

How to weed out those difficult clients

The issue: High-maintenance clients

The scenario: Entrepreneur in business two-plus years. Satisfied overall with business, but feeling very drained by a few difficult clients. Spending time fixing problems, explaining fees, and trying to satisfy them. Wishing these clients would disappear.



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High-maintenance clients are common for sole-proprietor business owners in service-related firms. Since you have been in business for two years and are still in business, you have reached a measure of success.

About one-third of businesses fail in the first two years. In that time you probably never turned away a potential client. You may

have felt grateful for the growing client base and increasing revenue, working with just about anyone willing to pay your fee.

As a more mature business owner, it is time to evaluate the clients you work with best and apply these metrics to your prospects. This is the ABCD model. This strategy may feel a little ruthless but it's critical for the

future of your business.

Here is how it works. Think back to all the clients you have worked with in the past two years. Evaluate the best ones (your "A" list) based on the following criteria:

- **Client personality:** Was there ease in communication? Did they show appreciation for your work?
- **Scope of work:** Do I enjoy this type of work? Are the client expectations realistic?
- **Value to the company:** What is the financial gain to my company? Did (or will) this lead to other valuable projects?
- **Collectibles:** This should be weighted heavily. Consider the speed you are paid on services delivered or contracted.
- **Referral source:** The value you place on the person who referred that particular client.

Once you have your "A list" clients profiled, do the same for B, C and D.

Use the A and B traits as a template for future clients. This

weeds out C and D prospects before they become clients. Some firms burn upward of 80 percent of their time with high-maintenance, energy-draining clients. That saps your quality of care for A and B clients. Delivering excellence to customers must be your highest priority, and you cannot deliver consistently outstanding service to the clients who drain you.

Let low quality prospects buy from someone else; you keep a selective client base that taps your passion and is a joy to serve. Sound warm and fuzzy? It's not. Henry Ford, one of our country's greatest entrepreneurs said, "A business absolutely devoted to service will have only one worry about profits. They will be embarrassingly large."

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