



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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Initiating New Business Relationships. Do you have a stack of business cards from people you never pursued even though they seemed interesting when you met them? Are you sometimes at a loss about how to pursue people you have met? Just meeting people and exchanging business cards, even with a very cordial conversation, is usually not enough to initiate a business relationship and certainly not enough to result in a referral of work. There are five stages to engaging with people in a way that promotes a business relationship:

- getting people to talk about themselves
- active listening about what they do
- probing questions about what they need
- connecting the dots between what they need and what you and your firm might provide
- taking action.

When people reveal something interesting, that is the time to ask for their card. If they don't have a card, give them two of yours; one to keep and one on which to write their contact information so you can follow up with them. As the conversation continues, use their card to make notes, especially of any promises you make, like introducing them to a colleague or sending them something pertaining to your discussion. Writing down what you have agreed to on the spot is an affirmation to your new contact that you are serious about the commitment you are making and about establishing a relationship.

Example: You meet a lawyer from a competitor law firm at a dinner. You find that you know lots of people in common but the conversation does not get really interesting until she mentions she is about to go in-house. With your gentle probing, she discloses that she has not finished negotiating her employment contract. You then ask for her card, verifying that the email address is sufficiently private under the circumstances. Of course you offer to introduce her to your partner who is an expert on executive compensation agreements or offer to send her some materials on new developments in executive compensation. Then take action: immediately write your commitments on her card. If you sense at dinner that she has urgent issues to deal with, and she is receptive, take a bolder action: offer to call your partner, at home if necessary, to introduce them and schedule a meeting. At a minimum, follow up the next day with a note that specifically refers to the promises you made. Even if she does not use your firm to negotiate her own contract, you have positioned yourself to follow up easily when she takes her new job.

Instead of adding to the stack of cards on your desk, are you prepared to put the action in your initial interactions with interesting prospects to set the stage for building a new relationship?