

GMSB 192 Transcript

[00:00:00] **Antony W:** Welcome to the Grow My Salon Business podcast, where we focus on the business side of hairdressing. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker, and I'll be talking to thought leaders in the hairdressing industry, discussing insightful, provocative, and inspiring ideas that matter. So get ready to learn, get ready to be challenged, get ready to be inspired, and most importantly, get ready to grow your salon business.

[00:00:28] **Antony W.:** Hey, it's Antony Whitaker here, and welcome to today's episode of the Grow My Salon Business podcast. As always, it's great to have you join us here. Now, I think it's important to try and predict the future purely so that you can anticipate and prepare for whatever the future may bring, but I also think that as the last three or four years have shown that you have to be prepared for whatever the world may throw your way. And be able to adapt and evolve with the Times. Now, my guest on today's podcast is Virginia Meyer. Virginia, has an extensive background in the product side of the industry, and although she isn't a behind the chair hairdresser, she's also been heavily involved in the education side of the industry. And as a co-founder and partner with Hair Colorist and Trichologist David Adams in the Fourteenjay Salon in New York.

[00:01:20] **Antony W.:** Now, I did speak with Virginia on the podcast at the very beginning of Covid in March, 2020, and that was in episode 32. And today I wanted to check back in with her and see how her business and the industry at large has evolved since then. So without further ado, welcome to the show, Virginia Meyer.

[00:01:40] **Virginia:** Well, thank you so much Antony. It is great to be with you and with all your listeners and wow, I cannot believe it's been three years.

[00:01:47] **Antony W.:** You know

[00:01:48] **Virginia:** it's crazy.

[00:01:49] **Antony W.:** I was just going to say that as, as I just did that introduction, it was like, it's three years since we spoke. It's like, oh my God, I can't believe that that is three years. now I'm going to ask our listeners that if they haven't, listened to our previous episode, which was a long time ago, three years ago. It was episode, uh, episode 32, I think I said. and it was an episode that you shared with a couple of other people to sort of talk about the anticipation of what Covid would bring. So we will come back to that in a minute, but I thought what I'd first of all do is ask you to sort of do, introduction of yourself. So sort of give us your two minute backstory. Who is Virginia Meyer? And then we can dig into, all the other stuff.

[00:02:32] **Virginia:** I love that happy to. So I have been in the business probably more than 40 years now. When I stopped to count I have to kind of like, oh my gosh, has it really been that long? But, uh, I started very organically answering the telephone in a salon many years ago and actually fell in love with what the salon is all about and what hairdressers do. You very rightly cited that I am not a hairdresser, but I am a card

carrying hairdresser groupie. I think that hairdressers are the most powerful people on the planet. I think you have the ability to change people's lives in your hands, and I knew very early on that I wanted to dedicate my life essence to supporting that and to helping hairdressers be successful and salon owners be successful. So I, from that sort of very, I. Easy start just answering the phone in the salon. Became the manager, had the opportunity to meet horst when Aveda was tiny, tiny I became the general manager of horst and Friends, which is now Jute. And then had the opportunity to work in distribution for about 15 years, where I helped salon owners every day be more successful with their business.

[00:03:49] **Virginia:** And then from there, moved internally to work as the Vice President of Global Education for Aveda for a number of years. And then from there I met my business partner, David. We had an education company pre Covid that we kind of quieted during Covid. Um, and, we also co-own a beautiful salon in Tribeca, New York, where I, like many of you who are listening, uh, work every day to support our team in being successful and to meet the changing demands of our guests. So, I love our business and I love what you're doing, Antony. And again, thank you so much for giving me the chance to be with you and your listenership. I really appreciate it.

[00:04:31] **Antony W.:** Thank you. Well, it's great to have you here and I know you've got a lot of wisdom to share across a lot of different areas of the industry. And you know, I was reflecting well with you before we push the record button about, you know, it's three years ago, as we've just said since we last spoke. And really when we last spoke, it actually wasn't for that long because as I said, we shared the episode with a couple of other people. but we were talking about it was March, 2020 and that was. That was sort of ground zero of covid, you know, this thing that was spreading around the world. And none of us rarely knew how long it was going to last. I think at the time a lot of us thought, a couple of weeks and this will be all over, you know, done and dusted. And, it certainly wasn't that case. Well, depending on where you were, for some people they did manage to get away with very, you know, short lockdowns, et cetera. but you know, our conversations around that time were all about trying to anticipate, well, what impact is this going to have on our business, on our team, on the industry, et cetera. and you had some great, insights that you offered at that time, which were really valuable. So I suppose what I want to do now, just to start with, is, as a salon owner in New York, and I know New York was hit really heavily, at the beginning of Covid in particular because there was a sort of a mass exodus of people, that left, Manhattan. and we can, we can dig into that. But let's just start off with talking about that, you know, what were the changes that happened to your business that weren't just things that last five minutes that, you know, that lasted months

[00:05:57] **Virginia:** Yeah.

[00:05:58] **Antony W.:** and maybe are going to be permanent. So, yeah. So over to you.

