

H.E.A.T.

The 'H' in H.E.A.T is for 'hear'.

Hear the complaint, don't interrupt, listen, really listen. Listen with your eyes and listen with your ears. Don't jump to the defense, don't be planning your defense and mentally rehearsing the next thing you are going to say, just listen attentively to what they are saying. If you really listen to people, you start to diffuse some of their emotion and anger if you don't listen you will quickly inflame the situation.

The 'E' in H.E.A.T. stands for 'empathize'.

It takes courage to complain, be thankful that they have complained because they are giving you the opportunity to respond. Many people never complain because they are too intimidated, they just vote with their feet and never come back and that deprives you of the opportunity to learn why they were unhappy and remedy the situation so that it doesn't happen again. Creating empathy is about your body language, don't stand above them and talk to them through the mirror, sit down next to them and talk to them face to face. Creating empathy is about the words you use, say... "I understand you are unhappy...Thank you for bringing this to my attention..." You don't create empathy when you are argumentative, angry, and defensive. You create empathy when you ask yourself how would I feel if I were in her shoes, regardless of whether they are right or wrong, how would you feel if you were them?

The 'A' in H.E.A.T. stands for 'apologize'.

It doesn't matter whether it is or isn't your fault, resist the temptation to apportion blame or make excuses. Just apologize. "My apology that you are not happy... My apology that it is not what you wanted... My apology that you didn't get what you expected..." No if's, no but's, just an apology.

The 'T' in H.E.A.T. stands for 'take action', offer a solution, a next step.

What might that be? There isn't a generic one size fit's all 'action' to take, it might be an offer to repair the problem, it might be an offer of a refund, it might just be saying "thank you for bring it to my attention I will ensure that it doesn't happen again". But take some action, take responsibility, and offer some solutions.

In summary

We spend a lot of time and money attracting clients and training our team to be able to fulfil their needs. Unfortunately, some clients for a variety of reasons are unhappy and complain. Many hairdressers tend to get defensive or lay blame elsewhere to 'get the complaint out the door as soon as possible' instead of taking steps to remedy the situation to a positive outcome. So next time you get a complaint remember the H.E.A.T acronym. It helps you focus on the positive steps needed to handle complaints and achieve a win: win outcome.

As a coaching exercise, brainstorm with your team

- How do we currently handle complaints?
- Is there a specific area that as a salon we need more training in to reduce the number of complaints?
- Role play complaint situations using the H.E.A.T. acronym
- Come up with a scenario of possible action steps for the most common complaints
- Ensure there is a clear policy as to who has authority to offer refunds or credits

Finally, there is a great quote from Bill Gates the founder of Microsoft he said, "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning."

