

# METROWEST BUSINESS



## [ WRITE ON THE MONEY ]

# Surprising things to be grateful for

It's easy to be thankful for some things – a good job, happy clients, a great working environment. But what about those things that creep



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into your professional life on a daily basis and drive you crazy? While it's more challenging to express gratitude for these annoyances, I'm going to give it a try in the spirit of Thanksgiving.

Here are a few issues we all face in our professional lives – and why you can be thankful for them.

### Demanding customers

I hope you have clients that love your work, praise your efforts and pay you well. It's also good to have the other kinds of customers, too – the ones who demand a lot, are hard to please and won't pay for anything but the best – as long as they are relatively fair and reasonable. Why? Because these individuals force you to communicate clearly, set expectations and rise to the occasion every time.

A new client of ours is extremely intolerant of typos, even in first drafts of her marketing pieces. When we first became aware of this, we naturally complained and called the whole thing unreasonable. But we quickly realized that our clients should expect a high attention to details from us, and we should give it. We created a process where all client work gets a careful, fresh eye before reaching a client.

### Long hours

Who isn't complaining about being too busy these days? It seems to be a badge of honor to out-schedule your peers with business, family and social commitments. We're all moving at a frantic pace and everyone seems unhappy about it.

Consider the alternative. What if no one found your skills valuable enough to hire you? What if your business was failing miserably because you didn't have enough clients to sustain it? What if you had no friends inviting you to do things? What if you had no hobbies or interests to pursue? What if you had no family or loved ones to connect with at the end of the day?

Sure, you'd have many free hours in the day, but I would suggest that those hours would feel empty. While I'm a huge proponent of maintaining a sane balance in life, I am deeply thankful for the wonderful family members, friends and clients who seek my time and attention.

### Technology troubles

You have a huge presentation to prepare and you lose Internet access unexplainably. You are scheduled to attend an important conference call and can't access the call in line. You finish creating a great report for your client and the computer dies and you lose the whole thing. Servers crash, batteries die, you know the drill. We've all experienced these hairy technology headaches.

Technology troubles require you to be creative – how can you achieve your goal in a different way?

They also inspire you to finally do what you should,

which is give yourself enough time to allow for mishaps, protect your data and equipment and have a Plan B for everything. This is not sexy stuff, but you'll be thankful you did it when you have a presentation to deliver to that hot prospect.

### Missed opportunities

It's never easy to be passed up for a job or promotion or to lose the new business to a competitor. The toughest part of these situations is that the power is in someone else's hands and it may feel like you can't do anything about the outcome.

But there is something to be grateful for when you lose out to someone else – the lessons you learn that can help you win the next time.

We all hear that when we fall, we should pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and start all over again, that we should not look backwards but ahead. But by taking a little time to figure out what you could have done better – by positioning the value you deliver in a more compelling way or showing up on time and well prepared for the interview or anticipating tough questions that may arise, for example – you will give yourself a better opportunity in the future. And who can't be thankful about that?

### Personnel issues

A colleague of mine once told me that within companies, "where there are people, there are problems." She was speaking specifically to the decision about whether to hire employees or rely on subcontractors and freelancers, but her words stayed with me.

People are complicated –

they come with personal lives, they don't always get along with each other, and they can be unreliable, irritating and disappointing. So why be thankful?

Personnel problems force you to be strategic and thoughtful. They require you to figure out where each person brings the most value, how to communicate effectively to individuals and to a group about performance and goals, and how to manage conflict. Acquiring these skills is something to appreciate.

### Vendor challenges

It may be lackluster service, poor quality or ridiculous pricing. The vendors who you rely on to do business can be a source of frustration at times. Even your best ones will not be consistently perfect. Why be thankful for this hassle?

All day long, most of us are doing what we can to serve our customers, employers or bosses. We are all typically in the role of doing for others. But when dealing with a vendor, we get to be the customer. We also get to choose what kind of customer we want to be. It's a huge opportunity to do the right thing, be the kind of customer you've always wanted to have and make someone's day a little easier. That's definitely something to be thankful for.

I'm always grateful when you read my column. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

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