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9 Things They Don't Tell You About Opening a Salon

A new salon owner shares her hard-earned wisdom to help make the process of striking out on your own a little easier.
BY MILLIE HAYNAM .

I knew when I was 16 years old that someday I would own my own salon — it or 25 years. When I finally made the decision to open my own place, I was thrilled, stressed. I pressed forward to get it open. So why was I so stressed? This was supposed to be the most exciting time of my life.

Now that my salon is finally open, it's a dream come true, but opening your own can be a harrowing experience. With good planning (including stopping, looking, listening) and a little bit of luck, you can avoid many of the pitfalls that can stop t dream in its tracks. Here are nine things they DON'T tell you when opening a sa

one Not everyone will be as excited as you are about your new vent

Deciding to brave this new uncharted territory may leave friends, family, and ass wondering what to make of your decision. Some may even try unconsciously to sabotage your efforts. They may wonder what will happen to your relationship if become a business owner.


So, first, you need to surround yourself with what I have termed the “balcony per those supporters who cheer you on, yelling “bravo” all the way. Negative though creep into your mind at night and wake you in a panic without any help from you negative friends. Remaining positive and certain of your decision is very difficult, is crucial when following through with a project of this magnitude. Set up a hotlir believers who you can call for reassurance. I always felt much better after speak one of my “balcony people.” They believed in me, told me so, and worked hard t

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me back to a positive frame of mind.

Another way to battle the doubts is to develop a success wall. Pin notes and acc from clients, friends, and family members on a wall where you can see them wh working and immediately feel their support. Save every inspirational note and e-you receive — you will need them all. Become a sponge for inspiration. I found inspiration in a Disney movie of all places. In “The Princess Diaries,” her father, King, gives the young princess a note about courage. He writes, “Courage is not absence of fear, but the understanding that some things are more important than fear.” The dream of opening your own salon must be that important as well.

two Be prepared to listen to the journey.

The journey will tell you the right path if you open yourself to the signals. When I pursued a salon several years ago, everything that could go wrong did. I wanted own salon so badly I disregarded many signs telling me the time was not right. I ignored advice that a business should feel right. While there will always be strug and challenges with a new venture, red flags need to be recognized and heedec

I had several things hit all at once to give me the insight I needed to understand right then the salon was not going to happen. First, while working on the salon renovations, the city wanted a \$5,000 tap-in fee per sink before I could open. I h eight sinks. Second, my boss discovered I was opening a salon and fired me wit warning, leaving me with nowhere to service my clientele for the next three mon during the remodel. And lastly, I was offered a very good job that I couldn't refus These events forced me to listen to the journey I was taking. It was a warning th was not the right time to open my own salon.

You must have the courage to listen to what is happening and back down if the t is not right. I listened, albeit reluctantly, and am glad I did. Opening my own salo been a totally different journey this time.

three There are easier and more cost-effective alternatives for everything — if you are willing to seek them out.

I learned in a sales position that everything is negotiable. From locations to equi know that some choices make better economic sense than others. In pursuing n location, I had two guidelines I was determined to adhere to. Obviously, I wantec great location in a growing area. But, I also wanted to find a place that I could su totally by myself if necessary — leaving out places like expensive mall locations. found a beautiful new office building that fit these requirements. I fell in love with space. It was an upscale building in a great location with a beautiful courtyard a windows. The price per square foot was higher than I wanted to pay, but the lan was willing to give me a “build-out” allowance of \$18,000 right off the top of a fiv lease, bringing the price back down to my range.

This all was so attractive to me that I quit looking at any other locations and star lease negotiations. My consultant stopped me short, saying, “You can't fall in lov the space, you will lose all leverage. It is a business decision and you must view any other piece of property,” she told me, encouraging me to continue looking a the landlord know that I was.

So I did pursue other locations. I looked at retail strip centers, and other lower-end office buildings; I even looked at renovating a house. All the while I kept in touch with the leasing agent at the original office building. And every day that passed his negotiation got better and better until I knew, finally, it was the right move.

Another area to examine for cost-cutting is equipment and furnishings. You can go from Ebay to message boards, Target to IKEA, and even your local newspaper. Scouring these sites may turn up just what you're looking for. Consider the benefit of purchasing well-made, used equipment and renovating it yourself or having a cabinetmaker relaminate the pieces. I am lucky to have a husband who is a carpenter, but the renovation can be cheaper than brand new furnishings, if you find the right piece. It can be a great opportunity for awesome savings.

