

Q “ Our firm has always focused on preneed as it relates to traditional funeral planning. How can we change the conversation with cremation families about the value of preplanning? ”



A **Matt Outcalt, assistant vice president, sales,
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The important thing to realize when it comes to making cremation arrangements is that the conversation doesn't really need to change at all. We should be offering families the same full range of

services no matter which disposition they choose.

What does need to change is our own thinking about cremation. For years, many people in our industry have seen cremation as an “alternative” threat looming in the distance, slowly creeping in to burn up profits and erode the significance of the proper, traditional funeral. While it does represent a change, we need to accept it and be experts at it, because it isn't going away. In fact, according to the Cremation Association of North America's cremation statistics, as of 2017, 51.6 percent of families nationwide chose cremation – the majority. Cremation is not in the distance anymore. It's the new tradition, and we need to change the way we talk about it.

So often when a family wants cremation, counselors and funeral directors automatically assume “direct cremation” and neglect to have a full discussion about all the options available. Isn't a visitation and a gathering and cemetery placement and merchandise just as important to your cremation family? You won't know

unless you ask, and you should ask every time, even when a family actually says they want “direct cremation.”

Speaking of direct cremation leads to the importance of packaging. One of the best ways to ensure you're giving complete presentations while also maintaining reasonable contract averages is through packaging. If you think about it, direct cremation itself is a package, so it's important that you have other package options for families to choose from. We recommend making them comprehensive, but keep them easy to understand. Create three price points – good, better, best – and support them with pictures so families know immediately what you mean by things like “funeral” and “memorial service.”

Incorporate your packages into a uniform, visual presentation that you use consistently. Schedule training sessions with your sales team and role play your presentations to be sure everyone understands and can answer questions about them. In addition, be well-versed on additional cremation services and merchandise your firm offers so you can help families take advantage of the many options available today to make their services unique.

One of our most important duties as funeral professionals is to help families understand the full range of options available to them, regardless of the disposition they choose, so they're able to arrange fitting and meaningful tributes. When you take the time to do that without making assumptions, the family wins, the firm wins, you win, and the cremation conversation becomes just another aspect of your professional expertise. •

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