

Chapter

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Bring Out the Best in People Around You

By Janelle Koncan Nagy

If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well.
If you are a teacher, do a good job of teaching. If your gift is to encourage others, do it!
Romans 12:7-8

As a young girl, I would watch in fascination when my parents got ready to go out for a big evening. I would help my mom set her hair in rollers and pin curls. She would put on a fitted sheath dress, gartered stockings, high heels, rhinestone earrings and glamorous red lipstick. She'd fluff out her hair, spray it into place, and she was quite the knockout! My dad would shine his shoes and then groom his hands that took a beating from his job at the steel mill. He'd inevitably nick his chin when shaving and sport a piece of tissue there until he left the house. A little Brylcreem and a slap of skin bracer, a crisp white shirt, cufflinks and he became a new man.

I loved the way my parents transformed into movie stars right before my eyes. That experience, coupled with the curse of an unruly head of hair, is what probably steered me toward the beauty industry.

The salon of my dreams appeared in my hometown in the 1970's and it changed my life. I was no longer relegated to a rubber-banded ponytail. Gone was my bushy, wiry and hard to manage hair so proudly handed down from my father. My new shag hairstyle was a dream come true. It didn't matter how I combed it or how the wind blew it; my hair still looked great.

The salon owner, Connie Pagano, became my mentor. Upon completion of my formal schooling, I began to work with him. His customer service skills were impeccable and he would remove the cape from his customer's shoulders with the flourish of a matador. Customers knew they looked absolutely perfect before they left. As the demand for my own services grew, I

frequently worked long past closing time with him to accommodate our guests.

One of my customers owned a successful drywall and painting company. She became a great friend and encouraged me to go into business for myself. I began to dream of having more control over my destiny and soon opened my first of two salons.

The most difficult part of running my own business was coming to the realization that I could not be an effective leader and also provide my guests with the level of individual attention they deserved. After twenty years, I reluctantly hung up my shears and literally mourned. I feared losing the intimate friendships I treasured with my guests. I began to devour books on customer service and leadership. I learned to redirect my creativity and to find new ways to bring out the best in the people around me.

While working with a business coach, I implemented a "level system" of performance based rewards that would make the business stronger and help retain my employees. The transition period was initially met with resistance and fear which soon was replaced with hope and confidence for a much better future. We now had a career growth plan, monthly coaching, accountability and feedback. We lost some of our staff who felt uncomfortable with the new system, but they were replaced by a stronger group of professionals who embraced the new structured system and the rewards it offered for all.

My business has grown and become like its geometric namesake, the octagon, a symbol of harmony and balance. We are well known for providing both the classic and the latest trends in hair color and styling along with a collection of hair extension services that add beautiful length, thickness and volume to any head of hair. Octagon's strong commitment to every bride's satisfaction is demonstrated by our attention to details and our flexibility which enable the wedding day to flow smoothly. Our goal is that the entire bridal party can enjoy picture perfect looks that endure the rigors of the day.

Stress is no stranger to anyone, especially here in the Chicago area. Relief can be found through the spa services we offer which include therapeutic massage, specialized skin care, soothing pedicures and hydrotherapy treatments.

Operating my business successfully over the years has taught me several key principles that are essential to any entrepreneur:

- 1 Listen to your customers – they will tell you what they do and do not like.

- 2 Welcome suggestions and pay attention to complaints – they can be great opportunities to grow.
- 3 Don't try to micro-manage – surround yourself with people who successfully do what you cannot. In other words: DELEGATE!
- 4 Your customers and your staff are your biggest assets – if you don't take care of your people you will find yourself very lonely.
- 5 Set aside time to work *on* your business – not just *in* your business. We've all heard the saying: “When you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” Think about your best-case scenarios and put them into action.
- 6 Make a list of your goals and the steps you need to take to achieve them. Give yourself a timeframe and a deadline for completion.

I used to spend much of my time frustrated because I was trying to take care of every aspect of the business by myself. I am an idea person. The accounting, education planning, inventory management, and the putting out of day-to-day fires sapped my energy and creativity. There were never enough hours in a day. After living on the edge of exhaustion for years, I learned to empower others who are gifted in those areas. Now I am blessed to have a team of leaders who do so well what I could not. They are the key to the freedom I have today.

In the future, I visualize Octagon expanding its services by adding new salons co-owned with leaders in our present salon. Nutrition counseling would be a natural addition in order to address health and beauty issues from the inside out. I visualize alliances with other professionals whose talents and ethics I admire in the areas of image consulting, fitness and cosmetic dentistry. Eventually I would like to coach other salon owners to grow their businesses and improve their lifestyles.

My strongest advice to aspiring entrepreneurs: Become successful so that you can help

other people to do likewise.

Nugget of Wisdom (*Box around the title & statement)

Live debt-free, save wisely and give away the rest to others in need.

Janelle Koncan Nagy, Author

Janelle founded Octagon Spa & Salon in 1984, which today has a team of fifty plus bright and incredibly talented people who share a passion for bringing health and beauty to our world seven days a week. They live by the principle that relationships – and the powerful connections they have with their guests – are what define their success.

Octagon is more than just a hair salon and day spa. It is a gathering place where wonderful people meet to enhance their lives. They carve out a slice of time to find a refuge from the hustle and bustle of life. It is a reminder of how much enjoyment can be found by simply taking good care of yourself.

The Octagon gives back to the community through involvement in numerous charitable organizations. Octagon has had the honor to serve our Wounded Soldiers, shave heads for the St. Baldrick's Foundation for cancer research, minister to Teen Moms and reach out to those affected by Hurricane Katrina. Janelle loves serving along side of her husband Dick. They head up a PADS team that provides warm meals for homeless men every winter, and they go on mission trips with Cornerstone Church to impoverished villages in Guatemala. In response to America's current unemployment problem, Janelle has implemented a "Free Haircuts for Job Interviews" campaign. Octagon generously donates to local events, fundraisers and charities all year through.

Octagon Salon & Spa

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