[00:06:02] **Virginia:** I, so interesting. You know, I, we should go back and listen. I'm curious about what my predictions actually were. Cause my instinct is what we thought was going to happen happened, but differently, right? Because we don't have a crystal ball. We can't really see. But so it was crazy. I mean, we were open, we were closed,

we were open, we were closed, we were open, we were closed. That initial time, we were closed for two weeks. We truly thought that was going to be it.

[00:06:30] **Virginia:** 12 to 18 months later, we were still working on reduced staffing. So everything changed. We had to reset everything. It was a wholesale level reset. We couldn't work the same hours. And then when. You know, and I think this has happened for a lot of people. Then when we could start to rebuild our hours, we discovered that our team just didn't want to work in the same way. So we had this beautiful cadre of just super loyal team members that had been with the business from the beginning and really helped us grow. Everybody was working a full-time schedule. Now nobody wants to work a full-time schedule, so we just had to say, okay, team, here we are. We love what we do, we love you, we love our guests. How are we going to put the blocks back in the box in a way that really truly works? So we put our flexibility hat on. We met with each team member and said, what do you want to work? How much do you want to work? We met them exactly there. We recast our hours of operation. We recast. We took a look at, sort of everything on the backend. We took a look at, benefits we took a look at. We've always had a very well-articulated compensation system. We feel very committed to making sure our staff has a clear path for growth with us. but we just used it as an opportunity to re-level set everything. The guests came back in droves, they're still coming back. We're still in a situation where for us guest demand is really outstripping our staffing levels. We've seen that level off a little bit, but it's still very prevalent. So. I just think the whole world changed and our business changed right along with it and we had to respond completely differently as leaders. And it's been great and it's been illuminating and I am pretty sure that for us, we're not going to go back to the way it was before. I think we're in this new time where, um, flexibility meeting the team where they are, making sure that we are as flexible for our guests as we can be. I think that's really the lens we're looking through today.

[00:09:05] **Virginia:** Yeah.

[00:09:06] **Antony W.:** Okay. That's interesting. so let's talk about the team first of all. Uh, so before that, you had x amount of people all full-time doing five day, week, you know, 35 to 40 hours a week, somewhere in, in that vicinity. Uh, they come back and, oh, I only want to work three days, or they want to work late nights, I want to work Saturdays or whatever.

[00:09:25] **Antony W.:** It's great that you adapt to that. what happened in terms of Yeah, that's fine. Uh, but obviously it's going to have an impact on. On what you earn. Are you cool with that? How did, how did that go down? Because some people were cool with that. Now I, some people went, yeah, I really like the idea of what I've been doing lately, sitting around at home and having, you know, a lot of time with my family to pursue other hobbies just for whatever it is and, and not to be completely driven by work. And so they wanted to become part-time, but they still wanted to earn full-time money. How did that, how, how's that balance been for you? Because I know that's something a lot of people grapple with.

[00:10:06] **Virginia:** Totally it. It's an awesome question, and I'm going to give you a generalization, please challenge the heck out of it. It's just the world according to what

I see when I'm consulting with salons or when I'm talking to, when I'm looking at our business, and then I'm talking to other salon owners. Most of us have a ton of unrealized production sitting on our books, so that full-time schedule, although our business was growing exponentially and beautifully, In a five-day week, there's still opportunity for growth, right? So, most of us were then, and still today, are in a situation where we can compress our books and take what we were doing in five days and push it into four or three, and really not if we're scheduling properly, not have a giant impact on productivity. but to answer your question about the team, in our, in our structure and in our culture, we start with, From the team's point of view, talk to us about you.

[00:11:10] **Virginia:** So, you know, what is it that you want to achieve in this career? What are your, what are your dreams? What, what do you hope to accomplish? And all of our dreams require some type of money, energy in the gas tank to be able to fulfill that dream. So that vision for what I, thought, the car, the house, the vacation, whatever it is that does require money, energy. We feel like we have a responsibility in our salon. To understand what someone desires for themselves for from an earning perspective, and then show them very clearly the path to get there. So, when our five day people wanted to come back over four days, we were able to be very clear about what it would take for them to earn the same amount in five days that they were earning in four. And so that was a, that was actually an easy answer and it was a great conversation.

[00:12:10] **Antony W.:** was it a case of, um, you were doing five days and you know, 36 hours or whatever, whatever the number is. Let's do four days, but do longer days, so you've still got the same amount of hours, but then you've got some, you know, freed up days. Was it that sort of exchange or was it less hours as well?

[00:12:31] **Virginia:** Yes well, I think one thing that sometimes we forget as owners, and maybe it's because we sometimes get feedback from the team that allows us to think it's different. the people that are working with us want to do well and they want to earn money. So y you know what I mean? they have those things. They've got rent to pay and all that. So we want to get them there where they're comfortable, and then we want to make sure that they can grow. And that's a matter of having great conversation with them. In our world, it's all about guest count because we are, uh, we're focused on the guest count at the average, combined service and retail ticket that is going to be required for you to get where you want to go financially.

