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MAGAZINE

Memorialization &
Aftercare

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March 2019

Beyond the Plate - Laura Augustine's Aftercare
Cooking Workshop by Joe Weigel
It's Time to Get Serious About Aftercare by
Ellery Bowker
Ways to Memorialize a Love One - Notes From the
Editor by John Yopp
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Joe Weigel
Publishing Funeral Prices Online Will Lead to a Race
to the Bottom! Right? by Ed Michael Reggie
The Venerable Prayer Cards - Are You Using Them
Effectively as a Memorialization Item? by George
Carlos
Keys to Service = Symmetry of Balance (Part II)
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FEATURES

- 4 Ways to Memorialize a Love One - Notes From the Editor by John Yopp
- 6 Beyond the Plate - Laura Augustine's Aftercare Cooking Workshop by Joe Weigel
- 10 It's Time to Get Serious About Aftercare by Ellery Bowker
- 16 Sully, George Bush's Service Dog, Pays Final Tribute
- 20 Reputation Management in the Digital Age by Joe Weigel
- 24 Publishing Funeral Prices Online Will Lead to a Race to the Bottom! Right? by Ed Michael Reggie
- 29 The Venerable Prayer Cards - Are You Using Them Effectively as a Memorialization Item? by George Carlos
- 32 Keys to Service = Symmetry of Balance (Part II) by Todd Van Beck

INDUSTRY NEWS

- 13 Aftercare.com Introduces Aftercare-By-Text
- 28 The Foresight Companies Announces Dynamic New Collaboration with Roosevelt Investments

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notes from the editor

Please Stop Honoring Veterans on Memorial Day--a Request From My Veteran Husband

by Minda Zetlin

Next month is Memorial Day, a holiday celebrated throughout the United States with barbecues, music festivals, and children running through sprinklers. All those traditions are wonderful. But my husband, a veteran, has one request: Don't treat Memorial Day as a day to honor our troops currently serving in the military. It's not a day for them. As the word "Memorial" tells us, it's a day for remembering and honoring those who sacrificed their lives in battle and are no longer among us.

Why does it matter? I hadn't thought about this myself until I was watching TV with my husband Bill, a Vietnam veteran. A message from the station told viewers to "Celebrate our troops on Memorial Day," and his reaction was loud and negative. "I hate it when people treat Memorial Day the same as Veteran's Day, as a day for supporting our troops," he said.

In perspective there is a vast difference between Veteran's Day and Memorial Day. Consider the history of the respective holidays. Veteran's Day, formerly called Armistice Day, commemorates the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918, that officially ended World War I. That war was optimistically called "the war to end all wars," a name that turned out to be sadly inaccurate. Veteran's Day is also a day to thank and honor those who have served in our military. If you see Bill on November 11, please feel free to thank him for his service, he says.

Decoration Day.

Memorial Day is a different matter. It dates back to the Civil War, in which an unimaginable 620,000 soldiers were killed. For perspective, that's about 19,000 more people than live in Baltimore today, a death toll huge enough to force the creation of national cemeteries. The holiday used to be called Decoration Day because many people would spend the day placing decorations and flags on the graves of fallen soldiers. The name was changed in 1971, perhaps because so many of the fallen in Bill's war, the Vietnam war, could not be



brought home, and have no graves to decorate. When I asked Bill why people honoring living soldiers and veterans on Memorial Day bothers him so much, his answer was: Because of the Wall, the Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C., where the names of the 58,220 soldiers who died in that war are engraved in a long and heartbreaking list.

"I knew so many of those people," he said. "Kids I went to high school with. Kids who just wanted to go to college. Kids who didn't make it to 20." He didn't say it, but he didn't have to: Bill's name could easily be on that wall, if he'd been unlucky instead of lucky. All those men, and some women too, who died in Vietnam and every war before and since, didn't get the chance to bring up their children, or grow old with their spouses, or have careers. All they have is their names on the Wall, or another memorial like it, and a triangular folded flag for their families.

So go ahead and thank our veterans and support our troops on every other day. Save Memorial Day for remembering and honoring those who never had the chance to become veterans. This one day a year is all they and their loved ones have left.



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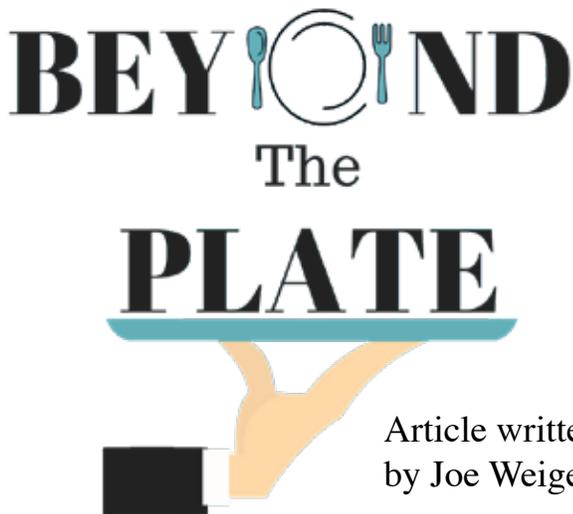
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Article written
by Joe Weigel

A Recipe for Aftercare Success

It was shortly after the death of her father that Laura Augustine came to a realization – if she as a funeral professional felt challenged helping her mother with her grief journey, how in the world do most other people who have experienced the death of a loved one move forward with their lives? Most people don't have a family member or friend trained in the funeral profession or in grief therapy for individual support. Augustine, who has extensive work experience and training in preneed, aftercare, marketing, business development, grief and hospice care, wanted to use her skills and expertise in a more giving manner. It was this revelation that led her to create her “Beyond the Plate” program.

“After my father’s passing, I realized that those of us in funeral service have to change our thinking about the way we approach aftercare,” Augustine commented. “Aftercare should be much more than a ‘packaged’ program simply implement. In order to be effective, aftercare must be something that is interactive and involves the participants.”

As a result, Augustine set about to create innovative aftercare programs – ones that was not only beneficial for participants – but programs that required hands on participation by the attendees. According to Augustine, the funeral profession needs to shift the way it thinks about aftercare. Aftercare should not solely be business driven with seminars about estate planning and veteran’s benefits, but needs to have a “warm,

“What I found so rewarding about the event is that it really connects the bereavement part of what we do at hospice with the efforts of the funeral home,” Constantine commented. “It creates a wonderful bridge that helps those suffering a loss to understand that there are resources available to help them cope with their loss.” - Jennifer Constantine, Hospice Liason-Amedisys

comforting and caring” component to it.

The “Beyond the Plate” series consists of four events held seasonally – with the first commencing in early winter, with sessions following in the summer and early fall. It is culminated with the final session taking place during the Holiday season. It is intended for the surviving spouse or significant other, the surviving son or daughter, children, grandchild or other family, friends, neighbors or co-workers.

Each workshop touches on more than cooking – it’s culinary grief therapy that goes beyond the traditional cooking class. In addition to food and diet, those who attend learn things like proper breathing techniques, meditation, grief exercising and reflection. The workshop provide a compassionate approach for coping with daily lie and promoting healthy grieving. Augustine aimed to do more than just help people get by. She designed the program to provide grief education, an understanding of feelings and a place where a person could see that others were feeling and experiencing the same things.

That’s why Augustine sees the group setting as beneficial. Being able to talk with others in a similar situation is an opportunity to heal. In the words of Rabbi Earl Grollman – “Grief shared is grief diminished.”

