

# THE NO-NONSENSE SALON OWNER

**30+ Years in the Trenches: From Garage to Largest Hair, Spa & Beauty Chain and How to Scale Your Business on Your Own Terms.**

**FREE  
BOOK**

## About the author:



Neven Shtiliyanov is a third-generation professional in the hair, beauty, and wellness industry with over 30+ years of real-world experience. At just 18, he began his journey and went on to build the [largest hair and beauty chain in Bulgaria](#), later transforming it into a group of prestigious spa centres that served elite clientele in luxury locations.

In 2009, combining his industry knowledge with a passion for technology, he founded **Alkaya Soft** in Bulgaria—a pioneering platform featuring dynamic payroll logic and expense integration far ahead of its time. While the project earned him national recognition, it was just the beginning.

In 2012, he was awarded **Best Manager - Intercoiffure Mondial**, honouring his impact on modernizing salon business practices.

Seeking higher goals and new challenges, Neven emigrated to the UK in 2015 to further expand his horizons.

**Today, Neven is a Salon Manager at Gould Barbers, the largest barber chain in the UK with 49 locations, where he helps optimise internal processes and scale operations.** This vast international experience led to his latest innovation: [Appointica](#). Built specifically for the hair, beauty, and spa industry, [Appointica](#) moves beyond traditional software by acting as a personal AI partner that professionals can simply talk to—removing the complexity of management so owners can focus on their craft.

In addition to software development, Neven delivers management seminars and mentors salon owners across Europe. His mission: to empower beauty professionals with the tools, mindset, and systems to build sustainable, stress-free businesses.

## Introduction

I built the largest hair, beauty, and spa chain in Bulgaria, but without connections, a wealthy family, money to start with, or any formal management education. Yet years later, I was honoured to receive the Manager of the Year award.

This is the first proof that anything is possible if you truly want it. Throughout this book, you'll find many more such examples—real-life experiences that I hope will inspire you, challenge you, and help you navigate your own path to success.

When I left my small town for the capital at 18, my parents gave me their life savings for the course, and I had to sleep in an office, slipping out every morning before the staff arrived. I walked three kilometres every day because I realised, I had to buy a lot of things for the course that weren't cheap, and we hadn't planned for them. It was tough, but I knew this was my chance. But I had something else—something I rarely saw in others: an unrelenting hunger for success. That drive and determination transformed a simple course into the foundation of everything I later achieved. And now, I'm writing this book to share that journey with you.

Before we dive into the practical side, there's one thing that will shape your success more than anything else: your mindset. Many talented hairstylists fail as salon owners, while others with average skills build thriving businesses. Why? Because success isn't just about skill—it's about learning to think like an entrepreneur.

If I managed to create the biggest salon chain from nothing in a country where bureaucracy and corruption often create obstacles for businesses, then anyone can. We'll touch on this throughout the book, but in Chapter 6 (Hiring, Finding, and Building the Right Team), we'll go deeper into the mindset shifts required to expand beyond a single location.

As Napoleon Hill said, *"Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve."*

This book is not a step-by-step guide. Instead, I'll share my personal journey—my struggles, my wins, and the strategies that worked for me. But this is not the only way to succeed. When my wife joined the business, she brought a completely different approach backed by a degree in business and management. And yet, both of our approaches led to success. That's why I encourage you not to treat this book as a rulebook, but as part of your own learning and growth. Some of the lessons I've learned will resonate with you, and some may not. What matters is finding your own path—one that works for you—by applying real-world insights to build something of your own.

But is it worth it? As you read this book, I hope you'll not only find your answer but also discover that with the right mindset and relentless drive, nothing is out of reach.

## The Course That Changed Everything: Focus on the Future

*The lesson that taught me to follow my own star, not someone else's.*

The course I attended wasn't held in a proper academy; it was inside a real working salon. We were split into two groups, attending from Monday to Friday:

- One group had lessons from 9 AM to 11 AM.
- The other from 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM, rotating each day.

After just a few days, I realised that three months wouldn't be enough to make me truly skilled. Years later, I would come to understand that I would never be fully satisfied with my achievements.

Not knowing whether I was allowed to stay in the salon outside of my scheduled hours, I came up with a strategy. If my group started at 11 AM, I would arrive around 8:30 AM. I'd start cleaning and helping the hairdressers. When the first group arrived, I would pretend I was there by mistake but stay with them since I was already there. When the second group arrived, I would stay with them as well, repeating the same lesson. This way, I was able to learn more than anyone else.

Eventually, the owner of the salon—the most respected hairdresser in my country and the founder of the largest salon chain at the time—took notice. After seeing my dedication, he invited me to stay as an apprentice in his renowned salon.

But I said **NO**.

I didn't want to work for someone else. I wanted my own salon, my own brand, my own chain.

**Back then, I was young, ambitious, and stupid.** As you read on, you will understand why.

### Was it the right decision?

Years later, the same man—the most powerful name in the industry at the time—approached me with a proposal: to merge our businesses and bring my salons under his brand.

But by then, I realised something important: my brand was just as strong and recognizable as his. I had built something just as big as the man who once dominated the industry.

At that moment, I understood that success isn't just about recognition—it's about the relentless drive to build something extraordinary. I succeeded because I had an insatiable hunger for it. From day one, I saw myself as successful and pursued it with unwavering determination.

Years later, observing most of my teacher's students, I realised that if I had remained an apprentice in that salon, I would have taken a completely different path.

*"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."* — **Thomas Edison**

## Chapter 1: Lessons From Early Mistakes: How and When You Are Ready to Open Your First Salon

### The Hidden Risks of Opening a Salon Right After a Course

After completing my course, I returned to my hometown, excited to open my first salon. My father and I started planning how to build a small shop, and looking back, I made so many mistakes that I don't even know where to begin.

Our plan was simple—build a 15-square-meter salon in our garden, facing the street. We had some skills to do it ourselves, but there was one major problem: we had no money. Even buying the cheapest materials was a challenge. So, I continued working in my father's garage while slowly building the shop, piece by piece. It took nearly two years to complete. And when it was done, I had unknowingly built the most energy-inefficient salon possible: The floor was just a concrete slab with no insulation **and** cheap tiles that didn't retain any heat.

Single-layer brick walls with no insulation. A concrete roof—again, with no insulation. We had a mutual friend who owned a small warehouse for aluminium doors and windows.

He agreed to sell us a door and a window with delayed payment, but there was another problem—his warehouse was 300 km away.

Since we couldn't afford a van, we loaded the massive 2x3 meter window frames onto a train and transported them ourselves.

Like everything else in the shop, the windows were the cheapest and least efficient available.

In winter, the highest temperature I could achieve inside the salon was 15°C (59°F)—and most of the time, it was even colder.

We bought the cheapest equipment we could afford, and finally, I was ready to open and start working.

But the biggest problem wasn't the poor insulation or the cheap equipment. It was the location.

Throughout my career, I noticed something—every hairstylist dreams of owning their own salon.

Many of my employees believed that the moment they had enough skills, they were ready to open their own business.

Years later, when I moved to the UK, I sold some of my salons to my former employees.

These were people who had worked under me for years and had seen firsthand how a successful salon operates.

Yet, despite their experience, every single one of them failed.

Opening a salon right after finishing a course is a romantic idea, but in reality, it often leads to failure.

It's not just about having a shop—it's about having the right experience, knowledge, and location.

If I had started differently, I would have saved myself years of struggle. But the good news: You can learn from my mistakes—so you don't have to make them yourself.

*"It's good to learn from your mistakes. It's better to learn from other people's mistakes."*  
— **Warren Buffett**

## How and When You Are Ready to Open Your First Salon

When I opened my first salon, I had one competitor who later became a friend.

He had more life experience than me and was older. Unlike me, he did everything by the book.

He rented a garage in a prime location in the city, right next to the busiest administrative building with a massive footfall.

This gave him a huge advantage over me, as his schedule almost instantly filled up with employees from the city administration—people from the middle and upper class who were financially stable and cared about their appearance.

The rent was never an issue for him because his schedule filled effortlessly.

A few years later, we both ended up running salons next to each other in key locations across the city.

However, he still had the upper hand—not only did he benefit from the high foot traffic, but he also had a solid base of loyal clients from his garage, while I was only just beginning to build mine.

## Gain Experience Before Opening Your Own Salon

Before rushing to open your own salon, don't make my mistake. Do everything possible to secure a job in a large, high-traffic salon, spa, or wellness centre with an experienced team.

