

Spa Professional Discovers Dharma

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Dharma is a concept of both the Buddhist and Hindu religions that, according to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, defines “the basic principles of cosmic or individual existence.” And although it may be difficult to wrap your head around this concept, Bonnie Waters understands it personally. “They say when we are close to our dharma in life, it comes effortlessly, and we can lose ourselves in it. I’ve been blessed to find my dharma in the spa industry.”

Now a 33-year veteran of the beauty profession, Waters first opened the doors of a small nail salon in downtown Walnut Creek, California, after graduating beauty school at the age of 17. “I thought I should learn a trade to earn more money so I could go to college,” she says. But she never made it to college—her head was turned by the charms of the beauty industry instead. “I fell into it as a trade, but grew to love it and what it represented. As a technician, you’re able to get an instant feeling of gratification from what you’re doing. I think that’s why people get drawn into it on a technical level, but those of us who work in a spa know it is a business,” explains Waters.

This business aspect also appealed to Waters, who loved to play office and accounting when she was a little girl. “I’ve always been fascinated with business—listening, learning, applying, trying—I’ve been very intrigued with it,” she says.

After spending eight years at her first location, she worked up the nerve to open a larger space for a full-service salon. Remaining in Walnut Creek, Waters opened the 1,000-square-foot Changes Salon & Day Spa, which today occupies the entire ground floor of her building, coming in at approximately 10,000 square feet. “In 1996, we added 6,500 square feet of space dedicated to spa. We knew we wanted to be part of the solution to help clients feel beautiful,” she says.

Remaining at the top of clients’ priority lists is more important now than ever before, and with the economy experiencing hard times, Waters isn’t afraid of the challenge. “Someone told me years ago that it’s not what you know or who you know or the education or money you have, it’s the ability to persevere when things are tough. It’s having a clear idea of who you want to be and focusing on that and staying true to that.” She recommends networking with both small businesses and other spas in your community, as well as focusing on yourself. “One of the best things anyone can do for themselves in life is to do some personal work. It’s not sexy, but the book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Free Press, 1989) by Stephen R. Covey is so powerful and will help you focus on what is important and prioritize your life accordingly,” she says.

Obviously something is working for Waters, who was named West Coast Salon Entrepreneur of the Year by The Global Salon Business Awards in 2008. “It was one of the proudest moments of my life,” she says. And another source of great pride for Waters are her children. Her 17-year-old daughter is the exact age she was when she opened her first salon and is herself expressing interest in the beauty industry. “At the age of seven, someone asked her what she wanted to do when she grew up, and she said, ‘I want to do what my mom does.’ As the years have gone by, the answer has remained the same,” explains Waters. Although her daughter wants to earn her business degree before looking to the spa for a career, Waters thinks she would fit into the spa world comfortably. “I also have a 14-year-old son and just hope they both find jobs they love and that they feel great about,” she says.

Waters knows the importance of doing something that you love—after all, she’s found her dharma. “I love the people in this industry so much. I’ve never not wanted to come to work. I feel very fortunate in that,” she says.

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