

## Do You Turn Down Clients with Different Beliefs?

So, do you turn down clients who have beliefs that are not just different from yours, but completely opposed to yours? For example, if a potential client has plastered on their social media "End to Israel" I may think twice about representing them. Or even something more basic.

Would you turn down those people as potential clients? Does the type of case make a difference?

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While I do not invite clients to parties I host, I always select clients as though each was someone I would invite to a party I host. People who are good, honest, hard-working people usually make good clients. And those are the kinds of people I would invite to a party.

Robert "Robby" W. Hughes, Jr., Georgia

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Depends. More important first questions for me: Do they have dispositive facts needed for a win? Can and will they pay? Can and will they cooperate with me, and respect the lines of attorney purview versus client purview? If these are all "yes" it probably doesn't matter what we believe.

Robert Thomas Hayes Link, California

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It depends on the belief and how significant it is. I'm sure I've had several clients with different beliefs than me in terms of politics, vaccines, COVID, mask or no mask, Black Lives Matter, Universal Basic Income, etc. I say "I'm sure I have..." because I don't ask that type of stuff.

If it's not a distraction and the client and I can still converse intelligently about their legal problem, etc, then I have no problem with it. On the other hand, if everything out of their mouth is politics-related such that they can't see anything unless it's through that lens, then I'd probably never agree to represent them in the first place.

Andy I. Chen, California

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I had this issue about 10 years ago. One of my clients was VERY political and, more concerningly, very pugnacious, getting into spats not only with those on the other side of the political spectrum but also infighting with supposed allies (and even within its own organization). They naturally

assumed that anyone who worked with them had the same views, and so I wound up on a bunch of distribution lists I had no interest in. Worse, because they were constantly getting into fights, and I was identifiable as one of their counsel via a trademark filing, I got phone calls from the press and others about my client's activities. I moved on from that relationship as soon as I could extricate myself.

Kevin Grierson, Virginia

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Andy said: If it's not a distraction and the client and I can still converse intelligently about their legal problem, etc, then I have no problem with it.

For me, that's the bottom line. Having said that... as my practice is largely divorce/custody/support... very strong personal views are often a distraction from what I'm trying to accomplish.

Laurie Axinn Gienapp, Massachusetts

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The ABA rules (1.8) generally talk about representation that would compromise your loyalty or independent judgment for a client. If you have deeply held beliefs that could compromise your representation of a client, it appears you would be obligated to take a pass.

In practice, I do not run into the issue much. I tend to focus more on whether a client's matter has merit and whether the client has the capability and resources to pursue a matter. "Tin foil hat" type potential clients are generally raising other red flags, as are those with what I would classify as other radical beliefs. Generally, I can and have represented a lot of clients with beliefs different from mine. One needs to add other significant facts to make me want to take a pass on a client.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas

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I do mostly family law these days, and family issues can occur in anyone's life. I will take a client's case so long as their beliefs do not interfere with my ability to represent them. (And so long as they can pay and there are no other red flags, of course.) I don't usually even discuss politics and religion with them, though religion is sometimes relevant to the case, concerning child rearing decisions for example. I'll turn away clients that I am not likely to be able to work comfortably with, however. I once had a potential client who started the phone call by saying, "I am looking for an attorney who will make my wife's life a living hell." I said, "Keep looking, that's not me," and hung up.

Susan L. Beecher, Washington

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Sometimes clients as if I'm a "Christian" or otherwise try to engage me in political discussions. I tell them, I represent people of all faiths and do not discriminate and as a rule keep my private life separate from my practice. I just never answer the question.

When it comes to politics, I usually avoid their questions or comments but steer the topic back to the case.

Sterling L. DeRamus, Alabama

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I've represented Nazis. It was not easy but they wanted a "smart Jew lawyer." I've also represented someone who asked me where my horns were--their priest told them that Jews had horns and that's how they could tell who we are. Always interesting to say the least. But I told them that either they were polite and respectful or they were gone. Choose.

David Kaufman, Florida

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There are some great points in this thread. I remember after the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Richard Spencer complained often that he couldn't find someone to represent him in the civil matter. I strongly believe that had more to do with his outspoken, obnoxious demeanor than his beliefs (which were horrible). Always be wary of those clients who are fighting over "principles" all the time. He wanted to go to war with the press and put the whole "system" on trial. He's just an example of that type of client.

Ryan Young, Virginia

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Since I retired last year, I don't face this issue any longer. I represented clients who often had different views than I did, but there were lines I would not cross. I'm sure I represented clients with racist views, but seldom would that be expressed in the course of a representation. If my representation hinged on such a belief (example: evicting a tenant on a pretext, when the real reason was the tenant's race), I would refuse or withdraw from representation. Same is true of a client who lied to me. I would tell them at the outset, that if they lied, I would no longer represent them. And yes, I fired clients for not being honest with me.

In today's world, I would not represent a client who expressed support of racism or bigotry on the basis of religion, who spouted "The Big Lie" or support of the insurrectionist attack on the Capitol. I just would not do it.

Steve Terrell, Indiana

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I did not agree with him, but I admired his courage and dedication to the law.

James P. Moriarty, Iowa

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I really think what is important here is that you want a client who jurors will like. So, for litigation, I will not represent an unlikeable client. I do not care how winnable his case is.

Robert "Robby" W. Hughes, Jr.

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Yes, I turn down clients who provide early "red flags", whether it's an opinion, or one of their early actions (lying to me, or asking me to do something dishonest on their behalf). One of my pet peeves is potential clients who think they are "too clever for the room".

Bob Arnold