

“It’s hard not being nice”

On the tennis court he rarely gives away a point unnecessarily. Tennis champ Stefan Edberg is aiming to be as tough in his new career.

As a businessman he has learnt the importance of getting paid on time. “I am probably a little too kind, which is a problem,” he says.

Almost eleven years have passed since his last volley as tennis pro. The former Wimbledon winner was not attracted by the idea of becoming a trainer or joining the veteran tour, although Stefan Edberg has always retained close contact with the sport. He is involved in the ATP tour’s If Stockholm Open, where Intrum Justitia is one of the main sponsors.

He also sees a further link to tennis in his investment firm’s results-based activities:

“If you do a great job you get paid well, if you do a bad job you don’t get paid well. I think that is a good basic philosophy.”

But the most basic demand is to just get paid, he says. Over the years he has amassed substantial experience in this area.

“In tennis everything functioned pretty well, even if there was occasional problems. But I was pretty spoiled because I had agents who took care of everything. After a tennis career it is almost as if you grow up when you start having to suddenly lead a normal life. You have to take responsibility for things yourself and sometimes tackle these types of problems.”

Edberg’s strategy to get paid on time:

■ **ACT FAST.** “If someone does not pay on time I tackle the problem pretty quickly. You send a nice reminder. But experience is that most people renting want to pay, they really do not want any black marks.”

■ **BE CLEAR-CUT.** “You must be consistent, tell people what the rules are. And if the customer does not behave then you have to get tough.”

■ **DARE TO BE TOUGH.** “A business relationship has other rules than a private one. Sometimes you have to put your foot down.”

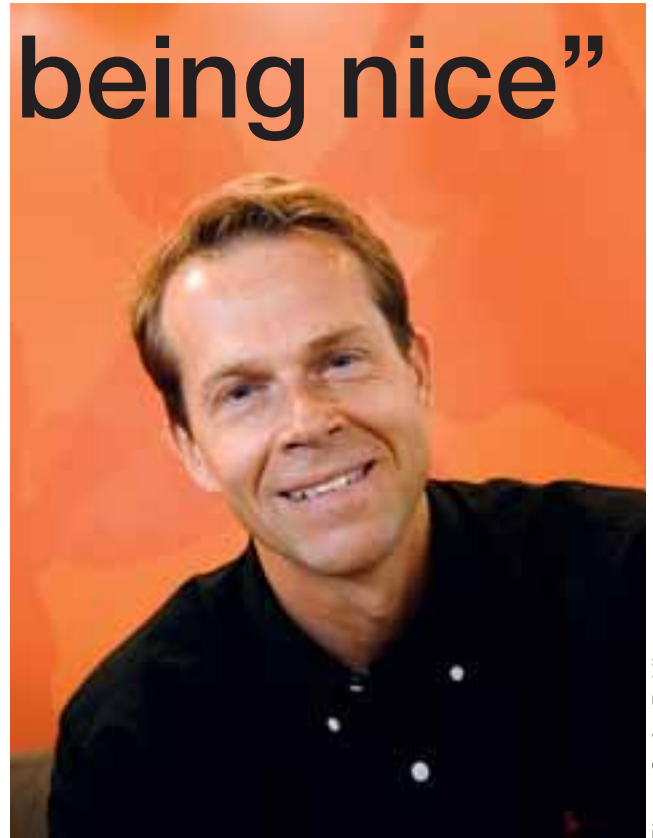


Photo: Stefan Bohlin

This became most concrete for Edberg in his other role – as a landlord in his hometown of Växjö in central Sweden. Cash flow is vital, especially during certain periods when major payments have to be made.

“Most of the time it works really well, but sometimes people forget to pay the rent. My philosophy is to deal with the problem immediately.”

Have you any special way to ensure getting paid on time?

“It is important to make it clear from the start: paying on time is what counts and if you don’t then I will get tough. You must be business-minded and not think ‘I will be nice’ or ‘I have money, I can manage anyway’. Business relationships must be clear-cut.”

Is it hard not being nice?

“I find it really hard work. You act in one way privately, and in another way in a business. I am probably a little too nice, which can sometimes become a problem. I think you have to be pretty tough in business.”

Have you ever found yourself in a business relationship where you have been cheated out of money?

“I have perhaps been swindled a couple of times, but you have to swallow the pill and keep moving forward. I have had many propositions over the years, but reject most of them. I try to avoid danger and choose the safer option.”

Christofer Brask