



**10 tips for successfully
managing challenging
client relationships**



10 tips for working with clients you don't like

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Every now and then, you are faced with the prospect of working with a client you don't particularly like. It may even be that you don't have a relationship with this client, but rather, another of your partners does. And if it were up to you, you wouldn't bother having a relationship with the client!

But, at the end of the day, we are professionals, and with the right mindset and strategies, we can navigate these challenges and even turn them into opportunities for growth.

If this sounds slightly familiar, here are 10 tips and tricks to help you manage difficult client relationships and even thrive in the challenge of turning this around to be one of the best relationships you have!

Focus on the task, not the person

First and foremost, in circumstances such as this, it is really easy to focus on the person and not the task at hand. Here, you need to redirect your attention away from how you feel about the person and concentrate on delivering results.

Trust me, if you believe you can deliver the result the client wants/needs, they'll not only be your new best friend but also your biggest advocate!

Set clear boundaries

Make sure you have in place an engagement letter that establishes clear boundaries around how the relationship is going to work. Clearly outline your availability, working

hours, preferred communication methods and the scope of the work you are expected to be doing to avoid any misunderstandings later that could give rise to a disagreement between you and the client.

Our experience has been that clearly setting boundaries at the start of a matter helps to reduce unnecessary friction and prevent misunderstandings.

Document everything

When all else fails, document everything!

Keep clear and accurate records of all communications, updates and deliverables. This helps avoid misunderstandings and provides a fallback if disputes arise.

Accurate records serve as a safeguard in case of disputes and ensure accountability on the part of both parties.

Seek support from your colleagues or mentors

Share your experiences with trusted colleagues to get advice or simply vent. They might offer solutions you hadn't considered.

Don't hesitate to consult with the colleague who has the relationship with the client. If this is a brand-new relationship that no one has previously known, then seek guidance from your colleagues, mentors or supervisor to ask whether you are being reasonable in your actions and/or thoughts.

Seeking support from others often acts as a good sounding board for your concerns.

Practice empathy

As professionals, it can sometimes be easy to get caught up in our day-to-day problems. If you are having relationship issues with a client, take a step back for a moment and try to understand where the client is coming from. They might be under pressure or dealing with challenges you are completely unaware of. For example, the outcome of this matter might be the difference between getting a bonus and not for them!

Unless you know what the client's KPIs and issues are, you won't know their drivers – so

try and learn what these are so you can make their lives easier and, by extension, yours too!

Practicing empathy towards your client can help shift your perspective and respond more constructively.

Be solution-oriented

Instead of dwelling on the problems, focus on finding solutions!

At the end of the day, we are professionals, and a proactive approach can defuse tension and demonstrate your commitment to the client's success.

Maintain professionalism

Remember, we have professional duties to always remain polite and courteous, even when a client is being difficult.

Keeping interactions between you and your difficult client professional should help prevent any tensions from escalating. Keep in mind though that if you lose your temper then this will almost certainly escalate the issue – regardless of whether or not you feel you are in the right.

Know when to walk away

If the relationship becomes too toxic, [it might be time to refer the matter on.](#)

However, always weigh the professional obligation you have to the client before taking this decision.

Learn from the experience

They say the client is always right, but that isn't always strictly true.

Use any negative interactions as a learning opportunity. Undertake an after-action review to identify what specifically bothered you. Think about how you can avoid similar issues in the future, and ask yourself honestly what you did right and what you could have done

better to defuse the situation.

You might also want to ask your colleague or mentor to peer review the file and see if there is anything they may have done differently.

Don't take it personally

Finally, don't take it personally.

Now, I have to admit, I have never been too good with this one. But in recent years, I have come to recognise that a difficult client's behaviour is not necessarily a reflection of my abilities. Keeping this in mind has helped me stay composed and focused on the issue at hand.

In a nutshell

Let's face it, working with a client you don't like is going to be a challenge. But it can also be an opportunity. By staying professional, empathetic, and solution-focused, you can navigate this tough situation while maintaining your professionalism.

And every client interaction is a chance to learn and grow your practice!

More articles on client relationships

- [The importance of creating "relationship value" with your clients](#)
- [10 tips on providing an excellent client service](#)
- [6 steps to handling client complaints](#)

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