[00:13:20] **Virginia:** So, yes. I only want to work four days, but yeah, you know, I'll work a couple extra hours a day, or, hey, if you only want to work four days a week, here's how that guest count translates to what you want to earn. So let's take a look at how we, you know, jig your book so that, that that potential is available for you.

[00:13:40] **Antony W.:** Right. Okay. So they're

[00:13:42] **Virginia:** Was that

[00:13:43] **Antony W.:** they're thinking differently about how to manage their own productivity as well. So, yeah. Okay. So have you end

[00:13:51] **Virginia:** Sorry. Sorry.

[00:13:52] **Antony W.:** Going to say, so have you ended up with, with more staff or less staff?

[00:13:57] **Virginia:** We have fewer, we're departmentalized, so we have fewer stylists, more colorists. Total staff now is about the same.

[00:14:09] **Virginia:** But everybody's working very differently. So I have, um, I just, I just looked at, it's great that we're having this conversation cause I just looked at this the other day. So we have probably two and a half people that are taking the space of one and that, that's unusual, you know?

[00:14:25] **Virginia:** We would have never, and, and I'm glad for this. I'm really glad for this. We would have never in the past said yes to somebody says, Hey, I want to work three days a week. We would've been like, no, we really need you full-time. Sorry, we're not the place for you now. We're like, yeah. Great. Let's talk about what that looks like and let's talk about what your commitment around that is. And you know, we never, we have someone who is, um, very focused on her editorial trajectory. She has great promise. She's excellent. She brings huge value when she's in the salon. We would have never flexed like that in the past and said, okay, we can figure out how to make it work with your editorial, the editorial side of your business too. So those are some of the things that three years ago could not have predicted,

[00:15:18] **Antony W.:** Yeah.

[00:15:19] **Virginia:** Could not have predicted

[00:15:20] **Antony W.:** So revenue is about the same. Like you haven't lost revenue, so to speak. It's

[00:15:25] **Antony W.:** just

[00:15:25] **Virginia:** No.

[00:15:25] **Antony W.:** grown

[00:15:26] **Antony W.:** The way it's all been put. You've grown. Fantastic.

[00:15:28] **Virginia:** We've grown substantially. Substantially. And I think, um, we only just took. A price increase in what month are we in April? It started in April and that was in response to, in the US cost of living. the cost of living, uh, percentage increases about 9%, but things like that we consume all the time, like milk and eggs. They cost like 11% more. So all of our vendors took a price increase. We had to keep pace with that. We wanted to make sure our team could, you know, so I guess what I'm saying

is if I stripped the price increases out of our growth, we're still getting super high double digit growth. And I believe that's because the guesstimate demand is there.

[00:16:15] **Virginia:** And if we're really. Looking at both the feeling and fact side of things. We were talking earlier that I, I believe all great decision making has a strong feeling, component, component to it. What, what do my values say are important about this decision and a fact component? And it's those two things together that help us make good decisions. So I think we're growing because we've really listened to what's important to the team, and we've just doubled down on adding great value to the guest experience. And, you know, that's been a really winning formula for us.

[00:16:53] **Antony W.:** Yeah. The, the other thing that must have had a big impact on you around this was where your salons located with, downtown New York, uh, Manhattan empties, whether you've got the staff there or not, didn't matter because you didn't have the clients there. They all left, Manhattan, so to speak.

[00:17:11] **Antony W.:** and a lot of them, you know, were lucky enough to have multiple homes and so they'd go upstate or whatever, and leave their, you know, New York apartments. And now that we've, come out the other end of Covid and some. Obviously a lot of clients have, you know, changed their work life balance and a lot of clients and they're, um, working from home to a couple of days a week, maybe working from the office, you know, two or three days a week. And they're finding all businesses are juggling with this balance. And so a business like yours that was very much in this sort of, you know, the business end of town, do you know what I mean? Like, people that, uh, are living and working there, but now they're often no longer living and working there. Did that have a, an impact, of, I know it had a short-term impact. Has it had a long-term impact on your business as to, you know, what that looks like?

[00:18:02] **Virginia:** Yes. Such an interesting question, and it's a great question because you're right. Immediately when Covid happened, people like they flocked out of New York. They, lots of our clients decided they were going to move to Montana, for example. Um, they just didn't want to be in the city. and you know, for about, I don't know, eight to 12 months visiting New York was a very bleak thing.

[00:18:26] **Virginia:** I'm ha so happy to say the city has recovered and then some, I think if you were to visit New York today, it is. It's got that great New York energy, but it's also got a new vitality. The streets are cleaner, the people smile a little bit more. It's, uh, it's, I think it's back and I think it's back better. So yes, we had guests leave. We were fortunate to get, and then many people stayed. We were fortunate to continue to get new guests. I think what we're experiencing now in terms of how the guest is building its relationship with the salon is that. Um, you know, yes, maybe they've gone back to work and they're working three days a week, but their schedule is really in flux and we have to flex with that.

[00:19:18] **Virginia:** So maybe where it took one phone call or one email, or one outreach to get the appointment booked, it takes probably two or three now because, oops, I got called into a meeting. My boss just asked me to sit on a Zoom. My babysitter canceled that. That's always happened. But you know, it, I feel like if I'm working, if I'm

working three days a week in the office and a couple days at home, I have a certain amount of unpredictability, unpredictability in my schedule that is impacting how the book looks.