This will provide you with invaluable opportunities—not only to refine your technical skills but also to observe and learn business and management in action.

Pay attention to every detail: How deliveries are handled. How the reception operates. How the manager, receptionist, and owner interact, customer service. These small insights will teach you more about running a business than any book or course.

Take notes, make observations, and start forming your own plan.

Once you feel fully confident in your professional skills, you can begin planning to open your own salon, spa, or beauty studio.

Later in this book, we'll discuss whether you even need to own a business, weighing the pros and cons of salon ownership.

#### Use Your Free Time to Learn

While working and gaining experience, use your free time wisely.

Don't just rely on hands-on practice—educate yourself. Read books on business, management, and customer psychology.

Engage with AI tools—ask them questions, simulate business challenges, and analyse different strategies.

Study finance and marketing, focusing on essential topics such as: Pricing strategies.

Cash flow management. Brand positioning.

Customer acquisition and retention. Many professionals focus only on perfecting their craft, forgetting that business knowledge is just as important as technical skill when it comes to running a successful salon, spa, or wellness centre.

### Assess the Real Cost of Investment

There is no way I can give you an exact plan because circumstances can be very different for everyone, and I might even mislead you.

However, here are some essential guidelines to consider. Before starting, make a detailed calculation of all necessary expenses, divided into: Fixed costs (rent, renovation, equipment, licenses).

Initial operational costs (salaries, marketing, products for the first 3–6 months).

Unexpected expenses (a buffer of 10–15%).

**Principle:** Never start with the bare minimum—lack of funds in the first months is one of the main reasons businesses fail.

#### Save More Than You Think You Need

Whatever amount you think is enough—double it.

Unexpected costs will arise, and running out of funds is one of the top reasons new businesses fail. Along with saving, make sure you understand accounting, expenses, and financial planning before making the leap.

**Principle:** A financial buffer can save your business during the critical first months. Most people usually get only one chance.

If you invest all your savings or take out a loan and it doesn't work out, it's highly unlikely that you'll get a second opportunity.

### Start with Essential Equipment Only

Buy only what is absolutely necessary—avoid expensive designer furniture that doesn't add real value.

Some equipment can be bought second-hand. Upgrade your interior gradually as your business becomes profitable.

There are many ways to create a cozy and inviting atmosphere on a small budget—strategic lighting, plants, and thoughtful decoration can make a space feel high-end without major expenses.

**Principle:** Remember, first and foremost, you are offering comfort and atmosphere—only then comes the service itself.  
We will talk more about this later.

## Location: The Most Critical Decision

One of the biggest mistakes people make is choosing the cheapest possible location, thinking they are saving money.

In reality, a poor location can cost you your entire business.

Here's a simple example: Imagine you have two rental options: A prime location with a €2000 rent.

A low-traffic location with a €500 rent. At the high-traffic location, even if you don't have existing clients from your previous workplace, you may get 3-5 walk-in customers per day, generating around €100 daily.

Over 25 working days, that alone covers your rent—before even considering your loyal clients from your previous workplace.

At the low-traffic location, on the other hand, you may have zero walk-ins.

The only people who visit you might be friends coming to check out your new place.

**Marketing Costs** – A prime location markets itself through walk-in traffic.

A budget location requires constant advertising just to attract clients.

**Client Drop-Off** – If even 20-30% of your clients don't follow you to the new location, that's a major financial loss.

**Lower Pricing Pressure** – In a high-end location, you can charge higher prices.

In a budget location, you must compete on price, which lowers profit margins.

**Principle:** A good location isn't an expense—it's an investment in automatic marketing and long-term profitability.

## The Misconception About Client Loyalty

Many Hair, Beauty & Spa professionals assume that their loyal clients will automatically follow them when they open their own business.

This is a dangerous misconception. They fail to realize that many clients don't visit just for a specific professional.

They choose a salon or spa because of: The convenient location.

The variety of services—hair, nails, facials, massages, laser treatments, and more.

The overall experience and atmosphere.

Just because clients appreciate your work does not guarantee they will follow you.

Some will, but many will stay where they feel comfortable and have access to multiple services in one place.

And even if every single client follows you, here's the key difference: In a prime location, your rent is already covered by walk-in traffic.

Your loyal clients will be your profit, and you will have huge growth potential, including the ability to expand your services and raise prices over time.

In a low-traffic location, you will rely almost entirely on existing clients, who will also be targeted by dozens of other salons, spas, and wellness centres competing for their business.

### Walk-In Clients Are Your Growth Engine

Your business cannot survive only on existing clients.

It's not that word-of-mouth advertising doesn't work, but even if you are out of this world, it takes a long time to show results.

Growth comes from new customers. Even if 100% of your clients follow you to your new salon, if no new clients come in, your business will stagnate. Furthermore, you will have employees whose schedules also need to be filled.

A prime location ensures daily exposure to potential customers, while a low-traffic location requires expensive advertising just to be noticed.

## Final Thoughts – Laying the Right Foundation for Success

- Opening a salon, spa, or beauty business is not just about skill—it's about strategy.
- Gain experience first. Educate yourself beyond technical skills. Save more than you think you need.
- Choose a location wisely—it can make or break your business.
- Invest in atmosphere—your clients come for the experience, not just the service.
- By making the right decisions before you open, you can set yourself up for long-term success instead of short-term struggle.

*"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."* – **Benjamin Franklin**

## Chapter 2: Pricing – Targeting the Right Clients

When you find your place, take some time to research the pricing of your competitors in the area. This will give you a general idea of the client demographics and spending habits in that location. However, do not get distracted by their prices. Your pricing should not be based on what others are charging—it should be calculated strategically. Many salon owners fail to realize that after calculating costs and deciding on a markup, pricing should always be directly linked to service duration.

A common misconception is that higher-priced services automatically bring more profit. For example, many assume that hairstylists earn more than barbers because their services cost more. But in reality, barbers often generate higher revenue per hour because their services are faster and require fewer products.

## Why Time-Based Pricing Matters?

Let's compare two professionals working in the beauty industry: A skilled barber completes a men's haircut in 15 minutes for £20.

A hairstylist charges £40 for a women's haircut, but with washing and even short drying as working on long hair could take 50-60 minutes and requires shampoo, conditioner, towels, and hot water.

While the profit on a women's haircut is £35, a skilled barber can complete four men's haircuts in the same time, generating £80 per hour with minimal product costs.

Now, let's apply the same logic to high-end services like Balayage: A Balayage service is priced at £250-£350, but product costs can be £100 or more.

The service takes 3, sometimes 4 hours, meaning that even at £350, the real profit is £250.

Divided by three hours, the revenue per hour is £83—which is the same as a barber making four quick haircuts per hour but without the stress of using chemicals. Naturally, the duration and prices will vary for everyone, but you understand the logic.

### Key Lesson:

Your prices should be based on the time spent, not just the service provided.

## How to Calculate Your Hourly Rate

1. Start with your most frequently sold service. For most hairstylists, this is a standard haircut.

2. Determine how much you earn per hour from that service.

If you charge £40 for a haircut that takes 30 minutes, your hourly rate is £80.

3. Use this rate as a baseline for all other services.

This is a guideline, not an exact science.

You need flexibility in execution. You don't have to price everything based purely on hourly rate—some services have strategic value beyond immediate revenue.

## Practical Exercise for the Reader

Take your top 5 most popular services.

Write down how long each one takes and how much you charge. Now divide the price by the time.

Are there any services that are dragging down your hourly rate?

Should you adjust pricing or limit how often you offer them?

By doing this, you will identify which services are most profitable and which ones need adjustment.

## Focus on Your Service, Not on Beating Competitors' Prices

Once you have researched the competition and calculated the prices that will sustain your business, stop thinking about pricing. Your focus should now shift entirely to the experience, the atmosphere, and the unique service you can offer that sets you apart from competitors. What will make clients remember their visit to your salon? Will you greet them by name and with their favourite drink, simply because **Appointica's smart client profile** reminded you of their preferences before they even walked in? Will you take their coat, making them feel truly taken care of?

What small but meaningful gestures will you incorporate into your service that competitors overlook? These details matter more than price. Clients remember how you made them feel—not just the service itself. A complimentary coffee or another drink costs you just a few cents, but if the client were to order it in a café, it would cost them several times more. If your schedule is already empty and you have time, offer a free hair wash, a nail polish application or something that doesn't cost you much in materials but provides great value to the client.

