



PAY OR PLAY

DO NICE (SALES) GUYS FINISH LAST?

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A seventh-grade teacher once told his class that he didn't understand what "being nice" meant. "What is being nice?" he asked. He said that nice was such a nondescript word that really didn't give any direction of how to be or describe a set of behaviors. No one in the class had any comment as they were just 12 years old and were always being told to be nice. As many business people continue to run their businesses, the question of how nice they should be as a salesperson, program coordinator, boss, renter (and the list could go on for each of the hats worn each day) is often on their minds.

The dictionary says nice is defined as pleasing, agreeable and delightful. These three words will get you labeled as "nice," but will not necessarily advance your business career. To be pleasing, agreeable and delightful means that you are acting and making decisions based on always having others leave meetings happy and getting exactly what they want, many times at your expense. It may seem like your customers are pleased with the deal but if you do not feel good about your agreement or are unable to follow through on your word, your customers won't feel good for long. And don't forget about your real needs to make a profit, fulfill sales quotas, or pay your utility bills. If you give away your services or products to make others happy, your business won't survive very long.

For example, you are a contractor who has been asked by an advertising agency to build out new office space. You would like the work, but the agency has a limited budget. Being nice and accommodating, you offer them a proposal that is below your bottom line and promise to get the work done on their timeline. As you get started, you see that the job is much bigger than expected and you need to inform the owners that you cannot possibly do the entire project based on the current contract. The ad agency of course is upset and pushes you to stay within your budget. You end up losing money in the end and the ad agency isn't happy because of the extra funds needed and that you finished one month after you promised to get your work completed. You were being nice during contract

negotiations but in the end everyone felt bad. You are very unlikely to get a future referral from the ad agency and the money and time lost on this project threatens the future viability of your business.

So if being nice isn't an effective strategy, what can you do? You can work to have your clients and customers be truly satisfied with your services or products. Your job is to meet the real needs of your clients *as well as* meet your own business needs. In this way, you give good service to both your clients and your business. To do this you must remember and act on three things:

Know your ideal customers. By knowing what type of customers your business needs and serves the best, you can more effectively find this population to promote your products and services. The chance of finding and creating a good match between provider and client is greatly increased when you are just looking and meeting the people who fit your ideal customer base. Metaphorically speaking, if you are fishing for salmon, don't go to a small pond where only koi live.

Promise only what you can do and refer out when needed. Really knowing what you can and cannot offer will help everybody in the end. Clients need and want to know the exact parameters of what they are contracting for and

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expect that a job will be completed as stated. Knowing what to expect and getting your expectations met is far better than leaving a meeting feeling like a super deal was had. People like to be taken care of and will pay for this service. If you are not able to meet the needs of a potential client, state this ahead of time and give referrals of providers that may be able to work at a lower fee or provide a special service that you do not offer.

Follow through. At the end of the day, your word is what truly matters. Of course contracts are important, but contracts are really the written extension of your spoken word. So any stated promise, no matter how small, must be followed through on. If you said you would make a referral, make the referral. If you said you would return a phone call or get back to a client by email, make the call or email promptly. If you said you would get information, a proposal, or contract out to a customer, don't delay, as this needs to be on top of your list.

And when you truly take the time to think and try these ideas out, you will find it is easier to follow through on promises made to ideal clients. You will feel more confident that your clients will be satisfied with your work, make your necessary profit, and wrap up the job with everyone involved feeling positive. In the end, "being nice" seems to have little to do with business success. Save being pleasant, agreeable, and delightful for the cafeteria line, corporate social functions, and vacation, but be kind and take a service approach when working with your clients and customers. In other words, work with conscious intention to meet the needs of your clients and yourself, but still play nice. ■

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