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Bob Heidlage, Global Recruiters of Batesville
Employee Retention Strategies for Your Company
in 2023 by Emeritus Workforce Development
The Role Marketing Can Play In Your Human
Resources Strategy by Joe Weigel
The Evolution of Obituaries and What That Means
for Your Website by Carol Heffernan
Fascinating Chapters in Funeral History You Didn't
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A Hiring Strategy That Might Work for You

by Bob Heidlage, Global Recruiters of Batesville

In every part of the country, small and medium-sized business owners are wondering how they are going to find enough people to survive and thrive. Have you thought about how you will continue to offer outstanding customer service to families with talent so hard to find? Perhaps you have thought about how better to find talented individuals for key roles, and hopefully you have been successful in implementing those strategies.

Good help is hard to find. Of particular concern to those of us who are focused on helping firms with their staffing needs, we are losing a lot of new professionals entering funeral service way too quickly. At the same time, many of our most experienced staff members are retiring as part of the baby boom generation. A recent podcast episode discussed our profession losing nearly 50% of mortuary school graduates within 5 years. I started thinking about what that means for the profession long-term. And how owners can deal with this double whammy... a lot of retirements and not enough new people sticking around to replace them. All of this at a time when consumers still demand high service levels and personal attention when a death occurs. So, what can we do to deal with staff issues that are likely here for at least the short-to-mid-term future?

Well, as you implement your business plan for 2023 and beyond, we would suggest considering a method that might positively impact both your short and long-term staffing needs. We are suggesting a new approach for some of you, and a re-focus for those of you who have used this approach--or parts of it--in the past. The idea is to think of yourself when it comes to finding, developing, and retaining talent, as both a patient farmer and an impatient trophy hunter. We think adopting strategies from the playbook of both roles, then combining them into one integrated plan, is a potential winner for most medium to larger firms.

Look around at other businesses in your local community, and talk to your friends who lead businesses and

you will likely find that they face similar challenges. Many of their concerns about finding and retaining talent are very similar to yours. It is an almost universal truth these days that finding high-quality, plentiful numbers of people with the right education, skills, and experience is difficult. And doing so while maintaining a budget seems to be an almost impossible task.

Remember too that businesses outside our profession face similar issues regarding licensing, certifications, and testing challenges. Accounting and engineering firms, pharmacies, and other healthcare businesses all face similar levels of educational and practical requirements as funeral service. And the military, local police & firefighters, and nurses, just to name a few, deal with difficult scheduling, on-call requirements, and less-than-ideal circumstances for families they interact with routinely in the line of duty!

So, as we think about the analogy of the farmer, what does that mean? First, think about what farmers must do to be successful. A farmer must prepare the soil, plant seeds, provide proper care and feeding, and at exactly the right time, harvest the crop that has matured. Skip one of these steps and the farmer risks disaster. Sometimes, even if all of the steps are properly executed, tough weather or other factors beyond the control of the farmer result in hard times. Farming is a tough business. And so is finding good help!

As we bring it back to funeral service specifically, sometimes you do everything right with your team, provide a great work environment, hire the right people, and provide terrific training and development, and then something happens and you find yourself looking for new people to adequately staff the business. Often factors beyond your control cause valued staff members to leave... family issues, death, marriage, divorce, and a host of other factors cause your employees to reconsider their roles, work schedules, or where they want to reside.

When one of those events happens to your firm, it is a rare circumstance where a prospective new team member is waiting in the wings, ready and willing to step in at a moment's notice. Best to start thinking about staffing as a process, rather than as an event. That way it can always be a part of your planning, and you should never again find yourself in an "all-hands-on-deck" hiring emergency. Emergency hiring can lead to expensive mistakes, and we want to avoid those hiccups at all times.

When we use the term "farming", we are referring to an approach of finding talented people whom you might "grow" into future employees. Farming in your local trade area offers great benefits and allows you to identify & train great local talent. Those great people can grow into terrific licensed staff members, providing high-level, loyal service to local families for many years.

Farming provides a way to get started now in the hopes of having ready-to-go talent down the road, like a farmer preparing the ground in Spring in hopes of a bumper crop in late Fall. Trophy hunting, on the other hand,

can help you when business needs dictate a shorter timeframe for you to add staff. Both make sense under the right circumstances and combined they provide a reasonable, cost-effective way to plan for the future and deliver great results.

For instance, most of the mortuary students we speak with each year do not come from funeral home families. Someone or something caused them to consider a funeral service career. In your community, who better than the owner and staff to tout the benefits of working in our noble profession? High school students or community college students who are interested in medical or service careers but are not sure how that would take shape might be ideal candidates. Engage them, maybe invite them to a lunch and learn. Ask about their future plans, and be prepared to give them reasons to consider a funeral service career with your firm as part of their future.

Ask friends and colleagues or talk to local school leaders about whom they would recommend as solid citizens with a good heart and solid work ethic. After an interview, if desired, offering a part-time job and a path



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to more responsibility can make it happen. My youngest daughter is thinking this through right now and recently went to a care center to learn more about what a clinical care employee does. She was impressed and thinks she will continue down the path toward a possible funeral service career. Planting seed works, and we know many of you do this already. It may not sprout every time, but why not plant the seeds and see what positive results might result from the effort?

The concept of starting close to home, inside-out recruiting if you prefer, also helps to reduce many of the hidden costs of hiring. Line items in your budget like relocation or housing assistance are minimized. One additional employer benefit often overlooked is that finding local talent increases the odds of landing a great cultural fit. Do you think the local football or basketball star smiling back at a family while they open the door at your facility wouldn't create a buzz with the families you serve? Finding a great fit might be as easy as asking residents already in your community to consider a career in funeral service at your firm. And if you start now, you will be able to reap the rewards and can enjoy the new staff members making a positive impact in your market. The old saying about the best way to enjoy shade under an oak tree today is to plant an acorn 100 years ago comes to mind. Don't wait to start, and you won't have to wait as long to see the benefits!

Job Fairs, trade seminars, and scholarship programs are low-cost, high-visibility forums you can benefit from. And if you are not posting on your website that you are seeking employees with a possibility of a career position... why not? Think about how else you let the community know that you are an attractive place to work, a business that employs great people doing special work. Every community, no matter how small, has people who are looking to serve others, and what better way to recruit locally? Farming really does work!

Have you considered implementing a work-study program that allows a young adult or second-career aspiring funeral director or arranger to learn the business from the ground floor up? And with the growth of online mortuary school programs recently, have you considered hiring a mortuary student to do part-time jobs that can help you start that loyalty-building early while they learn what they need to pass the National Board exams and jump-start their funeral service career? Part-time workers often lead to apprenticeships

and ultimately full-time Funeral Director positions. This is farming 101, friends, and it works!

The second approach we'd ask you to consider is sometimes referred to as trophy hunting. It is what many owners think of when they consider a "hiring event" when they need to fill a role. It is probably more appropriate when you need specific skills and/or experience that is hard to find locally. And it provides an optimal path forward when you need to add talent more quickly than farming allows.

Trophy hunting allows you to go out into the market, perhaps cast a wider net than just in your local area, and hire a more fully-developed professional who has already developed those critical skills and experience you might be looking for at that time. You will likely have to pay more for that additional experience, but you also should be gaining an almost "plug-n-play" team member, someone ready to contribute almost immediately and can provide stability and leadership. Associates who come to you as more fully developed in their craft also bring new ideas, and ways of serving families and the community that you might not have considered. Trophy hunting can work, it can provide a lot of benefits to your team, and can make a big difference in your business!

There are many ways to identify talent using a trophy hunter approach, but in today's world, there are no guarantees that it will happen quickly. That is just a reality in this labor market, but you can get started by determining exactly what you need, and then preparing a job description that reflects that focus. Ask your local network for referrals for anyone matching that profile, and you can also place an advertisement on local, state, or national job boards. You can speak to a recruiter or others who might have access to a larger, wider network, including talented individuals from other areas who might be persuaded to relocate. As readers of Southern Funeral Director are well aware, one big advantage that owners in the southeast have is that the region's warm climate makes it very attractive, especially when looking for talent from November to March!

