



empowering you
EMPOWERING THE INDUSTRY

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AT WORK

WHAT SKILLS ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY?

Some may say it's all about the technique – how adept you are with shears or color –and others may say it's about style or art, finding that perfect cut for the client.

Those are true, but at the root of each one is the same thing: *communication*.

Communicating with clients is essential when you're working to achieve their beauty goals. And communicating within the team is critical when you want an enthusiastic, efficient, effective, and empowered salon.

As we become better communicators, we lift up the people around us, improving morale in the salon and growing better at our own jobs. When things break down – and they do – our jobs are more difficult and it can become a seemingly impossible task to get a team motivated, much less raise morale.

A recent article said that 70% of all employees lack engagement at some level.

Sure, some of those folks don't feel challenged by what they do or have lost the spark that they once had, but most of them are reacting to one thing: poor communication within the business.

With that in mind, we want your salons and spas operating at the highest level, and that means communication is key.

After years of working with clients on clearing out lines of communication, and after decades of running our own beauty businesses, we've come up with **45 ways to improve communication** within your team. These tested methods will improve morale and lessen the drama in your business. Read on, then let us know what worked best for you and what new techniques we should add.

1. Be Clear on Your Mission and Vision

Take the time – especially with new hires – to explain your mission and values during their first days and weeks on the job. It's a good idea to reinforce these with your leaders, teams and whole staff as you hold employee meetings. Why do this? Because when your employees understand the goals of the business and how your mission and vision support those, they'll be more effective in communicating with one another and in their work.

2. Don't Be Afraid to Ask

Good communication is as much about asking questions as answering them, so as you interact with your teams and staff, don't be afraid to ask a follow up question to gain clarity on their goals, their ideas, their worries or frustrations, or any other thing they have to say. It can also help to ask employees about the best way they process new information, how they like to plan, and what ways you can support them (in supporting your mission, vision, and goals).

3. Stay Focused and Pay Attention

It's easy to check out of a conversation and check our texts or our email. It's become a constant – and constantly rude – part of life. How many times have you been talking with someone only to have them check their phone in the middle of your story? How often have you been the one checking your phone? Stop, it's rude, and if you do that when meeting with your team, you're setting a bad example, one that says, "This is more important than what you have to say." Stay focused in meetings and conversations. Make eye contact with the folks attending. And try this: next meeting, all phones go on the table face down; first person to check theirs during the meeting owes the room a coffee.

4. Listen (It's Important Too)

Strike a balance between talking and listening. By listening you can actually hear the answers to the questions you're tossing out there, but you can also hear the concerns of your team, ways to improve sales or workflow, and a hundred other things that impact your business. But you only hear them if you're listening. By being an active listener – attentive, making eye contact, taking notes – you show your employees their input matters and that tells them they are valued.

5. Maintain an Open Door Policy

As long as you're listening, you may as well keep an "open door" policy and allow your team, or at least the leaders, to come to you any time with questions, concerns, clarifications, and other issues.

6. Be Mindful of Body Language

Communication is about more than the words you choose, there's the pace and tone to consider, but body language may be even more important. You can give nonverbal cues to those around you that reveal you're bored, uninterested, ready to go; or you can tell them "I'm listening" and indicate you're excited and engaged. Keep your face pleasant and relaxed, same with your stance. Don't cross your arms over your chest, instead, keep them open and at your side. Make, and maintain, eye contact; smile; nod your head. Do all the things you like to see in an active, attentive listener.

7. Don't Just Inform, Inspire

When you interact with your team – whether in a meeting, in a one-on-one, or just casually – don't just give them information, take time to inspire them. Too often we've seen businesses communicate about the business only, delivering only news and notes and deadlines and not one word that inspires the team or boosts morale. Take time to say a few words that keeps those creative fires burning.

8. Talk is a Two-way Street

Yes, you need the balance between talking and listening, but you also need to balance giving and receiving criticism. Ask your team how you can improve your performance, what you can do to communicate better, and get their feedback and buy-in on ideas and plans. It can be scary at first to take feedback, but you and your team can grow together.

9. Never Personalize Criticism

All criticism should be based on results and actions observed or recorded, not on anything personal. It's tough to give or take criticism, but try this tip next time: start your criticism with two positive things ("Joan, you handled that difficult client well but...") and then move into the critical part of the conversation ("...if you improved X...").

