



A synopsis of the 5th Annual SWAA Conference

Smart Wellness Regions of Africa

Building a Decade of Health & Wellness

“This is Africa’s Moment”

The 2021, 5th Annual SWAA Conference was a resounding success in many ways and congratulations go to Elaine Okeke-Martin (Founder & President of SWAA) and the SWAA committee members. Immense gratitude to the dynamic panel of speakers who ranged from movers and shakers in various industries to Spirited Students and the dedicated patrons who believe in building a Healthy and Wealthy Africa- Together.

Reference: Photo by [Rui Silvestre](#) on [Unsplash](#)

“Be Courageous, Be an agent of change.” – Elaine Okeke-Martin

The conference kicked off with the topic on *Future Technology and Business Wellness* which unfolded with Charismatic John Sanei- Speaker and Motivator, who in his own words gave us a global context on “TRANS-FOR-MOTION”.

“Seek the idea of reinvention as the world is addicted to certainty and absolute outcomes, which when we hold onto, leave no room for reimagination. You are not alone when it comes to feeling uncomfortable with the unpredictable times we are living in.”- John Sanei

I believe that everyone who had tuned in had stepped into the motion of Transformation when John explained the different mindsets we apply to various aspects of lives and how to be aware of which mindset you’re in order to be able to redirect your personal and professional narrative.

“ Respond, Recover and Reimagine. Those that reimagine the adventure will achieve propulsion.” – John Sanei

We then found ourselves in contemplation with the following words; Innovation, Disruption, Personalization, Accessibility, Seamlessness and Trust, to name a few. With that being said, what does the tomorrow of your business look like?

Dr Ledivia Strauss, an advocate for Women’s Health & Director at Revita Health at the Val De Vie Estate led us into a deeply insightful conversation on Lifespan VS Healthspan. We valued the reminder that Health comes from the decisions we make daily as well as her personal journey to seek true Health.

Dr Strauss further explained that our weight is much more than the weight (number) we see on the scale and for a moment there some of us may have been grinning from ear to ear but humour aside, it goes beyond that.

Metabolic Health is what we should be aiming for and once we have this understanding, we then have the keys to become Healthier. Abiding by what she named the “7 pillars of Health (Eat, Sleep, Move, Connect, Protect, Relax, Supplements),” we have a choice to give our body the ability to heal.

“My passion was never to focus on the number on the scale, but how I felt- True Health from within.” – Dr Ledivia Strauss

The Future of smart data and technology in Spas was steered by Rupert Schmid, Co-Chairman of Biologique Recherche who warmly began with the Mantra;

“ Africa is the future and this is why I continue to support SWAA.”

Rupert dissected how Integrative and preventative medicine is the revolution that can be done via Artificial Intelligence and pointed out that something we do not use enough of is a model that utilizes DNA to curate personalization in Spa and Wellness.

In a world that is increasingly characterized by enhanced connectivity and where data is as pervasive as it is valuable, Africa has a unique opportunity to leverage new digital technologies to drive large-scale transformation and competitiveness. Africa cannot and should not be left behind.

The First Day ended with the announcement of the SWAA Education Framework which has been greatly articulated by the SWAA committee and aims to bridge the gap in Sustainable Education on the continent through the identification of the opportunity Africa has to uncover & reshape Wellness.

Day Two: “Social-Economic & Wellness Sessions” commenced with Smart Spas for tomorrow which was led by Industry Legend, Trent Munday – Senior Vice President, Mandara Spa.

Trent opened with a short heart-warming video clip of young girls at the Kitonje school of Empowered Girls in Uganda. Along with a few colleagues, Trent is currently running an initiative to support the girls and to know more kindly tune in to the replay of his segment where he has also been generous to share free resources.

Trent shared some golden nuggets on Crisis, Chaos and Opportunity and led us to think out of the box. He went on to reference the proverbial phrase “*Is the glass half empty or half full?*”

In his opinion, the glass is half empty as we decide what goes into the glass. So what then can we learn? What would we do differently? Massive opportunities lie amongst a crisis. Let's not go back to how things were, let us move forward.

“Transformations always occur during moments of Crisis”- Paulo Coehlo

The above quote is true for the award-winning Mandara Spa as it was during a crisis that it rose according to Trent.

The best way to prepare students for the future is by empowering them with the present. This could not be further from the truth when it came to the Students Challenge which was presented by Lucienne and Barbara from the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts Business.

The team was highly commended for their well-researched presentation that included the Challenges for African Countries, Opportunities for development, for the future and recommendations.

What do our therapists of the future need to prepare for?

Wilfried Dreckmann – Spa Project, Germany; opened this session by sharing some statistics such as, in Germany 1 in 4 people are diagnosed with severe depression and the fact that prevalent issues of Insomnia and anxiety to name a few are some of the maladies that our Spa Clientele face. Merely applying oil on someone's back is not going to help us, help them.

What could we offer differently to support the growing & ever-changing lifestyle issues? How can we better equip our younger teams to cope with the issues our clients are presented with?

Wilfried mentioned further that we are still treating our therapists as physical revenue-generating entities and not very much on a soulful level. This is a very valid point and stands strong within many establishments today. We can begin by educating our therapists on what Wellness truly is and most importantly what it means for them.

To the Smart Therapists of the Future- **“ You have a bright future ahead. Go for it!”** – Wilfried Dreckmann

Alas! Sustainability...

With all the changes impacting the environment on a global scale, sustainability has become a hot topic, naturally and rightly so.

With that in mind, the SWAA conference embraced an Influential and Positive panel of keynote speakers hailing from Sustainable Alliances, Sustainable Spa's, Clean Cosmetic Brands and Tourism Council. Every speaker was able to provide an interesting insight into the importance of engagement, education and the impact we can all create.

The combination of their fresh perspective and practical views sparked a lively panel discussion on a common goal and language about Sustainability in Wellness Tourism. By providing evidence of their experiences and statistics combined, this was a great platform to guide us on how we can all get the best out of these new frameworks.

A few key takeaways were;

- **“Start Simple with maximum impact.”**- Madhu Rajesh (CEO of the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance) * Check out her segment for the variety of free resources on sustainable best practices in Hospitality.
- **“Identify your most important stakeholders & suppliers and get them on board your journey.”**-Jessie Fraham (Branding and Sustainability Specialist)
- **“Ensure you are a part of local alliances. You can't do anything alone.”**- Valerie Obaze (Founder RandR Luxury)
- **“There is always room for improvement and this is what makes it exciting.”**
– Trevor Steyn (Founder of ESSE Skincare)
- **“Be socially conscious and consistent as Spa Managers and Business owners.”** – Zahra Duncombe- Edwards, Founder of Starts with Success Consulting LTD, Barbados
- **“Sustainability is profitable in the P&L bottom-line.”** – Rupert Schmid CEO BIOLOGIQUE RECHERCHE

In closing, the word “ Collaboration” was the chorus of every panel discussion and I pen off with both an African and Western quote/proverb to conclude.

“ If you want to fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

African Proverb

“ Evolution is not based on competition. It is based on cooperation.”

Dr Bruce Lipton



About the Author:

Michelle hails from Zimbabwe and is currently based in Dubai. She has been serving in the Spa & Wellness Industry since 2010 and her current role is an International Visiting Wellness Practitioner.

This journey has taken her into Spa Therapy/Management, Life Coaching/Neuro Linguistic Programming, Sound & Vibroacoustic Healing and Meditation.

She has been privileged to travel to 67 Countries which has granted her both great exposure to the diverse Wellness culture as well as the opportunity to be an instrument of Wellbeing globally.