



YOUR SPACE the client's place

As an owner or manager of a salon, we have the perfect environment to create a personal connection for our clients. I don't mean becoming friends outside of work, but building a consultative relationship where clients feel at home while in our professional space. By **Deborah Mangum-Copelli**.

DO YOU EVER wonder why some therapists seem to get the most client requests when they might not be the most technically proficient? It's often because they have something far more compelling than professional skills – a bond with each client.

Studies confirm the most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is by listening and building rapport with compassion; by engaging

all our senses. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give our clients is our time and attention. Those that have perfected this art are respectful, genuine and sincere in their fulfillment, and the rewards are bountiful for both parties.

How can we better connect with clients and create an atmosphere of community within our place of business? Research suggests that compassion is our number one advantage, and a primal instinct we all have as humans. If we feel and project caring to others we will also reap measurable benefits. Even at the age of two, humans will naturally reach out to another who might be in need.

As adults our instincts might be to share and help others, but often we stop ourselves for fear the recipient might think we want something in return. Or, we self-judge, and convince ourselves out of this selfless state for one reason or another. But when we retreat, we are not only missing out on the wellness component of social compassion, but we are psychophysiological suffering as well.

That sense of subjective belonging carries multiple rewards. We are 50 per cent more likely to live a longer life with a stronger gene expression for immunity. And we will have lower rates of anxiety and depression, just by reaching out to others. By being more connected in a meaningful way, we will enjoy higher self-esteem and empathy and be better able to regulate our emotions. This creates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being. Brain imaging studies actually show greater brain growth and synaptic activity when subjects are exposed to compassionate images. And when the subjects actually acted on their altruism, science shows the advantages are compounded.

The learning goes on to show that by not having social connection, or having low connection, it is actually worse for our health than smoking, high blood pressure and obesity. Low social connection is associated with higher cellular inflammation, which increases our health risk. The rates of anxiety and depression also elevate when we don't feel connected. Without connection we have slower rates of recovery from diseases, increased antisocial behavior and even violence and higher rates of suicide.

We know that loneliness, isolation and alienation are on the rise due to many factors; some are that family and friends live apart and don't have the physical contact that perhaps their parents and grandparents had. And there is growing reason to believe social media is another factor, as some people replace their real time human interaction with technological devices. Loneliness is the main reason why people seek psychological counselling as they struggle with a lack of hope or change.

These health and wellness benefits don't relate to, "how many" friends you have, but instead your internal sense of connection. So, in this case, if you feel your 1000+ Facebook friends are truly there for you in times of duress and need, then you are obtaining connection benefits. This is true as well for kids who will play with anyone in the playground; they feel genuinely connected for that time period and obtain a warm and fuzzy return as well. Ever wonder why your client having a long waxing treatment is getting deep and meaningful? She's possibly getting her monthly dose of "connection" with no fear, guilt or shame. Smile, because you just got a big healthy boost of compassion as well!

You can learn to build and nurture an internal sense of connection by giving, sharing, supporting and doing random, and scheduled, acts of kindness for others. The research supports that volunteering and compassion has huge health benefits and creates a sense of connection and purpose in life. And if you need help, ask for help; it creates a sense of connection and belonging for those we ask, which also benefits them.

Being happy within yourself and taking care of your body, mind and spirit lowers your stress levels and increases your sense of connection and willingness to reach out to others, making them happier and increasing the overall circle of connectedness.

At Stanford University Medical School there is even a class called "Compassion Cultivation Training". Isn't it amazing that a class such as this is now taught to medical students? And how wonderful that Western medicine is making a turn towards preventative health and wellness in 2016; perhaps there will soon be a new paradigm for doctors and their "bedside manner".

And now some practical advice to increase you, your staff's and your client's sense of connection within your business: **Time required:** 10 minutes
Observe and evaluate: For the next month, take a good look around the public spaces in your workplace; i.e., your reception and/or relaxation lounge.

How To: Count how many words, images and objects are related to social connectedness. This can include pictures of people interacting, or words like "together" and "friendship". **Change and create:** Notice if there are any empty walls, shelves or spaces where you could place or replace these "together" ideas in your public areas. What about the furniture? Is it conducive to clients chatting with each other or enjoying the space as a group?

Why you should try it

Research suggests that even subtle reminders of connection, operating below the conscious level, can lead to concrete and measurable increases in caring behavior among us all. This exercise shows you how you can add reminders to yourself, your staff and your clients on real life social connectivity.

Why it works

We and our clients are often too busy and frequently distracted by our own problems and agendas. By creating reminders of social connection in our workspaces, we disrupt this all-too-frequent self-focused tendency, and reorient our attention to other people. When we feel connected to others, we are more likely to want to help them, perhaps because throughout our evolutionary history, caring for those close to us was essential to the survival of our species.

Thrive and Survive is what we all want for our business, our staff, our clients and ourselves. If just by a few simple adjustments internally and externally we can create a warm and hospitable community within our environment, then we are increasing client loyalty and also adding value to our clients' health and wellness. And as we've learned, with connectedness, the entire workplace benefits abundantly. "Let's all meet (at your salon or spa); we can each get a facial at the same time," can become a familiar phrase uttered by your clients and their family and friends, just like a favorite café is for a coffee and a chat. And it's all because they feel so connected in your space. ■

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Some of the research used for this article, can be found at:

<http://www.emmaseppala.com/connect-thrive-infographic/>
<http://ccare.stanford.edu/uncategorized/connectedness-health-the-science-of-social-connection-infographic/>



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