

THE OTHER BREAK-UP

It's not easy to tell your hair stylist or other professional it's over

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Talk about bad break-ups.

When a friend couldn't bring herself to do the deed, Debbie Obert ended up doing it for her, going so far as to impersonate her friend's voice over the phone.

The conversation didn't go well. When asked if she was OK, because her voice sounded different, Mrs. Obert got flustered. She said there was a family emergency and hung up.

All that just to break up with a hair stylist.

It may sound silly, but ending a relationship with such professionals can be just as difficult as a romantic break-up for some.

Maybe harder.

According to Christopher Layne, a clinical psychologist based in West Toledo, "Romance it seems to me is a little easier to break up because it is so much more clearly subjective. With professional services, the break-up is presumably based on some objective [grading of] performance."

For people who don't want to hurt someone else's feelings, it can be a tricky situation to leave a stylist, doctor, or other professional.

"I don't know if men go through this, but [for] women, the hairstylist almost becomes your friend. You feel like you're hurting your friend's feelings," said a Sylvania Township woman named Abby, who didn't want her last name used to spare the feelings of her jilted hair stylists.

"I know a lot of women, they talk very personally with their hair stylist about their lives. In that sense, you are breaking up a relationship if you leave."

Still, that hasn't stopped Abby from "playing the field" when it comes to stylists. Her solution was simple silence.

"I just didn't call to make another appointment," she said. "It's not like I saw them at a store or in church or anything. I really didn't have any uncomfortable experiences."

Mrs. Obert's friend didn't get off quite so easy. When a co-worker went into the salon the day of the break-up, the stylist was so concerned about the "family emergency" that she asked about it.

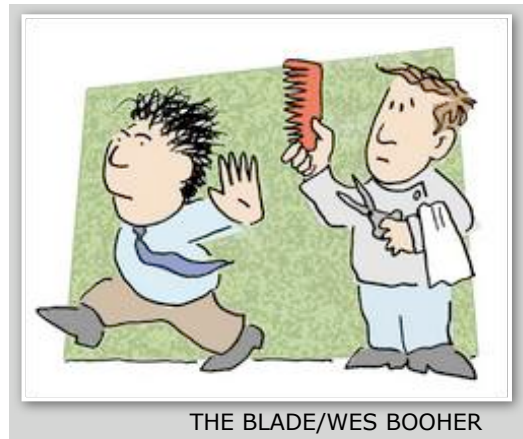
"The co-worker called asking about the family emergency and was very upset at the fact that we lied to the stylist," Mrs. Obert said. "The moral of the story is, just do your own breaking up and tell the truth."

That's not far from the advice that manners experts have to offer.

Anna Post, great-great granddaughter of etiquette maven Emily Post and marketing coordinator for the Emily Post Institute, said people should take a straightforward approach when there's a problem with service and they want to make a change.

"You need to be honest with people," she said.

That means telling the stylist or doctor or whoever exactly what the problem is and perhaps giving them a chance



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to fix things, rather than simply disappearing or making up a lie.

"People do appreciate knowing in a kind way," she said. "Don't make up an explanation. If there is no big reason, you just want to try someone new ... that's an OK thing to say."

Judith Martin, who writes the syndicated "Miss Manners" column and books, suggests using a polite excuse in breaking up, something like: "I appreciate everything you've done for me. I'm going to be trying something different for a while."

Dr. Donna Woodson, a family physician for 33 years and president of the Toledo-Lucas County Health board, said break ups are hard for the professionals too when they come after years of service - and sometimes celebrating births and weddings together.

"You become almost a member of the family," she said. "It would be very sad if someone breaks up in those circumstances."

Robin King, owner of Ta-Dah! Hair and Nail Studio in Maumee, said she's more hurt if someone doesn't give her an explanation for leaving.

"When people that I've done for a long time just quit coming, I take it personal," she said. "It's hard when you don't hear from them or hear anything. You keep wondering, why?"

In the end, though, it is an economic relationship, something that Mr. Layne said he makes clear to all his clients.

"What I try to tell the patient is: You pay me. We are not friends. You don't owe me anything but the money that you paid me."

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[< previous](#)

[next >](#)