



February 2021

THE BUSINESS NEWSLETTER FROM AUSWILD & CO
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Are You a Jerk? 10 Questions to Ask Yourself

The title of this month's **ausBIZ** newsletter is pretty confronting, isn't it? But as business owners, we sometimes have to do unpleasant things. We are placed in situations that encourage us to treat our competitors as our adversaries. We sack our underperforming employees. We have disagreements with clients/customers over invoices. And in those unpleasant situations, we are constantly being judged by how we respond.

We work hard to build businesses that benefit our employees and make the world a better place, so it's hard to believe we're the ones everyone is talking about around the water cooler. However, sometimes, business owners do turn into jerks. So, the next time you look in the mirror, do a quick self-assessment and ask yourself these 10 questions. You might be surprised – we were!

1. Do you underpay whenever possible?

You've scrapped, scrimped, saved and borrowed to build your business from the ground up. You've worked 18 hours a day for the past two years on nothing but a dream and your neighbour's WiFi (and they don't know it). You've sacrificed fine dining for frozen meals and fast food. But should you expect your employees to do the same?

It is sometimes difficult to pay a competitive wage, especially in the early stages of your business – but if you can pay your staff well, you should. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it will also benefit your bottom line. Well-paid employees are happier and more efficient, so you'll boost your productivity. You'll also decrease turnover, which is another profit killer.

2. Do you drop names to look good to other business owners?

Of course, some name dropping is necessary in business. It helps you position yourself in terms of your expertise in the industry and allows you to capitalise on the relationships you've developed. But when you're dropping names out of context, the conversation can go from classy to tacky pretty quickly. Other business owners might pretend to be impressed, but you'll quickly earn a bad reputation among your peers.

3. Are you condescending?

Being condescending isn't just bad form – you're also hurting your business. Clients, customers and employees don't like to be talked down to. They might be offended, or they might just feel sorry for you. Either way, they'll take their business elsewhere – where their custom will be valued.

4. Do you tell people how much money you have?

We all know people who have it all – money, power, a beautiful family, a fabulous mansion and exotic holidays to far flung places some of us can only dream of. What they don't have, however, is the respect of their colleagues. Why? They are too flashy.

Sure, telling the world that you are worth \$XX or have \$XX million in the bank will cause a stir and impress some, but not the kind of people you want in your corner. To earn the respect of your colleagues and employees, keep your personal wealth to yourself – unless you're giving it away.

5. Do you consider what's in it for you before helping someone?

As a business owner, you have to focus on driving revenue. You may feel that the machine will stop running if you take your eyes off the prize – and you may be right. But some business owners become so focused on money that they are unable to give without expecting something in return.

Giving has many benefits. In addition to helping you balance your life, it can also lead to positive outcomes for your company – a win-win for both your business and the communities that benefit from your charitable acts.

6. Do you blow up before listening to all of the facts?

Stories of evil business owners going off the rails on innocent employees abound. But if you're a business owner, you might have a different version of the story. The pressure to build your business is immense. The pressure to financially support tens, hundreds, or even thousands of people – and their families is debilitating. And sometimes employees are underhanded, dishonest or negligent and do things that impact the company in negative ways.

But, you have to be extra careful. Everyone is watching you, and they are usually taking your feedback personally. Something that would elicit nothing more than an eye roll from one of your children could deeply offend an employee, just because of the difference in the relationship. So, consider discussing important matters at the beginning of the day when you are fresh and try not to use email or texting to communicate, as it can be easily misinterpreted.

7. Do you use intimidation to gain the upper hand?

Often disguised as "straight talk," intimidation may work in some business dealings, but it will cost you the respect of colleagues and employees. If making people cry makes you feel powerful, then you're a jerk. Enough said.

8. Do you see culture as a necessary evil?

A positive organisational culture has a proven enduring influence on employee morale and productivity, as well as the company's bottom line. Even the most selfish business owner should see the benefit of creating a positive working environment for employees. It doesn't mean that you have to shell out thousands for a fancy weekend retreat or team building event – but it does mean that you need to do what it takes to promote a happy, safe and enjoyable work culture.

9. Do you get personal in an argument?

Healthy discussion, even debate, is necessary in a business to find the best solutions and fully engage your team. But by going below the belt and using personal or private information against someone in an argument, you shut down communication that could be essential to problem solving. You'll fracture business relationships, destroy friendships and end up eating lunch alone.

10. Do you think about what's legal instead of what's right?

It's obviously important to stay within the law when running a business. Besides the fact that it's the law, compliance will save you from some lawsuits, audits and a world of headache. But there is an ethical component to business as well. The difference between a strong, ethical leader and a jerk boils down to one thing. Are you out to lift, strengthen and promote the people around you? Or are you in business to aggrandise yourself?

As business owners, we can deeply impact the way our companies develop. So, the next time you walk out of a meeting thinking, "What happened to me? I used to be so nice," – re-read this article to yourself in front of the mirror and go make amends. You have most likely worked too hard to let a jerk ruin a great business.

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