



## ***"You can't manage what you can't measure"***

W. Edward Demming

Delivering exceptional customer service is paramount for funeral business success. But what is quality service? How do we know what the consumer expects, and how they respond to what your firm provides? Certainly families appreciate your efforts, and they often say as much; but for the last 20 years cremation societies and low priced competitors have taken thousands of calls from traditional funeral businesses; how many of those families told their funeral director what a great job they did?

It's one thing to appreciate effort, its something totally different to be satisfied. The point being, you really don't know if a family is satisfied; which is why leading funeral businesses nationally invest in Family Surveys. The single most important tool to measure your performance is to survey families just served. Effective satisfaction surveys provide meaningful feedback to enable continuous improvement in customer satisfaction.

The surveys identify strengths and weaknesses on specific aspects of your firm's services, including:

- Initial contact
- First call
- Arranger communication skills
- Staff professionalism
- Services
- Pricing
- Embalming, preparation and presentation of the deceased
- Follow-up and after care

Measuring a family's satisfaction is important, but measuring a family's loyalty is something else. A Family Survey product should quantify the level of the family's loyalty to your firm. This is accomplished by first identifying what services were most meaningful to the family, which is critical information when managers are constructing packages.

In addition, the survey report delivers a value quotient that measures customer satisfaction against your prices. The value quotient allows our clients to judge for themselves whether their prices are appropriate for the value derived by their families. If the value score is too low, they can make adjustments before there are negative consequences.

Perhaps the most universal question asked by funeral business owners is *"why did a family select our firm"*. Is your investment in advertising as productive as it should be, or should



you and your staff be investing more time in public relations? Nearly every funeral home has a website, but most still consider it as a service to families they serve as opposed to a vehicle to drive more business. Research indicates more families refer to the Internet for information on funeral homes than the Yellow Pages, but most funeral home websites don't even appear on Google searches of funeral homes in their county. This is critical information that can only be gained from family surveys.

An even more important issue, and one that is infinitely more difficult to accomplish is to identify what more should have been done. It can be very difficult for consumers to "think outside the box", but we need them to reveal what additional services they needed the funeral home to provide. A quality survey accomplishes this through a battery of subtle questions that encourage the respondent to examine the funeral process to identify unmet needs.

When selecting a company to provide you with family feedback, it's important that you understand the important facets of Family Surveys. First and foremost, do they collect enough family feedback to create normative data? A number standing alone really doesn't tell you much unless you have another number to relate it to. Norm's represent a basis for comparison. Along with the survey form, the families should also receive a cover letter along with the survey, which explains how important their feedback is to the funeral home they selected so they will take the time necessary to complete the survey.

Perhaps the most important element of a Family Survey report is the timeliness of the report, particularly when the family made critical comments about the firm's service. Given the large volume of completed surveys necessary to create meaningful and valid norms, it is necessary that the firm collecting and collating the survey data make a significant investment in technology. Just as important, clients are immediately notified by email if a negative survey is received or if a family requests information for additional services, such as pre-need or aftercare.

In summary, there was a time not long ago that funeral director owners made most arrangements, and represented the primary contact person with the families they served so they received first hand information from families as to their satisfaction. But as funeral service businesses have grown in the number of facilities, employees and even cities and towns served, its impractical for an owner or manager to have direct contact with every family served. Certainly you trust your staff to report any issues, but staff members might not even recognize when a family is dissatisfied.

Family service data provides owners and managers with the information they need to recognize training opportunities, evaluate staff members, even base performance reviews and compensation.