

Lasting Impressions

THE BUSINESS OF ETIQUETTE



In a world increasingly dominated by the dollar, **Kara Ronin** highlights the importance of professional etiquette and how it can make a positive and permanent difference to your bottom line...

Every time a new client walks into your salon, they evaluate. They evaluate what they see, the sounds they hear, the fragrance they smell, and the employees who are there to greet them. Within the first few moments of stepping through the door, your new client will have already formed an opinion of your salon, your service, their anticipated appointment, and may have also decided whether they will repeat their visit.

First impressions count. Your salon and your staff need to begin making a positive impact on new clients within the first few moments they

enter. If, in this very brief time, a negative impression is formed, it will linger throughout their salon experience and be difficult to reverse.

Following are five tips I recommend for salons and spas to make a positive impression, right from the start.

1 FIND YOUR SIGNATURE COLOUR, SOUND AND FRAGRANCE

Colours, sounds and scents influence how we feel. To a new client, they can provide a wealth of information about their anticipated appointment. To a repeat client, they provide a sense of familiarity and comfort. Decide what emotion you would like your clients to feel when they walk into your salon and choose your signature colour, sound and fragrance to create that emotion. For your clients to feel warm, cosy and pampered as soon as they walk through the door, add cinnamon red, olive green or tones of brown to your decor and staff uniforms. For your clients to feel revitalised and rejuvenated, choose citron green, invigorating orange or ocean blue as

your signature colour. The key is consistency; consistency between the image you want your salon to convey, and the first impression you want your new clients to develop.

2 USE CONFIDENT, POSITIVE AND OPEN BODY LANGUAGE

Body language can have a significant impact on first impressions. Whenever we meet someone new, we unconsciously but carefully study his or her body language. We look for signs and messages that can help us form an opinion of that person. As soon as new clients walk through the door, they will be looking for signs of warmth, openness and professional competence from your staff. Good posture, a head held high and a smile will immediately make new clients feel comfortable and cared for. Their decision to visit your salon is validated and they will feel you are capable of providing them with a friendly experience. Slouching, leaning, crossed arms and a neutral or unhappy facial expression could force a new client to ponder whether their next appointment will be with you. When you project confident, positive and open body language, it becomes self-fulfilling: you will soon feel as confident, positive and happy as you appear.

3 ADDRESS YOUR CLIENTS BY NAME

Hearing our name makes us feel special. Our attention is immediately directed to the person who used our name and, if it were said in a positive tone, it can evoke a range of positive emotions inside us. New clients can feel unique, respected, and will be touched that you paid enough attention to remember their name. Some clients may prefer to be addressed by their first name right from the start. Others would rather be addressed as Mr, Mrs, Ms or Miss, followed by their surname (at least until they get to know you a little more). Generational and cultural differences often dictate this preference. To resolve this issue, I suggest you simply ask them: "May I call you Ms Divine, or do you prefer Rose?" The fact you ask their preference signals that you care enough to respect their wishes. It's also a good idea to record in your files how each client prefers to be addressed. The next time they have an appointment, the staff member that greets them can immediately make them feel welcome.

4 LEARN ABOUT YOUR CLIENTS

Showing interest in others makes them feel attractive, appreciated and understood and is a powerful way to make a positive first impression. During your client's appointment or on the way to the treatment room, ask about their hobbies, comment on their bag or jewellery, or raise the subject of holidays. Keep topics light and positive, and don't get too personal too quickly. Some people are rather private and don't like to reveal too much to those they don't yet know. If you often encounter awkward silences, I suggest keeping a white board in the staff room with two or three current event topics you can safely bring up with clients. It's also important to listen authentically. Answering "uh-huh, uh-huh" and nodding your head rapidly with a glazed look in your eyes when clients are telling you about their life does not communicate true interest. We often use such techniques

in an attempt to fake enthusiasm, but the lack of sincerity is easily detected.

5 SHOW GRATITUDE WITH A HANDWRITTEN THANK-YOU NOTE

Handwritten notes are rarely used nowadays. However, it is because they are rare they have so much impact when we receive one. Sending a hand-written thank you note to each new client after his or her first visit is a wonderful chance to make a lasting impression. Yes, there is a cost — but if that small cost can bring your client back to your salon, isn't it worth it? Retaining existing clients is much easier than attracting new ones. I am an advocate of handwritten notes for two reasons. First, when a client leaves your salon, it gives you a chance to still influence their first impression. Second, if they left with a negative impression, you still have a chance to reverse it. The key is to consider thank you notes as an opportunity, not a duty. ■

Australian-born Kara Ronin runs Executive Impressions, an international business etiquette consultancy in France. Having lived in Japan and New York, Kara's international experience and passion for etiquette in the modern world led her to create Executive Impressions where she guides professionals and companies through international business situations.

Stay up-to-date with Kara's advice and tips on her blog www.executive-impressions.com/blog, on Twitter @execimpression or visit www.executive-impressions.com.

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