

DRAWING THE LINE

There is definitely such a thing as being "too nice." Don't let yourself get trampled over by your clients, coworkers, or boss. Four industry consultants show you how to set healthy workplace boundaries in the salon.



BY SREE ROY

It's only natural to want to make all of your clients, coworkers, and superiors happy, but sometimes you need to put your foot down on their (at times unreasonable) demands to preserve your own happiness. "The feeling of being walked over springs directly from not being true to the self, which usually reveals itself in the form of a 'yes' when one should have said 'no,'" says Erin Rhines, marketing manager with Salon Training International. "By taking responsibility, it becomes easier to see who's really in control here. Of course, it's easier to blame clients, coworkers, or bosses for the trampling, but the truth about being taken

advantage of rests on no other shoulders than our own."

Bryan Durocher, president of beauty consulting firm Durocher Enterprises Inc., adds, "If you think your clients are your friends, you've forsaken the most important boundary you can have. You need a professional personable relationship, not a professional *personal* relationship."

In addition to Rhines and Durocher, we've compiled the best advice from "Coach Kristi" Valenzuela, president of Crystal Focus Inc., and Nancy Friedman, president of customer training company The Telephone Doctor, on how to handle different scenarios with your pushy clients, coworkers, or boss.

YOUR CLIENTS



- **Scenario #1:** Your client wants you to stay late or come in on your day off.
How to handle it: Simply say, "I wish I could, but unfortunately that's not going to work for me." Offer to reschedule the client on a day you're available or ask her if she'd like to see someone who's open during the hours that are convenient for her.

If you have a family say, "I made a promise to my family that that would stay family time." This makes it hard for the client to argue back without sounding selfish.

If you don't mind coming in during your off-hours, tell your client you don't normally make exceptions to your regular hours, but in this case it will work out. If you're going to add a surcharge to the bill for the inconvenience, let your client know this before the appointment. (Note: Be careful about this. Once you start making concessions, it will be easier for clients to continue to take advantage of you.)

- **Scenario #2:** Your client tells you more about her personal life than you'd care to know or is asking you for intimate details of your life.

How to handle it: Acknowledge and redirect. For example, if your client says, "I think my husband is cheating on me. What do you think?" You respond by saying, "I'm so sorry to hear that, but I don't really know anything about that. But I did want to ask you: what did you think about that nail hardener I let you try out last week?"

If your client wants to know about your personal life, redirect the conversation toward the client. For example, if she says, "How's your love life?" You respond by saying, "It's fine. How was your weekend?" Or say, "I usually don't share that information."

A good rule of professionalism is the 90/10 rule — 90% of the conversation is about the client, and 10% about you. You can fit into the 90%: salon education about the service you're doing for her, home-care instructions, and upcoming promotions. In general, the more a client gets to talk about her world, the more satisfied she'll be after the appointment.

- **Scenario #3:** Your client expects favors, like a free polish change.

How to handle it: When your client asks about a polish change, nip the problem in the bud by saying, "I'd be happy to change your polish today. Your investment would be \$9." If she protests you've done it for free in the past, say, "I've really made a commitment to charge for these services. I can't afford to give services away anymore. I'm sure you can understand."

Refer the client to the salon menu, and tell her about any promotions your salon occasionally runs that include complimentary polish changes. Tell her from now on, to be fair, you have to charge for your polish changes.

If you're willing to do your client the favor, let her know you're doing it because she's a good client and you appreciate her business.

- **Scenario #4:** Your client is up in arms that you're raising your prices.

How to handle it: Unapologetically tell the client why you're raising prices. For example, say, "I've been reinvesting in my education to bring you better quality services and products."

You've most likely been preparing your clients for the price increase for several months. Point out the notice you've given her and let her know you understand if she needs to find a new tech. You have to charge what you're worth. There will always be a new client willing to pay the price and take the spot.

- **WORST-CASE:** You lose a client for not giving in to her demands.

How to handle it: Feel good you made a space for an ideal client who will respect your time and services.

It happened to me...

[readers share their
pushiest-client stories]



About five years ago around 12:30 a.m. on a Sunday, my home phone rang. My husband answered and a male voice asked if I was home. After my husband asked who was calling, the man said he's one of my "best clients," and he wanted me to come and give him a pedicure. My husband replied, "Buddy, I'm not sure you understand what time it is. My wife is not going to give you a pedicure at this hour. You need to sleep this one off and contact her on Monday for an appointment during business hours."

The client then put his wife on the phone, who begged me to come in to the shop and said I'd receive "a tip I couldn't refuse." The tip was very hard to turn down, but I did.

The man still remained my client for quite awhile — until he started expecting me to keep him company while he soaked for 10 minutes in the footbath. If I left the pedicure room, he would yell my name until I returned. I became very uncomfortable, and we parted ways. After the fact I found out through a few other salons in my county that he had been barred from their salons for the exact same reasons.

Regina Kelley

*Luv Nails & Hair Day Spa
Sciotoville, Ohio*

I was out due to pneumonia when a client called me at home on the third day to "see how I was doing." No more than 30 seconds later, she was hinting at coming over to my house so I could do her nails. I had to explain that I had pneumonia with a fever of 104° and that even holding the phone was painful for me. She said she'd call me back in a couple of days to see if I would be ready to return. I wound up staying out of work for four weeks.

Michelle Lyden

*Robin's on Broadway
Hillsdale, N.J.*