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Some Things I've Learned Along the Way

By Gabriel Schauf



My Grandpa Chuck shared a lot of sayings with his grandkids. One that I frequently heard was "Experience is a wonderful teacher." He would often suggest that it can be beneficial to learn from the experiences of others as well.

With that in mind, I want to share with you a few valuable lessons I picked up through personal experience during the last 15 years as a funeral director. I hope that you can take this list, use it, add some lessons of your own and then pass it on to others.

IT'S NOT A PROFESSION, IT'S A LIFESTYLE

This is probably one of the most repeated descriptions about funeral directing, and one of the most important. Funeral

directing is not an 8-to-5 job, and anyone who tells you differently isn't doing it right. Of course, there is the scheduled work, and there is the unexpected that will happen at night, on weekends and on holidays. I once did a prearrangement while staying at a hospital for surgery.

And even when you aren't at work physically, you may still be there mentally. You may be sitting down for dinner and find yourself thinking about the family you worked with that day. You might be out with friends and think of a great idea for a memorial tribute. You could be out shopping and find yourself scoping out a fancy new work tie. It happens.

You, and those close to you, need to remember that there will be times when you will get pulled away in some way, shape or form. Plans will be canceled. Parties will be missed. Holiday activities will be interrupted. We've all been there.

This doesn't mean that the job will become your life; it just means you need to find a way to blend the two. Make sure that those you care about understand the nuances of your profession. Also be sure to use the downtime you get to the fullest. Fun, relaxation and self-care are important. Try to take some time to separate your brain from the business.

Above all else, establish a work/life balance that works for *you*. This is challenging, but doing so can



Every firm has a different culture and way of doing things, and there's nothing wrong with that. Still, it's important to find a culture and a way that fits you.

mean the difference between a happy funeral director and a burned-out one. Admittedly, I'm still working on that.

NETWORKING BEGINS ON DAY ONE

Another piece of advice from Grandpa was, "It's not always what you know, but who you know." Networking in this profession is very important for many reasons. We can't do it all ourselves, and knowing the right people when some support is needed can make a huge difference.

Therefore, when you're in college, get to know your classmates. These are your future colleagues, co-workers or even dependable trade-call connections. When you go to conferences or on tours, interact with other attendees, speakers or tour guides. These are folks with whom you can share and build ideas or learn new concepts to take back and use at your funeral home. When the vault or fluids salespeople visit your firm, chat with them. These can be valuable resources and sources of information. Beyond that, you never know what kind of opportunities might arise from knowing different people.

Besides professional connections, there are personal connections to be made. Get to know folks in your community. These are the people you will serve and work alongside to serve others. These are your friends and long-lasting relationships as you find your place. They are also your future customers. Go to local sporting events, join some social groups or get involved with a church. People are more apt to reach out to those they know, including when a death occurs. It is your responsibility to take the time to get to know them. Don't just be the person seen at funerals; become an active member of your community. It's good for you and good for the community.

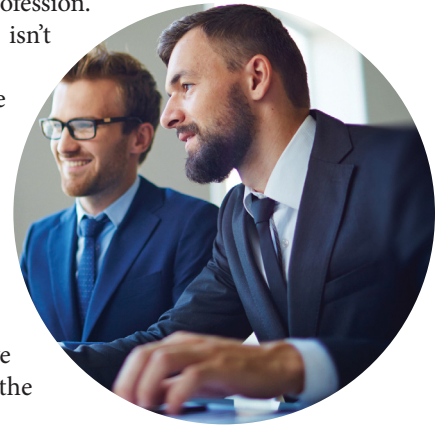


IT CAN TAKE TIME TO FIND THE RIGHT FIT

This is one lesson I feel gets overlooked more than it should. Everybody has that hope of getting into the profession, finding a great place to work and "living the dream." Sometimes that doesn't happen right away, though, and when it doesn't, the blame is often put

on picking the wrong profession. "I guess funeral service isn't for me."

People who should be in this profession often give up too soon, and all the time and effort they put in is wasted. Rather than being in the wrong profession, however, the truth might be that people have found themselves in the wrong place.



I share with my students this thought: All funeral homes are the same in terms of their purpose, but they can be different in terms of how they fulfill their purpose. Every funeral home has a different culture and way of doing things. There is nothing wrong with that. That being said, it's important to find a culture and way that fits *you*.

And by the way, if the "fit" you seek isn't in your town or area of comfort, then get out and find it somewhere else. There are incredible experiences and jobs to be had all over the country, available to anyone willing to take the risk, pack the car and go. Seek a place that brings out the best in you and that you love to be part of. You deserve it.

