

2013

# Global Spa Education FORUM

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### Global Spa Education Forum

Breakout Discussion Forums: Global Spa Education  
Monday, October 7, 2013  
Godavari/Kaveri, The Trident

Facilitator:

**Anna Bjurstam**, Vice President of Spas & Wellness, Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spas, Thailand; Owner, Raison d’Etre, Sweden

Panelists:

**Lori Hutchison**, Founder & Co-Owner, Hutchinson Consulting, U.S.

**Jean-Guy de Gabriac**, Owner, TIP TOUCH International, Belgium

**Ella Stimpson**, Chairman of the Board, The International Spa Association; Executive Director of Spas, Wynn Las Vegas, U.S.

After the publication of the SRI study last year entitled “Spa Management Workforce & Education: Addressing Market Gaps,” two committees have volunteered to find answers to the challenges of Spa Management in today’s highly competitive spa industry.

After regular online meetings throughout the year, they both presented their findings at the 2013 Global Spa & Wellness Summit in Delhi, in order to share practical and inspiring tools with spa professionals around the world.

As facilitator of the Global Spa Education Forum, Anna Bjurstam (VP of Spas & Wellness Six Senses Hotels Resorts & Spas; and owner of Raison d’Etre), presented the four parts in this well-attended Forum:

- Lori Hutchinson (Founder of Hutchinson Consulting) and Jeremy McCarthy (Director of Global Spa Development & Operations, Starwood Hotels & Resorts) presented the results of a survey that 548 participants responded to. In addition they shared the “5 Great Reasons to Love a Spa Career” (first place winner of the 2013 GSWS Infographic competition)
- Ella Stimpson (ISPA Chairman and Executive Director of Spa Operations, Wynn and Encore Las Vegas) presented the ISPA Body of Knowledge (BOK) which was edited and completed these past months, with steps for the potential implementation of a certification program (see the BOK on [www.experienceispa.com](http://www.experienceispa.com))
- An open conversation followed between participants and speakers

- Jean-Guy de Gabriac (founder CEO TIP TOUCH International, and sponsor of the Global Spa Education Forum) shared an inspirational conclusion and an invitation for more volunteers to join in for next year's deliverables.

## 1. Highlights from “5 Great Reasons to Love a Spa Career”

The SRI report highlighted three major gaps in the global spa industry:

- 1) Our industry's huge need for trained spa managers worldwide
- 2) Our need for more spa-specific college level courses and training programs
- 3) Our need for more spa companies to invest resources to train their managers and staff to prepare them for future career growth.

Since early 2013, Lori Hutchinson & Jeremy McCarthy have co-chaired a subcommittee working on the subjects of career paths, internships, and mentorships with:

- Elena Bogacheva (Founder Spa & Wellness International Council)
- Angela Cortright (Principal of Spa Gregories)
- Aldina Duarte-Ramos (Director of Development Wellbeing activities, Sofitel Thalassa Sea & Spa)
- Elaine Fenard (Principal, Spa Strategy)
- Nancy Griffin (Principal, Contento Marketing Group)
- Kim Matheson-Shedrick (President of Natural Resources Spa Consulting)
- Geeta Morar (COO SVA Spas)
- Deborah Smith (Owner of Smith Club and Spa Specialists)
- Ana Taffin d'Heursel (HR Manager, Six Senses)

They conducted a survey of 548 global Spa managers to learn about their opinions on their education and career paths:

- 86% of respondents are employed in a management position (14% are consultants).
- Most of the respondents (319) live in North America, 104 in Europe, 55 in Asia, 27 in the Middle East, 17 in South & Central America, 17 in Africa and 11 in Australia and Oceania.
- 52% work in either a hotel/resort spa and 14% in a day spa
- 50% respondents are in the 25-40 age range
- 66% of respondents have two to four year college degrees
- Over one-half have been in the spa industry more than 11 years and one-third over 16 years (when people come to our wonderful spa industry they stay!)
- 83% of respondents said that Spa is their first or second career.

