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# First, Last, and Always

By Julie King

From check-in to check-out,  
and in between, the locker room  
defines the member experience

**L**ocker rooms are one of the most relaxing and rewarding areas of your club. At the same time, they're a labor-intensive challenge for you and your staff—and that's putting it *mildly*.

Once simple, utilitarian changing rooms, they've evolved into a defining part of most clubs, the room that members tend to visit first ... and last ... and, often, in between. It's fair to say that most will use the area at least once every time they come to the club. Sometimes, just to change, stow a cell phone, or use the restroom; and, at other times, to employ it as a refuge, a safe haven from stress-filled lives, where they can linger, relax, and, even, indulge themselves.

"Our research indicates that members want their locker room to be a place where they can escape and relax for 30 minutes," notes Alan Leach, the area general manager and head of sales and marketing for the West Wood Clubs, a group of three premium facilities in Dublin, Ireland. "It should be an *experience*—like staying at a Ritz-Carlton. Our members expect these spaces to be something special."

Because these highly utilitarian and greatly appreciated spaces are heavily trafficked, they can be spotless one minute—prior to peak hours, for example—but then look as though a disaster hit a short time later. If and when that occurs, it can reflect poorly on your staff, the entire facility, and the value of a membership.

Conversely, a clean, well-kept, and well-stocked locker room speaks well about your business.

For many prospects and members, the locker room serves as a litmus test of a club's culture and management's true intentions—in the same way that, for many diners, a restaurant's restrooms are most revealing about its *real* standards.

For your locker room to pass muster, your staff must be relentless in its pursuit of near-perfection when it comes to upkeep. Regardless of their features or specific amenities—whether basic or luxurious—these spaces require rigorous and unrelenting attention to ensure a safe, comfortable, and satisfying member experience.

Creating a five-star locker room involves much more than keeping the floors clean or stocking enough towels, however. These mundane →

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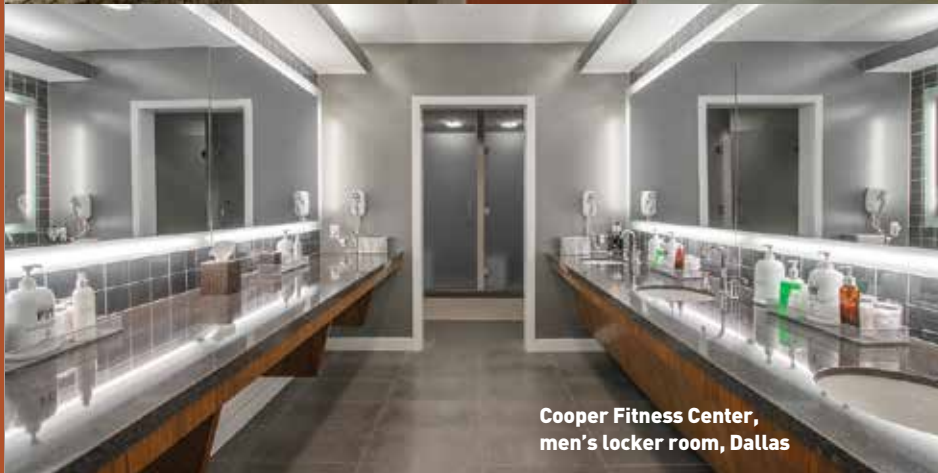
**Village Health Club,  
Camelback, Phoenix**



**Cooper Fitness Center,  
men's locker room, Dallas**



**West Wood Club, Clontarf  
Road, Dublin, Ireland**



**Active Sports Club,  
Petaluma, California**



Alan Leach



Brad Wilkins



Carol Nalevanko

housekeeping tasks must, of course, be performed diligently, over and over again. But a closer look reveals that a number of other factors play a seminal role. Among them: a club mission and culture that emphasize consistent attention, a sophisticated tracking system, solid communication among staff, accurate measurement of results, and

employee accountability.

Here's how West Wood and two other IHRSA-member club companies have succeeded in achieving—and maintaining—a standard of excellence.

**“Our members are very vocal about their locker room, and they take pride in it.”**

### A supportive culture

As in any service organization, clubs must commit to, emphasize, and *own* the pursuit of customer satisfaction—starting at the top. Because locker rooms are an integral part of a member's interaction with the club, the *entire* staff—not just the housekeeping and maintenance teams—must recognize that their upkeep and operation are ongoing group responsibilities.

“When hiring staff, we clearly communicate the importance of maintaining a clean, organized, and

well-stocked locker room,” says Ken Brendel, a regional general manager for Active Wellness, LLC, based in Sausalito, California. In all, the company oversees some 120 locker rooms at the 60 corporate and community fitness facilities it manages. “Every manager and team member is expected to maintain these areas by doing such things as closing locker doors, picking up dirty towels, and wiping down countertops, as part of their everyday duties.”

