

Client Love: Six Rules for Building Solid Gold Relationships

by Annet King (as seen in Skin Inc.)

These days, whether they're auditing your tax return, fixing your roof or leasing you a gleaming new Mercedes, everyone claims to be in the relationship business. And, they're right: Every business is dependent upon the critical relationship between buyer and seller. What's the key to this relationship? In a word, love.



Service industries in particular rely on the human elements of communication and empathy to thrive, but these days virtually every business should consider itself to be in the service industry. Unless you're truly contending with something that's one-of-a-kind, whatever you're selling is most likely a commodity. What wins the sale, not to mention the return business? How you make clients feel before, during and after the transaction. Yes, price counts, as do quality, access, convenience and location. But all of these factors are secondary to creating and sustaining client-love as the heart of your relationship business. And, as skin care professionals love must be at the very center of every level of your practice, as you breathe the same air, touch the warm skin of clients, and look deeply into their eyes as part of every treatment—and every retail sale!

Do you feel the love? Whether you're a newbie having start-up anxiety—which is to be expected—or an experienced pro having a moment of mid-life doubt—also normal—ask yourself: Why did you get into the business? While professional skin care is a lucrative business, money is not the ultimate answer. Successful skin therapists are in it for something less tangible, but no less real, giving credence to the first of six Golden Rules.

1. Love People

To succeed in the skin care industry, you must genuinely love people. Struggling to smile as you answer a client's question or take a client order? If so, it may be time to take a good, hard look at why you chose this profession and how much you want to love what you do.

You must find an innate, inherent reward in service, rather than feeling that it's demeaning in any way. I believe that this is an attitude that is either part of you or it's not. Truly, care professionals and service industries are not for everyone. If you feel resentful at the mere idea of putting someone else's needs, wants and whims before your own, you will be most successful in a profession that does not require intimate interaction with people.

Also, as skin care professionals, keep this in mind: most clients are women. Do you click easily with other women? This instant rapport is essential if you want to love your job.

Is a likable personality natural or learned? It can be both, but by the time you have your license, your personality is most likely already well-established. With this in mind, each individual has skills that require constant effort in order to stay in love with her job and to keep clients in love with their experience.

Make a conscious effort to work on your likability factor!

2. The Client is the Rock Star

Your business is not about you; it's about your client. Treat every client as though she is your favorite celebrity, hero, friend, neighbor or beloved granny. Give your client undivided attention. Conversation has been always recognized as an art, but these days, electronics have replaced some essential aspects of our face-to-face communication. As part of your personal and professional development, as well as team exercise, work at improving core verbal and nonverbal skills, such as making and keeping eye contact, reading and subtly mirroring client facial and body cues, and learning to relate to clients from generations and cultures other than your own.

Every client has something wonderful about her that is just waiting to be discovered. Find it and love it, and her business will be yours for life.

3. Relationship-building is a Skill

Social skills are a form of currency and can be the tipping-point in building clientele. Many potential clients will bail and seek out another provider if they get poor service on the phone. As the saying goes, "You had me at 'Hello.'"

Remember how hard you worked and studied to master your treatments, techniques and learn about the structure of the skin? Developing and nurturing relationships with your clients also is a skill, with both technical and intuitive aspects. Like any form of expertise, you must dive in.

Start by being fully present and paying undivided attention. Make mental notes when you are with a client. And, when she leaves, make actual notes! Write down her preferences, likes, dislikes and passions. And no, it's not cyber stalking to find out more about a client by checking her out on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest or LinkedIn. Keeping this data fresh will allow you to compliment her genuinely, interact in authentic and meaningful ways, and make recommendations that she will appreciate. Make yourself an invaluable resource, like a concierge at an eight-star hotel—and share tips that matter to your clients like giving her a gift card to that great new coffee spot when she's a java lover.

4. Tune Out Distractions

As part of listening and paying attention to your clients, place your calls and texts on hold when you are on the floor. Be mindfully in the moment when in the presence of clients and shoppers—who may be future clients. Really listen, because it's by listening that you learn to anticipate the subtlest needs or emotions of the client—water, food, warmth, attention, affirmation and so on. Focus on every detail and

respond in meaningful ways. Remember: Your specialty is to create a safe haven for her built on trust, touch and by listening.

5. Keep the Love Alive

When you're in the people business, the thrill can never be gone. It's your job to keep the relationship thriving—and a source of joy for you both. Long after the honeymoon, continue to nurture the marriage with surprise and delight. Remember, random acts of kindness go a long way. Consider an extra add-on treatment, a card or an essential oil for her pillow.

6. Say Thank You

Always make a point of thanking clients—even the first-time browsing shopper. In particular, make a very specific effort to express appreciation to someone who has demonstrated loyalty. Make appropriate physical contact—a hug if that's your style, but most definitely deep, real eye contact. Not just a casual “thanks” as they walk out the door. Use her name. Take her hand. Mean it—she will feel it.

Your human-centric business is utterly unique. As the world becomes more impersonal, your uniquely nurturing profession matters more than ever. Small business, like those that employ skin care professionals, may be far better-suited to creating lasting relationships. How do you define success? Money and power are only part of the equation—creating, feeling and returning love in the form of client loyalty make success as a skin care professional bigger and better than ever before.