

THE SWITCH

From hairdresser to trainer

While some struggle to figure out what to do after high school, Angela Stella had no such problem.

"I was obsessed with doing hair," she says. "I finished high school and went straight into a hairdressing apprenticeship."

But her initial enthusiasm was dealt a blow when she discovered first-year apprentices were kept well away from the scissors.

"It was lots of cleaning and sweeping, learning how to mix colours," she says.

It's not until the second year they get their first chance to cut.

"I was lucky that I picked it up very quickly," she says. "I started by cutting fringes and also baby hair – that was my favourite. You'd put it in an envelope for the parents with the date on it."

Stella soon discovered that while she loved her new career, her body wasn't similarly impressed.

"They say hairdressers age before their time and it's true," she says. "You're standing on concrete floors, so backs give way or your wrists click with all the blow drying."

After eight years, Stella knew she had to find another career. She gave up hairdressing and started a five-week pre-employment course with Aegis.

"I learnt all the systems I needed to go into the world of call centres," she says. "From that, I was offered a call-centre job, which was fantastic. I was really surprised, as me and PCs don't get along."

Her performance on the phones was so impressive, Stella was soon offered a promotion. She now works for the same company as a trainer, teaching others the ins and outs of call-centre success.

"I run a three-week course

training people for customer-service roles servicing our electricity and gas clients," she says. "Politeness is a major thing ... but there's also a whole lot of theory they need to know about compliance issues and privacy laws."

Stella quickly learnt being a good trainer goes beyond just being organised.

"You need to be well informed," she says. "The questions students come up with are really good but also sometimes really curly."

"You also need to be really open – people are different. Some may be loud or believe things should be done differently, while others are really reserved."

"You need to make sure the whole team works together."

Years of honing her people skills as a hairdresser have now seen Stella's trainees shine once they get out on the call-centre floor.

"My guys pick it up pretty quickly; I think that's because I make the training a friendly environment," she says.

While she misses aspects of hairdressing, Stella finds immense satisfaction in her new job.

"I love watching people learn," she says. "Especially people who come in and say, 'I've got no idea about how to do this' and by the end of three weeks, they're flying through it."

Today when she walks the floor of the call centre, this former hairdresser still has plenty of people to chat to.

"It's nice to walk on the floor and have people call your name," she says. "Recently, two of my guys became team leaders – that's a great feeling."

SUE WHITE



THEN

NOW

SALARY \$550 a week as a hairdresser.

WORK LIFE BALANCE "It was really hard, especially around holidays. I'd work really late on Christmas Eve and worked Sundays as well. My only relaxation was Saturday night. When you're hairdressing you also don't eat properly – you might scoff lunch down when a client has foils in their hair."

HOURS 50 hours a week, spread over six days. "I was supposed to have Wednesdays off but I was so enthusiastic I'd often go in and work a seven-day week."

SALARY \$48,000-\$53,000.

WORK LIFE BALANCE "Really good. I see my family every day and we have family dinners on Monday and Tuesday. I see my friends every weekend and I'm eating better. I got to go to my nephew's first birthday – I used to miss that stuff as I was working."

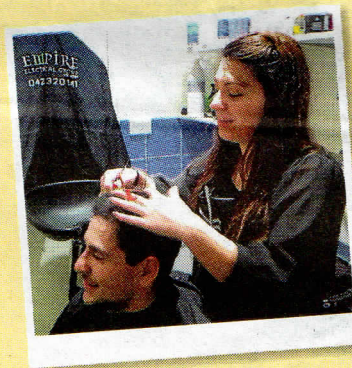
HOURS 8am-5.30pm or 6pm, Monday to Friday.

MISS "Hairdressers! I love their personalities and their different stories."

CHALLENGES "When computers crash you need to find things on the spot to keep the class motivated."

Getting ahead ... Angela Stella was a hairdresser (left), before becoming a call-centre trainer (above).

Photo: Eddie Jim



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