



Leaders in Travel

The World's Best-Kept Wellness Secret

An Interview with Paul Lehr, President,
Pritikin Longevity Center & Spa, Aventura, Florida



Paul Lehr

EDITORS' NOTE *The son of a renowned cardiologist, Paul Lehr was raised at the Pritikin Longevity Center & Spa in Miami Beach, Florida, which his father cofounded in 1978. After graduating from law school and practicing law for some years, Lehr returned to Pritikin as its president and in 1999, oversaw its relocation to Aventura, Florida.*

COMPANY BRIEF *Founded in 1978 and located at the Turnberry Isle Yacht Club, Aventura, Florida, the Pritikin Longevity Center & Spa is a residential health resort propounding the work of Natban Pritikin, who pioneered a health revolution by showing that heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and overweight could be reversed or prevented by exercise and a diet emphasizing fruits, vegetables, seafood, and limited lean meat. Guests benefit from a full-service spa, tennis courts, a private beach club, and championship golf courses, and receive lifestyle guidance from a faculty of leading scientists and educators in the fields of medicine, nutrition, psychology, and exercise.*

Wellness is a competitive industry. What makes Pritikin unique?

We provide extensive spa services and resort amenities, but we're really the premier health facility. Other programs claim to be the best for health or weight loss, but those words are often just marketing claims. Pritikin delivers results that are documented in more than 90 studies published in top medical journals like the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Guests usually drop their cholesterol by 30 percent, lose 10 pounds or more, and lower their blood pressure enough to throw away medications. Seventy percent of diabetics leave Pritikin drug-free. Eighty percent of those who "needed" bypass surgery avoid the surgery and still don't

need it five years later. Pritikin really does change your life. People call us the "two-week miracle." One of our alums, Jeff Garlin, star of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, says, "What you learn at Pritikin punches you in the face!" Jeff got off his diabetes medications at Pritikin and lost lots of weight.

It must be frustrating to compete for the attention of potential customers who might not understand the facts.

That's true, but Pritikin is different. Pete Ellis, chairman of Spa Finder, told us, "At Pritikin, I had a learning experience that is always on my mind. Pritikin really teaches people how to succeed after they leave. You have a disciple." Pritikin's faculty is unique, consisting of leading scientists and educators in the fields of medicine, nutrition, psychology, and exercise. They help turn people who want to live healthier lives into people who are living healthier lives. Many guests call us one of the world's best-kept secrets.

How have you attempted to build brand awareness?

We take advantage of the respect we've developed within the scientific community. We let people know that scientists at Stanford, UCLA, and Harvard Medical School have consistently lauded Pritikin, that no other health program comes close to the volume of research we've published over the past 30 years or has achieved results like ours. People are listening. The media regularly contacts us to comment on health and diet issues. *Frontline* and the Discovery Health network just did stories featuring Pritikin. Our nutrition director recently appeared on the *Great Health Debate* panel, televised nationwide.

What about corporate retreats and programs for executives?

We've been mentoring executives in health since 1975. Both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* recently wrote about our programs. The "CEO diet" and health in the workplace are hot topics now. Around \$32 billion and 132 million workdays are lost every year due to employees' heart disease, blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. Companies pay 20 percent more for insurance than they should have

to. We can save companies a fortune. Several studies have documented that following a program like ours can increase productivity by 30 percent, cut the risk of dying prematurely from all causes by 50 percent, and add six or more years of life. One study showed that for every dollar a company spends on health prevention for its employees, more than two dollars go back to the bottom line. So companies feel good because they're not only improving their bottom line, but also doing the right thing.

Who are your typical clients?

We have guests aged between 20 and 90 – people simply seeking prevention and people seeking to lose weight or reverse diabetes or heart disease. We have many leaders, including chairmen of large public companies, numerous members of the *Forbes* 400, celebrities, senators, and governors. Congressman Charlie Rangel flies down every January. Everyone becomes like a family, hanging out together in their gym clothes, and making not only business deals, but lasting relationships. Many return yearly with friends they met at Pritikin.

Do you work with your clients after they leave Pritikin?

"Real world" training starts at Pritikin. We have a wonderful education program. We give classes on label reading and take our guests to the supermarket so they learn to shop for healthier foods that they enjoy. We give cooking and dining-out classes, so our clients understand how to make better choices in restaurants. Everything we do empowers our guests to do well at home. And when guests leave, we offer ongoing communication with our faculty, a monthly newsletter full of practical tips, and alumni groups throughout the country.

Can you ever turn off the business and get away?

Pritikin is part of my father's legacy. It's been part of my life since I was a little boy. You never get tired of watching people's lives being transformed. It's inspiring. And to know that I play a small part in helping people achieve these life-saving benefits makes it the best job in the world. I wouldn't want to turn it off. ●

A poolside consultation