For you, it's just time—something you already have—but for the client, the perceived value is much greater.

These strategies help you maintain your pricing and brand positioning while building your salon's reputation.

If a client receives a standard but unremarkable service, they will see it as just another routine experience.

However, if they leave the salon with great memories, the chances of them sharing it with friends and acquaintances increase drastically—along with the likelihood of writing a review.

The same applies to word-of-mouth strategy—it only works if the client remembers their visit.

We will talk more about customer service later in the book.

## Crafting Your Price List: Adding Value Through Description

In Chapter 3 on Marketing, I emphasize the importance of how you present your prices, but I will also provide an example here. When you create your price list, remember that the way you describe a service can significantly influence a client's perception of its value, even if the price remains the same.

Think about it: the same service, at the same price point, can feel entirely different to a client based purely on its description.

For example, you could list a service as:

- \* "Women's haircut with wash and blow-dry."

Or you could phrase it as:

- \* "Women's haircut, including a deeply hydrating shampoo experience with an invigorating scalp massage (which you likely do anyway as an exfoliating massage), followed by a professional blow-dry using premium X brand styling products."

Both services might have the exact same price and involve the same fundamental steps. However, the second description paints a much richer picture, highlighting elements of care, quality products, and a more luxurious experience. This isn't about misleading the client; it's about effectively communicating the inherent value and the thoughtful details that go into the services you provide. You are simply emphasizing the quality and experience they are receiving.



## Undercutting Prices or Targeting Budget Clients – A Fast Track to Failure

My wife graduated with a degree in Business and Management from a university in the Netherlands, where the professors were real entrepreneurs with successful businesses.

One of them told her something that stuck with her: **"No matter what problems you face, never—absolutely never—lower your prices."**

A salon owner I once competed with decided, after COVID, that keeping high prices was too risky because people had lost a lot of money during the lockdown.

He reduced his prices temporarily by a third, thinking it would attract more clients because other shops are greedy.

But in our industry, most stylists work on commission, earning a percentage of what they bring in. Cutting prices by a third meant his employees were now making a third less on every service.

Within weeks, his team of seven shrank to just him—no one was willing to stay for significantly lower pay.

One of the biggest mistakes salon owners make is lowering their prices to undercut competitors and to attract more clients.

This creates a dangerous trap: Cheap pricing attracts price-sensitive clients who leave as soon as they find a better deal.

Talented professionals avoid working for low-end salons because lower prices mean lower commission-based earnings.

## Bad Atmosphere and Incorrect Client Targeting.

When I moved to England, I rented a chair in a large barbershop with five seats.

The shop was well-established, but after I joined, the clientele naturally redistributed among me and the other barbers.

This led to a slight drop in earnings for everyone.

As a result, two of my female colleagues asked the landlord to slightly lower the rent, arguing that business had slowed down while he was still making a steady income from fully rented chairs.

He refused. Feeling undervalued, the two women decided to leave.

The problem was, they were the heart and soul of the shop, creating the welcoming atmosphere that kept clients coming back.

Their departure disrupted the entire dynamic, and we lost a huge number of regular customers. Then the landlord had a "brilliant" idea—he installed two extra chairs designed as children's cars, thinking they would attract kids and, in turn, bring their fathers in for haircuts. Instead, the shop filled up with children (cheaper price) who came not with their dads, but with their mothers!

This is a perfect example of how a series of poor decisions can ruin your entire business.

## The Importance of Adjusting Prices with Inflation

Experienced businesses tie their prices to inflation, making small adjustments once or twice a year to keep up with rising costs.

This approach makes price increases more gradual and less noticeable to clients.

If you're afraid to raise your prices, you're setting yourself up for failure.

Inflation will continue to drive up the costs of products, rent, and wages, while your prices remain stagnant.

Eventually, your margins will shrink, and your business will struggle to stay profitable.

Sooner or later, you'll find yourself in a position where you'll have to raise prices drastically just to catch up—risking client backlash and potential loss of business.

## Final thoughts – Pricing as a strategy for success.

- Pricing is a strategic statement about the value of your brand and the clients you want to attract.
- Calculate your prices wisely, basing them on the time required for each service and your desired hourly rate, not just imitating the competition.
- Once you determine your prices, focus on creating an exceptional client experience, because that, not the lowest price, builds loyalty and reputation.
- Never lower your prices in an attempt to attract more clients, as this attracts disloyal clientele and demotivates quality staff.
- Don't forget to regularly adjust your prices for inflation to maintain your business's profitability in the long run.
- Correct pricing, based on value and combined with excellent service, will build a profitable salon that clients value much more than just a bargain.

"The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten." — **Benjamin Franklin**

## Chapter 3: Comprehensive Marketing Strategies: From Local Partnerships to Digital Dominance

### Quality Over Quantity: Targeting the Right Clients – A Lesson in Strategy

In the year 2000, when my salon was just starting, we were struggling.

We had no money, debts to repay to both family and banks, and we desperately needed quick cash.

Despite this, I had a clear vision—I wanted to build a premium brand.

I set my price at 5 leva, while most salons charged around 3 leva at the time.

My father, however, had a different mindset. One day, I was expecting a high-profile businessman—someone who, if impressed, could become a loyal client and bring valuable referrals.

At the same time, my father arrived with ten soldiers from a nearby military base, eager for quick, low-cost haircuts.

Their budget? 2 leva per person. For him, it was a no-brainer: ten customers meant instant cash in a time when we badly needed it.

But I saw the bigger picture. If my VIP client had walked in to find a row of rushed, budget-friendly haircuts, he would have never returned.

To build a premium brand, I had to maintain exclusivity and a carefully curated image. That day, I had to make a tough decision—I turned the soldiers away. It was a move that deeply frustrated my father, who couldn't understand why I refused money when we needed it so badly. Even without experience, I instinctively felt that working with

budget-conscious clients wasn't my path. And looking back now, I was absolutely right. Once you position yourself as cheap, it becomes impossible to escape. Clients expect low prices forever. Raising prices later becomes a nightmare. Your business is stuck in a low-profit cycle. Instead, I focused on quality over quantity, delivering premium service and charging premium prices.

## Proven Marketing Strategies for Local Business Growth

When I started, I applied several strategies that proved to be highly effective.

\* **Building Local Partnerships.** The first step was to carefully analyse the entire area within a 20-minute walking radius.

I identified key locations that attracted a high volume of people—gyms, restaurants, clubs, banks, and corporate offices.

One by one, I started reaching out to key decision-makers—owners, managers, or even the spouse of an owner or manager.

If the decision-maker is a man, it's less likely that the offer will appeal to him personally because we don't spend a lot of money on beauty. 🚫 In this case, the voucher should be open for family or friends to use.

If he doesn't have a family, look for another key player in the business who might have an interest. **The idea is to offer something more than just a service to capture their attention.**

Once I connected with them, I tailored my offer based on their business size and influence: If their business had similar traffic to mine, I proposed a barter deal—they would display my promotional materials, and I would do the same for them in my salon. If they were significantly larger, I offered barter + a VIP voucher for the decision-maker. For example, €200 worth of services per month. This approach worked exceptionally well, especially in the early days when I had more free time but fewer clients.

Providing bonus services cost me very little, but for the manager, it held high value.

One key lesson: Never save money on design and quality when printing marketing materials.

High-end businesses don't want cheap flyers cluttering their premium space.

## Corporate Partnerships & Employee Discounts

Another strategy that worked for me was partnering with large banks and corporations. Many big companies have internal portals where employees can find exclusive discounts from partner businesses. When employees need a specific service, they often check these portals first to see if there's a company offering a discount.

However, instead of giving large discounts, focus on increasing value. For example, instead of offering a straight discount on a haircut, provide 50% off a blow-dry with the haircut or a free nail polish with a premium service. This way, you're not reducing your

core prices but increasing perceived value while only spending additional time and effort.

This approach creates a win-win situation where both parties have a vested interest. The corporation benefits by offering attractive perks to its employees, improving their satisfaction.

Meanwhile, the salon wins in two ways: first, by acquiring the employee as a direct client, and second, because these individuals socialize with friends and colleagues of the same class and purchasing power, effectively expanding your reach to a solvent demographic.

By leveraging these strategies, I was able to build strong local visibility, attract high-quality clients, and grow my business efficiently.

