon at BNSF. Carter described "boomerang employees", some long-term BNSF employees who left because of the stress of the pandemic who are coming back. Consider some of the scenarios in which a "boomerang strategy" might apply to your circumstances with clients or departed lawyers:

- A team of lawyers departs from a firm en masse. When the senior people on a client team or in a practice group announce they are leaving for "greener pastures", it is often hard for junior talent to resist the invitation. But the deal the senior people strike for themselves may not favor everyone on the team, or the new firm's client integration or lateral integration process may be poor, or the culture of the new firm may be less appealing.
- A longtime client, under pressure from the company's leadership to cut costs, sends new matters to a law firm with much lower rates when your firm did not agree to a substantial rate cut to keep the work. The client's results on the new work with the new firm are not as favorable as your results.
- A partner left the firm for a less-pressured government position because of the stress of the pandemic, along with increased family responsibilities in the wake of a divorce.
- A lawyer left work altogether after he and his spouse adopted infant twins.

All of these are situations in which there may be an opportunity for the firm to attract back lawyers or clients who have departed. Clearly, if you want to preserve the "boomerang strategy", don't burn bridges when clients or lawyers depart. Being respectful, wishing them well and staying in touch will preserve the option of welcoming back lawyers or clients who figure out sooner or later that your firm is a better deal.

Example: When a senior lawyer in a firm with a sizeable client base defected with a large team to another firm, the firm's leadership sprang into action to prevent other client or lawyer defections. The tone from the top was respectful. The firm was successful in retaining several non-equity partners who had been disappointed when the new firm only promised that they would be considered for equity partnership within two years. They were concerned that they would be vulnerable if the senior lawyer who led the move did not have the same power in the new firm that he had had in the old firm when their partnerships came up for consideration.

The firm's leadership also analyzed which defecting lawyers had worked most closely with partners who remained at the firm and encouraged the legacy partners to stay in touch with the defectors they knew best. When the firm learned that the new firm did not follow through on many of its promises to introduce the defectors to the new firm's clients, the firm successfully approached some of the defectors about returning. The firm was also successful in retaining several lawyers who were about to take family leaves by emphasizing their risk of returning from their family leaves to an unfamiliar new firm.

Defections are commonplace these days. Are you ready to respond using strategies that enable some potential defectors to stay put and actual defectors to return to your firm? Are you treating lawyers who were on the lateral fence with appropriate respect and setting the stage for boomerang lawyers and clients?