

TRANSCRIPT

On Your Terms



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Episode #: 152

5 Lessons I Learned From Nightmare Clients

Sam Vander Wielen:

Hey, and welcome back to On Your Terms. I'm your host, Sam Vander Wielen. And, yes, I'm a lawyer turned entrepreneur who helps you learn how to legally protect your online business. But I also own my own business, obviously, and I go through a lot of, you know, experiences with customers. I have thousands of positive experiences per year, and I have a handful that aren't so great. And my almost, like, seven years in owning my own business, I've had my fair share of what I would call nightmare scenarios that I know that so many of my friends and colleagues have too.

So, I want to start out today by saying that just to be fair to everyone and protect everyone's identity and be sensitive to that and everything, I'm obviously not naming anything or anything like that. And I've also mixed some of my own experiences with experiences I've gotten from friends, because my job here is never to, like, call people out, make people feel uncomfortable. So, it's not my style.

So, we're going to get into today the five lessons that I've learned from these scenarios, both from myself and from other people. And I'm hoping that in doing so and me sharing about them, they will help you to two things. One, avoid them as much as possible in your own business, and two would be to navigate it better when it does happen to you. Because sometimes it's just unavoidable. It happens.

I think when you own your own business, some of this stuff just happens. Some people are a little wackadoodle, as my mom would say. It just happens. It's okay. We can't control everybody who comes to us and it's not our job and all that good stuff. And I think just not feeling alone in those moments and being like, Is there something wrong with me? Is there something wrong with my product? Did I do something wrong to attract this person? It can just feel really nice in that moment to be like, "Oh. This is just part of being a business owner. I'm in the club."

So, we'll hop into my five lessons in a sec. First, I wanted to share with you that I am back to work this week after taking a couple of days last week to go down the shore, as we say. I'm from Jersey, Philly areas, we say down the shore when we go to the beach. It's like going to the Jersey Shore, so we say we went down the shore. It's just how we talk.

So, I went down the shore and I spent a few days with my sister and my two little nephews and my brother-in-law, and Ryan and I went. And we just had the best time just spending a couple days together and, honestly, just playing in the ocean most of the time. I'm an ocean bunny. You can't get me out of the ocean once I'm there. I just love it.

And I was very excited to teach my nephews my very theatrical and skillful way of being in the ocean, which I call Belly Ride. So, I really love when this big wave comes, before it crests, if you can ride the wave on your belly and then you just kind of face plant into the ocean after the wave goes by you. It's really fun. And luckily for me, I have a five and seven year old nephew, so they thought it was hilarious to do belly flops in the ocean. So, I had a lot of fun doing that.

And I love days at the beach. And anybody who loves the beach, you know, at the end of the day, when you get to the end of a beach day and you just take a shower and you can feel all the salt in your hair, you just feel different, your skin is so sunkissed. And everybody always like showers and gets ready for dinner. Being on the shore is such a vibe. It's such a vibe. I just absolutely love it there. So, we had such a nice time.

On the work front, I've been doing a whole series of guest interviews this week for the first time in a long time, which is something I'm actually trying to get better at making more consistent. Because I tend to come up with a lot of ideas or have this burst at once of being like, "I want to interview this person, this person, and that person." And then, I go through this round of interviews and then I kind of forget about it. So, it's something on my end, I'm going to be better about regularly scheduling a time, like every single month, to ask my team to reach out to a certain list of people.

If there's anybody you wish that I would have on the show who you think would be really great for it, just reach out to me and let me know and let me know why. I would love to consider it. But I would love to bring you more regular guests.

I always plan to have at least half, if not the majority, of these episodes be solo episodes, because I'm going to teach you legal tips, I'm going to teach you marketing tips. But I always want to bring in experts in other areas who can supplement what we're all going through in business.

So, two of the episodes I've done this week, now you've heard already when you're listening to this episode. Podcasting is always weird because I'm always recording so far in the future, so I always have to think of the timeline of where things are at and predict the future. But two of them you've already heard or been able to hear.

So, Episode 149 was with Grief Therapist Gina Moffa. She just came out with a new book called Moving On Doesn't Mean Letting Go. I would highly recommend going and listening to Episode 149. And if you're going through grief, obviously, or have gone through it, you'll also hear Gina explain why. If you think you haven't lost somebody or experienced grief already, that you're probably wrong. So, I thought that was really interesting.