The infographic, which you can find at

<http://gswsinfographic.tumblr.com/image/60899286918>, tells why joining the

worldwide spa management community is a smart career decision. The survey results provide terrific information for a global public relations campaign to entice more people to join the global spa management community, with FIVE reasons to love a spa career:

**FIRST**, exotic workplaces and terrific co-workers!

**SECOND**, Spa managers LOVE their jobs:

- 86% are “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied” with their current jobs (with 65% being “extremely satisfied”),
- 94% are “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied” with their career choice in spa (with 68% being “extremely satisfied”)

**THIRD**, there are wonderful opportunities to be mentored in this industry and to learn from the best people:

- To prepare for their current role: 26% wished they had received mentoring from an experienced spa professional, 24% want opportunities to attend spa industry conferences and 23% desire academic education about spa management.
- 65% of respondents had a spa industry mentor and 94% of respondents said that having a mentor is important. Respondents associated mentoring as most important in developing two specific skill sets: leadership and HR aspects.
- Training and education are identified as “most important” in spa treatments and culture, financial management, marketing, PR/sales, IT systems, retail, and strategic planning.

So people recognize that mentoring is important, but also believe that academic training teaches the essential business skills.

Spa associations around the globe should have a hub for local mentor/mentee connections, using some valuable websites, which provide excellent information on best practices and how to start a mentor program.

- [www.mentorscout.com](http://www.mentorscout.com)

- [www.mentoring-association.org](http://www.mentoring-association.org) (International Mentoring Association)

**FOURTH**, there is lots of room for career growth: the spa industry is a fast growth business, where people work their way up: 64% of leaders worked as spa receptionists, and 58% as therapists or technicians.

However, there are not enough corporate or regional spa management positions available, and we will have to find new ways to keep executive level spa directors engaged in our industry.

**FIFTH**, 80% of respondents said they would recommend a career in spa management to their best friend.

There are three additional points that the data revealed:

1) Respondents prioritized financial management as the most important skill set for a successful spa career (ahead of understanding spa treatments, being a strong leader and HR aspects, and delivering excellent customer service...) but they ranked themselves below those three aspects on skill attainment! A huge gap exists between what they know is important and what they feel they have actually attained.

2) 37% feel that most of their spa management education has come from on-the-job learning, and 15% feel it has come from attending conferences and belonging to spa associations.

3) Despite 86% of respondents being satisfied or extremely satisfied with their current jobs, 57% are actively seeking a new position.

Respondents said that the aspect of spa management they enjoy the most are:

- 35% leading staff
- 17% assisting guests
- 12% marketing, PR, and sales

For the least favorite aspect, 37% said dealing with IT and systems!

For the ultimate fulfillment of their spa career:

- 31% would love to attain a corporate or regional position overseeing multiple locations.
- 26% want to be a leading spa consultant.

About internships, the committee researched 35 hotel/resort websites looking for internship information:

- 17 companies offered no internship opportunities,
- 18 offered internships (but only four might be in spa - it was difficult to decipher for certain).

Regarding the companies that offered internships:

- 7 offered them to hotel school grads,
- 2 companies that had them, didn't provide application information,
- 5 had non-spa internships, which leaves four who might offer them in spa (Four Seasons, Hyatt, Kempinski, Shangri-la).

## **2. Key facts from the Spa Management Certification Task Force**

Task force:

- Peter Anderson, Anderson & Associates Spa & Hospitality Consulting
- Anna Bjurstam, Raison d'Etre
- Elena Bogacheva, Spa Priori, LLC
- Rekha Chaudhari, JCKRC Spa Destination
- Jean-Guy de Gabriac, TIP TOUCH International
- Samantha Foster, Spa Source Asia
- Su Gibson, Houston Spa Association
- John Korpi, Korpi & Korpi
- Ginger McLean, Walt Disney Company
- Lynne McNeas, International SPA Association
- Mary Tabacchi, Cornell University
- Deborah Waldvogel, Sedona Resorts
- Mary Wisnom, Florida Gulf Coast University

The purpose of our task force was to explore a spa certification program that would meet the need for a globally recognized professional designation in the spa industry:

- Setting forth the things a senior level spa director must know to operate at a high level in the industry,
- Outlining the knowledge needed from individuals eligible to sit for certification.