The Beyond the Plate program is about self-care during a period of time when those who have lost a loved one wish to curl up into a ball and pray they could disappear into a void. But the program also is one of the most significant steps that a person can make in propelling themselves toward the journey of healing. In the words of an ancient Chinese proverb – “The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step”.

Once she had the program designed, she needed a funeral home to sponsor the event. Fortunately, Frank Kapr, CFSP, was in the process of reevaluating the

aftercare program his funeral home was providing. Kapr is a funeral director and owner of Frank Kapr Funeral Home in Scottsdale, PA, as well as the current secretary-treasurer of the Pennsylvania Funeral Directors Association. Kapr's wife, Rhenee, is also owner and vice president of the firm along with Alyson Swank Zombek, who is a licensed funeral director and recently became a partner this past year. The funeral home was started by his father in 1954 and the Kaprs still live above the funeral home to ensure 24-hour service for the community's families.

Kapr had conducted aftercare programs in the past, such as ones on estate planning. During a visit, Augustine explained the concept behind "Beyond the Plate". Kapr quickly realized this was entirely different approach to aftercare and thought to myself – "why not give it a try"?

"To be honest, I didn't know what to expect when the program started that night," Kapr commented. "When Laura started talking about breathing techniques and

meditation, I thought to myself – what have I gotten into?" His apprehension quickly subsided as he saw participants become engaged, open up and talk about the challenges they faced in everyday life.

Throughout the night, participants laughed and cried as they learned about exercise, sleep, grief, hydration, nutrition, cooking a healthy meal, reflection and meditation. "I never realized how tough 'cooking a meal for one' can be," added Kapr. And what I found particularly touching was the fact that participants stayed around more than an hour after the event was over talking and sharing."

Kapr also invited Jennifer Constantine, a hospice liaison from Amedisys, to attend the event. Amedisys is a leading provider of healthcare in the home. From home health to hospice to personal care, Amedisys team members provide quality, clinically distinctive care to more than 369,000 patients every year.

"What I found so rewarding about the event is that



it really connects the bereavement part of what we do at hospice with the efforts of the funeral home,” Constantine commented. “It creates a wonderful bridge that helps those suffering a loss to understand that there are resources available to help them cope with their loss.”

After the event, Kapr was pleased that he had hosted the workshop. He is still receiving emails and notes of thanks from those who attended. In fact, Constantine was so thrilled with the presentation and class; she wants to bring her entire team from Amedisys to participate in the next event. “This is truly a program where hospice and the funeral home can work together,” Kapr added. According to Augustine, aftercare programs shouldn’t be solely about generating preneed leads. Rather, they need to be about building relationships with families and helping them understand what to expect during their grief journey. A good aftercare program provides a forum for people to talk about the challenges they are facing with other’s facing the same journey.

The workshops themselves are economical and Augustine has created other hands-on events from which to choose. She has made the process simple for a funeral home to host. “Once the funeral home agrees on a date, time and place; I take it from there.” Augustine continued. “I work closely with the funeral home and its staff to ensure the workshop is well organized and, once the date of the event arrives, it runs smoothly and on time.”

Augustine is quick to point out that with today’s mobile society; the concept of a family’s loyalty to a funeral home has changed. It is imperative for funeral homes to focus on continuing to build and maintain loyalty with the families of their community, or without it, families will have no reason to call when the need arises.

“Grief is isolating. It’s very important for funeral directors to be there for people after their loss,” Augustine said. “Many people go through the motions that they’re OK. They go back to their daily lives and do what they would normally do, but for many of them, it’s vital to be able to come to a peer support workshop like Beyond the Plate.”

Kapr concluded by saying, “Everyone had a great time and they can’t wait to get together with the people who attended the last class, new participants and others for the next part of the series! It will once again be a

day or evening full of friends, education, laughter and fellowship.” Kapr continued, “The workshop was a powerful event and one that I was proud to sponsor and open my funeral home to the grieving people of Scottsdale.”

If you ask Augustine and Kapr’s staff, no doubt they’d agree wholeheartedly with his assessment.





It's Time to Get Serious About Aftercare

by Ellery Bowker

If you are concerned at all about maintaining the volume of families coming into your funeral home, then you need to get serious about following up with them after the service is over.

I'm going to make a case why you should take aftercare off the proverbial back burner, bring it to the front and turn the heat on high. I believe there has never been a time where post-sale service (AKA aftercare) has been more important. I believe the urgency to build and cement relationships with your families is underestimated and is leaving funeral homes at risk of losing calls to competitors. There is no time to wait and we'll explore why in this article. We will also get clarity on what aftercare really means and why it's not as hard as you might think.

Before we get started, bear with me as I point out the obvious for a minute.

Every business has two jobs, including your funeral home. Just two, yet they are the most important. The first job is to acquire new customers and the second is to keep them coming back. If you fail at either, you'll eventually go out of business.

Naturally, getting customers is the priority and seemingly the only focus based on the resources that go into customer acquisition, particularly in the funeral business. If you look at the effort to get new families to come to the funeral home versus getting existing families to come back next time, you'll see an epic disproportion.

Nearly everything regarding growing a funeral home is about customer acquisition. Advertising, billboards, paid search marketing, social media, etc. are all focused on getting new families to choose that funeral home, either at-need, or prearranged.

Every conference has breakout sessions that lean heavily toward sales and marketing. Very few, if any about aftercare and zero even mentioning customer retention.

There are three pillars in funeral service. They are preneed, at-need and aftercare. At-need gets the most attention, preneed is second and aftercare is a very

distant third. However, all are equally important as each one feeds the next one and can create a circle of business. Preneed generates more at-need, at-need generates more opportunity for aftercare and aftercare, if done properly, can generate more preneed.

Most everyone misses the third part.

For most funeral homes, aftercare isn't something they dismiss as irrelevant or willingly ignore, it's one of those things in the back of your mind that you know you should be doing.

Aftercare is also a big word with different interpretations of what it means and in that is the root of the problem. It's time to take a step back and look at what aftercare is and more importantly what it is not. Here are three common ideas about aftercare that are not accurate.

Aftercare is NOT just about grief support

The immediate thought of aftercare is providing grief support or grief counseling to families. It's a logical assumption but it's only part true. Given the fact that someone has died, and you have helped a family honor their loved one, most likely in a fog of deep grief and emotions, it's easy to understand that line of thinking. This belief can easily cause funeral homes that do not have a comprehensive grief program to feel like they aren't qualified so they do nothing.

Aftercare in fact can be anything you do to support a family after a service is over. Grief support is only one thing. Providing a post-death checklist, guiding them on how to close accounts, providing non-legal help with estates, just checking on them with a call or text, sending a card, etc.

I would bet most families would want you to check on them and let them know you're thinking of them even if you don't have an "aftercare" department.

Aftercare IS NOT just for getting preneed leads

A big mistake is to use aftercare exclusively as a sales tool. Preneed marketers understand the value

of aftercare as those interactions and post-funeral touchpoints provide opportunities to share the value of prearranging but that can't be the only reason. Aftercare must be altruistic and should not be looked at as a lead generation tool. Families will see that from a mile away. If you lead by truly caring for the family and an earnest desire to provide value after the funeral is over, then you will build relationships and yes, get more preneed. Preneed is simply a bi-product of great aftercare.

Aftercare IS NOT something you do when you have spare time

Yoda from Star Wars said it best with "Do... or do not. There is no try." In the case of aftercare, doing something small consistently is better than doing something grandiose on occasion. If you consider aftercare as service-after-the-sale, which it is, then imagine any company having a customer support department that was only available when the business was slow.