If you think of yourself as both Farmer AND Trophy Hunter, you can pick and choose the best approach for your firm that allows you to best meet your needs as circumstances change. It is not an "either/or" scenario,

but rather a “let’s try both” approach, choosing each as needed when appropriate for the changing business climate. And by utilizing both approaches, you can create great teams, lasting family loyalty, reduced turnover, lower costs, fewer headaches, and a growing firm legacy!

As President and Managing Partner of GRN Batesville, Bob brings more than 25 years of experience on the vendor/supplier side of the funeral & cemetery profession. Bob spent 8 years as the Senior Search Consultant for GRN of Cincinnati before purchasing the business in 2021. Before that, Bob spent 10+ years at

Batesville Casket Company and 8+ years as an award-winning sales and marketing consultant for 8 years with The Forethought Group. His breadth of experience working with Funeral Home clients gives Bob a unique understanding of the recruiting needs of the profession. He can be reached at 812.932.1290 or bheidlage@grnbatesville.com.



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14 Employee Retention Strategies for Your Company in 2023

By: Emeritus Workforce Development



As economists debate whether the U.S. is entering a recession, there's little doubt the world faces a good amount of economic uncertainty in 2023. Still, the American labor market remains highly competitive.

In October 2022, 4 million Americans quit their jobs, leaving 10.3 million jobs open. And with an unemployment rate of just 3.7% and only 6 million Americans currently looking for work, companies are still struggling to retain employees and attract new talent. In this unique market reality, companies cannot afford to gamble with their most valuable asset—their talent. Investing time and resources in proven employee retention strategies can help organizations ensure they enter 2023 strong.

Why Employee Retention Is Important

The impacts of employee turnover go far beyond temporary disruptions. For one, it's costly. Replacing an employee will cost anywhere from one-third to double their annual salary, according to the Work Institute. And the Houston Chronicle reports that, in addition to those costs, high turnover also impacts the staff that remains—and the business's customers.

As employees watch their colleagues leave, their workloads often increase. This can lead to a downward spiral of departures and stress. Frustrated, overworked employees are less likely to perform at their peak, meaning the company's product or service suffers, and customers have more negative interactions with the company. The ramifications are difficult to fully quantify.

Effective Employee Retention Strategies

So how can companies keep employees happy and prevent them from looking for new opportunities elsewhere? These 14 employee retention strategies at your company will put you on the right path.

1. Invest in Employees' Careers

According to LinkedIn, 94% of employees say they would stay with their company longer if it invested in their career development. In today's economy, employees understand that they need to keep their skills sharp to remain competitive and move up the ladder. Organizations can tap into their employees' desire for development by providing structures like mentorship programs and investing in additional education for their employees. Online professional education courses like those Emeritus offers help organizations reskill and upskill their employees, growing their talent base while increasing employee satisfaction.

2. Focus on Managers

Have you ever heard the old line “people don't quit jobs, they quit bosses”? Well, sometimes it's true. A 2022 survey by Goodhire found that 82% of Americans would potentially quit their job because of a poor manager. Fortunately, leadership skills can be trained. Companies should ensure performance reviews take management skills into account and offer training and mentorship to managers at all levels, especially if they are first-time supervisors.

3. Recognize Employees' Contributions

Everyone likes to feel valued, and that's especially true in the workplace. A 2022 Gallup/Workhuman survey found that when employees feel recognized for their work, they are 56% less likely to look for new opportunities. Even so, only 19% of employees feel that their organization has a strong culture of recognition.

Companies should encourage managers to recognize their direct reports' work. They can also go further to offer division- or company-wide recognition of staff who go the extra mile. During the pandemic, when

many employees have been forced to manage difficult circumstances amid ever-changing conditions, that recognition is especially important.



Sources: DDI Frontline Leader Project; Society for Human Resource Management

4. Reassess Compensation

In today's competitive marketplace, compensation is an essential piece of any company's retention strategy. No matter how valued an employee may feel, they are likely to look outside their current company if they feel inadequately compensated for their work. Companies that provide transparency around their pay and a clear, simple pay policy are more likely to win over employees, according to Monster.

Regular reassessment of industry compensation standards is important, as is a strategy to financially reward top performers. Spot bonuses and regular wage increases can go a long way toward making an employee feel valued.

5. Consider Your Benefits Package

Similarly, benefits are a major factor, with Forbes reporting that for nearly 6 in 10 employees, a company's benefits package is the most important non-salary factor they consider when assessing a job. Benefits like lower employee healthcare premiums or increased parental leave can mean the difference between staying in a role or looking for a new one.

Even before COVID-19, flexible workplaces were a major driver of retention. Companies can expect that their willingness to accommodate employees' needs and preferences will remain a major factor in employee loyalty.

6. Prioritize Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance isn't just a buzzword. While remote work and flexible scheduling policies are important factors in creating work-life balance, they are of little

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use if employees simply have more work to do than they can reasonably achieve, or if the company culture expects them to check their email well after business hours.

Managers should regularly check in with employees to ensure they don't have more on their plates than they can handle and to encourage open lines of communication about workloads. Moreover, organizations can reduce the crunch by cutting back on unnecessary meetings and administrative duties that drain time without adding significant value. Ultimately, companies should weigh the cost of adding staff against the cost of increased turnover if workloads become unsustainable.

7. Create Pathways for Growth

The world of work is changing fast, and employees know they need to keep moving or risk falling behind. Yet many worry that they lack opportunities for promotion and upward mobility within their current companies. As a result, they look outside the organization for their next step. According to McKinsey & Company, lack of opportunities for career development and advancement was the top reason employees left jobs between April 2021 and April 2022.

“The world of work is changing fast, and employees know they need to keep moving or risk falling behind.” Dedicated career pathing can help increase employee engagement and reassure employees that their future with the organization is bright. Career pathing is a process through which employees and their managers work together to identify goals and create a learning and growth action plan to achieve them.

8. Improve Organizational Culture

While organizational culture may seem subjective, its impacts on retention can't be denied. In fact, company culture is one of the key drivers of workplace satisfaction. While the building blocks of a strong culture vary somewhat from one workplace to the next, strong corporate cultures share key traits such as:

- having and carrying out clearly articulated values
- valuing and seeking out employees' voices
- having strong commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- executing supportive leadership

9. Prioritize Hybrid and Remote Options

In the “new normal,” remote and hybrid working is increasingly seen as the norm. In fact, a 2022 ADP survey found that 64% of Americans would consider looking for a new job if required to return to the office full-time.

While some roles truly cannot be performed remotely, employers should work to create remote and hybrid options whenever possible. Options like requiring core “in-office days” or recurring in-office meetings can provide the collaborative benefits of a shared workplace without requiring an overly rigid approach.

10. Focus on Flexibility

In addition to remote options, employees increasingly prioritize flexibility in their schedules as one of their employee retention strategies. Employees who can flex their hours to accommodate family caregiving, medical needs, or even a simple run to the bank in the middle of the day are likely to feel more in control of their workday and more able to attend to their needs. This is true even if the total number of hours worked remains the same.

Options like a compressed workweek or allowing employees to get their work done on their own schedule (outside of necessary collaboration) can drastically increase satisfaction without impacting output.

11. Give Employees the Tools for Success

Dealing with IT issues or an uncomfortable workspace is never good for morale. And for employees already feeling overwhelmed with work, taking time out to deal with a computer that won't work or dated software can be a major cause of frustration. Employers should work with employees to ensure they have the equipment and productivity tools they need to be as productive as possible. It's especially important to ensure that remote employees also have the tools they need to work effectively.

