

HANDLING UNETHICAL REQUESTS

What should you do when your client asks you to do something that's illegal or unethical? Have you ever been asked by an employer or client to do something that seems odd or possibly even illegal? I have.

As professionals, we need to maintain the highest level of integrity as we are serving our clients. That doesn't always mean just going along with whatever they ask of us. Sometimes it means doing just the opposite...running away.

For those situations where the project, the customer, the request, or the business opportunity seems wrong or just too good to be true, think twice before moving forward. A bad client is a bad client. An organization that seems like they may be doing something criminal probably is doing something criminal. Trust your gut. You could be wrong. But who's going to help you if you are right, and yet you proceed?

If you see warning signs like clients asking you to fill out liability documents that you've never had to fill out before, or asking you for financial information that doesn't seem to fit the purpose, or asking you to do something on their behalf that makes you want to run 100 mph in the other direction, don't go through with it. For every bad client or bad project, there are 100 more out there that are good. It's not worth the career and reputation risk – no matter what the price.

If you are doing wrong, know that you will get caught. What percent of wrongdoers do you really think evade the law? They may get away with something for a while, but most eventually pay the price. Do you think you're smart enough and stealthy enough and slimy enough to find yourself living the high life (and on the run forever)? Probably not. And that price you will end up paying is never going to get your reputation back, your old life back, and your felony conviction fully (and I mean fully) erased. You will suffer, your career or business will tank, and most of all your family will suffer.

Be selfish – protect your career and family. If your client asks you to do something that you are concerned may be illegal, pause. Likewise, if you are acting as an employee and your employer asks you to do something that seems to contradict good, legal practices for doing business, pause. Consider the situation and consider the consequences.

I know of an individual who recently went to jail for several years for continuing business with and for an organization conducting illegal and fraudulent practices. It doesn't matter whether he knowingly did this or was just duped, that's not my area to judge. The bottom line is this – his family has been put in peril and he's locked away for months or possibly years. Put yourself in that position. You don't want to go there.

Summary

When we are working for our clients, we have a responsibility to act to the best of our ability on their behalf. We want their repeat business and that often happens if we make them happy. But making them happy, satisfied customers should not come at the price of our reputation, our employment, our family or our freedom. Be aware of every next step you take. People are sometimes thinking of their own monetary gain and they don't care who or what they take down with them. It could be you and your career.