



What are Schools Teaching? What do Operators Want? Do They Match Up?

Concurrent Breakout Session

Monday, May 18th, 2009 4:00pm – 5:00pm

La Salle Seiler, Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa, Interlaken, Switzerland

**Moderator: Mia Kyricos, Director of Spa Development, Operations, and Marketing,
Starwood Hotels Corp, United States**

Panelists:

Raoul Andrews, President, International Hotel Spa Academy, United States

Siddharth Biswas, Corporate Spa Manager, Kempinski, Switzerland

Christine Hays, Director of Spa Operations, Oberoi Hotels, India

Christopher Norton, Director of External Relations, EHL, Switzerland

Harminder “Harry” Singh, Student, Elmcrest College of Spa Management, Canada

Scribe: Andrea Leuenberger (Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne)

Main subjects:

- What do operators want?
- What are schools offering?
- Do they match up?
- What drives choice?
- What cultural considerations are there?

Calls to action:

- Financial know-how + systems/standards - for instance universal systems of accounting for Spas
- Internships/previous experience
- Quality of global therapists + expectations
 - Realistic or not?
 - State / local regulations
- What do we want from institutions/schools/academies?
- What is the career path for Spa-related talent?
- What can we learn from F&B that could apply to Spa?
- What about recruitment?

Christine Hays

Besides technical skills on how to give treatments, I am looking for students who:

- Understand and apply proper Spa etiquette
- Are able to take guests through the entire experience



I help students by guiding them in their career choices. In India there is no standardization so far; in Indonesia, Banyan Tree trains their staff and we re-room them to our needs.

Siddharth Biswas

We need people who manage a project; turn-key solution providers who work with General Managers, managers, treatment givers on a project basis; big picture people.

Christine Hays

From an operator's perspective, the numbers are important. What we need are therapy schools with a business aspect. Hotel managers often lack empathy, they know about yields and other key metrics but are unable to relate these to the Spa environment. There is a need for Spa operators to master anatomy and physiology as well as business aspects.

Raoul Andrews

Schools and universities have their own benchmarks imposed on them; they abide by their own rules. Subsequently a discrepancy has evolved. Universities are not structured to satisfy industry needs. Vocational schools are not interested in the hospitality field. They lack the service and customer relationship approach.

We cannot find the staff we are looking for, so we re-train, which is costly. A limiting factor to a project could be that we cannot bring people in from the outside because they do not understand our culture so there is a need to create the structure to fulfil the industry demand.

Christopher Norton

Hotel schools traditionally produce managers, we could say of the "Swiss type", managers who master the art of delivering service, in other words the vocational aspect. Over the years, these hotel schools have built in the business aspect but even Cornell, in the eighties, was a vocational school. Nowadays, hotel schools have evolved into academic institutions and some have even lost the service side, the vocational aspect, so we have the other extreme.

Christopher Norton

At each and every conference one appeal is made to educational institutions: “you are not doing what the industry needs, namely giving an all encompassing education in F&B, technology, Spa, etc.” There is no way in the world to deliver a generic Bachelor degree covering every need that the industry at large has. Management knowledge and the need to understand the treatments and how to apply them efficiently. Harry, in your experience as a student, is this resonating with you?

Harry Singh

Before choosing a college I did extensive research. I already had a Bachelors degree but every employer wants to hire someone experienced in spa, with a minimum of two years in the field. So the question was: how can I get a job?

Elmcrest College in Canada is the one school I found which has its own Spa, so that is where the experience comes in. Whatever the manager is facing, clients react to it. Elmcrest teaches detailed budgeting separating between fix- and variable costs; students learn to see the business from an investor’s point of view, that is why I chose Elmcrest.

Is supply and demand matching?

Josef Ransley, Professor, IMHI-ESSEC University, United Kingdom

For over 30 years, this institution has been involved in teaching industry leaders. All schools teach finance etc. but few institutions bring this subject together with the work process, operations, and treatments. No one is teaching how to manage the process.

Siddharth Biswas

Hotel schools teach future hospitality managers. Spa is not a core business in hospitality and is often outsourced, hotels give the responsibility away. A Spa is not considered a profit-making service but as a cost centre onto which expenses are pushed. From a customer’s perspective however, a Spa is often viewed as the core business.

Josef Ransley, Professor, IMHI-ESSEC University, United Kingdom

From a development perspective, no graduate knows what the Spa treatment requirements are or the relationship to create efficiency.

Susan Harmsworth, Founder & CEO, ESPA International, United Kingdom

No one can expect these graduates to be project managers. A group person within let’s say Kempinski or Four Seasons would do that job. I use pre-openers, experienced people.