And then, my second interview that you've heard already is from Emily, that was Episode 151. Emily's a burnout specialist, and so we had a really great conversation about navigating burnout, identifying it, what is it really, how does it get misconstrued, some great tips on managing it and then avoiding it as well. So, I just thought that was really, really helpful. So, definitely check out 151 if you're curious about burnout, too.

All right. So, with that, we're going to get to the five lessons that I've learned from these nightmare scenarios. It's not about nightmare customers. It's nightmare customer scenarios. The nightmare is the scenario, not the person. I guess I do want to preface this by saying - how do I put this? - I try not to judge these people from the experience that I have, so I'll tell you a kind of funny story. It's not my proudest moment.

But right after my dad died, I remember that something had come in the mail, I think the week he was in the hospital, and I was down in Philly and so my house was here in New York. And something had come in the mail from West Elm, the store. And my dad was in the hospital for a week, then my dad died, I stayed in Philly for a couple of weeks to help take care of things. By the time I came back to New York, I found the package, like pulled my head out of the tissue box. I was like, "Oh, shoot. I have this thing from West Elm." It turns out I don't even need it. I need to return it. And it was past the date that they would take it back.

So, I go into local West Elm store and I asked them to return it. And it was just one of those scenarios where the woman who was working the counter, she had zero customer service. There was just nothing. No bedside manner happening here at this West Elm. And you mix that with a grieving person who's tired and crabby and not herself, let's just say it didn't go well. I ended up having a freak out, like a total Karen freak out. I'm so frustrated. I was just yelling at her because she was definitely being very rude. But I normally would never do that.

And I felt horrible for it as soon as I did it and I apologized right away. And I was honest because I was like, "I am so sorry. My dad just died. I am not myself. That was totally inappropriate. I'm really sorry. I'm just having a really hard time." And she was like, "Okay," like she didn't even care.

But I always think about that. I'm bringing that up because I think about that when I have nightmare client scenarios or somebody cuts me off in traffic or whatever, I'm like, "You know what? Maybe they're going through a hard time. Maybe they're projecting onto me. Maybe they're doing all these things." But I don't know, maybe this is not their best moment. Maybe if I talk to all their friends or their significant other, they would be like, "They're a lovely person."

So, I try to remember that in the grand scheme of things because it helps me to de-charge some nightmare scenarios sometimes. And that's why I didn't want this episode to be like, "Here's three things about the worst people

ever that I've ever dealt with." I don't know if they're the worst people. They had a bad moment with me, that's for sure. They did not show me their best foot forward but that doesn't mean they're a bad person. They could think they're right. They might be right. There might be something about what they argued with me about that they're right about. They could be wrong. I have no idea. So, point being, it's not about them being nightmare people. It was, generally speaking, these scenarios were nightmare-ish.

So, tip number one about any kind of nightmare scenario that you go through in your own business is that there is always a lesson. I honestly think if you're walking away from a nightmare scenario or even some of you would qualify as a nightmare client and you're like, "There is nothing I could have done any differently from that," that's a problem. That would be a major red flag to me.

I just went through the worst one I've ever had, and I walked away with a number of lessons from it. I was like, I would do this differently. I would do that differently. I wish I would have done that. I wish I would have said this, not said that. Totally. We had a conversation about things on the team that we could do differently in the process, in the management, the whole thing. I always walk away from these things thinking that there was a lesson that I could have taken from it.

So, you might not be able to see it at the moment when you're really pissed off, and maybe rightfully so. But in the end, I do encourage you to step back and be like, "Where is the lesson for me? What is it about this process, this scenario, my marketing, my messaging, my copy, my onboarding system, my contract? What could have been better, tighter, clearer, any of it?"

The second thing is that I have learned from these nightmare scenarios that it is rare that it is 100 percent someone's fault. So, as many times as I've had these and I've really wanted to paint that person to be a monster and all of that kind of stuff, going back to tip number one, I did see like, "Okay. I could have done that better." Often, it wouldn't have excused their behavior or it probably doesn't mean that they're right in

the long run of what they did, but I'm like, I can see why maybe that wasn't super clear or I can see why you'd be upset about that.

I don't know, if your life circumstances changed and then you're blaming me for a refund policy, that's not my fault either, but I can understand why that's not their fault. So, something changed and now they're just trying to get out of something. But I get that that's not their fault that their circumstances change. So, I guess that helps me to de-charge it a little bit as well.

Now, my third tip for you is that you need to not react when these things happen, even though it's easy to. If somebody writes you a nasty email, leaves a nasty comment on social media, if you have a VA and they contact your VA and they're like, "I want my money back. This is the worst program ever," it's really important not to react. But instead to plan. So, often when you let things deescalate a little bit and you come up with more of a plan of what you're going to do, things go better.

