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TEN TIPS FOR SMOOTH SAILING IN THE SALON

By Kate Hahn

As salon owners and managers, we have a lot in common with ship captains. We work hard to stay on course and keep the crew happy. But operational and personnel issues can make the voyage choppy. For tips on smooth sailing, we talked to two pros with lots of experience steering salons towards calm waters: **BRYAN DUROCHER**, success coach, Durocher Enterprises, Miami, FL and **SUSAN HITE**, (Buy her book: *Drinking The Punch* \$12.95 [Click here now!](#)) creator of Susan's Train Your Brain Series™ and owner of Hite Resources, Inc., Raleigh, NC.

Clarity: Mutinies start with questions like: "Why is it always me who has to swab the deck, but Kristy gets more doubloons?" Head off an HMS Bounty moment by clarifying job descriptions and defining payment structure on hiring day. "Have an employee manual," says Durocher. Be up front about your compensation package. Include things like: pay raise schedule, service or back bar charges, commission percentages, and other specifics. Have staffers sign a job description copy, too. Be as clear as possible, so expectations don't clash with reality.

Shared Purpose: Turn your salon into the Loveboat. Without a unifying goal, staffs divide into cliques and camps, or drift to other employers. "People support what they help create," says Hite. So get everyone on board, and brainstorm a vision for the salon. Durocher recommends a threefold approach: define the value of what you do every day, find shared personal goals, and then determine the salon's values, like honesty and empathy. "The process makes people realize they share a lot already," says Durocher. Hite says that salons get a huge morale boost from group efforts that have an impact, like walkathons or other fundraisers.

Education: "Knowledge is the most powerful gift," says Hite. "Build your people and you will build your business." Retail classes help products fly off shelves. Communications seminars create harmony with customers and co-workers. Technical workshops teach the latest trends, and put the salon on the cutting edge in the eyes of clients. "People have to be set up for success. You can't expect results without proper training," says Durocher. Turn to manufacturers, distributors, and coaches for classes.

Customized Motivation: A salon staff is as diverse a group as the Minnow castaways on Gilligan's Island. "Not everyone is

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motivated by the same thing," says Durocher. He IDs the top three: praise, dollars, and the satisfaction of a job well done. Gilligan was happy with a pat on the back, the Skipper craved the island currency of banana cream pie, and the Professor just wanted his coconut radio to work. Do you have to administer personality tests to figure out what drives your employees? No. "Just ask people," says Durocher. Take the time to listen and ask questions. Then, act accordingly.

Regular Meetings: Hite recommends small salons meet weekly, chain operations monthly. "Have something fun and dynamic going on," she says. Plus, review the agenda quickly, before the meeting starts, so attendees know what to expect. Besides group get-togethers, Durocher recommends taking 15 minutes to review goals with each employee, each week. He uses goal sheets that focus on six key performance areas including average tickets and retail sales. "Acknowledge what people accomplish, and then help them set a strategy for achievement in less successful areas," he says. Set a time limit for any meeting, so discussions don't drag.

Real Leadership: Captain Ahab held the right title, but his behavior put the crew at risk. "You don't have to be a whip cracker or tyrant," says Hite. "Love never fails as a leadership tool." Set a great example, and others will imitate you. The kindness factor doesn't mean you have to spend hours solving everyone's dilemmas. "We often end up spending most of our time trying to correct the problems of the 10% of employees who have the most difficulties," says Hite. "Focus on building up your stronger people. Don't give up on tougher ones, but don't let them run your life either." Another sign of a great leader: surround yourself with people who are smarter than you. Hey, every president has a cabinet.

Ownership: "People respect those who take ownership of a situation by admitting they did something wrong, and taking steps to correct it," says Durocher. "A simple apology can turn a negative situation into a positive one." Establishing a policy of ownership means that a climate of trust must be created. People will try to blame others if they know they will just be criticized for their mistakes. "It is especially impressive if someone in a management position admits an error," says Durocher. If you have recently decided to improve the way your salon operates, a speech like this might be a good way to mark the start of your journey in a new direction.

Communication: In some co-worker clashes it seems like what's at stake is the last seat in the last lifeboat on the Titanic, instead of who forgot to take the towels out of the dryer. Steer clear of icebergs: practice communication skills. "Rather than just make a demand, I explain why I am asking someone to do something," says Hite. Instead of putting people on the defensive with an accusatory: "You were late," opt for phrases using "I" "we" and "our." Try: "Let's make sure our schedule runs smoothly tomorrow. What can we do to make that happen?" And skip the impulse to gossip or vent. If discussing someone who is not present, pretend everything is being taped. Do you really want that person to press "play" later?

Team First: We're all in the same boat, but sometimes it seems like salon guests travel in high style, while employees are treated like stowaways. "The staff should never feel like second class citizens compared to the client," says Durocher. "Without employees, a salon has no business. Take good care of your staff, and good customer service will follow." If a conflict arises between a client and stylist, make sure both sides are heard equally before taking action.

Consistency: Once you've created an employee manual, establish salon values, and put procedures in place - make sure everyone sticks to them. "People soon realize if you don't follow through," says Hite. To show those few limit-pushers on staff that you're serious about preserving a pleasant salon environment for everyone, institute **RDCA**: Respect, Demand,

Consequence, Action. In a conflict, first request that the other person change a behavior. If that doesn't work, demand it, then spell out the consequence, and finally, follow up with an action. "You can't skip this last step," says Hite. Whether the action is a dock in pay or a three-day suspension, make sure it happens.

Your cruise to Happy Salon Island will take a little time. Shoals and storms are part of the journey, but stick to it and you'll sail into a cove where you can toss your supply of Dramamine overboard.



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