10. Face-to-Face is Best

Communicating with your team via emails, break room flyers, or even text messages is fine – sometimes – but face-to-face discussions are best. In these moments, you can read the body language and tone of the folks you're speaking with; take and answer questions and ask a few of your own; and get more done in less time.

11. Don't Over-communicate

Keep the number of after-work and weekend emails, calls, and texts to a minimum. Better yet, cut them out unless they're absolutely necessary (and you'll know the difference between absolutely necessary and everything else).

12. Offer Thoughtful Compliments

When you tell someone "Great job," do they know why you told them that? Maybe not. Be specific when you dole out a compliment so the person complimented knows exactly what they did right and (hopefully) can do it again.

13. Explain Yourself

You may be thinking, "I'm the owner" or "I'm the manager" and "why do I need to explain myself to anyone?" But you do. Whether the answer to a question is yes or no, explain why to your team and you'll earn their respect and give them a sense of ownership as they buy into the idea or reasoning.

14. Allow Anonymous Feedback

Think suggestion box or virtual suggestion box, a place your team can leave anonymous notes, suggestions, complaints, and the like. Why anonymous? Because some of your team may be reluctant to share their concerns in a public way.

15. Take Action

Communication isn't just about talking and listening, it's about taking action on the suggestions and ideas that you've discussed. Be sure to do something to address the issues at hand, not just talk about them.

16. No is Sometimes The Answer

Sometimes "No" is the answer, but when it is, be sure to say why. By explaining your reasoning, you help your team become better thinkers, problem solvers, and employees.

17. Meet with Purpose

Do your meetings ramble and drone on and seem like they'll never end? Even if the answer is no, you may want to tighten things up just to be more efficient. Try making – and sticking to – an agenda. Also try meeting with only the personnel necessary for that particular topic. There are times you'll want to meet only with team leaders or managers, and times that call for an all-hands-on-deck meeting, be sure you're calling the right people to the right one.

18. Wrap It Up Right

At the end of every meeting be sure to note the action items, the folks responsible for each item, and deadlines. This holds everyone accountable.

19. Moderate Your Messages

How many messages do you send to your team? Are you flooding them and diluting your key points? Send too many messages and people start to ignore them; send too few and you get the old "I was never told..." line. Find the right balance for your culture and your team, then message away.

20. Message Medium Matters

How you communicate is just as important as how much you communicate. Is everything an email marked "URGENT" or do you also send texts at all hours of the day and night? Are important notices lost among the other break room flyers? Match the message to the medium. A text for a reminder ("Meeting Tuesday, don't forget") or immediate announcements ("The snowstorm looks worse than expected so we'll be closed tomorrow. Rebooking appointments now") is fine, but not for major news. Emails work for things like meeting wrap-ups or put-this-on-your-calendar notes. Calls work for all of the above. Just be sure you're moderating your messages and keeping them appropriate for the medium of delivery.

21. Follow Up

After team, group, or one-on-one meetings, send a follow up email outlining what was discussed and noting any relevant action items and deadlines. This helps keep everyone on track. If you give them a subject line like "Meeting Notes 2-18-18" you'll make them easy to index or file in your email inbox.

22. Say it Face-to-Face

When the message is important, say it face-to-face and cut down on the confusion of reading a tone into an email and of wondering just what all those non-verbal cues would indicate.

23. Remember: Motivation and Morale

Remember, communication is more than just a message you need to get across so everyone can get back to work, there's room to motivate your team and keep morale high too. A "Great job yesterday on..." goes a long way to keeping everyone invested and keeping spirits high.

24. Celebrate Employee Achievements

Part of motivating your team and keeping morale high is celebration and encouragement. Celebrate the victories, accomplishments and achievements of your team. This can mean a party, an afternoon break with coffee, popping a bottle of champagne, or any other means of celebration as long as you tell everyone why you're celebrating. Whether it's an anniversary or work anniversary, meeting a team goal or personal milestone, completion of a continuing education course or college class (or even degree), celebrate it.

25. Stay on Schedule

In meetings you want to use an agenda to stay on track, but for those meetings, develop and stick to a schedule. Your one-on-one, team, and all-hands-on-deck meetings should be regular, predictable occurrences that everyone (including you) can schedule around.

26. Learn Your Team & Communicate Accordingly

Learn how everyone likes to communicate and try to deliver your message in a way they'll hear, accept, and synthesize.

27. Be Constructive in Your Feedback

When you give feedback to teams, individuals, or the whole company, be sure the feedback you deliver is constructive rather than destructive. Think of it this way: don't present a problem with no solution; always have a fix (or at least an idea on how to attempt a fix) ready to go. Constructive feedback helps us become better individuals and employees as it builds us up rather than tears us down.

