Hairdressing Business (Winchester)

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XX started hairdressing at 16 in local salons; she set up her own hairdressing business when she was 24. She had a child 2 years ago and continues her business around her son.

CG: What brought you to set up on your own as a hairdressers?

XX: I was working for a good 6 or 7 years and went travelling quite a lot. I enjoyed working with clients but I didn’t enjoy having to work the hours when the salon needed me to. I wanted more freedom, especially to travel more. So when I started to do clients outside the salon, private ones to raise money for travel, I could see how it would make sense for me to build that side up. I was looking at it as an opportunity to earn more money really, and then I found the flexibility to work for myself and choose my hours and my clients was a bonus.

CG: Now you look back, when you took the leap and set up on your own, has it delivered what you hoped for?

XX:: I already had quite a big client base when I left, I built up to it. So whilst I was at the salon I also worked with private clients in my own time (evenings and weekends and my days off). So I told all my existing clients to spread the word that I would be available for home visits and that worked really well. No expensive advertising or marketing, I think word of mouth is the best way to drive business if you can, it’s trust.

CG: So when you had R, how did change the way you ran the business? Your business is wholly reliant on you to deliver as an individual and R disrupts this both time wise and distance to travel?

XX:: So I have been very lucky with a lot of my clients staying loyal to me. When I had R I took maternity leave for 9 months and they obviously had to go off and find new hairdressers to do their hair. When I contacted everyone to say I was coming back to work and with reduced hours, there was a great response with lots coming back to me and re-booking back in. I knew there would be a drop off from some who had found alternative services, but then I wasn’t going to offer the hours that I did before, so I was lucky that the returned demand matched my reduced hours. Also I found those clients that did return have been particularly loyal.

It’s been great because coming back to work after R has been completely on my terms really. I have been able to pick and choose which clients and what hours. If I need extra money then I can pick up my hours when I want to. If I think someone has a special occasion coming up and I can fit them into my normal hours well then I don’t mind squeezing in the odd evening to help them out when my husband is at home.

I haven’t struggled with flexibility too much given like you said it all relies on me, I can’t pass responsibility on to anyone else. I was very lucky that so many of my returning clients were happy to wait or be flexible around timings. I had not done their hair for a year, if it meant that had to wait a few extra weeks for me to be able to book them in, they were happy to do that. Likewise some have to wait a bit longer in between appointments, but still they are happy to wait. I think when you have children people are a bit more understanding, so it’s changes how my clients see me too, they are more accommodating around my service times and availability to them. So if R has not been well, he comes first and no client has ever had a problem with that, likewise if their child is ill I show the same understanding and flexibility.

CG; If we think about how your business worked before R and now, how do you feel it has changed and what does it bring to you now that it did or didn’t before?

XX: Yes definitely the change has been enormous; before I had R I worked all the hours God sent. I love my job, I am really lucky that I love it, but I look back and see that I was a bit silly really. I would work 7 days a week and into the evenings. I was making really good money and saving for a house deposit and wedding, but I was shattered. Now I am much more selective about the hours I work and the clients I take on.

I actually find I enjoy my work so much more now. It gives me time to be me, just me again. I really enjoy my work and I have a really good balance now. I have days with R and days when I can go off and do my thing and you know be myself whilst earning money to contribute to our family. I do get a lot of joy from that, I like to be able to put my money down as well. That feels important too. But that me time is the best, just not running round endlessly after a small person all the time!

CG; So when you compare your business before and after R, would you say the benefits have broadened out to include more factors that weren’t relevant before him?

XX; Yes so before R was it solely focused on income, how many clients I can manage. I set the business up to do something I enjoyed of course (but I could have stayed on at the salon to do it) but mainly to make a lot more money, which I did. Definitely, I would be looking to book as many clients as I could do in a day and how many days I could fill, I would also take on extra clients and just work later because they would bring in more money.

Now I work and yes the money is important to our family, but I don’t work every hour anymore. I also have days home with R and look forward to those too. I do think it benefits me and us as a family that I do take the time out now to relax a bit more, it is only hair. I just have a different perspective and the business can flex to that. So if R is poorly I may re-arrange bookings, he has to come first and all my clients are so understanding now. Before R I wouldn’t have done that. It may be a nuisance but he is my priority and he comes first.

I feel that it is so different now; before it was all about money and income and now it is still about income but also just as important it’s about me, balancing my life and giving time for my head.

CG: So if we think about how you consider your own success, before R I assume that it was income whereas now it seems to be a balance of considerations?

XX: Yes before R I felt successful if I was making money, if I was busy and booked up. Whereas now I feel successful because clients have waited for me whilst I was on maternity leave and have come back to me when I started up again. Lots of people might lose most of their client base when they took a 9 month break, but I have been so lucky to have enough come back to me that my business is busy again. I mean I lost some, but them that’s normal. I view that as a real success, to have clients value me so highly that they wait and return. It’s a completely different way of thinking about it.

CG: So you value the business differently now?

XX: Yes definitely, so rather than earning as much money as I can it brings me that perfect mix of going out to a job I love, feeling satisfied that clients value me, being there for R and still bringing in income for the family. All those elements combined make me feel successful. It’s just a really nice balance, I’m not out working all hours and yet still have a successful business whilst being present for my young son.

Whilst I am working my parents and my in-laws look after my son and I feel that is also really beneficial to him.

CG: Yes the benefit of family close by is very common and do you find that this reinforces the wider family so everyone gains?

