

HAS EMPATHY DIED?

> Funeral orders are such a big part of most shops' daily business that I wonder why we do such a rotten job at selling them. Yes, I am starting this month's column with a chip on my shoulder! That's because I am frustrated at our general inability to connect with customers who are ordering sympathy flowers and our fear of offering high-priced designs.

Here's my story for September: I called a large retail operation with multiple locations to place a simple order for sympathy flowers for a family member. The salesperson should have handled my order much better and sold me a design at triple the price. How did this sale go so terribly off the rails? Listen to the recording and draw your own conclusion.

The Opportunity: Good-bye, Grandma

When the saleswoman answered the phone, I explained that I was calling from out of state and needed to order flowers because my grandmother had passed away. I played dumb as to colors and budget, only mentioning that I was vaguely interested in an easel spray. I offered further clues by sharing that this design was being sent on behalf of the deceased's 17 grandchildren (quick math: even at \$15 each, she should have started me at \$255!). I played my role pretty laid-back, receptive to *anything* she was willing to offer. In other words, I made it clear I was open to her expert suggestions.

Thumbs Up: No Lowballing

Too often, when making these calls, I am told, "Our arrangements start at..." Thankfully, this clerk had the wherewithal to start me at \$200 for an easel spray (that price is slightly

above their minimum). Unfortunately, she then undermined the sale with an all-too-common mistake. (Listen to the recording to find out more!) And...that's it! Nothing else she said or did made an impression on me or made me want to buy flowers there in the future.

Thumbs Down: Let the Customer SPEND!

The most egregious mistake happened in the first 20 seconds of the call. After I clearly stated that my grandmother had died, the clerk simply asked for her name and details on the services. What ever happened to saying, "I am so sorry for your loss"?

After being offered a standard \$200 easel spray, I asked, "Am I spending enough?" That's a major hint! But the salesperson didn't bite. Instead, I was told that \$200 was plenty. Can you imagine standing in a jewelry store and being told, "No, don't buy her the \$5,000 earnings, the \$2,000 ones are just as sparkly"? Or: "No, you don't need that 10,000 BTU air conditioner, this 5,000 BTU will keep you cool enough"?

Me neither. The sad part is this clerk was not taught to be empathetic and attentive, which would have made me feel better and probably would have led to a bigger sale. Remember, there were 17 of us! The saleswoman further botched the sale when I had to ask about a scripted ribbon that read "Beloved Grandmother." (Again, listen to the call to find out more.)

The Takeaway: Listen, Listen, Listen.

We can't create a more memorable, engaging and comfortable shopping experience for customers until we slow down, listen and offer the appropriate item/budget for their needs. Clearly, that is easier said than done and I understand that sympathy orders sometimes make us feel uncomfortable. What's the answer? Ongoing training and coaching, which is something you can get from this column and from my Tim's Calling...Live webinars, available at safnow.org/webinars. 🎧



The Recording

You're only half-done learning from this column. Next step, gather your staff 'round a store computer, read this column to them and then play the recording of my call to this shop by visiting safnow.org/timscalling. Turn it into a group discussion: Ask your team for feedback on what they heard and have them talk about how they can make better funeral sales moving forward.

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Tim Huckabee, FSC, is the president of FloralStrategies.com, which teaches ultimate customer care to retail and wholesale florists. tim@floralstrategies.com



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

How does your staff REALLY treat customers? Call (800) 983-6184 to volunteer your shop for a free Tim's Calling undercover shopping call, anonymity guaranteed. (Retail value: \$50.)