

Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

Creating the Preneed Experience

as seen in:



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Creating the Preneed *Experience*

On a recent nine-hour flight I was writing down a few ideas for future articles when the plane hit some major turbulence, triggering people to scream, curse and say a few prayers. Strangely, I giggled and thought, “Wow, what a great premise for another preneed article.”

I could almost hear the passengers around me as they contemplated their impending deaths. Thoughts and questions streaming through their minds, like:

- *This sucks. I'm too young to die.*
- *I almost made it to Sicily – I truly hate flying.*
- *I hope my kids know where I stashed my cash.*
- *Who will make my funeral arrangements?*
- *Does my family even have a clue*

what I want for my funeral?

- *I love my family and this is going to be so hard on them.*
- *Why me? Why not my ex?*
- *I wish I could hug my kids one last time.*

And my personal favorite: *This is better than any roller coaster I have ever been on!*

If anything, this type of experience puts most people in the frame of mind where they are thinking about death. We want the consumer to

think this way when discussing pre-arranging one's funeral. Intelligent, competent, truthful funeral directors use psychology smartly and respectfully to engage consumers in what we funeral directors like to call, “the talk.”

In researching the psychology of the consumer, I came across an on-line “Marketing for Dummies Cheat Sheet” from the popular “For Dummies – Wiley Brand” series, and I have modified it to suit our industry.



Seven Ways to Create Perfect Preneed Sales Experiences.

1. **Never miss an opportunity to talk about the inevitable.** It doesn't matter where you are, finding an opportunity to talk about taking care of one's final wishes is essential. Create these opportunities in all that you do. Possibly, after a plane full of people have had the crap scared out of them. Is it inappropriate to lean to the person by the window and casually say, "Wow that really makes me think about making sure my final arrangements are complete." No it isn't inappropriate. You should never be afraid to bring up the topic. It is far more easy to talk about it before rather than after.

2. **Spend at least 10 minutes a day**

talking/listening to people about taking care of their final arrangements. So many funeral directors don't do this routinely and then complain that they don't have enough families wanting to prearrange their funerals. Selling is 60 percent listening and 40 percent talking. Your goal is to figure out how you can help these families, which is truly hard to do when your mouth is open.

3. **Know what you want to get out of discussing preneed before you actually sit down with the family to make a prearrangement.** It is easy to lose focus and forget the purpose of why you are sitting down with these families. It isn't about you. It is about creating an environment that is safe to talk about one's death. Remember to keep the conversations simple, clear and always on point. It is OK to allow families to share memories, just remember to bring them back to the purpose of your meeting.

4. **Know what makes you special to consumers, so that you can remind them of your strengths in every preneed marketing communication.** Families come to you specifically because they know they can trust you. Find that one (or several) specific thing(s) that make you a step above the rest. Sometimes it is helpful to send out a questionnaire as a follow up to the families that you serve to find out exactly what brought them to your funeral home instead of the competition down the street. It is important to know what you have over your competition to make sure you stay that extra step ahead.

5. **Experiment.** Great businesses are built on finding what works best for them and their consumers. These conclusions are arrived at through trial and error. In our industry, it pays to be unique. More than anything, families that we meet know that death is a depressing experience. They want to avoid the stress it imparts on their loved ones. It is important to create comfort for our consumers when prearranging their final arrangement by presenting them with unique options that are as unique as they are. The key is to design a funeral that everyone is com-

fortable with. Too often those making the arrangements forget that they are making these arrangements to save those left behind from the burden of making hard decisions. A simple reminder that it "may not be about them" but rather their family may be helpful.

6. **Sort out the people you know wouldn't want to talk about prearranging their funeral.** You know, the ones that are convinced they will live forever. These individuals also think that their families know what to do and honestly feel they just want to be wrapped in a blanket and dropped in a hole in the backyard. I really had someone say that to me. Rule of thumb: These people may not be your target audience, however, with certain outreach programs, they may be reached. Remember Rule 5 where we talked about experimenting.

7. **Keep it simple – do not make your prearrangement marketing plan too complicated.** How many times have you heard, "the simpler the better?" Now you have heard it again. You want to aim for a single-page preneed marketing plan. This way, you may actually implement it. You don't need to hit people over the head with fancy mailers telling them about how you are the world's greatest preneed guru. Instead, offer community outreach programs where the discussion of prearranging one's funeral is part of that program. Above all, share a part of yourself that will make those attending want to reach out to you.

Now I wouldn't suggest flying more frequently hoping for turbulence to get people in the mood to talk about prearranging their funerals. I would suggest finding what works best for you. As funeral directors, I find our hearts are always in the right place when it comes to discussing prearrangements. We see the benefits day in and day out along with the added stress to those families that are lost when trying to make arrangements, especially for someone who never felt the need to talk about them. The future of our industry and its importance to our society as a whole may in some ways depend on the future preneed experiences we create. •