

PROFILE: LIFE LESSONS: ALY JETHA

Life Lessons: Aly Jetha

Aly Jetha, co-founder and co-president, Big Bad Boo Studios and Oznoz Entertainment, on how to turn corporate disasters into PR opportunities



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On success and failure: "Regardless of the situation that comes up, the way that you respond to it has more to do with your success or failure [than the situation itself]. Because you can't control what happens to you, but you can control how you react. And I think the most important thing is just making sure that you're good to your customers."

On self-knowledge: "You've just got to be honest as to who you are and what you want to be within your customers' frame of mind. That's the most important thing I ask [entrepreneurs] is: 'Who do you want to be through thick and thin?'"

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Big Bad Boo's products are aired in more than 70 countries

One night while Aly Jetha was chief corporate office of Via One Corp., disaster struck: the telecom company's automatic clearing house system, which charged customers nightly for their previous day's use of prepaid airtime, malfunctioned and extracted twice the amount due from their accounts. The overcharged amounts ranged from \$1,000 to \$1 million.

Jetha vividly remembers discovering the error the next morning with the executive team.

"We were in panic mode; we were like, 'Holy moly, this is a really bad situation, and we could lose a bunch of customers.' [Our] immediate thought was: we need to call [customers] before they find out from somebody else or we'll lose their trust." The company leapt into action: calling customers, apologizing "profusely" and promising to make right any bounced cheques or fees incurred because of the error.

"You kind of instinctively respond to a situation when it occurs," Jetha said. "I really just wanted to put myself in the customer's shoes and say, 'Boy, how would I feel if this happened to me? What would I want done?'"

That quick response, Jetha said, didn't just prevent the company from suffering significant customer losses, it also allowed it to prove its value to customers and ultimately strengthen relationships.

"The lesson that I learned was: a mistake is often the best time to prove to a customer that you're a good partner for them – that you're not just there to sell them products but you're there to be a resource for them through good and bad."

Jetha added that that lesson continues to drive how he runs companies – even in smaller "disaster" situations.

"If a customer ever calls in and complains or we learn of an unsatisfied customer, we really go into overdrive to find out what we can do to learn from the error and make sure that the situation is corrected and that customer becomes kind of an advocate."

Tags: disaster, strategy and marketing, telecommunication service

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