



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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Changing of the Guard. Even the best client relationships are at risk when the people loyal to your law firm leave. If they are replaced by people from another law firm, or partial to another firm, the threat is acute, especially if you have not had time to plan for the change. If you do have advance notice, consider these steps:

- Help the client fill the position with someone who knows and respects you.
- Get frank feedback from the outgoing people on how your work compares to their other firms in terms of results, costs and user-friendliness.
- Ask the outgoing people to introduce you to the new people.
- Use all means to extend your network beyond the outgoing people.
- Provide the outgoing people with a short summary of your successes for them, including recognition from senior management, to use to advocate for you with the new people.
- Get ready to fight for your turf.

Example: One of your most loyal clients is retiring. You introduced possible successors to the company but the new general counsel is from a firm with whom you have competed fiercely for the client's work. You are prepared to pull out all the stops to retain the business. First, organize help within your own firm. Ask your marketing department to help you identify other lawyers with relationships to the company and its key executives. Invite those lawyers to a strategy session. Next, solicit the help and guidance of your retiring client to broaden your network of influence at the company and to candidly assess your firm's strengths and weaknesses. You might suggest to your client that he include you in any retirement events at the company. You can also host your own reception at your firm and get his help inviting other lawyers and senior management to attend. By the time your client retires, you need to be (1) ready to meet the new general counsel, (2) willing to concede the work for which your firm is not best suited, but also (3) prepared to fight to retain the work you have earned with great results delivered on a cost effective basis. If you have reinforced your reputation and relationships among other lawyers and senior management at the company, even if the new general counsel is inclined to use the familiar and comfortable lawyers from his old firm, he may feel constrained to show a semblance of impartiality. If all else fails, you can try recruiting away key players from the new general counsel's old law firm to join your team.

Nothing is as certain as change. Are you anticipating the inevitable changing of the guard at key clients and insulating yourself to the extent possible?