[00:19:55] **Virginia:** And so we've kind of had to double down on that too, making sure that. We're able to be available to them when they want to communicate with us, making sure that we are flexible if they want to move their appointment. Um, making sure that we appreciate that the struggle is real and we don't want to be another problem. We don't want to make it tough for you to, to book your hair appointment. We want to, we want to be the easy button for you. So, you know, we work hard to be that.

[00:20:29] **Antony W.:** Yeah. How does that fit though with, oh, sorry. He or she doesn't work that day anymore. They used to work at five day week, but now they only work these days. Is it, I mean, it's like, it's like both

[00:20:43] **Virginia:** There's a lot,

[00:20:43] **Antony W.:** jigsaw that they're trying to

[00:20:45] **Virginia:** There's awesome, there's a lot of creative tension. So we're very gracious and we're very gracious. We're very transparent and we say, you know, In fact it's kind of like a little sing song loop in my head, you know? So and so unfortunately, so-and-so is fully committed that day. The next availability is here. We're happy to add you to the cancellation list. We'll keep a sharp eye open. That cancellation list and the science of working it, I think has up-leveled since Covid for sure, and we've always been huge, huge proponents of pre-booking because we do see it as a true value to the guest. And it's also something that, from a business perspective, increases frequency of guest visits. So, super important that we're trying to extend some influence over that. So we double down on that, you know? Uh, and it doesn't matter to us. Yes, a certain percentage of those pre-booked appointments will move anyway. Or maybe, you know, it doesn't end up working for the guest schedule. So much better to have that time on the book than we can move, than frustrating the guest with not being able to be in. And then, you know, uh, you know, truth be told, I, I had a heartbreaking email from a guest that, you know, just said, look, I just have to take a pause because it's just too hard to get an appointment. and that's heartbreaking and not something we want to hear. So we just responded to it by meeting the guest where they are and being very transparent, very service oriented, and very much on their side in terms of getting them in when they'd like to get in. So we, we work all those angles.

[00:22:33] **Antony W.:** Yeah. Good.

[00:22:34] **Virginia:** I don't know if that was succinct enough answer, but

[00:22:36] **Antony W.:** Yeah. No, no, that, that, that's good. I'm just wondering, um, uh, did you, cause one of the things you mentioned at the beginning about all that flexibility, that you offered, which is great, and you said that, you know, we looked at

the benefits and everything that you had going on, uh, and I weren't sure, are they employees or are they self-employed? Or does it

[00:22:54] **Virginia:** Yeah, no, there, they're our team members and we work really hard to, and again, I, I say this with grace because the complexion of every salon is different and what's affordable, quote unquote for every salon is unique to each salon based on your very unique expense structure. But you know, our biggest expenses across the board, this is true for all of us. If we have employees, are what we pay our team. The rent that we pay for our space, um, what we pay for the products that sit on our shelves or sit on our back bar. Those are our big expense categories. And so we have always looked at our business. David and I have, have said, look, our people have to be more successful with us to retain them.

[00:23:44] **Virginia:** They have to be more successful with us than they can be anywhere else. So that means we are obligated to show them a clear path for growth from the time they start with us as they move. We have a deep responsibility to help them understand how the salon makes money and that making money is a really good thing, and that when we do make money, there's a great deal in it for them too.

[00:24:09] **Virginia:** So if, if they're going to stay with us and be successful with us, we have to make sure we're meeting their life aims

[00:24:16] **Antony W.:** yeah. As employees. Yeah.

[00:24:18] **Virginia:** totally,

[00:24:19] **Antony W.:** Yeah. Did, did you get, I, I mean, I know the answer to this question. Did you get a lot of salons around you clothes?

[00:24:27] **Virginia:** Yes.

[00:24:28] **Antony W.:** Yes. So was that, was that good for you? I mean, like, you know, that sounds a bit mercenary, uh, but did you attract staff from the area that you were able to accommodate?

[00:24:39] **Virginia:** We were, um, blessing and curse. You know, I mean, we, we, yes, yes. I think anytime a salon closes, it's a heart hurt for our industry in general because I believe it says that we've somehow, as leaders in the business, have failed that owner in terms of supporting them and operating a very successful business. We did benefit from salons closing in the area. We benefited from both their staff perhaps wanting to come work with us, and then also guests wanting to find a new salon home. So, yes. and we, we've always been a train them from the inside, um, focused salon, and we did bring people in from the outside during Covid, and in some instances that worked really well. And in some instances it was just a cultural disconnect,

[00:25:28] **Antony W.:** Yeah. Yeah. well that leads perfectly into talking about recruitment. as you said, you know, people's expectations of what they want have

changed, uh, dramatically from, from the salon learner's perspective. How have you, and, how have you found that you need to change your whole approach to recruitment?

[00:25:49] **Antony W.:** I, I know, that you know Stephanie Fox well and, and you've worked together, and I don't know if, her, I've just interviewed her as I told you before, and, and we talked a lot about recruitment and that may come out just before your episode, this episode, or it may come out just after, I'm not sure. Uh, but I'm really curious to see as a salon owner, how you've changed your approach to recruitment these days.

