



International Institute of *Modern Butlers*

SPA BUTLERS – ADDING VALUE TO SPAS AND HOTELS ALIKE

For spa directors in hotels and resorts offering spa services there is the constant pressure to excel even further and so differentiate themselves in the minds of their guests; to find compelling ways to entice guests to return when there are many other venues for them to choose from.

The same could be said of the butler service offered by many such hotels and resorts. Both programs add value and prestige, but is there a way to improve these service offerings? The short answer is, "Yes!"

Imagine you are, as one guest noted, returning to your hotel suite looking like a scrubbed vegetable and feeling anything from exhausted to exhilarated to even nauseous. You are about to run into the one key flaw inherent in every spa experience: it ends the moment a guest leaves the spa to return to his or her suite. The way to make a guest's experience a complete one, and offer a total immersion in the "get away from it all" relaxation and rejuvenation, is to form a joint venture between the spa and butler programs. Simply put, make the butler service an extension of the spa experience, wherein spa-trained butlers provide their usual high-end service on the hotel side, but with the added knowledge and techniques that enable the spa environment to continue in the guest's own suite.

Does this mean that the butler will roll up his sleeves and stretch, massage and pluck the guest? Not at all: but put yourself in the shoes of the guest. If you have ever been pampered and prodded, sweated and doused, this should not be too difficult. When the doors of the spa swing shut behind you and you make your way to your suite, you re-enter a world that runs on different agreements. People rush around, lost in thought, and not up to speed on your own serene/mellow/invigorated world. You open the door to your suite and it is, well, flat and empty and definitely not that interested in your new state.

Guests may even experience a catharsis or detoxification as a result of their spa experience. How reassuring or safe would an empty suite be, with butlers at the end of the telephone line who know nothing of your condition or how to assist.

Now imagine a butler who knows how guests can react to their spa experience and how to assist them with understanding and empathy. It would create quite an impact on guests. Moments of drama aside, when a butler knows and understands the spa program of a guest, he can converse about the guest's experiences with good reality, should the guest so desire, and can also take actions to enhance that program (such as adding a complementary (not necessarily complimentary) bath salt to the bath, rather than one that conflicts with the spa program.

The spa butler is a new creature in the hospitality and spa industries, for he or she is really the architect of the ultimate spa hospitality experience, designing and arranging the entire spa guest experience. The spa still delivers the spa services, but the butler acts as the main point of contact before, during and after the guest's stay. Because he



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understands and knows what the guest is going through, and the basic spa methodologies, he can be there for the guests and extend the entire stay into a smooth experience for them. That's the simplicity of the spa butler program.

Translated into the real world, this program means the butler asks and cares about the guest's goal in coming to the spa; he cares about the guest's room, ensuring that the space reflects the guest's needs and wants. The butler supports the guest by being a sounding board and conversing with understanding and empathy. He introduces the guest to the people, places and services he or she will be experiencing at the spa, answering all questions and resolving all concerns. He smoothes the preparations for each spa experience and helps the guest through the ramifications of each spa treatment, asking the right questions.

The spa butler understands the mechanism of each spa treatment in order to give accurate and convincing explanations of treatments to the guest. The application of hot or cold therapy to the body may seem odd or even silly to the guest without an understanding of the expected physiological effects and benefits. Earning the guest's confidence and compliance with intelligent answers to his/her questions is an important part of the spa butler service and helps the spa personnel to recommend the most appropriate treatments.

Types of Guests

There are at least four categories of spa guests. Identifying them is key to serving them successfully.

"Fluff and Buff" guests are delighted with the ultimate in pampering. They are investing time, energy and money in the expectation they will be treated as kings and queens. They are enjoying a mini vacation from the stresses and strains of everyday life.

"ROI" guests are looking for a return on their investment. They are spa savvy, meaning that they have been to spas before and have preconceived notions about what a great spa experience is and should be. They expect their spa experience to deliver on the health enhancement and therapeutic expectations they have formulated.

"Solution seeker" guests want a spa experience to alleviate pain and discomfort from their ongoing medical conditions, such as multiple sclerosis, osteo-arthritis, etc. and are hoping to find relief and answers that will alleviate some of their suffering.

"Transformer" guests are committed to transforming their own worlds, understanding they play an integral and vital role in optimizing their health and well-being. They trust the spa to have highly specialized facilitators who honor the holistic nature of man.

By knowing and understanding each guest's goal and being there for them in their pursuit of that goal, the butler forms a unique relationship with guests and so brings about the ultimate spa hospitality experience.



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Assuming this spa butler concept strikes a chord with an owner or manager, the next step is simply to train some or all of the existing butlers on spa methodology with the help of outside consultants working with the in-house spa personnel. It takes a few days of training to implement. Hotels without butlers would need to train butlers first (see article Ask Not What The Butler Did, But What He Can Do For Your Hotel, The Hotel Butler – Recognizing the Value Butlers Bring to the Bottom Line and then add on the spa butler training. To reiterate, a spa butler is a fully fledged butler with additional training on spa methodology <not just a fancy title shoved onto someone whose only familiarity with a butler is from the movie Arthur, for instance. John Gielgud's sub-voce remark when his boss is in the bath Gielgud just drew for him, is not the kind of attitude that will work for a spa butler.

To borrow from a completely different field, spa butlers are now beginning to appear in hotels like the inevitable next version of your favorite software. How smart is it to talk to guests in Windows when they are using MAC? There are not many places the many ultimate spa destinations can go to create a unique position in the mind of the guest, but the spa butler provides just such a leap forward perhaps because it reaches outside the spa itself, where standards are already exquisitely high, to raise the bar even further.

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