

OPENING/STARTING YOUR OWN SPA, MASSAGE CENTER OR WELLNESS CENTER
(WITH EMPHASIS ON PHILIPPINE SETTING)

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For several years now, a lot of people are asking me about how to start and what are the steps to make before starting their own spa, massage center or wellness center. I will give you seven (incidentally, my favorite number) MUST and NEEDED major steps in order for you to be well-prepared in starting your own spa, massage or wellness center. Although not step-by-step and dogmatic, this article will approach the issue in contemporary style and focus on the major things that you should be doing before opening or starting the business.

The first and foremost step is for you to identify what type of business will you be engaging in. Remember, that starting a business is like accepting a marriage proposal; you should know what you are getting into. Here in the Philippines, there is a saying that goes “hindi yan parang kanin na isusubo na kapag napasong ay iluluwa” let us apply that in a business situation, in this field, even if it is profitable... it is difficult, it will not be easy, whoever said it was di ba? Be able to answer the following questions: Are you putting up a massage center? A spa or a wellness center? Let us differentiate the three. A massage center focuses only on massage or bodywork therapies. Purely, massages lang ang i-o-offer mo. A spa on the other hand is a place where you can get spa treatments aside from massage. Siyempre kasama na dito ang facials and body treatments. Kung spa ang gusto mong itayo, then identify what type of spa ba ang itatayo mo? Will it be a hotel/resort spa, medical spa, club spa, cruise ship spa, airport spa, destination spa, atbp. or the most common, the day spa or sometimes referred to as a spa-lon or a combination of a spa and a salon. A wellness center is a lot more broad than a spa kasi ang wellness center ay nag-o-offer ng all of the things that I mentioned plus you also offer either fitness and exercise regimens, yoga, music therapy and other activities to enhance the well-being of your clients. Bakit mahalaga na i-identify mo ang type of business mo especially if you are starting from scratches? Mainly because, the types of services that you will provide will depend largely on the type of business na mapipili mo. Of course, the wider the scope of your services the larger the capital that you will be needing. So, kung purely massages lang ang i-o-offer mas maliit ang capital as compared to a full-scale day spa or a wellness center (So, if you will be offering purely massages it will have a lesser capitalization required as compared to a full scale spa or wellness center).

Secondly, after identifying the type of business that you will be getting into, you have to know the government regulation regarding putting up a spa, massage clinic/ center or wellness center. Directly or indirectly man, you have to know the regulations of the Department of Health (DOH); also the regulations of the Department of Tourism (DOT); Department of Trade and Industry (DTI); and if you are putting up a spa under a corporation, eh di isama mo na rin ang Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) plus, don't forget your local government office or mayor's office, wherever your establishment will be located.

I will give you a concrete example, kung gusto mong magtayo ng spa, (some) of the minimum standard requirements in operating a spa establishment in the Philippines according to the revised rules and regulations of the Department of Tourism (DOT), would include, but is not limited to:

1. The location should be safe, reputable and conducive to relaxation.
2. There should be a reception center attended by qualified and trained staff with a lounge area commensurate with the size of the spa.
3. There should be clean and separate washroom areas for male and female clients.
4. The spa should be able to provide: different types of massages, steam, sauna, water baths and other spa treatments.
5. Locker and treatment rooms should be separate for male and female clients.
6. There should be suitable facilities and provisions for the disabled, a well-stocked first aid cabinet, an employees' lounge, backroom operations, adequate supply of linens, towels and garments, etc.
7. Staff should be trained by internationally recognized institutions or associations; shall be well-groomed, with proper attire and clean.

So, there you got a glimpse already of DOT's requirements. Alamin mo rin ang requirements ng iba't-ibang ahensiya ng ating gobyerno (you should also know other government requirements), like the Department of Health, and other governing bodies, as what I have mentioned above.

Third, you have to create your business plan. Nung una (Before), kahit walang business plan okay lang mag start ng business parang before kahit hindi ka nakatapos ng pag-aaral madaling kumuha ng trabaho- not anymore, especially nowadays that it is more difficult earning money. Kaya as much as possible, dapat talaga gumawa ka ng business plan. Ika nga, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. If you have partners, sit down with your partners together with a spa consultant. The business plan should answer a lot of questions including your expected capitalization, location, marketing, your return of investment, break-even, and a whole lot of things - especially about financials etc. Your business plan should have a very strong marketing plan. Also, you as an owner or operator should be able to read the numbers. Alamin mong mabuti yung pre-operations na gastusin (Know how much you need even before you operate), yung ROI mo kung kelan, atbp. Then after your business plan is finished, have this re-checked by a lawyer and an accountant. This is to ensure that you are

complying with legal laws as well as GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles). The accountant will also be able to identify numerical deficiencies ng business mo so you can adjust even before starting and shelling out your hard earned money for capitalization.

Marami din ang nagtatanong magkano ba talaga ang capital needed? In actual fact, hindi pwedeng masagot yan with a ball-park figure because it will depend on a host of factors like where is your location? Siyempre, if your spa is located in Timbuktu (for example lang) at i-co-compre mo yun sa Day spa in a mall eh di siyempre mas mahal ang capital mo sa mall. It will also depend kung malaki ba yung gusto mong facility like for example, gusto mo sa Timbuktu pero ang lawak naman ng gusto mong facility eh di parang nasa mall ka na rin. It will also depend on the construction costs but to be safe ang pinaka-maliit na home-based massage clinic ay gagastos ka rin ng 50,000 pesos. Hindi pa kasama dito ang operational cost ha...ito lang ay para maka pag start ka. Up to as much as millions and millions of pesos (yes, tama, milyon ang gastos kung full scale spa ang gusto mo). Meron ding nag papa franchise na spa that I have heard in the provinces na around 50,000 pesos pero wala silang support na ibigay sa iyo after you sign their franchise agreement bibili ka lang sa kanila ng products and that is it. Meron ding branded facial and spa centers na gagastos ka anywhere from 3Million (in Philippine pesos) to around 10 Million. Depende sa iyo kung gusto mo ring mag franchise or what basta ang importante pag mag fra-franchise ka you know the stability of the company, the support they will give you during the operational years of your business, at iba pa.

