



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 Lure of Greener Pastures. Are you looking for a safe harbor because your firm seems shaky lately? Lawyers with portable business or unique expertise are being wooed aggressively, even in this economy. Before you jump ship too fast, ask yourself whether it really makes sense to make a move. One of the most critical issues is whether you can really implement your business plan at the new firm. Going to a great law firm with great clients and the prospect of new work is like being invited to a party with a fabulous guest list. If the other guests are all strangers and you have no one to help you connect to people, you may end up a wallflower at the party. As you weigh your options, consider these questions:

- What is the new firm's track record in integrating lateral partners? If the firm is absorbing a large group of new laterals, does it have any experience doing so?
- What is the firm's process in general for onboarding lateral partners?
- What specific plan—and budget--does the firm have in mind for onboarding you and your team or are you really going to be on your own?
- Who will be responsible for figuring out which clients of the new firm can use your services and for introducing you to the relevant relationship partners?
- Who is going to hold the relationship partners accountable to introduce you to clients and facilitate your getting work?
- Who will help you navigate thorny conflicts of interest?
- Who is going to help you get visibility inside the firm, like speaking engagements, so your new colleagues can get to know you and trust you?
- What incentives does the firm provide existing partners to embrace and integrate new ones? How is cooperation measured? If it isn't measured, is it really counted?

Example: Your firm's profits are down 20 percent, the firm just announced layoffs, and people are demoralized. A recruiter calls about a firm you hold in high esteem which is apparently healthy financially and looking to expand in your practice. Instead of a year of depressed income, you could get a bump up in compensation. Your basic due diligence is positive and the firm leaders you meet are impressive and very interested in you. But as you probe, you find some red flags. You haven't met any lateral partners. You discover a group of lateral partners who have come and gone in the last two years. Even though the firm asks you for your business plan, the practice group does not have its own business plan. When you talk to a lateral partner who left, she reports she lost major business when other partners would not ask their clients for conflict waivers. The firm has not laid off lawyers but staff layoffs have left the marketing department stretched thin. The partners meet only every other year to save costs so you won't meet most distant partners for another 18 months. You conclude that structurally, there are too many risks in making a move to the firm.

Are you willing to resist being seduced by seemingly attractive job offers and to ask the tough questions which will help you either walk away or ask for the kind of support that will make you successful in a new firm? Can you afford not to ask the tough questions?

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?