12. Support Employee Wellbeing

Between a rising cost of living, complex personal lives, and political and economic uncertainties, it's no wonder that nearly half of employees report feeling burned out, with little improvement since the peak of the pandemic. While ensuring employees have appropriate workloads, clear lines of communication with management, and a positive corporate culture are the

most important tools for fighting burnout, employers can also consider taking additional measures to support their employees' physical and mental health. Perks like wellness reimbursements for gym memberships or massages, insurance coverage for therapy and mental health treatment, and even access to digital wellness or meditation platforms can all help employees feel more restored.

13. Focus on Team Building

With less work taking place in person, it's especially important to intentionally facilitate connections between employees. Their sense of community and belonging at work is a major factor in their satisfaction and loyalty. Plus, effective teams are better at collaborating and communicating.

In many cases, in-person, casual conversation may be a thing of the past. But digital communications tools like Slack that allow channels for different purposes can help foster casual conversations. Additionally, cross-functional projects or assignments can help employees in different parts of the organization get to know one another.

14. Help Employees Find Purpose in their Work

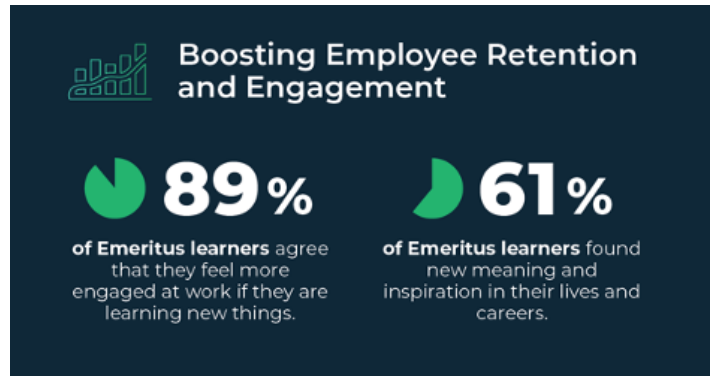
We all want to make a difference to those around us—and many employees expect to do so in their jobs as well as their personal lives. According to McKinsey & Company, employees who feel that their personal purpose aligns with that of their organization are more engaged and more loyal to their employers.

Company leadership can help employees engage with their organization's purpose by communicating the company's impact on the world and helping employees connect with it. For example, holding town hall sessions or small group discussions about how to improve customer experience—and acting on employees' ideas—can help employees feel they are directly impacting the lives of others.

Implementing Employee Retention Strategies

In today's tight labor market, the importance of employee retention strategies can't be overstated. Since a few employees leaving the organization can quickly lead to lost morale and unmanageable workloads, it's essential to be proactive by implementing effective employee retention strategies such as compensation reviews, recognition programs, and opportunities for upskilling and reskilling.

In fact, in the 2022 Emeritus Global Career Impact Survey of more than 3,900 past learners, 89% of respondents said they feel more engaged in the workplace if they are learning new skills. Plus, more than three-fifths said they found new meaning in their career and lives after finishing an Emeritus program.



Source: 2022 Emeritus Global Career Impact Survey

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The Role Marketing Can Play In Your Human Resources Strategy

By: Joe Weigel

To be successful, every funeral home must do a great job of marketing to families. Your families, your “external” customers, are the lifeblood of a funeral home; but what about “internal” customers? What marketing efforts are you undertaking to ensure you can attract and retain good employees? Though perhaps not an obvious pairing, a strong partnership between your marketing tactics and your firm’s staffing efforts can obtain substantial results for funeral homes

Whether it’s connecting with families or trying to hire the best arranger, it’s crucial to stand out and differentiate your firm in a competitive marketplace. In each case, success relies on building strong brand awareness, delivering a top-notch “customer” experience, and effectively communicating a company’s values. The only difference is the audience. While marketing targets current and prospective families, in human resources (HR), the “targets” are current and prospective employees.

When you think about it, marketing and human resources rely on some of the very same tactics. Positive press coverage, informative news releases, engaging social media posts, dynamic websites, prominent awards, and outreach as well as similar initiatives all serve a dual function for HR and marketing – attracting talent just as they attract new families. These efforts become even more essential when operating in a tight labor market. Anything that builds a firm’s prestige is going to help it stand out in the eyes of top talent.

Of course, these efforts must be more than just lip service. Families and employees are both savvy enough to see through initiatives that aren’t grounded in actual excellence. Marketers spend a lot of time researching how to offer the best customer experience, ensuring that families interface with a brand in only positive ways.

The same holds on the employee side, where programs must resonate for employees. Just as you wouldn’t want a family getting frustrated when navigating your website, you don’t want potential employees feeling

the same aggravation when they search your site for information.

For example, did you know that more than 90% of all job applicants visit at least one online resource to evaluate a company before applying? Further, the most visited site by job candidates is the firm’s website, followed by the company’s Facebook account and Glassdoor page. Additionally, a serious job candidate may check out reviews on sites like Google My Business and Yelp. They want to see how others view and interact with you and your firm.

Try this simple test. Simply enter your funeral home’s name into your favorite search engine. (I bet a number of you already do this regularly.) Examine the results you get, but do so from the perspective of a job candidate. What did you learn about the company that would make you want to work there (or conversely not work there)?

So – just where can marketing lend a hand in attracting and retaining staff members? Below are several things marketing can do to improve how your firm recruits and retains your staff.

Website – Just like the exercise above with the internet search, take a look at your website from the perspective of a job candidate. You certainly need to have it focused on the families you serve, but not to the exclusion of job seekers. One simple remedy is adding a Careers section. Even if you seldom have openings, wouldn’t it be nice to have potential new employees contact you about an opening? And the purpose of this section is not to necessarily list openings, but rather to outline all the benefits your employees enjoy as a member of your team. And be sure that the Staff section on the About Us page is informative and not an afterthought. Take some time to really “build up” the talent you have working at the firm.

Glassdoor – For those not familiar with Glassdoor, traditionally it’s been a website where current and former employees anonymously review companies.

Glassdoor also allows these employees to anonymously submit and view salaries as well as search and apply for jobs on its platform. Many people aren't aware that Glassdoor can be a "two-way street"; it allows companies to impact how they are portrayed on the site.

By setting up a company account on Glassdoor, funeral homes can verify basic information listed about the company, add photos or videos, link their social media accounts, and customize the "Why Work for Us" section. This allows the funeral home to "have a voice" in what is found on the Glassdoor website; for too long the site has been an area for disgruntled employees to gripe about companies.

Social Media – Openly discussing your culture on social media is a great way to make your firm more relatable. This can have a positive effect on potential families who're looking for trust indicators before they reach out, but recruitment candidates will also appreciate this.

The more information you can publicize on social media about your culture, the better your candidates will align with your company. After all, no one wants to hire a new employee who has all the necessary skills but doesn't integrate properly into the company's culture.

Everything you post on social media channels will be viewed with a bit of skepticism, and that's to be expected - every company wants to convey itself in the best light. However, you can increase the credibility of your social posts when you get your employees to contribute to what is posted. Research shows that more than half of all people trust a normal employee more than management.

In addition, encourage your employees to share your social content and add their insights. This can convey a sense of unity in the workforce. Research has shown that posts shared by workers get 8X more engagement than posts shared by the company's official social media accounts. People may be distrustful of official posts, but when employees share (or better yet post their unbiased opinions of working for the company), this is treated with higher credibility.

Media Outreach – Don't limit your news releases to just information about your firm and new services you

might be adding. Be sure to draft and distribute news about promotions and achievements of your staff. Not only will this resonate with potential employees, but this news also makes a great retention tool for your current staff. Not to mention, this information makes for great social media posts.

Community Outreach – I once worked for a company that had a Contributions committee, comprised of employees along with one member of the management staff. The group was given a budget and would meet regularly to evaluate different outreach opportunities.

At the meeting, employees were encouraged to bring their favorite charities and community events. They would then present the rationale for why the company should support this particular cause. In many cases, a representative from the organization under consideration was there to answer questions and provide additional information. Each proposal was evaluated and the decision was made whether to support the proposal or not. It made for not only staff buy-in, but much more engagement by employees.

