



mane games

They cut and colour our hair, and more often than not look after our heads on the inside too. Meet the salon psychologists. By **Stephanie Darling**

Every six weeks I head off for a cut and colour and, invariably, a therapy session. I've been going to both of my fabulous maintenance men for over 10 years now, and always sink into the chair with a sense of abandonment. This really is the perfect relationship: there is the pampering, the download, plus you leave with great-looking hair. What more could you ask for?

According to the "Sassoon ABC Cutting Manual", the job of a hairdresser is "10 per cent ability and 90 per cent psychology". Part of the diagnosis is the ability of a stylist to "read" the situation and interpret the client's wishes and then translate that into instilling confidence.

The Sassoon way splits the initial consult into three phases. Firstly, "listening and observation", which takes into account "facial proportions and profiles" to help choose the style of haircut; second, level of self-confidence and body language; and third, personal style. The skill of judging these factors without appearing intimidating is definitely a fine art.

Next it's comfort zone 101: use eye-contact and "gestures" to ask questions; be a good listener; and "listen not only to what is being said but also how it is being said". Finally, the judgment call: coming up with a cut, colour or style that suits – perfectly. No pressure. Here, four experts speak about their unique approaches to the fine art of hairdressing.

TRAVIS BALCKE

Stylist, Renya Xydis City, Sydney

What is the best piece of life advice you have given a client about: love... Practice makes perfect.

Seems that the more you do it the better you get at it. **Family...** It's important to tell them that what they want to hear. Never tell them everything. Family hold onto things for life. **Friends...** Your friends will be with you for life... or until you sleep with their partners.

What is your opening greeting line to a new client?

"Why me now... what happened to all the others?"

What has been your worst experience? Brides – nothing worse. She will be blame everything on her dry, unmanaged, untreated hair... in other words, you the stylist.

Have you ever had to break up with a client and how did you do it? Yes. "I travel a lot, sorry."

How do you feel if a client leaves you? A client can leave for many reasons, but the funny thing is they always come back. And then, we will see!

And what are the best excuses you have been given? I love the clients that come every eight weeks but when they are late say they couldn't find the salon!

(Because we move it every six weeks... not!)

At the end of the day, how do you unwind? Run, run, run. The Bondi to Bronte [coastal path] is a great way to run away from the day and your clients.

PHILIP BARWICK

Stylist, Muse Hair, Sydney

What is the best piece of life advice you have given a client about: love... Be true to your partner by being true to yourself, don't pretend to be something you're not. **Family...** Family are the way they are, so expecting them to change is futile. **Friends...** Good friendships are effortless; a true friend has your interests at heart and will never betray you.

What is your opening greeting line to a new client?

Our clients are our guests so it's simple, really. I greet them by name and give them an open and warm welcome.

What has been your worst experience? Years ago, one of our clients asked what CD we were playing. I don't know what possessed me but I thought I'd have a joke so told her the name of the CD was, "Smooth as Poo". I had no idea she would go straight to the music store and ask for a copy!

Have you ever had to break up with a client? While I always do my very best, there can be times when the vision can't be shared so we may choose to part ways.

How do you feel if a client leaves you? The feeling you have let someone down is very confronting but you have to put your ego aside; it's about the client not the stylist.

And what are the best excuses you have been given?

As in all relationships, I've found when it's over, it's over.

At the end of the day, how do you unwind? Exercise, playing with my dogs, wine. And reading... if I have the time.

CATERINA DI BIASE

Stylist, Heading Out, Melbourne

What is the best piece of life advice you have given a client about: love... Always love deeply and most importantly, love needs to be a two-way street. You also

both need to adapt as your life does. **Family...** You can't choose your family but you have to learn to live with them.

Friends... Your true friends are the ones that are with you through thick and thin and all of the highs and lows.

What is your opening greeting line to a new client?

"Tell me what you like and dislike about your hair."

What has been your worst experience? The worst is when someone wants a complete change. They will describe the exact change they want and sometimes have a picture reference. You put your heart and soul into it and at the end they turn around and say, "It's not your fault because I asked for it, but I don't like it and can you change me back?"

Have you ever had to break up with a client?

Yes and it was a very difficult and stressful situation.

How do you feel if a client leaves you? You do feel awful and start to question if you could have done more.

And what are the best excuses you have been given? "I cancelled my appointment. Didn't you get my message?" is by far the most common excuse.

At the end of the day, how do you unwind?

Good food and a glass of wine or French bubbles.

DAMIEN RAYNER

Freelance colourist

What is the best piece of life advice you have given a client about: love... Distance makes the heart ponder, not fonder. **Family...** You can choose your friends, but can't choose your family. **Friends...** It's your fault, you chose them!

What is your usual opening greeting line to a new client? "What's going on?"

What has been your worst experience? Stalker clients!

I had a young girl who suffered from "hair dysmorphia". She tried to befriend me on Facebook for months before making a booking. Then she wouldn't listen to my advice and ended up calling me three times a day after coming in to tell me about how her hair looked in different lighting.

Have you ever had to break up with a client? Yes, indeed, the girl above!

How do you feel if a client leaves you? I used to take it personally, but nowadays, I'm pretty cool with it. I don't want to be stuck in a bad relationship.

How do you unwind at the end of the day? A good debrief with my partner and a laugh with friends, plus a glass of good wine certainly helps. I also have been known to yell things off of my balcony! The funniest thing I used to do with a work colleague was go into the back room, twist a towel into a knot and yell clients' "issues" into it, then throw it into the wash. It worked rather well. **m**