

WELL CONNECTED

Salon owner and Aveda Business College Purefessor Susan Haise knows that true leadership begins with communication.

Sitting with Susan Haise as she checks in with her team feels a little like dropping in on Mission Control during a satellite launch. A 50-inch video monitor scrolls the numbers from her five Neroli Salon & Spa locations in Milwaukee: average service dollar amount, percentage of guests buying, retail per client ticket and others. "I can see the numbers as they change all day," Haise explains. "I definitely believe that a good understanding of the numbers, and what it takes to move the numbers, is essential." Yet Haise will be the first to say that strong leadership is about more than numbers: It's about creating followers by developing and nurturing a strong salon culture.

Haise credits Aveda Business College (ABC) with giving her the skills she needed to create that culture and grow her business from one to five salons, plus the Aveda Institute of Beauty and Wellness, in 20 years. She was among the first attendees of the Benchmarking for Success workshop at the inception of the program in 2005, and is now one of five Aveda Purefessors, facilitators who teach the ABC curriculum to salon owners throughout North America. She still returns as a student a few times per year, bringing along the team leaders from her salons.

"We've spent a lot of time, as a team, attending those programs," Haise says. Each salon has at least three leaders, so there are 15 to 20 people in the company at any one time who make up the core leadership team at Neroli Salon & Spa.

Communication, Haise says, is the key to effective leadership, and she describes the daily routines that help her stay connected to what's happening at all the locations. At 8:45 a.m., team leaders in each salon "huddle" with staff in the break room, reviewing a game plan for the day. (Haise, an unabashed football fan, says she prefers sports metaphors to salon jargon.) Salons open at 9 a.m. and after the first guests are greeted, team leaders huddle again



Neroli Salon & Spa stylists give free Father's Day cuts in conjunction with a salon class on men's cutting.

with front desk staffers. At about 9:20 a.m., Haise begins receiving calls from team leaders at each location with a rundown of the huddles. Three days a week, there's also a conference call between Haise and up to 100 team members, including Neroli Salon & Spa's manager of guest services and her Aveda Experience Center managers, to make sure everyone is on the same page regarding long- and short-term goals. Tuesdays are for discussions about inventory control, Wednesdays for marketing, and Thursdays for human resources and team development.

Benchmarking has been a keystone of Neroli Salon and Spa's growth strategy, and Haise says

the ABC Benchmarking for Success seminar has provided the roadmap for using it in a way that supports the company's specific needs. Each salon team chooses its own benchmarks twice a year, a practice that supports team members' personal connection to the goals. It also acknowledges that each of the five salons—the oldest opened 20 years ago and the most recent this past fall—is at a different place on its journey, with different personalities, challenges and opportunities. "We try to pick one or two benchmarks each time," says Haise. "It helps us focus. Otherwise it's too overwhelming."

Haise also holds ABC Benchmarking for Team Members seminars in Neroli salons every year, and looks at them as annual conditioning for her staff. "No team starts their season without boot camp," she says. "If you're the type that doesn't examine those numbers frequently, you can look at it as an opportunity to dust off those skills."

As for her own skills, Haise has found Aveda's Quarterly Owners' Forums to be an invaluable tool for sparking new ideas and cultivating good business practices. "The networking opportunities through Aveda are really phenomenal," she says. Haise adds that she likes the intimate atmosphere of the gatherings, and loves the opportunity to connect with others facing similar challenges. "The benefits I've taken away from the Owners' Forums show the depth of connecting with others and



This Neroli Salon & Spa in Bayshore, WI was the third of five Milwaukee-area locations to open since 1993. The latest addition, in Mequon, WI, opened late last year.

sharing ideas," she says.

Haise says the support of Aveda and Neroli Salon & Spa's in-field Salon Development Partners Christine Enright and Sheryl Gahagan has been an essential component of the company's success as well. "They're in the salons basically every week," Haise says. "They connect with our team members and retail members to bring us product news and keep us informed of the various programs coming up."

Each salon sets both service and retail goals, and Enright and Gahagan act as part of the team in helping to reach them. "We're regularly coaching that throughout the day," Haise says, and adds that non-tech team members, such as hostesses, front desk staff and Experience Center associates, all share in bonuses when those goals are met. It fosters an atmosphere of cooperation that not only boosts retail numbers, but helps with staff retention. "Tech team members never feel threatened in any way by having another member close their sale," Haise says.



Susan Haise

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Aveda Purefessor Susan Haise is an award-winning, innovative business leader who changed the beauty industry in Milwaukee by starting its first day spa in 1993. Today, Neroli Salon & Spa operates five locations and has been named one of the "Best Places to Work" by the Milwaukee Business Journal four times. As a licensed hairdresser, Intercoiffure member and Cidesco Diplomat, she has a perspective that's rare in the industry.

The supportive atmosphere is one component of Neroli Salon & Spa's stellar record of employee retention, which has a direct relationship to the business' ability to grow. "I always open a new salon with foundational team members who have been with the company for years. It has everything to do with team member retention," Haise says. "My team members collect clients, which feeds into client retention. When we reach 85 percent booking, that's the benchmark for opening a new salon."

Which circles back around to the numbers on that 50-inch monitor. As much as she relies on them, Haise knows they are only an abstraction. What makes her success real to her are the times spent with the people in her organization, such as the yearly lunches she enjoys with each employee on the anniversary of their hiring. "At the last one we had six original team members from the second salon, the one we opened 11 years ago," Haise says. "At one point we were all in tears. It was an amazing feeling!"