

Fire These Customers Immediately

Not all clients are created equal. Nor should you be compelled to treat them equally. There's no law stating you must sell to everyone or keep servicing clients that are the wrong fit for your business.

It's as fair to say that your business has outgrown certain types of customers as it is to say that you have some customers you should have never brought on in the first place. (You know who they are!)

If you're miserable working with a client that you know isn't profitable for your company, you won't be motivated to serve them well. And, if that client isn't receiving the best treatment, they won't hit their desired goals. By virtue of this predicament, you've created a lose-lose situation: You're not helping the client reach their objectives and they're not helping you reach yours.

Besides the ones that are clearly not profitable for you, here are four other types of clients that must go immediately:

- The “no one else matters” client. These are the clients that expect you to work only for them and all the time. They drag quick calls into 90-minute meetings and 90-minute meetings into all-day events. They call you on the weekends on your cell phone. These relationships never work and turn ugly when their inappropriate expectations aren't met.
- Walk away from any client who constantly threatens you. Perhaps they threaten to withhold payment, leave for the competition, or shop your solution around. You can't do your best work for them if you are constantly under negative pressure.
- The “check is in the mail” client. You aren't a bank, even if you work for a bank! Cash flow is the lifeblood of any business. When a client starts abusing the financial aspect of the relationship, talk to them immediately. If they will not rectify the situation, stop work until they do, or fire them immediately. No matter how prestigious.
- The prima donna client. Success and failure should be a shared experience. When you and the client achieve a desired outcome, it should be celebrated as a team effort. And, when something goes awry, there shouldn't be any finger-pointing on either side. Each accepts responsibility for their part in what went wrong and quickly resolves the issue. Rarely is a mistake one-sided but if it is (and all on you), accept responsibility immediately and resolve the issue. If a client is continually parading your joint success as their own singular success while at the same time foisting all the blame on you for failures, your relationship is one-sided and can never be profitable for you.

Remember, when dismissing a client, be respectful. Thank them for their business to date and explain that you're not the best fit for them moving forward. Try, “Thanks for considering us. At this point I don't think we are the right fit for helping you meet your goals.” Always keep the focus on their interests.

Firing a client may mean a short-term hit to an organization's profits, but it's critical for the long-term emotional health of the company and the team. Firing a client now not only frees up time for you to spend on more profitable clients - it also provides a boost of morale internally. When you step up and fire a bad customer, you win everyone's trust, loyalty, and respect. Especially your own.