

by Michele Meyer

## management workshop

# Sweat the Small Stuff

Nine niceties spa owners should never neglect.



Like most business people, many spa owners tend to spend their time and energy focusing on the big picture—grand marketing plans, client database spreadsheets, profit-boosting promotions and so on. Attending to these matters is important, of course, but doing so can also mean that smaller issues get overlooked. Unfortunately, if certain details fall through the cracks, it quickly becomes clear that they're not so small after all.

Paying attention to the finer points of spa protocol has

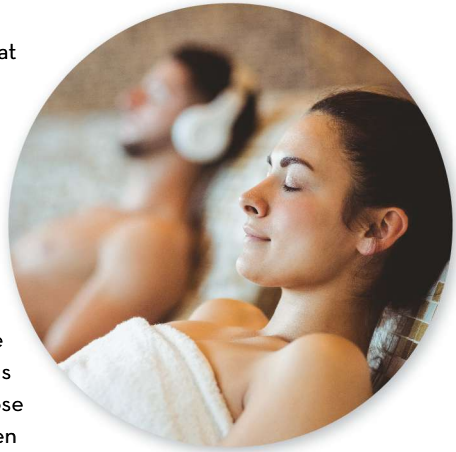
a ripple effect, leading to a greater impact than pros may realize. "The spa business is in the details," says Cheryl Jordan, regional spa director for Delamar Hotels' three Connecticut locations. "You're creating a Zen environment where guests feel cocooned." So, in the name of ensuring that your guests' needs are always met, and that your spa reaps the rewards of your dogged attention to detail, we've identified and addressed common small—but mighty—client turn-offs.

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**THE LITTLE THING:** Recycled music

**THE BIGGER ISSUE:** As anyone who's ever listened to a tune on repeat can attest, when the same old spa music is played over and over—even if it's intended to be soothing—the effect can be anything but calming. Meanwhile, there are some tracks that guests simply don't enjoy for a wide range of reasons. "Music really sets the tone for relaxation," says Angee Smithee, area director of spas for the Hyatt Regency in Scottsdale, Arizona. "It should vary while fitting the spa's concept and mood."

**THE QUICK FIX:** Find audio streaming vendors who offer playlists that can be modified and customized—Smithee's staff can even remove a song from rotation if it receives negative feedback. Plus, music menus in the treatment rooms let guests set their preferred volume and choose from waterfalls, chimes, ocean waves, classical, New Age—they can even turn it off for complete silence.



**THE LITTLE THING:** Disposable dishes

**THE BIGGER ISSUE:** Cheap plastic cups, plates and cutlery don't exactly make for an indulgent experience. "When you charge \$200 for a massage, your customers expect to be pampered," says Renae Cassam, spa director at The Houstonian Hotel's Trellis Spa. "Plastic is for picnics," she quips.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Invest in better-quality options. Trellis Spa serves lunch on high-end china with silverware and cloth napkins, and champagne and bellinis are offered in fine crystal glasses. "We don't use disposable cups unless guests want coffee or tea to go," explains Cassam. You can also buy upscale unbreakable options for the pool and other wet areas. "We're working on ways to be more eco-friendly by looking into shatter-proof, reusable champagne flutes, tumblers and tea cups," adds Danielle Kichler, spa director at Dia Feliz Spa at The Cliffs Resort in Pismo Beach, California.



**THE LITTLE THING:** A skimpy toiletry selection

**THE BIGGER ISSUE:** Have you ever started a shower only to realize you've run out of shampoo, or that you need to shave but don't have a razor handy? Then you know how some spa visitors feel, and it's not pretty—especially if they're returning to a conference or heading to an event after their service.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Offer a complete set of toiletries that ideally includes various hairbrushes, plus hairspray, styling gel, headbands, hair ties, mouthwash, toothpaste, toothbrushes, deodorant, cotton tips, razors, shaving cream, feminine hygiene products and plastic bags for damp swimsuits. "Male travelers appreciate men's haircare lines—and heated shaving cream dispensers are also a nice touch," Smithee points out. Ensure you're fully stocked by checking inventory at opening and closing, suggests Jordan.



**THE LITTLE THING:** Bad lighting

**THE BIGGER ISSUE:** Overly bright hallways and public areas can be a literal eyesore for spa-goers. "You don't want your guests squinting from the glare," says Jordan. "They need time to adjust to the outside world."

**THE QUICK FIX:** Dim lights throughout the spa, raising them briefly in retail areas when necessary—for instance, if clients are trying to find the right shade of lipstick, bronzer or nail polish—advises Jordan. "Subdued lights are part of the Zen experience," she says.





**THE LITTLE THING:** Overlooking special occasions

**THE BIGGER ISSUE:** Spas tend to be a preferred destination for special events, and these festivities should be memorable for the right reasons—not because a group of friends celebrating a milestone birthday or bridal shower gets separated from each other, or feels like they aren't receiving enough attention.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Ask clients about any special requests or amenities to be offered—right down to the guest of honor's favorite colors, flowers, beverages and snacks—and apprise every staffer of these details. Not only should plans be explained in the booking system, says Cassam, but workers throughout the spa, salon and restaurants should confirm that the group is together before and after services. "At Trellis, we're always connected via radio—management included," she notes.



