

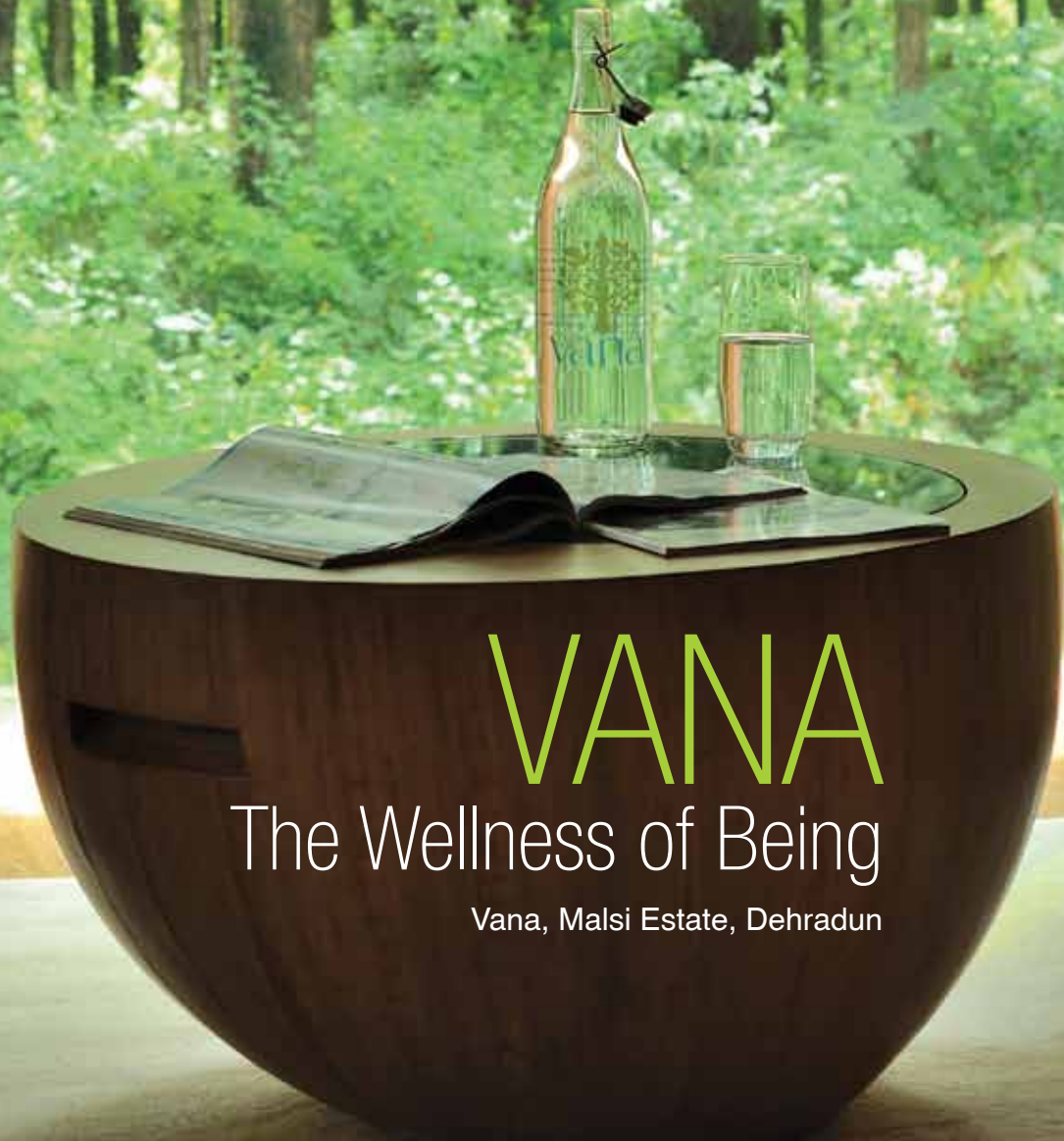
Spa mantra

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The Nizam of all
Wellness
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Spa Focus
Staffing, training and
education in spas



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HARD PUSH FOR SOFT SKILLS

From imparting communication skills to body language to work ethic, spas are realizing the importance of soft skills training

Writer | Bindu Gopal Rao

Training can be the difference between a good and bad spa. A spa's greatest asset, their therapists, should be well-trained, so that they have a competitive edge. While revolutionary techniques in spas are wonderful; there should be a competent therapist to execute them, ensuring an enriching experience for the guest. Considering the personal nature of the interaction between the therapist and the guest, it is imperative that the relationship is given the attention it deserves. An obvious way to do this is to train therapists to

interact with guests in a manner that is comfortable and easy. Soft skills training plays an important role in achieving this objective.

THE RIGHT TOUCH



Anna Fernandes undergo an induction program conducted by the Marriott.