As the members of the task force were updating the ISPA Body of Knowledge, a lot of ideas and details bubbled up, finally agreeing on core competencies in the following chapters:

- Origins of Spa
- Spa Modalities/Treatments
- Fitness
- Operations
- Front Desk and Client Management
- Facility Design and Maintenance
- Hospitality Management
- Food & Beverage
- Human Resources
- Risk Management
- Financial Management
- Leadership and Management
- Marketing
- Retail Management
- Product Knowledge and Vendor Relations
- Tourism

In order for a group to use this BOK (Body of Knowledge) as a framework for a

certification program, ISPA has initiated research on certification development with a psychometrician who assists in the development of certification programs, and with gaining accreditation as a certifying body.

The opportunity of a feasibility study has been raised in order to answer the following questions:

- Who does the certification protect?
- What regulatory agencies across the globe are engaged
- Who would pay to take the certification?
- What is the value of the certification?
- How many potential certification applicants are there?
- Will there be different levels of certification?
- How many interests exist in the industry?

The overview of development has also been outlined:

- Marketing Plan
- Management System
- Defining the elements of the actual certification
- Establishing the credentials and experience expected of an individual eligible to sit for certification
- Development of the exam
- Defining how certified individuals will maintain their certification
- Determination of how and when exams will be administered globally

Complete development of a certification program would require a long-term commitment of time and resources, however, the group who commits to leading this effort could complete a feasibility study and initial steps toward certification program development within a year. ISPA acknowledges the importance of developing a certification of this nature and will continue to support and offer assistance as much as possible.

### **3. Main contributions from the attendees**

How can we move this forward?

- Create a formalized mentoring program, because not everyone is a natural-born mentor: it takes time to develop active-listening skills, with no ego.
- When executives quit a company, most of the time they quit their boss, not their job. We, as an industry, should work on career advancement, with job opportunities, in order to increase employment longevity (and reduce resignations). Otherwise most spa managers will feel stuck after a few years managing a property, with no choice but to change companies for career jumps and salary bumps.
- When people feel that they are not recognized for their potential they start

looking around, so we should think of giving them projects with the corporate management as an option to expand their implication with the company's development.

- To excel in their very complex profession, it is education that spa managers aspire to, not just training. However spas are usually not big enough to afford to pay for their spa manager's education.
- Online programs are on the rise to help spa managers climb from one level to the next.
- Mary Tabbachi asked the audience: "How many of you are going to take an intern in the coming months?"
- There should also be more research on our industry done with the help of students.
- The certification program could be developed in an incremental, iterative way. First, developing standards, then slowly growing the resources available to measure and benchmark against those standards.

Anna Bjurstam concluded the conversations on the floor, saying that the question of Time to Market is essential: we have the WHAT, now we need the HOW, in order to draft an internship program and a mentoring program to present to hotel groups for them to roll out.

#### **4. Conclusion from TIP TOUCH International, sponsor of the Global Spa Education Forum**

Knowledge is power and education is the key to develop our industry, in order to transform day spas, hotel spas and destination spas as a place for personal development for our guests and for professional growth for the spa staff.

Working at a spa, with long hours, sometimes in a hotel's basement, with a deep calling for servicing others is not a job; it is a vocation!

However, we as an industry need to re-enchant the lives of our spa staff who might become exhausted, frustrated, and sometimes disheartened by organizational dysfunction and seeing so much money invested in design, architecture, and marketing to promote what looks like a beautiful façade, with still a Taylorist management system to use staff as productive units. But they are human beings, not human doings.

With increasing staff turnover and 57% of spa managers already looking for other job opportunities, owners and GMs must understand that either they help them GROW, or soon enough they will see them GO. Jim Collins reminds us in "Good to Great" and that "People are not your greatest asset, the right people are."



Service and self-esteem go hand-in-hand. When spa managers see the money spent on renovation but how hard it is for them to obtain a well-deserved raise for their staff, they usually start questioning the board of directors who demand authenticity and daily WOW factors from their spa staff.

Nobel prize winner Albert Schweitzer said “In each life, at a certain moment, our inner fire goes out. Those who revive this light deserve our deepest gratitude.”

I believe there will be a ripple effect from the initiatives of the Spa Education Committees, nourishing and influencing thousands of spa professionals, in turn touching (and hopefully transforming) the lives of millions of spa guests around the world.

It is an honor to be of service for our industry, joining this Committee and helping draft the documents and tools that spa managers await, so I strongly encourage you to now step forward and join a committee and contribute your time, passion and experience.

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the support of TIP TOUCH INTERNATIONAL as sponsor of the Global Spa Education Forum

