

e-STYLE May 2009 – Member in the Spotlight

Christine Binder - FLOAT Relaxation Lounge

What makes Float Lounge different from other spas? People skills are top of the list. Not only do I insist those skills are utilized to their fullest by my staff, but I also hold myself accountable. I know of other spa and salon owners that appear to have no people skills and are not management material. Staff are mistreated and exploited. I've even seen managers and business owners yelling at staff, in front of clients. It's not rocket science. You absolutely have to treat people with respect and consideration at all times. I believe that is the primary way to ensure you have a good team effort, and a very satisfied client walking out your door. As far as what FLOAT offers that makes us stand out, I would have to say that some of our success certainly comes from focusing a bit more on the male clientele, who in Vancouver, traditionally have been overlooked in the spa industry. The décor in FLOAT is more 'gender-neutral', and that attracts a wider clientele. You could call it the 'Business Class' spa service, as we do get a lot of male clients who work around the downtown core. We also allow for, and encourage walk-in services. It's supposed to be about relaxation, not stress. You should be able to walk in to a spa without an appointment when you need some instant de-stressing.

What is an example of a unique spa service FLOAT provides? We offer an Ice Wine Facial (Eminence), something that originated in the time of King Louis XIV. The grapes and leaves of the Hungarian Tokay ice wine plant are used in a facial regime, bringing glowing benefit from the polyphenol content. It's a great firming and anti-aging treatment as well.

On Opening Your Own Spa Best advice: Know your client! Make sure you have a good profile of who they will be, what they do and what they want. Secondly, location location location! Pick the spot for your business wisely.

On the Economy I have always been a firm believer in strong pre-planning, especially when it comes to marketing. With the current global situation, I'm sticking with my original marketing plan because it works. I feel I will be better off due to the early planning that was done. I would advise anyone not to 'panic market' by adding all kinds of new products and services. Concentrate on what you do best, and market that. Networking for business relationships is paramount, since it opens so many doors you may have never known were there. There are many opportunities for simple networking as well. For example, befriending the Concierge at your local hotel can do wonders, as they refer guests for local services. The free seminars offered by the Association are also good opportunities to network.

On Regulation I'm very pro-regulation. It shouldn't even be up for discussion really; this is something that we have dire need for. In my days as a Financial Planner for RBC, each year I had to take a 3-4 hour exam to update and upgrade my skills. We all did. Sure, there was grumbling, but you needed that new information each year, in order to pass it on to your clients and ensure they were always in the hands of a fully qualified and knowledgeable professional. For our industry, there should be an annual or at least bi-annual exam update.

On Community The importance of both getting involved in your community and giving back cannot be understated. We're involved with a number of charities, including the BC Lung Association Annual Stair Climb, and the MS Society Bike Ride. For the latter, we took massage chairs over to Science World and de-stressed the bikers with complimentary massages. We're also very happy to be a sponsor of Ravi Bansal, candidate for Miss Universe Canada 2009.

What are your favourite member benefits? I took advantage of the insurance benefits offered through CIABC membership when I opened the spa, as A,C & D had better rates than the quotes I was getting elsewhere. As a business owner, I would actually suggest you have your insurers provide even more benefits, perhaps something like critical illness insurance.

The free seminars offered are priceless, because that's where the information is. We are in the information age still, and information is currency. When the Association is providing free seminars, members really should be packing the place because they will be paying upwards of \$150.00 for seminars elsewhere. And, it's free! It's bizarre to me that members wouldn't take advantage of that.

What types of seminars do you find most helpful? Any that address the sanitation and hygiene aspects of running a spa / salon. I'm getting more and more calls by the day, where people want to know how we perform our services, and what kind of tools and equipment we use. People are definitely more aware of how businesses in our industry are not monitored or inspected properly, if at all. Some of the newer clients at FLOAT have horror stories from their experiences at spas where sanitation and hygiene are obviously not high on the list of priorities. Media's recent coverage of the state of our industry since deregulation is playing a large part in creating this resurgence of consumer awareness. Christine added that Coastal Health did seem to be on their toes recently, as she has had a couple of inspections where officials wanted to see what detergents were being used on site, and checked other health considerations such as what type of cups were used to serve beverages to clients. Prior to the inspections, even at the point of starting the business, City Hall would not grant her a business license without the CIABC Certificate of Qualification for Esthetics.

What would you like to see the Association do more of? I think it would be great to see the Association more involved in business owner or employee recognition. Everyone loves recognition, especially when it comes from your peers. Members who are outstanding in what they do could have their names submitted by local industry peers. You could have the 'Esthetician of the Month' or something similar. It shouldn't be difficult to find sponsors within our industry who could provide some kind of prize or trophy.

Since the students coming into the industry are the future, an interesting idea would be to host some kind of networking nights. Once they finish your exam, they could attend an evening at the Association where they meet various industry professionals, including top salon and spa owners in BC. It could be the 'Introduction to Industry', and would be a perfect time to help harness the energy and passion these students have for their careers. It could also be a great chance to either find or be a mentor. I've partaken in various mentoring programs, and the value of them is undisputable.

We are sorry to announce that since the interview, FLOAT Relaxation Lounge has closed its doors for business. Christine cites the main causes as being the combination of global recession and lack of new investors. Prior to opening FLOAT, Christine had a 20 year run with RBC, working as a certified financial planner. She is currently looking for new opportunities in spa sales or marketing consultancy and welcomes calls from prospective parties. To contact Christine, please call 604-340-6500