[00:26:14] **Virginia:** Kind of everything, you know, as I say, what's about to come out of my mouth, I want everybody to hear that this is my goal. This is my goal. I'm not saying that we're doing this, but we, we know we have to spend, and this is a huge amount of time, 10 to 15 hours a week on recruitment that's completely different than it was before. Because the recruitment strategy has to be the compliment of everything. And it has to be brand and experience specific. And by that I mean, um, what people looking for a job are really looking for is a cultural fit, a place to grow. Leaders that are involved in helping them grow. that includes education and compensation and all of those things and making sure that we're telling that story, our brand story, our unique and special sauce story very consistently across re recruitment channels, which includes Indeed and how you advertise and social media and building relationships with schools in your area.

[00:27:22] **Virginia:** And, and, and so that takes time and on your website. And, and so, you know, when I think about cause I struggle with it all the time. I, the, the other dynamic in our business is David's in the salon every day working behind the chair. I actually live in Minneapolis, so I travel to New York once a quarter, but I'm very much behind the scenes and I'm very involved in the business in terms of the operations and I'm in the business every day. We did not have to spend pre covid as owners 10 to 15 weeks in recruitment, because if we placed an ad, people would come. That's not the case anymore. So recruitment is a part-time job, and it's not something that we can ignore. We have to figure out how to get our energy around maintaining those buckets. And I think Stephanie's, program is a great way to help identify from a values perspective what's important to you as an owner, and then how you make sure, like who you are, what you stand for, what makes you unique, your special sauce. Mm-hmm. That's what has to be communicated in every recruitment channel because that's what's attractive to people and that's how you find the people that are the good fit for you,

[00:28:46] **Antony W.:** Yeah. What, what do you find as a generalization that this is a big shift when you've got someone sat in front of you today that you're interviewing? Was it that, that they're wanting that, you know, three years ago that sort of wasn't, and it wasn't a thing. Uh, whereas now it's just, I mean, in part this is partially covid, but it's also partially generational.

[00:29:07] **Antony W.:** and I mean, I, I often talk about how a lot of things, I mean, often people, people have always talked about Covid as being an accelerator. Um, not necessarily the cause of things. Uh, you know, that accelerated a lot of trends and, the

business model of more people going, uh, self-employed and more people, wanting to be independent, whether it was suites or, uh, whatever. I mean, that was happening anyway and it was being amplified. Because of the technology that we now have, you know, with, everyone's got a smartphone, and so you can take payment on it, you can book appointments on it, you do all your marketing on it. Uh, and just the fact that we have this new generation in the workforce, you know, gen Z, who are, anyone under 26, you know, and is, and, and our workforce is, is Gen Z.

[00:29:51] **Antony W.:** And so when you combine all these things, the technology covid, a new generation, there was an inevitability about, new business models and new ways of working. Is there any particular generalization that you find about the person sat across the table to you when you're talking to them, that you know that this is who they are and this is what they want?

[00:30:11] **Virginia:** Well, what's been great about what you just described is that it's forced us to get really great at articulating who we are and how people can be successful with us. We believe fully, and again I say this with grace, that we can help anybody be super successful in this business and we're highly committed to that.

[00:30:28] **Virginia:** And this is what it takes in our environment. I think, there's, There was the movement pre covid to, get out of school, get on the floor fast, reduce the training time, da da da, da da. We've looked at all of those things too, and try to live in the creative tension. There's a point at which the internal training, if we're, we're people coming out of school have some level of technical skill or in the US have demonstrated a level of technical skill to get their license. However, what we're finding is perhaps don't have the interpersonal skill or don't have the confidence with the technical skill or whatever it is. we have to, we have to address that in our training, and we have to make sure that when we develop someone that they are, they feel fully, fully confident. To greet the guest that is sitting in their chair. The, the needs of the guests are sitting in their chair, and there's a point at which you just can't go any faster. I mean, you know, the, the skills are the skills, the time is the time. So we try to really, understand where they're coming from, what's important to them in that experience, and then just be super transparent about what the process looks like in our salon and what's in it for them, and what awaits, uh, sort of at the end of the training process and be really clear that, it might not be for everyone, but for those, it's for, it's exciting and we're going to make sure you're a very, very successful hairdresser. So, in a way, I guess it's just forced us to get very real. yeah, and we've tried to shorten everything as much as we can to meet that demand to go fast. We've tried to, um, but at some point you can't go any faster because it compromises quality,

[00:32:25] **Antony W.:** Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. I mean, they have, you know, they have different technology to enable them to learn outside of the classroom. everyone can, you know, we're all online, we've all got phones, we've all got access to YouTube, social media, whatever. And so there are a lot of opportunities to learn, if you take the initiative to dive in there and, uh, and to do the work. But you still can't, you can't fast track experience. You can't fast track. Well, you've actually got to do a certain amount of heads before you are competent at that. You know, that's one thing that you just can't change. But yeah, a lot of the other things are movable. Um,

