



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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Reconnecting with Former Clients and Old Friends. Have you put off approaching an interesting business prospect because you have not talked to the person in years, or even decades, and don't know how to resume the relationship? Everyone has people in this category: clients who changed companies; associates who went in-house; classmates who made good; neighbors who moved and an occasional long lost cousin. It can be awkward to resume old relationships; we all flash on comedies like Romy & Michele's High School Reunion. But for many people, the hardest part is getting past their own reluctance. If you can overcome your inner restraints, here are some simple rules:

- Pick up where you left off. Try to remember some common denominator or experience, like the outcome of the case you handled; the opposing lawyer or judge; a class you had together; or mutual friends.
- Focus on resuming the relationship first. Do not swoop in to attack your self-interest in doing business with this person's new company. You need to show a genuine interest in renewing the old relationship first. Someone you have not seen in ten years is like a stranger for all practical purposes.
- Sending a note of congratulations is the easiest way to connect and the surest way to get a response.
- Enlist help from other people who knew the person in the old days.
- Google the person so you can find out what has happened to them in the meantime.
- Take advantage of places you know they will be, like speaking engagements, charity events, or the proverbial reunion.

Example: You read in the press that one of your firm's former associates has become general counsel of an interesting company. You lost touch with the associate after he went to another firm and had not realized he had moved in-house. You feel sheepish about contacting him, concerned your interest in his business would be transparent since you have not talked in years. Get over it. The easiest first step is an email. If you don't have his email address, call his assistant and ask for it, explaining that you are an old colleague or friend. If his assistant will not give you his email, you can ask for hers and send the email to him that way or you can send a note. In either form, congratulate him on his new job and invoke something from your shared past, like "I can't believe it has been so long since we worked on that injunction for X client together." Or "I remember you always said you would end up in-house. I would love to hear how you landed at your new company." You are virtually guaranteed to get a response. Gauge the warmth of the response and decide whether to proceed and how fast. If you hardly knew the person in the old days, have been out of touch for a decade, and get a terse reply, you may have to find some other people to pursue. But if you had a close relationship to start with, you may find that a simple outreach on your part will spark a new opportunity.

Are you confident enough to risk reaching out to an old friend or colleague who has made good?