In closing, perhaps one of the more important overlaps between HR and marketing centers on their joint responsibility in developing and selling a firm's values, both internally and externally. Most funeral homes operate with a set of guiding principles — things like transparency, integrity, caring, compassion and honesty. It is HR's responsibility to acquire talent that can easily adopt those values, help maintain those values among employees, and, in turn, discover what values its employees expect. Once HR has defined an ideology, it must promote it through team education, staff meetings, documentation, and other internal communication.

The process is strongly reminiscent of the marketing department's responsibility for defining the company's value proposition and selling it to families via digital media, mailings, advertising, and the like. Although the audience and messaging may differ, in both arenas peak performance relies on establishing relevant, meaningful values that are transmitted effectively.

Therein lies the beauty of collaboration between marketing and HR — or any other seemingly dissimilar departments, for that matter. By discovering the shared challenges and responsibilities, marketing and human

resources can not only learn from one another but also foster a company culture.



Joe Weigel is the owner of Weigel Strategic Marketing, a marketing communications firm focused on the funeral profession that delivers expertise across three disciplines: public relations, branding, and communications. Please visit

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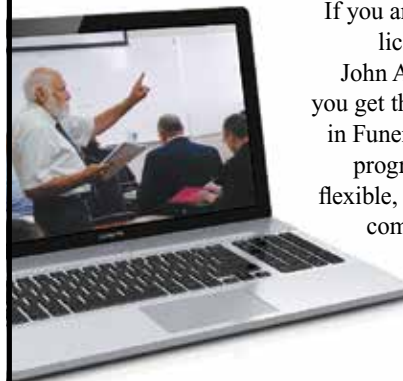
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The Evolution of Obituaries and What That Means for Your Website

By Carol Heffernan

Today, Families Expect More from an Obituary

How many of us can picture our parents or grandparents flipping to the obituaries section of the newspaper looking for names they recognized?

Generations of Americans have clipped copies of notable obituaries, stashing them away to reread and pass along to their kids and grandkids. Some would tuck the obituaries into a family Bible. Others would create a scrapbook with the obituary front and center as an homage to the deceased – be it a family member, beloved teacher, or even a celebrity. Too often, though, the newspaper copies became torn and faded, were misplaced, or simply never looked at again.

Today, printed obituaries have taken a backseat to online remembrances, as younger and older generations turn to social media to share updates on life and death announcements. These posts are often powerful, especially when accompanied by photos, videos, and comments. This development is revolutionizing the way people view and engage with your online obituaries. Here's How to Immediately Set Your Online Obituaries Apart

Most people visiting a funeral home website are there for the obituaries. In fact, data shows that upwards of 85% make their way to a firm's site for this reason alone. These visitors range from local family and friends looking for service details to far-flung relatives searching for information and a way to grieve their loss from a distance or share their condolences with the family.

Today, many families are spread across the country or region. Gone are the days when family members all live in close proximity as was once typical. This distance coupled with the digital age means people expect online options when communicating after a loss. Knowing this brings a few questions to mind including:

- **What do families expect and want in an online obituary?**
- **How can you keep visitors to your website for longer amounts of time?**
- **How does more time on your site = better business?**

Funeral homes are always looking for ways to better serve families and keep their firm the leader in the market. Improving online obituaries is a guaranteed way to do both – and it starts with the support of family and friends.

As more and more families honor their loved ones online rather than in the newspaper, there is an increasing demand for more interactivity on the obituary, to make the obituary itself a gathering place for honoring the loved one. Create a space on your obituaries for those who have lost a loved one to contribute to more than ever. Posting condolences, memories, stories, and photos are a practical way to help a grieving family heal, as those who have lost a loved one can visit a firm's website to read and reread these messages. Drawing my people to your website and keeping them engaged longer also build brand recognition and loyalty as visitors start to recognize your website as a trusted place to “gather” digitally. Let's take a look at the many ways to enhance an online obituary.

Obituary Comments

Families often say they learned new information about their loved one at the funeral. These conversations typically occur at the visitation or reception and may be forgotten in the business of events. But now, they can be posted online to reread and remember. Consider adding prompts to your website to encourage people to comment.

Families will be sure to see every note, memory, and story on the obituary page and can revisit these special messages for decades to come. What a practical solution to ensure that all comments are read and remembered.

Uploaded Photos

Photo books are part of every family's treasures celebrating births, weddings, and the everyday moments of our lives. When a family posts their own photos on the obituary page, it will inspire others to do the same. Many families already select photos to display at the funeral. Encourage them to upload photos online and ask others to do the same. We've found that when a few photos are uploaded by family or friends, other join in the sharing and soon the online obituary is filled with images.

Memorial Gift Details

Memorial and floral gifts bring comfort and hope, as do the heartfelt messages that accompany them.

Your firm may already take note of who gave what, which is a beautiful testament to the love and support received during a difficult time. Many funeral directors also choose to upload additional flower purchases and who they are from to the obituary so families know exactly who gave what. And many funeral home websites now have the ability to post to the obituary sympathy gifts that were purchased on your website.

Photos Taken at the Funeral and Reception

When loved ones come together for a funeral it often feels like a family reunion, bringing together those who haven't seen each other in many years. But most say that the day goes by in a blur with very little recol-

lection of detail, including who attended, the beautiful memory tables on display, or the prepared homemade food.

Your funeral home can provide great value in thinking ahead for the family and encouraging them to photograph these elements and upload them to the online obituary after the service. This also presents guests with another way to contribute. Funeral homes are always looking for ways to help families before, during, and after the funeral – and helping build a robust online obituary is one more way to do so. Photos, condolences, memories, and service details bring a special measure of healing during a difficult time. What a gift for families – and for the professionals who serve them.

Finally, thanks to technological advances, there's even the possibility of a print-technology mashup with the new keepsake Tribute Book that transforms the online obituary into a book the whole family will treasure for generations to come.

Carol Heffernan has been as a professional copywriter for many years, working in the death care industry for the past five. She enjoys every day of her job as she wants to help people and knows how much hope and comfort the written word can bring to others.

An advertisement for WilbertEDU. On the left, a laptop is open with a large, thick book resting on it. The book's pages are fanned out. The background is a solid blue color. On the right, there is text and a QR code. The text reads: "WilbertEDU, where Funeral Professionals can learn and earn continuing education units at no cost! For information on the wide variety of topics and to register for any, go to wilbert.com/wilbertedu". Below the text is a small graphic of a white scroll with a photo of a man in a military uniform saluting, and a QR code to the right of it. An arrow points from the scroll to the QR code. The text "Treasured Tribute Tools" is written below the scroll.

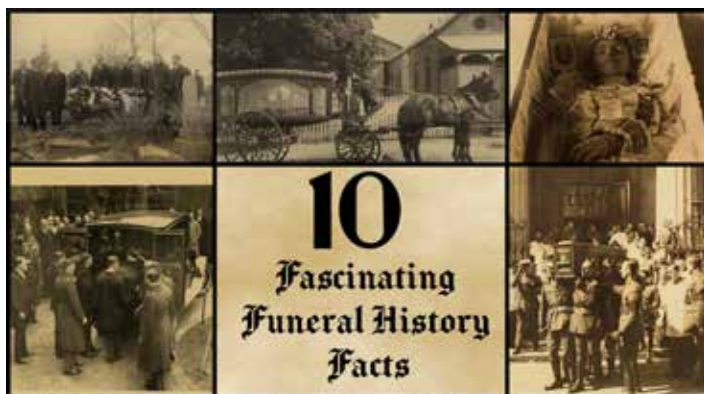
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Treasured Tribute Tools

10 Fascinating Chapters in Funeral History You Didn't Learn in Mortuary School

By Jessica Farren



There is a treasure trove of truly captivating and surprising stories buried within the footnotes of death-care's past. Over the years, I have had an opportunity to learn quite a lot of fascinating historical narratives involving funerals and memorialization. While these untold chapters were likely not included on your funeral boards or mortuary school readings, they make for great conversation fodder at any cocktail party.

