

A Consumer's Perspective On Funeral Service

Based on research reported in *What Families Know About Funeral-Related Costs: Implications for Social Work Practice* by Mercedes Bern-Klug, David J. Ekerdt, and Deborah Schild Wilkinson, *Health & Social Work*, Vol. 24, No. 2, May, 1999

1. People who make final arrangements are typically in crisis and overwhelmed by grief

Federal Trade Commission, 1984

“...the emotional trauma of bereavement, the lack of information, and time pressures place the consumer at an enormous disadvantage in making funeral arrangements.”

2. Final arrangements are usually expensive and most consumers think that this is just the way it is everywhere

Why do funerals cost so much?

- 1. Non-declinable fee (averages about \$1960 in Austin area)**
- 2. Consumers do not shop for funerals**
- 3. Funeral homes are typically under-used**
- 4. Consolidation and monopolization of the industry**
- 5. Marketing methods and strategies are used to manipulate consumers**

3. The finality of the decisions is unlike most other purchases

4. There are usually time pressures to make quick decisions

5. Confusion about purpose

6. Funeral Director is a salesperson who is more experienced than the buyer

How funerals are sold

1. Appeals to emotion
2. Appeals to social status
3. Appeals to family pride
4. Appeals to guilt and remorse
5. The three caskets gambit: grouping
6. Appeals to artificial quality
 - expensive woods or metals
 - expensive linings
 - innerspring mattresses

From *Etiquette* by Emily Post, 1942

“The wrong type of (funeral) director will ... do his best to hypnotize the family into believing that the more expensive the casket (and) the more elaborate the preparations, the greater the love and honor shown the deceased.”

7. People are not sure what is expected of them (etiquette)

Funerals cause stress

- The uniqueness contributes to the stress
- Usually a grief-stricken family member oversees the arrangements
- All of the survivors are under stress
- The funeral home environment is unfamiliar
- People are not sure what is expected of them (etiquette)
- Lack of knowledge increases the stress

8. Lack of knowledge increases the stress for participants

Implications for funeral service education

Teach how to exploit these vulnerabilities

or

Teach how to serve the needs of families

Teaching for service

1. FTC's Funeral Rule

- What's a GPL?
- Protective casket (Do you mean gasketed?)
- Basic services fee mistakes
- Basic services fee and direct cremation
- Embalming claims
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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health authorities in the U.S. and Canada report no public health reasons for embalming.

“(I)t is a deceptive act or practice for a funeral provider to ... fail to disclose that embalming is not required by law except in certain special cases, if any.”

Source: §203.8 Rules and Regulations, Texas Funeral Service Commission & FTC Funeral Rule

Embalming

“(The purpose of embalming) is to make the corpse presentable for viewing in a suitably costly container.”

Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death*

Dead Bodies and Disease: The “Danger”
That Doesn’t Exist
A Primer for Reporters

These 34 pages of materials (with references to much more material) written and collected by Josh Slocum are available free at www.funerals.org

Teaching for service

1. FTC's Funeral Rule

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- Sanitary care and preparation for ID viewing w/o embalming
- Casket price ranges
- Pricing direct cremation and immediate burial

Pricing direct cremation

Our charge for Direct Cremation (without ceremony) includes the basic services of funeral director and staff; removal of remains; necessary authorizations; and coordination with and transport to the crematory.

- A. Direct cremation with container provided by purchaser - \$1400
- B. Direct cremation with minimum container provided by funeral home - \$1400
- C. Direct cremation with casket purchased at funeral home - \$1400 plus cost of casket

Pricing direct cremation

What happened to the crematory fee?

The Funeral Director's Guide
~to~
Consumer-Friendly General price Lists

*Everything you need to know
to make your price list legal and easy to use*

This 25-page publication written by Josh Slocum
is available at no cost at
www.funerals.org

Teaching for service

2. Why don't more mortuary schools use CANA's cremation training program, or improve on it?
3. Green and natural burial
4. Home and family-directed funerals
5. Public viewing without embalming - preparing the body

Funeral Ethics Organization newsletter - Spring 2005

www.funeralethics.org/spring05.pdf

Lighting a Fire Under Mortuary Education

By Lisa Carlson