

CHAPTER

# 2



## communication in the workplace

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

On completion of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify different forms of communication
- Use effective questioning and listening skills
- Work and communicate within a team effectively have an understanding of and be able to overcome communication barriers
- Communicate with customers and colleagues from diverse backgrounds
- Have an understanding of telephone communication and how to process information.

## INTRODUCTION

Whether you are an employee or a salon owner, you will spend much of your time at work communicating with co-workers, your manager, clients and suppliers. In this chapter, we look at the skills required to communicate effectively with clients and other team members in the salon.

## WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication is the process of transferring ideas or information from one person – the sender – to another person or group of people – the receiver/s. Good communication is essential in any salon for it to function effectively. This means that good communication is important at all levels – between employees, suppliers and customers – and is essential in a salon to ensure that the everyday business tasks are able to be achieved.

There are many different types of communication in the workplace. These can include:

- ❖ sending out newsletters
- ❖ making telephone calls
- ❖ sending emails
- ❖ sending or receiving faxes
- ❖ asking for feedback from a co-worker or client
- ❖ face-to-face with co-workers and clients.

### ACTIVITY 2.1

Using your own workplace or personal experience as an example, add other forms of workplace communication to the above list. Think about the tasks in your job and identify the types of communication that form part of these tasks.

## FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Communication can be divided into two main forms – verbal communication and nonverbal communication.

### Verbal communication

Verbal communication involves communicating through writing or speech. For example, it may be through a telephone conversation or face-to-face. With verbal communication, information is exchanged quite quickly and the speakers are able to respond to each other and provide feedback immediately.

#### *Vocal expression*

The best speaking voice is one that sounds conversational, natural and enthusiastic. When you express yourself vocally in a way that is similar to your normal conversational style, people will be attentive to your words. *Vocal expression* refers to the volume, pitch, tone and tempo of



the voice, and the frequency of pauses. Using *vocal variety* is the best way to communicate. This means adjusting the volume, pitch and speaking rate of your voice to keep your audience – the receiver – listening.

### *Choice of words*

Words convey different meanings to different people, so using words that everyone can understand is crucial to effective communication. Age, education and cultural background are all factors that influence the words we use, their meaning, and how they will be understood and interpreted by the receiver. Also be aware of jargon, especially abbreviations, acronyms and technical language, which can exclude receivers and result in them ‘switching off’.

### *Tone, pitch and rate of speech*

The tone and pitch of a person’s voice and rate of speech can be excellent indicators of their real thoughts and feelings. The tone (how the voice is used), pitch (how high or low the voice is) and pace of speech can help you gauge a person’s emotion.

## Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication involves communication via a form other than words. Nonverbal communication can exist in spoken or written communication or body language. Examples of these are:

- ❖ the way the voice is used – for example, grunting
- ❖ body language – eye contact, gestures, facial expressions.

Communications experts estimate that only 10 per cent of communication is in the spoken word, 30 per cent in the sound (tone, pitch and rate of speech) and 60 per cent in body language!

### *Body language*

When communicating with other people, we encode our message with a whole range of signals that will either support our words or show up our insincerity (we don’t mean what we say). These signals can be ‘seen’ in a lot of different ways, including:

- ❖ eye contact
- ❖ gestures
- ❖ facial expressions.



**FIGURE 2.1**  
Facial expressions can reveal emotions

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS

A customer's requirements can be very simple or quite complex. Consequently, the information you need to gather from them in order to meet their needs and expectations will also be either simple or complex. It is important that you get a very clear idea of what the customer is looking for before you make a proposal or recommendation to them.

### Questioning skills

There are a number of different types of questions. The kind of answers you get will depend on the type of question you asked. In approaching a customer, you should never open your comments with a closed question. A closed question is one where only a one-word answer is required. For example: 'Can I help you?' a closed question, and the customer can respond by simply saying 'No.' This leaves you with nowhere to go. It is always best to start a conversation with an **open** question – one that requires a longer answer. For example: 'Those nail art designs are made by our nail techs. What do you think of them?' The question asked is an open question, and the customer cannot simply answer it with one word.