Now that we've talked about what aftercare is not, let's

look at what aftercare is.

Aftercare IS a competitive advantage

A person moves to your town and a few months after getting settled hears the unthinkable and will soon have to plan a funeral for a terminally ill loved one. They may have the benefit of a few weeks or even a few months to get everything planned but it is all new to them, never having been responsible for making funeral arrangements. Time to start calling funeral homes, right? Not so fast. The most likely first step is they are going to ask family, co-workers and friends to see who they recommend. Then they are going to take those recommendations and look at those funeral home reviews online.

That scenario is played out daily across the country and shows us that word of mouth and reviews (the consensus of strangers but we believe them) are what drives new business. Customers recognize when a business goes above and beyond, which you could define as anything they do after the check has been cashed, and those are the moments that create something worth talking



about. Following up with a family after the service is over is an opportunity to surprise and delight. They recognize that you took the time and you cared enough to reach out to them. Even if it's just a card in the mail. People remember how you make them feel. They tell others because of the way you made them feel. If you don't give them something to talk about, they won't.

Aftercare IS the missing link in most funeral homes

Going back to my example of the three pillars in funeral service, aftercare is almost universally what is not being done. I hate clichés but, in this context, think about an engine firing on all cylinders and think of the way it runs if one or more stop working. The most successful funeral homes understand this and invest in building the relationships that endear the family to your firm and taking the competition out of the running the next time the family has a need, and that is the goal.

Aftercare IS proactive

If you think about customer service, you think of who to call when you have a problem with something you've bought. The phrase, "they have great customer service," is usually because they had a problem and the company made it right. That is great, but it's reactive. Reaching out to a customer to see how your solution is working for them (before they ever call you) is proactive. Of course, most businesses can't reach out to every customer to check on them, but a funeral home can. If you're a small firm, you have time. If you're a large firm, you have resources to make it happen.

Relationships are an asset on your balance sheet

The relationships you have with the families you serve are golden. They are worth everything and mean everything. Once you acquire a customer, be it from a referral, paid search or a call from an obscure yellow page ad, they are now your customer. They chose you, and you have the privilege to serve them. At least once. The extra effort put into building relationships after the service is the best investment you can make. Any funeral home can copy your prices and business model, but they can't copy your relationships. That, then, is how you win.

Ellery Bowker is the founder of Aftercare.com. He can be reached at ellery@aftercare.com



Our Mission

To help funeral homes and cemeteries build loyalty by staying in touch with families after their loss. At Aftercare.com, we come to work to solve a big problem in funeral service today. Funeral professionals

want to follow up with their families after the services are over but just don't have time, or have tried and just couldn't keep up. It's more difficult than it seems to focus on at-need families and still show previous families you are thinking about them.

In years past, funeral directors have tried sending out cards during the holidays or on the anniversary of the loss but, despite the best intentions, were unable to keep up. At Aftercare.com, we understand this problem and what's at stake for any company that doesn't serve the customer after the sale. In short, we know that if you "Remember your families, they'll remember you!"

Today, we provide the Aftercare Card Program as a welcome answer to this continual problem. This automated solution sends four cards plus a survey during the first year, at a cost that has been called a "no-brainer." We love hearing that!

Since launching in 2015, thousands of funeral professionals are following up and letting families know they are thinking of them on those difficult days in the first year, all automatically. Many are even generating preneed leads just by following up. If you'd like to talk, we're easy to find.



Aftercare.com Introduces Aftercare-By-Text

(Clinton, NC) - Aftercare.com today announced the official launch of Aftercare-By-Text, a new program that will send automated caring text messages to families after the service is over. This modern outreach tool will help funeral homes let families know they are thinking about them and offer support in a way that lets a family easily respond.

“A funeral home’s success is dependent on their ability to build relationships,” said Ellery Bowker, founder and CEO of Aftercare.com. “This tool helps a funeral home reach out using the preferred way to communicate for many people, including older generations,” he continued.

The program was designed so the messages do not look or feel automated and are personalized for each family. If a family responds to a message, the funeral director that served that family is notified and can assist them without their cell phone number being revealed.

The funeral home decides what messages are sent and the schedule. The messages can be a simple check to see how the family is doing, a caring message on the birthday of their loved one, etc.

A key component of the program is the ability to send a message asking the family to leave a review online. By gently asking and giving the family an easy link to click, the funeral home can generate a lot more reviews which is very important in today’s competitive market.

The funeral director can enroll a family from a computer, or their phone and it takes less than 30 seconds. The messages can also be sent to multiple people.

The price is \$100 per month for unlimited families and messages. Having one simple price demonstrates Aftercare.com’s commitment to make following up with families easy for funeral homes of all sizes.

Aftercare.com is well known for their Aftercare Card Program and now by adding a digital component, they can help funeral homes stay in touch and support even more families.

Funeral homes can learn more by visiting Aftercare.com or calling 1-800-721-7097.

About Aftercare.com

Aftercare.com helps solve the problem of not having time to do aftercare. Their Aftercare Card Program™ and Aftercare-By-Text™ help funeral homes and cemeteries build relationships and create loyal families by automatically following up after the service is over.





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Sully, Bush's service dog, lies before the president's flag-draped casket in the Capitol Rotunda

George H.W. Bush's flag-draped coffin was flanked by rifle-bearing troops before they were joined by Sully, his paws quietly shuffling across the polished Capitol Rotunda floor.

The yellow Labrador retriever dutifully marched toward Bush's remains Tuesday for another farewell to the 41st president, who found comfort in the service dog's companionship over the last few months of his life.

Sully was solemnly led by Valerie Cramer of America's VetDogs, a nonprofit that trains and places service dogs with veterans like Bush, a Navy pilot in World War II.

A presidential seal was sewn onto Sully's harness. He sat and looked around at a crowd both large and silent, then lay for a moment.

After Bush died Friday, Sully captured nationwide attention when a photograph of him lying in front of Bush's casket in Houston went viral.

The dog appeared woebegone, his head slack over his front left paw, his muzzle resting on the ground. Yet he was also steadfast, still keeping watch over Bush.



Sully the service dog of former President George H.W. Bush lays in front of Bush's casket as it lies in state inside the U.S. Capitol rotunda on Capitol Hill on Tuesday. (Melina Mara / The Washington Post)



Sully, George H.W. Bush's service dog, lies in front of the former president's casket in Houston. (Evan Sisley/ Office of George H.W. Bush via Reuters) (Handout/ Reuters)

The display of instinctual, animalistic devotion captured the reaction to Bush's death in a way that the words spilled all weekend over the Internet could not.

Dogs, wrote the poet Emily Dickinson, "know but do not tell."

"Mission complete," Jim McGrath, the Bush spokesman who shared a photo of the service dog's mournful stance Sunday, wrote on Twitter.

Bush will lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda until Wednesday, when family members and friends will gather for a funeral at Washington National Cathedral.

Sully was raised by VetDogs, first through its prison puppy program that gives inmates a chance to teach animals the basic tasks of housebreaking and standardized commands, and then at the program's campus in Smithtown, N.Y.

The Labrador was matched to Bush in June, when he was almost 2. He is named after former commercial airline pilot Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger III, who safely landed a plane on the Hudson River in 2009.

Bush welcomed “the newest member of our family” the same day he received a visit from former president Bill Clinton, a friend and onetime political adversary, at his home in Kennebunkport, Maine. The occasion was also distinguished by a sartorial salute Bush made to his successor. He wore a pair of socks imprinted with Clinton’s face.

