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You've Got This: Effective Networking During Challenging Times

By Michael LuBrant, Ph.D.

As COVID-19 continues to impact the in-person delivery of higher education, it's critical that we work together to develop innovative, creative ways to ensure the continuation of networking opportunities between funeral service students and professionals.

Data gathered by the American Board of Funeral Service Education tell us that only about 15% of funeral service students today have a family member working in the profession. Compare this with a generation or two ago – where sometimes half (or more) of mortuary science students had a relative in funeral service – and it's now more important than ever to make connections between students and professionals early in each student's academic program.

As a student, there are a number of things you can do to build meaningful relationships with future colleagues and employers – even given the impact of COVID-19 limiting in-person networking opportunities. What follows are some ideas we have found helpful at my school (University of Minnesota) to connect students with funeral directors and future employers.

SEEK EMPLOYMENT AT A FUNERAL HOME If you are not currently working at a funeral home, try to find a job at a local mortuary. In some communities, it is possible that the



Seize every opportunity to get to know the funeral directors in your community.



Supply company reps can be some of your greatest advocates in connecting you with funeral directors.

firm does not have any paid positions available at this time. If that's the case, then offer to volunteer a few hours a week to help with visitations, services, transports and the like. It's critically important that you get to know people working in the profession, so seize every opportunity to get to know the funeral directors in your community!

ATTEND A VIRTUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CLASS RELATED TO FUNERAL SERVICE. NFDA, your state funeral directors association and other professional organizations offer many virtual events at this time. NFDA, for example, offers a variety of resources to funeral service students, and every student should consider becoming a member – it's free (nfdanet.org/join). You should then consider attending virtual or in-person conferences, where you will meet other funeral service professionals (see nfdanet.org/conferences and nfdanet.org/education). Moreover, there are many opportunities to apply for funding and to receive support to attend conferences (see FuneralServiceFoundation.org).

Work with your program director, instructors and other students to **CREATE VIRTUAL NETWORKING EVENTS WITH FUNERAL SERVICE PRACTITIONERS.** One thing we did at my program was email an invitation to all the funeral homes in our state, inviting them to attend a series of virtual meet-and-greet events with our students. We scheduled a total of four networking events, each two hours long and facilitated remotely via Zoom.

During each event, we offered six funeral firms 20 minutes each to discuss their business, make introductions with attendees and answer any questions students had. We used Zoom to record the sessions and posted the recordings onto Canvas (our online learning platform), where students can

access the recordings at any time to learn more about the firms. We also included contact information for these firms so students could reach out to make networking connections.

These networking events were run entirely by student volunteers, and feedback from student attendees is that they proved to be a great way to make connections with their future colleagues.

GET TO KNOW LOCAL SUPPLIERS AND VENDORS. One of the best things you can do to build your network is get to know the people who regularly visit funeral homes in your community. Casket company and embalming fluid supply representatives, in particular, regularly call on funeral homes. These folks may have immediate knowledge of who is hiring and can help you make connections with practitioners in your community.

To get started, look up the contact information for the supply companies (caskets, fluids, supplies, etc.) that serve your community to find out who your local representatives are and then contact them to request a meeting via Zoom, FaceTime, etc., so you can get to know one another. Supply company representatives can be some of your greatest advocates in making connections with funeral directors – and possibly even helping you secure a job!

ALWAYS FOLLOW UP WITH FOLKS YOU MEET. Send anyone you meet in funeral service a follow-up message thanking them for the opportunity to speak with them. Include a convenient way for them to reach out to you (e.g., a phone/text number and/or email address). Even if they don't have a job opportunity available at this time, things can change unexpectedly, so if they have your contact information at hand, they are more likely to reach out to you.

Keep in mind, too, that people will always recall the impression you made when you first met, so if you are positive and show initiative (and concern) by sending a follow-up note, your professionalism will be remembered. Know that the actions you take now by writing follow-up messages/notes and also by making check-in calls from time to time, will help you build strong professional networks with your colleagues over the long run. These efforts will only help you be more successful in funeral service.

While COVID-19 might have temporarily reduced the number of opportunities you have as a student to network in-person at this time, there are still a number of things you can do to get to know others in the profession using technology and virtual-meeting tools. Take advantage of every opportunity you have (and can create) to get to know other funeral directors, and always strive to present enthusiasm for your chosen profession and the work you have been called to do. Your efforts now will be rewarded as you establish yourself as a future funeral director in your community.

Michael LuBrant is program director of the University of Minnesota Mortuary Science Program.

Joining the Workforce and Setting Your Expectations

By Daniel M. Isard

Living up to an employer's trust is all about their expectations, not yours. And those expectations should be contained in a written job description and employee manual.

The challenge should not be your age, personal beliefs or fashion – it's about communication! When making service arrangements, for example, you'll want family members sitting across the table to "hear" you and know that you understand them. If you keep this in mind, you will be able to communicate well.

That said, we communicate with both words and body language. Part of the latter includes how we stand and are dressed when meeting with a family. In other words, dressing properly is a critical part of communication.