#### *Open questions*

Skilful questioning can get you enormous amounts of information without you having to say a great deal. This is where you ask open questions. Open questions usually begin with the words **what, why, which, where, when** or **how**, and can rarely be answered in just one or two words. During your first meeting with a customer, you will need to find out certain specific details in order to suggest either the service or product that will suit them best.

#### *Clarifying questions*

Once the customer has finished telling you what they are after in either a service or product, you can summarise and clarify what they have said by saying something like, 'So, you would like a full set of tips?' This is a good check to make sure you are both on the same track.

A clarifying question is asked to:

- ❖ make sure that you have fully understood what has been said
- ❖ gain extra information about a particular point.

#### *Leading questions*

At some time during the consultation, you will arrive at a point where you have sufficient information to know what your customer requires and you want to wind up the consultation. You can do this by asking a leading question. A leading question *leads* the customer in the direction you want them to go – towards a commitment for a firm booking or sale. For example: 'So, you would like a full set of tips on Monday at 4 pm?'

As you can see, the response to the above questions will be much shorter than they would be to an open question.



### *Closed questions*

A closed question is one that requires only a 'yes' or 'no' answer, or a very short answer. This type of question usually starts with: **do**, **can**, **is** or **are**. You generally ask closed questions at the end of your consultation when you are summarising the conversation or closing the sale.

In this activity, you will be endeavouring to find out a secret! Your ability to find out this secret in the least amount of time will demonstrate your ability to ask questions effectively.

- Split into groups of 3–4.
- Taking turns, each person must think of a favourite nail art technique.
- The remaining teammates may ask a maximum of three questions each to determine the name of the technique.
- The people asking the questions may not ask 'What is your favourite nail art technique?'
- The person answering the questions should answer only that which is asked. In other words, don't supply information that hasn't been asked for.

ACTIVITY  
2.2

## COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

There are many ways to communicate, as previously covered, but there are also barriers we may encounter or be guilty of committing ourselves. For example:

- ❖ not listening or paying attention to what a person is saying or indicating
- ❖ not maintaining eye contact
- ❖ butting-in or interrupting when someone else is talking
- ❖ making assumptions and not clarifying exactly what the person wants
- ❖ being sarcastic or rude.

## Customers with special needs

Special needs customers are just customers. You may require a little extra help and patience when serving them, but, like any other customer, they may wish to purchase a product or service, and it is your job to serve them. Sometimes it is not apparent that they are a special needs customer as they might not like to draw attention to their disability, and in some cases they might not consider themselves as having any special needs. Therefore, when communicating with a person with special needs, take care to treat them as a person and not a condition. If the person is escorted by a carer, speak to the customer rather than the carer. The carer will intervene if appropriate.



## Cultural differences

Many people slow their speech when speaking with people whose first language is not English. But no matter how slowly you speak, if the person simply cannot understand the words you are using, you will never get your message across.

When speaking with people for whom English is a second language, use plain and simple English. This means using as few words as possible to convey your message, and using simple words (i.e. with just one or two syllables) to aid understanding.

## EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Communication is one of the most important skills we will learn in life. We spend most of our time communicating in some form or another. It begins from the moment we wake up: dealing with partners and children; discussing what to eat, what to wear, what we are going to do today. It continues all day long: talking to colleagues and clients, coming home to talk about our day, etc.

Listening is the most important communication method as it allows us, if done correctly, to understand completely what is being said to us. Listening isn't something that comes easily. Most people are fairly self-involved and, while we are interested in other people, our own needs are often more important to us than other people's needs. This tends to make us concentrate more on what we are saying, or what we intend to say, and less on what is being said to us, so we need to spend some time learning how to listen effectively. This is not something that will happen quickly; however, with good intentions and a lot of practice, it is a skill that can be acquired.

In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey tells us that listening takes place on a number of different levels:

- ❖ ignoring
- ❖ pretending to listen
- ❖ selective listening
- ❖ attentive listening
- ❖ empathic listening.

Let's take a closer look at these to see what they involve and how we relate to them ourselves.

### *Ignoring*

This is the worst form of listening, as we are not actually listening at all. We ignore the person who is speaking to us, and make no effort to hear what they are saying. This is a very negative listening attitude, as it makes communication completely impossible.

