



THE ROI OF FUNERAL AFTERCARE

What are the benefits?

When a 15-year-old girl died in a car crash in 2009, her family logically turned to the funeral home to help. After all, the funeral home is where every grief journey starts. Yet, aside from a small collection of old books, the fourth-generation funeral home, the largest in the county, offered nothing.

The family was shocked. It was as if they had walked through an inferno, suffered third degree burns, remained engulfed in pain yet still standing. With no follow up or support in the aftermath.

Months later, when the mother ran into the funeral home's administrator, she asked why they had no grief resources to offer their families.

"It's because the owner sees no value in it," she said sheepishly. "I've been trying to talk him into it, but it costs money he doesn't want to spend."

That owner wasn't alone. Many funeral businesses don't want to invest in aftercare outreach.

PERCEIVED BARRIERS

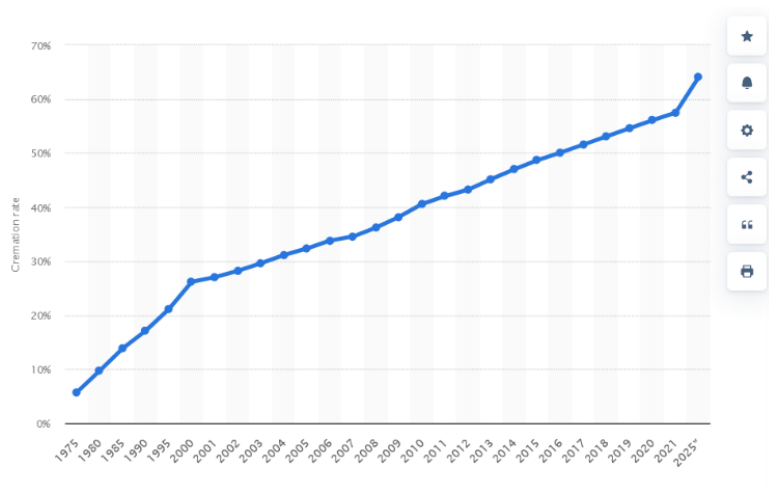
Despite changing times, funeral businesses can be resistant to aftercare for a variety of reasons, including:

- Perceived lack of value to justify cost
- Worry about doing more harm than good
- Lack of quality resources
- Lack of ways to consistently deliver grief resources
- Hope that families will find support through community resources instead

THE IMPACT OF CREMATION ON THE FUNERAL INDUSTRY

A 2018 NFDA Consumer Awareness and Preferences Survey showed that 85% of consumers selected a particular funeral home because they had previous exposure with that home.

In 2023, just five years later, inflation challenges have forced many consumers to choose a funeral home based on price.



(Cremation trends, Statista Research, 2022)

Further, over half of funeral care is now dedicated to cremation in both the U.S. and Canada (CANA, 2023). One Washington Post article published in 2022, predicts that by 2040, four out of five Americans are projected to choose cremation.

How do the rise in cremations impact family-owned funeral businesses?

With two fundamental elements to the death care process being disposition of the body and memorialization, today's rise in cremation over burial results in less profit, forcing funeral homes to lower their profit margins to stay competitive.

WITH LESS PROFIT, HOW CAN AFTERCARE HELP?

Funeral homes are looking to increase their market share by offering services above the competitor, making aftercare a marketing strategy with a built-in ROI, if one has the patience and willingness to look outside the box.

In 2020, Curtis J. Holt's Sons Funeral Home in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, began hosting an annual Valentine's luncheon for customers who lost a spouse the year prior. When the pandemic halted community events, Certified Aftercare Specialist Anne Miguel took Valentine's to them by hand-delivering gift packages that contained a card, a grief booklet, chocolates, and a crystal ornament engraved with the deceased's first name.

The funeral home's willingness to harness the power of personal aftercare has paid off by way of numerous awards and establishing Holt as the leading funeral home of Woonsocket.

IS FAMILY CARE THE FUTURE OF FUNERAL CARE?

Just as medical providers follow the mother and baby after birth, consumers look to funeral providers to follow the family after a death. When one funeral business doesn't offer

aftercare and another one does, it can create consumer confusion that negatively impacts reputation.

Aftercare offers two major benefits to the funeral business. Subliminal marketing can be obtained through branding of aftercare products and programs. Consumer retention can be increased through direct follow-up with families and becoming part of their healing that first year and beyond. Both of these lead to positive digital reviews that generate more leads.

Because one can't put a price tag on easing human suffering, the difference between a funeral home offering aftercare or not comes down to how consumers perceive it.

"The one thing that makes all the difference in the world is having somebody walk with you in support and understanding. It all starts with the funeral home," says Lin Findlay, aftercare expert and managing partner of the International Grief Institute. "We can't ease the suffering or make it stop, but we can be there with aftercare."

THE PAYOUT

Grief doesn't end when the service is over. It's just beginning.

Funeral businesses who make a difference in their community through aftercare earn customer loyalty, further reach of one's brand, and a positive reputation that impacts the bottom line. How much is that worth to a funeral home?

For those looking to serve future generations, it can be priceless.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lynda Cheldelin Fell is founding partner of the International Grief Institute, and international bestselling author of over 35 books including the award winning Grief Diaries series. With her background as a firefighter/EMT, Lynda specializes in trauma, grief, compassion fatigue, and holds a national certification in critical incident stress management. A popular keynote speaker and educator, she is a member of the continuing education faculty at Whatcom Community College. She has earned six national literary awards and five national advocacy award nominations for her work.