



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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Finding Out Who Needs You. Lawyers often express frustration when prospective clients say they are impressed with their qualifications but that they are satisfied with their current lawyers or that they cannot consider them because their companies have just finished trimming their approved counsel lists. When you take into account most organizations' resistance to change and the value to a company of working with lawyers who know its policies, procedures, and personnel, it is amazing when new law firms are considered at all. In preparing to approach any company of significant size, assume it already has very capable lawyers. You have to ask yourself the following question first: "Why would they consider making a change?" The sooner you are ready to ask that question directly to a prospective client, the better off you are. If you meet companies that just eliminated half their approved law firms, they are not great prospects in the short term. And if the general counsel tells you that her boss is strongly committed to another law firm that does what you do, you may not want to invest in that courtship. Do your homework first by investigating the following:

- Has the company experienced any poor legal results that have been reported?
- Have any relevant decision makers inside the company changed?
- Is there any change among leading outside lawyers like mergers or retirement?
- Do you have any sources of information on the company's level of satisfaction with existing firms?

Once you have done your homework, you are ready to approach the company and ask the critical question: "What would cause your company to consider adding another firm to your list of outside counsel?"

Example: After concluding a major transaction, the other party's general counsel expresses admiration for your firm's work on the matter. You seize the opportunity to suggest lunch. When you meet, first acknowledge the superb work of your opponent and your understanding of the long relationship the company has had with that firm. Then stop talking and listen. It is imperative to give the general counsel the opportunity to affirm their existing law firm relationships. Then you can start probing. If your team was lean and mean and the other group was bloated, you might ask whether they always staff up in that way. If the lead lawyer on the other team is approaching retirement, you might ask who they rely on other than that lawyer. If the other firm does not have offices in a part of the world your firm covers, and the company does business there, you might ask how they manage legal affairs in that region. If you know the company is struggling with a major problem, be prepared to probe how they are doing on that problem and what will happen if they don't resolve it. You are looking for the opening to an area in which your firm has something to offer that the company really needs.

Are you willing to confront the reality that many prospects are not hungry for new lawyers, even very talented ones, and to ask the questions that may uncover the ones who are?