

2

Leadership skills in the spa environment

In order for spa managers to be effective, it is essential that they should have the necessary skills and self discipline to be able to personally manage themselves; if not, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to manage and control their team effectively. Strong and effective leadership skills are key to a well-functioning spa operation. This chapter covers the most important areas and behaviours that a spa manager needs to develop and focus on in order to lead their spa team well.

A point that is often overlooked is that spa staff will be more responsive to being led through example as opposed to being told. The more that spa managers can set an example through their own behaviour and communication skills, the more likely the staff are to follow suit. Watching a spa manager communicate with their guests with excellent people skills will be just as, if not more effective, than any customer service training. In short: the staff will do what the spa manager does!

Alternatively, bad habits such as coming in late, poor appearance etc, will also be picked up on by team members. Unprofessionalism puts the spa manager into a weak position – cutting corners, lax personal discipline and bad timekeeping will be mirrored in time by the staff. In order to build up his or her respect and maintain a strong position, the spa manager should always be aware of and be continually working on their professional and leadership skills.

Michael Solomon's PHD work at the Graduate School of Business of New York University (Polly, 2015) suggests that we make 11 assessments about somebody in the first seven seconds of contact. These are:

- 1 Economic status – where somebody is positioned in society, and their income level and wealth.
- 2 Educational status – how intelligent they are and what is their probable academic level.
- 3 How honest and/or credible they are.
- 4 How much they can be trusted.
- 5 Level of sophistication.
- 6 Gender, their sexual orientation, desirability and availability.
- 7 Level of success.

- 8 Political background.
- 9 Whether they share the same values and principles.
- 10 Ethnic origin.
- 11 Social desirability – how much you would like this person as a friend.
(Eggert, 2010)

For the spa manager, honesty, trust, a certain level of sophistication, values that complement a healthy lifestyle and having a likeability factor, stand out as being the most relevant. Guests need to feel that they can trust the manager, that the manager has a certain amount of elegance (spas after all sell experiences and treatments, not hamburgers!) and that the manager portrays similar values as today's spa goers, values such as humility, altruism and wellness. As mentioned in the previous chapter, most of all, the customer wants to see the manager 'like' a friend, a friendly host who is going to guide them through their experience.

In the previous chapter we looked at the percentages of communication, in particular non-verbal communication according to Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55% rule. If personal presentation and body language is 55% of how customers will react to a spa team, the spa manager should be setting an exemplary example.

Presentation

Spa environments are normally conservative. Globally, spas tend to veer towards being a luxury experience, with many, though not of course all, situated in four- or five-star hotels. The expectations of how a spa manager should present themselves are high. Not only do spa managers need to demonstrate professionalism through how they dress and their attention to detail, but given that they are also selling health and harmony, they need to look the part. No one expects them to look like a supermodel or Olympic athlete, but they should be smart, impeccably groomed, relatively fit, and balanced.

■ What to wear

Often a uniform will be provided by the company. This is the preferred option as it will reflect the style of the spa operation; a uniform will also save the manager time and energy each day in selecting what to wear. Many companies, however, do not offer this option.

With respect to dress, the aim of the spa manager should be to present themselves in a discreet and professional way. Understatement is the key word. If the spa manager wants to make a statement and stand out, they should stand out through their personality and their excellent people and management skills, not through their dress or piercings.

The 3 'T's

The 3 'T's provide conservative guidelines for selecting clothing: traditional, tasteful and tailored. (Hankins, 2005):

- **Traditional:** in the spa environment the spa manager will normally be required to wear a suit. Whilst not particularly comfortable or practical, this is currently the common standard. The style should be formal – no extreme fashion, with white, blue or light coloured shirt or blouse.
- **Tasteful:** the suit should be in dark colours, black or dark blue, matt and of natural fibers.
- **Tailored:** clearly it should fit comfortably, not too light or not too loose, with a buttoned jacket.

Men

- **Grooming:** hair should be cut regularly, shaving should take place on a daily basis before the shift, if the manager has a beard, designer beard, moustache etc. this should also be trimmed regularly. Nails should be clipped, clean and cuticles taken care of. With age, as nose, eyebrow and ear hair become more prominent, these should be plucked or trimmed. Jewelry or visible tatoos would generally not be considered appropriate.
- **Attire:** depending on the formality of the spa environment, ties would normally be expected. Again, these should be conservative, tasteful and not gimmicky. They should be tied properly and up to the neck, with a moderately sized knot, with its length to the belt. Shoes should match the suit, and be clean and shiny on all sides. Socks should be of a dark coordinating colour.

Women

- **Grooming:** if hair is long, normally it would be expected to be tied back, particularly if the spa manager is also multi-skilling as a therapist. Nails should be of a reasonable, practical length, clean, with nail polish of a discreet colour. Miminium is the key word when it comes to make up, perfume and jewelry. Any accessories should be understated.
- **Attire:** in addition to a suit, either with skirt or trousers, a contrasting blouse with collar should be worn. The blouse should avoid being low cut. The more revealing the outfit, the less authoratitive the impact. Shoes should be business-like but practical – spa managers will spend most of their day on the their feet – and naturally the shoes should match the outfit

■ Body language

The previous chapter focused on customer service and the importance for staff to be aware of their body language. Given that the spa manager will be setting the example, good body language in this case is even more relevant – if the staff are expected to have a good posture, slow, confident movements and eye contact, the spa manager should set the example.