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Does the Beauty Industry Have a Credibility Problem?



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The Nail Extension Jaime Schrage

In last month's article, I urged fellow beauty professionals and salon owners to "prepare ourselves for the strong possibility of closing our salons again." Days later on July 13, California's Governor Gavin Newsom ordered the immediate closure of "personal care services" in counties reporting troubling increases in coronavirus cases, hospitalizations and deaths. This impacted more than 80% of the state's population; several large counties had not even reopened yet.

Exactly a week later, Governor Newsom responded to pressure from certain legislators, county officials and licensees with guidance giving those affected by his previous order the option to provide beauty services outside licensed establishments. Temporarily suspending an existing law that requires otherwise, further restrictions apply, like the proximity of the outdoor space to the establishment, compliance with OSHA heat illness prevention standards and a prohibition against shampooing, chemical services and electrology.

Not surprisingly, this drastic announcement attracted national attention, prompting beauty professionals across the country to consider whether they could and would operate outdoors

if that were their only option. Judging by the disbelief, anger and ridicule, few find this feasible or practical for a number of reasons: safety, weather, physical space, product performance, liability insurance coverage, landlord consent, neighboring businesses and more.

Recent developments provide ample opportunity to reflect on how we find ourselves in this position as licensed professionals. While there's considerable discussion about our financial hardships and personal sacrifices, very little centers on accountability. What's our individual and collective responsibility for our circumstances?

For my entire beauty career, I believed this to be true: success depends on compliance and adaptability, in that order. When asked for my expert opinion before this option was announced, I made my position clear:

allowing outdoor services sends an irresponsible and harmful message to consumers and beauty pros that there's always a workaround.

The same explanation applies to many other examples where our industry works around the rules,

from unlicensed activity and health and safety violations to labor exploitation and tax evasion.

Within the beauty industry, we value creativity, while regulators value compliance.

Now we're struggling mightily to convince governors, legislators, mayors, public health officials and consumers that we deserve to be open. No matter how many posts and comments we make, emails we send or petitions we sign, this industry has a credibility problem. Our efforts to reopen have been plagued by a compounding series of falsehoods:

False hopes that the initial shutdown would end quickly and our work and lives would resume with minimal disruption.

False equivalence of our nonessential salons with essential business. We do not provide vital goods and services like food and utilities.

False comparisons about the nature of our work. Prolonged and close physical interactions of clients and beauty pros during salon visits cannot compare to the interactions of shoppers and cashiers at grocery stores.

False claims that our training and licensure make us "health and safety experts." In no way does

a beauty school education make an expert of any student. We operate under minimal and outdated regulations, and many states don't even require continuing education.

False assurances that we have always complied with all existing laws and regulations. Consider your own actions and check your state's enforcement statistics before committing to this.

False promises about our abilities to maintain a safe and clean environment. Stop using the word "sterile" to describe your salon.

False statements that we have complied with recent government orders. Given the public defiance and our personal knowledge of individuals and salons operating "underground," we should know better.

False advertising of products and equipment to reduce/eliminate the risk of infection. For example, disposable wipes can not "sterilize" surfaces and skin, much less both.

False sense of security that results from questionable investments. No matter how much we spend, we can not "COVID-proof" salons or guarantee safety when our work depends on live interaction.

False information that no cases have been traced to beauty salons.

False accusations of persecution and discrimination of our industry. The government's authority

to protect the public takes precedence over our individual rights to engage in the beauty business.

False steps of threatening or pursuing legal action to force the courts to restrict the government's actions.

False front about the size of the beauty industry. Repeating an exaggeration, like the number of licensees in a particular state, does not make it true.

False perception that state boards should advocate for licensees. Government agencies regulate us to protect consumers. Want advocacy? Do your own, or join a trade association that shares your values.

What's true? Who has earned trust?

Please do our industry a favor - be truthful and trustworthy.

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