What hairdressing employers want
Many jobseekers get confused because they are unsure what employers are looking for in people seeking an apprenticeship. They answer questions with things they think employers want to hear and are disappointed when it doesn’t go down well.

We asked a group of young people interested in a career in hairdressing what they thought an ideal candidate.
They said...

- I’m creative.
- I’ve always loved hairdressing.
- I do my friends’ and family’s hair.
- I can already do some things.
- I’m passionate.
- I’m skilled.
- I’m hardworking.
- I’m friendly.
- I’m a team worker.
- I’m ambitious.
What hairdressing employers want

NEXT, we went and talked to a number of employers who employ and train apprentices. We asked them the same question. What are they really looking for in a new start apprentice? Their answers were as varied as that of the group of jobseekers. However it boiled down to three main areas.
They said we want staff who are:

- Reliable.
- Responsible or responsive.
- Ready and willing.

Let’s look at what they mean by these words and why they think they are important.
Reliable
What do employers mean by reliable?

- Staff will turn up to work on time.
- Staff will turn up to work every day they are rostered, especially busy weekends and late nights.
- Staff can be contacted for any changes (mobile phone not turned off or unavailable, no inappropriate or confusing voice messages).

Remember, many employers are older and still prefer voice to SMS, so don’t make it hard for them.

If you have children, make sure your childcare arrangements are in place and you have backup.

Employers have a business to run. If they didn’t need staff present, they wouldn’t hire them. It is no good to say “I can’t come, so don’t pay me.”
Responsible

What do employers mean by responsible or responsive?

• Don’t just turn up, but arrive with appropriate personal presentation (no dirty clothes or “I couldn’t get the washing done”).

• If you can’t come at short notice (sick or sick child), make contact early (“my phone had no credit” is NOT an excuse).

• If you need time off for something important, give plenty of notice; don’t just ask the day before. Come with solutions, not problems (e.g. “I have a specialist appointment next Wednesday, but Mary is happy to swap days off”).

• When you are shown what to do or how to something, do it again when necessary without being asked (employers say “I don’t want to have to tell them every time”).

• Take responsibility for your actions. If you have stuffed up, admit it, don’t make excuses.
Ready and willing

What do employers mean by ready and willing?

• Being work ready means you understand reliable and responsible.
• You must have your life in order, at least so far as work is concerned.
• You need to be able to leave your problems at the salon door.
• You must be ready and willing to work hard. This means being healthy and fit. Hairdressing is hard work, and you are on your feet for hours at a time on a busy day.
• You must be willing to learn.
• Practical skills take lots of practice and repetitions to perform well. No hairdresser has ever done it once and got it right.
• But they also want someone who is eager to learn and will do whatever it takes to succeed.
• You must be willing to follow procedures. Even if you think you know a better way, salon procedures should be followed rather than ignored or bypassed. Employers want you to do it their way, not your way.
Firstly we asked employers what was their pet hate. What is the worst thing a candidate could say?

- The answer was to avoid saying you are already skilled, that you do your friends’ and family’s hair, or anything along those lines.
- Employers have spent years learning hairdressing basics and more years getting good at it. They don’t like suggestions a school kid or untrained person can do it already.

Lastly, we asked employers what they love. What is the best thing a candidate could say?

- The answer was to talk about how much you want to learn to be a hairdresser, and how you admire the type of salon that the employer runs.
- Employers want keen people, but they also want people who are like them.
How can I get the best chance of getting a job?

(it all sounds scary and a bit too hard)
Step one

- Have a fully prepared résumé (your school, employment counsellor or family may be able to help).
- Have a copy you can leave, with contact details that work.
- In the interests section, include information about hobbies (even if they are only listening to music or following fashion).
- Have something in the section about your goals (do you want to own your own salon, work overseas, do photographic work, wedding etc).
Step two

Check out the salon you are applying to (walk past, use social media, do an internet search). Understand the style of salon and what makes you right for it (not just it right for you).
Step three

Go into the salon, don’t just ring or send an email.
Don’t just leave your resume; they are unlikely to get back to you.
Instead, ask when you can come back to see the owner about a job.
Step four

If you get an appointment, be 5 minutes early, not late and not 30 minutes early. You should go on an earlier bus, and hang around nearby to be sure you are on time. Know who to ask for by name (e.g. “I have an appointment with Michael for an interview at 3pm”).

Step five

Be dressed appropriately for the salon, a little better dressed if anything.
Step six

Practice answers to questions so that you sound confident, not nervous.
Step seven

Have a reason why they should give the job to you, rather than someone else (could be you live close, your family are supportive, you go to gym or dance or sport so you are healthy etc).
Collect some photos of the type of hairdressing you would like to do. Think about why you like them. This makes it easier to talk, and gives you an opening.
If you are invited to do a trial, great! This can be an opportunity to learn on the job. Before you accept though, get some advice from an employment consultant or careers advisor on whether what you are being offered is fair and legitimate.
Summary

Remember, if you really want a job in hairdressing, it will show in your interview and your actions.

Review what we said about what employers want and be prepared.

You may have to try a number of salons. Don’t be discouraged. You might get ten NOs before you get a YES!
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* Project team members: | ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry | Habitat Personnel | Auswide Projects