[00:33:04] **Virginia:** Yeah. The, the one other comment to that, an Antony, excuse me. I think, and this happens to all of us, we confuse our ability to name the thing with the ability to do the thing. And they're very different things. So you can say, you know, someone new coming in could say, hi, I'm, you know, I'm super confident with my blow drying skills and da da da da, da. But then when you put them in an environment where, the hair is tricky or the guest is tricky, because those are the things we're trying to manage. Sometimes the hair is easy and the guest is difficult. Sometimes the guest is, is difficult and the hair is easy. Sometimes they're both difficult and sometimes they're both easy. And a great training program teaches you to navigate all of that in a supportive way. So, for us, getting their hands and hair faster, giving them exposure to more, more and different kinds of hair so that they. They for themselves can understand the difference between speaking, I can do it and actually being able to do it. And so I think that's the gap we're always trying to manage educationally.

[00:34:09] **Antony W.:** Yeah, that makes sense. Now, now, on one hand, everything we've spoken about so far is very much about you, New York, your salon, and those situations, but, um, you sort of touched on that at the beginning, that, that you have a, a much wider view of what's going on in the industry because of the work that you do with Aveda. so that, that brings another perspective to it, that you have. So, tell us about the training side of things as a, as someone who is involved in a, a corporate level as well and just having a more, a wider overview of the industry, in the US particularly. What are the changes that you're seeing in training? I mean, we've sort of touched on some of it from the technology point of view, but also from, the covid point of view. Uh, has, how has that sort of all, you know, evolved over the last three years?

[00:35:03] **Virginia:** great question. I think it's still evolving. I think now for, and I can, I can answer from a, like a business owner, leader, manager standpoint and then, more from a technical standpoint, just in terms of what I see. I think now, We as business leaders, at least this is the perspective that we're taking, want to double down and focus heavily on developing our culture and becoming a values culture-based leader and translating values, purpose and culture to the work, the operational work that we're doing in the salon.

[00:35:44] **Virginia:** So, we've got real needs. We have to recruit more staff, we need more new guests. We need to up our level of operational efficiency and rigor to be able to respond to what's changing economically in the world. I think, the operations things, those have always sort of been there, but what's different today is that leaders I looking from a, what do I stand for? What's important to me from a value standpoint, how am I making that clear and present in my salon culture so that my team is crystal clear on who we are, why we do what we do, how we show up every day, and then how that translates to the, the guest. Super important. I also think that we have to always, our job is looking for ways to add more value, more value to the guest experience, more value to our team experience.

[00:36:48] **Virginia:** On the consumer side, we can see that things like scalp health are becoming more and more and more important. the ability to expand our service offerings to treat everything that's happening from the neck up, you know, underneath the hair. And then what's underneath it. Um, Or on the skin as well, if you have a, a spa, I think is very important. And recognizing that the need to create highly

customized solutions is also really important. So if the guest wants what they want, when they want it, and they deserve to get it, and they want something created uniquely for them, then how do we take, what does that mean? So what does, I would, I would ask rhetorically salon owners to think about, so what does that mean?

[00:37:41] **Virginia:** What does our culture say about things like consultation? What does our culture say about what our promise to our guest is in receiving a consultation or understanding what the price of the service is before the service begins, or understanding what the customized solutions are for them, or understanding what that blow dry lesson looks, looks like for them. Or understanding the compliment of products that are right for them and giving them access to be able to get those products either in salon or online. I think some of those things are, the work at hand, you know,

[00:38:17] **Antony W.:** yeah. Okay. One of the things that, that, you know, has happened, it's been happening for 20 years. The salon suite type thing, the independent thing has really grown. It's grown everywhere. Um, here in the UK in Australian market all over the world. as an industry there's more and more of that happening. and sometimes the conversation becomes that one of the things that's driving it is, and you mentioned the word leadership a few times, uh, that one of the things that's driving it is that the traditional. You know, usually referred to in the America as a commission salon, uh, outside of America, it's always referred to more as an employee salon as opposed to a self-employed salon.

[00:38:56] **Antony W.:** So the employee employer relationship, you know, that type of salon, so the exactly the same thing, just slightly different terminology. and so one of the things that's often said is it's what's driving this movement towards suites and independence, as well as the things I spoke about, you know, the different generations and the technology, et cetera, is that the traditional salon model has to lift its game. And with a lot of things that you've spoken about in the last, 45 minutes or so, you've brought up about culture, you've brought up about values, you've brought up about vision again and again and again. It runs through everything you talk about, which is great. I'm a firm believer in all that as well.

[00:39:38] **Antony W.:** and so, I suppose what, what, where am I going with this? I'm sort of thinking about, what you are talking about is very much not exclusive to that commission based salon, but that's sort of where your message is, isn't it? It's like, listen, not everyone wants to go to a suite or be self-employed. I don't, as a consumer, I've often said that, and you know, I, I don't sort of hide from saying that. I, I just want to be in a, a salon environment, a bigger environment as a, as an employee, as an employer, and as a client, you know? Uh, but I recognize exactly what you are talking about that, businesses need to get really clear on who they are and what they offer and vision and values and purpose, and, and they're not just buzzword, say, actually mean something. So, I suppose what I'm, try what I'm trying to, what I'm waffling on about here, what I'm really trying to get to is to get your take on the future of the commission based salon. Where is it and what do you think it, it, looks like at the

[00:40:39] **Virginia:** Yeah.

