

RETAINING YOUR PRECIOUS CLIENTS...

Delivering on your Promise

By Kym Krey

WE'D ALL AGREE THAT BUILDING A STRONG, LOYAL AND PROFITABLE CLIENTELE IS A KEY FACTOR IN ANY SALON BUSINESS, AND I'M SURE WE'D ALL SAY THAT WE OFFER EXCELLENT CLIENT SERVICE. BUT SOME SALON OWNERS BUILD THEIR BUSINESS FASTER AND MORE PROFITABLY THAN OTHERS, SO WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE?

Business is a game of snakes and ladders. We all have our ups and we certainly have our downs as well but from my perspective as a coach, I see some who seem to climb ladder after ladder to consistent growth and I see others who unfortunately spend a lot of time sliding and trying to recover from setback after setback.

Our database and clientele are one of our most valuable assets and nurturing and retaining them should be a key focus. It's really quite simple; if they love what you do; they feel valued and you keep them enthusiastic about you and your salon, they come back. If they feel rushed, taken for granted, ignored, forgotten or they are allowed to get bored, they don't come back. So what can we be doing to ensure our most precious assets stay our most precious assets?

Clients are attracted by **PROMISES** and held through **SATISFACTION**.

To attract new clients, we must believably promise what the client wants (marketing/branding), but to do that we must first understand exactly what that is. We might assume that we know, but the only sure-fire way to really understand is to ask and then to walk in their shoes- experience what they experience as a client. So client feedback is essential and you can get it by using client feedback forms and surveys, focus groups and informal feedback sessions or by just talking to them. Then, you must develop empathy- or the ability to truly understand another's point of view. How? Go and be a client..... regularly.

Feel what it's like to pay for really awful service. Get annoyed at having your stylist or therapist leave you repeatedly throughout the service or ignore you or just be distant and cool. Feel under-valued and then be asked to make another appointment and see how you respond. Make a point of having treatments at other salons so you personally experience the best and worst of it all and then come back to your business and make sure your clients receive only the best. Even better, send your staff to other salons so they know what it's like to be a client.

When you can define exactly what it is that you do better than any of your competitors and your clients have confirmed that this is valuable to them, you've found your promise.

Now, you need to deliver. There is nothing worse than being sucked in by great

marketing and handing over money and then feeling like you've been ripped off because it was all a pile of rubbish. The reality was nothing like the promise. Not only will you not go back but you will tell anyone who will stand still long enough because you feel burned and wronged (and you know the saying.... *'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!'*).

How do you know you're delivering? How can you be sure that each one of your staff are delivering consistently at an exceptional level, every client, every day? Well, instead of you experiencing the service of other salons, you must now have other people experience your service... and report back. It's called mystery shopping. Find friends who know what great service is, who's opinion you value and whom your staff don't personally know and book them in with various staff members for different services over time and then complete a report for you on what was great and what wasn't about what they experienced. 'Clue them up' beforehand as to exactly what should happen so they're on the lookout, give them a list of questions to answer and ask them to complete this immediately after leaving the salon, while it's all still fresh in their mind. You need them to be really honest with you and you need to follow up on their comments and strengthen what needs to be improved. Only then will you know that what you think is happening; what you have asked to be done is actually being done.

That's delivering on your promise. That's integrity.

Those who look after their customers better than their competition, win and that's the game we play. To win that game, we must understand what 'quality' means to our clients and how much quality they expect. Then we must do a better job of delivering that quality than any of our competitors do. Not just think we deliver great quality, but check to make sure.

Making sure that an exceptional experience is created consistently requires systems because it's the extra little touches that really wow clients and make you stand out and it's these touches which are easily skipped when you're busy.

What systems have you created to define your service and are these clearly documented, trained into each staff member from day one and observed/reviewed continually? Do you discuss the importance

of excellent service & attention every day in the way you interact with your staff and then more thoroughly in monthly team appraisals (I call them 'PowerChats!') team meetings and feedback sessions?

If I experienced my service or treatment with 3 different members of your staff, would I receive the same excellent service standards & attention to detail or would this vary considerably according to the pride, commitment & attitude of each staff member? If you had a celebrity on their way to your salon, could you confidently book them with anyone on your team or would you make sure they didn't get 'that' staff member? Yes? Then fix it.

Every service you deliver is a series of activities or steps performed by your employees, which are designed to seamlessly create an enjoyable overall experience. If one or more of these steps is left out, rushed or minimized, the client's experience can be seriously affected. It's just not the same.

If you are the only person you would trust to look after that celebrity client, it's time to document what you do and transfer that knowledge to the rest of your staff. Sit down and write each of the steps you would perform to make sure that service or treatment was exceptional and memorable. Every little step. Write them down, get them out of your head and then get them into the heads of your employees. Because many staff who are attracted to our industries are visual, diagrams and flowcharts can be even more effective than just a list of words.

We all aim to build profitable businesses and it has been proven repeatedly that profitability is closely linked to service quality and client satisfaction so if you want to be successful and highly profitable, quality must be everyone's job!



Kym Krey is a salon business coach, presenter and trainer with Your Coach, supporting salon owners to develop real business skills and highly profitable salons. She is available for individual

coaching and can be contacted on 0403 042 312; kym@yourcoach.net.au or at www.yourcoach.net.au "Helping you to build your dream business...TODAY!"