

Progressive Practices Bring World Class Status

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After Steve Case stepped down from Time Warner-AOL, he stayed at Miraval Spa in Tucson Arizona. He was so impressed with the facility he decided to become involved with the operation and became a majority owner. You might say the “Miraval experience” was extremely motivating. The readers of Conde Nest and Travel Leisure think so too. They rated Miraval number one in North America and number one in the world respectively in 2004. Oprah Winfrey picked Miraval as one of her “favorite things” on her 2004 annual show of the same name and regularly features the resort. Miraval has only been in business for 9 years and faced stiff well- established competition in the spa and resort market. How were they able to overcome the competition and rise to the top of their marketplace?

“I think what made us successful is we let our guests and staff be individuals. Our culture is a culture of caring and nurturing because that is really what we do. This is a sanctuary. It is a sanctuary not only for our guests but for our employees too”, said Mark Michalski, General Manager of Miraval.

In my consulting and coaching practice, I work with leaders to introduce some of the ideas that come so naturally to Miraval. Any business can improve their operations and profitability by embracing these concepts and best practices. The following best practices helped Miraval rise to industry leadership:

1. 100% commitment to personal choice “We don’t really model ourselves after anyone. The founder of the company basically wanted to have an environment where you could go to find yourself, improve yourself and embark on a self journey”, said Michalski. “That’s what makes us different. Our facility is based on choice. We don’t tell people what to do. We offer opportunities to things and we are here to help, but the individual makes the choice.

2. Mindfulness “The thread that goes through everything we do here is mindfulness – being aware. When we first opened, we were the only ones doing it in this business but now you see it more and more,” said XXXX. Mindfulness can simply be described as “paying attention to the moment.” Being present and aware of your circumstance at any particular moment without judgement. Many individuals spend their time rushing from one activity to another, being

tethered to a mobile phone or blackberry and miss major issues in their environment.

3. Hiring The Right People. “The reason we are successful is because of our staff. Our turnover rate is one of the lowest in an industry where 100% turnover is common. We hire sincerely nice nurturing people. We talk with our guests and they say that the best thing about the facility is our people,” said Michalski.

4. Walking The Talk. Unlike many businesses, Miraval lives their vision. Managers at Miraval work a standard 5 day week. Staff are invited to take any of the classes that guests take and are often on a first name basis with famous guests. If you arrive by car, a friendly staff member greets you warmly and immediately there is a sense of comfort and welcoming. Mark Michalski said, “It’s a great job. I pinch myself. It’s like working with the Chicago Bulls when Michael Jordan was there.”

Bill O’Donnell founded Miraval with a vision of an environment where people could improve their lives. Steve Case, the majority owner, brings the concept of making Miraval available to more people and plans additional Miraval sites. This successful visionary enterprise demonstrates many of the concepts that are slowly entering the business mainstream.

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