I incorporated my business on the Internet for a nominal fee with the help of an accountant. Attorney fees are \$500 and up for the same service. Attorneys are not necessary to your business, just make sure you use them wisely.

four **Feeling overwhelmed and unsure is totally normal.**

I have said to friends that I could write a book on how to open your own business and how it goes crazy in three months or less. Be prepared to strap yourself into an emotional roller coaster and hang on. Your emotions will change on a daily — sometimes hourly basis. There are so many options, so many decisions, and so many details to think about. You find yourself gritting your teeth and pacing the floor as each decision has a domino effect on the next one down the road. It is an experience like no other, and you will sometimes want to pull the covers up over your head and go back to your old boring life. This is the time for your hotline! Call your best supporter so she can help you down. .

five **Determine a theme right from the start.**

A theme for the salon environment and services will help you stay focused. If you base your mission statement around that theme, you will find that decisions become much easier to make. Things either fit or they don't, plain and simple. My salon is called Natural Beauty Salon and its theme is focused on natural products and holistic services. I look for product lines with natural ingredients and design salon services that follow this theme.

six **You really do need to write a business plan.**

The exercise of formulating and actually writing out your business identity helps to ward off the panic that might otherwise take over. It is crucial to identifying your market and to determine a viable working model. It won't hurt when securing a bank loan either way; the more information you can provide them, including financial forecasts, the better. Fields Carder, an industry business consultant and founder of Your Beauty Network, recommends business software for this purpose. Business Plan Pro by Palo Alto Software has a "wizard" which guides you through the entire process. There is also a sample salon business plan that is helpful as well. This exercise forces you to take a magnifying glass to your proposed business. It's better to look before you leap than to look when it's too late. You'll find there may be some surprises you had not planned on.

seven **Work ON your business, as well as IN it.**

Michael Gerber, author of *The E-Myth Revisited* and a business consultant, emphasizes the need for business acumen prior to and while owning a business. You must continue to work on your business for it to grow and thrive, he says. Too many times the technician part of you makes the decision to open a business out of sheer enthusiasm, without first considering if you have the business skills required to run it. Business skills must be learned and developed over a period of many years.

More help is available today than at any other time in history. The Small Business Administration (SBA) has courses and seminars to decipher the small business world, but you still need to do your homework. Alethea Eatman, owner of Nail Technician University in Cleveland, Ohio, teaches continuing education classes, including seminars on opening your own business.

I took advantage of an SBA microloan program, which has a maximum loan amount of \$25,000. My application was my business plan and I had to work with a microloan liaison/representative. I did not go before the approval committee myself to sell my idea, but was represented by my liaison who also served as a committee member. What my representative failed to tell me was that 25% of my loan amount went toward "processing fees" and that my monthly loan repayment amount would be more than my rent. Find out all the details of these helpful programs before you sign on. The Salon Association (ISA) offers seminars and forums throughout the year, providing outstanding business education directed solely to salon owners. Also consider using an industry consultant. Most consultants are worth every penny they charge. Usually they are former owners who can guide you away from mistakes.

eight **You must continue, now more than ever, to network, network, network.**

Your sales consultant can be your new best friend. When I worked for a manufacturer, I was somewhat amused by the owners who used to run and hide when their sales consultants would walk in. After the amusement faded, I felt sorry for these owners. Developing a good working relationship with your sales consultant can be one of your best resources. Most are from the industry and many have made themselves so familiar with it that they become a second pair of eyes for your business.

"I can see what the owners may not see about their business," says Jennifer McCallister of Barnum Beauty Systems. Jennifer is a great example of a true sales consultant who zeroes in on the salon's niche market and doesn't waste time with things that won't work. Jennifer regularly schedules owner lunches, gathering several owners together once a month to discuss some of their similar struggles, challenges, and triumphs. Building these relationships helps everyone succeed. Remember, it is in the best interests of your sales consultant that your salon business do well.

Also, it can be very beneficial to partner with salon owners in other cities or communities to build a support network. Seminars and industry shows provide opportunities to meet and partner with other owners. Gaining as much information as you can in preparing to open your business is key.

nine Don't forget to take care of yourself.

The exhilaration of your business coming together can mask your mental and physical exhaustion. Allow yourself the breaks you need to recharge. I got great advice from a good friend and fellow business owner, Chelly Eric of Total Image, in Winthrop Hill.: "Take long, hot spa baths with candles, essential oils, and dim lighting, often said. "And don't forget a good glass of wine."

Cheers!

Millie Haynam is the owner of Natural Beauty Salon and Academy in Twinsburg. She has been a licensed cosmetologist for 23 years.



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