Raising the bar in service standards

How to avoid getting cheated

The Consumers Association of Singapore (Case) recommends that you:

- Ask for a price list for the products and services.
- Check the items delivered to the wake.
- Ask for the terms and conditions of the services provided, particularly refunds for leftover food and drinks.
- Take note of the unused items after the funeral and ensure that you are not billed for any of them, including food and drinks.
- You can opt to buy your own items such as drinks and snacks.
- Go for CaseTrust-accredited funeral service providers.

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logical.”

But that has been the way here for customers, who have no choice of looking at actual caskets before picking one out. They are forced to make a hasty decision after seeing through a catalogue before picking one out.

Mr and brother Victor Goh, who has an economics degree from the University of London, saw the showroom as a way to add credibility to the industry.

“We drive the customers to the showrooms, where they can physically see everything on offer and make an informed, informed choice,” says the older of the two brothers. “This is a step that needs to be taken to get rid of the image that everything in the industry is done under the table and not in the customer’s best interest.”

Upping the ante

This change in the industry goes beyond the concrete and extends to the type of service on offer, which is long overdue for an overhaul.

The lack of regulations governing the running of a funeral business has allowed directors to parcel out everything from funerals to catering to fly-by-night subcontractors and part-time staff. The result: Almost no quality control and accountability on the part of the funeral director to ensure the customer gets what they pay for.

During a funeral, subcontractors come and go, with no proper supervision. It was in this free-for-all climate that the Singapore Funeral Services two brothers entered the business 12 years ago. Instead of subcontracting items out, they decided to handle almost everything from start to finish, right down to the part-time staff. This was ahead of its time, since most employers are part-timers and contracted only when needed.

“The way things are handled by the older generation of funeral directors is totally different,” says Mr Ang of Ang-Chin Bros. “My father’s staff previously turned up only when there was a case to handle, and could sometimes be unreliable and not present. Everything was based on verbal agreements.”

Today, the Angs employ more than 15 full-time staff.

And the firm has a payroll of five full-timers and an equal number of part-time staff, adding up to a total of 10 staff members spread throughout the wake to help families in any number of ways, from buying flowers to setting up an altar.

The staff have all been trained under the in-house ‘Extra Mile for Exceptional’ programme. The company recently received an ISO 9001 qualification for its management excellence in funeral services.

“We invested heavily in manpower, despite being told by industry elders that it was a stupid move,” says Mr Ang. “But today, our competitors are also scrambling to train their staff to keep to the level of service we have set.”

His customer, Mrs L S Quah, 60, a legal assistant, says: “Having their staff there helped me feel more comfortable. The service provided was the last thing I needed to grieve with my family.”

Mr Ang says his firm’s motto “to serve and to make the deceased more comfortable in death” is the guiding principal behind the company’s successes.

The extra effort, he says, is the key to our success. “We treat them as if they are our own family, and this goes a long way in making sure that our clients feel comfortable when they are grieving.”

The service has won several awards, including the “Best Funeral Services” award in the 2008 Singapore Business Awards and the “Best Funeral Undertaker” award in the 2006 Singapore Business Awards.

Mr Ang says the company’s philosophy is to provide a personal touch to each and every client, treating each one as if they were family.

“Every client is important to us, and we go the extra mile to ensure that their wishes are met,” he says.

The company has also launched a new “Funeral Planning” service, which helps families plan their funerals in advance. This service is available to clients who wish to pre-plan their funerals, allowing them to make informed decisions about the type of service they want.

The service has become increasingly popular, with many clients choosing to pre-plan their funerals to ensure that their wishes are met.

The company also offers a range of other services, including wake planning, casket selection, and floral arrangements.

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