## Social Media & AI – The Most Underestimated Business Tools for Staying Ahead

This is exactly why I created [Appointica](#). I realised that salon owners don't need another complicated software; they need a partner. [Appointica](#) uses AI to handle the tasks you hate—like chasing clients for confirmations or filling empty slots—so you can focus on the art of hair and beauty. It's not about replacing humans; it's about giving humans superpowers. Social media started to grow rapidly around the same time I had already opened multiple salons.

I've always been an innovator, and that gave me a huge advantage over my competitors.

I found myself in a massive gap in the market, where consumers were spending hours every day online, yet there was no competition on the other side.

We weren't doing anything groundbreaking—we simply created a Facebook page for our brand and posted four times a day: one post about hair, one about nails, one about beauty treatments, and one for mood and motivation.

Within a year, we had grown so much that 5-star hotels we worked with started offering joint campaigns—they wanted to use our reach to promote their own pages.

That's when I realised something else: Facebook didn't just help us attract new clients. It helped us build a brand so strong that our customers wanted to tag themselves at our salons to showcase their style and status.

We also gained a huge number of followers who had never even been to our salons—simply because we didn't have locations in their cities—but they still supported us daily through comments and engagement.

## Loyalty, Referral Programs, and Online Presence

I'm giving you brief examples that you can fantasise about and mix endlessly. Doing this manually is exhausting. You can't possibly remember to message every client who hasn't visited in six weeks. **This is where Client Profiles become your most valuable asset.**

A smart system like [Appointica](#) leverages these records to do the heavy lifting for you. As technology continues to advance, the systems utilizing these profiles are becoming capable of handling almost everything—from retention to marketing. The key is that the software uses your client history to automate growth, turning simple records into revenue while you focus on your work.

Here are the strategies you can implement (and automate):

### Loyalty & Promotions

- **Loyalty Program:** Reward points for visits that clients can redeem for discounts.
- **Referral Program:** Give discounts to clients who bring new customers.
- **VIP Membership:** Exclusive discounts, priority booking, and special perks.
- **Service Bundles:** Example: "Colouring + Haircut + Hair Mask" at a better price.
- **Happy Hour Discounts:** Lower prices during off-peak hours.

### Local Marketing & Partnerships (Covered in detail above)

- **Cross-promotions:** Partnering with nearby businesses.
- **Workshops & Events:** Free haircare and skincare workshops.
- **Community Event Participation:** Festivals, fairs, and corporate events.

### Online Booking & Automation

- **24/7 Online Booking:** Easy scheduling via website or app.
- **Automated Reminders:** SMS & email notifications for upcoming appointments.

### Reviews & Social Proof

- **Encouraging Reviews:** Ask clients to leave reviews on Google automatically after a visit.
- **Before & After Transformations:** Share client results on social media.
- **Case Studies & Stories:** Share real customer experiences.

### Exclusive Services & Trends

- **Personalized Treatments:** Unique services only available at your salon.
- **Product Testing Sessions:** Let clients try new beauty products before they launch.
- **Subscription Plans:** Offer monthly services for a fixed price.

### Additional Digital Strategies to Stay Ahead:

- **Automate Your Marketing:** Use AI-powered tools for content creation, scheduling posts, and analysing engagement to maximize your online presence with minimal effort.
- **Engage With Your Audience:** Don't just post—interact! Respond to comments, create polls, and use Instagram/Facebook stories to build a real connection with potential clients.
- **Showcase Before & After Transformations:** Visual content is king. Regularly post before-and-after photos or short videos of your work to showcase your skills and attract more clients.
- **Stay Visible on Google:** Optimise your Google Business profile. A well-maintained listing with reviews and updated services can bring in new clients searching for salons online.
- **Invest in Short-Form Video Content:** Platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts are currently driving engagement. A few seconds of engaging content can bring thousands of views.
- **Keep an Eye on Trends:** Whether it's a viral hairstyle or a new AI-powered tool, adapting quickly to new trends helps position you as an industry leader rather than a follower.
- **Leverage AI for Pricing & Booking Optimization:** AI can analyse client preferences, peak hours, and competitor pricing to help you set competitive rates and manage appointments more efficiently.

Even if you take one or two of these steps, you'll already be ahead of many competitors. The key is consistency and adaptation—don't wait until it's too late!

### Final thought – Define your success through strategic marketing.

- Your clients define your brand, pricing, and ultimately your success, so aim for high-end clientele by offering an experience that matches their expectations.
- Avoid chasing quick money, as you risk being trapped in the low-profit market indefinitely.
- if you accept the wrong clients, you will inevitably lose the right ones.
- Build strong local partnerships with other businesses by offering mutually beneficial terms and high-quality marketing materials to increase your visibility.
- Take advantage of the power of the digital era by maintaining an active presence on social media and leveraging the benefits of artificial intelligence to stay ahead of the competition.
- Be consistent in your marketing efforts and adaptable to new trends, because this is the key to sustainable growth and brand recognition.

Success is not about serving everyone, but about serving the right people.

*"Price is what you pay. Value is what you get."* — **Warren Buffett**

## Chapter 4: Living Your Brand – How Funky Became Bigger Than My Name

When people think of your business, they should instantly associate it with quality, experience, and authority.

This is how I turned 'Funky' into something much bigger than just a nickname—it became a movement.

At one point, almost no one knew my real name. Even those who did still called me Funky.

I didn't just run a brand—I lived for it. My business identity was so strong that it completely overshadowed my personal name.

I was obsessed with having the perfect business card and always carried them with me.

Even when I went out clubbing, I would hand out my cards to everyone I talked to.

Sometimes, after a few drinks, I forgot who I gave them to—until people reminded me! The Result?

I managed to build a successful salon in the most remote, impossible location—my very first salon.

But when I opened my second salon, I had already learned from my mistakes.

This time, I chose a premium location. The new salon was 125 square meters, designed with: Three hairstyling stations, a manicure section, a beauty treatment room, a massage room, a solarium, and a reception area.

By the time I opened my second location, the Funky brand had completely taken over—it was bigger than my name, and clients already recognized it.

**Lesson:** If you want your business to dominate the market, don't just run a brand—become the brand.

### The Power of Branding: Winning Luxury Hotel Contracts

The biggest impact of branding became clear when I started applying for salon spaces in top hotels in Bulgaria.

That's when I realised just how much my competitors ignored branding—to the point of being laughable.

I'll never forget the moment I sat in a meeting with a general manager of a luxury hotel. On his desk was a flimsy, nearly transparent flyer from the previous candidate, along with some basic paperwork.

Hotels typically place these flyers in every guestroom so that clients can easily access salon services.

Since many guests take them, the salon must provide a large quantity for housekeeping staff to replace daily.

This was what my competitors could afford—a cheap, thin, uninspiring flyer.

Meanwhile, I walked into the meeting with a 20-page luxury brochure.

Each page featured no more than 3-4 services and prices, leaving plenty of space for high-end visuals.

The catalogue included: Professional photos of our actual work, models showcasing our premium styling, top-tier equipment used in the salon, and step-by-step beauty rituals to emphasize luxury.

The general manager had no choice but to say yes.

**Lesson:** Big brands don't buy services, they buy trust.

Your brand should represent an experience, not just a service.

## Why Branding Was My Biggest Advantage

Luxury hotels don't just offer services—they sell an experience. Guests, who stay at these hotels expect every single service to match the high-end standard of the hotel itself.

This is where most salon owners fail when pitching to high-end locations: They see the hotel as just another rental space.

They focus on how much money they can make, instead of how their salon adds value to the hotel.

When I presented my luxury brochure, I wasn't just selling haircuts—I was selling a guarantee.

Why hotels chose me over competitors: I understood that they were not just looking for a tenant, but for a long-term partner.

My salon branding seamlessly fits into their high-end atmosphere. They saw me as someone who enhanced their hotel's reputation, not as just another business renting space.

## A Brand Opens Doors That Money Can't

Many people think that to get into high-end locations, you need connections or a big budget.

But the truth is, branding and professionalism can get you further than money ever will.

When your brand looks premium, clients and partners will assume you belong in premium locations.

**Lesson:** Your brand should work for you, even when you're not in the room.

## The Role of Branding in Attracting Clients and Social Media Influence

Most people understand that branding helps attract clients because it guarantees quality.

But there's another type of customer who is drawn to popular places simply because they are trendy—whether it's a famous salon, a high-end restaurant, or an exclusive club.

Why does this matter? These clients don't just visit your salon—they brag about it online. They post pictures.

