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THE CRISIS AND THE TRAINING

Reflections on the Relationship Between the Staff Crisis and Staff Training

Lack of staff and high staff turnover are severely restricting many Spa owners profitability and threaten many a business' continuing existence. Spa therapist trainer Elaine Denton reflects on the problem with more than a dash of her indigenous wisdom shedding some fresh light on this familiar dilemma.

“How can we minimise staff turn over?” is a complaint echoed over telephone lines and dinner tables between Spa owners and directors everywhere. Owners complain of poor quality delivery and no loyalty, and therapists complain of being overworked and underpaid.

Lets go back to how foundations are built. With the foundations of a building, preparation takes time and requires strength applied at the right angles to the correct depth and levels. This is also the foundation preparation and strategy we need with our staff.

How It All Starts

When you are establishing your new Spa – everything is important all at once, the décor, reception, phone system, Spa software, skin care product, front of staff, Spa therapists, human resource team, management, Spa menu, treatments. It's a basic business set up, not too complicated. Once open and running it looks good but why isn't it working and why the high staff turnover? Something is out of synergy.

Your therapists and your skin care range are crucial investments for your successful Spa, key ingredients for delivering professional high standard Spa treatments. Your selected Spa skin care range needs to melt from the hands of your Spa Therapist into your client's mind, body and spirit. Two vital elements working together. Like a morning mist comes with an evening chill, they need each other, a natural balance.

You choose your ideal range, and are impressed by the free in house training, the standard four-day training program offered to new accounts. It's all fitting into the budget nicely. Enrolment of the new Spa Therapists is near completion, once the application and interview process has been completed you feel like you're nearly at the finish line.

Brilliant, finally you can take a sigh of relief; your new therapists are excited and looking forward to their 'free' training program. It's a buzz-



ing time, so much energy going into organising, the money is now all invested and there is the unspoken promise of long term commitments from either side. Employer and employee, you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back.

As the Spa owner / director you can now rest, you've gathered the ingredients, it's out of your hands. You have now handed your hard work over to the company that you have purchased your Spa care products from - its time for them to train your Spa therapists. You have invested thousands of dollars for your new range; it is now up to them to deliver their part of the bargain, a skilled Spa Therapist.

The therapists emerge - skilled perhaps, but are they passionate and committed?

The Rotation Cycle

How many times as a Spa business owner have you felt your frustration boiling over, because you are repeating the training cycle just about every three months – with constantly rotating staff? Slowly the new therapist training becomes like Chinese Whispers, as knowledge gets handed from one therapist to another. Too bad if the exiting therapist is doing the training and is not in a centred and committed training space, or it's the senior therapist with a bee in their bonnet about the Spa care range or even the environment the owner has created. Sometimes it can be like the blind leading the blind.

In my opinion this dilemma escalates because Spa owners are not investing in quality training. This has unfortunately become a common culture in our industry.

Our Spa therapists become increasingly disillusioned.

With early enthusiasm and intention, the new owner enthuses to new staff about the free training support the therapist will enjoy in your establishment - helping them establish their career for the future. The intention is good but it doesn't happen. The therapists start floating from one Spa environment to another; their resume is starting to fill with all the skin product training workshops they have participated in. These regular workshops are no longer inspiring any enthusiasm, no matter how good, new and innovative the range.

You try again, it must be the products...you choose the best Spa care products on the market, your staff will just love this, they will love applying these muds, salts, special oil blends, facial masks, this product will make them stay, its guaranteed. The ritual starts over again. The relationship is refreshed, the training is performed, and the therapist stays. But soon again they start to feel empty in what they are doing; starting to feel that this career really isn't for them, and just as quickly as the newfound relationship began it is over. Recognise the pattern, feel familiar? Another therapist drifts away from the industry.

The Professional Therapist

Many therapy and product range training programs are fully focused on creating the 'Professional' Therapist. The program considers training successful when the therapist earns the title by becoming a clinical, knowledgeable product sales representative. This may sound harsh but how often have you felt the calculating frozen energy of the therapist trying to achieve her quota. How many infomercials have we had to listen to while trying to relax during our treatment? They may even



**Investing in the right training is paramount
to running a successful business**

sell us a product but how many clients return for more treatments or even more products? And how many therapists are fulfilled within this therapy delivery focus?

