

Do You Need A Career Mentor?

By Douglas Preston

Estheticians and spa professionals all share a common goal: to become a solid success in business. That goal, while admirable and necessary, can be far more elusive than many professionals realize. We may have the required licenses and skills, even the experience useful in opening a spa or skincare practice, but business success depends on a longer list of capabilities than this. Here are a number of the more important ones:

- Cost control and an understanding of profit margins
- Marketing and social media communication
- Customer service excellence
- Employee recruitment and leadership
- Sales skills (service and retail)
- Organization and time management

In addition to the above, there is motivation and inspiration to consider. Business ownership can be a tough, emotionally draining experience, especially when things don't go according to expectations. One can feel scared, isolated and confused, not knowing what decisions to make or next steps to take in problem solving. This is when a skilled mentor can be of great help.

Sometimes overwhelmed spa or salon managers have hesitations about revealing their career weaknesses to others. Many feel that because they voluntarily took on the role they're in they should also know how to execute it well. Others fear the potential cost of employing a business expert or worry they will be required to perform tasks they dislike. This leads to more delay, stress and opportunity losses that can far exceed whatever mentoring or consulting fees one might pay. For example, a day spa I worked with several years ago was losing money and facing possible closure. My fee for the business assistance project was just under \$4000, an unthinkable amount for the spa owner already bleeding red ink. So, we financed the fee, adjusted service prices (the owner was terrified to follow through with this action item... but did so reluctantly), changed the retail collection and trained employees to boost sales. Improved revenue exceeded my fee the first month alone and the spa went on to pull into the black and record its first ever profit. Revenue grew by \$37,000 that year at a consulting cost of less than 10% of the extra gross. By the second year revenue grew and no more mentoring fees came with it. You can't grow and harvest fruit if you won't pay for water.

Consider my advice when deciding to hire the services of a business mentor:

1. Admit that you need help, perhaps more than you realize at the moment.

2. Be open to change. Most mentors will uncover mistakes large and small when reviewing your business, and they will recommend changes to your methods. Prepare to hear this and take positive action.
3. Find someone who “speaks your language.” Similar to selecting a psychotherapist you want a mentor you trust, you feel understands you, and has your best interests in mind. I’m a bit of a driver when it comes to change so don’t work as effectively with clients who want to talk at length about problems but then stalls when it comes to solving them.
4. Know the outcome you’re expecting in advance of contracting with a business mentor. An open-ended relationship may feel good but could end up being expensive and having little impact on your spa or salon.
5. Be patient. Change takes time and results may come gradually.

Whatever you do, know that there’s no shame in finding yourself underprepared for the job of business owner. But, putting off a cure for the ills of a spa or skincare practice, large or small, may spell the end of it. So, don’t let embarrassment or pride get in the way of being prudent!