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COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: I’m the owner and manager of a hair salon. I’m struggling with the decision to turn away one of my repeat customers because she always complains or berates whichever hairstylist cuts and styles her hair. She’s never satisfied, always demands a discount, and then doesn’t leave a tip because no one “deserves one.” I’m concerned about our reputation if I turn her away because I don’t want her to spread a bad word about us. Any suggestions?

FRUSTRATED SALON OWNER



DEAR FRUSTRATED SALON OWNER: This type of decision is never easy for a business owner. As important as it is to mind your bottom line, it is just as important to stand up to people in the face of mistreatment. Your hairstylists deserve to be treated with respect and to feel valued. Sure, money talks but looking out for your workers is just as important. Honest mistakes can happen and I’m sure you have ways to rectify those occurrences, but as you strive to keep customers happy rather than unhappy, you also have to keep a

A time to fire (a customer)

watchful eye on whether they’re good or bad customers.

An unhappy customer can be saved or transformed to a happy customer by extra effort and empathy on your part. And even if you can’t improve their experience, the unhappy customer can still be a good customer when they respect your honest efforts to satisfy them. It’s when they have no manners, blatantly disrespecting you, your people, or your establishment that they become “bad customers.” And you DO NOT have to deal with bad customers (other than possibly giving them a refund and telling them to have a nice day).

Similar to the notion that there is a time and season for everything, there is a time and occasion to fire customers, regardless whether they are right or wrong. Many businesses and service providers, both large and small, have done it for various reasons.

A graphic designer I know began turning down one of his clients because she would never be decisive with the visual designs he created. He would spend hours creating and recreating color schemes because the client couldn’t make up her mind on what she liked. It would get to the point that he’d waste valuable hours of his studio

time that this particular client became unprofitable for him. So he fired her.

A district manager for a high-profile coffee shop chain banned a customer from all locations because he would always make a scene and berate workers who would not make a latte to his liking. This customer’s rude, selfish, and mean behavior would devalue the coffee shop’s staff, hurting morale. So he is no longer welcomed in their establishments.

See? You wouldn’t be the first to fire a customer. And don’t worry about a bad customer hurting your reputation. Do all you can to provide the best possible service and the results of your efforts will speak for themselves. Your good customers will appreciate you and keep coming back over and over again, regardless what a bad customer may say or write. Your attitude, actions, and service will cement your excellent reputation as someone who can be trusted to provide the best service possible.



For an opportunity to have your question, issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.