

les nouvelles *esthétique* & spa

AMERICAN EDITION

for estheticians and spa professionals March 2010 \$7.50



Inspiring Champions

FRONT DESK FINESSE!

IS YOUR FRONT DESK MAKING YOU money or costing you money? To the clients who walk in the front door of your salon or day spa, your front desk literally represents your business. What do your clients see upon their arrival? Your front desk person is the touch, face and pulse of your entire operation. They have more interaction with your customers than anyone else who works at your business and in many cases, all of your money is handled through them. They have a tremendous amount of responsibility and many hats to wear. With the proper training, guidance and inspiration, they can become a powerful source of revenue for you—they may even become the most important member of your staff team!



make your business soar: smart guidelines for front desk personnel

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Lance Courtney is a business trainer and coach who specializes in the professional beauty industry. He has worked with thousands of salons and spas nationwide and specializes in training front desk personnel and devising systems to create perfect front desk interactions with clients. His webinar training, conducted over a period of nine weeks, contains nine modules that cover every aspect of customer service in salons and spas. “The old way of conducting business leaves the client in charge,” Courtney explains. “The client needs an appointment, so they call and schedule one. Then they come in, get their service and leave. There is nothing cycling them back into your business again. We reverse the traditional flow of service and turn it upside down. When your front desk initiates the activity, they then become the driving force piloting the interaction.”

Have a “Top Gun” at the front desk

Courtney uses the “Top Gun” terminology from the inspiration that started it all—a relative who is an actual fighter pilot. “There is a difference between a Top Gun pilot and a regular pilot,” he notes. “A Top Gun pilot is the best and most highly trained pilot there is. A Top Gun pilot

owns their air space. They assume the duties of both a pilot and an air traffic controller and are 100 percent proactive.” Courtney applies this initiative to his trainees, giving them skill sets to revolutionize their front desk interactions. “Receptionists are seen as passive,” he relays. “We don’t use that title. We reposition our graduates, empower them to believe in themselves and own their new skill sets. We turn them into advocates for the guests.”

Treating clients as guests changes the entire customer interaction. One of the first skills participants learn is the proper way to greet clients as if they are guests. The first thing to get rid of is the chair behind your reception desk. A receptionist hiding behind a counter cannot be an interactive host or hostess. “We replace the chair with a rolling stool,” says Courtney, “while freeing the front desk person with a wireless headset. Now they are capable of interacting with the guest, like a concierge. It takes a lot of effort to keep getting up from a chair to guide the guest around the salon or spa. Their goal then becomes to discover the needs of the guest.” The next thing to get rid of is your usual greeting. Do not greet guests by asking how they are. This will just be answered with the traditional response: “Fine.” Instead ask, “What brings you in today?” If they are a new guest, introduce yourself first and then warmly welcome them to the salon or spa.

After following these steps, you have a better chance of having an interaction that results in booking an appointment, or even a booking for extended services. Next, offer them a drink of water, soda, wine or champagne, just as you would for a guest visiting your home. Think of creative ways to spoil your guests! You can utilize your retail items to encourage additional sales. Offer a heated aromatherapy wrap for your client’s neck and invite them to browse in your retail section while they wait for their appointment. Or lead them to the relaxation room

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where they can enjoy the scents of the aromatherapy candles and music that you retail. "Now they are fully engaged," notes Courtney. "They have been properly greeted and are immersed in smelling, feeling and tasting. They have been made to feel like a guest. First impressions are everything, and you should treat every guest as if they have a sign on them begging, 'Make me feel important!'"

Remember that every time the phone rings at your business, you should end up making money. Properly investing in the training of front desk personnel guarantees that curiosity calls become booked reservations. Courtney teaches a system he calls QUAC. The acronym stands for Question, Answer and Close. "This ensures that an interested customer doesn't get off the phone without booking an appointment," he explains. "If they are calling you, they are already in the mindset of buying and are very likely to book." Another often missed opportunity are confirmation calls, which Courtney believes are a great chance to be pro-active and sell add-on services for the guest. "We've had salons and spas literally increase their incomes by thousands of dollars immediately after implementing the new systems they learned—solely from curiosity calls and confirmation calls," he notes.

There is much more to learn in addition to how to properly make reservations, confirm appointments and physically welcome guests. The next modules Courtney addresses in his training are building a rapport with clients, escorting them to their next service provider and stabilizing the guest experience, whether it is good or bad. "Knowing how to handle difficult situations is vital," he relays. "It's very important to learn proven, repeatable systems to diplomatically handle these circumstances." It is not advised to just hand someone a free product, give them a discount or extend an insincere apology if they are unhappy. "The customer doesn't just want to be right," he explains. "They want to be seen, heard and understood. They want to feel acknowledged. Make them feel their complaint was well received and that you empathize with them. Thank them for their patronage and give them a sincere apology if it is appropriate." Remember also to never let your guest hear the word "no" from you. Rephrase your statement in a positive way. If you cannot offer what the guest needs, tell them what you can provide.

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Tips for front desk etiquette:

- Never allow neutral or bad moods to carry over into conversations with guests.
- Never hang up on an angry guest.
- Never share personal opinions that are not positive.
- Never eat, drink or chew gum on the phone or in person.
- Never talk about one client in front of another guest.
- Never ignore requests, even if you are busy.
- Never ask a guest about her pregnancy.
- Do not ask guests to call you back.
- Do not put callers on speaker phone.
- Do not put callers on hold without first telling them that you are going to do so.
- Do not place a caller on hold more than twice.
- Avoid holding side conversations.
- Offer more than one word answers.
- Always say "Please," "Thank you," "You're welcome" and "My pleasure."

The front desk training is completed with instruction on how to conclude the guest's visit to your business. Another great chance to increase your sales comes with retailing opportunities. Selling retail products is one of the most common things that salon and spa owners say they want to inspire and motivate their front desk personnel to do. However, there are two potential challenges that come with your front desk personnel actively retailing. The first is that they are not properly trained in sales or in the product line's technical use. Overcome this hurdle by educating your staff on your product lines and their use, and provide some instruction in sales techniques. Courtney also encourages the use of scripts in retailing. The key is the practice of guest consultations by your technicians, which will then have set the stage for the product recommendations that your front desk can facilitate at checkout. The second challenge with retailing will then be the potential conflict with your technicians over the commission for the sales. "We teach systems to reward the front desk personnel fairly without creating competition with the back of the house," Courtney explains. "Encourage, motivate and inspire your front desk team. Ensure they are properly trained and well rewarded. Ideally, they should be an advocate for your guests, more invested in the guest's experience than they are in enforcing the policies and red tape of your business." An empowered and engaged front desk will reward your business tenfold. Make the choice today to invest in your front desk team and create the kind of experience that your guests will never forget! ■



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