The basics—the room's layout, its aesthetics, and its essential features—are certainly significant, but, when it comes to moving from *acceptable* to *excellent*, it's the details that define the difference. Practical amenities, such as shampoo and hair dryers, along with more luxurious ones, and being able to access responsive staff put satisfied smiles on members' faces.

Village Health Clubs & Spas, a chain of four 82,000-square-foot, multipurpose facilities in Phoenix, Scottsdale, and Chandler, Arizona, which have a total of 18 locker rooms, clearly goes the extra mile. “We offer shaving cream, razors, Q-Tips, cotton balls, mouthwash, and sunscreen, as well as shampoo, conditioner, body wash, and deodorant,” says Carol Nalevanko, the president of the company and a former member of IHRSA's board of directors.

The Cooper Fitness Center, in Dallas, boasts deluxe rain showerheads; high-end, salon-grade, flat irons and diffusers for haircare; and handheld mirrors, adjustable fans, and chilled towels. The men's space has a shoeshine attendant, as well. “Our locker rooms are designed to make our members feel as though they're being pampered at a luxury spa,” explains Brad Wilkins, the senior vice president of operations for Cooper Aerobics Enterprises, Inc. “We want to make them feel special—so they enjoy the ‘sweat of their labors.’”

Some clubs employ part-time or full-time locker room attendants, while others use roaming housekeeping staff to keep an eye on things, and many conduct regular management walk-throughs. This valuable exercise assures a constant focus on upkeep, as well as a visible presence for members who might want to report issues, and helps identify problems before they occur. “Manager walk-throughs are imperative not only to identifying current issues, but also to preventing potential ones,” suggests Brendel. “Our goal is to solve problems long before our members become aware of them.”

### Systems, tracking, communication

Due to the need for repetitive tasks, along with regular attention, savvy clubs use a variety of paper and/or software systems—e.g., daily checklists, →

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Village Health Club, Ocotillo,  
Chandler, Arizona

**“Members evaluate your business not on something going wrong, but, rather, on how you respond when it does.”**

service logs, and preventative-maintenance databases—to stay on top of things. The West Wood Clubs, which serve a total of approximately 22,500 members, utilize the Club Vitals software program, for instance, which allows staff to take note of issues, track responses, and document solutions.

“After logging a problem, the maintenance team is immediately alerted, on walkie-talkies, about the need to inspect the situation,” explains Leach. “If it’s something that can be fixed—it takes precedence over everything else.”

At Ocotillo Village, a Village Health Clubs & Spas facility, weekly inspections are conducted of spa heaters, steam generators, chemical feeders, and laundry equipment to identify deterioration, gauge life expectancy, and plan for timely replacements. Quarterly preventative-maintenance service is conducted on larger equipment.

Keeping extra parts on hand for simple repairs is an easy way to avoid problems that, otherwise, might linger painfully, points out Wilkins. “We maintain an extensive inventory of regularly needed parts and supplies onsite—a proactive effort, on our part, to make quick repairs and minimize any inconvenience to members.”

Given the complexity of locker rooms—with their numerous components, heavy staff involvement, and constant traffic—clear and regular communication is the grease that ensures smooth operations. Staff must share information about



Cooper Fitness Center, women’s  
locker room, Dallas



Marcia Franks



Ken Brendel

everything from supply needs, to maintenance, to malfunctions with each other and with external vendors and contractors. And members also need to be part of the communications loop.

“If a problem can’t be fixed within six hours—particularly if it’s an issue with the pool, sauna, steam room, or Jacuzzi, we let members know immediately by e-mail or text,” says Leach. “If they understand what’s going on, they’re not as upset.”

Active Wellness does much the same. “When something requires repair, we’re proactive in sharing the timelines involved with members,” notes Marcia Franks, a regional general manager for the facilities, each of which serves from 1,000 to

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10,000 members. “Members evaluate your business not on something going wrong, but, rather, on how you respond when it does.”

### Measurement, accountability

In a service business, a customer’s *perception* represents *reality* for a company, so it’s important to seek out, and act upon, client input. Although many clubs report that members frequently volunteer comments about locker rooms, a formal evaluation process seeks feedback from everyone and demonstrates management’s receptivity.

At the West Wood Clubs, two member-satisfaction monitors—the Medallia and Listen 360 Net Promoter Score software programs—have alerted the staff to, among other things, the critical importance of keeping the rooms spotless. “With the Net Promoter Score, we became aware that our locker facilities were an issue,” recalls Leach. “And, even so, members were spending, on average, 40% of their time in the club in the locker rooms and spas. They regarded it as their ‘treat’ at the end of a workout.”

