

# How To Fire A Customer

By Wayne M. Davies

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Wayne M. Davies  
Wayne@YouSaveOnTaxes.com

You Save On Taxes <http://www.YouSaveOnTaxes.com>

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It must be Tax Season. How do I know?

I'm swamped with work.

And I just fired a client. Again.

It happens every Tax Season -- I don't like to do it, but it's something that just has to be done every now and then.

Let me explain.

First, let's define our terms. I use the word "client" to describe the people that pay for my tax services. You may use the word "customer" or "patient" or "subscriber".

Ya' know, whoever buys what you sell.

Second, let's get something straight here. When you own your own business, you get to call the shots. It's your business, so you get to do things your way.

That's how I see it, anyway.

So I have certain rules that my clients must follow. Policies, procedures -- the way things are done around here.

Example: I prepare tax returns in the order received. First come, first served. Fair enough? I don't know any other way to do it.

So last week a client comes in and says, "Can you please 'put a rush' on my return. I really have to get it filed right away. My ex-wife and I don't have a written agreement re: who gets to claim our children as dependents. So whoever files first gets to claim them."

"Last year I didn't file first, but I went ahead and claimed the kids anyway. So the IRS rejected the return. My refund was delayed. I'd really like to avoid all that mess this year. I know my ex hasn't filed yet, but she told me she plans to do so within a few days. So I need you to do my return right away -- I really want to stick it to my ex this year!"

Here was my response.

"I'm sorry Mr. Client. Normal turn-around time for a return is 3-4 weeks. When you bring me your return, you just got in line. You don't get to go to the front of the line at the grocery store, do you? And you don't get to go to the front of the line here, either."

"The fact that you and your ex-wife didn't put something in writing about this doesn't give you the right to expect me to treat you different than any other client. Your problem doesn't become my emergency."

[NOTE: most divorced people put this kind of thing in writing, usually as part of the divorce agreement.]

Mr. Client didn't like my answer and began to plead his case more fervently. He became unreasonable. He wanted me to stop what I was doing and do his return immediately. I finally just told him, "You need to find a new accountant. I'm not in a position to provide the type of service you're looking for."

(There are plenty of tax prep firms in town that provide faster service than me, and who offer services like

"rapid refund", etc. That's not what I'm about.)

I then politely escorted him to the door and told him it was best that we terminate our relationship.

In your business, I'm sure you deal with unreasonable requests on a regular basis, don't you? How far should you go to provide superior customer service without compromising your integrity or your sanity?

Sometimes it's a tough call. Here's a few guidelines.

1. When firing a customer, always remain calm and polite. No need for a shouting match. Be firm yet pleasant.

2. Not sure what to say when confronted with this type of situation? Sit down beforehand and write out 3 or 4 possible scripts. Not sure how to say it? It may take some practice, so practice! Stand in front of a mirror and rehearse how to tell a customer that it's best he go elsewhere.

3. Do not focus on the lost revenue that results from firing a bad customer. Focus on the resulting reduced stress and the simple fact that you'll feel so much better knowing that you won't have to deal with this jerk any more.

Think about how much time you'll save. Problem customers are really a losing proposition, aren't they? You end up spending so much time and energy putting out the fires they cause, do you really make any money on them, when you factor in the value of your time?

4. When business is slow, firing a customer can really be hard to do. If you cannot afford to fire your problem customers, then you need to take a hard look at your marketing. If your marketing plan is producing a steady stream of new customers, then getting rid of the bad apples every now and then should not be a problem -- they will be replaced soon enough with better customers.

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Wayne M. Davies is author of the new eBook, "The Tax Reduction Toolkit: 29 Little-Known Legal Loopholes That Will Reduce Your Taxes By Thousands (For Small Business Owners and Self-Employed People Only!) Don't file another tax return until you visit:

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