

Voices of Experience

Successful techs chime in with their two cents on how to have a great career in nails. Whether it's advice they learned via experience, or from a mentor in the industry, these techs offer up guidance that lasts a lifetime.



The single most useful piece of business advice given to me is “never let your clients leave the salon with nails you wouldn’t want to wear yourself.” It was given to me by my hairdresser/nail tech at the time, Tammy B, a local salon owner, and she said this to me when I first told her I was going to go to nail school.

KATHY GROSSTUECK

Royal Elegance Nail Salon, Two Rivers, Wis.

The most important advice I ever got was “you pay for what you get,” and I came up with it all by myself. Always give a service just like you would like to receive it. A lot of clients come to me for corrective services after they have gone somewhere else, and they’ll tell me they felt like they didn’t get what they paid for at the other place. Then I fix them and they sometimes become new regulars.

KALA BASTION

Sophisticuts Salon & Day Spa, Princeton, Ill.

Thirteen years ago, when I was four years into my nail career, I had the privilege of working with a nail tech

who is now a well-known specialist in the industry. He gave me the following advice that I still follow to this day: Always keep up on education and the newest products; always be professional and confident; customer satisfaction always comes first; and do nails because you love it, not for anything else.

LAUREN BLACKBURN

Electric Beach Tanning & Nails, Gulf Breeze, Fla.

The best advice I ever received was, “Smile and be really nice to clients while you are learning and they will keep coming back to you as your work improves.” I was given this advice by a successful salon owner who has operated a well-known salon in my town for years. She told me this just as I was graduating from beauty school and she was absolutely correct, because I still have the first client I ever did a set of pink-and-whites on. It was a terrible set, but seven years later she is still returning to my salon.

SHANNON CHOMANCZUK

A Polished Image, New Windsor, N.Y.

“Don’t sweat the small stuff because you will completely stress yourself out if you let every little thing bother you.” A friend of mine at another salon told me this when I was just starting out 20 years ago. I worked with her and saw her keep cool under pressure, and her advice has really helped me stay happy in this industry. I still think about it to this day.

SHARI FINGER

Finger’s Nail Studio, West Dundee, Ill.

My advice is to market yourself. Don’t depend on the salon owner to go the extra mile for your chair, even if you’re on commission. You must carry flyers or business cards at all times when you’re out, as well as have your nails done. Dress the part of a business professional even if you’re behind the desk as it gives a lasting impression with your clients and the people who they refer to you. Attend at least one trade show or networking event a year to stay up on what is new in the industry and to keep motivated.

TOPAZ WOODRUFF

The Nail Cabaret, Charlotte, N.C.



I've had to start over quite a few times and whether you're a newbie or starting over with experience, my advice is the same: Practice excellent customer service. If your customer service skills are at 200%, you're likely to retain clientele. Here are some specific tips: 1) remember and repeat the client's name, 2) talk to her/ask questions/be interested, 3) write down her polish for next time, 4) if you can recognize her voice on the phone without her telling you who it is, then she'll think highly of you, 5) bring up one subject from her last visit during her current visit, 6) get her talking (so you can work) and give some input here and there, 7) use a hands-free phone option if you must take calls while with a client, and 8) give the client what she wants. Ultimately, that makes her happy.

LORRAINE TISDALE
Nail Mania, New Philadelphia, Ohio

I've been a nail tech for 16 years and am licensed in two states (California and Washington). I'm a military wife and home is where the army sends us. So I've heard it all, and what sticks out the most is, "If the eye can see it, the hand can do it! Practice, practice, practice!" I fully believe that and live by it.

SHELLY DUNN-NEWMAN
Bella Bling Nail Bar, Anderson, Calif.

I always follow the advice I got from an educator who came to my nail school while I was a student. She said, "Do not give discounts for your service, offer something additional instead."

KEIKO MATSUI
Glam Nail Studio, Richmond, B.C., Canada

Practice! Don't think you can't do it; just practice until you can.

GLADYS TORRES
The Nail Factory, Coamo, Puerto Rico

Understand that clients don't appear magically, but take hard work, perseverance, and talent on your part.

If you're good, it takes at least two to three years to build a steady client base; if you know you have a lot of unsatisfactory areas you need to work on, it'll take longer. On that note, make sure you're well-rounded — with skills, creativity, and customer relations and communication skills. Finally, don't base yourself on another tech's achievements and goals, as everyone's purpose is different.

MICHELLE SMITH-BROWN
Rejuve Salon Spa, Great Extensions Inc.,
Beauty Education and Resources, Raleigh, N.C.

1) Practice, practice, practice, 2) networking is imperative, 3) continue to educate yourself even after school, 4) make sure you always do your very best with each client and 5) no matter what, never sacrifice your integrity or the integrity of the industry to make a quick buck.

LISAMARIE SANTOS
Spa 98, Destin, Fla.

I'd have to say, keep learning. You'll never lose anything by keeping an open mind and learning everything you can from other people. Take constructive criticism, turn it around, and use it to your advantage. And never give up.

SUZI DEL VECCHIO
Bloomingnails, Redding, Calif.

I offer these seven pieces of advice:

1) In the beginning, a positive attitude and a smiling face will carry you further than the less-than-perfect nails you're turning out. 2) Don't expect to build a large clientele in under five years. It normally takes at least that long to get the hang of doing nails, perfect your technique, and garner a decent following. If you quit before then, you'll never know what you could've been or accomplished. 3) Don't salon hop. You lose traction with building your clientele and with every move it becomes a step backwards, so it is imperative that you find a salon that suits you

for several years. 4) Don't gossip about your clients to other clients, because it makes you look petty; plus, it fosters an unhealthy vibe in the salon. 5) Never underestimate the amount of money your client is willing to spend. Just because she spent \$60 on a new full set doesn't mean she won't spend more on retail products to maintain them. This was very sage advice a hairstylist gave to me back in 1988. 6) Don't view "retail" as selling. Think of it as problem solving. As nail techs we have access to fabulous products to maintain our nails, skin, and cuticles....why not share that knowledge with others who could benefit (namely clients)? 7) Pace yourself and be sure to keep a watchful eye on not getting burned out. If you start dreading going to work because it's going to be the "same old same old" then it's past time to take a vacation and go to a trade show or class. Never stop learning!

JILL WRIGHT
Jill Wright Spa for Nails, Bowling Green, Ky.

Try to never talk about religion, politics, or your personal love life. Keep conversions on a positive note.

DAWN CLEMENTZ
Amedae Salon, Ortonville, Mich.

If you provide a cheap product, your client can expect a cheap service, and this is what will define your ability as a nail tech.

TESS HELLIER
Body and Varnish, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

The owner of a famous spa in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, told me: "You are your best fan." I tell myself that every time I need to.

CHARLENE DOLEZAL
Neopolitan Salon, Council, Idaho

The advice I'd give is this: Always ensure your customers' satisfaction. ■

SIERRA THACH
Donna's Nails, Philadelphia