

# Quality info

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## **When It's Time to Divorce Your Clients**

### **It's me, not you... well... maybe it is you**

From time to time we all have to send our suppliers or customers packing. Does the following client relationship sound familiar? About 100 of her clients use her services once a year. They expect champagne service on a beer budget, and they pull her attention away from the people she works with regularly. This group is weighing her down, and after some soul searching, she's decided they've got to go. Her business is running her, and it's not working.

#### **Or how about these?**

- Plain and simple, he doesn't like working with them. They pay late, they always look for extras, and they're generally unpleasant. Life's too short, he doesn't need the work, and today is the day he's pulling the plug.
- They pay their bills on time, they're as regular as clockwork, but they're no longer profitable. They've been great clients, and she dreads having to tell them they're no longer a fit. Nevertheless, due to resource constraints, it's got to be done.

From time to time and for myriad reasons, service providers need to let a client or class of clients go. As with any other difficult conversation, there's a right way and a wrong way to make the decision and break the news.

### **Step one: Be methodical when making the decision**

Snap judgments can feel good in real time. Later, however, many people come to regret actions they've taken in the heat of the moment. So, when the thought of leaving a client enters your mind, take a step back and ask yourself why. Does the client not fit with your business model anymore? Does the person bring you down in some way? Does helping the client take away from more important work? If you answer "yes" to any of those questions, it's time to think about what you will accept, what you won't, and what types of clients make sense for where you are now and where you want to be in the next few years. Once you have clear criteria, you have something against which you can evaluate.

### **Step two: Ask yourself if the relationship is truly finished**

After you're clear about what you want and the kind of client that fits the bill, you must decide if the relationship is finished or if it has rehab potential. For example, if a client is always late, and that is what's making the relationship unpleasant, a frank conversation may solve the problem. On the other hand, if the client doesn't value you, or his business is no longer part of your core service, you may want to say goodbye. Alternatively, if you can be had for a price, consider revising your fees. Some people may be perfectly happy to pay to stay.

### **Step three: Determine whether you will make a clean break or recommend an alternative**

When a client's behavior is perfectly fine, but the client is no longer a fit, sending them in another direction may make a lot of sense. When you do, however, you must be clear that you are out of the picture and not a go-between for managing the new relationship. In other words, if something goes wrong, you're not involved.

At the other end of the spectrum, if you need to move on from an abusive person or people, it hardly makes sense to recommend a colleague. After all, would you want people sending toxic clients your way? Probably not.

### **Step four: Choose the right time**

*When* you make a split can be as important as *how*. For instance, if you're an accountant, and just before tax time you make a break with clients who only use you at tax time, you're going to make a lot of people angrier than they need to be. When possible, provide ample warning.

### **Step five: Keep your message short and direct**

When you break the news, keep your explanation brief.

“Karen, I have some updates about my business and where my focus is for the coming year. We’ve been shifting our attention to full-service clients for quite some time. Full-service clients are people who need us every month and not just once a year. You should know this is the last year I’m going to be handling clients who don’t need our full services. Based on what I understand from working with you, I don’t think full service is something you need. Am I correct?”

If the breakup is a result of a client’s behavior, the message may be a little different.

“Arun, for our services to work, we need clients who respond when we ask for their feedback. We don’t have the resources to manage the follow up required when we don’t hear anything. Because feedback isn’t happening, and it’s been an ongoing issue, we’re going to step away from the relationship.”

### **Step six: Stand firm and stay calm**

Some people take a split well, and others don’t. No matter the reaction, you should stay calm and stick by your carefully reasoned decision.

No matter the reason, splits are rarely fun when they’re happening. Once they’re over, however, they can free you to take on new challenges, and do the work that makes you happy.

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ISO 50500 series innovation management: overview and potential usages in organizations

Innovation must be supported by a mindset shift, and cannot be reduced to innovation labs or creativity rooms with fancy furniture, writable walls, adding innovation as a company value, or launching innovation challenges. Those will generate buzz, not a sustainable innovation mindset. Culture is something you need to support, enable, and maintain. In 90's; quality culture has been spread in the whole industry value chain through ISO 9001 standards. This set of standards has defined what quality means, which are the core principles and how to structure the quality system. ISO 9001 has

been embraced and deployed across many organizations, this standard proved to be instrumental in quality culture dissemination. Innovation management needs the same visibility and the same culture development in today's organization. The future ISO standards on innovation management (ISO 50500 series) is presented in this paper, and their expected impact on building an innovation culture is motivated. ISO 50500 series stems from the 2013 ISO Technical committee on innovation management that has been created under the impulsion of AFNOR (French standardization office). The scope of this technical committee has been approved by its members in 2014:" Standardization of terminology tools and methods and interactions between relevant parties to enable innovation. " As of today, the committee gathers 48 countries and 6 international liaisons with international institutions (WIPO, WTO, OECD, CERN, World Bank and EPO).

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Mumbai. email: [dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in](mailto:dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in)  
Ph: 022 2267 2041

Edited by Hari Taneja, Mumbai  
email: [dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in](mailto:dlshahtrust@yahoo.co.in)