They tag your business. They share their experience. And without even realizing it, they're marketing your salon for free.

**Lesson:** Make your brand so attractive that people want to show it off.

## Branding Helps You Attract Top Talent

Another major advantage of strong branding is that it makes hiring much easier. Why? Talented professionals want to work for a brand that people recognize and respect.

They don't want to be associated with unknown, struggling salons.

The stronger your brand, the easier it is to attract and retain high-quality professionals.

## Final Thought – Branding is More Than Just a Logo

- Your brand is not just a name, a logo, or a business card—it's the reputation you create.
- Strong branding makes people want to work with you. Strong branding makes clients proud to visit you.
- Strong branding opens doors that money can't. If you want to build a premium salon, your branding needs to look premium before you even open your doors.
- Your reputation and image matter more than anything else. If you create a strong brand, people will talk about it, trust it, and want to be part of it.

*"A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is—it is what consumers tell each other it is."* — **Scott Cook**, co-founder of Intuit

## Chapter 5: How to Build a Loyal Client Base

Have you ever wondered why some salons have clients who stay for years, while others constantly struggle to keep them?

What makes a client not just return, but refuse to go anywhere else?

This topic could easily be a book on its own.

I've seen so many different approaches to building client loyalty, but one thing stands out—it usually happens naturally when someone has charisma.

Of course, if you make it a goal, the results will be even better. But in my experience, this is the foundation of long-term loyalty.

## Charisma and Natural Client Attraction

When I talk about charisma, I don't mean that charismatic people attract all clients. In a large team, you'll notice that every client prefers a different type of personality: Some love talkative stylists, while others prefer silence during their service. Some trust only male stylists, others prefer women. Some don't trust young professionals, others take pleasure in helping young people regardless of the end result, while others dislike heavily tattooed stylists or those with piercings. This is completely normal. You don't need to please everyone. Your clients will become loyal because of who you are, not because of a forced personality. If you have a large team, clients will naturally gravitate toward the stylist they feel most comfortable with. Trying to change your personality and values to suit everyone is exhausting. Even if you manage to do it at first, over the years, it will become more difficult to maintain.

**Lesson:** Be yourself. Let clients sort themselves naturally.

## The Power of Atmosphere

While you can't change who you are, you can influence the atmosphere of your salon. And that atmosphere is everything. When the salon has a strong atmosphere, employees feel it and are happy. When employees are happy, clients feel it too. When clients feel good, they will return—even if the salon was in complete chaos during a crazy busy day. I've seen salons with average pricing and average services, but a fantastic atmosphere—and they were always full. I've also seen salons with premium pricing and top-level stylists, but because of a cold, unwelcoming atmosphere, clients never returned. One toxic employee can: Ruin the entire atmosphere. Create unnecessary tension. Push both employees and clients away. We will talk about this in the next chapter.

**Lesson:** A great atmosphere makes people want to return. Protect it at all costs.

## Booking Systems and Client Profiles – The Foundation of Loyalty

I personally don't see how a salon can be successful without a booking system and client records. The data you collect about a client can completely transform their experience. The more information you store, the more ways you have to make them feel special.

Before a client arrives, review their profile. A simple acknowledgment like: "Welcome back, Sarah! Ready for your usual balayage?"

"Would you like your green tea with honey, like last time?"

This small moment immediately changes how the client feels in the salon.

Suddenly, they're recognized, valued, and connected to your business. Service history matters.

If a client has been experimenting with hair colours, remember which one they loved most.

If they mentioned wanting a small adjustment last time, bring it up before they do. Life details matter too.

If they told you they were attending a wedding, ask how it went.

If they were unwell last time, ask how they're feeling now.

## The Small Details That Make a Big Difference

Once you have the right client data, you can add small but impactful gestures that will make your clients feel truly valued.

Comfort Touches – Warm towels in winter, refreshing drinks in summer, a small treat while they wait.

Clean and Organized Salon – No hair on the floor, no cluttered workstations, no strong chemical smells.

Post-Service Follow-Up – A quick message the next day: "How do you like your new cut?"

This shows care and builds loyalty. VIP Treatment for Loyal Clients – Exclusive appointments, early access to promotions, or just making them feel like part of the salon family.

**Lesson:** Small details leave a lasting impression.

## Final Thought – Loyalty is Earned, Not Bought

- Building a loyal client base isn't about trying to make everyone happy—it's about creating an environment where the right clients feel at home.
- Be yourself. Clients appreciate authenticity. Let clients naturally sort themselves. The right ones will stay.
- Protect the atmosphere at all costs. A happy salon = happy clients = long-term success.
- (Also discussed in Chapter 6 regarding team impact). Use every small detail to make them feel valued.
- Loyal clients are not just customers—they are your salon's biggest promoters.
- Take care of them, and they will take care of your business.

*"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." — Maya Angelou*

## Chapter 6: Hiring, Finding, and Building the Right Team

Why is hiring in the beauty industry so difficult?

Is it because there aren't enough good stylists—or are most salon owners looking in the wrong way?

I've seen it time and time again—salon owners struggling to hire great employees simply because they don't know how to attract the right people.

Most job ads are either too vague or too demanding, making it impossible to attract top talent.

### Why Most Job Ads Fail

The Minimalist Ad: "Looking for a hairstylist in X area. Call this number."

Short, simple... and completely useless. 😊 It doesn't excite potential applicants, and it doesn't make your salon look like an attractive workplace.

The Employer-Centric Novel: A massive block of text listing every possible requirement, expecting candidates to prove themselves worthy before even applying. I couldn't believe that salon owners actually expected to attract great employees this way.

### How to Write a Job Ad That Attracts the Best Talent

Your first priority should always be to attract as many candidates as possible—then filter them after they apply.

Yes, you will lose a bit more time sorting candidates this way, but at least you are sure you haven't missed anyone.

**Here's how my job ads looked:** Funky Salons is looking for a hairstylist for our location in X. Flexible salary options: fixed salary, lower base salary + 10% commission, or 60% of total revenue.

Exclusive training opportunities: Work with leading industry brands, attend high-profile workshops, and get mentorship from top stylists.

Luxury work opportunities: Get a chance to work in our seasonal locations in five-star resorts, serving high-end clientele.

If you want to be part of an innovative, fast-growing salon brand, apply today! What's missing from this ad?

A long list of strict requirements. Instead of focusing on what I expect from candidates, I highlight what they get.

The goal is to make them want to apply before I even evaluate them.

## Why Most Salon Owners Make Hiring Harder Than It Needs to Be

Most salon owners make one of two mistakes when hiring:

### 1. **They Are Too Picky from the Start.**

They write job ads as if they're hiring for NASA. Instead of encouraging applications, they push potential candidates away.

2. **They Don't Attract Enough Candidates.** They post generic, uninspiring job ads and then complain that "there are no good stylists available."

A Better Approach: Get as many applicants as possible. Sifting through them is easy; getting them to apply is the hard part.

Understand that hiring is a numbers game—the more applicants, the better your chances of finding great stylists.

Focus on employer branding—make your salon look like an amazing place to work.

## Warning Signs When Hiring – Red Flags to Watch For

Not every applicant is a great hire.

Here are red flags that should make you think twice before bringing someone onto your team: Avoid candidates who: Constantly jump from salon to salon (no loyalty).

Speak negatively about all their previous employers. Are only interested in salary but show no passion for the craft.

Lack basic communication skills—if they can't connect with you, they won't connect with clients.

Are more focused on their social media presence than their work ethic.

Hiring isn't just about skill—it's about attitude, reliability, and long-term potential.

## Why Staff Retention is the Key to Success

The salon I currently manage is the most expensive in my city.

When I first took over, it wasn't very busy despite its prime location and high foot traffic. I started asking regular clients what they liked and what they didn't. The most common response?

"There's always a new staff member who cuts my hair." You can probably guess—there's no way to create a welcoming atmosphere when employees are constantly changing.

So, I changed that. Today, the newest member of my team has already been with us for three years.

I built a family-like environment, and the atmosphere is incredible.

There's always banter and laughter between the team, which naturally spreads to our clients.

Combined with our perfect location, the salon is now packed every day, despite having the highest prices in the city.

And when a salon is this busy, more advantages follow. No one wants to leave because nowhere else in the area can they earn this much. Even if someone does leave due to relocation, pregnancy, or other personal reasons, there are dozens of applications for their position. This is just one example of how following the core principles and advice in this book can make success feel effortless.

