

Technical and Communication Actions for Salons and Barbershops During COVID-19

Earning public confidence in a crisis.

By Bruce Bomier, MPH and Jennifer Lester

In what is now termed “the era of COVID-19,” what you do and how you communicate your actions are fundamental to the success and well-being of your salon and barbershop. It is critical that you guide your business using sound technical actions, and from there, gain the trust and confidence of clients, staff, colleagues, and the community through transparent communication.

Technical Actions

While we are learning a lot about preventing COVID-19, the fog of uncertainty is steadily lifting, and we now have reasonable postulates that businesses can follow with confidence in the interest of health and education. *(Detailed information about salons and barbershops and COVID-19 can be found at our website, along with lists of other responsible information sources [publichealthcouncil.org]).*

These are the current technical procedures your business should follow:

Mandate Personal Hygiene Protocols

This is the time to provide clear direction and establish personal hygiene protocols including wearing face masks, observing reasonable distancing, promoting personal control of coughing and sneezing, etc. For a good source explaining the benefits of masks, view [*It's Okay To Be Smart: How Well Do Masks Work.*](#)

Institute Hygiene Protocols

Every salon and barbershop setting is unique, so review your facility closely and institute hygiene protocols that include frequent sanitation wipe-downs of touched surfaces, with physical arrangements to encourage distancing, limitations on gatherings, restroom hygiene, and especially assuring wholesome ambient air distribution and dilution.

These and other safeguards can most effectively be accomplished on a business-by-business basis. Creative solutions and functional flexibility will almost certainly be a part of responsibly working through technical challenges.

Communication Actions

It won't be enough to simply do the right thing — your business must persuade clients, staff, and community that the COVID-19 threat is being wisely and humanely managed.

This may become the greatest and most threatening challenge you and your business must face.

Media and internet sources focus on newsworthy tragedy, causing a destabilizing sense of terror throughout much of our society. It is within this atmosphere of understandable public fear and desperation that your business must effectively communicate how it educates and protects your community.

Each situation is unique, but you have several communication action options:

A Single, Consistent Point of Contact

The salon and barbershop cannot have multiple information sources circulating differing factual information or even differing perspectives. Staff and clients must have a clear understanding that your business has a single point of information distribution for the public and for professional media sources. Communication must be structured to respond rapidly to events or concerns as they arise, and above all project a sense of calm concern.

Create a Communication Feedback Mechanism

The public is scared and uncertain about many things, so it is critical that you hear people out. Create a feedback mechanism where clients and staff can ask questions and the established contact person can dispel fears, correct inaccuracies, or calm nerves. During a crisis, transparency is paramount, so consider creating providing open forums to allow your staff to contribute to solving problems.

Hire Public Relations Support

Consider hiring professional public relations support to design and deliver sensitive messaging through predetermined communication channels. The more proactive and transparent you are with your messaging, the less likely media or others will be inclined to accept inaccurate information.

Develop a Rallying Cry

In times of crisis, communities need to unite. Work with your team to develop a word or phrase that encourages staff and clients to unite and act in support of your message. Get creative and make it fun.



Rationalize Every Action

Businesses make many decisions that affect perceptions of health and safety, and those rationales are subject to challenge. As an example, a certified industrial hygienist threatened legal action toward a small business about the material used in its face masks and made aggressive statements that were picked up by the local radio station.

Understandably, the business's staff and clients became concerned. But it turned out the industrial hygienist was wrong: the masks were made under guidelines suggested by OSHA and at least one other federal agency. You must be able to technically justify your many business decisions within the context of public health.

Operating decisions must be backed up with responsible technical support and communicated actively. Expect public scrutiny of decisions made for your salon and barbershop.

As your business confronts this monumental challenge and you work faithfully toward making responsible decisions, you must also prepare to effectively communicate at a level of unparalleled intensity.

About the Authors

Bruce Bomier, MPH, has spent almost 50 years working hands-on with health policy and designing public health solutions. He founded one of the largest environmental engineering firms in the Midwest, the Institute for Environmental Assessment (IEA), and was appointed by three successive governors to service on Minnesota's Environmental Quality Board. In 2007, Bruce retired from his engineering company to serve as Board Chair of Environmental Resource Council. He holds a bachelor's degree in forensics and a master's degree in public health/epidemiology.

Jennifer Lester is a communications expert based in Denver. She co-founded Philosophy Communication in 2001 and has counseled many educational institutions on marketing and public relations throughout her career. Jen currently holds a marketing board position with the University of Denver's Daniels College of Business and is on the advisory board of Public Health Council, a division of the Environmental Resource Council.