Clients texting after hours

Clients texting after hours are a business owner's second shift. The reply is typed before you have decided anything. Kindness got to the keyboard first. The pause is the whole practice.

Tonight, when the 9:40 text comes, leave the kind reply in drafts and put the phone in the other room.

If it is a real emergency for the client, a leak or a lockout, answer it. The policy is for the "quick question," not the flood.

It is 9:40. You are at the table where you also eat, or on the couch, or in the doorway of a child's room. The text is small. A question that could wait. A tone that could be read as urgent if you are the kind of person who reads everything as urgent.

Your thumbs have already written the easy yes. No problem at all. Happy to. I can jump on it. The words are a reflex the way a smile is a reflex. You are a person who does not leave people hanging. Hanging, in your body, feels like harm.

You send it, and then the work is yours tonight, because the yes included a clock you did not look at. Or you send the warmth and do the work at 6:00, and the client learns that 9:40 is a fine time to ask, because the answer came back warm and immediate. You trained them with your best quality.

You do not send it, and you feel rude for an hour, and you check the phone 12 times to see if the silence has become a problem. The silence is not a problem. The checking is the work, unpaid, in your kitchen.

You write a policy, a beautiful one, about business hours. You post it. You break it the first time a client you like is the one texting. The policy was for other people. The liked client is a special case. Every client you have kept is a special case. The policy is a poster.

You are tired, and you are also proud of being the one who answers. The pride is not fake. When the alarm runs you, the way of coping it reaches for may be Provider, the one that keeps the peace by spending you. In the book, Paige's tell is the nod. She nods while she agrees to things. If you have a nod, or a "sure," or a thumbs-up that leaves your hand before the thought does, that is the tell. Catch the tell and you have caught the alarm earlier than the speech about hours.

If your stomach just clenched, you are in the right room.

We know. We have sent the kind reply because the unkind pause felt like a verdict on our character. It was a pause we had never practiced, so it felt like cruelty. Cruelty and a pause are not the same tool.

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Why is "No problem at all" already typed?

Paige keeps the books for other people's shops, at her own dining table. She is 45. On a night the book marks, the text comes at 9:40. "No problem at all" is already typed. She runs the breath for the first time. She does not send it. She answers at 9:00 the next morning. Then she notices she billed nothing for the night she almost gave away, and the noticing is the second half of the lesson. The free yes is not only a clock. It is a rate, set at zero, after dark, by a reflex.

There it is. Then in for four, hold for seven, out for eight. Twice more only if the alarm is still loud. You are not required to become a person who never helps. You are required to let the breath happen before the send, so the send is yours.

In the morning the reply can still be warm. Firm and warm can share a sentence. That line shows up later in the book, when Paige is short with a kind client of eleven years and the table catches it. The overcorrection, once she finally pauses, is a coldness she does not mean. The practice is not ice. The practice is a sentence that does not apologize for having hours. "I can do this at 9:00 tomorrow." Warm. Finished. No novel about how swamped you are, which is the apology, and no "no problem at all," which is the surrender.

Why does the policy fail at 9:40?

The work of how to say no to clients starts in the hand, not on the website. A posted policy influences. It does not sit in your hand when the liked client writes. The alarm does not read the site. The alarm reads the silence as danger, because silence used to mean someone was unhappy, and unhappy used to mean you were not safe. So you fill the silence with kindness, instantly, and call it service.

Service is the work you do inside the hours you named. Instant kindness after those hours is a donation. Donations are allowed. Donations you make every night, and then resent, and then do not bill, are the pattern. Paige notices the unbilled night. The notice is the start of counting her own hours as real. This page will not tell you what to charge for them. The rate is a different fear, and it has its own page. Here the only number is the clock. 9:40 is not 9:00. You knew that. The thumbs did not.

