



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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Survival of the Fittest. Are you holding on to work that you used to delegate to junior or more specialized lawyers because of concern about your own billable hours? Are you then writing down the bills even before sending them out because your billing rates make them seem too high? Fear of scarcity can create a chain reaction. When partners do unfamiliar work at higher rates they also increase the anxiety of associates who don't have enough work to do and have less control over the situation. The economic meltdown is causing many adjustments but this is not a time to abandon the habits that have helped make you and your firm successful. Do not give up on:

- Staffing leanly with the most cost effective and appropriate lawyers
- Building a team of lawyers to service clients and expand the relationships
- Giving responsibility and client contact to local lawyers in your firm
- Taking into account your clients' and your firm's diversity goals
- Communicating to firm management on your work load and allocation of work

Understand that your clients are facing similar issues which affect their decisions to send out work. You can help clients make good decisions—and build client loyalty--by doing the following:

- Create initiatives to move work out of your firm that can be done more efficiently in house or by another firm
- Give clients the option of hiring law firm personnel in house
- Rigorously review the necessity and timing of new legal projects with clients
- Consider ways to terminate, cut back or slow down existing non-essential projects

Example: Even though his own hours were low, one corporate partner continued to assign work to associates in his group. Having trained and nurtured his team, he did his best to protect them. He assured clients that their work was being done by the lowest cost lawyers who could do the work. He also let his practice group chair know that his work was slow and picked up the pace of his own business development activities. But he did not get his firm's commitment that if he spread the work around and his own hours were low, that the firm would not hold it against him. At year end, he was shocked when his firm told him that he was being laid off, along with most of the associates in his group. He had failed to get buy in within his firm to his approach and got hurt as a result. But when he called one valued client to ask for guidance on new opportunities, he was met with an offer he could not refuse: an in house job to handle the work he and his team had done. After a lot of personal trauma, he made a smooth transition.

Are you confident enough of your ability to survive the downturn to maintain the best practices that helped you build effective teams and solid client relationships during better times? Are you also protecting yourself by managing your firm's expectations and communicating effectively while you do so?