[00:40:39] **Antony W.:** in the United States,

[00:40:40] **Virginia:** Wow. Okay. So, maybe we'll talk in another three years and, and see, you know, I think we have so moved beyond. So again, there's the operational side. You got to, as a leader, you have to understand what the drivers are on the operational side of your business. But I think we have so moved beyond the, the particular business model and so into a time where what people are lining up behind is, That vision is the purpose, is what they can become with the company. I think Stephanie's research even talks about people preferring to work in an environment like that versus necessarily working on their own. And I know we have amazing, successful independent operators, and I love that we have that. And I feel an obligation to help them be successful in their small business of one.

[00:41:37] **Virginia:** As much as I feel an obligation to help a salon owner of any type be successful, and I think we are in a time where, gosh, when I started in the business, Antony, you know, rent was cheap, hairdressers were plentiful, and you could hang out a shingle and if you build it, they will come.

[00:41:58] **Antony W.:** Yeah.

[00:41:59] **Virginia:** It's just not that way anymore. Our world is incredibly complex. We are moving at a breakneck speed in terms of, um, you know, our, our, the information that we have at our fingertips and how it's being served up to us based on our unique preferences and so forth. And so we just have to, if, if we're going to be successful salon owners and leaders. I just really believe, and I think it's a beautiful opportunity, we have to step up and step in to our full role as a leader, which means we're tending our culture, we're creating a place where people want to be. Where they want to come stay and grow. We are tending our flock and we are recognizing that they're bringing everything they have to work.

[00:42:57] **Virginia:** And some of it isn't attractive. You know, the mental health struggle is real. We have to figure out how to address that. The need for, if our greatest human need is to be seen, heard, and understood, a very wise person once said that and it stuck with me, then that's part of our role as a leader. So we can't just say, you know, check your bags at the door and come to work. Do your clients go home. It doesn't work like that anymore. people want to be in a community and they want to be in a community that cares about them. So that's our great. It is such a privilege to leave. It is such a privilege. It is such a privilege, and whether we accept it or not. If we look in our business, and I include my own in this with grace and space, everything we've got that we like, everything that we've got that we don't like has, its rooting in a cultural component and we are the ones who are manifesting it.

[00:43:59] **Virginia:** So it's up to us to be able to, to look at that, the great part of it, the part that, the parts that make us cringe and say, you know what? I've got a great chance here and I'm going to do everything in my power to be the leader that I can be so my team can be successful and I have a salon that lasts. We have unlimited potential. We just have to decide if, um, we're ready to do the leadership work to leverage that potential.

[00:44:29] **Antony W.:** Yeah, it great words. If, if, you were listening to this and you were young, hairdresser, salon, owner, uh, maybe 2, 3, 4 staff, small salon, and you were listening to this and, and you were thinking and, and you aspired to more, and you're listening to the, because leadership is a word, is often one of those things that people think, well, I'm just, not that, I'm just not a leader. I'm just who I am, a little old. Me. What would you say to them, you do to become a better leader? How do you, you know, we all know how we develop our skills at Balyage, et cetera, but how do we become a better leader?

[00:45:01] **Virginia:** I would say you have one job and that is to work on you and surround yourself. Find people who are already doing what it is that you aspire to do or be and be with them. Watch what they do because they leave footprints, they do things that other people don't. And we, the great thing about just. Kind of being a human being is that the work is never done. And we are, you know, all of us are on the same journey, and each of us is on a unique path, and the work is never done. And we're here to support each other. So I think when you look at, for however you term successful, look around you and find people who emulate or who, who live what you aspire to be.

[00:45:50] **Virginia:** And then be with them, be with them. Invite them into your community. model what they do, build a relationship with them. It's kind of like, um, you know, people who want to live a healthy lifestyle, find other people who are going to the gym and walking and all that. You know, you, you go there because they're already doing what it is that, that you aspire to do. And it's easier to do it when you're in your community of people who are already doing it. And so I would say, Pay attention to where you turn your attention and everything is two things that what you want and that what you don't and wherever you turn your attention, you're going to get more of. So if you want more prosperity, if you want more growth, if you want more, if you want to see more opportunity, be around people who are doing that. You know, they're growing successful businesses. They do take care of how they think. They do take care of their body. They do go be with them.

[00:46:51] **Antony W.:** Yeah. Yeah. Okay. It's that, it's that thing. You become the average of the four people you hang around with the most really, isn't it? Do you know what I mean? And whether hang around means face-to-face or listening to podcasts with them, or watching them on YouTube or reading books or whatever. It's, it doesn't necessarily have to be that you are hanging out with them every day of the week. Yeah. But, but good point. Um, look, the, the last,

[00:47:18] **Virginia:** I think if we work on us.

[00:47:20] **Antony W.:** Yeah, what was that?

