

Examining the Shortage of Qualified Spa Managers and Its Impact on the Spa Industry

According to a poll taken at the Global Spa Summit held this past May in New York, recruiting and retaining good people to work for you is the biggest problem spa owners and managers face today. Given the extreme shortage of readily accessible, high-level business training for spa managers and personnel that exists worldwide, this hardly came as a surprise, given that the more than \$40 billion global spa industry has experienced double-digit growth over the past 20 years.

A growth rate that impressive in any channel always escalates the demand for educated, experienced spa managers and personnel. If the spa industry is to continue expanding and building on past success, it must somehow find educated business leaders who understand the importance not only of running a successful spa but of maintaining the integrity and feel of the “spa environment” as well.

Though labor shortages are the most serious problem the spa industry faces today, a lack of industry-wide standards that define and set quantifiable standards for best practices in the various categories in which spas currently provide service is a close second. Without such standards, industry leaders say that consumers have no means of knowing what to expect when they arrive at a spa. Industry standards are necessary for devising quality training programs as well, and without them spa managers and owners will continue to have a difficult time finding qualified spa personnel to staff spa businesses.

Sensitive to industry concerns, keynote speakers for the Global Spa Summit concurred on the dual importance of enhancing spa clients’ health and sense of well being and educating consumers that spas are for increasing wellness and taking preventative measures against disease by adhering to healthful practices that include the spa environment.

In addition to the keynote speeches, conference attendees also had the opportunity to hear presentations and participate in breakout sessions about the latest spa industry data and statistics from around the world, spas as investment opportunities, ownership and management cooperative arrangements for hotel-based spas, and presentations on sustainability issues for spas—all challenges the industry must conquer to if it is to remain viable and continue to grow in a healthy manner.

Though spas have been prevalent in Europe and Asia for centuries, Americans have only recently begun to understand that spas are active contributors to an ethic of physical and mental wellness rather than places used simply for sybaritic self-indulgence. American consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the overall health benefits and improved life balance spas can help to provide.

Furthermore, while Wall Street’s increasing interest in the spa industry is beneficial in many ways, spa owners and managers must exercise vigilant care in order to maintain the authentic spa experience for clients and the soulfulness of the spa industry as a whole.

Today's spa manager must be a well-rounded business person, knowledgeable about how operational functions such as human resources, finances, client services, marketing, public relations, facility management, staff training and education, customer loyalty, business branding and retail sales all affect the bottom line. Chief among these responsibilities is establishing and maintaining good employee relations, which in turn depend upon creating and sustaining a safe and respectful working environment for employees. Implementing a good employee relations program boosts productivity and helps businesses to comply with the host of employment laws and regulations mandated by state and federal laws.

To minimize employer liability, spa business owners and managers must identify, communicate and reinforce a slate of values and beliefs that support positive employee relations. Additionally, there is a need for spa managers to learn more about how to create and maintain the positive employee relations essential to the survival of all businesses. U.S employees spend more hours at work than any other employees in the Western World.

Successful business people recognize that teamwork is essential to reaching productivity goals will provide a workplace free of discrimination, harassment, substance abuse and violence. Management must realize that the company's teamwork value isn't being expressed as it should be when any one of the above behaviors is ignored, excused or simply overlooked.

Most spa owners and managers earnestly want their employees to be actively engaged in building their business, but many fail to communicate on a continual basis and meaningful level with their workers in three critical ways necessary for such engagement – explanation, feedback and consideration.

Spa owners and managers who want their businesses to succeed in the long term must learn how to engage their employees in building their businesses by making sure they explain not only the work they want employees to perform, but also why and how the work that they do is important to accomplishing the company's mission and goals. People who appreciate the connection between what they do and the desired result feel included in the overall mission of any company, and when the spa industry develops an industry-wide set of standards and a uniform mission statement, getting spa personnel to understand this essential connection will be much easier than it is today.

To maintain the integrity of the spa environment, a spa manager must become an excellent teacher/trainer. In most cases, this can only be accomplished when the spa manager is a well-educated management professional to begin with.

All training materials should be kept close by and accessible whenever needed. Whether located in a three-ring binder or a computer training module, well organized reference materials for job tasks should be easy to navigate and information kept to the minimum required. Good managers know to cut wordy training documents to their essence and not take three sentences to make a point when three words will do the job. Spa managers should also recognize that to be of maximum value, training programs must be adaptable to the different ways in which people learn. Visually oriented people like to learn by reading, seeing and taking notes; auditory learners need to hear instructions to fully comprehend them.

Organizers and attendees of the Global Spa Summit both expressed hope that this meeting would be the beginning of solid solutions to problems currently plaguing the industry. The summit, which came about as the result of years of informal discussions between senior hospitality and spa executives worldwide who felt a sense of frustration at the lack of an industry wide forum for concerns of executive spa owners and managers, provided an opportunity to begin defining the steps necessary to improve the current state of affairs.