

Funeral Home Customer Service A-Z: Creating Exceptional Experiences for Today's Families \$ There's a new customer out there€”one who no longer implicitly values the funeral and the role of the funeral home.

I told them, as I tell you now, that their businesses would not survive unless they changed the way they do things. A new, emerging economy is coming to the fore, one based on a distinct kind of economic output experiences. In his speech Gilmore explained how our economy has evolved from being commodities-based to goods-based to service-based, and now, to experience-based. This evolution of economic offerings can itself be instantiated in something as commonplace as the birthday cake, which I previously noted in this column. Gilmore pointed out that in the agrarian economy, mothers made birthday cakes from scratch, mixing farm commodities flour, sugar, butter, eggs that together cost mere pennies. As the goods-based industrial economy advanced, moms paid a dollar or two to Betty Crocker for pre-mixed ingredients. Experiences, says Gilmore, are a fourth level of value above commodities, goods and services and thus can command a much higher price than mere goods or even excellent service. Boomers want and are willing to pay for memorable experiences. We know that Boomers typically want more information and more ideas for personalization. They increasingly want cremation. Across the board, Boomers want engaging experiences. Funeral service just happens to be an old-fashioned, traditional goods- and services-based industry that might suffer more growing pains because it may have to be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the Experience Economy. Joseph Pine II, I found that the concept of creating meaningful funeral experiences could be further explored in context of the Experience Economy. Before we go much further, however, I should point out to you that experiences are not synonymous with entertainment. While the visionary Walt Disney and others who followed in his footsteps certainly foresaw and capitalized on the value of entertaining experiences, companies stage an experience whenever they engage customers in a personal, memorable way. And buying those experiences is akin to buying a series of memories. There are four "realms of experience," according to Pine and Gilmore, and entertainment is just one. You can guess what the entertainment realm is all about think Disney again. The other three are educational, escapist and esthetic. In the educational realm, customers learn as part of their experience. Here at the Center for Loss in Fort Collins, Colorado, I teach a number of week-long courses to bereavement caregivers each year. Groups of 18 caregivers such as hospice workers, funeral directors, physicians, and clergy gather to learn from me and each other. Their experience includes five days of interactive, discussion-based content, as well as sharing their own personal stories of loss, listening to music, enjoying meals together and hiking in the rugged mountain foothills around the Center. The Center itself is a lovely hexagonal-shaped building with many windows, comfortable seating and a tasteful decor. Consciously, I have set the stage to make this week of education as much of an experience as possible for everyone who participates. The escapist realm, on the other hand, immerses customers in a totally different reality. Examples of escapist environments include theme parks, chat rooms, laser tag centers and casinos. Have you ever tried to find your way around a mirrored, labyrinthine casino without getting lost or disoriented? Casino designers are very good at creating escapist experiences. Escapist experiences actively involve customers; people come to "do" in the escapist realm. In the esthetic realm, people come just to "be. Funerals traditionally are esthetic experiences. People come to funerals just to "be there," to demonstrate their support and love by their presence. For the most part, they do not play an active role in the funeral itself, but rather "take in" the sights, the sounds, the readings, the music. They allow their thoughts and feelings to wash over them as they focus on the life and death of the person who died. Esthetic funeral experiences are wonderful and healing, particularly when funeral homes do a good job of creating a sense of place, engaging all the senses and eliminating negative cues-topics discussed later in this chapter. However, exceptional funeral planning attempts to integrate more than one realm of experience for bereaved families and friends. The escapist realm, in particular, offers many possibilities for funeral directors; indeed, we are already seeing a trend toward escapist funerals. The escapist realm would ask: What can bereaved families and friends "do" at the visitation or funeral to further immerse themselves in the experience? When you sit down with families and actively

