

The After-School Special

Why ongoing education is funeral service's secret weapon, and six actionable steps you should take.

If you remember the era of the “after-school special,” you’ll probably recall that these television shows weren’t just entertainment – they were designed to teach life lessons. The programs aimed to leave a meaningful impression and often tackled important topics through storylines that helped the audience reflect, learn and grow.

The funeral service profession could benefit from this sentiment regarding lifelong learning. Today, the profession finds itself at a point where education – education for your teams and the families you serve – has become more important than ever. As consumer expectations shift and the complexity of your services increases, your ability to inform must grow in tandem.

THE EDUCATION DISCONNECT

Now in its sixth year, the 2025 “Funeral & Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study” (FCCBS), published by The Foresight Companies, revealed a sobering reality: Most consumers don’t feel adequately informed about their funeral and cemetery options. In addition, most funeral service professionals don’t realize the extent of the disconnect.

Only 37% of surveyed consumers said they received any education about their choices. In contrast, 76% of surveyed funeral service professionals said they provided education. That 39-point gap represents a missed opportunity for not just better service but also improved outcomes and stronger relationships.

Consider some other examples of this education gap, per the FCCBS:

- **Online cremation memorialization arrangements:** 78% of professionals said consumers know what this is, while only 18% of consumers said they were aware of it.
- **Resting-place options for cremated remains:** 79% of professionals said they discuss these, while only 32% of consumers recalled a conversation on the topic.

- **Prearrangement planning:** 88% of professionals said they provide this education, while only 31% of consumers reported having received it.

These figures paint a clear picture: Education is overestimated and underdelivered. In a service rooted in trust, transparency and emotional connection, this disconnect represents a critical issue you cannot afford to overlook.

The education gap also speaks to another ongoing challenge: The funeral service profession has been reactive, rather than proactive, when it comes to the education of families. Too often, conversations about service options happen only after a death has occurred. This limits families’ emotional and financial flexibility when making decisions, and it hinders your ability to demonstrate the full value of what you offer.

GET BACK TO BASICS

Because families are navigating unfamiliar territory when working with you, they need “blocking and tackling” education (i.e., fundamental education about the goods and services you offer and the process as a whole). When these basics aren’t understood, confusion and indecision take over.

One of the more telling statistics from the most recent FCCBS is that only 29% of consumers were actually aware of specific products and services. This compares with the 61% of industry professionals who said that that consumer awareness exists. That’s a 32-point gap in consumer knowledge. Imagine launching a product or service with such little public understanding in any other profession.

As funeral service professionals, it’s your responsibility to guide families through each step with clarity, empathy and repetition. It’s not enough to explain something once. You need to say it, show it, repeat it, then do it all over again.

Major brands spend millions on integrated marketing to ensure their messaging reaches consumers

through multiple channels and in various formats. When educating families, you must use a similar tactic: consistent, multitouch communication that reinforces key concepts across consultations, printed materials, digital resources and follow-ups.

Moreover, you must not underestimate the value of storytelling in education. Families connect more with real-life examples than with a list of bullet points or technical descriptions. When you educate through compassionate storytelling, you not only inform but also build trust.

EDUCATE YOUR TEAM, TOO

The education disconnect doesn't stop with the families you serve. It exists within your teams, as well. According to the most recent FCCBS, funeral service professionals are requesting more training. Staff members across the country are eager for resources, such as onboarding materials and continued professional development, that help them better understand the profession and their role within it.

In their own words, professionals requested:

- "Training on the specific 'whys' of why we do things"
- "Comprehensive customer-service training that supports employee and client relations"
- "Clear guidance on the products and services we offer so we can better explain them to families"

When you invest in internal education, you create stronger teams and equip your staff with the confidence and knowledge to educate families. In addition, you demonstrate a commitment to excellence that permeates every level of your organization.

One underutilized method of internal education is peer-to-peer mentoring. Experienced funeral service professionals hold invaluable institutional knowledge that isn't captured in manuals or handbooks. Encouraging knowledge-sharing through formal mentorship programs can empower new staff and strengthen team cohesion.

Education builds culture. It fosters professional pride. And it inspires individuals to elevate the standard of service across the entire profession.

In addition, firms should consider offering tuition reimbursement and/or stipends for continuing education. Professional growth opportunities, such as formal coursework, certification programs and national conferences, increase employee retention and create an environment where excellence is cultivated and expected.

EDUCATION AS STRATEGY

Education is a strategic differentiator. Families that understand their options are more confident in the decisions they make. They are more likely to engage in meaningful services, opt for personalized memorializa-

tion and see the value in preplanning. When education is prioritized, service satisfaction increases and opportunities for revenue growth follow.

Think about the families that choose direct cremation simply because they don't realize other meaningful options exist. Or those who skip preplanning because they don't understand its value or utility. Both of these scenarios represent an opportunity lost.

In this context, education isn't an obligation; it's a way forward. By aligning your communication strategies with the real informational needs of today's consumers, you will elevate the profession and build trust with every interaction.

In an increasingly competitive landscape, firms that lead in education also lead in reputation. Word-of-mouth referrals, positive online reviews and family loyalty are based on more than service. They're based on experiences where people feel seen, heard and understood.

Firms that consistently educate also position themselves as thought leaders in their communities. Hosting free seminars, offering planning guides and publishing helpful content on social media or in local newspapers can build credibility and even attract preneed business.

ACTIONABLE STEPS FOR FUNERAL SERVICE LEADERS

The path to improvement is clear, and it begins with intentionality. Here are six practical steps every funeral service leader can take:

- 1. Assess your educational materials.** Evaluate what you currently provide to families and staff. Are your resources clear, updated and accessible?
- 2. Implement structured staff training.** Develop standardized onboarding procedures and ongoing education programs. Focus on what you do *and* why it matters.
- 3. Use multiple communication channels.** Pair in-person conversations with written guides, follow-up emails, videos and web content. Repetition promotes understanding.
- 4. Measure your impact.** Track client feedback. Conduct follow-up surveys. Ask families if they felt informed and supported during their experience.
- 5. Prioritize empathy when communicating.** Approach every interaction from a place of understanding. Avoid industry jargon. Assume families have no prior knowledge.
- 6. Stay committed to continuous learning.** Promote professional development at every level. Encourage certification opportunities, conferences and mentorship.

As a funeral service professional, your mission is rooted in service. And the foundation of great service is understanding. By embracing education as a core part of what you offer – to families, to staff, to yourself – you strengthen relationships, improve outcomes and build trust that extends beyond the arrangement room.

Take the key message of the “after-school special” to heart: *Learning changes lives*. In your profession, it changes businesses, too. It’s time to invest in education, not as a one-time initiative but as an enduring strategy. By doing so, you will adapt to the evolving expectations of modern families and shape the future of funeral service. That is a legacy worth building.

Chris Cruger is CEO of The Foresight Companies, a business and management consulting firm that specializes

in succession planning, representation of buyers and sellers, financing, and valuations. Contact Cruger at 602-274-6464 or ccruger@theforesightcompanies.com.

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