The former president came to use a wheelchair or motorized scooter in the final years of his life because of a form of Parkinson’s disease.

Among the services that Sully was able to perform for Bush were retrieving dropped items, opening and closing doors, pushing an emergency button and supporting him when standing. As the dog went about these tasks, he amassed a following on social media, including on his own Instagram account, which boasted more than 98,000 followers as of early Monday.

Sully celebrated his birthday in July with a bone tied in a bright pink bow. Last week, he was already preparing for Christmas. On Sunday, the photo of the service dog lying before Bush’s casket became the latest post.

Although his presidential mission is complete, Sully’s work isn’t done. America’s VetDogs said the Labrador will join the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., where he will assist with “physical and occupational therapy to wounded soldiers and active duty personnel during their journey to recovery.”

That Sully will continue to serve veterans was a source of comfort for the Bush family. George W. Bush, the late president’s son and the 43rd president, predicted that the dog will bring joy to patients at Walter Reed. Jeb Bush, the late president’s younger son and a 2016 contender for the Republican presidential nomination, also weighed in.

“Sully has the watch,” he wrote on Twitter.

The 41st president’s devotion to dogs was not born of necessity alone. Long before he came to rely on man’s best friend to move around, he and his wife, Barbara Bush, who died in April, kept the company of Millie, an English springer spaniel named for Mildred Caldwell Kerr, a friend of the couple. The pet was once declared

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“the most famous dog in White House history.” Bush did, however, use the dog to score political points, although they didn’t always land effortlessly.

In a campaign speech in 1992, the incumbent Republican president attacked Clinton and running mate Al Gore by saying, “My dog Millie knows more about foreign affairs than these two bozos.”

Sully, by contrast, bore none of the weight of his person’s political ambitions. Sometimes he appeared with the American flag, such as on the Fourth of July. At other points, he was used to promote guide dogs.

But mostly, he was just at Bush’s side, which is where he remained after the president’s death.



Sully, a yellow Labrador service dog, accompanies a group of ADA mourners to the U.S. Capitol rotunda on Tuesday. (Melina Mara/The Washington Post)

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Reputation Management in the Digital Age

by Joe Weigel

In the past, it's been easy for funeral directors to manage their reputations locally. By merely keeping up with the local news and going to service club meetings, they could stay abreast of their standing in the community. However, in today's digital world, there are dozens of places on the web for people to leave comments and online reviews have never been more important. Platforms like Google and Yelp make it easy for families to talk about (as well as to hear about) a good (or bad) experience with a funeral home.

And if you ask me, in today's connected world, managing your online reputation is more important than digital marketing. You can perform all the SEO, PPC, social media posts, and email marketing campaigns you want, but these efforts only makes your online negative reputation that much more visible. When such a high percentage of families doing online research before they contact and visit a funeral home, you can't assume that potential customers aren't going to look at your reviews.

A lot of funeral homes spend hundreds of dollars at digital marketing without even looking twice at their online reputation. If your funeral home is plagued by nasty comments and poor reviews online, then you might as well be throwing all that money away. Without an effective strategy to guide you through maintaining an online presence and monitoring conversations about your firm, you could be turning away potential families every day.

According to a recent study, 80 percent of families are more likely to purchase from local businesses

with positive reviews on their Facebook Page. Add to that the fact that 85 percent of families trust online reviews as much as recommendations from a friend or family member. Therefore, it's crucial that funeral directors stay abreast of online conversations about their firm.

Funeral home owners looking to take control of their online presence would be wise to put the following activities at the top of their list.

1) Do a Deep Audit of Your Online Reputation
What do families find when they Google your funeral home? Ideally, they are presented with a clean, impressive, up-to-date list of positive Facebook posts and news articles as well as online business profiles. If not, that subpar first impression might be the reason you have lost "your" families.

Obviously, it stands to reason that funeral homes lose calls when families find negative article or posts in their search results. As scary as that is, negative articles aren't the only risk factor funeral homes ought to be worried about.

For example, are there inconsistencies or confusing information across your digital footprint? Are your web assets kept active and relevant or do they look like digital tombstones with cobwebs that need dusting? Do you have old tweets or posts long forgotten that might be taken out of context?

You can do much of this auditing manually, digging through search results, images, and old social media posts, or look to professional help for a serious deep dive. A combination of automatic and manual auditing is often the best choice. For example, setting up Google Alerts for your company's name, key executives, and related industry terms is a good first step to manually track your online reputation.

However, the manual process requires a commitment to review and monitor. It also is not effective at tracking social media posts. What's needed is an automated way to monitor a firm's online presence and quickly interacting with families; a way to consolidate all reviews and comments from multiple sources into one single platform. One such option is Rannko (www.rannko.com/funeralservice), whose review management suite makes achieving 5 star customer

satisfaction as easy as a click of the mouse.

2) Make Better Use of Online Reviews

Review profile platforms come in all shapes and sizes, and they are important for different reasons. Employee-facing review platforms like Glassdoor and Indeed will impact your recruiting efforts at the funeral home while customer-facing platforms like Yelp and Google are more likely to impact calls.

The benefits of an active and positive review profile are hard to overstate, and the reason is simple: as mentioned earlier, a recent survey indicated that families trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation. Unfortunately, self-motivated reviewers are more likely to be dissatisfied, leaving many funeral homes' review pages with a misrepresentative collection of poor reviews.

If that sounds like your situation, don't panic. Defending against an inherent negative review bias is possible, though it does require patience and hard work. It boils down to proactively and consistently prompting families for reviews to showcase a more authentic

representation of the funeral home in the long term. But the very first step is incredibly simple: claiming your online listings. It's the verification process by which you prove that you represent the business in question. If you haven't done that yet, you're missing out on a valuable opportunity to showcase accurate business information, respond to online reviews, and ultimately control your online reputation.

With more than 60+ places to list business information on the web, reputation management software like Rannko (www.rannko.com/funeralservice), offers a funeral home the ability to sync their key information with each of them using just the click of a button. This way, when a funeral home's information changes, it can be updated in Rannko and pushed out to these online listings with ease.

These online platforms allow a funeral home to take back control of their online brand across digital services and to synchronize this information. The result is that the funeral home will rank higher in online searches and be easily found across the web no matter what platform or device a family uses,

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thus enhancing the funeral home's search engine optimization (SEO) and search results.

3) Publish Content That Families Find Valuable

When families were asked why they selected a particular funeral home, one reason given was the funeral home's web content and social media pages had an impact on the decision. Families today without a "family" funeral home progress more than half way through the decision-making process on their own before ever contacting a funeral home.

Funeral homes without a strong digital content strategy risk losing awareness, and ultimately, future calls. Families will simply find answers to their questions elsewhere.

There's no one right way to produce digital content — some funeral homes find more value in an engaging website while others prefer dynamic social media platforms. Test different styles, media, and formats and let the data be your guide as you refine the process.

4) Embrace Social Media: A Window of Opportunity

If you want to control the messaging that families receive, your social media tactics can't be treated as an afterthought. Think of your social media profiles like the windows into your funeral home's operations. Inactive or nonexistent platforms are like boarded-up windows — they don't show anything and are often a cause for concern.

But a well-managed group of social media profiles showcases the very best your funeral home has to offer. They highlight your company's culture and personality, industry news and updates, and valuable funeral content.

It also has the benefit of keeping you top of mind with families who have shown enough interest to follow and engage with your channels.