### *Pretending*

Here we pretend we are listening, but in reality we are only paying attention with 'half an ear'. We make all the correct 'uh-huh' and 'OK' sounds in the right places, but in the meantime we are actually concentrating on something else, such as filing or painting the person's nails. This



is also a negative listening attitude because, even though you appear to be listening, you're not really and the person trying to talk to you will sense this.

### *Selective listening*

We only hear those things within a conversation that we want to hear. Children and spouses are particularly good at this! For example, John comes home from school and his mother tells him: 'Go upstairs, put your bag away, clean your room, do your homework and then you can watch TV.' John hears: 'Put your bag away ... and then you can watch TV'! This, too, is a negative listening attitude and can cause a great deal of frustration.

### *Attentive listening*

Attentive listening is considered by many to be the highest level. Here we are doing all the right things – leaning forward, maintaining eye contact where possible, nodding our head in understanding, and generally showing interest in what the other person has to say. This is a positive listening attitude.

The average person is capable of speaking at a rate of 122 words per minute. The brain is capable of thinking and absorbing information four times faster than we can speak. This means that while someone is speaking to you, you have time not only to hear what they are saying, but also to wonder what the traffic is going to be like on your way home from work, decide what you're going to have for dinner and remind yourself to take some books back to the library.

So, even when we are listening attentively, are we really paying attention? Or are we, while the other person is talking, already thinking about our response:

'Well, if you think that's something, wait till you hear what happened to ME!'

'I know just how you feel. MY ...'

By subconsciously doing this, we could be missing out on important information or signals.

Very few people use the final level of listening ...

### *Empathic listening*

What exactly is empathic listening? Listening with empathy means listening with the full intention of really understanding the other person's point of view. When you listen with empathy, you are putting yourself in the other person's place. Listening with empathy can be a very effective communication tool. Instead of projecting your own thoughts, feelings and assumptions on to the other person, you are instead focusing on the thoughts, feelings and motivations inside someone else's head and heart.

#### TIP

Treat people how you would expect to be treated yourself, particularly in terms of how you communicate with them. Never 'judge a book by its cover' – you can't assume why people are acting the way they are, even if it's negative.



ACTIVITY  
2.3

In this activity, you will be interviewing your table partner about a favourite hobby to demonstrate your listening skills.

- Split into pairs.
- Spend two minutes (each) interviewing your partner about their favourite hobby or pastime.
- You are not allowed to take notes.

When you have finished the interviews, you should present the information you have received to the class/partner.

## 2.1

## In the salon



**When I had my salon, I read a book on communication and I found a couple of valuable ideas** that I still practise to this day. One suggestion was that, if you had a client who was very negative and you felt was zapping your energy, try the reverse of what you would probably do naturally, and voluntarily give that person your energy. By this I mean, instead of trying to switch off, or getting annoyed with that client, pay them a fabulous compliment – for example, 'Wow, that's a great colour you're wearing today!' Saying something positive will change their energy output from negative to positive.

## COMMUNICATING BY TELEPHONE

Communication on the telephone has become increasingly important in the salon. It has become the essence of how business is carried out in nail salons – by appointment. Clients can be easily put off or won over by your telephone technique, so a good telephone manner is essential.

Here are some general guidelines to follow when taking a telephone call in a nail salon:

- ❖ Answer promptly – the telephone should ring no more than three times before it is answered.
- ❖ Answer the telephone 'with a smile'. This instantly creates a friendly tone and helps the client feel at ease.
- ❖ Identify the salon and yourself. Be professional and speak distinctly in a pleasant tone.
- ❖ Be pleasant to the caller. Even if you are busy, don't rush the call.
- ❖ Listen to what the client is saying and obtain all the necessary facts. Ask questions tactfully and offer your help.



- ❖ Always repeat the appointment details back to the client – the day, date and time, and the name of the nail technician who will attend to them on the day.
- ❖ Take messages correctly. Learn how to use your phone system to transfer calls correctly.
- ❖ Thank the client for calling.

## Booking appointments over the telephone

Booking appointments over the telephone is one of the most frequent activities in a nail salon. The conversation below demonstrates correct telephone techniques:

*Nail technician:* Beauty Nail Bar. Good morning.  
Christine speaking.

