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Beyond Selling: Helping People to Buy

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Advance Sales

By Susanna Pau

BEYOND SELLING: HELPING PEOPLE TO BUY



Public attitude is changing toward end-of-life ceremonies, and as a result, it is transforming the funeral and cemetery industry. We often see statistics about the rising cremation rate as more people choose cremation for their final disposition. The industry gets fixated on the statistics, and we end up hearing news about some cemeteries experiencing decreased sales because of the trend toward cremation. It is so easy to get hung up on the statistics and the associated news that we tend to lose focus on what we should be trying to achieve.

We are in the service industry. Much of what we provide our clients is intangible, and they need to experience it. With so much information available online, people are turning to do-it-yourself planning for funeral and burial arrangements. Unfortunately, online research does not help them to experience your service. They cannot tell the difference between what you have to offer versus your competitors. Therefore, they end up focusing on price.

One strategy is to promote enjoyable visits to your cemetery. For cemeteries, every person that visits the property is a potential client. When a person visits a cemetery, they may simply be there to pay their respects to a deceased friend or relative or they may be interacting with one of your employees. Regardless of the reason, each encounter is an opportunity to ensure that the visitor has a satisfying experience.

Going Back to Basics

Sometimes, we need to go back to the basics and look at the value of the satisfied client. Since we are in the service industry, we need to keep in mind that we are constantly building relationships. We should not be selling – we should be helping people buy.

The following fable and excerpt from “How to Win Customers and Keep them for Life” by Michael LeBoeuf, is a whimsical illustration covering a couple of key points to remember:

Once upon a time, a farmer wanted to breed his three female pigs. He loaded the sows into the back of his pickup truck and took them to visit several boars at a nearby farm. While the pigs were getting acquainted, the first farmer asked the second, ‘How will I know if my pigs are pregnant?’

‘That’s easy,’ said the second farmer. ‘They wallow in the grass when it takes and they wallow in the mud when it doesn’t take.’

The next morning the farmer awoke, looked out the window and found his pigs wallowing in the mud. So he loaded them into the truck and took them back to the boars. But the following morning the pigs were still wallowing in the mud. Undaunted, the farmer once again loaded the pigs into the truck and took them back to the boars for a third time, hoping for some positive results.

The following morning the farmer was away from the farm, so he anxiously phoned his wife and asked, ‘Are they wallowing in the grass or the mud?’

‘Neither,’ replied the farmer’s wife. ‘Two of them are in the back of the pickup and the third one’s up front blowing the horn!’

The farmer’s goal is to get his sows pregnant. The good news is the more enjoyable and comfortable the sows are with the experience, the more likely they will continue to go until the farmer’s goal is accomplished.

The key points this fable is highlighting are:

- Every behavior has its consequences. The female pigs visited the boars (the behavior) and liked it (the consequences).

- Future behavior depends largely on the consequences of past and present behavior. If the consequences are rewarding, the odds are great that the behavior will be repeated. The pigs’ visit to the boars had very rewarding consequences so they were eager to repeat it.

Be Part of the Community

You’re probably wondering how the fable about the pigs relates to

advance sales. Well, regardless of the type of final disposition chosen we need to remember what a cemetery is. A cemetery may be a place where the remains of deceased people are interred but, more importantly, a cemetery should be a part of the community.

An organic way to help boost advance sales is to find ways to bring more people to the cemetery (the behavior). Events held at the ceme-

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