## The Hiring Experiment: Why Branding Matters

To prove how much branding influences recruitment, I ran an experiment with a friend who had just opened a salon. He wrote a standard job ad for his salon. I rewrote his ad, positioning his salon as part of my established brand. The difference in applications was shocking. My version of the job ad attracted far more candidates, even though it was for the exact same salon.

## Retaining a Great Employee is Always Cheaper Than Replacing One

Never forget—it's far more cost-effective to pay a valued employee more than to lose them and spend weeks or even months searching for a replacement. The time, effort, and lost revenue during the hiring process will cost you significantly more in the long run. That's why: Invest in your best people before you're forced to replace them.

## How to Keep Great Employees

Hiring great employees is just the first step—keeping them is just as important. Create growth opportunities – Stylists need to feel they are progressing in their careers. Provide training, certifications, or new challenges. Offer flexible commission structures – Some employees prefer stability (fixed salary), while others want high commission. Give them options. Recognize achievements – A simple “great job” can go a long way in boosting morale. Foster a positive work culture – A toxic work environment pushes good employees away, no matter how high the salary is. (As also discussed in Chapter 7 regarding client loyalty).

## When a Star Employee Breaks the Rules

One of the best hairdressers I've ever seen had everything you could ask for—exceptional skills, great looks, intelligence, and a broad knowledge of various topics. On top of that, he had an incredible attitude toward clients. But there was one problem—he was always late.

I personally cannot stand lateness. It drives me crazy. Not only was he supposed to be at work 15 minutes before opening, but he usually arrived 5-7 minutes after we had already opened, leaving his first client waiting.

To fix this, I suggested he start at 10:20 instead of 10:00. He agreed.

From that day forward, he arrived at 10:25. Later in my career, I would realize that punctuality is simply part of a person's identity and trying to change it is often a waste of energy.

Instead of making an emotional decision and firing him just because I couldn't stand it, I took a step back and analysed the bigger picture.

The problem had two key points: All his colleagues arrived 15 minutes early to prepare the salon.

His lateness could be seen as unfair and disrespectful. His first client had to wait for him every day.

But after talking to my team and carefully analysing the situation, here's what I realised: Point #1: He was far more experienced than anyone else, and every day, he helped his colleagues improve their skills while treating them with great respect.

Not a single one of them felt he was being unfair.

Point #2: His clients absolutely adored him.

He received glowing reviews daily, and his first clients never complained because he always made it up to them—whether through a small gesture, a joke, or simply by making them feel special.

In the end, his lateness didn't harm my business in any way.

I chose to ignore it, and he continued working for me for years.

Later, when I moved to the UK, I even sold him the salon he worked in—a testament to how much value he brought, despite breaking one of my biggest personal rules.

## Final Thought: A Team That Feels Like Home

- A salon is more than just a workplace—it's a community.
- The energy, culture, and atmosphere of your salon start with your team.
- Hiring the right people is only half the battle. Keeping them, motivating them, and creating an environment where they want to stay is what truly makes a salon successful.
- Employees who feel valued, supported, and part of something bigger than themselves don't just show up for a paycheck—they show up with passion.
- They contribute to the salon's growth, build lasting relationships with clients, and create an environment where both the team and customers feel at home.
- If you get hiring and retention right, everything else becomes easier—client loyalty, brand reputation, and even pricing power.
- A salon with a strong, happy team becomes a magnet for both talent and customers.

*"The secret of my success is that we have gone to exceptional lengths to hire the best people in the world."* — **Steve Jobs**

## Chapter 7: Handling Common Salon Problems – Clients, Conflicts, and Everyday Challenges

This is a topic for another book.

Furthermore, every situation is different and requires an individual approach. Nevertheless, I will share my views on some issues.

A client came to me with three different shades in her grown-out roots.

This meant that her colour had failed three times—likely due to an inexperienced colourist or at-home attempts.

My apprentice and I bleached and blended these lines, and then my apprentice applied the toner.

While my apprentice was blow-drying, the client suddenly caused a scene, claiming she had come in as a blonde and was now "pearl" (due to the toner).

I responded, "I'm very sorry, ma'am, but you did not come in as a blonde. You came in with three different colours in your roots and blonde lengths."

At this point, my apprentice was already in tears. I never followed the saying "The customer is always right."

In fact, I have my own joke: **"In my salon, I'm always right."**



This situation highlights at least two major issues: The client came in with a serious problem that we fixed, correcting previous mistakes and perfectly evening out the colour.

Yet, she tried to use this as an excuse to get a discount or avoid paying altogether.

This could have had a lasting impact on my 16-year-old apprentice, discouraging her from pursuing a career in the industry.

That's why, in this case, the client was not right, and I would never allow anyone to take advantage of my team like that.

Early in my career, I took every unhappy client personally. I would spend days questioning what I did wrong.

But whether it was my mistake or simply a client who is never satisfied, I learned that dwelling on it changes nothing.

What matters is not letting it distract you from your path. When should you actually worry?

You should only be concerned if a large number of your clients are unhappy.

That's when you need to analyse what's happening. If you serve 500 clients per month and receive 5 complaints, it's likely not your fault.

That doesn't mean you should ignore complaints—you should always pay attention—but if there's no real pattern, then you're probably dealing with a client who is never satisfied with anything.

## Handling Complaints Without Hurting Your Business

These situations are not only about clients—they are also about how you handle your team.

Before blaming an employee, take a deep breath. I know you've given everything to build this salon, and you want it to be perfect.

But if you lose a stylist who serves 495 happy clients per month just because of 5 complaints, you'll face even bigger problems: Finding a replacement.

Holding interviews. Risking that the new hire is worse. Damaging team morale.

When analysing complaints, look at the big picture—not just one incident.

If a stylist consistently has bad reviews and unhappy clients, then it's a real issue.

But if the same stylist successfully serves hundreds of people with only a few complaints, don't be too quick to criticize them.

**Lesson:** Your reaction to one complaint should never be bigger than the success of your entire team.

## How to Handle a Difficult Client:

First, calm the situation. A loud argument in the salon is bad for everyone.

If other clients are watching, de-escalate things professionally. Offer a small gift, a free product, or a complimentary service (only if you believe it will resolve the situation).

Once things are settled, make a final decision about that client.

If a client is abusive, aggressive, or disruptive, letting them go is better for your business in the long run.

**Lesson:** A toxic client can cost you much more than just one bad experience—they can destroy your team's motivation.

## How to Handle Fake Negative Reviews

A Smart Strategy for Handling Negative Reviews I have a very clever tactic for dealing with bad reviews.

Whenever someone leaves a negative review, I always respond personally as the owner of the company, asking the client to contact me directly and providing my email.

This approach has several benefits:

1. It moves the discussion out of the public eye, preventing potential and existing clients from seeing an ongoing argument.

2. It shows that the owner cares and takes action.

Everyone makes mistakes, but what matters is how you handle them.

3. It builds trust.

Even if I know the issue isn't on our end but with the client, the public perception is that we take every concern seriously.

Whether I take further action or not depends on the situation—but the important thing is that it appears handled!

In general, Respond professionally. Never get defensive—thank them and offer to resolve the issue privately.

Encourage happy clients to leave reviews. The best way to fight fake reviews is by flooding your page with genuine positive ones.

Expose obvious fakes. If a competitor or a fake profile leaves a review, calmly point out that they were never a client.

Monitor review trends. If you notice a pattern of fake reviews, report them and warn your staff to be aware of potential sabotage.

Stay focused on real clients. One fake review doesn't define your business—your actual customers do.

**Lesson:** Keep delivering great service, and no fake review will ever stop your success. (Content of "Quick Test – How Good Are You at Handling Salon Problems?" not provided in source)

## Final Thought – How You Handle Problems Defines Your Success

You can't make everyone happy, and that's okay.

Analyse problems logically—don't react emotionally. Protect your team from toxic clients. Bad reviews will happen—don't let them consume you.

A strong team will overcome any conflict if you foster the right atmosphere.

Running a salon isn't just about hair and beauty—it's about managing people, handling conflicts, and staying strong in the face of criticism.

Problems will come, but your reaction defines your success. So, next time a challenge appears, take a deep breath and ask yourself: 'Is this worth my energy?' Focus on what truly matters—your loyal clients, your talented team, and your unstoppable vision for your salon.

