



Efficiency \neq Effectiveness

A funeral home would be well served to inventory all its service aspects for any possibility that it is sacrificing effectiveness for efficiency in serving families.


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I always enjoy the opportunity to teach about the value of the individual elements that make up meaningful funerals. At a recent workshop, I responded to a question about why people in many cultures send flowers at a time of death. At the next break, a funeral director approached me and said, “It is so much easier on me when people don’t send flowers for funerals. I wish they would just do donations and leave it at that. It is just much more efficient.”

How sad, I thought, that this funeral director was more concerned about donations being easier than understanding the symbolic expression of support that flowers bring to many people.

This had me reflecting on how *easier* and *more efficient* often go hand in hand – they both seek value in less work and greater speed. However, if you really think about it, you will see that easier and more efficient are often much *less effective*.

So, it occurred to me that perhaps every funeral home would be well-served to take pause and inventory any possibility that you are confusing efficiency with effectiveness in any and all aspects of the services you provide.

 **Here’s a tip: To uncover examples in your funeral home, listen to staff’s use of the word “easier” in their conversations with families.**

Allow me to suggest that it might be beneficial to hold a staff meeting and review the following list. Perhaps you can add to it from your own observations. After all, any ability to make changes in your service delivery system starts with insight into the need to make changes.

Here’s a tip: To uncover these examples in your funeral home, listen to staff’s use of the word “easier” in their conversations

with families. Check off any of the examples below that might in some way apply to your funeral home and discuss the necessary actions to make changes immediately.

- ◆ You have someone on staff who is proud of how fast they can complete an arrangement conference. Worse yet, you have a reward system in place that reinforces the quantity of families seen over the quality of the service arrangements provided.

- ◆ A person on your staff encourages families to have a visitation just one hour prior to services because it’s “easier” for those attending. Worse yet, you have someone on staff who discourages visitations altogether.

- ◆ Your scheduling of services is more for your convenience than for the desires of the family. For example, the family would really like to have an afternoon service, but you encourage them to have a morning service in case you receive another call soon. Or your “rolling stock autos” are already committed to another service at the time the family prefers, but you don’t want to rent so you encourage the family to hold the service at a time that is more convenient for you.

- ◆ You are not being compensated for a visitation with body present, so you decide not to offer the family any private time with the body.


- ◆ The family you are serving wanted to bring in the deceased person’s favorite chair and place it near the casket during the visitation. You tell them, “No, that just wouldn’t be convenient. We have never done that before.”

- ◆ You have a practice of encouraging families to end the service in your chapel and not proceed to a committal, scattering, etc. After all, it’s more convenient for you, but it’s much less of an experience for them!

- ◆ You discourage processions, explaining that it’s just “easier” to meet at the cemetery.

- ◆ You get focused only on the commodity, i.e., “What did you sell?” instead of the experience, i.e., “What kind of service did you create?”

- ◆ There is a death on Thursday with an arrangement conference on Friday. Visitation is set for Sunday, with the service on Monday. The family asks if they can spend some time with the body on Saturday and a staff member decides no, it is more efficient to have the family come in for a private viewing prior to the public visitation on Sunday.

 **If you really think about it, you will see that *easier* and *more efficient* are often *much less effective*.**

- ◆ A family member flies in from out of town and wants to see his father’s body. The body is already casketed and a staff member is at the funeral home. The son is told, “No, it will be easier if you just come in tomorrow afternoon as scheduled.”

- ◆ As in the opening example, you subtly or directly discourage flowers because you don’t want to handle them.

Easier and more efficient are almost never better. In funeral planning, easier and more efficient mean skipping steps and details that enrich the funeral experience and help families heal. ☰

Alan Wolfelt is recognized as one of North America’s leading death educators and grief counselors. His books on grief for both caregivers and grieving people have sold more than a million copies worldwide and are translated into many languages. Wolfelt is founder and director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and a longtime consultant to funeral service. Contact him at drwolfelt@centerforloss.com.