

Investors in People Case Study: Martin Regan Hair Salon

Background

Size: 8 people

Sector: Hairdressing

Location: Newton Abbot, Devon

Status: Achieved Investors in People accreditation in August 2006; implementing Skills for Life assessment and training

Overall impact

“A survey of our own customers showed that 99 per cent of them are happy with the service they receive.”

Martin Regan, Owner and Manager

The organisation

“I only started the ladies salon in May last year, as a new venture having been involved in a gents' walk-in barbers,” says Martin Regan, owner and manager of Martin Regan Hair Salon in Newton Abbot, Devon. “I am not a businessman and I have a long way to go before I am one.” Modesty aside, however, his business has expanded rapidly, increasing from just two stylists to seven, who now serve up to 200 customers a week.

The salon's ethos is for staff to add as much as they can to the service they offer customers, “I like to think of what we offer as a 'hair review'”, says Martin. “We want to find out what a customer wants to achieve with the style they have chosen. And I want every stylist to make customers feel good, so I want them to feel comfortable talking about different hair products, but not selling them. In the same way a dentist might recommend what toothpaste and toothbrush to buy. It is about trying to help customers by giving them enough information to make a choice.”

The challenge

“I wanted to get busy, but didn't know how to get busy. In a ladies salon it is different than in a walk-in barbers. It's all about appointments. It takes one hour to forty five minutes for each customer,” says Martin. Sticking to this strict time schedule was initially made more tricky because telephone messages were not always taken accurately and till readings sometimes came out wrong, which both suggested that some essential skills might be missing.

In other salons stylists are often taken on, but their skills are not developed. This approach, says Martin, means staff can often become frustrated and decide to leave. For a man with an ambition to expand his business into a chain of five near-identical salons, he can ill-afford to lose staff so easily. "I want staff to be looked after because there is a structure," says Martin.

The strategy

"I had read bits and pieces about Investors in People and was very interested in what it stood for: if you invest in people, then they will invest in you. When people say 'You are doing really well,' I say, 'I am only as good as the team I have,'" says Martin,

"I have regular meetings with my Investors in People Adviser and in return he gives me ideas and then we come up with a plan on how to structure the business. The main thing is that it has made me slow down," Martin says. "I thought everything would happen tomorrow. I now know otherwise. You need to plan week-by-week, month-by-month and year-by-year. I was doing loads of the right things but loads of the wrong things as well. I stopped and now I am going ahead again."

He has developed practical ways for stylists to develop their skills, which he thinks will mean fewer are likely to feel they have to move on. "I try and support stylists who want to do other things. You are dealing with things like cuts, colours, shampooing, perms, straightening, and extensions." Two stylists have been booked to do an NVQ Level Two hairdressing course and all members of staff have been assessed for essential skills needs, under the Department for Education and Skills Skills for Life programme.

Martin also pays staff a commission on top of their basic pay to encourage them to maximise the level of service they provide.

"Working with Investors in People has helped me out no end, particularly the regular staff meetings and appraisals," says Martin, "We have a staff meeting once a week, do quizzes and have one-to-one meetings. We also have training evenings on things like colouring. We try and do different scenarios. Next week, for example, we will be giving a presentation to a salesman about his own product. The idea is that everyone is bouncing off the same ball."

The results

The salon was assessed under the Investors in People Standard and achieved recognition in August 2006.

The work Martin has carried out as part of the process has clearly made an impact on the service. "A survey of our own customers showed that 99 per cent of them are happy with the service they receive," says Martin, "which is already a great achievement."

Meanwhile, a full time receptionist has been taken on to manage the appointments, helping overcome some of the problems with telephone messages. And while expansion has slowed down to a more manageable pace, plans to scale the business up are still advancing quickly with the second salon opening in August 2006.

“I think that when I open the next salon it will be easy. I will just have to pop back for a morning once a week.”