Of course, you can't control messaging on a platform you don't have access to. It's a good idea to register your brand's name on as many social media channels as possible. When today's new, fringe platform becomes the next Facebook in two years, you'll be thankful you reserved your firm's name when you did.

That doesn't mean you need to be active across a hundred different channels. Take a similar approach to social media as you do with your content: try out the platforms your audience is most likely to care about, and refine the process as you go along.

Thanks to software platforms like Rannko (www.rannko.com/funeralservice), interacting across all of your social networks has never been easier; create a dynamic scheduling queue and publish your posts to see what drives the most interest. Get a higher view of timeline and brand assets all with the push of a button.

Now's the Time to Get Started

The fact that a brand's online reputation is never fully controllable is what makes it so valuable and trustworthy. It's why 97 percent of business owners agree online reputation is a top priority today.

Merely because some things remain out of our control does not mean everything is uncontrollable. Funeral homes that use the tools at their disposal are the ones who will find their online reputation most accurately reflects the narrative they prefer. And helps build a funeral home's caseloads over time.

The internet's a more difficult and darker place than most of us realize; a person wanting to do any kind of damage online will find very few obstacles. But as they say, "prevention is better than cure"; therefore, a proactive online reputation management strategy can be the cushion to minimize damage in case of future crisis. And an online reputation tool like Rannko (www.rannko.com/funeralservice) is a great starting point to start controlling the way you appear online.

Joe Weigel is the owner of Weigel Strategic Marketing, a communications firm focused on the funeral profession that delivers expertise across three marketing disciplines: public relations, branding and communications. Visit his website at weigelstrategicmarketing.webs.com. He also can be reached at weigelstrategicmarketing@gmail.com.

About Rannko: Rannko is the #1 online digital platform for reputation management, social media management, listings management, and web analysis. With Rannko, you can automate your digital marketing efforts to save you time and optimize your digital footprint simultaneously. Rannko was designed with local businesses like funeral homes and law firms in

mind. Rannko enables funeral professionals to build, consolidate, unify and empower their funeral home in a way that will attract families, increase the funeral home staff's productivity and operate a successful online presence. Rannko can be contacted at 888-909-9939 or by email info@rannko.com.



About Weigel Strategic Marketing: Weigel Strategic Marketing is a full-service marketing firm that is focused on helping businesses in funeral service succeed. From funeral service suppliers to cemeteries and funeral homes, Weigel Strategic Marketing operates as a marketing and communications resource that

specializes in delivering expertise and results across three interrelated marketing disciplines: strategy, branding and communications to help death care companies with their business challenges. To learn more, visit weigelstrategicmarketing.webs.com or email the company at weigelstrategicmarketing@gmail.com.

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Weigel Strategic Marketing is a marketing firm providing strategic communication assistance and branding expertise to a diverse portfolio of funeral service clients.

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Publishing Funeral Prices Online Will Lead to a Race to the Bottom! Right?

By Ed Michael Reggie

It would be difficult to argue that anything has changed business marketing more than the meteoric growth of the internet and third-party comparison websites. The marketing of funerals, including cremation services, is no exception. While some funeral homes may think their traditional businesses don't need to be up-to-date on internet practices, the opposite is true. The founding of our company, Funeralocity, was based on this premise, and the numbers do not lie.

The scope of the funeral business is major:

- 500,000 to 600,000 people will have organized prearranged funerals.
- About 95 percent of these people will have funded their prearrangements with a funeral home.
- Of those arranging a cremation about 210,000 will choose cremation for the first time in their family's history.
- Of the over 1.23 million that will be buried, about 300,000 will limit the use of a funeral home to visitation just before the service.

The business model of funeral home operations is changing in all dynamics, including marketing and revenue.

A New Demographic Group

The demographic labels – millennials, GenX'ers and baby boomers – are familiar. Boomers are a group of 76.4 million people born between 1946 and 1965, and Gen X consists of 44 million people born between 1965 and the late 1970s. Today, they are taking care of the funerals of their parents. The arrangements are more complicated than in the past because many also belong to a group called “movers”.

Movers consist of more people than Gen X and boomers combined! Movers are those people who have relocated from the place of their birth and are today residing in a community in another state. A funeral business in their new home base might be 100 years old, but to a mover, that has no meaning because they haven't grown up in the community. Their friends may also be movers, so neither can serve as a center of influence for the other when they need a funeral home.

Movers span the age spectrum. People become movers for jobs or opportunities while others relocate when they retire. Therefore, they may die far outside of the service area they know best.

To market effectively to movers, funeral directors need to do many things that are not historically standard operating procedure. A poll was commissioned by the Harris Poll subsidiary of A.C. Nielson Ratings to learn what consumers think about funeral homes and how they wish to make their choices in the future. This research revealed three compelling issues with consumers:

88 percent say the funeral industry should do a better job of making its services and prices transparent and easy to find.

How long have funeral directors heard this? The many options offered by a funeral home or cremation provider can be difficult to sort, especially during a family's time of vulnerability. The public wants funeral directors to make prices transparent, so customers can easily compare the facts and make an informed choice. Funeral home owners and managers report that the number one reason they don't put their prices on their website is that they don't want competitors to have them. When asked, “Do you have your competitor's prices?” the reply is always “Yes.” The excuse clearly has outlived its usefulness.

79 percent of Americans would like to be able to shop for and compare funeral home services, reviews and pricing online.

Contrary to popular belief, price is not the most important factor for families when planning on Funeralocity. They make decisions based upon five important factors:

1. Photos and videos.
2. Service descriptions and benefits.
3. Ratings from independent sources.
4. Reviews and testimonials from other consumers.
5. Price.

The misconception is that the “internet is about price.” It isn’t. When you are looking for a restaurant, you might go to Yelp to get the reviews and comments and then book the reservation on Open Table. Restaurants put their prices online. These sites are not driving the price of a steak down. They are driving consumers to the restaurants they want to patronize, the ones that can accommodate them on a certain date and time they desire.

Think about how people shop for and buy automobiles. Sites like Carvana and TrueCar now play an important role in the process and their pricing is transparent. In short, consumers today have an expectation that they will be able to see the prices as they make their decisions.

73 percent say that being able to compare services, reviews and prices for funeral homes on a third-party website would influence their decision on which one to use.

The key point here is the third-party comparison website. It doesn’t mean that your own website is not necessary. It is. But movers want to see a comparison. Studies have shown that the same type of consumers who book a hotel without the help of a travel agent go onto third-party comparative websites. They don’t want to go from website to website to view their alternatives. They want to see all their choices in one place, to look at pictures (both by guests and the establishment), reviews and comments, descriptions by the owner of the property, and price. They are looking to understand the total value of each alternative, not just the cost.

The basic concept of consumers using the internet is to make it easier to shop.

- 86 percent of people 50 to 64 years of age routinely research products online before they buy.
- 80 percent of all people 45 and over regularly use some form of third-party comparison sites.
- 92 percent of all homebuyers use the internet to search for a home.
- 55 percent live in households with incomes above \$75,000 (40 percent are in households earning \$100,000 and above).

We have found that people who shop online for funeral services are not getting the information and transparency they want.

Results from One Year in Atlanta

Funeralocity went from a theoretical concept to a real living company in May 2017. Atlanta was selected as the beta site because it has a population that is almost 60 percent movers. The Funeralocity process is simple. Funeralocity researches the market and aggregates the comparative information. Funeral homes apply to become Excellence Providers. Funeralocity vets them to make sure they qualify and then monitors their referrals and comments to ensure compliance. Out of 200 funeral homes, about 40 have qualified as Excellence Members.

