

Gone in 72 Hours – Tackling Direct Cremation

Successful ways for your business to address Direct Cremation.

State of the Future Union

What is up with this pace of life? For the majority of people, life seems to be running at over 100+ mph. If we study how this pace affects our industry, the evolution of funeral service seems to be heading in the same direction as a drive-through window at a fast-food restaurant. Everyone has to eat, just like everyone has to die...but no one wants to be inconvenienced at the moment. As we watch our service model continue to evolve, many of us may feel like we are holding on for dear life to the steering wheel while driving our professional destiny. The dynamics of cremation and the impact it is having on current/future services (and the declining revenue dollar) has many funeral professionals questioning the state of our future union.

The “D” Word

As we peel back the layers of our own business and study the trends in funeral service, one development that has become crystal clear is how cremation is going to force all of us to change our mode of thinking when it comes to making this consumer choice a positive influence for selecting families and our businesses. When it comes to your personal mindset toward approaching the cremation opportunity, you may feel like you are trapped in that motivation phrase, “You are either a part of the steamroller or a part of the pavement.” Which one do you feel like today? Certainly we want you to be a part of the steamroller and for today’s discussion I would like to

provide you some food for thought on a successful way to addressing that D word, “Direct” cremation.

The Ashes Are In the Mail

Many times when we hear the words “Direct Cremation”, we immediately begin to associate this request with a family that has a lack of funds, does not care or simply does not have time. When speaking to funeral professionals about the topic of direct cremation, they share a vision of spending very little time with these arranging families...almost the equivalency of issuing “just put the ashes in the mail.”

Too many times we hear stories of funeral professionals whose mind becomes closed when a direct cremation is requested because of an incorrect assumption about why the family made this choice. If you have ever found yourself in this mode of thought, for just one moment, think about the way in which we were raised in funeral service. Remember once upon a time...frequently a nice casket, calling hours meant 1-2 days of visitation with at least one stop to the chapel, church or cemetery for a final memorial service. It is hard to believe that at one time, the majority of our services symbolized that type of heritage. With every passing moment it becomes a little harder to imagine that this was once, life in funeral service...ah the good old days!

What really struck me as profound is how our industry

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had built itself on a 72 hour service platform and unless we performed that service within this time period...it was over. Have you ever caught yourself thinking, "I could not possibly think about holding my calendar open for anything beyond three days...that is just un-funeral!" When people ask for direct, they may very well be saying I have nothing, can afford nothing, nor do I want anything. Ok I get it. But I have got to share with you that there is much more to this Direct Cremation story, and all it takes is a little reminder of the way in which most of us live our lives and a thought of what direct cremation REALLY represents. If you stop and think about the big picture for a moment, you may find yourself with a brand new service opportunity.

The Luxury of Time

Because we live in a transient society where most family and friends are scattered across the country, we need to be reminded that sometimes it is nearly impossible to gather everyone at the time of an unexpected death because of travel requirements, unbudgeted funds, prior commitments that can not be rescheduled (i.e. work, school, kid appointments, etc...). It can become habit by many of our funeral colleagues to close their arrangement books when a family requests direct cremation because, How can this possibly present a service opportunity? How can I possibly turn this into a meaningful service if it can not be performed within 72 hours...without a body...poof...it is gone!

It really is important that as an industry we reflect on the reality of how we live (that old 100+mph) and that direct cremation offers a really big advantage...the luxury of time. Time is a pretty valuable asset in today's busy world. All of us are caught at one moment or another wishing we had more time to spend with family, friends, hobbies, etc...How can we possibly be critical of a family requesting direct cremation if the purpose is nothing more than to leverage time? No offense to our industry professionals, but in a consumer's life, they could care less about our schedule of funeral protocol

(that old 72 hours) and the standard steps for completing a service. If a family is confused, emotional, can not think clearly, and understands the reality of getting all their family/friends together within a short time period, etc...why would they not think that a direct cremation would be attractive? Think about it.

The Danger of Our Misinterpreting

Our reaction to direct cremation is critical to the future of our industry. I do not believe there is a funeral professional anywhere that is not experiencing more each year the request for direction cremation from arranging families. The most important thing that we should do when a direct cremation is chosen, is to allow a family to know that this is perfectly okay, acknowledge the advantage of time to **REFLECT**, choose an appropriate venue to **GATHER** (when the timing is appropriate) and lastly, to establish the most meaningful **MEMORIAL** tribute and the products to support this decision.

By establishing your approach in this manner, you leave the door open to suggest meaningful ways to conduct the services that could be weeks away, but keeps you in the equation. Do not ever be fooled in to believing that just because a family chooses direct, they are not going to do anything in relationship to a final tribute or farewell. Families/Friends are gathering all over the country to hold a final farewell and the scary reality is, it is happening in the absence of us, the funeral professional. Every day we close the arrangement book (our calendar schedule) when a family says they want direct, we are inviting the consumer to figure out how to conduct this memorial on their own. Our mission for the future is to avoid this costly mistake because the unfortunate reality is, we are teaching a bad habit for the next generation of funeral consumers who can really benefit from your professional wisdom and guidance. **FBA**

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