

Mapping Out 2014

Plan Now To Succeed in 2014

By Deb Hunt

Would you ever load your staff in your car for a road trip, promising them an exciting destination, but with no plan on how to get there? If you told them it could take two days, two months, or two years to arrive, how enthused would the staff be? Would they be confident in your leadership? How long would it be before they asked to be dropped off at the nearest rest stop?

Your business is much like a road trip; and your “road trip” to business success *must* be planned. While a solid business plan allows for some flexibility for bumps in the road, goals must be predetermined far in advance – you cannot make it up as you go along. Planning now for 2014 now will help ensure your salon is profitable and your staff is happy to take the ride.

When helping my clients plan for the upcoming year, I have them brainstorm several specific goals – and then I have them pare their lists down to no more than five. The following are some important things to consider when mapping out your 2014.

Company Finances. Many times I encounter business owners who used “hairstylist math” to establish their business – which is to say, they thought by doing their best behind the chair, the rest of the business would fall into place. Real numbers don’t lie. Understand your finances! Take an honest look at your books, with an accountant if necessary. Determine *exactly* what you are spending in all areas, including back bar, staff pay, supplies, etc. Next, make a budget and vow to stick to it.

Embrace Technology. If you are not using social media to promote your business, you are woefully behind the times and, more importantly, you are missing an enormous opportunity to create a fan base for your services. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram are easy to use and *free*. Why would you pass up free advertising?

Create a user-friendly Web site that’s easy for you to update. Already have a site? Make sure it’s updated at least monthly. Enlist a staff member to do this. (Keep the fee for updating Web sites and social media sites separate from his/her regular pay).

Clients may remember they need your services any time of day, so give them the ability to book at any time. Online booking is fast and easy for you and your clients and should definitely be added to your 2014 agenda.

Improve Client Base. Too often, business owners think the way to increase profits is to increase the number of new clients. Actually, the answer may be to increase the experience for the clients they already have. By increasing the average ticket by as little as \$15, business owners could see a significant boost in their bottom line. Indulge your

clients the minute they walk in the door. Make your salon their escape. Remember, customers who feel pampered and special will tell their friends – your client base will naturally grow.

Staff Training and Education. Having a staff trained in the latest techniques and trends is invaluable. Set aside time and money for this in your budget. Make sure your staff is well-versed on product knowledge. A stylist who uses cutting-edge techniques to achieve the latest beauty trends who can *also* recommend and answer questions on retail? That's a sure way to make the clients feel they are coming to a salon they can trust – and recommend to their friends.

Equally important, a well-trained staff needs to be up to date on the salon's staff manual. This way, there will never be a question as to what is expected. Having everyone following the same rules, builds a sense of teamwork.

Owner Training and Education. This can be one of the most challenging areas of planning because it requires the owner to do a bit of self-reflection and look at less flattering aspects of their business practices. Most salon owners believed when they started their business that because they are good stylists, they would automatically be good business owners and bosses. This is not always the case. You can be brilliant at hair, makeup, skin care or nails, but how does that make you a business person? Business and beauty are entirely different fields.

When I give business seminars, I ask how many of in the room went to school to learn their areas of expertise. Every hand goes up. When I ask how many went to school to learn to run a business, very few hands are raised. Commit yourself to taking the mystery out of running your own business. Take business classes. Hire a salon coach to review the inner workings of your salon. These investments will pay for themselves.

This may seem obvious, but do you know your own handbook? As the new year approaches, it may be time for you to review your manual and update your policies if necessary.

Business owners must not only learn the financial part of the salon, but also how to maintain staff. Part of being the boss means communicating effectively with your employees. Take an honest look at your relationship with your staff. Ask yourself, "What do I need to do to become their leader?"

Remember, the problem with not planning is that *you have no plan*. Planning the new year before it arrives will give you time to see what worked in the past and what didn't. Ending 2013 with your strategy in place will give you the power you need for success in 2014.