In the rollout in Atlanta, Funeralocity found some key factors that have helped Excellence Providers secure incremental referrals:

- Excellence Providers received almost 42 percent more referrals than non-excellence members.
- Families were willing to spend up to \$16,000 with a funeral home they never used before based upon their online shopping experience.
- More than 50 percent of all our consumers were looking for a relationship with a funeral home for a prearrangement.
- Almost 72 percent of all consumers shopped for a funeral home via our site on their smartphone, about 11 percent on a tablet and about 17 percent on a desktop.

In Funeralocity’s first year in Atlanta, many consumers were searching for a funeral home or cremation provider via our website from hospitals and nursing homes. During our first year in Atlanta, these statistics emerged:

- 75 percent of Funeralocity users are 45 and over, with the bulk over 65.
- 56 percent are female.
- Excellence Providers cover the gamut of demographics, price ranges and areas of the city.
- Consumers have shopped through Funeralocity in numbers beyond our expectations.

The internet is an unstoppable force. It is a vital supplement to a website. Like hotel guests, the families you serve don’t want to go from one website to another, painstakingly comparing different prices. Comparison sites motivate spending – they don’t depress it. They make it easy for consumers to make decisions with confidence by eliminating the unknowns. •

What families are saying



Greta G
San Francisco CA



During a difficult time, it was so helpful to have so many options at my fingertips.



Randy F.
Louisiana



A very important aid to ease the burden at this time of family stress.



Greg F.



I liked being able to compare the quality and costs of vetted funeral homes, allowing me to narrow down the choices before talking directly to a funeral home.



L Thorsen



A really wonderful vehicle for "planning ahead." No surprises! Thanks.

How it works

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2 Compare

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3 Connect and Save

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Your Assurance of Quality and Savings

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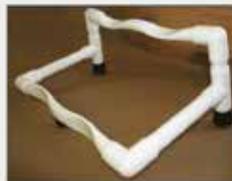
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The Foresight Companies Announces Dynamic New Collaboration with Roosevelt Investments

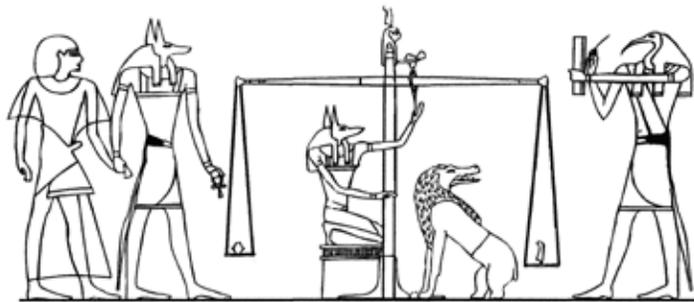


Two respected firms are now aligned to serve death care operators and their businesses.

Phoenix, AZ, March 18, 2019: Daniel Isard, Managing Partner of The Foresight Companies, and Adam Sheer, Co-Chief Executive Officer of The Roosevelt Investment Group, Inc. (Roosevelt Investments), announced today they have entered into an agreement to provide support to each other's clients and to jointly market to the funeral and cemetery professions. "Our company has continued to evolve for over the past four decades. We continually strive to find innovative services that our clients need. We identified that we needed a company to refer our clients to that reflects our values in how we treat our clients and provides solutions to meet their additional needs, Isard stated. "Doug Gober and Adam Sheer have had a great

relationship for many years. Almost 20 years ago I spoke with Adam as he expressed his desire to have a greater presence in the funeral and cemetery worlds. After months of due diligence on both sides, we have concluded that Roosevelt Investments is the company we need to align with," Dan added.

"I am thrilled that Roosevelt Investments will be collaborating with The Foresight Companies to provide additional value added services for our clients," said Adam Sheer. "Many wealth managers claim to provide comprehensive planning, but only advise clients on their liquid wealth which, in the case of a funeral home owner or cemeterian, pales in comparison to the true value of their business. Through our new collaboration, our ability to refer clients to The Foresight Companies for M&A services, valuations, accounting and human resource consulting will allow us to offer truly comprehensive planning. Additionally, we are honored to work with, and learn from, two industry icons and thought leaders, Dan Isard and Doug Gober and the entire Foresight team."



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The Venerable Prayer Cards

Are You Using Them Effectively as a Memorialization Item?

When you think about what element of today's funerals have been used as a memorialization item for centuries, what comes to mind? I certainly hope thanks to the headline of this article, prayer cards were your answer. These little cards have quite a history. Funeral prayer cards are also known as memorial, remembrance, mass or mourning cards. It is believed that their use may have begun in the 18th Century, initially by the Catholic Church. It is thought that Catholics began the practice of regularly issuing holy cards. Eventually a subset of the holy cards was used specifically for funerals. In these early times, they were used to inform friends and relatives about the upcoming funeral services.

Prayer cards honored various saints or biblical episodes. These cards were generic and provided at funerals; they did not feature information relating to the person who had died. As printing became more accessible and customization more affordable, the cards were adopted for use as a memorial tribute. Plain prayer cards that are unrelated to a funeral or memorial can still be found today. They are sold in church gift shops and specialized religious stores.

The imagery on the cards also has changed. The earliest cards showcased images of Jesus Christ suffering on the cross, or else tending to his dying stepfather, Saint Joseph. Later cards show Christ's glorious resurrection, or the Christ child instructing the masses. Just as the verb "dying" has been euphemized into "passing," so did holy cards begin to replace death's meaner aspects with images of heavenly triumph. The popularity of holy cards began to wane with the Second Vatican Council of 1962–1965. In the decades since, holy cards have been all but relegated to a funeral item and marketed as prayer cards.

That's enough about the past. What about the present? What can be done to ensure that more than just Catholic families see prayer cards as a special keepsake that they can keep in a purse or wallet, or tucked away in your Bible?

While many of the following suggestions may already be in use at your funeral home, here are nine things

you can do to ensure that prayer cards are seen as an important part of a funeral service.

Change the name – As a start, stop calling them prayer cards, holy cards or funeral cards. Rather, call them memorial cards. That way, they can represent cards that feature either religious or secular themes and not possible be a turn off for some families.

Not everyone is religious – Be sure to stock more than just religious motifs for the cards. Offer designs that feature patriotic or other special interest themes, such as hobbies. This allows you to get creative with the card's backside with something other than a prayer.

Speaking of the backside – Rather than printing a prayer on the back with the other information, consider having the family place one of Mom's special recipes or Dad's favorite sayings on a secular card. For a patriotic card – why not suggest printing the Pledge of Allegiance for the back?

Make them a part of the service – Traditionally, the cards are placed next to the register book and/or the donation table. For a change, why not have the grandchildren involved in the service by having them hand out the cards?

Embracing faith as death approaches – Remember, many people turn to their faith in their last moments. When people get sick, they turn to their practicing faith and pray. Let them continue that faithful journey by offering them cards that feature images from their homeland. For example, Irish people are devoted to Saint Patrick, Cubans to The Our Lady of Charity, Mexicans to Our Lady of Guadalupe and Italians to St. Francis of Assisi.

There's diversity in faith – Understand that all Hispanic families are not the same when it comes to their Catholic faith and heritage. Be sure to offer cards for different cultures, like families originally from Dominican Republic, Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile and more. Catholic families from these countries have a following for their patron

saint; they feel warmth and touched by having those images present in a funeral service.

