



THE WHITE-GLOVE STANDARD

It's as valuable to you and your successors as it is to your customers.

BY JARED TANKE

There is a moment, somewhere between the first phone call and the final goodbye, when grieving family members decide whether they feel truly taken care of. You don't get a survey response from them in that moment. You don't get a second chance to change their answer, either.

The funeral service profession has long prided itself on compassion and professionalism. And in many ways, that reputation holds. The 2026 *Funeral and Cemetery Consumer Behavior Study* (FCCBS), which surveyed more than 5,000 consumers and 1,100 industry professionals, confirmed that our people are perceived as professional, comforting and responsive. Those are real strengths. But this same study, now conducted for seven consecutive years, also revealed a more complicated picture beneath the surface.

Consumers want more. And the operators who figure out how to deliver it won't just stand apart. They'll legitimately build something more valuable.

THE DIFFERENTIATION PROBLEM

Walk into most funeral homes in America, and you will have the same general experience, with staff who are competent, respectful and efficient. What you are less likely to find is an experience that is genuinely elevated, a level of service that makes family members feel not just accommodated but truly cared for. This is the white-glove gap.

The best hotels, the best restaurants, the best healthcare providers – they all understand that competence is the floor, not the ceiling. What people remember – what they tell their friends about, what earns loyal-

ty and referrals – is the *extras*. The director who remembers a grandchild's name. The staff who have the flowers from a family's garden already arranged on the reception table. The follow-up call just to check in three weeks after a service. These things are not expensive. They are intentional. In a profession where so many locations look and feel the same, intention is your greatest competitive advantage.

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WHAT THE DATA SAYS

The 2026 FCCBS is not subtle about the opportunity here. Year after year, the study reveals a profession that is better than it thinks it is in some ways and more vulnerable than it realizes in others.

- **Customer service is the most commonly cited area for improvement.** When consumers were asked what the profession could do to deliver a better experience, the responses centered around transparency and affordability. Critically, 40% of all consumer suggestions touched on customer service. Not technology. Not facility upgrades. Service. And when professionals who gave their *own* profession a low rating were asked what needs to change, customer service topped the list, too. Our own people know it.

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- **Families feel forgotten after services end.** Among the lowest-rated competencies of the profession and its professionals are after-service support and going “above and beyond.” These are simple

to address. A handwritten note, a check-in call, a small act of remembrance on the anniversary of a loss – these gestures cost almost nothing and signal everything. Despite this, they are where funeral homes consistently fall short.

- **The basics of the physical experience matter deeply, and consumers notice when they aren’t right.** The study’s new data on facilities is instructive. Consumers said cleanliness (90% rated this as either “very important” or “important”), appearance and decor (84%), availability of private viewing rooms (80%), and accessibility for elderly and disabled guests (79%) are their top priorities. These aren’t glamorous line items, but they are the foundation of the white-glove experience. Before investing in modern audiovisual systems or shiny new technology, make sure the fundamentals of your space communicate care.
- **Consumers are shopping – and comparing.** Nearly 87%

of recent customers visited the location they ultimately selected. Even more telling is that one-third of those customers visited at least one other location first. In fact, customers averaged 3.1 in-person visits before making their final decision. Families are walking through your door having already walked through someone else’s. The question is whether your experience is the one they will remember favorably.

THE TRUST EQUATION

There is one data point in the 2026 FCCBS that should make every owner and operator think deeply.

When consumers were asked to rate the profession on honesty, 60% gave it a favorable rating. When professionals were asked the same question about their own profession, 78% rated it favorably. This 18-point gap, i.e., the “honesty gap,” has persisted since the study’s inception, so this is not a new finding.

Trust is the foundation of white-glove service. You cannot deliver a truly elevated experience to family members who don’t believe you are being straight with them about pricing or options. Transparency is a service differentiator. In a world where 81% of future customers plan to research your funeral home online before they even call you, and where online reviews significantly influence customers’ decision-making, a reputation for honesty is one of the most powerful marketing tools you can have.



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The operators who close the honesty gap through clear pricing, plain language and genuine candor will earn something money cannot buy: word of mouth from families that felt genuinely respected while in your care.

THE OPPORTUNITY IN FRONT OF YOU

Here is what the data makes clear: Consumers are not asking for perfection. They are asking to feel seen.

In 2026, 40% of consumers said they don't feel as though they know enough about funeral and cemetery products to make informed decisions. This figure is up from 36% just two years ago. Families are walking into arrangement meetings more uncertain, more overwhelmed and more in need of trusted guides than ever. More than half of them reported that their counselor ultimately helped them make their selections. This means your staff are in a position of profound influence and trust.

The white-glove standard is not about luxury. It is about meeting the moment with everything you have. It is about a clean, welcoming space; a team that is educated, attentive and genuinely present; a follow-up process that doesn't evaporate a day after the service; and honest pricing conversations that respect families' intelligence and finances.

In most markets, your competitors are not doing this. The 2026 FCCBS confirmed that gaps in education, after-service support and customer service remain wide across the profession. This is not a threat. It is an invitation.

SERVICE IS A BALANCE-SHEET ITEM

Here is where the conversation shifts from the emotional to the financial; however, the two are

more connected than most operators realize.

When a funeral home goes to market, buyers and their advisors are looking at not just revenue and EBITDA. They also are evaluating the *quality* and *defensibility* of that revenue. They're seeking a location with strong, consistent call volume; high average revenue per call; and a loyal base of at-need families that return generation after generation. These locations typically command a premium, not because of the real estate or the equipment, but because of what those numbers represent: community trust. And that trust is built one family at a time, over years, through exactly the kind of service we've been describing.

Call-volume trends tell a story. A location that has grown or held its market share in a competitive environment demonstrates something a buyer cannot easily replicate: a reputation that keeps families coming back and referring others. Conversely, a location with declining call volume in a growing market sends a different signal, one that no amount of polished financials can gloss over.

Average revenue per call is another quiet indicator of service culture. Families that feel well-served, well-educated and genuinely cared for are more likely to choose meaningful services and merchandise. The 2026 FCCBS indicates a significant unmet need for education. Forty percent of consumers feel underprepared to make informed decisions, and the gap between what professionals believe they're offering and what families are actually receiving is wide across nearly every product and service category. Operators who close that gap will grow revenue per call organically, without pressure or hard-selling.

Online reviews and community reputation – increasingly

searchable and permanent – have become a real input in how sophisticated buyers assess a location's market position. A funeral home with hundreds of five-star reviews and a consistent narrative of extraordinary care is a more attractive acquisition target than one with a comparable financial profile and thinner reputation footprint.

The intangible asset, it turns out, is quite tangible. It just requires the right lens to see it.

PLANNING FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

Eventually, most funeral home owners will face a transition, whether that is passing the business to the next generation, bringing in a partner or selling to a strategic financial buyer. The decisions made years before that moment, including the daily commitment to service excellence, will shape the outcome of this transition more than most owners anticipate.

At Foresight, we work with funeral home owners at every stage of the journey. What we see consistently is that the businesses that command the strongest interest and most favorable terms are those where the owner has built something that doesn't depend entirely on them. A culture of service. A trained, engaged team. A community reputation that can outlast the individual.

White-glove service is not just good for the families you serve. It's how you build a business worth something tomorrow. This "intangible that isn't" is yours to create, and it starts with the next family that walks through your door. ☐

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