Here are 10 Fascinating Funeral History Facts

1. The word 'mortician' was first published in 1895 in *The Embalmers Monthly* as a suggestion to replace the word 'undertaker.'

Have you ever been a part of a naming committee and needed to give your feedback on a new name for a mascot, building or program? Well, imagine being tasked with having to come up with a name for an entire group of professionals? After the practice of embalming became widespread due to the Civil War and Lincoln's famous funeral procession, funeral directors of that era wanted a new title to reflect the evolution of their trade. When they decided upon the word 'mortician' they were unfortunately met with a lot of derision from the general public (some things never change!). Nevertheless, mortician prevailed and is still widely used today.

2. President Grant's memorial flowers have survived for 136 years.

Many families today will use the phrase in lieu of flowers in their loved one's obituary to encourage other ways for people to honor the deceased rather than

sending flowers. The reasons for this vary, but for some the thought of watching the floral displays wither and fall apart after the funeral is an unwelcome one. While this is certainly what ordinarily occurs, that wasn't the case for former President Ulysses S. Grant's memorial flowers which have remained intact since 1885! It is truly extraordinary how long something can endure if left completely untouched!

"Ulysses S. Grant spent the last six weeks of his life in a hilltop cottage in upstate New York, a few miles from the Hudson River. He died there at 8:08 a.m. on July 23, 1885, and the cottage has remained almost untouched since," explains Jessica Andreon in an article for *Atlas Obscura*. "Today, visitors can see much the same sight those mourners did: a six-foot-tall gate entirely constructed out of dried flowers. Nearby a sword made of flowers rests on an oversized pillow of flowers surrounded by smaller floral sculptures. After 136 years, Grant's tributes have been drained of their bright colors—but the set pieces are mostly intact, which makes them a historical anomaly."

3. A funeral director's telephone invention, first patented in 1889, made switchboard operators obsolete.

Imagine this – you're a funeral director working in Kansas City during the late 1800s. You are highly committed to serving families in the community and are doing everything right, but for no discernable reason your business is shrinking. Fewer families are contacting you for your services. Finally, one day, you identify the source of your lost business. Your biggest competitor has a wife working as a switchboard operator—and



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she's sending all of your calls to him!

In 1889, Funeral Director, Almon Strowger, earned his place in history with a revolutionary new invention. Strowger transformed telecommunications with the first telephone exchange system and direct dial phone. Known as the "Strowger Switch", this invention allowed phone calls to be directly connected without the need for a switchboard operator.

4. The Five Fishermen Restaurant in Nova Scotia was once a mortuary that handled the burials of bodies recovered from the Titanic.

Fans of dark tourism and funeral history will want to make a reservation at this one-of-a-kind restaurant that lets you enjoy lobster and halibut in the same room where some of Titanic victims were embalmed. The Five Fisherman Restaurant in Halifax, Nova Scotia was once Snow & Company Undertakers, the funeral home which took possession of many recovered bodies from the Titanic, including John Jacob Astor IV. Nearby at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, also located in Halifax, the mortuary bags used to recover the bodies at sea can be seen on display.

5. Every other year, controversial leader, Vladimir Lenin's 151-year-old body is re-embalmed by Russian scientists.

Embalmers feel a great deal of pride when families praise their work and ability to make the deceased appear in death as they were in life. Well, imagine if after nearly 100 years, people were still lining up to view your embalming work. In the case of Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, an entire team of Russian scientists have employed experimental embalming methods to preserve the communist revolutionary's body for public display. The Russian method focuses maintaining the body's physical form (look, shape, weight, color, etc) but not its original biological matter. Lenin can be viewed for five minutes at a time in small groups under the watchful eye of guards in every corner of the room.

6. President Andrew Jackson's pet parrot had to be removed from his funeral for shouting obscenities at mourners.

If you have a parrot, it says a lot about you! That was definitely the case for former President Andrew Jackson whose pet parrot famously cursed out attendees at his funeral service. When Jackson brought the African



grey parrot home, named Poll, it was originally meant to be a gift for his wife. However, upon her death Jackson became the bird's sole caretaker and overtime the parrot picked up on some of the President's choice phrases. Talk about having a fowl mouth!

7. The first telephone prank calls on record were made to funeral homes.

"Some malicious wag... has been playing a grave practical joke on undertakers, by summoning them over the telephone to bring freezers, candlesticks and coffins for persons alleged to be dead. In each case the denouement is highly farcical, and the reputed corpses are now hunting in a lively manner for that telephonist."

The description above is the first written account of a telephone prank call, published in the February 2, 1884 issue of the journal *Electrical World*. According to sources, prank calls to funeral homes made in the early days of the telephone were extremely common, much to the chagrin of 20th century undertakers. By 1920, the Milwaukee city morgue was apparently tied up so long fielding calls for Mr. Graves and Mr. Stiff, callers "failed for an hour and 45 minutes to inform the coroner of the death of a patient."

It's easy to imagine how frustrating it must have been for those early funeral home professionals without ASD around to screen those pranksters out. We still receive calls today from people claiming to be calling from inside a casket or to report the death of "Mrya Mains" so we can confirm this trend has definitely not died out.

8. In the 18th and 19th Century, ornately decorated funeral biscuits or candies were traditionally handed out to mourners.

It is interesting to look back on how traditions evolve and trends come back around in new forms. In mod-

ern times, it has become increasingly more popular for families to want to personalize their loved one's funeral services. There are many ways to do this, but one method is to give out some sort of token to guests that represents something the deceased person loved. For instance, giving attendees a packet of seeds at a funeral for someone who loved gardening or handing out cookies during memorial for someone who loved baking.

In the 18th and 19th century, guests at funeral services might also expect to receive some sort of parcel or edible item from the family. In 18th century Sweden, small sugar sculptures or ornately decorated hard candies were traditionally given out by families at funerals as well as other important events such as weddings or baptisms. Swedish funeral confectionaries were often designed with macabre elements such as black wrappers printed with skulls or graves. In England and in other parts of the world during the Victorian era, funeral guests would traditionally be handed a sugared biscuit, often wrapped with white paper and sealed with black wax. Funeral biscuits, like the Swedish funeral candies, were sometimes stamped and decorated with memento mori or motifs such as skulls, hourglasses or cherubs. This tradition was also carried over to early America where it was common among British and German Americans from Virginia to Pennsylvania. This trend continued up until the first World War when it was phased out due to wartime rationing.

9. In 1878, a “coffin torpedo” was introduced as a device to ward off grave robbers

This one sounds like it came from an episode of *Tales from the Crypt*, but there really was once a thing called a “coffin torpedo” that was marketed and sold to defend graves from would-be body snatchers. However, before your brain starts wondering if any of those graves in your local cemetery from the late 1800s are crammed with ancient booby traps, we should probably make it known that these devices were rarely, if ever, actually used.

The coffin torpedo is an invention made in hopes of profiting from another person's paranoia. Fear of body snatchers was a very real thing in the late 1800s. Grave robbers became common in part because medical schools needed cadavers for experiments. At least 12 body-snatching scandals were reported in 1878 alone. Thus, the coffin torpedo was born. The device func-

tioned like a small shotgun secured inside the coffin lid. There were also similar contraptions patented at the time designed to work much like a landmine and detonate when thieves ran into wiring near the casket.



For a period of time, the devices made for delicious gossip fodder and were mentioned in many catalogs and newsprint. However, there is no evidence that suggests they were widely manufactured or commercially successful. Other more practical inventions, such as casket locking mechanisms and cast-iron vaults were invented to achieve the same goal and have been recovered archeologically. All of this suggests that the idea of a coffin torpedo was much more prevalent than the device itself. Still, it is a little unsettling to think there could be a few of them buried somewhere, waiting to make their presence known.

