

Turn down business when . . .

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Turn down business when

The Client. The client's business is about to collapse. This may be precisely why you are wanted. However, you cannot guarantee to turn the business around. Still less can you guarantee to turn it round if the management is bad - which is presumably how it got into this state. If you do accept the job, take the money up front.

The client has the reputation of being difficult or having 'very high standards'. Yes, you may well be utterly charming and be world class in your profession, but this does not guarantee success. Your predecessors also thought they were pretty good. You will be working in a stressful, hostile environment, and face a high risk of not getting paid. And if he really had 'very high standards' why does he need a consultant.

The client has a reputation for paying late. I have been caught badly.

The client has a reputation for not paying at all. There may be fabricated conflicts or

unwarranted criticisms. Ask around: a lot of your fellow consultants have been caught by the same person.

The client clearly cannot afford to pay you. Or clearly thinks he cannot. I will have to work hard to make an extra £50,000 for a small firm, but all too often his reaction is, 'I am just a small businessman, I cannot afford to pay you more than £1000.'

The client wants you to work for a fee that is unreasonably low.

You may not want to be associated with that client. I turn down jobs with tobacco companies...

The client clearly does not recognize your professional expertise and competence. This makes it difficult to get a fair fee rate. It also makes it very difficult to get your output, however good, accepted as being adequate.

The client is a steering committee which is clearly in a state of internal warfare.

The project

The project is ill-considered or ill-advised. The clients will not benefit - though they may think that they do.

The project is badly designed. It is not the best way to tackle the problem.

The TOR shows the client is totally confused, and has preconceived ideas which are likely

to be wrong e.g. ‘The existence of many wholesalers indicates an unnecessary level of distribution. They should be abolished in order to cut prices to the consumer.’ You *may* be able to overcome this.

The TOR are so vaguely worded, or cover such a wide range that you will never be able to say you have met them. There is a real risk of an argument about payment.

The project is illegal.

There are problems like office politics, hostility of management, trade union opposition or a management that is not willing to work with you. These may be precisely why you were called in. It will be extremely unpleasant for you, and there is a distinct possibility that you will ‘fail’ so spectacularly that you are not paid. It does not help your reputation.


The job is unethical.

Your firm

You are already fully committed.

The job is too small to be interesting and profitable. It may effectively prevent you from taking a much bigger job by blocking key dates.

The job may be too big for a small consultancy. It may tie up too much of your administration. It may tie up so many resources that you can no longer serve your bread and butter customers.



You do not have qualified staff. You are reluctant to subcontract.

Yourself

You know that you are not really qualified to tackle this job.

It is too dangerous. This may mean health, war risks, or the danger of exposing corruption in a lawless society.

You do not like the contact individuals. This may blow up into a quarrel leading to breaking the contract. It affects your reputation generally