“When a new client comes in, I have a consultation while I’m doing the pedicure,” says Lourdes Castillo, owner of Lourdes Nail Studio in Sarasota, Fla. “I look over the feet and begin to ask questions to decide what the client needs.” Castillo has taken classes in podology, so she uses the consultation time to talk about any conditions she sees, and also to educate her on which products she needs for at-home care. If she learns the client is diabetic, she opts for a special filing machine that cleans and shortens the nails and will not cut the skin.

HANDLING EXPECTATIONS Once you learn about the client’s health, lifestyle, and hopes for her nails, take the time to educate. “The consultation is a good time to let clients know what to expect and when to expect it,” says Burkholder. For example, explains Burkholder, a client may come in and want acrylics removed, and she wants perfect nails after the removal. She says she will acknowledge the limitation in being able to achieve that, but suggest an alternative. This could be gel-polish, or it could be a natural nail treatment, and the client would purchase for home care. During the service, Burkholder educates clients on the purpose and benefits of the products she is using. She revisits the conversation she had during the consultation. While applying strengthener, for example, she may say, “You told me your nails are weak, so I’ve chosen this strengthener.” She then teaches the client the importance of applying it every day and starting fresh at the end of the week. “I also have to tell clients to use the whole bottle,” says Burkholder. “Otherwise, they’ll use it once or twice and not see a difference.” She then tells new clients they will need to schedule extra time with new clients. However, new techs would likely benefit from cushioning the appointments of new clients with a few extra minutes. First, so they can listen fully and write down answers where appropriate. Second, new clients could take a little more time since they will require brief moments of consultation a number of times during the appointment. Burkholder says for new clients she will shape one nail, then stop and show the client. “I tell her to look at the length and the shape and let me know if that’s what she likes,” she explains. The learning curve of the new client could make the appointment last longer.

You’ve gathered the information, you’ve listened to your client, and you’ve educated her on products while you were performing her service. Don’t miss this crucial step to establish yourself as a knowledgeable professional. Pull retail items off the shelf and recommend steps for at-home maintenance. “We use baskets at our salon,” says Burkholder. “Any retail item we think a client should use at home, we gather together and place in the basket.”

Castillo and Burkholder have the experience and skill to conduct consultations as part of the first steps of a service. For this reason, they don’t schedule extra time with new clients. However, new techs would likely benefit from cushioning the appointments of new clients with a few extra minutes. First, so they can listen fully and write down answers where appropriate. Second, new clients could take a little more time since they will require brief moments of consultation a number of times during the appointment. Burkholder says for new clients she will shape one nail, then stop and show the client. “I tell her to look at the length and the shape and let me know if that’s what she likes,” she explains. The learning curve of the new client could make the appointment last longer.

Burkholder will say something such as, “While you were here, we talked about XYZ Products. I’ve put them up at the front desk for you.” And leave it at that. What do you do with all the information you’ve gathered, including which product recommendations she refused? As a stand-alone tech, you may be able to keep things organized on your computer or tablet. You could even create hard copy files on 4” x 6” client cards that contain all the information you need. In a larger salon, it’s likely you’re a step removed from the process and all the information is added into the computer by the front desk staff. If this is the case, make sure you have a way to add notes to the file, as Burkholder does. Ultimately, your client will expect you to remember the little ways you personalize her nails.

The consultation is a deciding point in your relationship with your client. Use that time to set yourself apart. You’re not just a pleasant conversationalist and talented nail artist. You’re an educated professional who can discover the goals of the client, and you’re in a position to help her meet her goals as you keep her hands and feet beautiful and healthy. Once you’ve established yourself as an empathic listener and a nail expert, you’ll earn her trust and loyalty.

Find out if your clients have any relevant medical conditions or allergies before providing services.

Note to Techs: 
[Insert salon name, address, phone, and logo here or just copy your business card] [Back should be lined to make notes]

CLIENT CONSULTATION FORM

Phone (home) (cell) (work)

What would you prefer we contact you? #1 #2

What services brought you into the salon?

What do you have any condition that could affect service options, such as allergies, diabetes or other circulation disorders, slow healing, sensitivity to any cosmetic ingredients? Are you pregnant?

How would you like your nails, hands, and feet to be different than they are today?

What services have you enjoyed in the past? How would you have improved the experience?

How did you find out about us?

Are you preparing for a special occasion?

What is your activity level/occupation?

Do you play any sports that take a toll on hands or feet?

What products do you currently use on your hands, nails, and feet?

Are there any special concerns you would like to discuss with your salon professional?

Thank so much for allowing us to get to know and serve you more effectively. If we can answer questions at any time, please feel free to contact any staff member. It is our pleasure to have you as our guest.