*"You can't stop negative things from happening, but you can control how you respond to them. That's where real power is." — Oprah Winfrey*

## Chapter 8: Managing Multiple Salon Locations

I remember visiting a friend's salon. We were supposed to have coffee and catch up, but he was cutting hair, answering the phone, handling the register, and even sweeping the floor while chatting with me. Probably everyone knows a colleague like that, or you might even recognise yourselves in the words: 'If I don't do everything myself, nothing gets done right,' he told me 😊 A year later, he tried opening a second location. It failed within six months."

Many salon owners dream of opening a second location, but the reality is that if your first salon depends on you to function properly, you are not ready to expand.

I've heard salon owners say: "If I'm not in the salon for a day, everything falls apart."

This is a red flag. If you cannot step away from your business without chaos, opening a second location will only bring double the stress and double the problems.

## The First Sign That You Are Ready

One of the clearest signs that you are truly ready for expansion is if you can go on vacation for two weeks and: Actually, relax without constant phone calls and stress. Return to find that nothing disastrous has happened. I knew a salon owner who, every time he took a vacation, closed the entire salon until he got back. He couldn't even imagine leaving his team unsupervised. If this is your mindset, opening a second salon will only create double the stress, double the problems, and double the chaos.

## The Difference Between a Stylist, a Teacher, and a Business Leader

There are four levels of mastery in the salon business, and each requires a different mindset and skillset.

The Four Levels of Mastery in Salon Business:

1. Being a great stylist – Mastering the craft and delivering excellent services.
2. Being a great teacher – Training and mentoring others, passing on your knowledge.
3. Being a great salon manager – Handling bookings, finances, marketing, and employee management.
4. Being a business leader – Running multiple locations, developing the brand, and focusing on expansion. The challenge?

Going from stylist to manager is already hard. But managing multiple salons requires high-level leadership skills—it's a completely different game.

## Delegation – The Key to Growth

To successfully run multiple locations, you must learn to delegate—**not just to people, but to systems.**

- **Train people who can replace you** – at least for daily operations.
- **Trust your team** – micromanaging will slow down your growth. Let go of the need to control every detail.
- **Implement a Centralized System** – Attempting to run multiple locations with paper or disconnected tools is business suicide. **You need a cloud-based system like [Appointica](#) that acts as your "digital manager," allowing you to monitor performance, cash flow, and bookings across all locations in real-time without physically being there.**

The less your brain is occupied with daily salon issues, the more successful you will be in growing your business.

Your mind should be focused on:

- Building and strengthening your brand.
- Finding and negotiating new locations.
- Partnering with key industry players.
- Spotting and hiring top talent.
- Staying ahead of the competition.

If your time is spent handling small daily salon problems, you will never have the clarity and vision needed to grow your business.

## Finding the Right Manager: The Biggest Mistake Salon Owners Make

I had an amazing nail technician who was an absolute professional.

She got along perfectly with everyone. At the same time, I needed another manager, so I decided to give her a chance.

Even now, as I tell this story, I still can't fully understand what happened.

Within just a week of her promotion, she had managed to have conflicts with absolutely every employee in two salons.

They didn't want to see her, and some even threatened to quit.

In the end, not only did it not work out, but I had to let her go because the damage she caused was beyond repair.

It turned out that she had dreamed of this moment and had a strategy completely different from mine—she wanted to prove her own methods to me.

A great technician is not automatically a great leader. Look for someone who: Naturally motivates and unites the team.

Can handle difficult clients and employee conflicts. Has strong organizational and communication skills.

The best approach is to promote someone with natural leadership skills, not just technical expertise.

Additionally, hiring an external manager: Costs significantly more because they need a full salary.

Struggles to integrate into an existing team. An internal promotion with a small percentage of revenue keeps the manager motivated while still earning from services.

## The Dangers of Expanding Too Fast

When you become successful, offers start coming in: Hotels want to partner with you. Landlords offer you prime locations. Investors propose business deals. It's tempting to think: "I'm doing well, I can afford to expand!"

The mistake? Using operational cash flow to expand too soon. Why is this dangerous? A slow period can wipe out your savings. Key employees leaving can destabilize your operations.

Unexpected expenses can force you to take on debt. A good salon management system gives you a clear picture of real profit vs. revenue, ensuring you expand only when truly ready.

## Are You Really Ready to Expand? (Self-Test)

Take 5 minutes to answer these questions: Can your first salon run without you for at least 2 weeks?

Do you have a manager you can fully trust? Are your finances stable enough to cover 6 months of losses if needed?

Do you have a plan for marketing the new location?

If you answered "No" to most of these, you are not ready yet.

But if you answered "Yes"—then it's time to take the next step!

## Final Thoughts – Readiness is Crucial for Expansion

- If you are still running around your first salon like an octopus, you are not ready to expand.
- If you can't leave your salon for a week without chaos, you are not ready.
- If you don't track your finances properly, you are not ready.
- Expanding successfully is about patience, planning, and making decisions based on data—not emotions.
- If you're ready for that step—go for it. If not, build your foundation first.
- The opportunity will still be there when you're truly prepared.

*"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."* — **African Proverb**

## Chapter 9: Financial Compass and Tech Solutions

Mastering Cash Flow and the Power of Salon Business Software

### Fundamental Money Management Mistakes

Beyond the strategic mistakes in pricing and location, I observed several fundamental financial errors that doomed businesses to instability, even those with clients:

- **Lack of an emergency fund:** Many owners invest all their money into opening the salon without leaving a reserve for unexpected expenses or slower months. A good rule is: always keep at least 3 months' worth of expenses in savings.
- **Over-reliance on credit:** Some owners take out large loans thinking they will easily repay them. But if revenues drop, the loan payments remain and quickly lead to a crisis.
- **Excessive initial investment in equipment:** Buying the most expensive chairs, mirrors, and decor before you have a stable client base is a recipe for

trouble. It is better to start more modestly and reinvest profits into improvements.

- **Ignoring seasonal fluctuations:** The salon business has strong and weak periods. Many owners enjoy the large revenues during the summer and around holidays but fail to plan for the slower months like January and February.

For many colleagues, this is a boring topic, although they know it's important. Anyway, that's why I left it for the penultimate chapter :)

## Introduction: The Inseparable Link Between Finance and Technology

Many new salon owners focus only on profit, but the biggest reason businesses fail isn't lack of profit—it's poor cash flow management. Even a profitable business can run out of money and go bankrupt if the cash flow isn't controlled.

I realised how much I needed software when I opened my third salon. At that time, salon management software was just starting to emerge, but nothing fully met my needs. In today's digital age, especially with the advent of Artificial Intelligence, sound financial management and effective software are not just useful, but absolutely inseparable for the success of any salon.

## Understanding Financial Fundamentals – Why Cash Flow is More Important Than Profit

### What is Cash Flow?

- **Cash flow** = The money coming in and out of your business on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.
- **Positive cash flow** = You have more money coming in than going out.
- **Negative cash flow** = You are spending more than you're making.

A salon can look successful on paper, but if all the money is tied up in unpaid invoices, product stock, or expensive equipment, you can still struggle to pay rent, salaries, and bills.

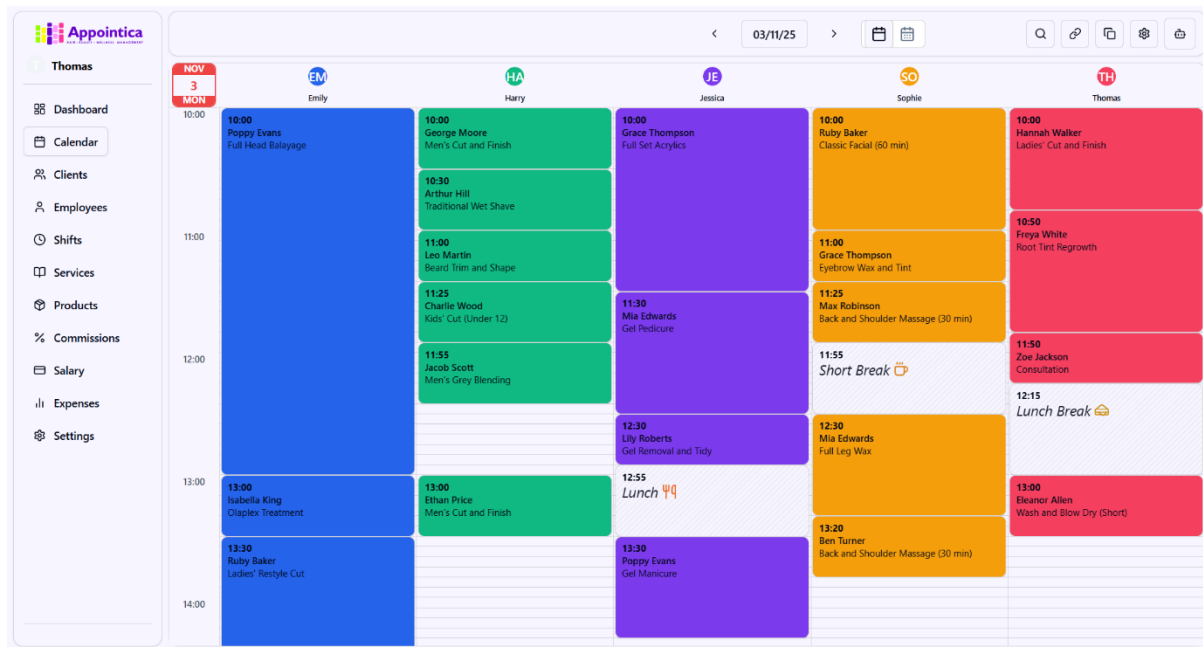
When I had already built my salon chain, salon management software solutions weren't very advanced, especially for the financial tracking features I wanted. I had no choice but to develop my own software, which I called Alkaya Soft.