I would also encourage you - and I've talked about this many times in the past on the show - that when a nightmare scenario like this comes up or, really honestly, this tip is applicable to anything you do in your business, when anything like this comes up in your business, it's time to create a process. Like, what does the process look like? You get a nasty email from somebody who's disappointed in your service or your product, what are the series of events? Create an SOP, a standard operating procedure. What is the SOP for what happens? What is the series of events that are triggered once you get that customer email, or that nasty comment on social, or a request for a refund, or whatever the scenario is?

So, even when you're by yourself, I recommend coming up with this list because then, when your business continues to grow and you can hire somebody like a VA, you now have a plan in place that you start to hand over to someone. You're not asking for them to give you a plan because you don't want to accept other people's plans. Technically, you want to give them a plan. And you would hand this over to them and you would show them which one of these steps you're responsible for, "You're responsible for one, two and three, and I'll be responsible for four" or once you have

multiple people on your team, you're like, "You have steps one, two and three. And then, step four and five, go to this person on the team."

And things evolve over time. So, right now you might be the one that's responsible, that's fine. You're building out the system. So, don't react. Plan. And use this as an opportunity to come up with a plan so that you're not reinventing the wheel every time. You can templatize some of your responses, so if there's a response, for example, to "Hey, I bought your digital product and I want a refund," come up with a templated response that talks about what the refund policy is so you're not retyping this every time. First of all, you won't re-aggravate yourself every time, but also it's going to save you time and you can't afford to just keep wasting time doing the same thing.

The fourth lesson I've learned, and this comes from my brilliant Mindset Coach, Jen Diaz. And I believe that Jen cited someone else when she told me about this. But honestly, I got it from Jen and we've talked about it at length. So, I'm crediting Jen right now for bringing this concept to me. And I'll link down below to Jen on Instagram and everything. She's fantastic and has an incredible mindset resources and a mindset program, an incredible subscription called JAVA Method you should check out.

But in this one I want to go over something that Jen said. So, she said, you're responsible to people, not for them. You're responsible to people, but not for them or their reactions. So, the way that I have taken that and the way that Jen and I have spoken about this is that, I am responsible to, for example, my customers. I create a good product, the best product I can create. Am I perfect? Is it perfect? No. I would never say that it was or it could be. Everything can always be improved and I always hope that my stuff continues to evolve and improve.

But I am a responsible business owner in that I know that I try, I check my facts. I am providing you good, hearty information and good hearty contract templates, for example. And I show up. I do what I say. I don't keep charging your credit card after you've paid your payments or something. I don't ghost you. I give you the services and the products that you've paid

for. All that kind of stuff, that's my first part. That's what I'm responsible to you for.

What I am not responsible for you is your reaction to it. So, for example, something that you will see in the business industry if you sell things to other people who start their own businesses is that sometimes people's businesses don't go as planned. Maybe it's not their fault. Maybe it is their fault. Maybe they didn't do the right stuff. Maybe they didn't put it in the work. Or maybe they had some life circumstances that really sucked and it made it that they couldn't get to their business. Or things just didn't pan out. They had a bad idea that they thought was a good idea. Doesn't matter.

But what I have found is that sometimes that stuff can get projected onto you. And, actually, this doesn't even matter if you have a business type business, because I can understand how this is the same. If you work with people about their health, about their fitness, about their finances, that sometimes people take their lack of results or action, or they wanted to see something different, and they turn that around and they blame that on the messenger.

And so, sometimes we will get people who are like, "I wanted this to work out, but it didn't work out and now I'm mad at you. Because I'm mad, I bought your thing because buying your thing is reminding me that this thing didn't work out." That's part of it. And you might get a similar reaction out of people sometimes.

And I try to remember that I am responsible to them, so did I provide them the thing that they said? Was I clear and fair about that? Was I honest? You know, all of that kind of stuff. And I'm then not responsible for how they react to it. Of course, I want people to be happy and all of that, but I also can't control that because there are life scenarios where you do everything possible for somebody and they're still not happy. And, unfortunately, those people do exist out there. They're rare. They're really rare, but they do exist.

And I think something that people don't talk about as their businesses grow is that that is a quiet secret thing that we deal with behind the scenes that we don't talk about. When I have a really bad day or I hear about this kind of person doing this to my team behind the scenes, it pisses me off. I get really, really pissed. I'm upset. I take it personally. It's hard not to. You've poured your heart and soul into something and people can get nasty when they don't get what they want. And they can project a lot of crap onto you and all this stuff. It's very frustrating.