Imagine that your driving passion, for instance, is to make the world a better place by making hamburgers, and a company notable for its logo's yellow arches hires you. What might your first day on the job be like if you showed up in a tie-dyed shirt and clogs only to hear your new boss tell you that you're dressed inappropriately because they use uniforms?

Well, funeral service requires uniforms, too. Maybe these are designed by a conventional haberdashery, but they are still uniforms. Therefore, you must understand the three purposes of a uniform:

1. *Consistent appearance:* All employees present themselves in a fashion the owner wants to portray.
2. *Functionality:* Clogs around grease and oil? A uniform focuses on safety over fashion.
3. *Meets expectations:* Consumers cannot hear you if they are distracted. A dress code helps eliminate one potential negative distraction.

Given this, the very concept of a modern-day uniform in funeral service continues to evolve. Once a blue suit, white shirt and black shoes for men and comparable attire for women, the 20th century's fashion rules have disappeared. So, what should you do?

First, I recommend that you dress for work as if you actually lived in the 20th century. Remember, you should dress for the people with whom you meet, and the ones making the decisions are generally not millennials.

When in doubt, dress up as opposed to appearing more casual. Dressing up does not necessarily mean dressing fashionably. For example, wearing a black suit with a black shirt and a silver tie might seem fashionable for going out, but it's



not fashionable when meeting with a grieving family. You are allowed to have a work wardrobe and a personal wardrobe – just don't try to blend them.

Another key point of communication involves language. When speaking English, for example, there is "youth" English, "street" English and "business" English. Just as you wouldn't wear your personal fashion statements to work, keep both the tone of your voice and the choice of words you use with a grieving family on a more formal level. Remember, it's your job to help them feel at ease.

If you face the (enviable) need to choose between potential employers, remember that while they have to decide to hire you, you also get to hire them! Therefore, walk through the business location. Interview existing staff. Read the job description for the job they want you to perform. If you have two choices and one offers a written job description and the other doesn't, vote in favor of the company with the job description if all other things are equal.

Moreover, think about your motivation for entering the profession. If your wish is to join for the money, then please leave now. I have rarely seen an overpaid funeral director, and those who are highly compensated are paid more because of their responsibilities and/or ability to direct patronage. Ultimately, being able to drive consumers to a business because of your personal goodwill is the highest compliment and will generally earn you the highest compensation.

Finally, always remember your motivation for entering this business, but please don't leave the profession because of a negative employer experience. You will meet many people – some will teach you what to do, but most will teach you what *not* to do. If you're passionate about this calling, stay focused on your drive and do not feel discouraged.

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Always the Apprentice

By Todd W. Van Beck

I believe mortuary science students have universally chanted the same phrase over and over since time began: “Why do we have to know this stuff?”

I know I asked the question when I was a student back in the Middle Ages. But on looking back, the truth is I most often asked this immature question when I was having trouble in a course, such as chemistry.

After more than five decades in funeral service, I have concluded that I adopted that attitude because it was easy and immature on my part to ask the “why” question when certain failure in a particular course loomed on my horizon. Asking that pesky “why” question and getting reinforcement from my other college friends made me feel artificially in control of an academic situation that was, in truth, spinning out of control. This approach to academics was a pretty pale type of student psychology. I passed chemistry, but just by the hair on my chinny-chin.

In writing this article, I felt there might be some worth in focusing on the concept of creating a philosophy of education and associating this with the great value of looking at a career in our profession as being an experience of “always the apprentice.”

A philosophy of education is a process of living life and searchingly asking one specific question: “What is the aim of education?”

English author Samuel Johnson penned a sentence that points to a persistently important subject in all professional educational endeavors, and one I feel is particularly important for

funeral service: “Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless; knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.”

In contemporary funeral service education, I often hear students speak of education as if it were an end in itself. Today, I hear people debating the question of whether funeral service is a profession, a trade, a ministry or a business. I

also hear people question the relevance of mortuary education in the first place. There is no required licensing in most countries around the world, except for Canada and the United States, so why is this education stuff important anyway?

Here is a possible answer. A philosophy of education is ultimately not concerned with proving or disproving anything concerning the “sand traps” of evidence that people get caught up in and addicted to. These concern academic elitism, intellectual snobbery, a general attitude of affectation or even the obsession of whether this or that course is actually relevant to the realities of any kind of career path. Instead, a philosophy of education is a process of living life and searchingly asking one specific question: “What is the aim of education?”

I believe that if those charged with, and those who have earned, authentic funeral service influence would center their vision solely on the high-level moral and nonpolitical ideal of education simply for the sake of education, we would see some impressive and much needed changes and improvements. This sounds easier than it is, of course.

I also believe that if those same people centered their vision on imparting the ancient wisdom of humility, we would again see some impressive and much needed changes and improvements. History has repeatedly shown that the greatest of the greats in every profession learned, accepted and adopted the humble position of being an “apprentice for life.”