Village Health Clubs & Spas also employs the Medallia survey. “Our members are very vocal about their locker room, and they take pride in it,” notes Kevin Schofield, the operations director at the chain’s Camelback Village location. “Many give us suggestions on how to provide a better experience.”

The accountability for maintenance must be precise and unambiguous, as it travels down the line from the club’s director and managers to the housekeeping staff. The managers are responsible for setting expectations and conveying them clearly, and should position walk-throughs and performance reviews as *positive* opportunities for improvements ... and commendations. In turn, they should always share compliments and positive reviews with staff to encourage them and increase their pride in their work.

“We pinpoint the process of maintaining locker room standards by using hourly and daily checklists, and by conducting monthly and quarterly quality-control inspections,” explains Franks. “Our fundamental belief is that we must *inspect* what we *expect*.”

At the West Wood Clubs, the member feedback rises up through ranks to leadership. “All of the managers know that it’s going right to the managing director,” says Leach. “So, in effect, locker room cleanliness is *self-managed*—no manager wants to receive constant negative feedback about untidiness.”

Two other productive possibilities: Staff, our experts suggest, should visit neighboring facilities to unearth new ideas and sample the competitive experience. And management should budget for capital improvements to demonstrate its commitment both to the locker rooms and to “wow-ing” members.

### Personal preferences

A final thought: Each club operator that *CBI* spoke to conceded that pleasing everyone was nearly impossible. “Some people love the new soaps, and some hate them; some like the remodel, and some don’t,” observes Schofield. “You can please some of the people some of the time, but you can’t please everybody all of the time.”

Joe Melendez, the operations director at Village Health Club & Spas’ Ocotillo Village facility, agrees. “Since members have their own tastes and preferences, one of our challenges is finding just the right fit for most of them, while still contributing to that individual experience.”

Concludes Wilkins: “Locker rooms represent one of the—if not *the*—most personal and intimate places that members experience. When they elicit a positive emotional response from members—it’s priceless. It’s an indication that we’ve created an environment that reflects our appreciation for the time they spend at, and the investment they make in, our club.” —

– Julie King,  
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Kevin Schofield



Joe Melendez

## PRODUCT SHOWCASE

How can you make your locker room a safe, spotless, comfortable, and convenient amenity, an after-workout "treat" that members will rave about? The following products from IHRSA associate members can help you make that happen.

### DIGILOCK

Security simplified. NextLock by Digilock is pleased to introduce Axis, a fresh approach to securing personal storage. A slim 8mm profile that's available in a keypad, a touch keypad, or a touch RFID interface offers several advanced features, including an audit trail, and the option to manage use with a mobile device. With more than 35 years of experience, Digilock is a global leader in the delivery of high-performance electronic lock and locker solutions. The company's steadfast commitment to providing superior customer support, and responsiveness to market demands, has made Digilock a recognized industry leader.

*Contact: 707-766-6000, digilock.com. Please see our ad on page 69. —*



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Now clubs can improve their towel presentation, save money, be environmentally responsible, and make sure that towels stay where they belong ... in the club. Developed specifically for the health club industry, the Anti-Theft (AT) Towel System from PETRA-1 solves the problem and expense of towels "walking out the door." As a result, the AT Towel System pays for itself quickly. What's more, members and guests will appreciate the high quality of these soft absorbent towels. It's truly a win-win!

*Contact: 800-463-2516, petra-1.com. Please see our ad on page 86. —*

### GANTNER TECHNOLOGIES

The GAT NET lock .7000 locking system affords club operators the ultimate in security and locker room management. Front desk and reception staff can see, in real-time, from the front desk's PC whether lockers are free or in use. This gives staff the ability to ensure that each visitor is using only one locker at a time, whenever space is at a premium. In addition, the locking system comes with a break-in alarm message at the locker, and on the networked PC.

*Contact: 844-703-1139, gantner.com. Please see our ad on page 84. —*



### ZEPHYR LOCK

Zephyr Lock offers a complete line of shared-use locks that can help improve efficiencies, provide an upscale presentation, and streamline the locker experience for club members. All Zephyr Lock shared-use products offer simple access for managerial staff, as well as a simple user interface for club members and clientele. With systems ranging from maintenance-free mechanical locks to highly programmable RFID electronic locks, Zephyr Lock products fit every need and application for a club's locker rooms.

