



THE AMERICAS: UNITED STATES

What are the most significant global issues facing us today?

It's mind-boggling to scratch the surface of so-called "global" issues.

There are basic daily challenges that individual people all around the globe share, like putting food on the table and a roof over the family's head. Those can occur in a world with pure water, clean air, and in an environment that is politically and religiously strife free. What's happening to and around the rest of the globe is intrinsically irrelevant to people who face those microcosmic issues.

The macrocosm of global issues that in one way or the other impacts great numbers of people, is well documented. Broken down into social, political, religious, economic and environmental issues, priority is a very subjective topic.

The common thread, when you strip away the effects of an issue, rather than the direct issue itself comes down to this: Poverty and economic uncertainty are among the most significant global issues.

What do you see as the main innovations happening around the world, those which are game changing and/or disruptive?

Easily accessible, inexpensive means of communication and social media come to mind first. These are game changing and disruptive, as witnessed by global political events in the past 18 months. Disruptive is another subjective term. Out of disruption and chaos arise new ideas, products, and social and political behaviors.

Another fascinating field is biotechnology, particularly its application in the health/medical arena. From nerve regeneration to prosthetic feedback the notion of the bionic person is no longer just science-fiction. Coupled with advances made in agricultural development and sustainability fooling with Mother Nature may not be so bad after all. Science and lifestyle are extending the limits of what we used to call "longevity".

What do you see as the main innovations in the spa/wellness industry (existing and future)?

True innovation, rather than progressive improvement in spa/wellness has been stagnant since 1957 when Harold Zinkin (Muscle Beach) patented his "Universal Equipment."

The next major innovative influence was when Dr. Kenneth Cooper taught us all how to take a pulse and kicked up the heels of "aerobics."

Everything else that has happened in the development, delivery and execution of spa and wellness since then has been (sometimes highly) creative and attentive, at best.

However, innovation in how we communicate with each other and our guests has changed, along with new marketing perspectives. One case in point would be SpaFinder, which led the way and continues to develop new concepts.

In the future there will be more intimate means of caring for oneself in the home environment such as toilets that read your vital statistics. New communities will be developed with the intent of extending active lifestyles beyond what is happening in the so-called "active living" communities of today.

In design, both architectural and interior, the major innovations will be designs that incorporate the practicality of accessibility with visionary aesthetics.

What do you see as the greatest opportunities/challenges for the global spa and wellness industry?

People are often moved to action by necessity rather than rational or determined thinking. Education can chip away at the collective consciousness, but that alone will not motivate, but only affirm. Stress, obesity, and the desire to continue leading vibrant lives are opportunities for spas to make a strong, positive impact in people's lives.

The challenge to that opportunity is the same as it has always been. Lifestyle changes take discipline.

Spas are viewed as enjoyable endeavors, whereas the concept of wellness seems to evoke no similar sensations. Kinesthetic and emotional connection must be made by individuals to the state of well-being. Short-lived euphoria on one hand, or pain and suffering on the other are much easier to recognize. There would be greater benefits to healthy living if people consciously and willfully gravitated to the mid-range of the continuum of health, rather than mindlessly drifting to the outer edges.

If we are passionate about sustaining our industry, then it's our job to nudge perception in that direction. Delivery of treatments, wellness protocol and time spent on spa/wellness must have value. And the participants and potential participants must acknowledge that value. A variation on the saying "money follows quality" is that "consistent money follows consistent quality."

What are some practical ways for businesses to create a climate for creativity and innovation?

First, creativity and innovation must be core "living" values of a business. Every employee, guest, vendor, contractor and others associated with the business must know those values and support them. The business must regularly do pulse checks to ensure they are staying on game.

Hire rebels. Quite often a person is hired because of, or in some cases in spite of, unique characteristics and ideas. Given enough time within the corporate or business structure, the employer may come to minimize the value of that contribution and discourage the very behavior or attributes that was originally viewed positively. That's a great way to stifle innovation and lose valuable resources.

Periodic wake-up calls like the recent economic challenges, forced operators to re-evaluate how they were doing business. Changes in hiring practices, pay, operating hours, purchasing, and marketing were made at a very grassroots level in order to survive and thrive. Small changes like those give owners and developers confidence to take greater risks with investments. Incite mini quakes on your own.

Keep your eye on the market, both current and desired. No market is stagnant. Twenty years ago the self-image alone of the 40- to 60-year-old woman was quite different from the group that has now grown into that market. This endeavor should not be relegated just to a marketing person who pores over statistics and thinks up great ideas. The untapped information from the entire staff, attendants, service operators, instructors and front desk is invaluable. They may not even be aware how much information and knowledge they hold. Make them aware. Help them look for it. Reward the innovative mind-set. The actions that lead to innovation are important to acknowledge and reward. Not every idea is a winner. But the more ideas tossed about lead to the great new idea or two. Expose your team to non-spa/wellness related influences to avoid myopic vision.

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