

Dream Jobs: Hairdresser

By Leo Benedictus, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.16.16

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TOP: Hair stylist trainee Fatima Hussein practices on a mannequin at the Cut and Color Friseur Klier hair salon in the Alexa shopping mall in Berlin, Germany, May 17, 2013. Photo: Getty Images.

"There was a poll out recently," Jessica Leverett says above the clatter of scissors and pop music, "saying that hairdressers were the happiest people. We laughed at it, didn't we?" She turns to the woman at the glass counter behind her, who laughs on cue.

If the poll results are true, it would not be surprising. Leverett, however, appears serious and completely in charge of herself and her salon. Leverett works at Zappas, about 35 miles east of London. At 26 years old, she has been in the business for 12 years. She is now an experienced professional.

Leverett has a theory to explain why so many hairdressers enjoy their work. "We always work late hours," she explains, "and we don't get paid extremely well for it. That's why everyone that does it has to love their job."

"I Had Quite A Hard Time Of It"

Certainly, Leverett's early years in the business were not easy. "I had quite a hard time of it," she says, remembering her days as a shop assistant when she was 14. After that, she left school to work at Toni & Guy salon in the town of Reading. "I can't count on my hands the number of times I wanted to leave because it was really hard work."

A Nervous Wreck

When Leverett was finally allowed to cut hair she was a nervous wreck. "My very first haircut I did as a junior, I actually cut my lady's neck," she remembers with horror. "With my boss watching me at the time, it was the most nerve-racking thing I'd ever done in my life."

So, when the stress was so high, the money bad and the hours long, where did her strength to keep going come from? "It's in creativity," she answers without hesitation. "It's in the passion."

14 Basic Haircuts

Leverett's training at Toni & Guy lasted for 2 1/2 years. "We learned 14 basic haircuts, which covers everything," she explains. "But then we mix and match them together as we get more confident to create other haircuts."

Leverett stayed with Toni & Guy for three years before moving to Zappas, where she is now manager. This means she gets to cut hair and be the boss. It's a change of pace she enjoys. Nevertheless, contact with customers is what she cherishes most.

People don't just talk to their hairdresser about the happy things, however, and Leverett's role can be more like that of a therapist sometimes. "I've had women in tears in here. But we can't show our problems to people, so we're a bit like actresses."

Whatever It Takes To Make Customers Happy

As manager, it is also Leverett's responsibility to deal with any complaints that arise. The key is to do whatever it takes to make customers happy before they leave the salon.

For Leverett, as for every hairdresser, the one customer that she would most like to work on - and never will - is herself. "The best wish that a hairdresser could ever have would be to have hair that you could take off your head and cut," she says.

Until removable hair is invented, Leverett's favorite customer will always be the long-haired woman who walks in having finally decided to go short. "Some girls are scared of it, but I love chopping it all off," she says. "That's the most amazing thing in the world."

Job Stats

Current position: Salon manager at Zappas

Pay: "I get paid commission, and for management and training, so it varies. But I take home roughly £1,500 to £1,600 (about \$1,860 to \$1,983) a month."

Hours: "A five-day week with long days, and we only get a 45-minute lunch break. Sometimes we do have little breaks between customers."

Career high: "Every day is different, and every person you talk to is different."

Career low: "Pay and hours, probably. We love what we do, but we all feel we deserve a bit more."

Quiz

- 1 Which selection from the article BEST supports the idea that hairdressers need to be passionate about their work?
- (A) Leverett works at Zappas, about 35 miles east of London. At 26 years old, she has been in the business for 12 years.
 - (B) "We always work late hours," she explains, "and we don't get paid extremely well for it. That's why everyone that does it has to love their job."
 - (C) Leverett's training at Toni & Guy lasted for 2 1/2 years. "We learned 14 basic haircuts, which covers everything," she explains.
 - (D) For Leverett, as for every hairdresser, the one customer that she would most like to work on – and never will – is herself.
- 2 Based on information in the article, which of the following statements is TRUE?
- (A) Leverett is paid more than people in other professions.
 - (B) Leverett would like to work more hours than she does.
 - (C) Leverett has never made any mistakes when cutting someone's hair.
 - (D) Leverett connects with her customers in ways other than just cutting hair.
- 3 How does the section "I Had Quite A Hard Time Of It" contribute to the article?
- (A) by showing the commitment it took for Leverett to become a hairdresser
 - (B) by describing the haircuts that most customers ask Leverett to give them
 - (C) by highlighting the people who most helped Leverett begin her career
 - (D) by providing details about how Leverett helps nervous customers
- 4 How does the section "A Nervous Wreck" relate to the section "14 Basic Haircuts"?
- (A) The first section describes an effect and the next section explains its cause.
 - (B) The first section lists steps and the next section explains the reasons for them.
 - (C) Both sections show how Leverett's confidence has grown from her first haircut to her current work.
 - (D) Both sections compare what it was like for Leverett working at Toni & Guy with working at Zappas.