I mentioned before that I did not like chemistry in funeral service college, but I also really didn’t like the chemistry professor in a big way! He was obnoxious, ego driven, rude, unreasonable, and he made me work like hell. On our first day, he looked at our entire class and announced in a loud, aggressive voice: “When I finish with this class, we will hold



commencement in a telephone booth.” Do you know many people can you get in a telephone booth? I hated him!

In addition, all the student’s at the New England Institute sat back and complained that nobody uses chemistry, anyway, to embalm a body – nobody! The students in my class were devoted to the idea that the embalming chemical companies mixed the fluids and all we had to do was add water. Thus, chemistry had no relevancy to the real world of funeral service or so we thought.

This was *not* a philosophy of education; this was just a bunch of funeral director wannabes who were terribly young, probably immature, definitely insecure, and who certainly had horrible attitudes toward the very purpose of enrolling in a funeral service college program in the first place! Humility toward the purpose of the chosen career – and the purpose of mortuary education – had vanished (temporarily anyway).

And yet somehow, despite all these wacky student protests, negative gossip and unkind graffiti that ended up on bathroom walls, our dedicated-but-still-annoying chemistry professor kept pounding away at us week after week. And the more this relentless professor pounded, the more I hated him.

Of course, the glaring problem was that I was too young (and possibly too stupid) to understand what a philosophy of education was – even when it stood right in front of me day after day. I totally missed what the professor was trying to do.

But then the clouds lifted and a strange thing happened to me: I had a sudden and fickle change of heart. The haunting feeling struck me that just possibly the chemistry professor might have known what he was doing all along. Once I had that epiphany, I loved my chemistry professor! (Yes, this was totally psycho on my part, I know.)

After doing really well on the National Board Exam (I earned my highest mark in chemistry), I felt a tremendous appreciation for my chemistry professor. I even had a fleeting moment of actual maturity when I thanked him.

Looking back, my chemistry professor at New England Institute of Anatomy, Sanitary Science, Embalming and Funeral Directing possessed a very effective philosophy of education. He lived by example the power and truth of education simply for the sake of education, *period*. No argument, no debate, just educational action. Having him as my professor was indeed a humbling experience. He was not my chum – he was my professor, and he knew what was better for me than I did. And that is how a philosophy of education works.

Okay, I admit I don’t use chemistry theory to embalm per se, and I don’t actually use anatomical theory to raise vessels. The truth is I forgot all the linear and anatomical guides in embalming theory decades ago. But just because I have forgotten the written theory, however, does not mean I am embalming or chemistry illiterate. I still calculate the HCHO demand and still use chemistry every day of my life in general.

Education is a powerful tool – for good and for bad. I have worked with students whose life experiences and education taught them to deceive and take the easiest way out. I have

seen students who had great talent and intelligence, but life had taught them the lessons of deviousness and destructiveness – even unto themselves.

Education is surely not a substitute for morality, but in teaching and attempting to communicate with students, I have found that moral, ethical and, yes, even spiritual elements must be added to give philosophical character and balance to their lives. These are elements that go immediately to the bottom line in their ability to function in the “real world” as caring and compassionate funeral professionals. This is not easy, particularly given the cynical and complicated period in which we live, but it is a worthy ideal that is worth discussing and holding onto as a vision into the future.

The National Board Exam and license are vital, but those really make up a “learner’s permit.” What I learned from my chemistry professor 50 years ago has been a part of my life ever since. In



History has repeatedly shown that the greatest of the greats in every profession learned, accepted and adopted the humble position of “apprentice for life.”

the end, his dedication to his philosophical ideal of education for the sake of education helped create in little ol’ immature me a career that is now well on its way to the half-century mark. I was smart enough to thank him when I could (he is now dead), and I am still beholden to him and always will be.

ALWAYS THE APPRENTICE

When I graduated from mortuary college, I made a categorical mistake: I thought I knew it all. When I received my license, I made an even larger categorical mistake: I thought I knew what I was doing. I was so immature that if someone else got to drive the funeral coach for a service, I was upset. (Looking back, I am embarrassed at my behavior and offer thanks and appreciation to those veteran funeral professionals who had the kindness and graciousness to tolerate my arrogance and ridiculous behavior.)

Back then, I landed a job with a gentleman in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, named John B. Turner. He was mature, confident, knowledgeable and extremely humble and kind. Today, I call him the “Great American Funeral Director.” Anyway, Turner approached me one day and said, “Todd, you are going to meet this family and be the funeral director in charge of this service from start to finish.”

I was so happy. I was so full of myself. I was so obnoxious.

I had my conference with the family, and while the actual funeral service was being held, Turner came up to me and very gently said, “Now, Todd, you know that on our services, the

funeral director in charge takes the flowers to the cemetery.”

I was stunned, confused and could feel anger growing in my soul. The places at which I had worked in the past gave the job of taking the flowers to the cemetery to the staff grunts. The funeral director in charge usually drove the lead car, or at least the funeral coach, but here at Turner’s, they got to deliver the flowers to the cemetery. I didn’t like this notion one bit and wondered if he didn’t real-



When I graduated, I made a categorical mistake: I thought I knew it all. When I received my license, I made an even larger categorical mistake: I thought I knew what I was doing.

ize that I was a graduated, licensed funeral professional.