XX: It works really well as I know I am really happy with their ethics and how they care for him and they enjoy the bond that builds and see him grow. I grew without having any grandparents around so it’s great that R has all 4 actively in his life. What better way for him to grow up than have all the care from people who really do love him and will be with him for a long time.

CG: Do you feel this minimises the stress for you of being able to go out to work and enjoy it?

XX: Yes definitely, because I am one on one with a client and I have all their phone numbers if I am running late because I can text them and they are always understanding because they know the juggle too. Therefore the stress is much less. I think children can start school without basic skills like getting dressed and I can spend that time helping R become more independent. I am not rushing at home, I can take the time to be with him. Have the flexibility, clients who have children who also understand and family childcare makes for a good balance.

CG; Do you find you have a different relationship with your clients?

XX: Yes definitely, they are loyal and have stuck by me, they show understanding. Most of them I have been doing their hair for years and so I love to hear how their life has changed and their children have grown, things that they accomplish and now I R is part of that conversation too, which is really nice. I feel so much more empathy for key milestones, difficulties and changes. I can relate to it all so much more now that I have R, whereas before I didn’t have a clue what they were going on about and if I did I never really appreciated how hard it was for them. Now I fully understand how it is with children, full on 24-7, 365 days!

CG: So for you now, how do you feel in terms of your identity as a business woman?

XX: I still forget that I run a business, I think perhaps because I don’t have premises as I move for house to house. I suppose for me it’s just a job, yes there is paperwork, tax and the responsibility is all mine but I never really feel like I run a business. Maybe because I was setting up in business against a competitor, I didn’t really feel like I had competition in that way. When people ask me what I do, I just say I am a hairdresser I never say that I have my own business, I don’t really think of it like that to be honest.

CG: Why do you think that is?

XX: Maybe I just don’t feel like old enough? It is odd as I’ve been running my business for 9 years now, but then I was only 23/24 when I set up on my own and it felt young then to be doing it. It’s strange, I just can’t think of it in that way, even now. I view a business as setting up your own shop and I haven’t done that, so it doesn’t feel right. It’s just me who feels that, no one has made me feel like that, it’s just I’d feel like I was trying to be something I wasn’t.

CG; Do you think you will always do this, have the business?

XX: Yes, definitely. When I was younger I looked into setting up a salon, but the pressure felt too much, getting premises, finding staff who are reliable, keeping standards. When I was really busy before I had R my husband suggested I might want to take on someone, employ them and build a pool of hairdressers because I was turning appointments away. It’s a huge step of trust to employ other people. Having worked in salon when I was younger and know everything that goes on behind closed doors, it’s a huge investment and therefore risk to set up like that. All that rental and overheads and wages, for now as long as I have fuel in my car and tools in my bag I can go anywhere, which is amazing.

CG; So flexibility and control, is that critically important to you?

XX: Yes definitely, particularly the flexibility, I really value that. If I have a gap in my day I can nip off and take the dog for a walk, do the food shopping anything that needs doing really. Then that means on my days off I then get to concentrate on doing nice things with R rather than chores and that is really fantastic. I see friends with young children who commute up to London 4 days a week, they don’t pick their children up until 6.30 then race back for bedtime. I just find that exhausting, so stressful just thinking about it, when do you get everything done? There is no downtime, just chasing your tail. I really appreciate having my business when I compare, I really do have a great balance.

CG: Some women have described that they have the best of both worlds, how do you feel about that term?

XX; Oh yes, definitely. Being control means that my stress levels and therefore my family stress levels are minimised. On my day off, I have the mental space and energy to plan quality activities that both R and I can really enjoy together. If I was with him day in day out, I know I would really struggle to find the enthusiasm for it, the days would grind and I would struggle to give the variety and care that I can give now. I view my days working in the business as my days off really. It’s just different, a change from what can be a bit boring and yet if I need to be there for him I can be. I can chop and change to manage our family life, whilst still be able to get out and work for me.

CG; Does you feel that balance or mix makes you feel like a better mother?

XX: Oh yes definitely, undoubtedly. Personally for me, I love my son to pieces and I loved my maternity leave that was a really special time, I absolutely cherish that time but I need to work. For me to have the get up and go I need for the days I spend with him, I need to have worked outside the house. I really need those days, just to feel like I am contributing to society and to the home and to me, I need to be more than just at home, I need to be out. I think it is good for him too, not to have me at home all the time. He is a real mummy’s boy, so it’s good to have a break from me sometimes so he can be more independent. Those days with his grandparents and his day with dad on Saturdays whilst I am working is good for him. He needs to know I work too, I make money as well.

CG; Showing children that mum works too is a recurring theme…

XX: God yes definitely, as he’s a boy it’s really important. I have plenty of clients who say to me to being R with me when I go round, they have the toys etc and would love to see him, but this is my time, this is my space. I don’t want any crossover, this is me and this is my time. I don’t want him encroaching on this space, just as I shouldn’t on his space without me.

CG; This is your space and future?

XX: I have always earned money and my mum always did. I think it’s important to not lose sight of you when children come along. I need my independence, it makes me, me. My family worked hard when I was young and I need to work hard too. And it works brilliantly for us as a family and so why wouldn’t I?

CG; So no regrets about setting up on your own?

XX: Not at all, I loved the salon when I was young but in the long run being told what hours I have to work, being paid a fraction of what the customer pays… no, I was always going to set up on my own. It’s all on my terms.