engage them in arranging the funeral, you are creating an escapist experience. When family members and friends participate in the service by giving readings, playing music, sharing memories and lighting candles, they are in escapist realm territory. When funeral guests not only sign the guestbook but are asked to write down a specific memory of the person who died, they are venturing into the escapist realm. When people lay flowers or throw dirt atop the casket at the close of the committal service, they are in the escapist realm of experience. Anything you as a funeral director can do to present families with "escapist" options-never forcing them but encouraging them to take advantage of these healing activities-helps create an exceptional funeral Experience. The educational realm is also not out of place in funeral service. Honoring Family Choices is a series of signage and literature for display in funeral homes that teaches the importance of funerals and the elements of ceremony. The signs ask, for example, "Why do we have funerals? Your funeral home brochure and website should also educate consumers and community members about what you do and why. Giving talks to service clubs and other community organizations about the history and importance of funeral service is yet another way to capitalize on the educational realm. The entertainment realm of experience can also be used to great effect in funeral planning. While few would term the funeral an "entertaining" experience, humor is certainly an appropriate part of many eulogies. The gathering or reception after the funeral is perhaps the best time to consider the entertainment realm: Funeral homes would be well served to consider the entertainment realm as they plan the building or remodeling of their reception spaces. According to Gilmore and Pine, "When all four realms abide within a single setting, then and only then does plain space become a distinctive place for staging an experience. Occuring over a period of time, staged experiences require a sense of place to entice guests to spend more time engaged in the offering. Positive and Negative Cues One of your main responsibilities in creating exceptional funeral experiences is ensuring that every impression families have of your funeral home is a good one. When passersby drive past your funeral home, what impression do they get? When a family first phones you, what impression do they get? When they see your Yellow Pages ad, what impression do they get? When you go to their home to remove the body, what impression do they get? When they walk in your front door, what impression do they get? When they sit down with you to arrange the funeral, what impression do they get? When they view the body for the first time, what impression do they get? Each of these key steps in the funeral planning chain of events is a Moment of Truth and merits scrutiny. They are the main moments in time in which a customer judges who you are. Collectively these moments form the backbone of the Experience the customer will have with your funeral home. In addition to Moments of Truth, other, seemingly more minor impressions contribute to the Experience. Is it easy for families to find their way to the right visitation room or the chapel or the restroom-or do people tend to get lost or disoriented? The latter makes good business sense for casinos but definitely not for funeral homes. Or consider the jargon you might sometimes use in front of families. Have you ever said, "Where is the deceased now? Bring in an objective outsider-not a funeral service "expert"-and create a mock funeral planning experience for her. Afterwards, ask her how she felt during the various Moments of Truth and which cues she found negative, which positive. Take this feedback seriously and make changes where necessary. Charging for Experiences Funeral service is falling prey to commoditization. Many funeral homes and "alternative" funeral service providers are competing based on low prices: So, at the same time Gilmore observes that people are seeking "experiences" and believes, as do many of us, that this applies to funeral service, much of the advertising we now witness in funeral service is based on competing on the basis of price for goods commodities. You know it; we all know it. But what do we do about it? Gone are the days when the sale of the casket and other products could support your funeral home. Going are the days when simply charging a "service fee" for the basic services you render is justifiable to customers. They want more bang for their buck, more Experience and less focus on goods and services. Gilmore and Pine give the example of computer giant IBM. At first IBM offered free service to support computer sales until the computer industry matured to the point that the computer itself was of less value than the service behind it. What if you created a pricing structure that built little if any profits into the casket and other products you sell and instead firmly planted your profits where they belong-in the valuable, value-added Experiences you help families create? I agree with Pine and Gilmore that the Experience Economy is a fourth and higher level of economic offerings. Boomers and X- and

Y-geners value experiences are willing to pay for them. You are in a position to provide those experiences, to differentiate yourself among area funeral homes. Families and community members will come away from your funerals saying, "Wow. That was absolutely the best funeral I ever attended. I never knew a funeral could be so powerful, so meaningful, so healing. This article is excerpted from Dr. An abbreviated pocket-sized version is also available. To order or for more information, visit [www. Center for Loss and Life Transition](http://www.CenterforLossandLifeTransition.com).

Chapter 2 : Funeral Home Customer Service A Z Creating Ex by Shakita Lacrone - Issuu

Funeral Home Customer Service A-Z has 3 ratings and 1 review. Redfox5 said: This book is very American and while I think alot of it would be useful for w.

Those funeral homes that fall back on the status quo will find themselves falling behind in market share. Without a service strategy the funeral home is often not managed in a way to assure quality service, while a well-defined service strategy helps create high quality service standards. Funeral homes that have a clear, focused service strategy will be better prepared to be successful today, tomorrow, and well into the future. The Importance of Employee Training Has Been Overlooked Without ongoing training, owners, managers, and employees will not provide top-notch customer service. Everyone benefits from being exposed to new skills, attitudes, concepts and ideas. While mortuary colleges have made strides in teaching customer service skills, the bulk of the educational experience is still on embalming and preparation. Employers should not assume that the new graduate is qualified to fulfill the customer service obligations of the position. My experience suggests that many funeral homes place little, if any emphasis, on ongoing staff training. The potential result can be a downward service spiral. One unhappy, untrained employee can result in an unhappy customer. The more the customer is unhappy the more the staff is unhappy and so the cycle reinforces itself. One negative interaction between a staff member and the family being served can cause headaches; that small incident can overshadow all of the good things that had been done before. This fact alone underlines the importance of ongoing customer service training for every funeral home employee, from the funeral director to the part-time assistant. The Evolution of the Large Corporate Structure Many think that the growing trend toward the large corporate structure will create a financially stronger funeral service industry. However, those participating in this natural change must guard against diminished levels of customer service. As an organization grows, it tends to drift away from the needs of the front line customer. Sometimes it is tempting for the corporate executive to increase prices to enhance cash flow while downplaying the need for an ongoing focus on customer service excellence. As the corporate hierarchy grows and policy makers become more distant from customers, the risk is that people in the system may forget who the customers are. Though this is certainly not true of all corporations in this industry, I have observed that it has happened to some of the players in corporate funeral service. The challenge for funeral service corporations is to keep their ears to the ground and listen to what the customer, on the local level, is telling them. Bottom-up management techniques facilitate this process. Excellence in Customer Service: A Challenge Owners, managers, and front-line employees must realize that customer service excellence is a strategic process. Families served and those you hope to serve must be at the center of all your management decisions, changed attitudes and customer-friendly behaviors. Moreover, funeral homes across North America must realize that this service crisis affects all of them. Funeral homes in small communities sometimes think that customer service problems only apply to large funeral homes in large cities. This is not true. Without the necessary trainingâ€”from the top level executive to the front line part-time employeeâ€”positive strides toward excellence in customer service are unlikely to occur. I challenge you to lead your funeral home staff in the direction of total commitment of quality service. Copyright , Center for Loss and Life Transition.