





'Tis the Season TO UTILIZE TOP MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

by Mara Shorr, CAC II-IX and Jay A. Shorr, CAC I-IX

Every year it seems as if the holiday season has arrived out of nowhere. One minute, the start of summer vacation is being celebrated and then, suddenly, jack-o-lanterns are being replaced with evergreens or dreidels. This holiday season, try some spa management tips to make it through the holiday season unscathed. While it is certainly not an all-inclusive checklist, the following are the mistakes that are most often made by spa owners.



Marketing

Plan ahead. Professionals may feel like they are starting their planning early enough, but, in reality, if the spa does not have a holiday marketing campaign in place by the first of November, they are behind. In the future, know that creating a holiday marketing plan in the spring and making changes to it throughout the summer as things change is recommended. Professionals need to be sure they have their holiday marketing budget, holiday staff, and holiday images organized in order to properly execute whatever is needed.

Make it a community effort. Get the staff involved in planning this festive season; as a result, they will feel more invested, excited, and in the spirit if they feel that their ideas are valued and taken seriously. Ask seasoned staff what worked last year and what they wish they could change. Did certain specials not sell? Were there too few people at the holiday party? Did the invitations for the party go out too late or fall into the database's spam filters? Did clients love the Christmas tree but wonder why there was no menorah? The staff is the spa owner's eyes and ears, so include them in the brainstorming process. Most professionals are surprised by what their staff has to say.

Offer special combination packages that vendors support. When looking at special holiday offers for clients, ask vendors what they are willing to do for the spa. The majority of the time, vendors have end-of-the-year quotas to fill and are happy to support the professional's efforts. Some have specific supporting marketing materials designed just for the fall and winter, while others are focused on sales numbers. Remember, if the professional does not ask, they are guaranteed to get nothing.

Give back. Most communities have opportunities for small businesses to get involved. Whether the professional is based in a small town or a large city, they are part of a community and prospective and current clients love to see businesses support their community. For example, spas can run toy drives for local hospitals and homeless shelters and offer a discount on products and services in exchange for a new or unwrapped toy. They can also

sponsor community events, such as tree lightings, wine walks, and chamber holiday parties, getting their spa's logo out into the community and having key staff members present to answer questions about the spa's most popular procedures. This season abounds with networking opportunities disguised as holiday mingling! Evaluate what appeals to the spa's brand and get creative!

Offer gift cards. This idea may sound basic, but it is often overlooked. Be sure to have more than enough gift cards printed in advance so that the spa does not run out before the season ends. Offer gift certificates at a set dollar value and in small increments as a free gift with purchase. For example, allow clients to receive a \$25 gift card when they purchase one of \$125 or more for a friend. Once the gift card offers are set, be sure to create marketing material to promote the deals, including e-blasts, framed signage in treatment rooms and at checkout, and on-hold messaging.

Send out more e-blasts than normal. Professionals may normally only send one or two e-blasts a month, but this is the holiday season! Send two to four blasts per month to stay at the top of the client's mind when they are making their purchases. Send out offers, reminders of offers, and then different offers and reminders of those offers. Keep in mind that during this time, purchases are being made at a higher-than-normal rate.

Personalize phone calls to VIP clients. Be sure the spa's VIP clients know about the spa's holiday plans. Whether it is for holiday parties, quick-filling time slots, last minute openings, or special offers, treat VIPs like the treasures that they are during the holiday season and they will remember their special treatment all year!

Post a notice of any dates the spa will be closed for the holidays and be sure clients know who to call if any procedural complications should arise during that time. Include this information in the spa's on-hold messaging, on the front door, at check-in and checkout, and in an e-blast. It should also be stated to any client who gets treated during that period.

Staff

During the hustle and bustle of the season, do not forget to show the staff how much they are appreciated. Look at party options that make the most sense for the spa. For example, a special catered lunch may be ideal. If the spa has a close-knit staff that enjoys spending time together outside of work, an evening or weekend party at the spa owner's home or at a restaurant might be more appreciated. Look at the dynamic of the team and get creative. If there is going to be a lot of drinking at the party and the location is far from the office, consider offering the staff a limousine service; it is both a fancy treat and something that caters to their safety.

The office celebration should be separate from the holiday party for clients. It is great that the spa owner is throwing a holiday party for their clients, but keep in mind that the staff is expected to work the party. From



socializing and schmoozing to making sure the punch bowl is filled with ice, the majority of the time, the event, although different from their regular work week, is still work and not a time for them to let their hair down. Keep this aspect in mind and set the expectations for both parties accordingly.

Let them know how much notice they should give if they are going to be off between November 1 and January 1. Furthermore, be sure to discuss paid time off policies ahead of time. Clients are going to want to start booking their appointments well in advance, so it is best to have the staff give their holiday availability by October 1. If the professional's providers are contractors, let them know that ample notice is the fair thing for clients. If the providers are employees, remind them that their time off will require approval so that overlaps do not occur and become problematic. Think about who will cover reception and make sure the check-in and checkout areas are well covered during busier-than-normal periods. The phones will ring more than normal and a higher-than-average volume of social media and website appointment requests will come in; be sure to assign someone to answer all of those requests as soon as possible.

