

My Favorite Business Rules: The 4 Nevers & the 4 Always



Seems like every day there's another spate of articles with titles like "Ten Success Secrets of the Top-Selling Superstars." These stories are like car accidents: you can't look away. A lot of it is common sense, but as George Carlin reminded us, common sense isn't. So in that spirit, I have compiled a list (from direct experience) of good and bad practices. Here are my favorite four Always Rules and my four Never Rules.

The 4 Never Rules

1. NEVER work with anyone who treats you like you're stupid.

Over the years, I have found that no matter how much you want a project, never put up with disrespect or abuse. If a customer refuses to treat you as a fellow human, or thinks that paying you for your product or service also buys the right to be obnoxious, flee. Life is too short and you will never be that hungry.

2. NEVER sell your product or service to someone who doesn't understand its value.

This happens when we make assumptions about the customer's knowledge level. It is our job as businesses to make sure our customers understand not only what they are buying, but how it will benefit them and why it is valuable. People often don't even know what assumptions they're making because the assumptions are unconscious. Sometime it's wishful thinking; sometimes it's based on a customer's previous experience that has nothing to do with you and your offer. So always try to identify a customer's knowledge gaps and take care of them. Otherwise you run the risk of bad surprises, especially at invoice time.

Which brings me to:

3. NEVER let your client set your price.

It is our job to set a correct value on our work. We have all had the customer who wants to "break us down" or "score a deal." Even with no intention to power trip you into lowering your price, customers may often have a price assumption that is based on either wishful thinking or no thinking at all. These customers need to be gently educated (see #2).

4. NEVER ignore what your gut is telling you.

We all lapse on this, and it will nearly always come back to bite us. Many times, because we really need the sale,

we bulldoze over that big red flag that popped up. We do this at our peril! Little nagging voices may not be telling us what we want to hear, but they always tell us what we need to know. Slow down long enough to listen and learn – you will save yourself boatloads of suffering.

The 4 Always Rules

1. ALWAYS observe the Golden Rule.

This can be expressed in many different ways, but what it comes down to is, the best way to treat people is how you would like to be treated. As a rule for doing business it is absolutely infallible. This is the flip side of the #1 Never rule above.

2. ALWAYS put agreements in writing.

No matter how hard we try to cover all bases and be clear, there is always potential for misunderstandings whenever we make agreements about doing business. For the sake of everyone's sanity, every project should begin with a written agreement about the scope, budget and timeline, and have a process for scope changes.

3. ALWAYS strive to do better and learn more.

It's very easy to get complacent and find yourself in a comfortable place of "we've always done it this way." Comfort is the enemy of growth. If you are not making time to stay up on new developments in your field, you are writing a slow, painful death warrant for your business.

4. ALWAYS believe in the value of your work and your expertise.

If you don't, then why should anyone else? Even though we may sometimes feel insecure about our worth, this belief needs to be consistently conveyed, not only to our clients but to ourselves. Transient mood swings happen to all of us, and have nothing to do with our basic worth. Believing in the value of what your business offers is the bedrock of all effective marketing.