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The Twelfth of Never

Until the twelfth of never and that's a long, long time.

If you're 60 or older, you likely know the song as a Johnny Mathis classic. If you're a decade or so younger, like me, you may remember this as a Donny Osmond tune. If you're younger than that, you may have never heard of the song before, or Johnny Mathis or even Donny Osmond for that matter, not that it matters. I do wonder how songs like this are written. Being an accountant, I'm ridiculously literal so when I read or hear the lyrics to a song, they need to make sense to me. So a song like *The Twelfth of Never* does not impact me emotionally much, largely because I am too distracted wondering how they came up with such a nonsensical title. Not to belabor the point, but some day when you've got a few minutes, look up some lyrics to songs written by Stevie Nicks (former singer with Fleetwood Mac and has a notable solo career). Honestly, I have zero idea what the hell point that woman was making with **any** of her songs. Please send along the translations if you have them.

The point of this month's S & S is to talk about things you should never do in business. To make the title relevant, I am going to give you twelve of them. These are the absolute no nos. Just don't do it.

1. **Never argue with a customer** - If you're having words, you're saying good bye. You may feel better telling them off, particularly if they've been unfair to you, but the better course is to part as amicably as possible. Don't have the last word, don't have the first word. Just say good luck and good bye. The "need" to tell a customer off is more reflective of you than them.
2. **Never ignore your books** - One of the scariest things for me to hear from a client is "Oh well I don't know anything about the books, so and so handles that." You need to know, understand AND oversee your finances. Your accountant (hint hint) can help you here. Most business failures result from poor financial management. Just being involved improves management.
3. **Never ignore measuring cash flow** - This relates to #2 above but needs further reiteration. Cash is king. You should measure cash flow both historically (to find out where the money went) and forward on a projection basis (to find out where it is about to go). Again, we can help you do this. It is a worthwhile investment of time and/or money to build this into your processes.
4. **Never answer the phone without a smile** - Did you know that there is a measurable difference in your tone when you answer the phone with a smile. It's perceptible to the recipient and gets communication with them off to a great start. Try it out and thank me later.
5. **Never choose a prospect over an existing client** - This one is in the category of "all things being equal," but the point is clear: The guy/gal writing you checks today is more important than the one who might write you one tomorrow. Your marketing and communication plan should strongly emphasize the importance of keeping the current customers engaged and happy.
6. **Never criticize an employee in front of a customer** - You may think you are advocating for your customer, but you likely are looking like you're passing the buck. If an employee messes up, assume it is your responsibility, because guess what? It is. You'll get more respect by taking the bullet, and correcting the employee beyond the eyes and ears of any customer.
7. **Never advertise if you're only going to do it once** - Advertising, by its nature is a process of repetition. If you believe that advertising is going to help you, choose a market and mediums that permit you to afford to get that message to the recipients several times. And by all means, never market or advertise for "awareness," unless of course you're Coca Cola or Nike or Ford. You can't afford it and it likely won't help.

8. **Never meet without an agenda** - Even with prospects. Decide ahead of time what you'd like to talk about and stick to it. If possible, get the agenda to the participants ahead of time and ask for their input. People will appreciate the productivity that you just enhanced of the meetings you have.
9. **Never sign a contract without reading it, or having it read by an attorney** - It isn't going to matter much the oral representations someone makes to you when the signed contract indicates otherwise. In today's world, there is no such thing as boiler plate language. Everyone is looking to protect themselves or secure themselves in every way possible. Make sure your security is being looked out for by a reputable attorney/law firm.
10. **Never stop learning** - There is no reason to stop educating yourself throughout your life. A CPA like me is required to do it. If you aren't required by your profession to stay educated, *make it a requirement*. One you enforce and support with regard to your key people.
11. **Never let a day go by without thanking someone** - That way, by the end of the year, you will have made at least 365 thank-yous. Some will have heard it multiple times from you. That is not a bad thing. Here's an equation: **Thank You = Loyalty**, from your customers, employees, referrers, referees.
12. **Never pick up a curling iron by anything except the handle** - I learned that one recently, and no, it wasn't for use on my hair, which remains Beatles-straight.

Happy Thanksgiving!



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