

Tips From The Top

[advice from experts]

10 TIPS

to Elevate the Value of Services

As societal mores pertaining to funerals seem to be shifting toward condensed services and cremation continues to gain in popularity, those who provide funeral services need to be ever more mindful of elucidating the value of the funeral to families. It is vital to families for healing but also vital to our collective relevancy and future. Wayne Stellmach, director of marketing for Wilbert Funeral Services Inc., offers these 10 tips that may help advance the value of a funeral service and make it memorable for families.

1. COMMIT TO COMMITAL SERVICES

Arguably one of the most fulfilling elements of a funeral is the committal service. But families may not realize it ... or are not given that option. Every family – burial and cremation alike – should be encouraged to accompany their loved one all the way to their final place of rest and commemorate that person. “It’s our obligation to embolden them to do so,” said Patrick Lynch, president of Lynch & Sons Funeral Directors, which has multiple locations in Michigan. “Don’t deprive them of this experience.”

2. MAKE IT PERSONAL

Personalization has almost become a buzzword, which is too bad, because people tend to pay less attention to overused buzzwords. So let’s instead talk about making a funeral service *personal*. This extends beyond customizing merchandise, although offering that should be customary. It also involves favorite music, stories, photos, videos and special family rituals. Not a groundbreaking tip, but be sure you lead that discussion with all your families – even those who begin the call with, “I just want a ...”



Wayne Stellmach

3. INVOLVE THE FAMILY

Funeral director Paula Staab Polk of Staab Polk Memorial Home & Cremation Services in Chatham, Illinois, shares a story that best illustrates this tip: “What’s really powerful is action and motion,” she said. “I have a ritual at the committal service where the pallbearers place on top of the burial vault a white rose (symbolizing remembrance) that I’ve pinned on their lapels. I tell all gathered that this signifies the connection they have with their loved one. I then invite all those gathered to come up and place their hand on the vault just as their loved one touched each of them in life.”

4. INVOLVE THE VAULT

When I hear touching stories of how families and friends are deeply affected by a personalized vault, I am amazed at the relatively small percentage of vaults sold to families with some degree of personalization. We have cards and letters from countless families who are moved by the visuals and personal touches that were on their loved one’s vault. We hear marvelous stories from funeral professionals of interactive rituals involving the vault, such as writing messages or putting handprints on the cover, or even the simple act of touch that Paula Staab Polk shared above. Those of you who offer these types of ideas or simply tell families about ways they can personalize the vault for display at the graveside service very likely have also heard from families on how much it meant to them and that they had no idea they could do something like this. No idea, of course, until you told them.

5. CLOSE THE VAULT

Sealing and lowering the burial vault in the presence of those gathered for the graveside committal service is a ritual that adds extreme value. While it is certainly difficult, it is among the most rewarding experiences that a family can have, providing the final opportunity to say goodbye but also beginning for them the process of letting go and healing. This is the moment they have worked toward since the death, the act of laying the loved one to rest.

6. ENHANCE THE CREMATION SERVICE

According to the National Funeral Directors Association’s 2015 Cremation Business Practices survey, nearly 36 percent of cremated remains were buried at a cemetery. Just as with casketed burials, graveside committal services for cremation families greatly enhance their experience while also enhancing your revenue. A personalized urn and urn vault displayed on a memory table makes it personal and memorable. Sealing the vault and lowering it using a combination lowering device/memory table provides a dignified conclusion to the service.

7. FIND YOUR NICHE WITH NICHE-SIDE SERVICES

Going the distance with a committal service can also apply to those choosing columbarium placement. If you don’t offer niche-side services, both your business and your families are missing an opportunity.

8. BECOME AN EDUCATOR

Inherent in all these tips is a clarion call to educate your families on all their options, provide them with ideas, and don’t prejudge what they

may or may not be able to afford as value is expressed and measured in the eye of the beholder. Use educational tools such as video that can assist in concisely educating families while distancing you as a salesperson. I don’t know about you, but I know I want to know all of my options when shopping for just about anything, especially large purchases such as a home, a dream vacation, an automobile ... or funeral services. I appreciate being told my options and then making my own decision. I believe most people are the same.

9. BECOME A STUDENT

As you are currently holding this publication in your hands, you are already following this tip to stay abreast of industry trends, new merchandise, services or tools, and business ideas. And the more current you are, the better you can serve families. As a funeral professional you also maintain your credentials with continuing education but also keep an eye out for webinars and other opportunities that may not offer CEUs but provide you with new ideas. As Albert Einstein once said, “Once you stop learning, you start dying.”

10. GO TO A SHOW

Perhaps there’s no better way to stay abreast of what’s going on in the industry than to attend industry trade shows. Where else can you see and meet with multitudes of vendors and colleagues in one place over the course of a few days to see what’s new, refresh what’s old, exchange ideas, and maybe even have a little fun? Sometimes just that break in routine and both personal and professional rejuvenation can translate into a more energized focus and service provided to your families. •