



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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Is It Time for Business Development on Steroids?

Every time a headline appears in the legal press about the latest series of layoffs, there is more pressure on lawyers, particularly those who are not equity partners. When law firms are forced to consider layoffs, there is heightened scrutiny of the value contributed by each player. This even extends to people who are not at risk of a layoff per se. Business generation and overall productivity get the most attention. The most at-risk groups are senior associates and counsel who are up for partner and non-equity partners who are being considered for equity status. Before devoting a weekend to go over your contacts database and spend time identifying all the people to whom you can reach out for work, consider a less frantic, more curated approach including the following steps:

- Identify clients in companies or industries who are under stress and ask them what they need that you can help with. Be prepared to hear that they need something *unrelated* to your legal services and do your best to help them with whatever comes up.
- Identify clients for whom you did great work and with whom you are not currently working. Time for a check-in to reconnect.
- If you referred a matter to a lawyer in another firm who has not reciprocated yet, now is a good time to reach out so you are top of mind for referrals from conflicts or matters outside the scope of their expertise that you can handle.
- Stay as busy as possible. Talk to your colleagues who are busy and ask how you can help them in the near term. This is the wrong time for your firm's management to tag you as being below target for billable hours.
- For high value prospective clients, make sure that you fully understand their process for selecting counsel for new matters. It won't help you if you have been courting the wrong person.

Now is not the time to frantically cast a wide net, but it is the time to show your strategic chops and bring your "A" game in your efforts to secure new work.

Example: A partner had been active for several years in a specialty bar group devoted to her practice area. She was delighted to have the opportunity to work on a bar committee with one of the head lawyers in her specialty for a major company. The two worked closely planning several programs and developed a friendship along with mutual respect. The partner hoped that their close relationship would lead to work for the company and she regularly listed the company as a prospect on her business plans. She was disappointed when her fellow committee member never referred any work to her and finally asked him whether he would consider her and her firm for new matters in their specialty. The company lawyer reminded her that he had explained early in their relationship that he did not select counsel for his company's matters. Instead, he relied on his team to select outside counsel for the matters for which they were responsible. He explained that since he held each member of his team accountable for the results on their matters, that he considered it was only fair that they select the outside counsel who they supervised. He offered to introduce her to his team at the next bar conference which they would be attending but cautioned that his introduction would not control their decisions.

With so many firms showing signs of belt tightening and downsizing, have you reviewed your business plan to confirm that you are focused on the most likely sources of new work? What can you do to increase your odds of continued success?