10. American Patriot, Paul Revere, was the first person to identify a body through dental records.

While he's best known for being the man who warned the colonists that the British were coming during the American Revolution, Paul Revere actually has another claim to fame many are not aware of. He was America's first Forensic Dentist (also known as a “Dental Odontologist”), a title he earned after being the first man on record to ever positively identify a body using dental records. Revere had worked as a freelance dentist prior to the revolution and specialized in replacing missing teeth. When a close friend of his was killed by the British during the Battle of Bunker Hill and thrown in a mass grave, Revere was able to identify his friend from the dental work he had performed on him.



Jessica (Fowler) Farren is the Public Relations Specialist and Staff Writer at ASD. She has answered the calls of funeral homes nationwide for more than 19 years. Jessica manages ASD's company blog, social media accounts and digital marketing. She has been published in numerous funeral trade magazines and has written articles on a variety of subjects including communication, marketing, business planning, technology & funeral trends. To contact Jessica, call 800-868-9950 or email jess@myASD.com.

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The Child and Death

Part I of a III Part Series

By Todd W. Van Beck

Children and death. That seems to be automatically an inappropriate subject.

The child is just beginning life. Why should anyone talk about dealing with death when life is so fresh and new? This subject, on the surface, seems strangely inappropriate and in a manner of speaking violates our sensibilities.

However, in examining this subject carefully we learn that the child and death is a critical area in human development which can aid or harm the child's ultimate view of life.

No one, young or old, can separate themselves from some level of an awareness of death. Death is a part of life – everybody knows that. Death is all around us, all the time, at every moment of life. However even with the truth of this fact death anxieties, death denial, death phobias, abound in our contemporary culture. Oddly the death rate is 100% and so many people seem disinterested in the subject.

The purpose of this article is to address some of the issues concerning the child and death in a clear, open and honest manner. Also I would like to explore our responsibilities as clergy, funeral professionals and death care providers in relationship to this important subject.

Throughout my career the real “university” in my life was not attending classes at the university it was through the myriad of experiences with human beings that I served as a funeral director and through my work in the church. I would like to refer to case studies from my personal bereavement care experiences throughout this work.

Certainly we all agree that a healthy perspective on death is a valuable psychological asset to possess as we journey through life. This is particularly important when dealing with the child's perspective because the child has the rest of their lives ahead of them. If the child is filled with anxiety early on in their lives con-

cerning death it is a weight that they will carry with them for a very long time. However, if they can gain a healthy attitude, a sense of quiet perspective about death what a wonderful resource they will have when their life experiences demand that they confront this subject.

Geoffrey Gorer the well known British anthropologist wrote a book many years ago entitled *Death, Grief and Mourning*. In a portion of his book Gorer addresses the subject of British children and the subject of death.

Gorer's observations are rather frightening. He points out that in a questionnaire that had been distributed to a number of bereaved families who had experienced a death in their family almost half reported that they did not tell their children anything about what had happened. The parents figured that their children would find out the truth in their own way. In addition to this information Gorer discovered that some parents admitted that they told their children things about death that they themselves did not believe because they themselves had never really thought about the subject and hence could not think of anything else to say.

As a result of this evasion and untruth there was a complete breakdown in the communication between the child and the person(s) with whom the little one's look to for guidance and direction in the face of a major life crisis.

Gorer further observes that 100 years ago the British people had a great deal of difficulty talking to their children about the beginnings of life. A new baby would appear in the home and the child would ask a normal question such as, “Where did this baby come from?” The adult's greeted the child's question with deceit by telling the child that the baby came by way of a stork, or from a cabbage patch, or it arrived in the doctor's little black bag.

It seems extremely interesting that in our present day culture it is possible for parents to talk quite frank-

ly with children about sex and child birth. Classes in public and private schools routinely include “Sex Education” in their academic curriculum. I remember very well giving a seminar at the Clarke Institute for Psychiatric Care in Toronto and I was introduced to a Roman Catholic sister who was with the Sister’s of Mercy. She was an elementary school teacher. I asked her during a break what subject she taught and she whispered “Sex Education.” I commented that it must have been a unique life experience for a nun to develop a curriculum addressing sex education. The good sister smiled and responded “Yes it was, but sex education is terribly important these days, because you know – careless sexual behavior can kill you.” She had made her point.

In the last 100 years these two subjects have flip flopped. Parents will engage in the sex conversation but it is very difficult for them to communicate with their children intelligently and freely about the other side of life namely death.

I was asked to speak to a Parent Teacher Association

meeting many years ago. In the process of making my remarks I made the suggestion that if the school system was giving time and energy to sex education I wanted equal time for death education. The parents looked at me like I had carrots growing out of my ears!

Adults might feel that they are not telling their children anything about death by remaining silent. I disagree. By engaging in silence the adults are sending a loud and clear message concerning death. The silence is sending the message that this subject is “off limits” it is “taboo.” Hence silence becomes a great teacher, but the educational lesson is backwards and what the child learns is a response to death which is filled with voids, anxieties, suspicions, confusion - silence. This is a point in development when the child needs reassurance, honest information, love and a quiet perspective from the adult’s with whom they take their life cues from.

A wonderful 14-year old boy was brought into be-reavement care because he was non-functioning. He was daydreaming in school and hence was unable to



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keep his grades up. However, he was really a bright, useful, intelligent boy. In time it was brought out that there were facts which were important parts of his experience which appeared to start a chain of emotional responses that made him practically impotent to function.

In conversations with his mother it was discovered that this young boy's father had died suddenly on a business trip. Relatives descended on the home where this boy lived with his mother and took the boy and his other siblings away for a week. The child did not participate in any of the family funeral activities surrounding the death of his father.

To this young boy this was an extremely unusual and alarming circumstance. No one had ever come in and taken him, his brothers and sisters away for a week. No one!

When this young boy came home he was naturally full of questions. He wanted to know when his father was going to come home. He was told that his father had gone on an extended business trip and that no one knew when he would return.

This unfortunate young boy began to feel an overwhelming and debilitating sense of guilt. He wondered what had he done to make his father so angry with him that he would leave and not return. In time his wondering and guilt left him impotent to function.

What a sad and unfortunate situation. What is so sad is that the deceptive psychological trauma that this young boy was put through was basically needless. What he needed was truth. What he needed was love. What he needed was attention. Children can accept most any truth, but adult deception is something that they do not have any ability to deal with.

In time this young boy learned the truth and he dealt with the truth, but he was playing catch up.

This young boy's relatives were extremely kind people – not a mean bone anywhere. They truly thought that they had done him a big favor by removing him from his father's funeral rituals. So many times a child's learning experience about death is unwittingly sacrificed on the altar of adult death anxieties and denial. Is there a better way?

I recall speaking to another PTA group on this general subject. During the break a mother of one of the student's came up to me and said, "Look, I'm NOT going to talk to my child about this, I'm going to protect him as long as possible. He will have time enough to have to cope with the agony and misery of life. I'm not going to start it."

One week later we buried this woman's husband.

Children learn about death no matter what. Parents who play "Peek-a-boo" with their new born infants are teaching the life lesson that "I am here one moment and gone the next." Parents think nothing of taking their children to the market and have them walk by and stare at rows and rows of dead fish. Parents routinely participate in television experiences with their children where John Wayne shoots ten men and then walks into the saloon for a drink to celebrate. John Wayne has killed ten men in front of the child's eyes and there are no consequences arising from these deaths save for the "Duke's" consumption of alcohol

Regardless of the silent treatment which many adults implement concerning teaching their children about death – lessons are being taught.

There were two young boys ages ten and twelve. Their 8-year old sister was dying of leukemia. The parents brought the dying girl home from the hospital for an hour long visit on Christmas day. As it turned out this would be her last trip home, she died in January

The parents of the dead girl felt that they should spare the other children all the "gruesome" aspects of this family crisis and tragedy. They sent the two boys to school on the day of the funeral, and did not even let them know that the funeral was taking place that day. One year later both boys were referred to bereavement care by the school counselors. The boys had become difficult to manage, they were hostile in their activities, and one of the boys had developed a kleptomania condition. He was stealing anything he could lay his hands on.