*Client:* Good morning. I'd like to make an appointment with Emma at 2 pm next Thursday.

*Nail technician:* Certainly. What service do you require, please?

*Client:* Just a manicure and pedicure, thanks.

*Nail technician:* Emma does have a spare appointment at that time. What name is it, please?

*Client:* Mrs Lauren Connolly.

*Nail technician:* Thanks, Mrs Connolly. Your appointment at 2 pm next Thursday, 14th of June, with Emma, is now booked. We'll look forward to seeing you then.  
Thanks for calling, Mrs Connolly.

Trying to manage the appointment book is a hard task. There will always be instances when clients want to book a certain time and day but there is no availability. For example, lunchtime during weekdays is a popular appointment, as well as Saturday mornings. You should always try to offer alternative appointments, rather than just refusing their request. For example:

*Nail technician:* I'm sorry, Mrs Connolly. Emma already has an appointment at 2 pm, but she's free at 11 am and again at 12 pm. She's also free Thursday week, the 21st of June, at 2 pm. Or is there someone else who could look after you? Sarah is free at 2 pm.

## Taking telephone messages

Taking telephone messages is another important activity in a nail salon. Often your colleague may be attending to a client and is unable to take the call at that time. In those instances, you will need to take a message. Here are some general guidelines to help with taking telephone messages:



**FIGURE 2.2**  
Answering the telephone 'with a smile'

### TIP

Consider enrolling in a communication course; there are so many you can do. Try doing a web search for 'communication courses' (in your state). Also there are several great books on various communication skills such as body language, writing, verbal and nonverbal, etc.



- ❖ Always write the message down on a telephone message slip.
- ❖ Ensure you ask for the caller's name and contact number, and if they would like to leave a short message.
- ❖ Listen to the message carefully and note it down accordingly. Always repeat the details to check that you have written it down correctly.
- ❖ It is important to write down the date and time the call was received.
- ❖ Finally, always pass the message on to the correct person.

### Telephone Message

Message for: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Received by: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of caller: \_\_\_\_\_

Returned call   
  Urgent   
  Returned call   
  Will call again

Message:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**FIGURE 2.3**  
Example of a telephone message slip

## 2.2

### In the salon

**I was reading an article about telephone etiquette recently, and it reminded me of something** I overheard once when I was a customer at a beauty salon. I was sitting in the reception area waiting for my nail technician and one of the beauty therapists was answering the phone. The salon obviously had 'call waiting', as the therapist kept putting a client on hold while answering other calls. She must have said at least four times: 'Can you hold the line for a minute, please? I have another call coming in'. In the end, the client must have become so frustrated with constantly being put on hold that she hung up on the therapist.

The therapist looked surprised and didn't seem to understand why the client had hung up!



- The two main ways of communicating are through verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Verbal language includes:
  - expression
  - choice of words
  - tone, rate and pitch of speech.
- Nonverbal language includes:
  - body language and gestures
  - use of voice.
- Types of questions include:
  - open
  - clarifying
  - leading
  - closed.
- Some communication barriers may be:
  - not paying attention
  - not maintaining eye contact with the person
  - not listening
  - interrupting
  - being rude or sarcastic.
- Be aware and considerate when dealing with people with special needs.
- Listening with empathy means putting yourself in the other person's place and trying to really understand what they are saying to you.
- You should aim to develop excellent telephone skills.

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- 1 Why would it be important to have good communication skills in the beauty industry?
  - 2 List a number of ways you could communicate with:
    - clients
    - co-workers
    - people with special needs.
  - 3 What is the difference between closed, leading and open questions? Give an example of each.
  - 4 List a few methods of body language communication.
  - 5 What might be a bad choice of words that could make a client feel excluded?
  - 6 List some of the things to remember to ask when taking a telephone message from a client who wants to make an appointment at a specific time with one of your co-workers.
  - 7 What are some examples of nonverbal communication?

summary

revision  
questions

- 8 For each of the question types listed below, give an example that has not been used in the chapter:
- an open question
  - a closed question
  - a leading question
  - a clarifying question.
- 9 What is your interpretation of being:
- empathetic?
  - compassionate?

Sample pages

