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GOES THE CLOCK

Managing late arrivals and no shows

By Dori Soukup

Every spa owner, manager and solopreneur strives to fill every appointment slot and maximize capacity. But a great day starts to crumble when a client either calls to say they are running late, doesn't show up, or cancels their reservation on the same day as the scheduled appointment.



Have you been in that situation? Sure you have! Every spa professional has to deal with this challenge, which is very costly for the spa industry. However, there are strategies you can employ to help reduce late arrivals and no-shows.

RESERVATION GUIDELINES

Instruct your reception department to follow these steps when taking reservations to minimize client tardiness and no-shows:

1. Take credit card information to confirm reservations

You can't reserve a hotel, car rental or dinner without providing credit card information, so why do some spas still not take credit cards when booking a reservation? Make sure you do.

The reception department should ask the client, "Which credit card would you like to use to confirm your reservation?" This should happen with every reservation — no exceptions. This practice solidifies the reservation and helps reduce your no-shows or late arrivals, especially when it's followed with the next point...

2. Make guests aware of rescheduling guidelines

First, guidelines should be for rescheduling, *not* cancellation. "Cancellation" is a negative word, as it indicates that the client is not coming back. The word "reschedule," on the other hand, indicates that they are returning. Your receptionist should share your rescheduling or late arrival guidelines with each guest at the time of the reservation. Create a scripted message that each receptionist must recite with every reservation, such as the following:



"Ok Jennifer, we will be expecting you Wednesday at 9:50 for your facial! Just so you know, should you need to reschedule your appointment, you will need to inform us at least 24 hours in advance to avoid any charges. It takes preparation on our part to deliver the best experience for you, and we want to make sure you get the most out of your visit with us.

Jennifer, what is your preferred communication method for your confirmation? Text, email or call?

Great, we will text you the day before as a courtesy reminder! Also, I am sending you an email with great information to prepare you for your visit with us. Thanks Jennifer, we look forward to seeing you Wednesday at 9:50!"

3. Post-reservation guidelines email

Create an email template to be sent automatically once a reservation is made. Your email should explain arrival guidelines and treatment preparations. Make

sure you include your guidelines for late arrivals, rescheduling and no-shows.

4. Confirmation via communication preference

The day before the scheduled appointment, make sure you send out either a text, email, or make a phone call based on the client's communication preference.

5. Rewarding good behavior and respect

If your spa is among those that implement a loyalty program offering points to your clients, inform clients that by arriving early to their appointment, they can earn additional loyalty points. This is a great way to encourage positive behavior. Include this offer in the email template you send out post-reservation.

"I'M RUNNING LATE"

Let's assume you implement the five steps above and you still have clients who run late. How should you balance the objectives of providing a positive

guest experience and protecting your time? Do you give them the full treatment? You have to use your own discretion in this situation. However, note that if you give them the full treatment the first time, they will expect it every time they are late.

Instead, consider using this as an opportunity to teach them how to spa with you. Kindly offer them the option to either reschedule or receive whatever time they have left. If they are a first-time offender, you may want to apply some of the amount paid toward their next treatment as a goodwill gesture, and make sure they understand your guidelines about being late.

Always give the impression that it's difficult to get an appointment with your spa. We have clients with solid appointment reservations for three and four months out. Do you think these clients are late or no-shows? No, because they know that if they miss their appointment they are not getting in. That's the effect of urgency and time scarcity. If this protocol is practiced and known among your clients, instances of tardiness and no-shows will be reduced.

BALANCING GUIDELINES AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

The goal of the spa is to deliver a great guest experience, which sometimes means you must forgive and be flexible. After all, we are in the business of making clients feel better, and they won't stick around if we tick them off! As a business owner, it is your responsibility to create a culture and environment that is inviting to your guests so they look forward to coming to your spa.

For example, the reason I suggest taking credit cards is not to charge first-time offenders. Doing so will only upset them and they will never come back to you. Don't be black and white. Grey is sometimes required. Teach both your team and your clients how to be in a great relationship based on mutual respect.

Where do you draw the line?

Once you put all of these guidelines in place, you are sure to minimize these challenges. But there will always be those few clients who are consistently running late, no matter what you do. For these repeat offenders, you must make the difficult choice of either charging them or "firing" them. If a client is not respecting you, takes valuable time slots from you and doesn't care about you and your business, it might be time to draw the line.

Redemption from a "no-show" or "cancellation"

Make sure your receptionist contacts the no-show client and attempts to reschedule them. The sooner this is done, the better the chances are of booking a new reservation with them. However, if the client does not want to make another reservation, you need to find out why. This is an opportunity to discover what really happened and learn from it.

Track your results

It is essential for a spa leader to run reports to track the rate of no-shows and late arrivals in order to address them accordingly. The reception team and your therapists can manage this challenge. Create your reservation guidelines and make sure everyone — from the team to your clients — knows what they are. Post them on your website and create email templates to send to clients as a reminder. If everyone on the team is aware of your guidelines and makes them clear to all guests, the rate of no-shows and late arrivals at your spa will be minimal. ■



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