In careful bereavement care it was discovered that the boys had concluded that their parents did not love them. They felt that they could die and their parents would not even notice; that nobody would even mention their deaths. They could pass off the face of the earth and it would be meaningless to the special peo-

ple around them. They had of course drawn the wrong conclusion. However, in their limited experience with the crises of life they really had no other alternatives in terms of their own experience.

Is it a valid question to ask “Can we develop more intelligent ways to deal with the death crises that children experience?”

Now we need to move on to examine what poorly handled death experiences in childhood can do to us in our adulthood.

A few years ago, I was lecturing at a Theological Seminary in San Francisco. The Dean of the Seminary brought to my attention a student who wanted to talk with me. I agreed to speak with him and I asked him what was on his mind. This student by the way was a fine looking young man who I understood was an excellent student. He was completing his senior year and was going to take a parish. When he sat down I asked what seemed to be the problem. I did not have time to be non-direct as I was only going to be on the campus but a short time. He indicated to me that he felt he was

going to have trouble doing funerals. I asked in what way. He said that whenever he saw a funeral coach going down the street he broke into a cold sweat and could feel the perspiration roll down his back. Furthermore, he said that in his town there was a funeral home down the street and he would walk four blocks out of his way just to avoid walking passed it.

I didn't argue with him – he was going to have trouble doing funerals.

I asked him if he had ever been to a funeral. He said he never had. I asked if anyone in his family had ever died and he said no.

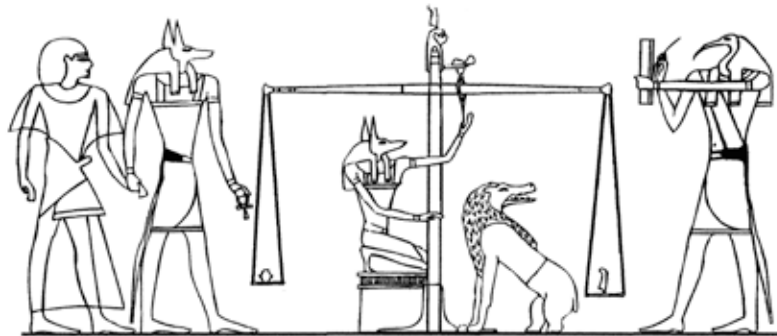
“Is your mother still living?”

“Yes.”

“Is your father still living?”

Here the young seminarian seemed startled almost as if this were something that was a blocked out area.

“Well, I don't know anything about my father.”



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“Does your mother live near here?”

“Yes, she lives in one of the suburbs.”

“Could you go home this evening and talk with your mother about your father?”

“Yes, I think I could do that.”

“O.K. let’s have an early morning session before my flight leaves.”

This young man came back the next day all smiles. “You know I feel like I know my Mom for the first time in my life.”

Then he told of the details of what had happened. This young man was a year and a half old when his father died in an industrial accident. He was an only child and his mother not wanting to concern him surrounded him with a protective type of affection. As time went by it seemed that the opportunity to speak to him about this important life event became more and more remote.

Yet while it became more difficult for his mother to broach the subject reminders of the family tragedy were all around him. When he would go out to play friends would ask him “Where is your Dad?” When the other boy’s in the neighborhood went to the ball game with their Fathers this young boy went Fatherless.

In time the young boy on his own moved into an awareness of his fractured life. Where was his Father? What had happened to his Father? What was his Father like? A great deal of anxiety began to pour into the vacuum that was created by these unanswered questions.

Eventually he went to college and on to the seminary and at seminary was directly faced with the task of dealing with the problems of others as they coped with death. What was he to do? He was an up and coming clergyman who had death anxiety.

Here was the break-through. He rediscovered his mother. From this experience he now understood the source of this own anxiety and he was able to deal with it openly and honestly. The one thing in his life that had been the source of such destruction and anxiety

for him for years was fortunately resolved at the point where he became aware of the needs of other people to find solutions to their problems. That is a mighty handy resource for a clergyman to possess.

A young child going through a traumatic experience should not be so sheltered that the basic questions he or she wants answered (as difficult and/or emotional as they might be) are met with silence rejection or even hostility. There must be a better way of dealing with death in early childhood.

(Part II of III, Continues Next Issue)

Todd lives in Cincinnati, OH with his wife Georgia. He is the Dean of the College of Funeral Management at the University of Memphis. He is a Certified Funeral Service Practitioner and a member of the Academy of Professional Funeral Service Practice, a Certified Embalmer, the author of 4 books, 400 professional articles. He is associated with Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science.



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PTO

By Curtis Rostad, CFSP

If you grew up on a farm you probably learned that PTO stands for “power takeoff” and that it is the connection point on a tractor for other implements and attachments.

But today we will be talking about PTO as “Personal Time Off” or “Paid Time Off” as a system to replace the traditional vacation, sick leave, and personal leave policies that you may be presently using.

Simply put, PTO combines vacation time, sick leave, and personal time into one “bank” of time-off available to your employees as the need or desire arises. Employees have more flexibility for a work-life balance while no longer having to be untruthful or deceitful when obtaining time-off.

You don’t have to have a very large operation with very many employees before you will recognize that you have at least one “warrior” and one “wimp” on your staff. The warrior is the person who despite a migraine headache, severe allergies, or even a sprained ankle will always come to work on time and be ready to go.

On the other hand, you have the wimp, who at the first sign of a headache or minor throat irritation calls in sick. Strangely these calls tend to be on a Friday or a Monday creating a three-day weekend for them. These days might coincidentally follow a weekend where they posted photos on social media from the great party they had over the weekend. You may also see an increase in “sick” days towards the end of the year because the employee recognizes that unused sick days disappear on December 31st.

While it’s bad enough that these absences disrupt the workflow and scheduling for everyone, it can also breed resentment among the other employees who realize that this person is getting more time off than they are and that they’re having to pick up that extra workload or on-call night.

We have also found that a lot of firms do not have a set sick leave policy. They allow a person to call in sick

whenever they feel the need and the employer is simply assuming the reason is legitimate. Too often they don’t even keep track of the amount of time taken as long as it seems reasonable. That lax attitude is ripe for abuse and resentment by other staff members.

The PTO system remedies all of that. Under this system whether a person is sick or taking a vacation it comes out of the same bank of time-off that they have accumulated and is fair to everyone.

Now the rest of your policies concerning time off can remain intact even if you change the terminology a little. If you require employees to notify you so many weeks in advance that they want to take vacation time or if you have a policy that says only a certain number of people can be gone at the same time, or that the number of consecutive days off are limited, those requirements can remain in effect. If you have a policy that says people have to call in by a certain time of the morning to say that they’re going to be out that day for an illness or other last-minute need, that policy can also remain intact. But if you have a policy of requiring a doctor’s statement to justify multiple days of time off for an illness, you no longer need to require that. It doesn’t matter why they were out, it’s just time taken out of their bank.

To simplify the tracking of time taken, you can also specify that PTO time must be taken in blocks of half days or full days only. You also have the option of expressing the amount of time off as hours rather than days (One day = 8 hours of PTO). You can then grant PTO in increments as small as one hour if you wish. The only difference for you and the employee is that you no longer have to track the reason for their absence. Simply put, if they want to use their time off for minor illnesses instead of vacation time with their family, that’s up to them. They don’t have to justify the use of their time to you.

You should also have specific policies concerning unpaid leave. When a person has used up their PTO time you may want to grant them unpaid leave under certain circumstances. You may also need to check your state

requirements on unpaid leave to make sure you are complying with those laws.

It might take a little time for both you and the employees to get used to the concept, but once you implement this system, the only real downside is that you may notice that you have an employee who is not only a warrior but a source of contamination. In their desire to preserve their time-off they might come into work when they are not only sick but are also contagious. The solution to this situation is a policy simply stating that as the manager or owner, you have the right to send them home and have their time deducted from their PTO bank rather than giving them the opportunity to infect the rest of the staff or the families you serve. So to implement this system, the first step is to determine how many days (or hours) you're going to place in everyone's "bank."

