

On the job: Manicurist

**Florence Doherty, 34 /EMPLOYER: Park Avenue Hair Studio, Oak Park/
SALARY RANGE: \$200-\$1,500 per week**

How did you choose this field?

I've been doing it for six years. I just stumbled into it; I wasn't seeking it. I used to get my nails done in a salon; my manicurist moved away and I couldn't find a place so I bought the stuff and did my own. I kept doing them and got better and better. Then I started doing nails for my friends and family. I did nails on the side while I had full-time jobs in a car dealership and then a mortgage company. When my sister, who owns this salon, went on maternity leave she asked if I'd watch out for the shop. Then she said, "Why don't you start doing nails?"

What educational experience do you need to be a manicurist?

You need a license. You need to go to a manicure school. I was grandfathered in because I had so much experience. You also need 14 credit hours every two years of continuing education to keep your license. I sign up for classes through distributors and different nail companies.

How did you build your clientele?

When I first started out I did a lot of sitting. It took a while to build my clientele—it took a good year. Now my business is strictly by appointment. I advertise in the Yellow Pages for the salon. We do a small listing and a big (display) ad. But it wasn't like that in the beginning. People just came in. I think I do my job well because people keep coming back. And I get a lot of recommendations.

Describe an average day.

Now I only work four days, and I usually get here around 9 a.m. and stay until about 10 p.m. I'm usually booked by the hour and I try to get two manicures in per hour. I don't take a lunch, I eat on the run. The nail business is very much booming.

What's big now is nail enhancement. Now 90 to 95 percent of my clientele want acrylic or gel nails. When I do acrylic or gel nails, I prep them by filing, pushing the cuticle back and cleansing them. I use an antibacterial spray. Then I put on the nail enhancements, file and shape them. It's a three-step process. The key thing to nice nails, to making (the acrylic or gel nails)



Florence Doherty (left) gives Crystal Hawkins a manicure at the Park Avenue Hair Studio in Oak Park. "You definitely have to be a people person," Doherty says.

look real is filing. It usually takes one hour for a full set and 45 minutes for a fill-in which customers usually get every two weeks.

And the pedicure business during warm weather is insane. I can't do enough of them. I think it's because the sandal business has really come out in the past couple of years.

I also have to order supplies. I don't do that at any special time, just when I feel I'm low on something. I keep a pretty good stock. When something gets low and I go to refill it, I can see that I need to replenish it.

What's the best thing about your job?

The freedom. I love the people I've met; they're people I've made friends with. And it's not boring. People think it would be because you're doing the same thing over and over, but it's on different people. And you become everybody's therapist. It's a lot of fun. You know how they talk about doctor-patient confidentiality? This is the same

thing. I really enjoy coming to work. Sure there are days when I might not feel like working, but I never wake up and think, "Boy, I'm dreading it."

Doing manicures is a great living, but it depends on the individual manicurist and the clientele. What makes you good is your speed. If you're slow your not going to make any money.

What's the worst thing?

I really don't (dislike anything). Sometimes I wish the hours were a little shorter but I have days off so that kind of compensates for it.

What attributes are essential to doing your job well?

You definitely have to be a people person. You deal with a lot of different personalities and it takes a while to build trust. You have to be very responsible. And you have to be committed to taking it on. I've heard horror stories—people making appointments and technicians never showing up. I've heard people say they've shown up for a mani-

cure and people will say, "Oh, she's not here today."

There are times when I want to make plans for a certain day but I don't because I know a good client is getting married and needs her nails and her bridal party's nails done.

What are your future career plans?

I absolutely will keep doing this. I have no other plans on doing anything else.

What advice would you give to people interested in this field?

Make sure you can deal with the public very, very well. I've heard (other manicurists) say, "Don't you wish your clients would just shut up?" I think, "You're in the wrong business." You also have to be willing to put in long hours and you have to be very organized since you're timing everything every hour on the hour.

—Kathleen Furore

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