



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.

Volume 2, Issue 9

May 5, 2008

Everyone is a Part-Time Lawyer. If you have more than one client and multiple cases or transactions, you are constantly juggling competing priorities and struggling to insure that each client feels secure and well-served. The most successful lawyers are juggling even more; a ten million dollar book of business per se creates a lot of competing demands. The best rainmakers are adept at managing multiple demands while preserving clients' sense of access and importance. How do they do it? Here are some of their strategies.

- Under commit and over-perform. If lawyers tell their clients that getting a great result will be easy, they are setting themselves up for disappointed clients; either the result is not great or it cost too much. The lesson: manage expectations.
- Train your assistant to assess the level of urgency presented by clients and to distinguish real urgency from clients who characterize everything as an emergency. Make sure your assistant knows where you are, tracks you down and interrupts you for real emergencies but help your assistant develop the backbone to resist client pressures to interrupt you when he or she recognizes the situation is not urgent, too.
- Create teams, delegate responsibility, and introduce clients directly to the lawyers who have frontline responsibility for them. Clients understand that if they are hiring a great lawyer, that lawyer is not necessarily going to be the person who is handling all the day to day issues. But clients need to know who to call and they need to know that the lawyer with ultimate responsibility is managing her team and reviewing the most critical issues.
- Get all your ducks in a row. Get everything possible lined up in advance. One lawyer expressed the result this way: "The more I planned, the luckier I got."

Example: Two lawyers worked side by side. Both worked very hard but they had very different styles. One was single, with no children, and in her mid-twenties. She would work all night if necessary to finish a brief. The other one was close to forty, with three children and a husband. She organized her work life completely differently. She got every brief done in advance of the due date if possible so she could be ready for the inevitable occasions when one of her children would get sick and need special attention. She dubbed her energetic young colleague "the cliffhanger" but explained that she did not have the luxury of being a cliffhanger. Over time, she taught the value of planning and management to her younger colleague by example and gave the cliffhanger the magic formula: get all your ducks in a row. She also always had backup if she faced an unavoidable crisis. She would clear the decks, work late; and change her plans. But she did not do it all the time.

Which do you think your clients would prefer: a lawyer with no competing commitments who leaves a lot of things for the last minute or a lawyer who manages her workload so that most days she has time to devote to her family or other activities too? Which would you rather be? Happy Mothers Day and thanks to my first partner and mentor Blanche Bersch for teaching me not to be a cliffhanger.