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## Effective team management in the spa environment

A great atmosphere and a successful spa normally go hand in hand – it is not usual to find one without the other. Similarly, behind every great spa atmosphere will be a competent and effective spa manager. Atmosphere comes from the top and trickles down from the spa manager and their boss, and the boss above them, into the spa.

It is not just the guests who demand a good atmosphere, the staff do too. According to an inaugural ISPA workforce study which surveyed 1200 participants, a positive culture and working environment was the number one priority for staff (Kitchen, 2018).

The key to create a great atmosphere is 'the team'. And remember there is no 'I' in 'team'. Keep them happy and motivated, training is key, communication is key, and to be their boss, mummy, agony aunt. In our club our members could see how well we all got on, and it was infectious. Our staff retention was excellent and we all became like a little family. Even though our club was old and rancid, we loved it, we were proud of it, and this shone through!

Sarra Temple, previously manager of Watford Health Club, UK.

In most spas, the staff will be working out of love for the job as opposed to financial gains. Like most industries in the hospitality sector, the spa industry does not normally pay particularly well and staff are aware of this. Many will be prepared to put up with the shift work, the long hours and back to back treatment schedule if the spa is a pleasant atmosphere to work in. The ISPA study shows that spa staff are loyal and do not like to job hop – 76% said that they had worked for less than 5 employers (Kitchen, 2018). That is not to say spa managers should become complacent about how they treat their staff, for if the work environment turns negative and nasty (and if there are other opportunities available), staff will more than likely leave. The spa manager therefore has a vested interest in closely monitoring and managing the energy and atmosphere in their spa.

“Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients.”

Richard Branson

Weak leadership, an imbalance of personalities and abilities, unclear roles, lack of motivation, a culture of bad behaviour, unpleasant communication – are all factors that are characteristics of bad teams. Good teams on the other hand focus on performance and have a work culture built around values, norms and goals. They meet regularly and embrace differing viewpoints, evaluate their performance, give positive feedback and have common sense of purpose (Cardon, 2016).

The main role of the spa manager is to motivate and manage their team effectively. If the manager gets this right, then their job will be relatively easy and a joy to do. If they get it wrong, a dissatisfied team or two bad apples can turn the job into a nightmare. A nightmare in a spa means: telephone calls on a Sunday morning at six am because the receptionist has not shown up for work or a fire in the sauna because a member of staff did not bother to turn it off.

Investing time and energy in people are the building blocks to creating a good team, knowing how much time to spend with them and also when to leave them alone. This takes experience – “great relationships with customers, colleagues or loved ones don’t just happen magically. They take time...” (McGee, 2013).

So how does a manager create a good working team? There are some key actions for this:

- Leading by example, as discussed in the previous chapters.
- Having a positive attitude.
- Good listening skills.
- Being able to adapt communication styles to different personalities.
- Being effective – having good organisation and business communication skills.
- Using tried and trusted management tools such as meetings and performance appraisals.
- And of course, making sure the team is right in the first place – recruitment.

## Human resource in the spa environment

One of the mistakes spa managers make is in assuming that human resource in spas is an administrative role – sorting out contracts and personnel policies etc. However, this is only part of it. The main function of human resource and team management in a spa environment should be actively driving the development and motivation of the staff. This includes:

- Being able to hold good interviews and recruit the right people.
- Giving good orientation and induction training for new staff.
- Supporting career development and job training.
- Introducing benefits and motivational programs for employees.

## ■ Recruitment

To have the right team the spa manager needs to have employed the right people in the first place. One bad decision and the whole balance of a team can be thrown out of sync.

Recruitment can often be challenging and finding staff in some locations is sometimes almost impossible. However, there are certain actions a spa manager can take to help:

- 1 Building relationships with higher educational facilities:** encouraging local college and university leavers to apply for positions. Building personal relationships with key decision makers in the facility (i.e. career advisors), inviting students for show-arounds, conducting presentations and lectures in local colleges and educational establishments etc.
- 2 Offering students work experience in the spa:** many spas offer this opportunity. The advantage is, that if a student has had work experience, they will also have had on the job training and acquired some of the necessary skills, in addition they will know and have worked with the team.
- 3 Interviewing potential staff even when there are no positions available:** this might seem illogical, but continuous interviewing not only keeps the spa manager in good practice at carrying out interviews, it also enables them to build up a CV bank. Therefore, if a receptionist walks out on a Monday morning, the spa manager will have a list of potential job candidates to call. If none of those candidates are available, maybe they can suggest someone who is.
- 4 Recruiting through existing staff members:** approaching the best performing staff and asking them if they know anyone who would be interested in working in the spa. Some spas even offer financial incentives (for example, if the new recruit stays more than 1 year then the referrer employee gets an extra month's salary).
- 5 Promoting up:** promoting from within is normally smoother than recruiting new blood from outside. An existing employee will know the systems and the team. When someone is recruited externally, it often takes several months before they find their place – if it works out at all.
- 6 Being able to conduct good interviews and check references.** This will be analysed in the next section.

## Preparing for the interview

It is important to remember that the person being interviewed is interviewing the interviewer as much as the interviewer is interviewing them!