

Bringing Smiles Back to Salons

Do you have a service culture of 'Yes' in your salon? By Neil Osborne

"Yes. Now, what was your question?" Saying that felt great didn't it ... and it was even better for the person you said it to – perhaps a smile even appeared? One of the secrets in creating a memorable customer experience is to make your salon 'better than it has to be' and a simple way to start doing that is to master the art of "Yes," which in turn gifts your customers' with a smile.



There's a Chinese proverb that says "A man without a smiling face must not open a shop." That about says it all in retailing. Why is that? It's been shown that saying "yes" strongly correlates to customers' having higher satisfaction, loyalty and purchases ... all of which helps give them an exceptional customer experience.

A recent survey by Gartner, a US-based marketing research firm, found that this year 89 percent of the companies surveyed expect to primarily compete on the battleground of customer experience. Just four years ago, the same survey showed only 36 percent of respondents felt that was their future.

Now the fact that businesses are striving to dazzle customers with unforgettable experiences probably seems like a big "duh" to you ... especially given that salons have been striving to satisfy their customers for decades. However, the sad news is that for most customers, satisfaction is now their barely acceptable minimum.

Why? Because being satisfied isn't meaningful, marvellous or memorable.

However, giving them an experience that's wrapped in a smile – from something you've done, said or given – starts your salon down the road of more than just 'satisfying' and heads you toward delight and surprise.

So where do you start? With what you give, say and do...

SOMETHING YOU GIVE: CREATE GIFTED MOMENTS

There is no greater gift than customer service painted the colour of love:

- Start the experience with a lagniappe – a 'little gift.' It's amazing how gifts can bring a smile to customers' faces – it doesn't have to be much

– but it must be meaningful. It's an easy, cost-effective way of thanking customers for getting to know you better.

- Throughout your salon, great "Yes" service comes from modelling the same love for your work that you want your staff to display. By telling the right stories about customers, your affection will be infectious.
- When you smile at your customers, what do they do? They smile back. It's a two-way exchange of emotion that clings to their impressions of your service, attitude and generosity of spirit.
- When you love what your customers do for you, gifted moments happen. Generally, when you think about someone having a passion for great service, you only consider the serviceperson's passion for the customer. But real service passion happens when that person also loves the service or product they're representing.

SOMETHING YOU SAY: MAKE THEM A BUBBLE CUSTOMER

Every customer should feel like the last customer on earth:

- Customers appreciate your respect for their sanctuary and space. The BUBL concept (pronounced bubble) – as detailed in Micah Solomon's book "Culture of Yes: Practices and Principles of Great Hospitality" – focuses on how each customer is surrounded by an individual, invisible protective bubble. To provide great service, staff need to be aware of this and conscious of when that protective shell is open (for interaction) or closed (for solitude), at any particular time.
- Your customers want to feel that they're at the centre of your world. And as a service provider there's enormous power in creating that impression. What they want from you is not for your story to take centre stage, but for them to hold the stage – in both your and their world – even if it's only for a moment.
- Treating your customer as your only customer – and focusing on what he/she needs beyond a cut, colour, treatment and so forth – is where you'll find the opportunity to distinguish yourself. That's where you'll

build an advantage that is considerably harder for your competition to knock off.

- No matter how many customers your salon grows to serve, never stop believing in the importance of the individual customer. Don't fall into the trap of thinking there's an infinite number of people out there for the taking. Instead, remind yourself you have just one customer, the one you're facing right now. It's the same one who needs specific, individually tailored service.

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SOMETHING YOU DO: HIRE FOR A SPIRIT OF "YES"

When it comes to customer service, it's more important to be nice than smart:

- In a people-oriented business you need to have the right people. Who are they? They're the ones with the right traits for service.
- You can't send people to smile school. If potential staff don't smile easily, it's not something you can teach them. Only select people who are willing to go out on a limb to

help or delight a customer. A 'spirit to serve' is inherent, and just like smiling easily, it can't be taught.

- Apple stores hire for personality, not technical knowledge. They'd prefer to hire someone with no computer know-how, but is great at teaching, than an expert who can't teach. It's attitude not aptitude that counts.
- Your emotional skills are pretty much baked in by the time you reach your 20s. Put simply, that means it's hard to make people like other people ... to teach real empathy, or being part of a team. From the start, find people who match the nature, energy and attitude you want, don't wait to see what washes out on the job – that approach can lead to carnage amongst your customers.

Customers are the lifeblood of every salon. You know that. But here's the real question for you ... do you know how your staff treat customers when you aren't around? Could you confidently say your service culture was one of always saying "Yes" or does it sometimes lean more towards "No"?

Not sure? Well the right answer, starting today, should be "Yes!"

Neil Osborne is an elite sales trainer and brand coach who is unique in the salon marketplace. He has devoted more than 30 years of his working life to the Salon Industry and has been responsible for dramatically growing brands and businesses by helping them launch, develop and change their sales results with his salon-specific, results driven methods. Contact him at The SALES CATALYST, 1300 302 859 or go to www.thesalescatalyst.com.au

