



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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The Art of Bonding. Bonding with new people is a critical marketing skill. The process may be less daunting once you realize that we are all basically tribal in nature. Everyone connects more easily with people who are members of their “tribes.” What many people miss is how many “tribes” or communities they belong to. If you can identify common ground, you can bond with virtually anyone.

How do you find common ground? You start with a focus on the other person. Sometimes the common ties are obvious: you are at a company meeting, an industry convention, church, club, school, or concert. Other common bonds are looser or more obscure; you may just be sharing a common experience, like commuting. You gather information first by observation and then by asking questions. Being inquisitive will appear natural and not intrusive as long as your inquiry relates to a common thread.

If possible, pick a point of commonality that is connected to your business and likely to lead to a productive conversation. Then ask questions that acknowledge and explore the common bond. “How long have you worked in financial services?” “Do you agree with the speaker that the SEC will not get into this area?”

If membership in a group is the common bond, focus first on people you may know in common. Your job is helping the other person to feel comfortable with you. If you know people from their “tribe”, you are automatically safer. If you happen to hit on someone you both know, that creates an instant bond. When you find a common bond, stick with it. Be careful not to undo the process by jumping to something unrelated. Needless to say, once you have bonded, it is easier to exchange business cards, ask what the other person does for a living, or suggest a further meeting or conversation.

Example: You arrive at a reception early and your people are not there yet. Do you hole up in the corner with your BlackBerry or do you say, “this is an opportunity” and approach a stranger? Look for someone standing alone who is in the same boat you are. If you don’t observe a point of common reference, you can always just ask them: “What brings you here?” Chances are they will share an interesting story or tell you that their company is supporting the event. You can then ask if they know your cousin, neighbor or friend who works for that company. If you don’t have people in common, can you talk about your experience with their products? Or what you read about the company in the business press and how that relates to something you do? Once in a while, you will encounter someone who does not respond because they do not know the rules of the game. Just move on because 99 percent of the people there came with the same general goals: to build their network and increase their information.

As you make your rounds this week, are you willing to accept that if you work at it, you will find common ground with most people you encounter? If all else fails, you can always ask the stranger at the reception to accompany you to the bar!