If you are on call because the work is that kind of work, say so, and let the on-call be a real rotation with a real end, not a personality. This page is for the text that is not an emergency and gets an emergency's speed. If someone is hurt, or a job is unsafe, you go. If it is a question about a file, a time, or a draft, it can live until morning. The morning reply teaches the client the hours better than a paragraph on your site that you yourself do not believe.

What can you actually do at 9:40?

Circle 3 is the client's mood, their deadline, their habit of writing when they think of it, the fact that some of them will leave if you are not instant. You do not control that. A client who only stays because you have no night is renting your life. You are allowed to notice the rent without making a speech.

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Circle 2 is the sentence you send in the morning, the hours you put where a client can see them, the one client you tell directly because they are the one who texts. Influence. They may push. The push is data. It is not a command.

Circle 1 is the unsent draft, the breath, the morning send, and the invoice line you stop forgetting. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. The worth is in the pause. Not in being easy. Easy, at 9:40, is how the alarm keeps the peace.

What does the draft look like in the morning?

Leave the kind reply in the box overnight. In the morning it will look different, which is the point of the wait. You will see the extra sweetness, the promise of tonight, the way the sentence handed them your off-hours as if the hours were a sample. Delete that. Keep the warmth that does not spend you.

A morning reply that holds:

I saw your note. I can do this at 9:00 tomorrow, or by the end of the day if it is the longer one. Send me the file if I do not already have it.

That is firm and warm in the same breath. It does not explain your children, your dinner, or your philosophy of hours. Explanations are the apology, and the apology teaches them to comfort you for having hours. You do not need comfort. You need the morning.

Then do the thing at the time you named, not an hour earlier to prove the pause was not rude. The early proof is the pattern in a smaller coat. Paige answers at 9:00. She does not answer at 7:00 with a wink. The wink would have undone the breath.

If they push, read the moment before the person: a client who is frightened sounds like a client who is rude. The answer is the same hour, said calmer. You do not owe five minutes as a tax on last night's pause. Repeat the time. One repeat. A second repeat is a speech, and speeches at the dining table become the work. If this client only stays because you are available at 9:40, you have learned something expensive. A relationship that requires your nights is not a compliment. It is a price you have been paying in sleep. You still do not have to name a new rate today. You have to not type "no problem at all."

There is a second client, the one you like, who writes "sorry to bother you" and then bothers you, and the sorry makes the yes feel mandatory. The sorry is not a contract. Answer it in the morning with the same sentence you would use for a client you like less. Special cases are how the hours dissolve. If everyone you kept is a special case, you do not have hours. You have a personality that does not own a night. You were not rude. You were closed. Closed is a sign you already own. Use it on the phone the way you use it on the door.

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What do you do with the text on the screen?

Do not delete the kind draft. Do not send it. Leave it. There it is. Then in for four, hold for seven, out for eight. Then put the phone in the other room. The draft can sit until morning, where you will usually find it embarrassing, which is useful. Send the morning version: what you saw, when you will do it. If the script starts growing a second paragraph of apology, stop at the time.

Notice what you did not bill. Not to inflame the resentment. To see the donation. One week, mark the after-hours replies. Paige's notice was that the night was free. Yours will be a count. It is a number of nights. Numbers do not nod.

Tell one regular client the hours, in the same sentence as a yes. Not a policy blast. One person, the one who texts. "I can do this at 9:00 tomorrow. That is when I am at the desk." Then do it at 9:00, not at 7:00 to prove you are still nice.

The fear under a rate you have not said out loud is on Afraid to raise your prices. The check you do on finished work is on Why you can't delegate.

The book is the night Paige leaves "No problem at all" in the box and answers at 9:00.

Be first to know when *Someone Else Can Lock Up* is out

More reasons

Can your business run without you?

Why you can't delegate

Small business owner burnout

Afraid to raise your prices?

One bad review

The loneliness of owning the place

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Tonight's move

Tonight, when the 9:40 text comes, leave the kind reply in drafts and put the phone in the other room.

What to do

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