This induction program, apart from introducing the new associate to the Marriott culture, also trains the associate on how to adapt with different cultural backgrounds of guests that visit from around the globe. "For example the way of welcoming the guest from different nationalities is something we focus on. Some countries bow down and wish, some like to shake hands, some use the Indian greeting 'Namaste' and the like. Marriott, as a hotel, also adapts to the local culture and uses that cultural touch during the welcome scene of arrival. At the Goa Marriott

we welcome the guest with a glass of kokum juice and shell garland on the arrival at the hotel," says **Anna Fernandes, Director of Spa, Goa Marriott Resort and Spa.**

"All therapists at the Shamana Spa at Grand Hyatt Goa go through a vigorous training process just like any new member at the property. Not only

do we train them on the various spa techniques, we have a doctor in a spa, who trains them about anatomy and physiology subjects – this is an integral part of the training. We also help them understand why a treatment is to be executed in a particular way. We encourage our therapists to keep updating themselves with the latest techniques and methods to



Ram Chatterjee

ensure a thoroughly enriching experience for our guests," opines **Ram Chatterjee, Spa Director, Shamana Spa - Grand Hyatt Goa.**

THE SPECIFICS

Language plays a very important role. This is the only medium to impress the customer. In the Indian spa industry, the first and most important task is to understand whether the therapist knows English or not. "One of the criteria of appointing any therapist at The Lalit Ashok is the language. He



Dr Vasant Kumar

or she should at least know how to communicate in basic English, so that we can help them improve their soft skills," says **Dr Vasant Kumar, Spa Manager, Rejuve The Spa at The Lalit Ashok.**

"Apart from training the spa therapist in the spa treatments, equal amount of importance is given to the training on the body language. For example, in the midst of the treatment the procedure, one must be able to request the guest to have his/her face down, requesting the guest to turn around as per the treatment procedure, guide the guest to the shower area, etc. In the spa business we strongly believe that words alone cannot convey a message, the right body language can do better. We ensure that the spa therapist is completely trained on each aspect before they provide spa treatments to the guest," adds Fernandes.

Communication skills are among the other important soft skills required for spa staff. The ability to communicate through the spoken and written word is a necessity in nearly every industry and workplace. Communication skills



can be learnt and improved with the right training. It may take time for employees to learn this skill effectively. Work ethics is difficult to quantify, but spa staff will typically either display a strong work ethic and they drive to complete tasks, or they will not. While a work ethic is largely an innate quality, it can be learned with proper training and motivation. "Likewise, the ability

to work well within a team is another important soft skill. Some employees may naturally feel comfortable working within a group, while others may have problems and prefer to work alone. It is necessary to spot these personality types ahead of time for proper group formation. Also being able to make quick decisions, thinking on their feet and solving simple problems are important

employee traits that are a vital part of soft skill training," explains Kumar.

TRAINING INSTITUTES

The multi-crore spa industry is growing at a robust rate and naturally there is a need for professional institutes. India has several training centers that offer courses that even offer diplomas and several kinds of certifications. All hotels

and resorts with spas have also made suitable investments in house trainers to ensure that therapists keep abreast with the new trends and are able to provide a superlative guest experience. Generally, a combination of external and internal training is preferred for spa therapists. Spa trainings are conducted in-house especially by the spa team and also by the Training Manager of the hotels. "Most of our therapists have specialized certifications from external institutes; however we conduct our own training before our therapists are put on floor by our departmental trainer," says Chatterjee. Simple skills like handling the guest at wet areas can be taught and make therapists efficient.

CHALLENGE FACTOR

The lack of communication and in-depth knowledge of various techniques is one major challenge which is seen. "While at the Shamana Spa we try to give them the best possible training and guidance, the same might not be observed outside," observes Chatterjee. Since therapists come from different cultural backgrounds, their levels of understanding may be different and they need to adapt and respect other's cultures. Language is one of the challenges, since understanding the therapist initially becomes difficult. The level

of understanding in a therapist and delivering the services on the same level is also a challenge. "The biggest challenge is that these therapists are trained completely and after few months or a year they leave the organization for a better package. As a result, you end up training a new therapist each time," says Fernandes. According to Kumar there is a dearth of sufficient places for training therapists. "There should be more training centers for therapists because as of now they

do not have any kinds of certification to join the spa industry."

Today the number of travelers has increased, and as a result hotels are exposed to people visiting from different parts of the world. Adaptation to their needs and culture has to be done in a quick and efficient manner. Another factor is that there is a generation gap that influences the cultural change, and being in the business of hospitality, understanding this change of culture in today's generation and living up to their needs is important. Today's Indian spa industry relies on creating a sense of warmth and peace for customers. The ability to deal with customers politely and with a view towards their happiness may help in ensuring a large customer base. The range of soft skills that you bring to the spa is important for the organization's success. A spa deals with customers on a face-to-face basis every day. A range of soft skills – right from friendly communication to the ability to solve problems and to building a team – is imperative. The industry is certainly taking small steps in the right direction and this will definitely augur well for all. ☺

