



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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Crossing the Silos. “Proliferate business from existing clients” is the rallying cry at partner retreats this season, especially as major institutions crumble. If you sat there wondering how you would get access to other work since your client contacts are limited to your own area of practice, you are not unusual. Most firm lawyers do not have broad networks or easy access to decision makers outside their own circles at their clients. Ambitious plans to proliferate business without concrete strategies to network outside narrow silos are doomed to failure. And even if you are not under pressure from a new—or renewed—firm initiative, extending your networks is a matter of self-preservation since your client advocates may retire or take new jobs. Here are some habits to develop:

- Understand your clients’ own networks, starting with their reporting relationships and composition of the law department and senior management.
- Schedule meetings at your clients’ facilities. Welcome suggestions to eat in the executive dining room and let your clients know that you appreciate meeting their colleagues.
- Accept invitations to client-sponsored events where you can meet people.
- Encourage your clients to bring their colleagues to your firm’s events.
- Follow up with new people you meet and cc the person who introduced you.
- Keep abreast of other firm lawyers’ relationships to the company, legal and otherwise.
- Encourage your firm to organize client teams or organize your own informal teams.

Example: After a retreat, one partner dutifully shared with a client that he had been tasked to broaden his firm’s relationship with his company. The client, who had become a good friend, responded that he would love to help out but that he did not work with or even know the lawyers who control other work for the company who are located elsewhere. The partner realized that his client was in a silo, too. So the partner’s strategy was to stimulate his client to help himself first. He encouraged his client to think about ways to increase his own visibility and leadership in the law department. He asked if his client could report on his own successes (and that of particularly effective law firms, of course) at law department meetings or on the law department intranet. He asked if it would be a sign of leadership if his client organized a meeting between other lawyers in the law department and lawyers in his firm. He asked if the company would appreciate if his client helped identify a very competent firm to compete on RFPS for other work. Finally, when he found a charity in which an officer of the company and one of his partners were both on the board, he invited his client to attend a charity event and arranged for his partner to introduce him-- and his client-- to the officer of his company. Of course, when the conversation shifted to a recent project, the client gushed about how good a job the firm does for the company.

Are you getting in the habit of extending your networks within existing clients and helping to enhance the careers of the people who champion you at those companies?

Are you ready to share your own successful network building strategies with other lawyers in your firm?