NON-FUNERAL SKILLS ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT, SO USE THEM TO SET YOURSELF APART

One thing I love about this profession is that it's actually many different professions wrapped into one. Funeral directors must also be public speakers, marketers, counselors, entertainers, tech supporters, social media gurus, interior designers, video producers, writers... the list goes on.

I encourage everyone in the profession to look in the mirror and ask, "What else do I have to offer?" What other talents/skills do I have that can be used to better serve families or enhance the funeral home? I promise you they'll come in handy.

That goes for interests as well. Perhaps you don't have a lot of social media knowledge but would like to, and the funeral home needs a boost in that department. See if you can take some classes or seminars and take it on as a responsibility. Is the funeral home looking into streaming services? Then it will need someone knowledgeable to purchase and maintain a great system and teach others how to use it.

If you can take what you know, build on it and demonstrate how much of a benefit it can be to the funeral home, you are also showing how much of an invaluable asset you are to the firm. Being "more than a funeral director" means you bring more to the table when competing for work, raises, promotions and opportunities. Use what you have to set yourself apart and find your success.

CHOOSE YOUR ROLE MODELS CAREFULLY, BUT LEARN WHAT YOU CAN FROM EVERYONE YOU CAN

These days, it seems like role models can be found anywhere. Look at social media, for example. There are plenty of influ-

encers, even funeral influencers, out there who would love nothing more than to be the person on whose every word you hang and with the ideals you personify.

Outside of social media, those people exist in your funeral home, community, school and your social networks as well. Not all of them are bad, but not all of them are good, either. Make sure that anyone you believe is setting the standard for how you want to live, act and work as a professional is doing so with the same values you have. Don't compromise your beliefs to fit someone else's mold. Instead, seek those who inspire you to elevate who you are and how you conduct yourself personally and professionally.

That said, you can still learn from everyone you encounter. Even if you don't agree with someone, you might find there are some approaches they take that prove successful and that you could add to your skill set or thought process. I've had plenty of people in my life with whom I didn't agree or didn't particularly enjoy being around who did a few things I respected and appreciated. These range from techniques I use in the prep room to how I work with families to how I deal with challenges. Emulate the right people, but at the same time, don't completely shut down those with whom you disagree.

THERE IS MUCH MORE OUT THERE BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE

I have alluded to this a time or two already, but remember that in order to grow, improve and even better your situation, you need to step out of your comfort zone occasionally. This can be scary, and many of us would rather just stay where we are. That might work for a while, but from experience, I can tell you that choosing the comfortable path now may lead to some regret or disappointment later.

If you have a passion for a specific part of this profession, get out and learn more about it. Go to embalming seminars and arrangement conferences. Reach out to those who are where you want to be and ask them to mentor you. Take some night classes in business management or public speaking.

There are many resources and learning experiences to take advantage of. There may be some costs, challenges and additional work, but the benefits are worth it. Remember, the difference between a good director

and a great one is the great ones never stop learning and improving their craft.

Likewise, if you're at a place in your life in which you feel like your wheels are spinning and want more, don't be afraid to look around and see what else is out there. That might result in a cross-country move, a different work environment or

Don't compromise your beliefs to fit someone else's mold. Seek those who inspire you to elevate who you are and how you conduct yourself personally and professionally.

even a slight career modification (within the same profession, of course), but it could provide just the adventure or new setting you're looking for. No one should ever be faulted for trying to improve their situation or find what makes them happy.

YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE THIS PROFESSION WILL TAKE YOU

When I graduated from the University of Minnesota in 2006, I figured I'd get a job at a funeral home, work my way up the ranks and eventually become an owner. It seemed like a simple plan at the time, but plans have a way of changing.

Since then, I have worked not only as a funeral director but also as a crematory operator, mortuary school instructor and program director, public speaker, podcast host, consultant and small-business owner. I have worked in small and large funeral homes, traveled across the country and met some amazing people – all thanks to my job as a funeral director.

For those who are looking, there are incredible opportunities to be had within the profession. Everything I mentioned doing has had to do with funeral service, and I'll be the first to tell you how blessed I have been, but I firmly believe that anyone can have these same opportunities. It's just a matter of putting in the time and effort, getting to know others and always keeping your eyes, ears and options open.

When I was first licensed, I would have never believed that the highs and lows of my career would bring me to where I am now. Being here now, though, I wouldn't have had it any other way. You truly never know where this profession can take you.

I hope this article has provided you with some things to ponder. While learning these lessons in my career, I have been thankful for the experiences that came with them. I also look forward to more of both in the years to come. I know I still have a long way to go. I wish you the best of luck in your future and hope you continue to learn, experience and succeed in this incredible profession.