28. But There Are Times to Be Blunt

There are times when a frank, blunt approach will work best. Don't be afraid to deliver a strong message in a strong way when it's appropriate.

29. Clarify Roles, Duties and Job Functions

When you clarify the roles, duties and job functions of everyone in your business, you're establishing a chain of command or a hierarchy. This is valuable as the clarity you deliver here has day-to-day and long-term impacts, especially when those duties and roles determine promotions and advancement within the company.

30. Get Buy-in from Your Team

In meetings, get buy in from your team. When everyone feels listened to, they work better. They feel a part of the decision, not apart from the decision, and that motivation is huge. So, give your team a say in the decision making for your business and watch morale improve.

31. Keep the Door Open

If you have that “open door” policy, be sure to keep your door open, otherwise you erode the good will and faith you’ve earned as a good listener.

32. Training Is Key

With new employees, you have to train them in the ways you do – and don’t – communicate. Be sure to spend time with your new hires helping them adjust to your policies concerning meetings, communication with their team and managers, and with you. This will cut down on problems in the future. And if you develop materials to put into the new hire handbook or new employee-training manual, they’ll have it to refer back to when questions do arise.

33. Double Check Everything

That email you’re about to send? Double check it to ensure the message is clear and the tone is appropriate. That text? Be sure there’s no embarrassing autocorrect or missing phrasing that may cause issues. That meeting agenda? Make sure it’s relevant, on topic, and efficient.

34. Think Before You Speak

While double-checking your written communication is important, so is double-checking your speech. Think before you say a thing and take a moment to be sure you’re communicating as effectively as possible.

35. Have A Script

Have a script, plan, or outlined agenda you follow for all meetings. Sticking to the plan creates a disciplined, regimented structure that can help keep you on track and make meetings familiar and efficient.

36. Be Brief. Be Specific.

Can you do both? Yes. Should you? Absolutely. By keeping the message as specific as possible and as brief as possible, you’re using everyone’s time wisely.

37. Keep it Necessary

Just like ensuring you have only the essential personnel in a meeting, be sure the meeting itself is essential. Are you meeting just to meet? Did you call a 45-minute all-hands-on-deck gathering to discuss something you could’ve done in a 10-minute huddle? Keep your meetings and all modes of your communication necessary and you’ll eliminate the inevitable eye roll when you call one more meeting this week.

38. Hold Periodic Q&A Sessions

Provide your team the opportunity to ask questions to you and to the whole group. By addressing employee questions and concerns in this way, you’re creating an environment where open communication is valued and respected (well, as long as you’re respectful in how you conduct these sessions), and that goes a long way to keeping lines of communication open and working well.

39. Take Things One Question At A Time

In meetings small or large, there's a moment where four questions come up all at once. Answer each one fully, and then move to the next. Don't give one full answer and three partial responses, you'll just create confusion and generate more questions.

40. Meeting Needs

In any gathering or group discussion, be sure your needs and the needs of your team are being met. If not, work together to find ways to improve the situation.

41. Make Accountability a Priority

Accountability should be a priority, and that means accountability for you and for your team. When you note the action items that arose in a meeting, be sure your name is on that list. When it's time to accept or admit responsibility, set the example and step up to own your part of the successful or less-successful moments.

42. Be Positive

When you deliver criticism, temper your message. Try this: begin with the successes, then address how to strengthen areas of weakness. Don't jump right into "You could improve A, B and C" or you risk losing the message and learning opportunity with a few harsh (or harshly received) words.

42. Vocabulary Matters

Communicate simply and effectively as this makes the message easy to receive. Imagine this point was titled "The Importance of Word Choice and How Your Language Impacts Listener Actions and Outcomes." What a mouthful. Keep it simple. Keep it direct.

44. Multi-Location Meetings

Some businesses operate several locations. If this is the case for you, you'll need to schedule regular meetings with your top-level management teams, your second-tier team leaders, and even all-(and we mean ALL)-hands-on-deck team meetings. By doing this you demonstrate the same leadership and positive communication methods across the whole of the business.

45. Be Empathetic

When you're talking to, training, or coaching someone, be empathetic and try to see things from their perspective. What motivates them? What drives them? What do they hope to accomplish? Why do they approach situations the way they do? When we put ourselves into the shoes of the other person, we often see ways to be more effective when we work with, speak to, or coach them.