Then Turner explained to me his reasons. First, in order to ensure funeral service excellence, the funeral director in charge needs to be the first person to arrive at the grave. Second, this method ensures that if anything was wrong at the

grave, it could either be corrected and/or notification could be made to slow the procession. Third, and in Turner’s opinion, the greatest benefit, would be that the funeral director in charge would already be in position to personally greet and tend to the bereaved family when they arrived at the cemetery. Then, after the committal service was completed, the funeral director in charge could honestly say that he, and not somebody else, would stay to ensure that the vault and grave were properly closed.

John B. Turner made a production out of his graveside committal services and, looking back, there were solid reasons for why he was conducting more than 800 funerals annually. He was right and, as usual, I was wrong.

When I got back to the funeral home, I was still fuming. Turner, sensing my frustration, approached me. I tried to act cool and collected, but it was no use. He pulled me aside and said, “Todd, you are licensed and that is great; however, that is behind you now. We are all licensed; it is special, but it is not that special now. What is special, for the rest of your career, is humble service. Todd, remember here at John B. Turner & Son that we are all lifelong apprentices.”

Now that is a true philosophy of education.

Todd W. Van Beck is a longtime funeral director, funeral service historian, presenter, educator and author of hundreds of funeral service articles.

How You Can Be a Hero When Families Say, “We’ll Have a Service Later”

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

COVID-19 has forced hundreds of thousands of American families to postpone services for a loved one who died during the pandemic. While some gathered in person for limited, socially distanced funerals and others held online ceremonies of some kind, many understandably decided it’s simply too difficult or unsafe to hold a ceremony right now. Lacking a better alternative, many made vague promises to themselves and their family and friends that they will gather after the pandemic is over.

But even before the pandemic, families selecting direct cremation were apt to do the same thing – not always decisively foregoing a funeral but instead allowing themselves the possibility of a future ceremony while making no concrete plans to have one.

Unfortunately, most of these postponed ceremonies will never take place. Life goes on, new crises and demands arise, and

the idea of having a delayed memorial service fades further into the rear-view mirror.

In my experience, here’s the problem with that: When no ceremony is held, mourning is never properly initiated. This can create a terrible, never-ending limbo for these families, especially the primary mourners. I call it “unembarked grief” because these mourners often don’t leave the trailhead and venture into the normal and necessary wilderness of their grief. They have a much harder time fully acknowledging the reality of the death, which is the linchpin need of mourning. They also don’t receive the crucial public affirmation and social support a funeral provides.

Fortunately, these same families have *you* in their corner.



You are their funeral specialist. They don't understand what they're risking by not holding a funeral, but you do. They need you to be their advocate and guide. Not only can you help ensure that they hold whatever rites they can now, even if they're limited, but you can also be the catalyst for making all these postponed ceremonies happen.

That said, I also appreciate that you've been busier and more stressed in the past year than ever before, so please think of this initiative as a team effort (more on that later).

PLANNING NOW FOR LATER

I propose that when the time is right – during the arrangement call or in a follow-up call or visit – you take it upon yourself to help these families put future plans on paper. I've created a simple preplanning worksheet to help you understand what I mean. Please contact me through the email at the end of this article if you'd like me to send you a PDF. You're welcome to use it as is, if you like, or adapt it to your needs.

The goal of the worksheet is to capture the family's early, vague ideas and help them develop them as much as possible now, while the iron is still hot. Writing the plans down makes them even more concrete. For example, I know a family whose patriarch recently died. This man had numerous friends and acquaintances. He also loved ice cream. The family held a closed, family-only funeral in their Catholic church – an excellent start and already more than many families are doing – and announced in the obituary that they would invite the community to an ice-cream social later this year.

Will they actually have the ice-cream social? I don't know, but I do know that the conceiving of the idea itself makes it more likely, as does publishing that specific, future event in the obituary. Now the family has an image of a certain type of gathering in their minds, and their community members do, too. Talk of it is bound to continue, and that alone creates the momentum the idea will need to blossom into reality.

But what if their funeral director had taken the time to help this family think through and plan the future gathering in a bit more detail? The odds of it happening would increase even more.

Here are some things you can do now with at-need families that are postponing ceremonies:

Future Ceremony/ Gathering Preplanning Worksheet

Jotting down some ideas now will help make the future ceremony or gathering you envision a reality. We're happy to help. Please reach out to us at any time.

Today's date:

Funeral director and contact information:

Name of the person being remembered:

Possible ceremony date(s):

Event ideas:

Location/venue ideas:

Officiant, celebrant, or host name and contact information:

People who can help plan the event:

People to invite:

Other event ideas (music, readings, actions, memorabilia displays, etc.):

Miscellaneous notes:



- Initiate a conversation about what kind of ceremony and gathering they'd like to have in the future. Some are considering holding a full, traditional memorial ceremony in a church or at your funeral home.