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Serving Same-Sex Couples

By Marc Markell

Daria was preparing to meet Amir, who was making funeral arrangements for his husband Robert. She had met Amir when she was at his home to transfer Robert into her care. They had only spoken briefly.

As the arrangement conference started, Daria listened to Amir talk about how he met Robert at church shortly after Robert's divorce from his wife of 22 years became final. His now former wife felt betrayed and angry that Robert had left the marriage because he realized he was gay.

Robert felt both relieved to be living his authentic self and guilty that his former wife was experiencing such pain. His children, 19 and 15 at the time of the divorce, were sad but seemed to accept that their parents were no longer together. Robert and his children visited often after the divorce and continued to have a close relationship.

“We were married. I know she disagrees with her dad’s wishes, but I am his husband, and I want his wishes to be carried out.”

When Robert and Amir met, they realized they had a lot in common and started seeing each other regularly. Soon, they started to date, and a year later married at the same church where they met. Robert's children attended the wedding, but his older daughter, Camila, was not happy about the marriage. She told Robert that while she liked Amir, she felt awkward about having him as part of their family and didn't think they had a “real marriage.”

As the years passed, Robert and Amir saw Robert's children often, and Amir thought they all had a good relationship. Then, two years ago, Robert was diagnosed with Stage IV cancer. Everyone was heartbroken. Several weeks after telling the children about the diagnosis, Robert told them that he had decided he wanted to have his body cremated and the urn placed on the hearth in their home.

After hearing the plan, Camila stood up and said, “No. You will be buried next to Grandma and Grandpa.”

After Robert listened to Camila, he told her it was his decision, that he'd given it a lot of thought, and although he realized she wanted something different, his decision was final.



Camila left the house, saying she was never going to see him again. Her anger subsided after a few days, however, and she continued seeing Robert and Amir.

The day Robert died, Amir called Robert's children and they came over to see Robert's body and say goodbye.

Just as Amir finished sharing with Daria the story of his life with Robert, the office manager knocked on the arrangement room door. She said she hated to interrupt, but there was an emergency call for Daria.

“Hello?” Daria said after picking up the phone.

It was Camila. “You are meeting with Amir about my dad. My dad is not going to be cremated. He is going to be buried next to my grandparents. Amir is probably telling you that he and my dad were married. That's not true. They had a ceremony, but they don't even have the same last name. It wasn't a real marriage, so, since I am next of kin, I have the right to make the decisions. I looked it up on the internet.”

Daria told Camila that she would return her call and ended the conversation.

When Daria told Amir about the phone call, he was surprised and frustrated that Camila was trying to interfere with Robert's wishes. “We were married,” Amir told Daria. “I know she disagrees with her dad's wishes about cremation, but I am his husband, and I want Robert's wishes carried out.”

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

So what should the funeral director do? Should Daria ask to see Amir and Robert's marriage license? She'd never asked other couples for evidence of marriage, but no one had questioned the legitimacy of a marriage before. If she went ahead with the cremation and it turned out that Amir was not the next of kin, Camila would be denied her rights.

Though this is a fictional situation, you might ask yourself, “If I were in this situation, what would I do?” What is the ethical thing to do? What is the legal thing to do?

This same dynamic could certainly be present if two women were married and a relative disputed the authenticity of the marriage to the funeral director. The same skills would

be needed by the director to meet their legal obligations to the next of kin and, at the same time, attempt to open communication between all parties involved so the most dignified outcome could result.

For many years, same-sex couples had no legal protection unless they made sure legal documents were in place stating what they wanted to happen after death. As of 2015, however, all same-sex couples in the United States can legally marry in light of the Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

Even if same-sex couples decide to marry, however, there are still many challenges they might face. Because of other family members' disapproval of the relationship, or the couple keeping their marriage a secret due to bigotry and unacceptance, same-sex couples often do not have the same level of acceptance and normalcy as opposite-sex couples do.

Also, some same-sex couples might choose not to legally marry for a variety of reasons. Some believe the institution of legal marriage is too heteronormative for them to participate in. Others might decide not to become legally married because of finances or personal reasons.

Some people falsely assume that because same-sex marriage is legal, LGBTQ people have therefore reached a level of equality with their heterosexual peers. This is not true for many. While laws have certainly improved the choices LGBTQ people have, it has not come close to eliminating the prejudice and bigotry prevalent in the United States for many years. There are still couples with family members who refuse to attend their marriage ceremony or who only attend the reception because the marriage ceremony is "sinful."

