



Get Spa Smart about Customer Service:

Happy Employees = Happy Guests



Written by Mindy Terry
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What's the No. 1 thing spa managers can do to grow their business? Grow, nurture and educate their employees to offer outstanding customer service.

I've been to thousands of spas and when I go to one for the first time, I always feel intimidated. Where do you go between treatments? Where do you leave your towel? Do I tip the therapists directly or leave cash at the front desk? There are so many questions running through the guests' minds that it's tough for them to relax. That's why it is critical that the staff is trained to educate and "take care of" guests from check-in to check-out. Customer service is not intuitive. Therapists and other employees need ongoing education and training in order to offer 5-star experiences. This ongoing education should include clear, realistic expectations of roles; effective, frequent communication between management and staff; regularly-scheduled performance reviews; and empowerment of employees to make decisions on their feet.

How does a spa management team (that is likely strapped for time already) approach customer service education in a thoughtful manner? For that I turned to two experts on engaging teams in amazing customer service – Eric Stephenson, director, for imassage (www.imassageinc.com) and Debra Koerner, executive director, Destination Spa Group (www.destinationspavacations.com).

Eric and Debra present at top industry conferences numerous times each year on instilling a culture of flawless customer service in wellness settings. Here's what I learned during our chat:

Mindy Terry: It seems like customer service is a buzz word in the spa and wellness industry.

Debra Koerner: "Post recession, the businesses that continue to thrive have dedicated efforts towards their customer experience. Flawless customer service separates one spa from another and is more of a driver for consumers' decision-making than in the past."

Eric Stephenson: "The unique nature of the spa environment gives our industry the unique ability to stand out. When was the last time you were really wowed by a business? Our industry has the opportunity to create experiences that 95 percent of other businesses can't, that is, if we don't get it wrong!"

MT: Happy employees equal happy guests. How do leaders create a positive environment?

DK: "During team meetings, ask employees why they work at your facility and why they are in the spa industry to determine what motivates them. Use their answers to gather information on what is really important to them. Once you know their motivations, create communication points for engaging employees. Example: the team's purpose is to reduce stress in their community. The dialogue from management then becomes, 'We added 10 new people to our wellness program and can now reduce stress in the lives of these 10 families.'"

ES: "I love Debra's approach. Help your team analyze the impact of the larger picture: How many lives have we really affected? How many people are nicer when they got home because they visited our spa? Everyone working in a spa should know many guests they have worked with in a week, month, year, etc. It's up to the management team to be proud of this and, in turn, communicate the message."

DK – "Those in leadership positions should analyze how they are spending their time. If it's on employee issues, drama, and HR write-ups; they have a framework that is not being consistently enforced. If the management team's time is being sucked up with fires, it is absolutely worth their time to help everyone understand their sense of purpose and then outline guidelines for repercussions and follow-through. Afterwards, managers will see that they are spending less time on fires and have more time for strategy and growing the spa."

ES: "At imassage, we like to create drama-free environments, which centers on communication. There should be clear lesson plans for training and communication. The plans are physical documents that a consultant can help spas set up and, ultimately, become self-sufficient in practicing."

MT: How will managers analyze ROI from these tactics?

ES: "They will see it in the spa's retention rate and team's morale. The ROI is creating an environment where people are excited to come in and feel safe. How a team deals with problems is what separates great teams from mediocre ones." ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As the Founder and President of Creative Spa Concepts, Thailand-based Mindy Terry leads a team of consultants who represent more than 75 collective years of experience in the wellness and hospitality industries. Read more on Terry and CSC on www.creativespaconcepts.com as well as on Twitter @GetSpaSmart and @MissSpaSmart.