Others have less formal ideas in mind, such as the ice-cream social, a cars-and-coffee event for a car buff or a garden gathering. The possibilities are endless.

- Suggest they mention this specific event in the obituary. That way, their friends and family members will help hold them accountable.
- Help them think about a venue for their event and note some specifics on the planning form, such as contact names and phone numbers. Offering your facilities when possible and appropriate is also a good idea.
- If they're not already affiliated with a church or place of worship, help connect them with a celebrant in their community – maybe even a celebrant on staff. Whether it's a religious officiant, lay celebrant or family host, you can jot down the person's name, phone number and email address, and, if it seems appropriate, you can even ask if it's okay for you to pass their contact information along to the celebrant so they can reach out to the family in the days to come. Next, and this is key, you can share or pass along follow-up responsibility to the celebrant, who might not be as overloaded as you are right now. He or she can then become the leader of the delayed-ceremony team.
- From what you've learned about the person who died as you helped gather obituary details, suggest other elements that might help them round out the future event, such as appropriate music, readings, memorabilia displays and more. Write them down on the form, too.
- Help them identify close friends or family members who could help with parts of the ceremony, such as the eulogy, readings, a tribute video or refreshments. Help the family understand that the more people who feel invited to be part of the future experience, the better. In fact, inviting those helpers now, even if the ceremony is months away, makes the planning start to gel and helps everyone feel committed to and part of this important event. Add a few notes about this, and also write down the family's ideas about who to invite.
- Ask the family about a future date that might work for the memorial service. Having a prospective date on the calendar and in everyone's minds makes the nebulous real. The family might not be able to pinpoint an exact date, but they can

probably envision a month, and maybe even which part of that month. Sometimes a special date might pop up during conversation, such as a birthday or anniversary, that would make a suitable ceremony date.

- Finally, send them home with the form you've filled out or, if you've held a virtual arrangement, email it to them. (Even better, email it to a number of family members.) Keep a copy for yourself and consider emailing them a duplicate PDF in a few weeks in case the form has been misplaced in the stress of the early days following the death.

In a short conversation, perhaps only 15 minutes, you have the power to move a family at risk of holding no ceremony, and thus a forever-stalled grief experience, from a "not likely" to a "probably." And if your funeral home enlists administrative and community outreach staff, as well as a care-contact calendar/process to follow up at regular intervals with such families in the weeks and months to come to help them firm up ceremony plans and troubleshoot hurdles, the odds will skyrocket. You get the ball rolling; others can help keep it going.

I'm a big believer in the philosophy of "do good things and good things will follow." Even if your funeral home won't be compensated for helping plan these future ceremonies, it's the right thing to do.

In a short conversation, perhaps only 15 minutes, you have the power to move a family at risk of holding no ceremony – and thus a forever-stalled grief experience – from a "not likely" to a "probably."

What's more, focusing on families' best interests promotes long-term goodwill. The families you help in this way will never forget you. You will be their hero, and they will tell others in your community about you and your above-and-beyond service and compassion.

And when you're a guest at that ice-cream social, enjoying a banana split, and you take a moment to look around at all the smiles, tears and hugs surrounding you, you'll feel affirmed that there is no greater purpose and privilege for your vocation.

Alan Wolfelt is founder and director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado. He speaks on grief-related topics, offers training sessions for caregivers and has written many bestselling books and other resources on grief for both caregivers and the grieving. For more information, visit centerforloss.com, email drwolfelt@centerforloss.com or call 970-217-7069.

NFDA Student Membership Benefit: Work/Life Resource Program

By Chris Raymond

Even in the best of times, caring for both the dead and the living can prove challenging, but 2020 undoubtedly tested the mettle, stamina and commitment of funeral professionals and those seeking licensure like never before. As if planning and executing services for the deceased – while also helping survivors cope with the immediacy of their forever loss – wasn't demanding enough, the COVID-19 pandemic has added new layers of difficulty and stress at work, at home and at school.

This raises the question: Who cares for the caregivers?

The answer: NFDA, courtesy of one of your many student membership benefits, the NFDA Work/Life Resource Program. (If you're not yet an NFDA member, no worries... keep reading to learn how you can join for free.)

HOW CAN THIS BENEFIT HELP YOU?

