



*President of Aspen Spa Management, he is also the Technical Director of International Spa Association Inc.*

*His International career began when he was on the staff at Cornell University, teaching in several academic departments and in Physical Education and Athletics where he was Fencing Master and Director of Martial Arts. His hotel background and experience led to consulting. He soon became a renowned expert in Luxury Hotel Spas. His work took him to all parts of the planet.*

*He accumulated knowledge in Asian healing Arts in Japan and in the South East Asian basin.*

*He is one of the few consultants that is really hands on. His knowledge of architectural design and spa operations has made him a leader in the Industry.*

*His company offers a complete turn-key possibility from design to management including staff training inspection services.*

*When asked what he brings to his clients, he smiles and candidly says: "40 years of mistakes they will not have to make!"*

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## SPA PERFORMANCE

### MANY RESTAURANTS GIVE BETTER SERVICE THAN SPAS

## S E R V I C E , S E R V I C E , S E R V I C E , THAT'LL BE THE NAME OF THE GAME FROM NOW ON

*By Raoul Sudre*

**A**s Spas proliferate in the world, as every Tom, Dick, and Harriet is jumping on the Bandwagon to take advantage of the boom, the quality of service is diminishing. The most important element of the Spa Experience: Service is getting worse and worse.

The Mobil Guide has recently published their first Rating of the Spa Industry. They did not award any Spa in the U.S. a 5 stars rating, due to overall inferior client relationship and service. And this is at the top of the ladder... Why is this service Industry so poor in performing up to par compared with other hospitality venues? First and foremost the problem comes from a lack of training and because of the rapid expansion of the industry a lack of experienced service oriented staff. At this point in time the demand for Spa services is so high that the negative impact has not been felt yet. Yes there are more and more people expressing their dissatisfaction at various Resort and Destination Spas, a few articles here and there raising some doubts about the professionalism of some Spa operators: Do you call that a Spa? A New-York Times article first raised the red flag a couple of years ago, but the Industry did not react as everyone felt it did not apply to them. As a Consulting Company we are called upon to evaluate Spas worldwide for our clients. Everything being relative our evaluations are done based on a National and an International Scale. On a scale of 1 to 10 a high scoring U.S. Spa rated say at 8 would probably not score more than 4 on an International scale. The difference is partly due to treatment delivery proficiency but largely due to poor service and client relations. As the Industry goes from glut to saturation the attrition rate will rise and many will go out of business. The first to go will be the ones who forgot that Spas are a Service Sensitive Industry. What needs to be done to avoid being part of those who will sink into oblivion is in fact quite simple: First, many Spa owners and operators will need to review their attitude, too many think of themselves as Medical health providers and have adopted a Medical attitude of condescension towards their clients - they are not Doctors and to act as if they were, simply antagonizes most clients, surely 600 hours of schooling or even 1200 hours does not give any of them the intellectual clout to treat their clients with condescendence and derision. In fact Doctors with 12 to 15 years of school behind them

are less and less acting that way because they too are loosing patients... the industry has been in a self admiration Society mode for a number of years. When you start believing your own hype is when you will start getting into trouble. Have an independent entity evaluate your performance; don't just listen to your friends who by trying to make you feel good will take you directly to the poor house.

If you have the opportunity to travel to South East Asia and try out their treatments and check out their client relations skills you might come back with a few good ideas on how to greet and treat your clients. If you cannot afford a trip ask a good hospitality professional to evaluate the service skills of your staff and yours at the same time... you might be surprised!

Service starts at the front desk, your receptionist is an ambassador to your business, It is a most important position which many fill with retired charming old ladies or inexperienced high school drop outs because they accept a lower salary! You need to have a sharp looking individual, who knows how to smile sincerely, but also someone who understands completely every treatment offered and who can speak intelligently about the therapeutic benefits of all treatments and of the various retail products offered for sale. It is worth paying that person a good salary perhaps completed by a commission on sales. This will ensure that you have someone of quality who will go the extra mile for you. According to a recent study done by International Spa Associates spa clients indicated that they felt that most restaurants gave better service than Spas... most complaints center around lack of warmth and kindness from technical staff, lack of global knowledge about the various services offered in the Spa, lack of concern to personalization of treatments.

As this situation has reached endemic proportions, one should see a great opportunity to distinguish one self from the competition. Clients have become so sensitive about service that they will give their total loyalty to a place where they will be treated with kindness and compassion.

So take that gum out of your mouth, smile, be attentive, show concern, and anticipate your clients desires before they express them, and you will be the king and queen of the hill. ■