

SYMPATHY SALES: IS YOUR STAFF AT A LOSS?

> The passing of a loved one can be an especially difficult and chaotic time. Death is often unexpected and comes with the demands of planning the funeral and selecting the perfect floral arrangements. Having a florist who understands — and honors — what they are experiencing can make all the difference for people faced with such a loss.

Once families come to you — or when someone just walks through your doors looking for sympathy flowers — how do you treat them? Certainly with kid gloves, an attentive ear and an open heart. You'll be working with people caught up in loss. To one degree or another, they are grieving. They may have problems making decisions; so patience is truly a virtue in these situations.

1 Dedicate a quiet corner of your shop to hold the ensuing conversations in relative privacy. Have a table and chairs, so people can sit and review your selection guides. Make sure you've got a box of Kleenex and, if possible, some refreshment: Keeping hydrated at times like these is important.

- 2 Limit disruptions.** Put the phones aside; tell your staff that you or the manager is not to be disturbed unless it's a true emergency. This is the time to give your full attention to the tasks at hand. Start by listening; then asking questions, providing suggestions and, throughout it all, offering compassion. "I'm sorry for your loss," can be a nice place to start; but be intuitive and follow their lead. If you sense the need for a gentle touch on the hand, do so, but respect the boundaries the family creates. This is all about human connection: one has been lost, and you're creating a new one.
- 3 Take your time.** Allocate at least 45 minutes for the consultation and assign one dedicated employee who can be reached by cell phone number or e-mail if the family suddenly has questions. (If you'd do it for a bride, why not for a widow?) Availability can be the deciding factor for a funeral director suggesting a particular florist.
- 4 Give people space.** If there is friction between family members, do your best to give them privacy. Let them know you'll be back in a few minutes, and leave. A simple "I'll give you a little more time," usually works. If emotions get messy and tempers flare, acknowledge the differences of opinion on the flowers (type and/or color), and focus on a price range for payment. Give them your card, so they can call later with their final selection. Diplomacy can capture the sale ... eventually.

Keep It Professional

Be diplomatic, yet clear, when asking for payment. At the end of the consultation, ask whether payment is going to be credit card or a check. You may need to be flexible if relatives and friends prefer to split the payment. Make sure all staff members are clear on your point-of-sale procedures.

If the family "mentions" any time frame on having the piece/pieces there, make sure it is written on the sales order.

Make sure you give everyone in the family a business card, so that they can give other family members or friends the name of the firm handling the floral arrangements. Let them know these people can ask for you personally.

If a funeral director referred the family to you, take the time to call when the meeting is complete, confirm any logistics and say thank you.

Parting Gesture

When the service is over, and the quiet descends upon the bereaved, they can often feel isolated and alone. Follow up with a gift of a lovely flower in a vase on an anniversary of their loved one's passing. Remember, you're honoring a relationship. How better to do that than with a gift of flowers? 🌸

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YOU'LL BE SORRY IF YOU DON'T ...

- Turn off your mobile devices.
- Resist asking about the cause of death.
- Refrain from sharing your own stories of loss.
- Take your time.
- Keep the same salesperson involved, unless absolutely necessary.
- Have Kleenex and water at the ready.
- Ask about the deceased's favorite colors, flowers, activities and burial attire.
- Confirm the time, date and location of the first public visitation.