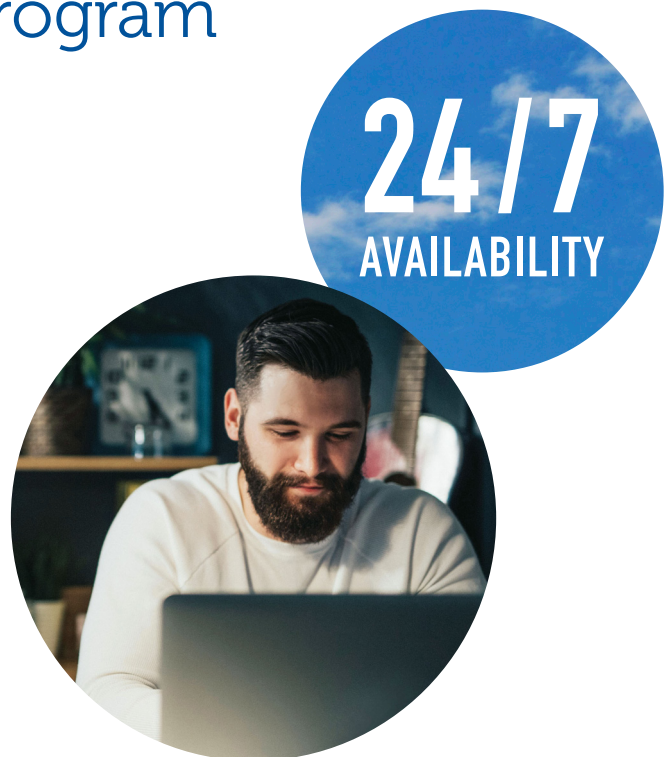
NFDA's Work/Life Resource Program is an employee-assistance program (EAP) administrated by Beacon Health Options, an award-winning, behavioral health services company based in Boston, Massachusetts, that employs more than 4,700 people and serves 1 out of 9 people nationwide.

In a nutshell, think of this NFDA-member benefit as a wise, trusted mentor you can contact 24/7 for useful advice/genuine assistance about something professional or personal that might keep you up at night. For example, delivery services such as DoorDash and Uber Eats have thrived during the coronavirus lockdowns, so perhaps you're struggling to manage your weight? Or perhaps you're trying to locate the right care facility for an elderly parent or could use some help educating a child with special needs at home? Maybe you're just hoping to find someone reliable to walk your dog.

But how can students access this benefit? Membership in NFDA, the world's largest association of funeral professionals, is free for funeral service students!

That's merely the tip of the "benefit iceberg" in terms of how NFDA's Work/Life Resource Program can assist you. By calling one toll-free number, you can connect at any time with a licensed, master's-degree level, dedicated counselor who can help you:

- Save money for funeral service school/college



- Consolidate credit card debt
- Address a substance abuse problem due to alcohol, drugs or tobacco
- Prepare for a significant life event, such as marriage, divorce, adoption, etc.
- Find the right preschool, prepare for a test or hire a tutor
- Learn how to manage conflict in a work or personal relationship.

Again, these are just a few examples of how the Work/Life Resource Program can assist you. The bottom line is that you can utilize this exclusive member benefit for any issue you face, large or small – you have nothing to lose by calling. Moreover, there is no cost to you, in most cases.

Now, perhaps you've snorted dismissively at this point, thinking: "I can do all this on Google." Well, the truth is you can't. As noted earlier, NFDA's Work/Life Resource Program connects you with a licensed, highly educated *human being*, not some list of maybe-relevant search results you must wade through yourself (as if you have the time).

Moreover, these dedicated counselors will actually listen to you and then draw up an action plan that could include online/community resources not publicly available, referrals that can save you money and/or professional counseling sessions, whether in person or by phone.

Finally, regardless of why you access this EAP, state and



federal laws require confidentiality in most cases), which means that your information remains private; unless you grant permission, no one else will even know you've contacted the NFDA Work/Life Resource Program, let alone why.

HOW YOU CAN ACCESS THIS BENEFIT

If you're not already an NFDA member, the first step is to fill out an application at nfda.org/join. Membership in the world's largest association of funeral service professionals is free for

funeral service students (\$35 if you prefer a printed copy of *The Director* magazine versus digital) and provides access to the latest data and information you need to succeed; money-saving discounts on school and office supplies, vacations, certification and training programs, etc.; networking opportunities with 19,000+ members worldwide; and many other benefits. Plus, it looks great on your résumé.

Next, visit nfda.org/benefits and click on Work/Life Resource Program on the left. Then log into your NFDA account for the toll-free phone number you can use at any time to access the member benefit. (Tip: Add the number to your contacts so it's handy.)

While you're there, check out the Work/Life Resource brochure and several videos, which offer a great overview of the many ways this members-only benefit can assist you.

Chris Raymond is the former editor of The Director magazine and runs funeralhelpcenter.com.

NFDA to Hold Virtual Career Fair April 29

If you're looking for a job in the funeral service profession, don't miss the NFDA Virtual Career Fair April 29 from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Eastern. Sponsored by the Funeral Service Foundation and the Newcomer Funeral Service Group, this free event is designed to connect job seekers to firms looking for top-notch candidates.

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?

- Active job seekers wishing to make genuine connections with hiring companies in real time
- Job seekers interested in speeding up their job search through numerous one-on-one interviews.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

Visit funeralcareers.nfda.org/events/nfda-2021-virtual-career-fair-2 to register. Create your free account (or sign in if you already have an account) and then upload your current résumé and cover letter.

For your account, make sure that your profile and contact information are accurate and up to date so employers can easily reach you.

Finally, review the tips and reminders on the site to ensure that you are properly prepared before interviewing, so you can put your best foot forward and make a strong first impression.