Unfortunately, when a person dies, the spouse or partner might face pushback, disapproval or confrontation about their role in decisions about the final disposition or what type of funeral or memorial will happen.

Some religions espouse that gay and lesbian people are disordered and that same-sex marriages are sinful. This type of proclamation can cause many lesbian and gay members of such religions to either stay with the religion and tolerate its view that their sexual orientation is not equal to heterosexuality, stay with the religion and work to change the system to more fully affirm LGBTQ people, or leave the religion.



Due to family disapproval or the couple keeping the marriage secret because of bigotry, same-sex couples often do not have the same level of acceptance.

Some in the latter group find a religion that affirms all sexual orientations and gender identities, while others reject organized religion entirely. Leaving a religion one has grown up with can be very painful and might feel like leaving a family of origin.

The bottom line for funeral directors is that the deceased's spouse or designee is legally allowed to make arrangements and decide on final disposition. But when there is a disagreement about who is next of kin, who has the burden of proof? Is it the surviving spouse or the person saying the spouse is not the next of kin?

When a gay or lesbian person who is not in a relationship dies, they can have a legally appointed, designated next of kin if they want someone different from the legal next of kin making decisions for their arrangements and final disposition. Many people who are gay or lesbian, however, have very good relationships with their families of origin and have no need for an appointed designee because they trust that their wishes will be carried out by their family.

POSSIBLE OUTCOME #1

Though it is unclear who would bear the burden of proof in the opening scenario, one possible and somewhat ideal resolution might be the following as we continue from the end of the original scenario:

Amir told Daria, "I know she disagrees with her dad's wishes about cremation, but I am his husband, and I want Robert's wishes carried out."

Daria knew this was a difficult situation for Amir. She also felt bad for Camila wanting a different final disposition for her father than what he had decided would happen. "I'm so sorry, Amir," Daria said. "This must be very disappointing."

Amir agreed. "It's very disappointing. I wish Camila and I could talk."

"I know this is frustrating," Daria began, "but how do you feel about this idea? You show me your marriage license. It's not that I don't trust you, but if we have the marriage license, it will be clear to Camila that you are the next of kin and can make the decisions about the arrangements for Robert. Then we can invite her to have a discussion to see if there is a way to meet at least some of what everyone needs."

"That is a good plan," agreed Amir. "I will go home and get the license. I don't know if Camila would be ready to talk today. Could we meet again tomorrow?"

“She did seem very upset. I think having some time to put things in perspective might be good. I’ll call her and see if she is open to meet,” Daria said.

“Thank you. I don’t want Camila to be hurt or angry, and I have to do what Robert wanted,” Amir said as he got up to leave.

Daria called Camila and invited her to meet with Amir and her the following day. Though Camila was still angry, she agreed.

At the meeting, Daria explained that Amir and Robert were legally married, and Amir was indeed next of kin. She also said Amir wanted to discuss things with Camila before making a final decision.

Amir said, “Camila, I know how much you loved your dad, and he loved you so very much. I need to carry out his final wishes to be cremated. Is there anything I can do to make this easier for you?”

Camila began to cry. “I want to be able to visit him at the cemetery with Grams and Pops,” she said.

“I understand,” Amir responded. “Would it help if his body is cremated and we bury some of his ashes in the plot by your grandparents? That way, we would honor his wishes and you could still visit him at the cemetery.”

There was silence for a few seconds before Camila said, “You would do that?” Amir smiled and nodded yes.

“Even after the way I behaved? That’s so kind of you.”

“Your dad would be happy knowing you will visit him,” Amir responded.

Camila walked over to Amir and hugged him. “I don’t like the idea of cremation, but... I can live with it. Is there anything I can do to help with the memorial?” she asked.

“I’d love to have you stay and help,” he replied.

Camila smiled and said, “I’d love to be part of the arrangements, and I know you have the final say. Dad was so happy being with... married to you.”

If someone is unwilling to problem-solve, a director may have to acknowledge their feelings, keep the lines of communication open and then leave the situation.

POSSIBLE OUTCOME #2

The above, of course, would be the outcome we all hope for. Daria helped Amir make the final arrangements and included his stepdaughter. What the funeral director did potentially helped save their relationship.

Unfortunately, even with the funeral director’s best intentions and efforts, the arrangement situation could turn out in a less desirable way. Let’s pick up the original scenario

again after Daria suggests that she, Amir and Camila meet:

Daria called Camila and invited her to meet the following day. Camila was still very angry, however, and refused to meet with Amir.

