



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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Make the Conversation About Business Needs. One place many lawyers report to me that they get stuck is in transitioning to discussions about business. How many times have you ended a meeting you organized for the purpose of marketing your services, frustrated because you never got past the small talk to get down to business? If you have left meetings feeling like you wasted your time, ready to swear off marketing, consider making a few small changes in your approach. Make sure that you have been direct about the reason for getting together. It is harder to transition to a business discussion if the premise on which you scheduled the meeting is unrelated to business. Business does not have to be the only reason to get together but it needs to be one stated objective. If you have made clear your purposes, then make sure that you state your agenda at the beginning of the meeting. Your agenda should be client-centric: you are on a fact finding mission to learn about what your client or prospect needs, not to make a presentation about your own work or your firm's.

Example: You have cultivated a relationship with an in house lawyer who serves on a committee with you. In addition to your work for the organization, you also share an interest in the arts and your children attend the same school. You have invited the lawyer to meet you for coffee or lunch before one of the committee meetings. The in house lawyer may suspect that like most outside lawyers he encounters, your motive in getting together is business. But he is not a mind reader and if you don't state your purpose, he has no way of knowing whether your invitation is related to the organization, your interest in the arts, your child's school or just the need to eat before the meeting. When you make the arrangements, you need to say that you want to make time to have an opportunity to hear more about his work/company/law department. When you meet, you need to be explicit. "I am glad we could get together. I have been looking forward to hearing about your work/company/law department." You can lead off with small talk about the news of the day, like who got into the playoffs for the World Series. But if you don't set an agenda that relates to the business purpose of the meeting, you might as well give up the pretense that you are having a marketing meeting.

Are you ready to take the necessary steps to insure that more of your meetings end up with a substantive discussion of business? The steps are: state that you have a business purpose; set an agenda in a client-centric way at the start of the meeting; listen and probe about your prospect's business; and above all, resist the temptation to launch into a presentation about yourself or your firm.