I wanted a system that could:

- Calculate salaries and commissions automatically.
- Generate accurate financial reports and statistics.
- Store client formulas for hair colouring and suggest them at checkout.

- **Prevent losses and track every expense.**

Since there was no software that could do all this, I had to hire a team to develop my own system. The moment I started using it, I realised how many mistakes I had been making without even knowing it. Years later, my colleagues were impressed by how well my system worked, and I decided to start selling it.



As I helped salon owners set up the software, enter all income and expenses, and automate calculations, a shocking pattern emerged: **Many of them realised for the first time that they were operating at a loss.**

Some salon owners, who had believed they were making a profit, suddenly saw that their expenses were higher than their income. Some of them were shocked.

Why were so many salons losing money without realizing it? The answer rarely lay in a lack of clients, but rather in a complete lack of financial hygiene.

**The "Pocket Money" Trap** The single biggest financial mistake I observed was that most owners treated their business cash register like a personal wallet.

- **Scenario A:** A product delivery arrives, but there's no cash in the register, so the owner pays from their personal pocket.
- **Scenario B:** The owner orders personal items (like shoes), and when the courier arrives at the salon, they take cash from the business register to pay for them.

This creates massive confusion. At best, you are unaware of your real expenses. At worst, you are slowly draining your salon's cash flow without realizing it. Many owners—especially those supported by a wealthy spouse or another income source—keep pouring personal money into the business to cover these "holes," turning the salon into a luxury hobby rather than a profitable business.

## The Invisible Leak: Operating Without a System

Even if you are disciplined with your cash, running a salon without software creates "invisible losses." You think you are doing fine, but you don't realize how much money you are leaving on the table every single day.

### Common "Silent" Financial Losses:

- **Missed Bookings:** A paper diary is only open during business hours. Software allows clients to book online 24/7 (while you sleep).
- **"Dead Gaps":** Small, unusable 20-minute intervals between appointments that are too short for a full service but too long to be wasted.
- **Product Waste:** Overusing colour or shampoo because no inventory tracking exists.
- **Flying Blind (No Clear Business Picture):** You lack a real-time overview of your business health. You don't know your exact income versus expenses, which services are your bestsellers, and which ones are simply not selling. You are making decisions based on guesses, not facts.

## Call to Action – Assess Your Salon's Efficiency

Try This Today: Are You Managing Your Salon Efficiently? Take 15 minutes and ask yourself:

1. How many tasks are you still doing manually (booking, payroll, inventory, reports)?
2. How much time do you lose every week?
3. What would change if all these tasks were automated?

If the answer is 'a lot,' then you already know what your next step should be.

**Lesson:** If you don't track your numbers properly, you could be losing money without even realizing it.

## Final Thoughts – The Synergy Between Financial Discipline and Technological Tools

A salon that runs out of money shuts down, even if it's profitable on paper.

- Always track and plan ahead: Don't just assume money will always come in.
- Be smart with spending: Buy what you need, not what looks good.

You can cut hair without software. You can even run a successful salon without it. But you will always be running behind—working harder instead of smarter. The best salons in the world don't just have great stylists. They have great systems. And that's what makes them unstoppable. If you're serious about growing your salon, investing in the right system is not optional—it's a necessity.

Sound financial discipline, supported and facilitated by intelligent software, is the foundation upon which every stable and prosperous salon is built.

*"Revenue is vanity, profit is sanity, but cash is reality." "What gets measured gets managed." — Peter Drucker*

## Chapter 10: Two Sides of the Coin – Reflections on the Entrepreneur's Journey

There are no words to truly describe the feeling of going from a poor kid who wore his father's hand-me-downs to standing at a cocktail party, surrounded by people I once watched on TV—people who were eager to meet me.

Maybe that's why I was always so close to my employees. I helped them, vouched for them, covered expenses when we went out, and even let them drive my cars—things most bosses wouldn't do. The feeling of being in a position to help others, to have people rely on you, is incredible.

But unfortunately, I also had my share of betrayals, and those hit me hard.

My eldest son had attended seven different kindergartens across Bulgaria by the time he was six years old. He was raised by his grandmothers, a paid nanny, and even some of our employees while my wife and I were drowning in work.

When you work with five-star hotels and luxury spas, one of the conditions is that your locations must be open every single day to serve the hotel guests. That means on Christmas Eve, we closed at 10 PM—by the time I got home, my kids were already asleep. We worked on Christmas, on New Year's, and on every major holiday you can imagine.

We survived the 2008–09 global financial crisis. We survived 2014, when Russia invaded Ukraine, and all the Russian tourists—our main clients in the resorts—disappeared overnight. And I survived COVID, which, frankly, was pure luck. I sold my last salon just six months before the pandemic.

The new owner wasn't so lucky. Imagine taking out a loan, investing everything into your first salon, and then the government shuts you down for a total of eight months. Eight months with no revenue, no chance to build your business, but with the bank still expecting its payments. The biggest challenge for me was that, as a business owner, I could never stop thinking about the business—day or night, whether it was thriving or struggling. It was impossible for me to just sit at home on a Sunday or relax on vacation, knowing that customers or employees might need me.

The concept of 'work-life balance' is very popular right now. However, such a thing simply doesn't exist when you own a large business. The fact that more salons have started operating on Sundays proves this. When you have invested thousands and put in years of effort, only to see competitors popping up on every corner and operating seven days a week, you have no choice but to take action. The market won't wait for you to find your balance.

On the other hand, if you've built yourself up as a true professional, any salon will welcome you with flowers and pay you well—enough to afford a decent life, buy a house with a mortgage, get a car, or pursue whatever priorities matter to you.

Everyone handles stress differently, but one thing is certain: when you work for someone else, the stress is significantly lower. You'll have far more free time to spend with your family or to do the things you enjoy.

Priorities vary from person to person. And if you are truly great at what you do, you will receive the respect and treatment you deserve—if nothing else, because they simply can't afford to lose you.

Don't get me wrong—I'm not trying to discourage you. Being at the top were some of the best years of my life, and I often look back on them with a smile. I just want to show you both sides of the coin.

My advice to you is to first find balance and understand that happiness is not directly tied to money—it's tied to your mindset. There are countless examples of celebrities who were on top of the world, had everything, yet died alone in their homes. Clearly, money didn't help them find happiness.

On the other hand, you'll see people who aren't super wealthy but are always smiling and in a great mood. That's because they've learned to appreciate the small things in life. I used to think these ideas were silly too. But as Jim Carrey once said:

*"I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer."*

At the end of the day, true wealth isn't in your bank account, but in how you feel about the life you've built.

As you can see, my own priorities have shifted over the years. Today, I value peace of mind, having quality time for my family, and the opportunity to raise good, grounded children.

However, my passion for the industry hasn't faded—I still love solving problems and helping businesses thrive. As many of you know, this is exactly why I created my reservation software.

**If you found value in my story, please consider following me and sharing this with your network. My goal is to reach and support as many colleagues as possible so we can all grow together.**

Please do not hesitate to write to me with any questions you may have. You can find my contact details and social media channels: [Appointica](#) [Instagram](#) [Facebook](#) [LinkedIn](#)

*Best wishes*

*Nev*