But what I come back to is this brilliance from Jen saying, I'm responsible to them. I am not responsible for them. So, they can have their hissy fit over there and it's okay. And I'm going to work with them to make sure that I do the fair thing and what's right for me as a business owner. But it doesn't mean I have to solve their emotions or go and take care of it or stop them from having a temper tantrum. It's okay for them to have a temper tantrum because some people do that for reasons that are totally outside my control. I'm not that powerful.

Last but definitely not least, the fifth thing that I've learned from these scenarios is that it's an invitation to clear up your terms or your contract. The answer isn't always adding to your contract.

I think sometimes people have this reaction, like somebody skips a payment plan or they copy their content or they do something bad, and then they're like, "I'm going to go in and add a whole ranting paragraph into my contract." Sometimes the answer is actually to make something clearer or even just to make it plainly stated.

So, I'll give you an example. When I first started the Ultimate Bundle, I, first, did not offer any payment plans. I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to get into it. I was afraid people would buy it and steal it and whatever. It was a whole fear situation.

Eventually, I don't remember even when, maybe 2018 or something, maybe 2019, I decided to start offering this payment plan. And I had all my crafty legal language about this is how the payment plan works. I think at that time it was maybe, like, an eight payment plan. This is how it works.

You're charged every 30 days, blah, blah, blah. I laid it all out in the standard legal language that somebody would.

People then would try to be like, "Hi. Hi, Sam and team. I'd like to go ahead and cancel my subscription." Like, after paying for one month of the Ultimate Bundle, downloading everything, and then just being like, "Thanks. I'll take it from here." That's not how it works. It's a payment plan that allows you to pay over time. You get it, you might have these in your business. And so, it's an option to pay for something over time. It's not a subscription.

And what I realized was in trying to be all legal about it, maybe I just needed to be plainer about it. So, in my webinar, for example, and in the contract and all this kind of stuff, I just started stating, "This is not a subscription. All 12 payments are required." And yes, there's still all that other fluffy legal language, but I put that one front and center and I bold it and I mention it on every single webinar. I say, "Hey. I offer this 12 payment plan. It is not optional. All 12 payments are required. It's just a courtesy to allow you to pay this over time." Doesn't that sound so much easier to understand?

And for the most part, yes, we still get some knuckleheads who say, "Hi. I'd like to cancel my subscription." We're like, "How did you get through this?" But it happens, but I would say it is way less. And guess what? I feel way more confident as a business owner saying to you, "Hey, look. In my webinar, I say it right here. I can see on my end that you watched my webinar. And I can see on the webinar right here, it's on the screen and I verbally say it, this is required. All 12 required cannot be cancelled, blah, blah, blah. This is a downloadable program that is standard in our industry, and it's also in the contract, and it's also here, and it's also there." Now, I feel much more comfortable because I'm like, "This is very plain."

So, in this fifth tip, yes, I think it's important to clear up your terms and contracts whenever you have one of these experiences. But the answer isn't always adding to it. Now, where that's not true is when you have a

nightmare client scenario that you realize that they slipped through the cracks.

So, a lot of my friends reach out to me about different scenarios where they're like, "Oh. This person says that they want this or they want that or they want this money back." And I'm like, "Well, what does your contract say?" And they're like, "Oh. It doesn't say. It doesn't say anything one way or the other." And they didn't get my contract templates. And so, I'm like, "Okay. Well, you need to add a paragraph about that or you need to add a line about what happens in that kind of scenario."

So, sometimes it can be an invitation to add something, but I just feel like that's people's default and I would rather have it be something that you pause and say, "Is this something I need to add to my contract or is this something I could just make clearer or state more plainly?"

So, I hope that this was helpful to you. I would love for you to reply back to my email or come over on Instagram, let me know what you thought about this episode. And I hope that you haven't had a nightmare scenario. You know what I was thinking would actually be not funny, but we could all commiserate together, if you want to DM me anonymously, you can DM me, I will never share your name or anything like that, but you could send me what your most nightmare client scenario has ever been. And if there's anything I have to offer you in terms of help or advice or feedback, if you even want it, I am happy to. Or you can just tell me like, "Hey. I just want to vent. This is all over. Everything's fine. But I got to tell you about this hilarious thing that this person tried to do to my business."

That's all. So, with that, I hope that this was helpful. And I will see you in a couple of days.

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