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The Importance of Client Communication

by Michele Phelan

Communication is essential in all aspects of life, whether interaction is achieved through words, writing, or actions. Without effective communication there can be no mutual understanding between individuals, exchange of information, nor expression of true feelings thoughts or ideas. It is so often taken for granted that when we speak to others what we say is actually perceived in the manner in which we meant for it to be interpreted. Too often we speak without forethought or consideration and our message is misconstrued by the recipient resulting in confusion or insult. Communication goes beyond the spoken word. I am sure that everyone has heard the adage, "Actions speak louder than words." Not a new saying, but it is true nevertheless and speaks volumes about the way an individual feels about her situation. If you wish to inspire others positively and make them receptive to your ideas, you must hone your communicative skills.

Aestheticians, like all therapists, are in the business of healing. This is accomplished through our advanced techniques, high tech modalities, and active skin care products. Astute aestheticians understand that their greatest skill is their ability to effectively communicate. The following two forms being the most important: The power of touch and the ability to listen. When you touch your client therapeutically you establish a connection that helps to develop sense of security and well-being. You are letting your client know that you are there to nurture and provide comfort. When you listen attentively you are able to understand what your client's needs and wants are – enabling you to deliver quality care more efficaciously and this lets them know that their concerns are important to you. It is not necessary to over analyze your client's responses to your questions or a situation during a treatment. However, re-affirming that actions speak louder than words, understanding body language and voice inflection can often be a tell-tale sign of unspoken feelings. For example, if you are performing a procedure where your client appears to be obviously uncomfortable but states that she is okay, you may assume she is trying to be polite or accommodating. In this case you may need to modify your technique to reduce discomfort and re-instill security. Or, if your client appears to be restless and continues to look at the clock while you are trying to provide her with last minute tips and advice about her skin, you know that it is time to bring the conversation to a close.

Every moment spent in the treatment room with your client gives you the opportunity to form a strong bond that goes beyond simple technology and allows you to build a client, aesthetician relationship that will last. In the spa industry, more so than many other industries, your ability to interact effectively is crucial. After all, you spend a great deal of time relating on so many levels with each client, developing an intimate, profound report is ineludible. Furthermore without this key component, the business cannot yield optimum results, even if your technical ability is outstanding. Therefore, every staff member in the practice should make it their priority to acquire, develop, and foster strong communication skills.

When clients first enter the facility they will immediately form an opinion about what they think and how they feel about their reception and their surroundings, especially if it is their first visit. Every once in awhile it is a good idea to re-evaluate what your guests experience when they arrive. Step back and take a look and listen. Does the reception area look comfortable and inviting? Does the receptionist greet each individual with a warm smile, direct eye contact, and a warm voice tone? Is every member of the team dressed appropriately and do they conduct themselves professionally? When the receptionist answers the phone does she exude positive energy and provide thorough, detailed information and have the ability to answer all of the caller's questions? This may seem like common sense, however these basic protocols are not as common as we would like to think and is not always observed consistently.

In general if the client is on time for their appointment they should never be required to wait more than several minutes before they are escorted to the treatment room. You want to acknowledge that their time is precious and that you respect it as much as they respect yours. Prior to beginning any treatment, provide an understanding of what the treatment will encompass and what the client can and cannot expect to receive. This will significantly elevate their confidence in you and decrease any anxiety that they may be experiencing. Ascertain what it is that the client hopes to receive from the treatment. This will also give them the opportunity to ask questions and give you the opportunity to provide education about their skin. Do not over exaggerate potential results it will only result in loss of trust. Additionally use this time to access their skin condition so that you are able to talk about and prescribe the appropriate home care products later.

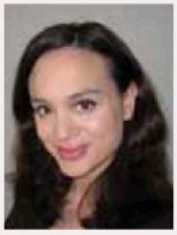
"Reading your client" should not be too difficult when you utilize the art of observation. For example, when performing a relaxing facial treatment, it is not the best time to try and educate the client about which skin care products they should be using at home, if they appear to be very quite or dozing. Likewise, if your client wishes to talk, your focus should be on the conversation as well as the procedure that you are performing. Let them guide the conversation. This is their special time and the time for you to exercise your listening skills. Developing your ability to "read" your client will come with time. However, when you simply watch and listen, you will detect small signs that will enable you to understand what your client's desires are.

Dealing with client's complaints or dissatisfaction with a service or product is inevitable at some point. It is impossible to please everyone all the time no matter how hard you try. However, it is much easier to attempt to resolve a negative issue quickly and

with finesse than it is to let it spiral out of control. It is always best to have the client leave happy and satisfied. This will help insure that they will return to the spa and potentially refer friends and family. If you feel that your differences are irreconcilable, perhaps the client's demands and expectations are unrealistic and their attitude is extremely negative, make sure that you part amicably. It does not make sense to let the client leave with a distaste for the spa when you have worked far too long and hard to build and sustain a good reputation.

At the close of each treatment, when it comes time for retail product recommendations, make sure that your client is knowledgeable with all phases of their home care regime. If you do not already use a prescription pad to write down the names of the products that your client will be using, it will behoove them if you implement this process. Briefly but comprehensively write down the frequency, the quantity, and where each product should be used on the skin. This can eliminate confusion and frustration when the clients arrive home with their new skin care program. Only providing a verbal explanation is not an effective way of communicating when it comes to establishing a process as it is easily forgotten when there are not any notes to refer to. More importantly make sure your clients realize that if they should have any questions or concerns about their skin, home care, or any other pertinent questions that they should not hesitate to call you.

In today's fast paced society we are in so many ways becoming disconnected from one another. The convenience and efficiency of our high tech, yet impersonal, ways of communication has left many of us yearning for human contact and interaction. The spa and health care industries are the few industries left that lend themselves to meeting this need. This gives you, the aesthetician a very special advantage that no machine, modality, or product can replace. It provides you the opportunity to offer a personal touch that goes far beyond the ability to treat your client's skin, and gives you the power to positively impact their lives more profoundly.



Michele Phelan has been a licensed, practicing aesthetician for over 20 years. She has taught State Board, CIDESCO, and post-graduate aesthetics. She has extensive knowledge of dermatological topics, cosmetic chemistry, electrical modalities, and physiology/anatomy. Phelan is an International CIDESCO diplomat and a registered aromatherapist. Her articles have been featured in many industry publications. She has been interviewed by CBS for her extensive knowledge of eye lash extensions. She is the co-owner of Concepts Skin Care Clinic in San Francisco, Calif. and the founder and president of Concepts Institute of Advanced Esthetics located in South San Francisco, Calif. Concepts Institute is an approved NCEA training facility. www.conceptsinstitute.com

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