The easiest way to convert to a PTO system is to simply take your current vacation policy of so many days off after so many years of service, add a certain number of sick days that you want to give to people, and then add any additional personal time that you give people such as giving them the day off on their birthday. That number of days then becomes their total PTO bank of time available for them to use each year. By the way, it also means they don't have to take that personal day off on their actual birthday. They can use that day any way they wish.

I'm sure a lot of you are hoping at this point that I will tell you how much time off you should be granting to your employees. That's a little hard to do because even among businesses outside of funeral service there's a wide variation between companies and industries. If anything, funeral service traditionally has been a little behind the curve on granting time off. If we are to attract and retain good employees, we are going to have to offer employment benefits, including time off, that is compatible with other businesses.

According to statistics available, after one year of service an employee typically receives 5-9 days of vacation. For 5-10 years of service, the typical vacation time is 10-14 days. For 10-20 years of service 15-19 days. Over 20 years of service, 20-24 days. In addition, the typical amount of sick leave granted is 3-9 days per year which in many cases is also tied to years of service.

So adding these together without any additional personal leave days, we have the following broad guidelines:

After one year of service:	8-15 days of PTO
5-10 years of service:	16-21 days of PTO
11-20 years of service:	22-27 days of PTO
Over 20 years of service:	29-35 days of PTO

Your PTO policy should also include what happens to unused time at the end of the year. Some firms have a "use it or lose it policy" meaning that unused PTO time disappears at the end of the year. Some companies allow the employee to carry over a certain number of unused days to add to the bank of new days in the new year. If you allow a carry over, we advise that you limit the number of days that can be carried over. You want people to take time off and get away for their own good as well as the good of the business. It is important for employees to have time away. You may also want to consider whether or not to pay an employee for unused time at the end of the year.

Please note that there are no federal laws concerning vacations and PTO, but some states have laws covering time-off. In some states, vacation time or PTO time is considered an "earned benefit" (or similar terminology). It means that once you grant time off, the employee is entitled to either use it or be compensated for it. For instance, if they resign their position or even if they are fired, you have to pay them for their unused time off. However, most of those same jurisdictions also say that you can have a policy addressing these situations and as long as these policies are clear and distributed to your employees, your policies are honored. You can decide whether you pay for unused time off if a person leaves and you can certainly specify that you do not pay for unused time off if you fire the employee.


An increasing trend we are seeing across the states is mandatory paid sick leave (MPSL). The benefit of a PTO policy such as the one we are describing is that most of the states implementing MPSL accept PTO policies in lieu of MPSL. The only requirement is that your PTO policy must meet the minimum required state MPSL. You should check to see what your state says on these topics prior to writing your policy.

That is why it is so important for you to have these pol-

icies clearly outlined, printed, and distributed to your employees. They should be a part of your Employee Handbook so there is no question as to what time is available, how time-off is administered, and what happens to unused time.


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Curtis Rostad is the Director of Compliance and Association Relations for the Foresight Companies in Phoenix, AZ. He is the former Executive Director of the Indiana Funeral Directors Association, a position he held for 12 years prior to his retirement. Prior to that he served both the Colorado and Wyoming associations and owned his own funeral home in Wyoming. He and his wife reside in Fountain Hills, AZ. He can be reached at 1-800-426-0165.



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INDUSTRY NEWS

Doug Gober to be Honored with the ICCFA Educational Foundation's Lasting Impact Award

STERLING, VA – The International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association's (ICCFA) Educational Foundation will present its Lasting Impact Award to Doug Gober during the 2023 ICCFA Annual Convention & Exposition in Kansas City, Missouri.

Doug has logged hundreds of hours as a speaker and educator at deathcare events across the globe and has presented at many ICCFA events including the ICCFA Annual Convention & Exposition, the DEAD Talks Sales Conference, and the ICCFA University. He has earned numerous national awards within the deathcare profession and has served as a consultant for marketing and merchandising projects on an international scale. Doug currently serves on the ICCFA Sales & Marketing Committee.

Doug began his career in deathcare 44 years ago as a sales representative for Batesville Casket Company. In 1995, he joined The Doody Group as Executive Vice President working in the United Kingdom and France. During that time, he was instrumental in planning and implementing several innovative merchandising concepts and products created by The Doody Group, Matthews International, and other leading manufacturers. From there, Doug joined Carriage Services as the Director of Development and Marketing, then became a Senior Loan Officer and industry liaison for Live Oak Bank. Currently, Doug serves as Partner at The Foresight Companies through his own company, Gober Strategic Capital.

"The remarkable connection across all of Doug's career is his commitment of time and passion to education in our profession," said Jim Price, ICCFA Educational Foundation President. "His ideas, perspective, and innovations aren't reserved for customers or paying clients, but freely shared with anyone who is interested in making our profession better. We are honored to have the opportunity to recognize Doug's remarkable contribution to deathcare with this prestigious award." The Lasting Impact Award is presented annually to an individual that has made significant contributions to the deathcare profession in education and memorial-



ization. The Educational Foundation's Lasting Impact Award will be presented to Gober at a reception held in conjunction with the 2023 ICCFA Annual Convention and Exposition in Kansas City, Missouri, on May 17 from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. Information on the reception and the Annual Convention & Exposition can be found at iccfa.com/annual.

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The ICCFA Educational Foundation, founded in 2005, seeks to make education accessible to the future leaders of the deathcare profession. It does this by awarding scholarships to the educational programs of the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association, as well as advancing initiatives designed to promote the profession and support the individuals who answer the call of service.

Founded in 1887, the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association is the only international trade association representing all segments of the cemetery, cremation, funeral and memorialization profession. Its membership is composed of more than 9,100 rooftop locations and 18,000 professionals in the cemetery, funeral home and crematory industries, as well as supplier and related businesses worldwide.



Pelé to be laid to rest in replica stadium in world's tallest cemetery

Brazilian football legend purchased mausoleum space 19 years ago because it 'doesn't look like a cemetery'

Pelé was a footballer like no other, and his final resting place will be exceptional too: a large replica stadium complete with artificial turf inside the world's tallest vertical cemetery.

The Brazilian football great, whose funeral was held January 3, 2023, bought his mausoleum 19 years ago inside the Memorial Ecumenical Cemetery, a high-rise building that holds the Guinness world record as the tallest cemetery in the world.

Located in Santos, the south-eastern port city where "The King" played for most of his storied career, the cemetery has a total area of 40,000 sq meters (430,000 sq feet) and features a 24-hour restaurant, a chapel, an automobile museum, a small fish pond and an aviary.

Edson Arantes do Nascimento – Pelé's real name – had spoken openly about his planned resting place, saying in 2003 that he liked the spot because it "doesn't look like a cemetery" and that it gave him a feeling of "spiritual peace and tranquility."

Located on the first floor, Pelé's 200-square-meter mausoleum will be decorated like a football stadium, with his embalmed body resting in a coffin displayed in the middle of the artificial turf, surrounded by gilded images from his glory days, a spokesperson for the cemetery said.

The striking white building was conceived by late Argentine businessman Jose Salomon Altstut, who broke ground on the project in 1983.

Officially inaugurated in 1991, it has 18,000 interment spaces, and became the first vertical cemetery in the world to provide space for mausoleums.

The cemetery's website says clients are allowed to "create a decorated space" in their mausoleums, which

can even include en suite rest areas for mourners.

Pelé's late father, aunt, brother and daughter are already interred in the same place, as well as Antonio Wilson Honorio, nicknamed "Coutinho," his teammate at Santos FC in the 1960s.

The cemetery sits a stone's throw from Santos's Vila Belmiro stadium, where Pelé first dazzled the world as a 15-year-old phenomenon, on his way to scoring a record 1,281 career goals and becoming the only player in history to win three World Cups.



A view of the Memorial Necropole Ecumenica where the Brazilian football legend Pelé is to be buried. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images



A view of the Memorial Necropole Ecumenica where the Brazilian football legend Pelé is to be buried. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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