

Service Opportunity

Service Opportunities is what we call our service requests or complaints. If you are not getting any, then it is a sure sign of a bad or declining relationship with your families. The family is either not being candid or not being contacted. In some cases both. I attended a seminar on “Customer Service” recently put on by our Chamber of Commerce. Being involved in local organizations and taking advantage of some of the programs is very important to our industry but that is another topic. The presenter quoted a study that surprised me.

- ◆ For big-ticket goods, 40% of unhappy customers will not complain.
- ◆ For medium ticket goods, 50% of unhappy customers will not complain.
- ◆ For big-ticket services 60% of unhappy customers will not complain.
- ◆ For small-ticket services 55% of unhappy customers will not complain.

They went on to say that complainers are more likely to do business with the company that upset them than non-complainers.

Another similar study referenced showed that...

- ◆ The average business never hears from 96% of its unhappy customers. At least 90% of them will not use or buy from it again.
- ◆ Of the customers who complain, 70% will do business with you again if the complaint is resolved.
- ◆ Of the customers who have a complaint, 95% will do business again if the problem is resolved ‘quickly’.

All this confirms what I believe - that most people don’t like to complain about the little stuff that did not meet their expectation, and it’s very important to encourage and give ways for your customers to complain. If you give them a way to complain easily they will also compliment you too. We send out a survey through the Order of the Golden Rule asking for feedback and to evaluate our performance.

As getting complaints are not much fun, asking for complaints may even sound crazy. Complaints can be helpful:

- ◆ If we don’t know it is a problem, we can’t try to fix it.
- ◆ If a family is having a problem, other families maybe too and we need to know.
- ◆ If the family does not complain, they are likely to quietly go to our competition.
- ◆ If a family is unhappy they are for sure telling anyone who will listen.

When you do get your families to complain you must be willing to be part of the complaint. This can at times be very difficult but complaining families are valuable to your business. Once you do get the complaint, how you handle it is what matters the most.

Here are some steps for handling them:

- ◆ Say “I’m sorry”. These should be the first words out of your mouth. It costs nothing; I am not saying you are to admit you are at fault. You are ‘sorry’ they are feeling inconvenienced. Saying it early enough can keep them from getting angry.
- ◆ Do not take it personally and get defensive. If you do you are likely to make excuses and point fingers at others in your company. Doing this accomplishes nothing and makes your family feel that you don’t really care.

- ◆ Do not argue. Nobody ever won an argument with a customer. If you 'win' just for the sake of winning, you lose. You lose that family.
- ◆ Become involved in the problem. Go up into the cemetery with the family and look at the problem. If they are getting angry let them have their say. Do not get angry back.
- ◆ Establish the facts. Listen to what they have to say and let them blow off a little steam. Once you have the facts, verify them. This will help to minimize the family's tendency to exaggerate. It will also keep you from admitting any fault of the cemetery or funeral home.
- ◆ If possible resolve the problem quickly. Practice the Sunset Rule, 'Never let the sun set on a problem without first calling your customer'. Usually by doing this you will exceed the family's expectations.
- ◆ Thank them for bringing their concerns to your attention. This lets them know that you value their complaint so if there is another opportunity to serve them, they will let you.
- ◆ Follow through and follow up.

Handling complaints or 'Service Opportunities' properly will set your company apart from your competition. This will help build your business by referrals and word-of-mouth which we all know is the best way to help our business prosper.