Put the cards to use after the funeral – If there are cards remaining after the service, remember to suggest that families include one in the acknowledgement cards, especially to friends who couldn't physically make the service.

Take them to the cemetery – If the loved one's favorite bible verse, psalm or prayer is featured on the back of the card, why not pass out the cards and have those gathered at the committal service at the cemetery recite the words together?

Feature them in every package you offer – In addition to offering memorial cards as a boxed set with register book and acknowledgement cards, be sure to include them as a component of every burial and cremation package that you offer.

When you are looking for a partner to supply your memorial cards, it is best to find a company with experience working with funeral cards. They will understand the need for fast shipping and are sensitive to the fact that they are serving a family that is grieving the loss of a loved one. Here are a few other things to look for when choosing a prayer card vendor:

- A good variety of designs that includes religious, patriotic and secular themes
- A customer service telephone number where you can speak with an actual person
- A commitment to the profession and not a company where funeral service is an afterthought
- Quick turnaround on orders – that are received and shipped the same day.
- A good selection of preprinted full-color cards – that require only a black imprint on the back
- Access to a designer in case you need help with a special request

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Carlos George is the President of St. Francis Cromo, a family-owned business that sells and distributes high quality religious items (prayer cards, crosses and crucifixes, register books, rosaries, announcement cards, and candles) to funeral homes and cemeteries throughout North America. Many of the products they offer are from the Cromo NB Studios of Milan Italy, the foremost publisher of fine religious art in the world. He can be reached at cg@sfcromo.com or 877-331-3367.

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Working with the Media

Keys to Service = Symmetry of Balance

By: Todd Van Beck, Director of Continuing Education, John A. Gupton College, Nashville, TN

Balance then is our watchword. Not too much, not too little. That my friends is a mighty difficult assignment and an almost impossible task, but we can try.

I would like to humbly suggest that in locating our illusive balance in life is more magnified right now, today, in the present, in our current funeral world than it has ever before been in the long and impressive history of our great profession. Why? For the simple reason that things seem everywhere seem to be so unbalanced, so unstable, so confusing when a loved one dies and when death occurs.

I would like to make clear that I am not telling other funeral professionals how they should do things or not do things; I am not that insightful. This work is devoted to exploring the nuances, the tiny little aspects in the big picture overall of the funeral experience and the funeral interview, it is not a “How to Guide” that you can purchase for \$19.95 on Amazon or the Home Shopping Network, and if you buy two, the second one is free, and I will toss in a free lip brush and trocar tip with your order if you call in the next 10 minutes.

Most all funeral professionals, I have concluded, are well versed in the techniques of the funeral interview and implementing and overseeing funeral rituals in their own respective communities. Clearly the public likes funeral directors. However is it not a good idea to just once in a while, every now and then, take time to review and think about what we are doing is that not always a good idea? Anyway that seems a good idea to me. Let us proceed.

As obvious as this thought might be on the surface I would suggest that one aspect of bringing more balance in our professional work is in the important initial stage of a funeral ceremony or a funeral interview. At the beginning. I would like to suggest, that while you

and I might well know why the clients are sitting there, in these turbulent days this might not always be the case. Because of this I would suggest that to balance out the initial phase of the entire funeral experience the matter about which the funeral professional and client family are meeting should be stated. This seems so obvious, but I have discovered that some family clients are so confused, so grieved, and so distracted that they don't know precisely why they are with us, nor do they know what they want, or what to expect, or what to do, and as we will see this confusion can only exacerbate itself because in this state of chaos many clients end up changing their minds, then changing them again – which represents no balance at all. We are the educated professionals that need to show empathy with each bereaved client, in other words, how would we feel if we had just lost our child or spouse yesterday? I know this sentiment has been expressed this same way a thousand times, but I believe it is a sentiment that is worth repeating, and repeating, and repeating, for one solid reason: What would the funeral service profession be without sentiment?

Because of this contemporary reality in our profession funeral professionals don't have to talk a great deal, but they do have to listen and lead a great deal. Balance is easily composed of what I call “Listening Leadership.” Listening and leadership go hand in hand and this is not an easy assignment.

Let us return to our talkative kind hearted funeral professional. His family surveys were needlessly negative because he was talking so much he couldn't lead. He literally ran out of time, and hence was unable to listen intently to the client's inner most wishes and directions. He flopped at offering his valued clients all the options and alternatives available because he spent an hour on vital statistics alone. Vital statistics are critically important, but are they the CENTRAL CORE

of the funeral ceremony and interview experience?

The challenge of balancing out Listening Leadership in helping others is that it seems a valid observation in our complicated culture to say that many people don't like to be led and resent the notion of being led. In other words many contemporary people are very attracted to the idea of "being the master of their own destiny" "doing my own thing" "I don't need any advice." This contemporary attitude is a far distance to what bereaved families used to be like, when they basically followed the funeral professional's guidance and leadership with great devotion. Because of this current situation the impact and important component of listening while leading is of the utmost importance in our quest for balance in being of service to others.

My personal experiences have taught me through the school of hard knocks that while these nice people who are "independent thinkers" who resist and resent that notion of being led, these very same people can easily put the funeral director in a very vulnerable and awkward position. The vulnerable, awkward, impossible position being of course that while they might resent the notion of our leading them, helping them, suggesting to them or resent the very idea of the representative imagined authority of a professional individual, just let something happen in their experience with us that because they really don't know what they are doing ends up causing them embarrassing blunders because their inability to listen to us, and we all know who these "independent thinkers" these good people who "don't want our help" or "we will take care of most of this on our own" will quickly blame. They blame us!

So, my friends in funeral service, if we (you and I) don't step up to the plate and balance this confusion out by offering gentle guidance, suggestions, and working in the service vineyard by planting a myriad of creative suggestions in their brains that they may not have ever considered before, to nurture and germinate a new funeral service idea, the consequences can well turn out unpleasant for you and I in the blink of an eye.

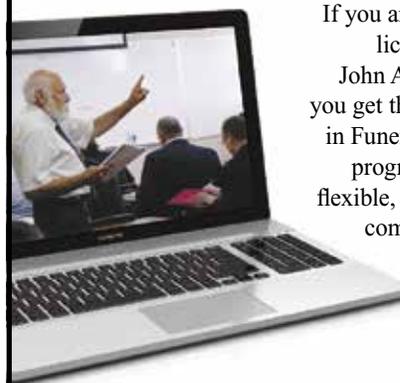
This then my friends is indeed a sticky wicket which confronts our profession in the 21st Century. Here then is the present day conundrum that confronts funeral professionals; bereaved clients don't want direction, but then they do want direction. Bereaved clients don't

want advice, but then they do want advice. Bereaved clients don't like suggestions, but then they want suggestions. Does this situation strike any of the readers as being out of balance? We expect the bereaved family to be out of balance, but what if the funeral profession is out of balance? What will happen? Well just possibly a negative family satisfaction survey.

In order to further analyze inner balance it might be helpful to put the overall funeral experience, both the ceremony and interview into a system of phases. It works like this:

The initial phase in the funeral interview starts immediately after the death. This phase can cover a myriad of issues but generally centers around the decisions that the client family needs to address concerning the death of another human being, the practical decisions concerning the legal disposition of a decedent, and ceremonial creativity. Likewise in the overall, big-picture funeral ceremony the initial phase centers on where people need to be, at what time, who is doing what, how long will this last and again many other possible activities.

