

# the *a* *B* *C*'s and *1* *2* *3*'s of Customer Service

You'll find clients will overlook inexperience if you treat them right. It's the simple things done well that account for excellent customer services. BY MICHELLE PRATT



**IS FOR ATTENTIVE ATTITUDE**

*1*

**BE READY.** Don't arrive at the salon at the exact time as your appointment. Whether you're opening the salon in the morning, or returning from a break during the day, be ready for your client when she arrives. Don't make her wait while you take off your coat, run to the bathroom, make coffee, etc. The message you send when you do this is unprofessional. It's too casual. This is difficult to hear in a culture where girls wear pajama bottoms in public, I understand. Still, such cultural tolerances make it easy to stand out in a crowd. Be on time, prepared, and ready to greet your client when she arrives at the salon.

*2*

**BE FULLY PRESENT.** As a rule, try not to answer the phone with a client in front of you, and never, ever answer your cell phone if it's a personal call. Again, I'm aware this sounds like I'm living in the '80s — everybody talks and texts anytime, anywhere. Not you. Not in front of a client. It's rude. We may have grown accustomed to rude, but it's still rude. Now, professionally, this can get sticky. You may be a one-person salon and you need to answer the phone or you risk losing business. Clients understand this — they want you to pick up when they need an appointment, so more than likely they will be OK with you picking up for someone else. But keep it brief. If at all possible, answer the first question the client on the phone asks you and then tell her you will call her back: "No, I don't have anything open this morning, but I'm sure I can get you in soon. Can I call you back when I'm not with a client?" Return the call when the client washes her hands, or when you get a break.

*3*

**LISTEN. AND RESPOND WITH A WARM VOICE AND INFLECTION.** If it's difficult for you to make small talk, learn to ask people questions about themselves, and just keep them talking. I swear, for 15 years my vocabulary at work was limited to exclamations, "Really?! You're kidding! Then what? ... Uh-uh. Oh? Wow!" Be interested in what your clients are saying. Sometimes, you'll be animated or excited, sometimes you'll be empathetic and compassionate. Dr. Karl Pribram has been credited with saying, "We remember 20% of what we hear ... and 100% of what we feel." Make your client feel like you have nothing in the world to do but listen to her — and she is fascinating. >>>

B

IS FOR BUSINESS BASICS



1

**REMEMBER YOUR MANNERS.** I think I developed an acute sense of entitlement about receiving good customer service since I was intentional about providing it at the salon. So, it's frustrating to me when Bambi or Barbie — or whatever name we want to assign the cute little cashier — doesn't address me with a simplest of greetings: "Hi. How are you? Did you find everything you need? ... Thank you for shopping here today. Have a nice day." If she addresses me with "paper or plastic" I know I'm about to be ignored. Don't be like the cashier. Despite all the things that make us different, one thing is true of everyone: We want to be important. We want to be valued, recognized, and appreciated. Greet your clients with a genuine hello. Ask them to please write the check to Your Salon, and say thank you for coming today. Tell them you're sorry you are running late, and you will be with them in just a moment.

2

**ALWAYS SAY YES.** Sounds crazy, doesn't it? It's not as bad as it sounds. The idea behind "always say yes" is really to always find a yes. The template for the response is, "Well, I can't do that, but I can do this." For example, "I can't hold your check until next week, but I can reschedule your appointment to a more convenient time." or "We all get caught up in traffic. No problem. I can still do your fill; I just won't be able to polish your nails. But I can add oil and buff them to give them a beautiful shine. They'll look gorgeous."

3

**KEEP GOOD RECORDS.** This is like the back room of customer service, but keeping good records pays off. Ask for information right up front and keep information current — birthdays, anniversaries, e-mails, phone numbers, addresses, etc. Also, keep track of what polish the client chose, what services she received, what retail was purchased, and if she talked about anything particular during her appointment that you want to remember for next time. Write down any feedback she offers. If she hasn't given feedback, ask for it. This information allows you to alert her to specials on her favorite lotions or nail-care items, and it reminds her that she is important to you. >>>



C IS FOR CLIENT CARE



**REMEMBER CLIENTS' UNIQUENESS.** Here's a trick. Make a list of all the clients you have tomorrow. Include name, the scheduled service, what polish was used last time, and any special event a client mentioned at her last appointment. (This is why record-keeping is vital.) Put the list out of view, but refer to it during the day to brief yourself on the client who is about to sit in your chair. Remembering to ask about something she had mentioned at her last appointment makes her feel valued. You can make her feel important even when she isn't in the salon — send her thank you notes if she's referred a friend or send her a card with a discount on her birthday, anniversary, graduation, or other special event. Every time you hear a client say, "Wow. I can't believe you remembered that," pat yourself on the back. That's a client saying, "Wow. You know me. You care about me. It would be hard to leave you."



**EDUCATE CLIENTS.** Clients want to know that when they have a question about their nails, you have the answer — or you can tell them where to find it. From "is there a special way I should file my nails" to "will my nails lift if I put cuticle oil on them every day," clients are looking for answers. Answer their questions even before they're asked. Recently, I went to a salon for a manicure and as the tech filed my nails, she said, "You may have heard you should file nails in only one direction." She went on to explain the correct way to file nails, why it's important to file them that way, and then showed me how I could correctly file my nails at home. Throughout the whole service, she peppered me with nail facts, how to care for my nails at home, and why it's good to make regular salon appointments. Did I feel like she was trying to "sell" me? No. I was impressed with how confidently she shared her knowledge with me, and I walked out of there believing she knows her stuff. That makes me want to go back.



**REMOVE THE UNCERTAINTY.** We become so familiar with the salon it's easy to forget what it feels like to walk in for the first time. I used to work in a salon where each tech rented her space. There were times when a person walked in and just stood there — ignored! We would just keep on working; we assumed that person was someone else's customer. The poor man or woman, who often came in for a gift certificate, stood there awkwardly until one of us finally said, "Can I help you?" Remember, new clients don't know what they're supposed to do — sit down, take off their polish, hang up their coat, get a drink ... there are lots of little details that can create a feeling of uncertainty in a first-time guest. Remove the uncertainty by offering a genuine greeting to someone who walks into the salon. Introduce yourself and walk her through your process. (To remind yourself of what this uncertainty feels like, visit another salon.) Be intentional about removing the awkwardness of being new. It creates a safe environment that draws clients back to your salon. **N**