

Title:

7 Signs That It's Time to Fire a Client

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Summary:

What happens to your business when you keep clients that are not a good fit? All of your time and energy is drained in serving these clients, you lose any enthusiasm you ever had for your business, and you no longer have the time or desire to go out and market yourself and continue to fill your client roster. Check your client roster against these 7 signs -- is it time for you to shake out your client roster?

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It's an issue faced by business owners worldwide -- having to let go of, or "fire" a client. When I started my business, it's not a situation I ever thought I would face, as I was happy to take on almost anyone that wanted to hire me. However, over time, my client scrutinizing skills became more acute, and I began to realize that not every client is a perfect client for me. In fact, more than 50% of the people I speak with are not a good fit for one reason or another. Just like Donald Trump in "The Apprentice", sometimes you just have to say, "You're fired!"

What happens to your business when you keep clients that are PITA (I'll let you figure out that acronym) clients? All of your time and energy is drained in serving these clients, you lose any enthusiasm you ever had for your business, and you no longer have the time or desire to go out and market yourself and continue to fill your client roster. You become angry and resentful of the clients that are dragging you down and begin to question yourself about why you started a business in the first place.

Disengaging from a poor client choice can be painful, and often it's not easy. However, given the alternative, letting go of that client is a healthy route to follow. I found a great quote on the topic of "letting go" by author Benjamin

Shield in his book, Handbook for the Soul: "Letting go is one of the most difficult challenges human beings ever face. I've always pictured letting go as a transformation moving from a closed fist to an open hand. As we take an open-handed attitude toward life, we can be free of the self-made obstructions that litter our path. This process requires a willingness to shed our persona--those inauthentic trappings we hold onto for identity but that no longer serve us. The choice to let go frees us to follow the pathway to our soul."

I can very much relate to this quote -- freeing yourself from a bad client choice does provide the pathway to follow your soul. Finding the perfect clients with whom you resonate will bring joy back into your life and business once again, thus putting you back in touch with your business and life vision and reconnecting to your soul. Life is too short to work with PITA clients. Check your client roster against these 7 signs -- is it time for you to shake out your client roster?

1. You dread every phone call from the client. If you're constantly ducking someone's call because you find it painful or exhausting to speak with them, or the conversation invariably makes you angry or resentful, it's time to take some action to remedy the situation. How much more would you enjoy your day-to-day client interactions if you looked forward to taking your client's calls?

2. The client nitpicks every single expense and insists that tasks should take anyone else as long to do. I've had clients who "knew" I was shortchanging them and insisted that what I was doing for them wouldn't take others in my field as long to complete, and I should adjust my bill accordingly. I've discovered that this lack of trust is about the client, not about me, and that I'm more than competent and skilled in what I do. Don't let a "nitpicker" make you doubt yourself --there are other client fish in the sea.

3. Emergency requests are the only type of requests your client makes of you. No one likes to be under the gun, and trying to do something quickly and under pressure stifles all creativity and thoroughness. Some people are addicted to adrenaline and like to stay in the urgent all the time. However, living the urgent is a high-stress way to live your life, and the toll it takes on body and spirit is substantial. A better client choice is someone who adequately plans and prepares his time, so that emergencies are rare.

4. Lack of client follow-through prevents any progress from being made. Do you spend all of your time with a client in review of plans and what's supposed to be done, yet seldom ever get to the point of completion so that you can move to the next stage? Nothing is more frustrating than a client who says she wants to achieve a certain result, but seems to be immobilized in the planning stage.

Consequently, you spend all of your time with the client in review rather than in action. Perhaps you're able to put on a "coaching" hat and help the client see the roadblocks she's facing. However, if she's unwilling to discuss what's stopping her and your frustration level is growing at her lack of action, it's probably time to cut her loose and let her go.

5. Your client loves to micromanage. Typically, when I'm hired by a client, they have a problem to solve and I offer the perfect solution to their problem. However, I've had clients who don't let me solve their problem in the way that I think is best. They insist on having to approve every step along the way and must be involved in every single detail. In many cases, they are accustomed to having employees and erroneously believe that good management entails micromanaging each step an employee takes. A great client is someone who hires you to solve a problem and doesn't really care how you resolve it -- they are willing to give you the room and latitude to bring your experience to the table and help them resolve their issue.

6. Delegation is a skill completely foreign to your client. Most business owners know that in order to be successful in your business, you can't do it all alone. A successful business owner has a great team to which she consistently delegates tasks that she doesn't have the time to do, while she is out there looking for new business opportunities. If your client refuses to let go of anything and insists on doing the very things you were hired to do, your client hasn't grasped the notion of "lost opportunity costs". Sometimes it's simply easier for a business owner to work "in" the business rather than "on" the business, as the latter usually means that you have to be in the marketing and sales mode -- a mode that many business owners hate. A great client does what she does best and delegates the rest.

7. Money issues plague your client. Can your clients really afford to hire you? Sometimes they're in a start-up phase, or they're just experiencing a cash flow crunch. They obsess over your fee in every conversation that you have, and are usually slow to pay your invoices. The time and energy you spend in chasing their payment is very draining. A better client is one who understands your payment requirements and is easily able to afford and pay your fee.

I realize that it takes time and a visit to the "school of hard knocks" to finely tune your ability to choose clients that are a perfect fit for you. Take a look at your standards for running your business -- perhaps to need to raise them so that you can make better client choices. And, the first standard to put into place is that you don't work with any clients you don't enjoy. Let go of those clients who are causing you pain, and new clients that are a better fit will show up in their place -- guaranteed!

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