The Funeral Industry: Revolutionized By the Industrial Revolution

By Carol Milano

Undertakers were members of a unique, emerging profession in England just before 1700. The term referred to “something between a contractor and an entrepreneur. “They organized funerals,” explained Thomas Laqueur, Helen Fowler Distinguished Professor of History at the University of California Berkeley. “Initially, they put together fancy funerals, for people with coats of arms, getting things like feathers.” They rented out cloaks, escutcheons, coaches and other requisites for anyone who could afford them.

Previously, nearly everyone – except the elite – was buried in churchyards. But members of an embryonic middle class wanted their funerals to be more personal than the usual churchyard burial, yet different from those of the wealthy.

By the early 18th century, undertakers began coordinating new-style funerals. “They’d be ordering cloth, carriages, food, a coffin and rings from different people,” said Laqueur, author of *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains*.

There was no embalming then; women would usually wash the bodies. In a small town, often the person who made the casket (perhaps a carpenter) would organize a funeral for a farmer or other community member. “Everyone was invited to the feast and would get a black armband,” Laqueur noted.

For a 17th century village funeral, he said, “People simply left home and got whatever wagon they could find.” Conversely, funerals of aristocrats were spectacularly expensive by the early 1600s. An important person might have 40 carriages and give away mourning rings.

Funerals were quickly impacted during the first phases of urbanization, as a more material society evolved. By the 18th century, as funerals grew more frequent, “Undertakers were hired to organize them in nascent cities or other places where there were enough people to see them,” said Laqueur.

lution, which became a revolution of rising expectations. The material wealth of the culture increased enormously. People started wanting to show their place in the world,” he observed. Many demanded not to have a “pauper funeral.”

In the 17th century, burials were mainly in shrouds. “By the 19th century, people wanted to look halfway decent,” Laqueur continued. Supply and demand soon converged. British manufacturers developed the capacity to mass-produce coffins, better-looking handles, gloves, scarves, all kinds of black cloth, wholesale angels, and flowers, just as more people were able to afford them for funerals.

Previously, nearly everyone – save the elite – was buried in churchyards. Now, members of an embryonic middle class wanted their funerals to be more personal, yet different from those of the wealthy.

Rising standards bred a distinct funeral industry. Funeral directors became available to serve the needs. Families could give friends remembrances, including locketts, mourning rings, scarves and mourning gloves. Those closest to the deceased received a carefully chosen, more personal item. “Funerals became a chance to gather people, hold a party and show their place in the world,” said Laqueur. Even city department stores began selling black dresses and mourning souvenirs.

Soon, accessory choices from the array of funeral items were abundant. Cotton, wool and silk mills turned out varieties of cloths for drapes, mourning clothes, hats, scarves and gloves. By 1870, more than 1,500 people in a single town were employed making jet mourning jewelry! A huge variety of feathers became popular – for the horses, various coaches, even the paid mourners.

AN INFLUENTIAL PURCHASE OPPORTUNITY

In the old churchyards, everyone shared a common grave. “But in 1804, in France – for the first time since antiquity – you could buy a grave plot!” Laqueur reported. “That changed the whole culture. Other countries soon followed.”

A church belonged to its community. The few very important local residents would be buried inside a village’s parish



INDUSTRIAL IMPACT

The 1780s are usually considered the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. To Laqueur, however, the increase in wealth started a bit earlier, in what he called “the commercial revo-

church; everyone else was in the churchyard. In 18th century England, about 95% of people had no tombstones, but by the 19th century, they were common. “More families had more money and could afford a family plot. All the early British cemeteries, like Highgate, were jointly owned,” said Laqueur. “A group would invest, buy 20 acres, landscape, build a chapel and sell plots until they ran out of land.”

As more people began to care about exiting this world, the undertakers’ market was expanding. For a working-class budget, the least expensive personalized funeral might include a horse and simple refreshments of beer and cheese. The next income level would include more items.

The wish for a “decent funeral and a place in the ground where one belonged” was widespread by the 1800s. A massive infrastructure grew to avoid the stigma of “being put away on the parish.” Burial clubs sprang up all over England. By 1874, 2.3 million people had joined friends’ societies, which provided death and sickness benefits. Another 650,000 belonged to burial societies registered with the government. Many more joined small, unregistered burial clubs.

The wish for a dignified burial spurred a new, respectable lifestyle. Burial club rules often included sobriety and civility at meetings. Proper burial could be denied for deaths attributed to alcohol or venereal disease. People began borrowing

As the concept of a corpse became increasingly sentimental, more was demanded of funerals.

and repaying pawn shop loans for funeral expenses. By 1850, fears of combined burials or undesirable funerals spurred the motivation for greater income, fueling the new economy by driving people to seek jobs in industry.

As the concept of a corpse became increasingly sentimental, more was demanded of funerals. The body en route to a grave claimed new respect, space and power. Some bodies were exhumed and reburied to right or avenge perceived wrongs of the past.