The Authentic Therapist

An Authentic Spa Therapist is an artist, a story teller, a dancer, a nurse, a consultant, a historian, a reflection of the Spa Care range, passionate about the skin care's qualities, genuinely wants the client to purchase the retail range because they know it really is wonderful.

An Authentic Spa Therapist is passionate about the client experiencing a holistic mind, body and spirit Spa treatment ... a treatment that the client wants to return for.

The kind of therapist every Spa needs a fistful of! Maintaining productivity and commitment from your Authentic Spa Therapist will reflect how good you are at looking after their wellbeing.

Authentic Spa Therapy Training

Lets go back to the training and how the therapist is mentored

Take the focus away from the product and its sales, lets focus on the therapist first. How do we help them establish their own self confidence in their own true ability to perform a professional authentic treatment, a treatment that encourages and ignites both their own, and the client's, mind body and spirit. Yes it is possible!

Strip away the plastic classroom environment; create a space that supports inner belief and growth. Establish steps of self-discovery, give the therapists the tools to see inside themselves, encourage the warmth to release. Teach the secrets of letting go of stagnant energy, plant the seed of hope and freedom, teach free flowing technique, and encourage that natural intuition that has been sitting waiting to be found. Enable the strength and vitality to be felt while overcoming cultural barriers. Trust, while respecting individual unique ideas with passionate intentions.



Investing in the right Spa training for your staff is paramount to running a successful business in Spa; they bring a strength that is second to none.

What is the next crucial component here – the Trainer.

The Authentic Trainer

The Authentic training experience comes from the passion of the Spa Trainer, the staff can feel it! They know if it is real or not. If it's not – the game is over.

Your Spa Trainer needs to reflect total authenticity with the Spa concept and be able to breathe this passion into those they are mentoring. They have to breathe, live and eat what they talk about. Spa messages are all about 'wellness', 'balance', and 'natural', it won't work while our therapists are trained in the most un-natural ways totally out of synergy with the messages we advertise that we will deliver in our Spas. Its

even worse when the training is delivered by individuals who no more walk the Spa wellness talk than fly to the moon.

Having the right Spa Training Mentor in your environment means the world of difference. This might mean employing out of house consultants or trainers. The cost of purchasing the right skill sets and passion will far outweigh the cost of the rotating staff door.

The seed for passionate authentic Spa therapy has generally already been planted in the therapist. It is up to the Spa training and the trainer to water, nurture and fertilise that seed to help it to grow. The Spa environment – your Spa, is the garden in which that seed grows, how deep and secure the roots are within your garden will be a reflection on how well nurtured it was from the beginning. 🌿



By Elaine Denton

Elaine has over a decade of Spa Therapy experience, she is an accredited therapist, Spa Trainer and Spa Management Consultant, she is passionate about staff training and Spa performance. Her commitment and passion for delivery of authentic Spa Training and Treatments is reflected in Makoha, her signature Spa range. Elaine took eight years to research, document and develop New Zealand's signature Makoha Spa which has recently been approved by the New Zealand Trademark and Maori Advisory Boards. Email: Elaine@makohaspa.com. Images courtesy of Makoha Spa Therapy Training.

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I think it's quite bizarre that Spa skin care ranges focus their advertising on peaceful images, strong relaxing nature pictures, you know the ones with the water cascading down river stones, but then sit their therapists in plastic classrooms with plastic folders and styrofoam cups.

Set up a training environment that reflects the values of the range and the spirit of the Spa. Training the therapist in a natural environment and getting them to connect to these elements is a key ingredient for them to establish a strong sense of connection to the Spa care and ignites a sense of pride in their working environment. A win / win situation. Skin care products use the words 'holistic', 'spirit', 'mind', 'balance' ... what does this all mean? How can a client experience these elements if the therapist doesn't even understand them themselves?

Creating a safe environment with love and encouragement, where a training therapist can bond the new knowledge with their own, be inspired by enhanced values and build new integrity, will bond the staff's relationship with the product and help cement a commitment to your business.

If the therapist can experience the feeling of what it is that attracts the client to the Spa themselves – they understand, can relate to and can bond with your clientele. They will feel your authentic commitment and respect that you have taken the time to research and invest in their Spa training. If they are feeling nurtured and appreciated as a valued individual while in their training, this feeling will then be reflected back to you in your Spa environment. They will treat your business how you treat them, they will support your business because you are acknowledging your therapists in a holistic manner.

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