



Goltz by Jay Goltz On Business

Sometimes It's Nice, Sometimes It's Naïve

Being nice is good business. However, sometimes in the effort to be “nice,” we are also being naïve. Sometimes instead of getting paid back for our kindness, we get regrettable consequences.

Take for example, when you start your business and you're so thankful for having a customer walk in the door, you'll do anything for them, including not taking a deposit. We're so happy that we don't want to jinx the deal. The customer is nice. They'll come in on time. And they do—98% of the time.

The problem is the 2% that don't, leaving you with a lot of pictures in your pick-up rack. If you frame 1,000 pictures each year, that means 20 pictures won't be picked up. This adds up to thousands of dollars.

Now, you could say that taking a deposit doesn't make a difference. Some people just won't pick up their pictures. While that is sometimes true, it usually isn't. Over the years we have found a direct correlation between orders that were not picked up and those on which a deposit was not taken.

Apparently, some people don't value their artwork that much, and when it comes down to paying for their framing or abandoning it, they choose to abandon it. And for those people that would have abandoned it either way, you could at least have a deposit to cover your time and materials.

It is not unreasonable to ask for a 50% deposit to have something custom-made. That's how it is for most custom items. As a matter of fact, I can't think of anything that does not require a deposit. Believe me, I've heard it all. Customers will say, “I'm leaving you my artwork; that should be deposit enough.” To which the answer is, “Unfor-

tunately, we can't sell people's artwork when they don't pick up their framing.” Follow that up with, “Will that be check or charge?”

The second way we get ourselves into trouble when being “nice” is by not controlling the urge to fix everyone's framing problems. Or, more importantly, not controlling the urge to *try* to fix their problems. The most common example I can think of is when the customer comes in with a badly damaged frame. They just want us to touch it up.

Now I don't know about you, but I don't consider us custom woodworkers—or for that matter, miracle workers (if you don't count making payroll every Friday). Sometimes, in an effort to be accommodating, we have said that we will “try to touch it up as best we can,” even if we don't have the skills required. Just like that missing sock that enters the dryer, then goes into cyberspace, so go the words, “...best we can.” All the customer hears is, “...touch it up.”

Again, it doesn't happen all the time, but it happens enough that we have to think twice before we say we will touch up anything. More than likely, in my business we'll tell them that touched-up frames generally don't look right, and it will look better and be less expensive to buy a new frame.

I must admit that one time I lost it. After I'd touched up a frame, the customer said, “I could have done it better myself!” To which I said, “I wish you would have!” Actually, I don't remember if I said that; sometimes I mix reality with fantasy!

Haven't you fantasized about saying exactly what you were thinking to a customer? If you haven't, you should; it's cathartic! How many times have you wished you'd said “No” instead of “I'll

try” after three hours of labor and frustration?

And then there are many of us who have the need to be the “nice” boss. This is frequently at the expense of our customers and ourselves. It starts out with the naïve thought that if we treat people “nice,” they will treat *us* “nice.” Sure, in the real world, when you treat people nicely, most will treat you nicely in return.

But then there’s the problem of treating your employees nicely. Say your employee wants to take Saturday off because it’s a nice day. You know it’s your busiest day, but you still want to be nice. Now your customers have to wait longer than they would have if you had your employee working. They might even leave.

Is it fair to the customers that, in an effort to be nice, you let employees come in late and there is

no one to take care of them? Is it nice to have the employee who is always on time cover for your absent employee? When it comes to management, nice has to be coupled with fair—fair to you, fair to employees, fair to the customers.

Many of us struggle with trying to be nice people while at the same time trying to run a business. If we make an effort to be fair, does that mean that we are not being nice? Absolutely not. That means we are being business people. In contrast, in an effort to be nice, we sometimes do things that are not fair to the business.

You can only have one mission. If you want to run a successful business, you need to do what is right for the business. At face value, it might appear that you are not being “nice,” but in reality it has nothing to do with being nice. It has to do with making customers happy and

making a profit.

My gut instinct about what it means to be nice when you’re the boss has changed dramatically over the years. When I started out, I was 22 years old and had no concept of what it meant to be the boss. I don’t believe I have gotten “less nice.” I believe I have become a responsible boss, taking care of the needs of customers, being fair to employees, and being as nice as I can be without not being nice to myself.

There is one thing you have to get over: just because you think you are being nice about something doesn’t mean everyone is going to agree. Being nice sometimes means having to say you’re sorry; like, “I’m sorry, you can’t have Saturday off.” Being “nice” is relative.

I’ll finish where I started.

As the boss, I think you should be “nice” to everybody. Have a nice day! ■