

Managing to be Different

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Have you ever sat down and thought about what makes a spa experience outstanding?

As an avid spa goer, who travels frequently running my own learning and management development business, I have a keen interest in people, and often feel excited about the opportunity to experience new spa brands or treatments in different locations.

From a management development perspective, let's consider how your spa experience can be influenced by professional managers. Here are two examples of recent visits I made to five-star hotel spas in Thailand.

I had read so much about the first Spa in the journals and was eager and very excited about the upcoming visit. The website research had been completed, treatment time had been pre-booked and initial impressions were very positive. Upon arrival, I was stunned by the architecture, the welcoming and calming ambience and the beautiful smiles that greeted me. All signs suggested that this would be a wonderful experience. My expectations were sky high and so were the prices!

Within seconds however, the positive impression and expectations were shattered. What happened? The smiling receptionist passed me an extensive spa menu and

said: "This is our menu, please choose your treatment."

- No questions
- No conversation
- No suggestions
- No consultation

Just choose a treatment as if it was a take away menu.

Severe disappointment set in. My attitude shifted and I felt angry enough to actually want to cancel my booking and just leave. The least I had expected was a professional consultation that focused on my needs. Eventually I received a pleasant treatment but when I wanted to pay, there was chaos, the credit card machine wasn't working and nobody knew what to do. I was escorted from the spa to the main building in my bathrobe to pay the bill. Despite a good treatment, it was a memorable experience, but for all the wrong reasons.

I had also heard a lot about the second spa, this time through colleagues and friends who had visited and raved about it. Again, expectations were high.

The initial impression had already been very good and the scenery and ambience striking, it was the spa consultant who really made the difference. Within seconds I was delighted and any concerns disappeared.

What happened here?

- I was asked what treatment I was looking for
- She found out what treatments I had enjoyed before
- She noticed bruising on my legs and referred to it
- I received a specific recommendation from the menu relevant to my responses
- The spa consultant gave me the feeling that I was a very important person

As a result I booked two treatments that not only worked well for me, but were also likely to be highly profitable to the spa. The service was amazing. I felt very good and sure this would be a truly memorable experience.

So what made the difference?

It appears to me that the first spa has invested heavily into its hardware, the architecture, the physical building, the extensive menu etc., but less so in its software, the people and the way the spa is managed.

In the second spa, the hardware was less impressive, however the software, the way

Spa guests will not settle for a mediocre spa experience, they expect an amazing experience.

people interacted with guests and how the spa was managed, totally made up for this and actually exceeded my expectations.

So what does make the difference?

The key to success is the people and especially the way the people and the spa are managed.

So how would you know if a spa is well managed?

Here are some indicators:

- everyone offers effortless genuine service from their heart and really wants to make a difference for each spa guest
- spa employees interact with their guests and colleagues in a friendly and sincere way
- spa receptionists provide an exceptional consultation
- spa guests feel reassured that they will have a "safe experience" both emotionally and physically
- everyone knows exactly what is expected of them and appears to have been trained well
- spa guests are assisted to buy relevant products and treatments
- attention to detail is good, premises are immaculate, displays are eye-catching and well-maintained
- serenity and calmness prevails and confidence levels are high
- spa guests make multiple visits to the spa during a hotel stay
- the spa is actively promoted within the hotel environment as a result of positive relationships being built between hotel and spa management

So obviously, good spa managers with exceptional leadership skills and personal traits are needed to achieve the indicators listed above. However, skilled, knowledgeable and experienced Spa Managers are hard to find in today's expanding spa market.

In markets where it is difficult to find local talent, a convenient solution has been to hire expatriate spa managers. Although they demand a much higher pay than their local counterparts, it has been generally accepted

based on the assumption that they will generate more revenue. With the immigration and labour laws tightening in many countries, developing local spa manager talent becomes not only a viable option but a real necessity.

Professional development of local spa managers involves FIVE key stages

1 Recruiting the best

This can only take place if there is a fair and consistent recruitment process and potential candidates are measured against agreed recruitment criteria. Up to date assessment techniques should be utilised including personality profiling and assessment of skills and knowledge. Without the selection of the right people, the next stages will be more challenging.

2 Training and Development

Training and development will be most effective if it is structured in a way that enables the local spa manager to develop skills and knowledge on a modular basis and then implement this knowledge in their business. An effective structure might include:

Self Management (Personal Effectiveness)

- Role of the Spa Manager
- Team Leadership
- Personal Organisation
- Time Management

Business Management (Driving the business)

- Financial Awareness
- Visual Merchandising
- Successful Selling

People Management (Managing the team)

- Recruiting the Best
- Managing Day to Day Performance
- Training and Coaching Skills
- Performance Appraisals

Service Delivery (Caring for guests)

- Managing service journey delivery
- Managing client relationships

3 Coaching/Mentoring

A culture of coaching should be encouraged. This means providing a

mechanism for ongoing coaching that is alive in the spa. Coaching will encourage long-term sustainable change and growth, build self confidence and increase the capabilities of spa managers. This in turn enables the spa manager to achieve quality results and to maximise their performance.

4 Measurement

It is well-known that what gets measured gets managed, and what gets managed gets done. Key result areas should be agreed on and managers are to be measured against them. This may include financial results, occupancy rates, guest and employee satisfaction ratings, as well as the achievement of performance goals.

5 Rewards

Based on the achievement of agreed key performance indicators, managers should be rewarded with financial incentives. This can be calculated as a percentage of salary, profit, revenue etc. Good performance pays!

If an operator is willing to invest in the right education and training, the spa can become the pride of the hotel property. Whilst it cannot happen overnight, it will happen with planning, dedication and determination. With a strong training focus, and full backup and commitment, the spa can realize its full potential and profitability.

As the spa industry continues to grow, and new spas open almost daily, outdoing themselves in more sophisticated hardware, décor and equipment, the only way to compete is to make a difference and the main difference is in the managing of the spa resulting in a unique service experience.

Even more choices are available to the spa-goer.

Your experience inside the treatment room should match your experience outside the treatment room. This can only happen if the spa is well managed.

Choose a spa that is truly managing to be different. **sa**