Let employees know about any office closures and whether or not they will be paid. The spa's employee handbook should have office policies about paid holiday leave and when the office is closed for the holiday period. If it does not include this information, now is a

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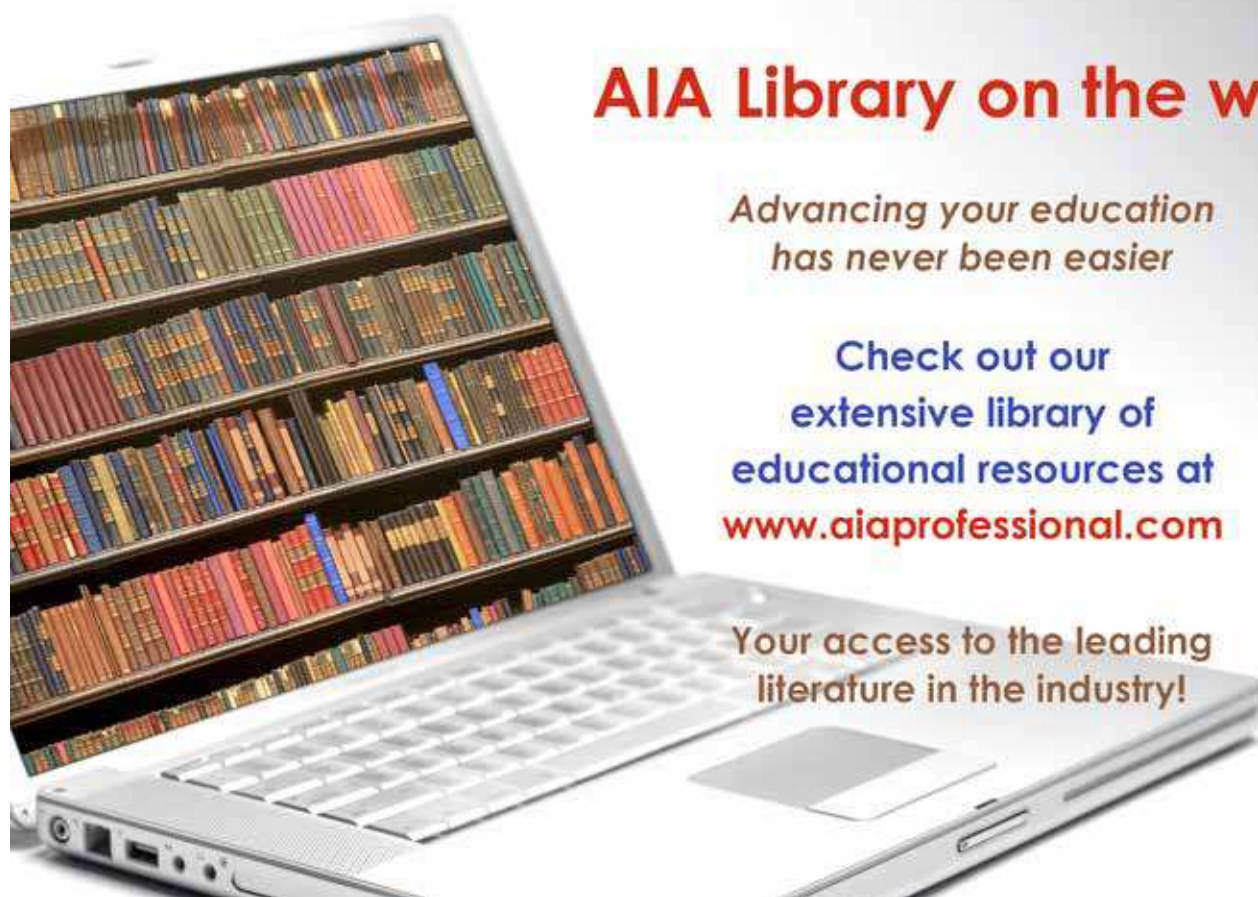
good time to update it for next year! If the office is going to be closed from Christmas Eve to New Year's Day, for instance, let employees know in advance. Also, let them know if they will be paid for this time.

Budgets

If the spa has a good amount of funds in their bank account, consider dispensing healthy bonuses. Furthermore, ask the staff what they would need to do their jobs better. In terms of taxes, it is better to make investments in new massage tables, examination chairs, and lasers, for instance, than to keep the money in a savings account and get taxed on it. It is also recommended to prepay for staff training for the next year, if possible. Remember, training for staff is an investment in the spa's future, not an expense.

If the spa is falling behind from where the professional thought it would be, first, although frustrating, do not be surprised. Remember to constantly evaluate the spa's incomes and expenses throughout the year in order to keep an eye on profit. Consult with an accountant about how the financial lag will affect taxes and future staff payroll for the following year. How does this shortage compare to others in the past, including during other months of the year and during this same time of the year in previous years?

Evaluate last year's bonus structure. Examine what each staff member received in bonuses last year. Did the



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contractors receive bonuses also or only true employees? How much was given and from what was that based off? When did the employees receive their bonus? Do they know how their bonus dollar figure was calculated? Most importantly, how did all of those things affect the spa owner’s bottom line and how does that compare to what is available to be given to employees this year? Examine any kinks in the system for this year and make notes for 2017.

Let the staff know in advance if there are any major changes that may negatively affect their pocketbooks. If the bonuses are higher than they were last year, be sure the staff knows it is because of all of their hard work. As a team, the spa was able to do better this year than last year and, therefore, the spa is happy to share in the success. If numbers were lower this year than last year, let the team know that in advance as well. Employees are most likely already spending their bonuses, so, if possible, give them a head’s up. Be honest with the team about why numbers may have fallen short, if it is nothing too personal. For example, were there unexpected repairs or damages to equipment or did key employees leave and that were unable to be replaced? Honesty is vital. 



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