

## How Are You Doing On Your Sympathy Business? A Checklist

Despite changing trends and increasing challenges, there will always be a sympathy flower market for florists. Almost no one wants a funeral devoid of flowers, and sympathy flowers provide an opportunity to serve families at significant times in their lives. In addition, florists who make the effort can successfully manage most funeral director concerns.

There's no better time than now to take a look at your sympathy program, spot your strengths and identify areas that could use a bit of professional polish. *How are you doing?*

**Check to make sure professionalism begins right in your own shop:**

### **DO YOU . . .**

- Keep up with funeral trends — i.e. shorter viewing times, more cremations, changing customer tastes and new product designs?
- Always insist on fresh flowers? Remember, flowers past their prime will shed, look unattractive, smell bad and reflect poorly on your shop.
- Make a special effort to recognize sympathy customers as they enter?
- Offer photos or a selection guide of sympathy arrangements?
- Offer a range of prices?
- Remind staff to avoid abbreviations such as “Fun Flowers” and expressions, such as “Have a nice day.”
- Make sure your staff and delivery personnel are professional in appearance?
- Suggest “personalizing” the arrangement?
- Legibly write the complete name and address of the sender for the benefit of those who will write thank-you notes?
- Include a brief description of the flowers?

- Legibly write the full name of the deceased on the card?
- Make sure the cards are securely attached?
- Use pins rather than hard-to-open staples?
- Offer to check the newspaper for time and place of the service if the family is too upset to remember details?
- Follow up with a card or note to the family offering condolences and thanking them for allowing you to serve them?

**Look after the business you already have, paying particular attention to producing problem-free, beautiful arrangements:**

**DO YOU . . .**

- Remind staff that funerals are one occasion when your work will be compared with arrangements from other shops?
- Provide well-balanced arrangements to prevent tipping and spilling?
- Remove thorns and pollen that can stain clothing?
- Avoid used, unattractive and leaky containers?
- Make an effort to protect the arrangement, especially in cold or windy weather?
- Check for protruding picks, pins, and wires?
- Use casket saddles that won't scratch or slip off?
- Make sure the casket arrangement will fit easily in the funeral hearse while it is on top of the casket?
- Immediately identify yourself as a florist when phoning the funeral home for information?
- Let the funeral director know in advance how many arrangements are coming?
- Show your delivery staff where to deliver at each funeral home?
- Deliver promptly at convenient, agreed-upon times and complete sign-in sheets?

- Make sure delivery is made in advance of the first visitation/viewing?  
*(Family pieces should arrive in time for special family-only viewings, which are usually 1-2 hours prior to regular viewing times. Also some visitations are now held on Sundays and holidays – to increase funeral business, be available for these special times.)*
- Correct any problems with arrangements or deliveries immediately, before visitations?
- Make sure all delivery vehicles are presentable and clean?
- Provide jackets, shirts or aprons that identify your shop and help staff look professional?
- Remind your delivery personnel to be courteous: avoid loud music and screeching tires, no smoking and no talking on cell phones when making deliveries?
- Offer your vehicles for transporting flowers at large services?
- Review with your staff religious or regional funeral customs?
- Consider a special coupon attached to the arrangement redeemable by the funeral director to be put toward flower disposal costs?

**Look ahead and take advantage of every opportunity to strengthen your share of the sympathy market:**

**DO YOU . . .**

- Recognize funeral directors as your customer and an important public relations audience?
- Remember them on appropriate occasions such as holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years), business anniversary, or remodeling with a floral gift?
- Send a plant or arrangement to the funeral home as an occasional “thank you”?
- Invite funeral directors as guests or speakers at meetings or banquets?
- Organize a group of area florists and funeral directors to address “in lieu of” problems?

- Provide SAF's suggested alternative phrases as a focal point for "in lieu of" discussions?
- Meet with editors or publishers of local newspapers to point out the phrase is discriminatory and suggest they adopt a non-discriminatory policy?
- Include tactfully worded sympathy flower advertisements in the obituary section of the newspaper as part of your marketing program?
- Explore if your local daily newspaper features online obituaries and consider the opportunity to place a banner ad in this section? *It's a targeted customer with little cost.*
- Suggest memorial flowers for a related occasion such as an annual birthday arrangement at church in memory of the deceased?