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Service with a style

Author teaches hair care professionals how to treat clients well.

Good old-fashioned customer service is something that's lacking in many industries, but especially in the hairstyling business - even though it's one of the few careers where professionals are licensed to touch their clients.

After years of going to hair salons, San Antonio motivational speaker Sandra Steen decided it was finally time for the industry to get a reality dose from its consumers.

"We are not going to tolerate it any more," Steen said.

Instead of beating up on stylist, Steen put words on paper and created solutions for them to improve their business.

Her 90-page book, "Shut Up and Let Me Do Your Hair," walks stylists through customer service techniques from dealing with irate clients to learning to read a client's personality and cater to her needs.

The founder of her own consulting firm, Steen said stylists are in a positive position to affect people's lives on a recurring basis. She said they can influence a teenager to get out of an abusive relationship or give inspiring words to a recent divorcee. Many of them don't realize it, she said, but their power is enormous.

In fact, her own stylist gave her the inspiring words "you can do this" when it came time to write her book.

Steen's inspiration came through an "aha" moment she had when a stylist told her, "Shut up and let me do your hair." She said that with her hair dripping wet, she left the shop and never returned. In many industries, Steen said, people are so focused on technique they don't fine-tune their customer skills. Her goal is to reach out to other industries and write books for bankers and the medical profession. But for now, she feels she has tapped into a gold mine with the hair care industry.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2000, barbers, cosmetologists and other personal appearance workers held about 790,000 jobs. Most of these workers are employed in beauty salons or barbershops, with many of them leasing space from a salon owner. Employment in this field is expected to grow faster than the average job because of demand from baby boomers.



Sandra Steen, business owner and consultant, holds her book 'Shut Up and Let Me Do Your Hair.' She says stylists must improve service and her book explains how.

Amir Kamel, president of Princess Beauty Supply in San Antonio, said he wants to sell the book because customer service and business skills are not promoted in the field. "All our industry is focusing on is (hair) education, product and how to run your business, but not specifically customer service," Kamel said. "The simplicity of the book touches hair stylists.

Kamel said that if the level of service is raised in the business, the more stylists will stay in business. Steen's customer service tips are easily readable and basic. They start with greeting clients with a smile and not allowing personal feelings to conflict with business. Another basic tip: Don't make customers wait any longer than you would want to wait. Phoebe Dabney, a San Antonio stylist in the business for 22 years, said that often a customer's pet peeve is waiting too long or not getting the style they want.

Practicing bad customer service, she said, is another stylist's gain.

"This is something that's needed for the industry," Dabney said. "A lot of us are not practicing good customer service and are losing clientele. This will help revolutionize the industry."

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