Fourth, is to seek professional help:

Maaaring sabihin mo, “bakit ko pa kailangan ng professional help marunong naman ako?” (why do I need professional help, I can do it on my own) Examples, if you want to put up a website for your spa, contact a web developer/designer. Then since in step #3 you have contacted a spa and wellness consultant already who will guide you in your business idea. The spa consultant can recommend products, services and suitable materials for your concept. They will save you an enormous amount of money, time and effort by their professional advice. It is better to shell out a minimal amount for a spa consultant than shell out 100,000 pesos (approximately 2,000USD) as your capital or even more without assurance of getting your profit back in the future. The spa and wellness consultant will be able to advice you on technical things and matters that only a professional would know. The spa consultant should be your trusted adviser. Then the spa consultant should meet your architect, interior designer or construction engineer or whoever is in charge of constructing your business establishment. I know that it is tempting to do everything yourself, but it is really best if you are doing more strategic and important things that only you can do. Kasi kung ikaw ang gagawa ng lahat (not unless if you are a spa consultant yourself, but even a spa consultant needs the help of a web designer, architect, etc. di ba?) mapapagod ka ng husto baka hindi pa nagsisimula ang spa mo eh lawit na dila mo. If you look at the

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most successful spas, you will observe that they do have a team of trusted advisors in place. So don't get stuck doing everything yourself. Leave the professionals to do their job and pay them for it.

Fifth, although this should already been laid out in your business plan, you should try it for yourself. Ito ang pinaka masarap at favorite kong part. Scout and try your competitors in your location. This means most, if not all, competitors within 15 miles or 25 kilometers from your location. Try their services, observe the cleanliness, how the staff treats you, the ambiance, what you like and don't like about their services, etc. This is also the time to ask questions at the reception area like what are their packages and programs, do they accommodate group scheduling, how long will be the treatment, the price, etc. Be very observant and take mental notes of your experience with them. Every time na lalabas ka sa spa, massage or wellness center nila- write it all down in a notebook. This will give you a glimpse of their strong and weak points as well as their operations.

Sixth, by this time, you should have completed your business plan and should be starting out your pre-opening marketing together with training of your staff. Your staff should be trained on both: their skills/technical training and their client services and referral building. If you decide to hire a trainer for their technical skills on massage, facials, body treatments, etc. marami tayong magagaling na trainers especially sa massage. The resource book on massage, spa and wellness has the most comprehensive list of training centers in the Philippines and abroad. You might be asking, how much is the training? Training period will be dependent on the number of services that you will offer: the more services that you will include in your menu the longer will be your training and the higher the cost for training. After this, train your staff in marketing, advertising, promotions, public relations and client care. Especially if you really do not know how the system works. Marketing is not just ads, flyers and posters. Hindi sapat ang mga ito (these are not enough). One of the most important but often neglected aspect is training staff regarding decorum and proper client handling. However skilled your staff is- if the service is bad, if they don't know how to communicate with clients or they don't ask for another appointment, wala rin. In short, if they don't ask, they don't get. So, it is very important that your staff should also be trained on things that would make your clients come back for more. Your people represent you, they are your backbone and clients are your bread and butter. Be sure to train your staff in making your clients remember about their experience, how they felt and making them addicted to the experience. Your spa consultant will guide you through this.

Since we are in the topic of how to open or start a spa, massage clinic and wellness center, I would like to stress that although this is a helpful guide, this is nowhere near being complete and perfect. So, the seventh step before you open your spa, massage and wellness center (in the Philippines), is be prepared for glitches, bumps and turns along the way. If you have done your part and what I have told you, you would have seen ups and downs along the way, be more prepared and creative to solve the problem and at least by doing so, you would have reduced your risk and eliminated possible big problems that would have come along the way.

This article is written by: Eunice Estipona a spa consultant, mentor, advisor, speaker and lecturer. One of her advocacies is to make healing and information regarding the field of spa, massage and wellness accessible and affordable to everyone. If you are serious about turning your business or practice around, making the right decisions, getting an unbiased opinion and knowing where to get help, for lectures and other concerns she can be contacted at yunesa@yahoo.com or +639184745685. To find out how she can help you take your business to the next level, visit her site at <http://www.meetup.com/philippinespaandwellness/>

These along with hundreds of resources found locally and abroad are contained in "The Spa, Massage and Wellness Resource and Career Book", the first book of resource information to know more about the Spa, Massage and Wellness Industry in the Philippines and other countries including the United States, Australia and other Asian countries. If you are a spa, massage therapy and wellness information seeker the resources contained in the book is for you. This book is a collection of data and valuable information regarding the spa and massage industry in a global perspective with a focus on the Philippines. Her advocacy in writing the book is to make "unbiased" information regarding the field of spa, massage and wellness resources and career, accessible and affordable for everyone. If you are considering a career in the massage, spa and wellness industry, this book will prepare you and give you a glimpse of what it is like, the preparation you need to take: emotionally, intellectually and financially. In this book, you will learn more details in the spa and massage field and the possible paths you can take. You will also learn about local and international training programs offered and numerous employment possibilities. Giving you much needed information at your fingertips. For more information, get in touch with Eunice at yunesa@yahoo.com

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