The growing working class started planning more elaborate funerals, with layers of meaning. Processions or parades might feature a band and hundreds of marchers grouped by their particular trade. Unionists and guild members wore distinct garb to march. Social reformers, particularly, honored their leaders with grand funerals. In 1853, working-class organizer B. Rush-ton, a prominent handloom weaver, had a double-lined coffin. His procession of more than 6,000 marchers, many arriving on special trains, included 140 members of the Oddfellows, England’s biggest working-class fraternal organization.

By contrast, the elite maintained their distinct category. In 1852, a million people bought tickets to the Duke of Wellington’s funeral. His giant funeral cart, 27 feet long by 17 feet wide, was modeled on Alexander the Great’s. It was consid-

ered a triumph of the metal trades: 12 tons of old Waterloo cannon was melted down and molded into a decorative form.

Typical 19th century funerals grew more impressive as the industrial economy produced a wide range of coffin furniture, wholesale angels and flowers. “Coffins of oak, pine or elm were decorated with select nails, lined with varying qualities of cloth and furnished with the mattress of one’s choice,” Laqueur reported. Extravagant funerals added an inner coffin of lead.

After 1850, private carriages were increasingly available. Art prints from the 18th and 19th centuries began showing funeral parades. British society’s emphasis shifted from rank and glory to a focus on property, trade contracts and profits. Funerals became almost standardized, with industry producing seemingly unlimited accessories. The middle class could afford to buy coffin furniture, decorative metal, angels and more.

DEVELOPMENTS IN AMERICA

In America, too, the development of funerals shifted dramatically after the Industrial Revolution began in Europe. Churchyards had not been common in the American Colonies, partly because the Puritans didn’t believe in sacred space, Laqueur noted. Many villages simply built graveyards just outside of town. “Quakers and other Protestant groups wanted very modest funerals. It took them awhile to get over their aversion to more sophisticated burials. After one or two generations, though, people began to accept them,” Laqueur said.

Until the early 19th century, New England was mainly an importer. Like most manufactured goods, mourning clothes and bands came from England. However, certain important crafts were long established in the young United States. For instance, there were important silversmiths like Paul Revere. “Coffins were built here. In Boston, they were made of pine and maple, not cheap woods,” said Laqueur.

“The standards of American funerals were always higher because the very poor were not the Europeans who came here,” Laqueur also pointed out.

But no special abilities had been required. Gradually, though, Laqueur pointed out, “Early embalming – involving more technical features – became the professional skill of the undertaker, shifting the role. That led to the creation of the funeral directing profession here.

“The embalming skill, developed in America, made its way to Europe after the Civil War. That was the huge turning point – when people wanted to get bodies back for embalming. From Gettysburg, railways made it possible to ship bodies to their hometowns.”

Years of researching his well-reviewed book, comprising nearly 600 detail-crammed pages, led Laqueur to recognize a universal truth: “Because people build their own worlds and communities, it matters what you do with the dead.”

Note to readers: The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains by Thomas W. Laqueur (Princeton University Press, 2015) is available through Amazon or Barnes & Noble.

Carol Milano is a Brooklyn, New York, freelance writer who has been covering funeral service for 25 years.

From the Editor's Desk

"Rust Never Sleeps"

By Edward J. Defort

There is an old saying that "you don't know what you've got until it's gone." While this is true, there are many things we all take for granted until we need them, and then they had better be in perfect working order.

Two summers ago, a close friend passed away suddenly. Four days later, still shocked by his sudden death, I arrived at the funeral home at the same time as another friend, and we walked in together. The family was scattered throughout the funeral home. I searched out the kids and finally made my way to the widow. The suddenness of my friend's death cast a surreal cloud over everything.

Finally, I made my way to the front to pay my respects. As I looked at my friend in the casket, I swear that if his photo hadn't been right next to the casket, I would have thought I was in the wrong room. It looked nothing like him. His cheeks bulged unnaturally, like he was storing acorns, and his mouth was set in an unfamiliar frown, making the person I'd known since first grade almost unrecognizable. I could see blue in his hands and in exposed parts of his wrists as he clasped a rosary.

My friend's brother came over then, and the first thing he said was, "Don't remember him by how he looks in the casket, remember him by that picture – always smiling." The friend who had arrived with me said the fact that the body in the casket didn't look like our deceased friend, for him, made it easier to be there. "I can pretend it's not him," he said. An odd thing to say, but I knew what he meant.

The rest of the visitation was painful as I listened to other classmates repeat how the body in the casket "doesn't even look like him." It was hard to move past that, especially considering it was counterintuitive for what I have always come to expect from funeral service. It was the opposite of the feeling I had nine months earlier when I attended the visitation for a friend's mother, who had died after a four-year battle with cancer. She looked peaceful and exactly the way I remembered her. But my friend, healthy to the end, looked nothing like himself.

When a profession such as funeral service does not afford anyone the luxury of "getting it right next time," the mandate to stay sharp never wanes. There's another expression, courtesy of classic rocker Neil Young: "Rust never sleeps."

Edward J. Defort
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