[00:47:21] **Virginia:** I said, I think our number one job is us. Right? So, uh, you know, so the more we feed ourselves, the better we are at helping others

[00:47:28] **Antony W.:** Yeah, one final thing that I want to ask you. you mentioned that you were, uh, with Horst at the beginning, of, uh, Aveda days, which is, um, yeah, I'm

sure that was a very interesting time. I've, I've talked about it with many different people. I've actually been lucky enough to sit down, uh, one-to-one and have lunch with horst as well, many years ago.

[00:47:48] **Antony W.:** and so that's a nice memory. But, one thing I think that they, as a company, Always did. Like from day one, I can't ever remember it not being a time where they were good at this. And that is that I always talk to hairdressers salon owners and I say, look, what's really important is that, I can teach you how to sell a product to a client, you know, to educate them.

[00:48:11] **Antony W.:** I can teach you all that stuff and come at it from many different angles, as to how to effectively do that. But one of the things that I often think that need addressing with salon owners, as I say to them, look, it's not just about creating a selling environment. It's your job as a salon owner to create a buying environment where people walk in there and they want to buy stuff now, um, I think Aveda have always done that extraordinarily well. And so when I say always, it goes right back to the beginning with horst now you were involved at the beginning. Was that him? Like, what is it about

[00:48:54] **Antony W.:** the brand that has made us such a strong buying environment? Whereas another brand you might go into a sell on and they've got all their products on a rickety old plastic shelf from Ikea or something, but it's such a strong buying environment. What, what is the key to that

[00:49:11] **Virginia:** saw early, he saw early on, and it was a gift from the universe. I believe he saw early on that it wasn't about the haircut or the hair color of the product at all. It was about the experience and everything counts.

[00:49:22] **Antony W.:** Mm

[00:49:23] **Virginia:** He saw very early on that what we are, quote unquote selling, if you like, is an experience. It's, it's an experiential relationship that creates an image for how people want to look and feel, and everything counts from the moment they walk in the door to the music that they hear, to what they smell, to how they're greeted. So when we engage all of those, all of our senses in that experience, and we deliver on our promise to create an image for how they want to look and feel, they're transported, he got that and he just lived it and was awesome at teaching everyone how powerful that is. And it's more relevant today than it was because we're tired and we're weary. And we're stressed and we're. The white noise in our world is at an all-time high. So salons are these beautiful islands, um, these beautiful havens of, he would've said they're beautiful islands of healing, that what we're delivering is a healing experience, but they're the, this place where fruit, just that time, all of that other stuff can get set aside. And here I can have people focus on me, my needs, my wellbeing, my expression of myself to the outer world. So I think if we really, truly stepped in as leaders to understanding how powerful that is, how transformative that is, and how absolutely. Essential it is to meeting the guest at every little touchpoint with a magnificent experience. When they call, when they email, when they walk in, when they sit in the chair, when they lean back in the shampoo bowl, whenever there is no

end to the possibility of value, we can continue to add, but it starts with a different point of view

[00:51:32] **Antony W.:** Great. Well,

[00:51:32] **Virginia:** it's so notable.

[00:51:33] **Antony W.:** they're, they're, they're good words to wrap up with. So, and unfortunately that's what we have to do. So, uh, whereabouts can people connect with you on Instagram or other social channels?

[00:51:43] **Virginia:** Well, um, 14 J is, uh, it's the word f o u r t e e n j a y is the salon. and then, you can reach out via Instagram through Fourteenjay and I watch that Instagram, so you can find me there. and then, or at my email, v Meyer, m e y e r, at fourteenjay.com. I just want to thank you so much, Antony, for inviting me back in three years later and, I look forward to speaking to you again. And I, I want to thank you for the work you're doing in the industry to have the dialogue and to bring people together. These conversations are really important, so thank you for doing the work.

[00:52:21] **Antony W.:** My pleasure. Thank you very much. And it's been, you know, been really good to, have this opportunity to ask you those questions. You bring so much sort of, you know, wisdom and experience and, uh, to it. So, thank you for, for sharing that. So, openly, I'll put those links, to your Instagram on, in the show notes for today's podcast. And if you are listening to this podcast with Virginia and you've enjoyed it, do me a favor. Take a screenshot on your phone, share it to your Instagram stories, and don't forget to subscribe and leave us a rating and review on the Apple Podcast app. So to wrap up, Virginia Meyer, thank you ever so much for your time and your, open and honesty and willingness, to share. It's been fantastic to have you back on the Grown My Salon Business podcast, so hopefully it's not another three years until we next time talk.

[00:53:10] **Virginia:** I hope not. I love speaking with you. Thank you so much, Antony. Have a great day everybody.

[00:53:15] **Antony W.:** Fabulous. Thanks, you too. Bye now.

[00:53:19] **Antony W.:** Thank you for listening to today's podcast. If you'd like to connect with us, you'll find us at grow my salon business.com, or on Facebook and Instagram at Grow My Salon Business. And if you enjoyed tuning into our podcast, make sure that you subscribe, like, and share it with your friends. Until next time, this is Antony Whitaker wishing you continued success.