Siddharth Biswas

As an owner, would you not feel better to have one general key person?

Entire audience

Nooooo

Christopher Norton

On the GM's side, Spa does not rank very high on their agenda.

Susan Harmsworth

GM's are comfortable with F&B etc. but not with Spa.

Christopher Norton

I am actually still wondering what Spa is!

Susan Harmsworth

Hotel and Spa is one of the most defined areas. GM's are scared of it. GM and Spa people cannot communicate.

The question is: are releases from Summits and conferences being used to create for instance international Spa accounting standards?

Mary Tabacchi, Professor, Cornell University of Hotel Administration, United States

We at Cornell are developing students for a broad range of tasks including Spa. We do a very good job on the business side of things, we know we do that well. But with all the brilliant business acumen our students have, they lack experience. Experience requires internships in whatever interests the student. I myself have reached out to the industry to say "I have a student for an internship", and I really do have a wide variety of students.

Mia Kyricos (session moderator)

What about experience prior to entry into an educational program? Raoul, can you tell us how you came about implementing the International Spa Academy?



Raoul Andrews

At one stage, I came to the conclusion that I needed to found the association in order to satisfy demand of my clients. Spa implementation was actually like having a Ferrari with truck drivers to drive it. We are now constantly asked to provide teams which we put together based on a philosophy and a mission. My projects are in countries like Morocco, Ecuador, where there are not schools. So I work

with ministries of tourism, kings, and potentates who want to develop health tourism but do not know how. There was no alternative so I created the Academy in order to provide the know-how that the Spa industry needed.

Brian Hunter, Owner/Principal, Mary Reid International Spa Academy, United Kingdom

In the last 5-10 years I have seen no improvement in the UK and Europe, education is indeed a global problem. The expectations of those who put a hotel together are: you get a bunch of therapists and put them in charge of the project but there is no way this can work. This doesn't mean there is not willingness on the part of some therapists to learn and develop management skills. Online certificates have increased interest and demand. On the other hand there are many therapists who want to remain just that: therapists.

Susan Harmsworth

The differences in standards and qualifications are huge from country to country. In Asia, Thailand, India, and China each of these country's standards and qualifications are different. Bali has no school at all. Many therapists have a certificate but have never learned about anatomy, they can do a lot of damage.

We do all the essentials in our courses. The number one issue we mentioned earlier is the cultural considerations. There is a huge mess across Spa functions, as you find out when you are operating in India, the Caribbean, etc. . .

Christine Hays

There are no governing laws and I would much rather train someone who is willing to give a "rub from the heart." In India I interview peasant girls who are interested in being trained. There are those who say they heard they could make lots of money to send home by being a Spa therapist and there are girls who say they love to give a massage and often rub their parents feet so I'd rather train one of these girls, who have the talent, who want to learn and who have a passion for massage.



A manager must know the treatments for the manager is in charge of the Spa staff. The manager must be able to intervene when staff communicate that they do not know how to do a specific part of their work, the manager must be able to say, wait, I'll show you, this is how it is done. I believe in schools like Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne but I cannot hire graduates because they do not know the things I need them to know.

Christopher Norton

What is it that you would like from hotel schools? What would you want us to teach? Could you give us a road map for what should be required for modern Spa operating?

Mia Kyricos

Who feels that technical talent is a great need?

Discussion

I have people who send me emails saying that plenty of people know how to run the business but not enough are able to provide the modalities.

Susan Harmsworth

We run 20 Spas in 15 countries. The Spa director is the issue, not the therapists. We have a disconnect amongst ourselves. Is there a career path in Spa? Are we growing and rearing talent? Is there a reason why [in a 1 year program] schools cannot fit anatomy and physiology in?

Demian Hodari, Professor, Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne, Switzerland

We are limited in our ability to provide the know-how, we need to partner with someone! Those who have the demand, would they really hire if we provided the education?

James “Woody” Wade, Managing Director, Wade & Company, Switzerland

I found the analogy with F&B questionable because all hotels have an F&B department and with the classic F&B and Rooms division departments there was mainly demand for these two departments in terms of managers. Until recently there has not been enough demand for wellness managers.

Mia Kyricos (session moderator)

At Starwood, we historically have 20-35% of our hotels with a Spa. Now 2/3 of our pipeline are hotels with Spa and in the future we will be looking at 90% of all Starwood hotels having a Spa.

Christopher Norton

The stake-holders in the industry need to work together. If you come to our school, as Susan Harmsworth does, you inspire our students. You can help us push the envelope so that together we can inspire the passion - like the example of the Indian girls who have developed a passion for massage.



The Global Spa Summit is an international organization that brings together leaders and visionaries to positively impact and shape the future of the global spa and wellness industry.