*Contact: 866-937-4971, info@zephyrlock.com. Please see our ad on page 85. —*

### SCHULTE-SCHLAGBAUM

Users are sure to appreciate SAG's Safe-O-Tronic state-of-the-art electronic locking system for lockers and safe deposit boxes. The LS line features award-winning design and flexible modes of operation, such as RFID, PIN code, or both. This innovative locking system is equipped with battery control, as well as easy-to-use functions, which help to optimize a club's locker capabilities. What's more, Safe-O-Tronic products can be easily customized to convey a club's corporate identity with logos and numbering.

*Contact: 49 (0) 2051 / 20 86-420, sag-schlagbaum.com. Please see our ad on page 82. —*





### MASTER LOCK

Master Lock's popular and easy-to-operate, built-in mechanical lock is ideal for high-traffic health and fitness facilities, as it's designed for multiple users on any one day. Members can set their own personalized three-digit code for temporary use, freeing staff for other responsibilities. Users simply select the code, set the lock to a locked position, and scramble the dials. When finished, they scramble the dials again, and leave it unlocked. Staff use a supervisory key to reset the lock, or gain emergency access to any locker, if needed.

*Contact: 414-571-5625, [masterlock.com](http://masterlock.com). Please see our ad on page 60. —*



### S3 DESIGN, INC.

S3 Design is an architectural firm whose practice is dedicated to the planning and design of health clubs, and sports and recreation facilities. The S3 Design team's passion is to create an environment, and thus, a user experience, which promotes participation in fitness and wellness, and encourages more people to pursue—and stay with—a healthy, active lifestyle.

*Contact: 781-848-8804, [s3design-inc.com](http://s3design-inc.com). Please see our ad on page 106. —*

### HYDROMASSAGE

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*Contact: 727-536-5566, [hydromassage.com](http://hydromassage.com). Please see our ad on page 43. —*

### SALSBURY INDUSTRIES—LOCKERS.COM



Constructed of industrial-grade particleboard and covered with plastic laminate, Salsbury's Designer Lockers are available in gray, blue, black, maple, cherry, and mahogany. They come in widths of 12" and 15" (extra wide); in depths of 15", 18", 21", and 24"; and in single-tier, double-tier, triple-tier, four-tier, five-tier box, six-tier box, and double-tier "S" configurations. Club operators are encouraged to call for a free quote or to request a catalog.

*Contact: 800-LOCKERS (800-562-5377), [Lockers.com](http://Lockers.com). Please see our ad on page 89. —*



## PRODUCT SHOWCASE

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### ATHLETIX PRODUCTS BY CONTEC, INC.



Athletix Guide Rod Wipes can be used to clean and protect guide rods in a simple, one-step process. They apply just the right amount of lubricant, preventing any excess from dripping and running between weight plates. The PTFE protective lubricant repels dust, allowing a club's machines to look, and work, like new. These wipes are also ideal for cleaning guide rods, elliptical tracks, seat slides, and other sliding mechanisms.

*Contact: 864-503-8333, [athletixproducts.com](http://athletixproducts.com). Please see our ad on page 41. —*



### GYMWIPES BY 2XL CORPORATION

GymWipes offers a complete product line—either full-spectrum protection, or more cost-effective solutions—that safely cleans and sanitizes all fitness equipment surfaces. These EPA-registered, bactericidal, virucidal, and fungicidal disinfecting/sanitizing formulas protect against more than 50 dangerous pathogens. Because they contain no alcohol, phenol, or bleach, this line has been tested and approved by leading equipment manufacturers. Product counts range from 700 to 2,300, and attractive dispensers and stands are available.

*Contact: 888-977-3726, [gymwipes.com](http://gymwipes.com). Please see our ad on page 88. —*

### KEYLESS.CO, LLC



The Keyless1 lock is a smart choice for locker security. Its simple operation, sustainable engineering, and unparalleled security will make members and locker room managers happy for years to come. This environmentally friendly lock requires no batteries or software. It has no plastic parts or wires, and is water-resistant and dust-proof. Once installed, it costs nothing to operate. The Keyless1 also has 10,000 possible combinations, and is easily reset from the front desk, allowing managers to retain the user codes. It's also anti-pick; has a break-away knob; reprograms to alternate master keys, and has a five-year warranty. ADA-compliant options are available.

*Contact: 972-331-2770, [keyless.co](http://keyless.co). Please see our ad on page 59. —*

### FOREMAN PRODUCTS, LLC

FOREMAN Products is celebrating its 10-year anniversary by introducing new designs that offer creative solutions to a club's locker needs. The Cubbie-Combo features open compartments with smaller, secure, wallet/phone lockers. The Contour locker's curved footprint adds a striking element to a facility, while maximizing locker space. The unique construction of FOREMAN products makes use of hinges and strike-plates that are integrated directly into the frame of the locker, and exterior and interior compact laminates. The result is an extremely secure and durable locker for both indoor and outdoor use.

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