

Does Belief Matter?

Written by Business News

I have resigned from a job twice in my life. Once, I did so to pursue another opportunity. The other time, I did so because I stopped believing in the quality of my employer's product.

I thought about this second resignation recently when I had lunch with a friend who is a public relations consultant. He was telling me about a product launch that he is working on.

"Sounds like a stupid product," I said.

"Yea, it is. I'm just collecting a paycheck," he responded.

Following this exchange, we spoke at length about what it's like to work with clients whose product, service or idea you don't believe in. We agreed that there is no simple answer to the question: Do I have to believe in my clients to work for them?



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“Typically, when I don’t believe in the client it’s because I don’t believe in their business strategy,” the PR consultant told me via email in a follow-up conversation. “They hire me and listen to me when it comes to public relations strategy, but I can’t do anything if I think their product is flawed, or in some cases, just a dumb idea. That’s none of my business.”

“I’ve turned down jobs because I didn’t think I could work with a certain client because of what they wanted in terms of media coverage. I don’t know if I’ve ever turned down a job because I thought someone’s product, service, whatever was a bad idea. I wouldn’t do work for a gun company or a tobacco company because of my beliefs, and I wouldn’t do work on behalf of some racist organization. But if someone wanted me to do PR for a car that runs on soiled underwear, I’d do it if the money was good,” the consultant said. “I wouldn’t actually work them though.”

That last comment, I think, was the kicker.

I resigned from a job years ago because I had to spend sixty hours a week doing something I didn’t believe in. My identity was intimately tied to my job and I just couldn’t see myself walking into that office every day knowing I was working for a company that I didn’t respect. But when I think about it, had they offered me a consulting gig, I probably would have taken it if the money was good. In fact, I’ve done consulting for companies I didn’t believe in.

A few years after I quit my job because of a lack of belief, I ended up doing consulting for a biotechnology company. The truth is, I couldn’t even figure out just what this company did and I didn’t trust the management. What the company wanted from me was some “out-of-the-box” public relations – press about the company that wasn’t related to its product. I needed the money, so I took the gig. I drummed up some decent PR, collected my paycheck and moved on.

There have certainly been times when I regret working for that biotech company, and I don’t mention the company on my resume. Nonetheless, I needed the money at the time and it wasn’t like I was trying to drum up PR for a company that was trying to hurt people. That’s my rationale.

“That’s a good rationale,” the PR consultant told me. “You can’t handpick every client. If you

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could, we would all be working for Apple, Google or whatever company you think is cool. Sometimes you just do things for the money. What matters is that you do the job you're paid to do and you do it right."

Another friend, a plastic surgeon, echoed that sentiment.

"I don't like doing breast enhancements and facelifts," the doctor said. "But people want them and they can go elsewhere for them. I do procedures which I don't necessarily agree with, but that allows me to do reconstructive surgery for burn and accident victims. It's a means to an end sometimes."

Would you take on a client that you don't believe in? Have you done so in the past? If so, how did it work out?

Ben Silverman was previously a business news columnist for The New York Post and the founder/publisher of DotcomScoop.com.

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