

Sailing the Twelve C's of Team Building

Everyone sailing the often turbulent seas of salon ownership wants to build a great team. That's why at almost every better business seminar you attend 'team' is such an over-used and under comprehended term: my team, team building, team dynamic, team work, teamity teamity teamy team team. Sigh...

What everyone really wants to know is: how do you do it? How do you take a bunch of people and turn them into a unified force to be reckoned with?

I used to work in improvised comedy – a game where team work is vital to the success of the show. During the highs and lows of ad-libbing entertainment for the punters I gleaned twelve valuable tips on building a team with Kong-like strength and keeping it that way.

If you spend some valuable time and attention on each of these twelve tips I guarantee everyone will start to contribute most effectively to your team's success. Your workforce will respect you, your empowered stylists will 'own' and be responsible for their effort to success, and your bottom line will improve.

Charter

If you don't have one yet, write a mission statement. Your team needs a common goal and purpose and without one, they're like pirates without treasure maps (and no one likes a sad listless pirate). If you want to know how to write a great mission statement, read through the "Mission: Possible" article by Megan Geer. You can involve the team in writing the mission statement so they feel part of the salon vision.

Now set your goals and timelines and make all of the team aware of where the salon is headed. Set strategies on how the team will reach these goals. Be sure to set realistic time lines, reward commitment to deadlines and give all the support you can in aiding your team in reaching them.

Communication

As I have stated to countless monosyllabic boyfriends, communication is a two way street. Your team will need a channel for clear communication with you, just as you will need to establish a method for giving honest performance feedback. Many salons use internal forms for communicating things such as leave requests, accident reports and stock requests (to name a few).

As for giving honest feedback, try implementing mystery shop audits conducted by people unrelated and unknown to salon staff. If you need to give negative feedback from a mystery shopper audit, use a “Management Sandwich” (remember to be firm, fair, and fun):

- ✓ Good attribute
- ✓ How they can improve on a skill
- ✓ Good attribute

Say some thing like this ... “Rachel, I liked the way that you had immediate rapport with your clients today, however you will need to concentrate on the hair more as I think the cuts could be slightly more modern. I did like the way you styled the hair and recommend the right retail products to the clients.”

Clear Expectations

As the team leader you must clearly communicate the expectations for the salon’s performance and outcomes. Write a team member handbook outlining the salon ‘rules’, including bonuses and benefits for adhering to the rules. Be pedantic and precise when writing your handbook. Include everything – rules for smokers, staff parking, how you expect the lunch room to be used, what condition uniforms should be in etc. Print and distribute the handbooks to all the staff. After all, people cannot follow the systems you’d like in your salon if they don’t even know what those systems are.

Context

Does each individual understand where his or her performance fits in the total context of the salon goals, ideology, vision, and principles? Write position descriptions which clearly define the roles and checklists associated

with each job. This will aid everyone in understanding their individual importance to the accomplishment of all team goals and that working as a team will assist them in reaching their personal goals.

Commitment

Most people can't just turn up and work for no reason. If they believe in the Salon Mission Statement, your team won't find themselves asking, "Why am I doing this job? What's in it for me? Why bother even turning up for my shift?"

The key to gaining team commitment to salon goals is to ensure the goals are attainable, realistic, and inspirational. If all members are committed to accomplishing the team mission and expected outcomes, and perceive their roles as valuable to the team and to their own performances, you'll succeed in reaching your goals.

Competence

This is a tricky one when talking about an existing team. Harden your heart for a moment to sentiment and friendships and ask yourself this question: Do your employees have the knowledge, skill, attitude and capability to succeed? If a team member is lacking a particular skill, are they willing to learn and are you willing to provide the support they need to learn? If not, you *will* have to let them go or move them to another position.

Keeping your team's competence levels high also means training and re-training to keep up with current trends and new techniques. No one should be exempt from ongoing training. No matter how long they've been in the industry or what knowledge they possess, your team can always learn something new.

Control

Janet Jackson's not the only one who wants it. Your team needs enough freedom and empowerment to feel a sense of ownership that is necessary to accomplish its goals. For more information about empowering your team, flip through this magazine and check out my "I've Got the Power" article.

With an empowered team, accountable for practices, commitments, and results, your salon will thrive. Implement a daily review process every morning so the team is aware of each other's roles and commitments for the day. This will keep them consistently headed in the right direction, both individually and as a unit.

Collaboration

When your team has a clearly defined mission, team handbook and position descriptions, it's easier for them to cooperate to accomplish the salon goals. During your daily review process encourage team collaboration on short term salon goals and problem solving. Be sure to listen to and respect everyone's ideas and opinions.

For more tips on creating a team structure which is most amenable to smooth collaboration check out Iain Horne's article "Where's the Boss?"

Creative Innovation

Provide the team with training knowledge, education, and access to events, books and films necessary to stimulate their knowledge and creativity. Welcome creative thinking and new ideas and reward stylists who take reasonable risks to make improvements. If you only ever reward those who conform to the status quo, you'll discourage the kind of creativity which wins awards for the salon and sets hair fashion trends for the entire industry. Nothing amazing ever came from doing things the exact same way everyone else does.

Consequences

Sadly, sometimes you will have to be the bad cop and discipline team members. In a thriving team, you'll find it barely necessary, as team members are fully aware of and take responsibility for their position tasks.

On the flip side, make sure you always reward success. When rewarding a success, make a big deal about it in front of the whole team. When reprimanding (with a management sandwich of course) take the team member aside in private and quietly discuss the issue. Spend constructive time resolving problems rather than finger pointing. Playing the blame game

does not solve problems it simply creates more such as poor morale and resentment. Finally, don't ask the team to 'do as I say, not as I do'. A leader should always lead by example and inspire the team to be the best they can be.

Coordination

In a great team, all individuals understand that everyone must work with common goals in order to work most efficiently and effectively. A consistent and strong Salon Coordinator can take an average team from good to great. Iain Horne fully covers the requirements for a great Salon Coordinator in his "Where's the Boss?" article, so I won't go into it further here.

Consistency

Consistency starts with you! As a Salon Owner/ Manager, ask yourself: Am I consistently working on communicating clear expectations? Am I consistently coming up with creative innovations to ensure context and control? Do I consistently collaborate with the team to evaluate their competence? Are there consistent consequences set in place for the occasional times the team's coordination and commitment to our mission statement strays? Do I always reward both personal and team success?

Not only will the team appreciate consistency, your clientele will too! Encourage a consistent level of service from the team so every client receives the same star treatment every time they visit your salon. You'll soon see how consistency in your team can improve retention and word of mouth.

So there you have it! Master these twelve C's and your salon team will be in for some smooth sailing now and in the future. Bon Voyage!