

10 Commandments of the Front Desk

A great receptionist has a diplomat's dash, a celebrity's style, and a socialite's charm. It can be a pretty glam gig. But sometimes, the front desk is where salon service gets as dowdy as last year's must-have handbag. But don't be too quick to blame the hardworking pro at the phones. Every salon needs guidelines that set the receptionist up for success, and help her do a great job.

Thou Shall Be a Host/Hostess:

Put on your virtual pearls and make every day a party. Greet guests by name and help them with anything cumbersome: coats, Birkin bags, kids. Offer coffee, hot green tea, iced tea or iced water. Let team members know as soon as their clients check in. When announcing arrivals, use names, not timeslots. No one wants to hear herself described as "Joe's 4:30."

Thou Shall Know Thy Script:

Pretend you're Julia or Brad. Learn your lines. Your salon should have scripts that spell out the exact language for greeting guests, answering the phone, and more. And, it should be updated for holidays and special promotions. Simple queries like, "What products would you like to take home with you today?" can transform a shampoo into the salon equivalent of a box office blockbuster. And if you mention a promo to every customer, you could end up with an Academy Award for best supporting seller. To sound really Hollywood, say you're "off book" when the lines are memorized.

Thou Shall Know Thy Stylists:

Hector never puts down his shears, and you can't keep Elaine away from the foil dispenser. Kazumi loves to cover gray, and Heather will come after you with a tube of INOA color if you double book her. Know the team's passions, specialties, and personality quirks. And memorize or make note of their rates so you don't pair the bargain-shopping, just-a-trim walk-in with your most expensive cutter.

Thou Shall Know Thy Retail Products:

Clients see you as a storekeeper, so get merchant minded. You can profit from knowledge about those bottles of Kerastase, especially if your salon offers a sales-commission. Plus, you won't end up sending a double process blonde home with a shampoo for normal hair. And a shopper might be so grateful you recommended the serum to help manage her frizzies that she gives you a tip. Attend product knowledge classes with the rest of the staff. If stuff sells fast enough, it doesn't have time to collect dust, making housekeeping less of a chore. Even so, check display shelves regularly to keep them clean and organized.

Thou Shall Look Good:

You are always onstage, and your appearance should show off what the salon can offer. So take your cue from casting calls. Dress your best, sit up straight (hey, it's good for you anyway), and make eye contact. Coordinate clothes with the salon's mood, whether it's Talbot's timeless

or trendy designer knock-offs (or the real thing if you're rich). Take advantage of deeply discounted hair treatments. But save it all for break time. Treatments are essential, but no one wants to wait until your hair dries before you can ring a sale.

Thou Shall Know Thy Services:

Hopping from chair to chair keeps you looking good, but remember to brush up on services even if you never plan to try them. Be able to wax on about hair removal options, even if you're a shaver slave. If your salon is big on balayage, know how to speak Francais to a foil follower. And even if a roller set is hours away from your two-second style, take the time to learn some fast facts about it. Understand the reasoning behind the service, plus how long it takes, maintenance requirements, and retail products that support it. Study the salon menu. After a month or so, you might expand your tastes.

Thou Shall Cross Market:

You compliment a client on her hair color, and she confides that her hair is so dry she's almost embarrassed to show off the new shade. You suggest a Masquintense treatment that just happens to be at a reduced rate that week. These are examples of cross marketing - offering services, gifts with purchase, and promotions beyond what the client has booked. And the opportunity to educate isn't limited to in-person encounters. If someone calls to ask the price of a retouch or partial highlight, make sure you let her know about any salon specials. After all, she's calling you...so it's not like you're a pushy telemarketer. Salon owners should include ideas for cross marketing a part of the reception script.

Thou Shall Be Cordial:

Smile through situations that seethe and you could develop qualities that land you at the **UN**. The best way to dispel anger is by listening. That's what most disgruntled clients - or co-workers - want most. So use the **LAST** technique: Listen, Agree, Support, Take Action. Skip this sequence, and it could be the last time you see a client. To head off the **LAST** resort, establish a friendly feel at all times. Tune your tone of voice, body language, and facial expression to open channels. And remember, when you're on the phone, only the person on the other end can't see you. So when your mom calls to ask why you don't make as much money as your younger sister, stow the scowl. That's what the headset-wearing translators at the **UN** do - and they're getting an earful of way tougher talk.

Thou Shall Stay Organized:

The Bain Age Recharge shipment just came in, but you're not sure if you can sign for packages. Mrs. Robinson wants to check out, but you can't find the register tape. Someone named Adele is holding on lines two and five for Jorge, but he isn't answering his page. The basics of staying organized at reception go beyond supply caddies. Major necessity: a manual that explains all policies and procedures. Another: retail support supplies. A third: a schedule, so you know that the object of Adele's affection left an hour ago. Stock the front desk with neatly organized must-haves (including office basics) and your composure will always be easy to locate.

Thou Shall Use Thy Downtime:

You're a moving Feng Shui powerhouse, helping Chi flow freely through the salon by removing blocks like messiness at the magazine rack, dropped smocks, and stray frappuccino cups. If there's time to snack, there's time to patrol. You're not only doing the decor a spiritual service, you're making the salon safer by blotting up wet spots on the floor or towing away towels blocking traffic patterns. You superhero.