



FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT:

*give families
a cuppa,*

not a clipboard

ANYONE WHO ATTENDED NAFD CONFERENCE IN BRIGHTON IN 2017 WILL REMEMBER THE INSIGHTFUL AND HIGHLY ENTERTAINING HOUR SPENT IN THE COMPANY OF LACY ROBINSON, DIRECTOR OF MEMBER DEVELOPMENT FOR THE NATIONAL FUNERAL DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (NFDA).

She says: "In the eighth grade, after the death of both my grandfathers, I became very interested in funeral service. After years of reading and researching about it I finally decided to give it shot. I landed a summer job at a funeral home and I was hooked. That was over 20 years ago!"

Funeral Director Monthly caught up with Lacy recently, almost a year after she visited the NAFD Conference, to find out her thoughts on the

future of the profession and what inspires and drives her personally. Lacy is optimistic about the future of funeral directing and sees her role as an opportunity to support funeral directors in meeting the challenges being faced by the profession.

"This is a great time to be in funeral service," she says. "There's a nice mix of strong traditions that are present as well as elaborate ideas that are executed. I appreciate the wide range of wishes and ideas that

families present. What really engages me is when a funeral director asks me the question "What do I say when a family says they don't want a funeral?" It's the challenging questions and objections I hear that bring out my passion for funeral service."

Q: Are we evolving fast enough as a profession to meet changing consumer needs?

Consumer behaviour has changed drastically and continues to evolve year after year. Many funeral homes have been slow to change and adapt to the needs of modern families. The good news is there are more resources available to funeral directors than ever before designed to meet families' needs and exceed their expectations.

Q: What is the one behaviour or action you encounter in funeral service that frustrates you the most?

Honestly, I could give a top ten, but I'll just share the one that takes top spot - which is lack of hospitality.

I'll never forget walking into a funeral home, watching a glass window slide open and being handed a clipboard. I was asked to take a seat and complete the arrangement form and told that the funeral director would be with me soon. There is no replacement for a generous reception of guests, whether they had an appointment or not.

Q: What do you see as the aspect of the service you would change in most funeral homes that you feel would be the quickest win for the funeral director?

That would be improving telephone skills for every employee who has contact with the public. Learning proper phone etiquette can take customer service skills to the next level. Training on everything from an appropriate greeting to asking the right the questions can transform a phone call into a meaningful conversation for both the family and funeral director.

I would also suggest training on specific situations. For example, when a family member calls to enquire about cremation prices or what to say when a hospice care team calls representing the family. Role play those different scenarios in order to better prepare for the unexpected. There's no predicting what that next phone call will entail, and a funeral home has one opportunity to make the very best first impression.

LACY ROBINSON
Director of Member Development,
National Funeral Directors' Association



Q: What tools or actions have you encountered, or would recommend, for a funeral company that is trying to focus on quality of service and avoid being drawn into a race to the bottom on price?

I recommend creating a timeline of customer touch points that may include: -

- a prior-to-the-arrangement conference;
- a during-the-arrangement conference;
- an after-the-arrangement conference;
- between the conference and services;
- before and during the services;
- after services are complete.

Within each one of those touch points detail how the funeral director (and support staff) can demonstrate customer service to family members.

Working on this timeline as a group will ensure every employee is consistent with the level of customer service they provide. When completing this timeline, add those personal touches that make the funeral home unique. Remember, no detail of the signature service a funeral home provides is insignificant.

Q: What would you suggest to address the challenge presented to the profession by direct cremation?

We know that families request minimum services for a variety of reasons. The key is to be prepared. If a family requests cremation and has plans for a celebration of life one month from the date of death, be prepared for that.

Communicate to the family that the funeral home can assist with custom invitations, menu planning and audio visual needs. If the family believes that cremation with no services is all they can afford, be prepared for that conversation.

Ask this question to each funeral director: "How can our funeral home stretch creativity to the max on a very small budget?" Examine all the different scenarios, challenging questions and objections that come with families requesting minimum services.

As the conversation drew to a close, we asked Lacy about her own personal goals and whether she has an ambition in relation to her work with the funeral profession that is still to be fulfilled.

"For me it's focusing on future funeral directors," she responded. "I want to continue to support NFDA's efforts in maintaining strong relationships with funeral service schools and their students. Providing ongoing mentorship and resources to those people entering into funeral service will be critical as we all continue to preserve the value of funerals."