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These two beginning or initial phases in both the actual funeral ceremony and funeral interview calls out for a concentrated balance from the funeral professionals perspective in order to bring calm and trust from people who may well feel they know that they know, but in reality they don't know that they don't even know what to do. This distinct happening is seen exhibited in people who have attended scores of funerals for "other" people, and possibly attended scores of ceremonies in your location. It is now clear that in this all important initial phase of a funeral ceremony and/or a funeral interview balance is created more by what the funeral professional does, how they led, how they listen, than what they say.

In today's current culture of fast lane living, keeping up with the Jones's I have found to my utter fascination that the funeral interview and funeral ceremony may not even deal with the "traditional" matters of practical information taking, with the funeral professional asking primarily closed questions, and being most preoccupied with instructional procedural aspects that were given by the client family. While taking and following family instructions is still a valid and important segment of the funeral ceremony and interview, certainly it is not overstated that this "balance" in the funeral professional's interactions with the contemporary client has most definitely been tilted.

Historically these "procedural" matters were so high on the agenda of the tasks of most funeral professionals, in fact so prevalent were asking for and receiving instructions from family clients I concluded many years ago that funeral directors were in reality more like high functioning organizational specialists instead of mere order takers – which I still believe to be valid today.

However, and this is a big however, in today's world of the modern customer seems more skeptical, more cynical, and more distrusting. Because of this the standard historic instruction receiving and acting upon is being replaced by a new environment which now includes from the consumers point of reference (or the lack thereof) a myriad of other unknown and unexpected points that can easily arise and hence needs to be confronted by the funeral professional in both the funeral ceremony and interview.

CASE STUDY: VATICAN TWO

As many of my readers already know the first funeral home I worked at, the place which gave me my start was the Heafey & Heafey Mortuaries in Omaha, Nebraska.

At this particular time in history Heafey & Heafey was primarily built on a clientele that was associated with the Roman Catholic Church. It is not that Heafey's didn't do Protestant funerals, it was just that we didn't do many of them. I well remember the first funeral masses I assisted on seemed to me set in stone. The rituals were set, solid and secure. It seemed also that they were basically generally speaking the same in every Catholic Church in Omaha.

One of my jobs on funerals was to make sure that the three candles on each side of the casket, up by the chancel rail, six total were in place right after the casket was placed, and the bereaved family had been seated by Mr. Heafey. I really enjoyed that responsibility, and I took that responsibility very seriously. Also I was good at it. Of course looking back it wasn't that difficult of a job to do!

I had never heard of Vatican Two. Didn't know what it was, where it was, or who was doing it, but in short order there was unbalance in my life as a funeral assistant.

One sunny Omaha morning we pulled the procession up in front of a Catholic Church in North Omaha, everything was running smoothly, until I walked up to the front of the sanctuary and low and behold THERE WERE NO CANDLES!

I froze, looked at Mr. Heafey, and he gave me "the look" which always nonverbally communicated the message "you do nothing, and get out of here." I received that look from him hundreds of times.

Naturally most of the readers will immediately recognize that the changes, which certainly created a sense of being unbalanced, in working a Roman Catholic funeral had been put into place.

It is risky to fiddle with the ancient, and historic traditions of people. However when they get fiddled with they never ever go back to where they were. Let's keep that in mind as we continue.

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What happened to me on that funeral in North Omaha created highly a uncomfortable situation in the form of surprises. Then there were more surprises which created an atmosphere that simply cried out for inner balance concerning my performance on a funeral in a Catholic Church in North Omaha, and hence in my interactions with people

This case study happened almost half a century ago, and I now can make a testimony that the surprise I encountered in North Omaha, the unbalanced tense feeling it created in me has actually never stopped happening, and from my vantage point given the complications of living life in the 21st century I don't see the surprises in our beloved profession stopping anytime soon, and for this premier reason our serious consideration of inner balance I want to suggest is critically important!

There was a time, not long ago when the funeral interview and ceremony was set, solid and secure – both experiences seemed basically to be written in stone. However today in this nonstop world made up of hectic times of rapid fire changes what seemed in the past as being so central to a client family and then hence so central to us can, and routinely does diminish or vanish altogether in a New York second in importance. Only to be quickly and randomly replaced by “people” with other ideas, wishes, instructions, and creative imaginations which are today of importance to our client family and which just a years ago were not important in the least.

Exploring and identifying the inner balance of the modern funeral professional has as a great part of that task the mammoth assignment of keeping up with what is going on in funeral service, not just in the USA, but globally.

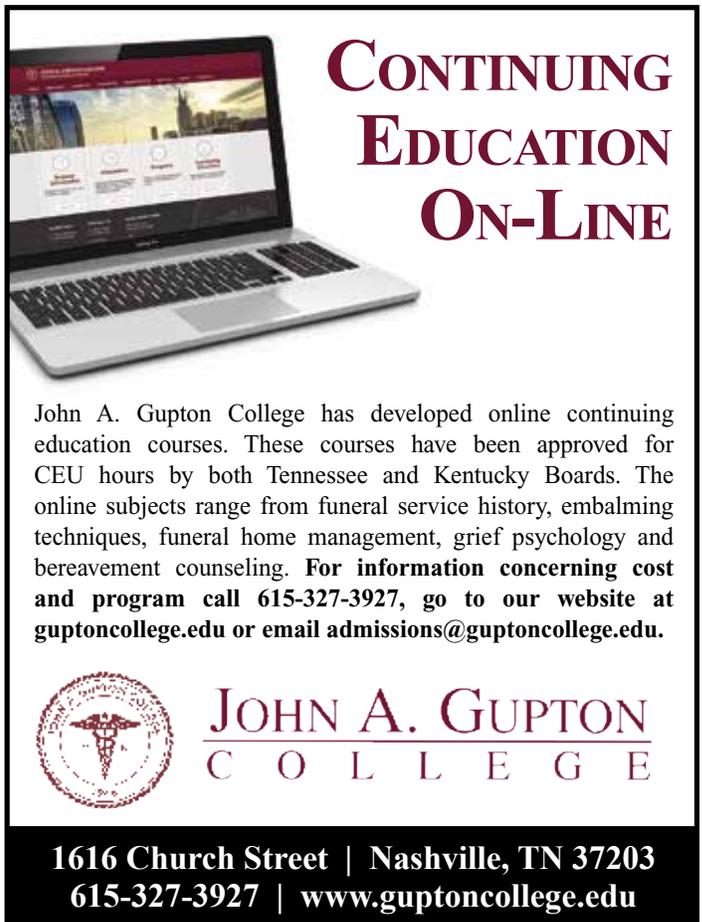
I suspect that many contemporary funeral professionals, my friends and associates do what I do many times by walking away from a funeral ceremony or interview experience, or both just scratching our heads and silently and privately asking this haunting question “where in the world did they get that idea from?” In other words in these turbulent times in the funeral world anything can happen. I hope that I have made my case concerning the importance of exploring inner balance.

To conclude this portion of the series “Keys to Service” I would like to offer some common sense ideas concerning how to raise the bar concerning our quest for inner balance. I am not a psychologist, or a very insightful human being, but as a true lover of this great profession I hope the reader will find these thoughts helpful. I know I sound like a parrot many times but out of pure conviction is not this worthy ideal the ethical goal behind all funeral experiences and interviews – funeral professionals following the noble goal of simply being helpful to another human being?

Sometimes we might have made something that is in reality very simple very complex, because the high nobility of being helpful to another human being is most often just as simple as you and I just getting a box of Kleenex, sitting down and listening to a story of loss and grief.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

Part III will conclude the article, as we learn to understand the “Symmetry of Balance”



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