

SALON OWNERS: SHOULD YOU SOCIALISE WITH YOUR TEAM?

By Lisa Conway

The answer is a resounding “YES” ... with a cautionary “but”. Yes, by all means, hang out with your salon team, but make sure you set some line-in-the-sand boundaries. Once you cross certain lines in the employer-employee relationship, you simply can’t come back. Proceed with care.



Why is it important to socialise with your team? Because that’s how you build relationships. When you relax beyond the deadlines and busy-ness of the salon, you get to really know each other. You connect on a human level. When you feel safe in each other’s company, you build two-way trust that strengthens your work relationship.

We can all do with stepping off the hamster wheel of life to chillax with the people around us, whether family, friends or work

colleagues. Making healthy connections with others is a strong marker for happiness and longevity.

When you work with someone, it’s important to see them in a broader sense, as more than just a worker. It gives you understanding and empathy for them that can only enhance the culture you create for your salon.

I always enjoyed socialising with my team. I sensed they wanted to catch up outside

the salon, in the real world, where they could see me as someone other than “the boss”. It’s like when you’re a kid and you’re surprised to see your schoolteacher in the supermarket buying milk and Weetbix. You realise they’re a real person, that they have a life beyond the classroom. That they’re normal.

Everyone wants to work in a place where they feel a sense of connection or purpose, and to gather with others in a like-minded tribe. Avoiding socialising with your team

sends a message that you're from different tribes. It's a disconnect signal that gives your team a hollow feeling. Without a relationship, it's just a paid gig and their care factor will reflect that status.

Millennials (those in their teens, twenties and thirties) have a stronger desire to connect and belong than any demographic before them. For the most part, they've been raised in a very different family dynamic than baby boomers or Gen Xers. They're more likely to have divorced parents and blended families. They have an incredible BS monitor and are used to being invited and involved in everything. Exclude them and you leave them feeling suspicious. Engage and socialise with them and you'll win their support.

"Your team is the heart of your business. Look after them and, in return, they'll look after your business."

Many millennials lack and crave a strong leader. Filling that space means you balance between standing beside them and standing ahead to protect them. It's a give-and-take relationship that serves you well as salon owner, and them as employee.

Now, back to those boundaries. I always set clear limits defining where and when I socialised with my team. Modelling good behaviour was key. I'm not a night owl or a drinker, so the chance of me losing control was next to zip, but I think the girls would've paid a premium to see me over-refreshed.

If there's an age gap between you and your team members, it's easier to separate work and play. It can be super challenging when you're all in a similar age bracket, say twenty-somethings. Wisdom's a rare thing in your twenties and it's easy to muck up and lose respect. You cross a line when that happens.

I suggest you never have too much to drink in the company of your team and that you're careful about what information you share. Avoid gossip and hearsay. Keep yourself nice! Otherwise you risk seeing the respect of your team members dissolving before your eyes.

It's not hard to plan social gatherings that will help you keep within the boundaries you set. Perhaps go out with your team, share a meal, maybe a tenpin bowling session and look to



head home at a decent hour.

Leave them to kick-on and do whatever they need to do without concerning yourself with the details. You can't unsay what you let slip or unhear what others say when fuelled by alcohol. And you can't unsee bad behaviour (even if it starts out as fun).

By removing yourself before things get messy, you eliminate the need for apologies or explanations. The line between professional and personal remains sharp and no one feels compromised.

When you choose to see way too much of your team members, you also blur that line big-time. You end up losing sight of where the workplace relationship ends and the friendship begins. You feel conflicted and confused. So does your team.

Short bursts of social interaction are incredibly valuable to any organisation. Be purposeful and plan for the best outcomes for everyone.

Have dinner together once a month. Team-up to participate in a fun run or a charity event, or watch a sporting event or a movie. The possibilities are endless.

Your team is the heart of your business. Look after them and, in return, they'll look after your business. Be generous – pay for the meal, buy them a drink, shout them a movie ticket. Ultimately, say "thank you". A gesture of gratitude from a strong leader is a very powerful thing.

For more salon team wisdom, email me at lisa@zingcoach.com.au, visit my website, find my video tips on YouTube, join Club ZING, read my 3 books - *The Naked Salon: an essential guide to time, team and money for salon owners*, *Your Salon Team: the salon owner's guide to finding, motivating and keeping great staff* plus my latest book *Your Salon Retail: the no-nonsense, no-hype guide to kick-arse retail in your salon business*. www.zingcoach.com