

Fired with enthusiasm

The idea that businesses should be able to “fire” nuisance clients has gathered momentum up in recent years. It’s not a new concept, certainly we have been advising on this for over a decade, but what is new is the tenacity with which it’s being approached.

It’s almost as if businesses have been given a new “superpower” one with which to wield their judgement upon who is and who is not worthy of being a client. This is dangerous mindset and is fraught with damaging potential.

To start with, what criteria determines a good client from a fired client? How do you get to that decision and how do you execute it? Getting this wrong can be potentially lethal.

The basis of this idea was to break the long-held belief in the generalisation that “customer is always right” - that is to say that whatever the client says, does or believes should be held as the ultimate truth against which we determine all our actions and deeds.

So steadfast has this approach been historically that it didn’t long before less scrupulous individuals learned that they could use this mindset for personal gain. In many commercial sectors businesses found themselves at the mercy of individuals well practiced in the art of complaint and the term “compo” was born. From there it was just a matter of time before this culture trickled down into every corner of commerce.

Not surprising then that it’s easy to confuse genuine client discontent with malintent, so how do you differentiate between the two? Well, it’s essential that you get an explicit and detailed understanding of the circumstances and that you are able to consider these objectively. Better still ask someone else in the firm that’s not directly involved in the situation, doesn’t know the client and can look at the circumstances impartially to help.

Get to the bottom of whether there is any genuine basis in the clients’ dissatisfaction. Was there any definitive material loss? What does the client want and is this a fair solution? If your answer to any of these questions is an honest “no” then your client is not being fair with you.

Sloppy preparation on the part of the client can easily lead to “buyer’s remorse”, or a failure to benchmark costs creates resentment from a sense of “paying over the odds”, especially when cheaper terms are later discovered. These excuses in themselves are not genuine reasons to seek financial redress through spurious complaints but do demonstrate an early lack of clarity or appreciation for the value of the work undertaken, something that you need to look at carefully. In either case the client probably didn’t set out to deceive their way to compensation but probably feels justified in doing so, nonetheless.