**THE LITTLE THING:** Excessive noise

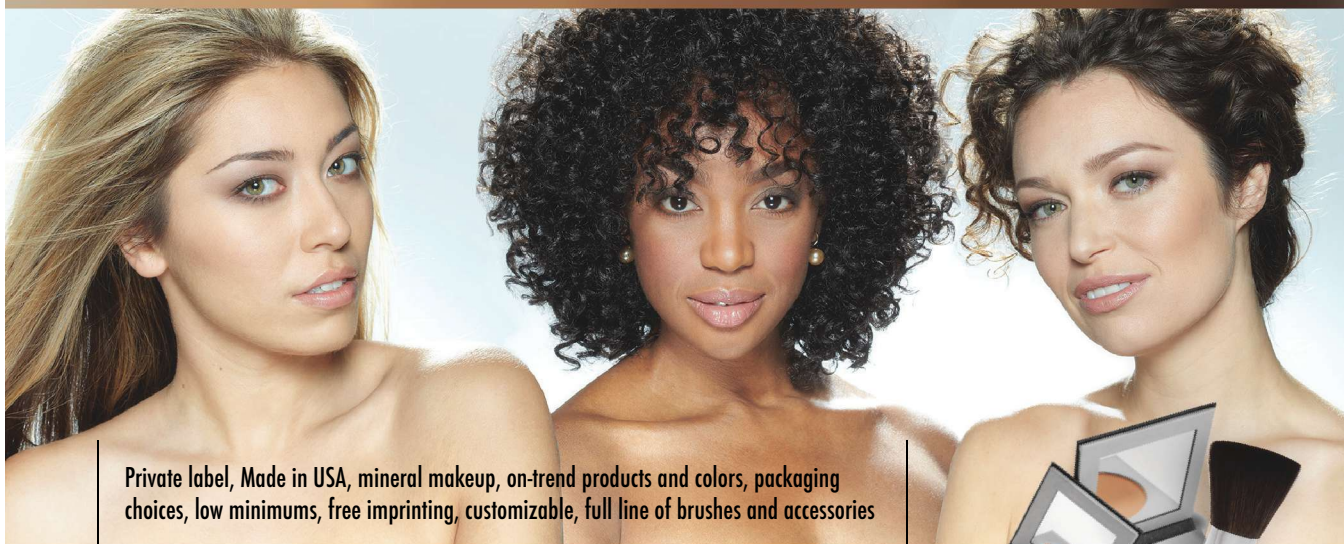
**THE BIGGER ISSUE:**

Patrons can't relax when others violate the no cell phone policy in quiet zones, or staffers gossip or guffaw in common areas. "Guests come here to chill out," says Irisha Steele, director of The St. Regis Aspen Resort's Remède Spa in Colorado. "If other guests or therapists are being loud, they might get the impression that we don't care."

**THE QUICK FIX:** Make room for noise. The Houstonian's Trellis offers an outside terrace where patrons can use cell phones and laptops while getting the same perks—lunch, champagne or bellinis—as those in the tranquility space, says Cassam. At Delamar, large groups are encouraged to reserve the entire space for a half hour before and after their services, explains Jordan, and employees are always reminded to keep their voices low. Meanwhile, Steele says that therapists at Remède are required to keep cell phones in their lockers, and managers walk the halls after services have ended to ensure a peaceful setting. "We even ask that, in case of an emergency, staff members have their families call the spa directly and we will then alert the employee," she adds.

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**THE LITTLE THING:** Lethargic therapists

**THE BIGGER ISSUE:** If the person providing a service is stressed or exhausted, clients will pick up on that and feel they're not getting the best care. "Energy, whether positive or negative, is contagious," notes Steele.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Remind yourself that taking care of employees is as much a priority as taking care of guests. "We offer yoga, meditation and group walks to personnel, so therapists can rebound after expending energy on their clients," explains Steele. At The Club at Kukui'ula in Koloa, Hawaii, spa director Justin Franklin tops weekly schedules with compliments and positive feedback from guests, whether it's for an individual or the entire team. "We don't ever want our workers to feel they're being taken for granted," he says.

**THE LITTLE THING:** The wrong robes

**THE BIGGER ISSUE:** Ill-fitting or uncomfortable attire can quickly ruin a spa experience. "One size doesn't fit most," says Smithee. "Nothing is more embarrassing for a larger guest than having to ask for a robe that fits." Meanwhile, petite patrons tend to "swim" in unisex robes. There's also the climate to consider—terrycloth-lined options will be too warm in heated rooms, while lightweight cotton robes may not be cozy enough in cooler environments.



**THE QUICK**

**FIX:** Have robes available in a wide range of sizes and materials. Offer guests options at check-in, and keep extras in the wet area so they can replace or exchange them if they're not comfortable or become damp.

**THE LITTLE THING:** Indifferent or inflexible staff members

**THE BIGGER ISSUE:** Your clients expect to be treated like royalty and with the utmost respect, so it's that much more disappointing if their requests—such as changing to a different treatment or modifying a service—are not well received.

**THE QUICK FIX:** Make sure that your workers are skilled in providing all, or virtually all, options on your treatment menu. Hire versatile therapists and then offer frequent training on new techniques. This is a service industry, so spas should be eager to accommodate customers who change their minds about what they'd like, points out Cassam. ☺

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