

Crossing the Threshold: Rituals to Make Your Spa a True Departure from the Ordinary –Part I

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This topic is divided into two parts. In this post, I will share some thoughts to help you create one of the most important aspects to your guests' sense of arrival. The next post will provide some concepts and best practices to help foster your team's positive energy.

In many cultures, a door, especially the entryway before entering a house, has great significance. For some, it is a place to leave everything unclean behind (including shoes); for others, it means a point at which one abandons the mundane (or the “bad spirits” you acquire throughout the day). In sacred places, the entryway is where you enter a haven of reverence.

I am not trying to compare a spa with a place of worship or a sacred space, but it should be a sanctuary for people to depart from day to day woes, constant chatter, and trivial worries. Nonetheless, it isn't easy to turn off that switch; I personally have a hard time taking “me time”. Like many others, I have a preoccupied mind and a phone connected to my hip. For these reasons alone, a gentle reminder to simply slow down my world is always welcome.

One of the best spa treatments I ever had was in South Asia. Before crossing a small bridge towards the treatment room, the therapist asked me to stop for a moment to ponder what was written on top of a beautifully carved entryway; I responded that I didn't read Thai. Her translation was, “From this threshold, leave the world behind”. Then, she asked me to take a deep breath, exhale, and walk with her. That was it. This petite, soft-spoken lady quickly eased my frantic ADD mind, and most likely, slowed my heart rate as well. This was the perfect preamble to a soothing massage that transcended the physical. I was spiritually relaxed from the moment I crossed the threshold.

As you may already be thinking, it isn't easy to replicate an exotic resort spa experience at an urban day spa. But what if I told you that you could? Here are a few ideas and practices to create simple, yet significant rituals to enhance your clients' experience and build on your unique value proposition:

The Threshold Stop: After checking in and before entering your treatment area, write some words above your threshold inviting your guest to leave the world behind. The therapist should pause, read the sign, and ask the guest to take a deep breath to begin the experience. Note: It's really important that your team perform this ritual with sincerity and with positive intentions. Basically, not rushed. Feel free to use the words stated above, in any language of your preference. My friend and colleague, Suzanne Holbrook, at the Ritz Carlton Grande Lakes has choice words written in Latin.

A Symbolic Thought Pond: Using an attractive bowl or bird bath filled with clean water, place a small container with dry or fresh flower petals next to it. Ask every client, to take a second to breathe deeply and “Think a Healthy Thought” (an affirmation, a positive thought, or simply a desire to be healthy) and then place a petal on the water.

A Cell Box: At your local craft store, buy some nicely decorated boxes to match your spa design. They need to be large enough to hold a cell phone. Before leading your client into the changing / locker room, offer the cell box and ask them to place the phone inside after taking a deep breath. Ask your team to explain to each guest that this act symbolizes the beginning of “me time”.

A Simple Pre-treatment Breathing Exercise: As part of your protocol and before commencing any treatment, have your therapist take a moment to perform a short “three-deep-breaths” exercise with the client. Before the exercise, gently ask clients to empty their minds and let go.

Not all of these rituals will match your personal choices or spa personality, but I sincerely hope you can, at least, adopt one or create one of your own. Have fun, and remember the spa treatment is just one part of the experience.

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