Daria said Amir was bringing the marriage license in, and once he showed it to her, he would continue with the arrangements. Camila argued that the license could be counterfeit. Daria informed her that she trusted the license was not counterfeit and would recognize Amir as the next of kin. “I know you disagree with what Amir wants. I’m sorry. It’s unfortunate that you’re not interested in meeting with him. He seems like a reasonable person,” Daria said.

Camila was silent and then spoke. “Robert was my dad. I don’t know why Amir is being mean to me.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way. If you want to talk further, please contact me,” Daria said before hanging up.

When Amir returned with the marriage license, Daria informed him of her conversation with Camila, and they continued with the arrangements. Amir voiced that he wished Camila would have been willing to meet.

Ultimately, Camila did attend the memorial service, but she sat in the back of the room, did not speak with Amir and left immediately after the service was over.

POSSIBLE OUTCOME #3

Unfortunately, if someone is unwilling to problem-solve, it might be necessary for the funeral director to acknowledge the person’s feelings, keep the lines of communication open for the future and then leave the situation. Daria found herself in that role in the previous outcome.

There’s yet another possible outcome to the original scenario. Let’s pick up the scenario again after Daria suggests that she, Amir and Camila meet:

Daria called Camila and invited her to meet the following day. Camila said she would meet with Amir. Daria told her that Amir would bring in the marriage license, and once he showed it to her, he would continue with the arrangements.

Camila said, “So, what good will it be for me to meet with Amir if he has all the control?” Daria told Camila that the conversation might help everyone express their needs and see if there might be some room for compromise.

The next day, both Camila and Amir were at the funeral home at the agreed-upon time. Amir said, “Camila, I know how much you loved your dad, and he loved you so very much. I need to carry out his final wishes to be cremated. Is there anything I can do to make this easier for you?”

Camila was silent and stared at the floor. Then, without looking at Amir, she said, “I want to be able to visit him at the cemetery with Grams and Pops.”

“I understand,” Amir responded.

“Well, clearly you don’t,” Camila replied. “You are going to cremate him, and I won’t have a place to visit.”

Amir said, “Would it help if his body is cremated and we bury some of his ashes in the plot by your grandparents? That way, we would honor his wishes and you could still visit him at the cemetery.”

Camila looked at him and said, “So, you would let me bury a small part of him? No. I want to have a visitation, bury his body and have a gravestone, like it’s supposed to be.”

Daria politely interjected: “You could have a viewing, and after, we would conduct the cremation and then bury some of the remains... the ashes.”

“I don’t want him cremated,” Camila insisted.

Daria said, “I understand you have a different feeling about cremation than your dad or Amir. It is very common and...”

“No!” Camila interrupted. “I’m not going to take your selfish little offer, Amir. You’re mean, and I never want to see you again.” Camila stood up to leave.

Amir said, “Camila, please don’t leave. Robert’s death is so difficult for all of us. We can work this out.” Camila paused, and Amir continued: “I hope you attend your dad’s memorial. You being there would be so important to him. It would be important to all of us.”

Daria commented, “Would you be willing to stay, and we can resume talking after a break?”

Camila sat down again and said, “Okay, we can take a break.”

Amir left the room and Daria stayed with Camila. After several minutes of silence, Camila asked, “Is cremation really okay?”

“What is your concern?” Daria questioned.

“I don’t want him burned up.”

“Is it the fire that bothers you?”

“Yes.”

“I have an idea. When Amir returns, would you tell him your concern about cremation, and then I will share a possible solution?”

When Amir returned, Camila told Amir of her concern, and then Daria described alkaline hydrolysis, also called

“water cremation.” She explained that Robert’s body would be immersed in a mixture of heated water and lye. After a few hours, the body, other than the bones, would dissolve into a liquid safe enough to drain into a sink. The bone fragments left behind could then be processed into very small pieces that could be scattered, buried or even made into a memorial object.

Amir looked at Camila. “I’m fine with what Daria described. What do you think, Camila?”

“It’s not fire, so... can we still have a visitation and then bury some of what’s left?”

“Of course,” Amir said.

“Okay,” Camila said, “I think that would work. Thank you, Daria.”

She looked at Amir and said, “Thank you, too. I didn’t think we could work this out, but... thank you.”

Camila attended the service, and although her relationship with Amir was strained for several months, she eventually visited Amir and apologized for how she behaved.

These three scenarios are not the only ways an arrangement might happen if there is conflict about next of kin. They do, however, give some insight and information about how you, as a funeral director, might be able to deal with a similar difficult situation.

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Why Funeral Service Pros Need Mentors (And How to Get One)

By Welton Hong

Think of any highly successful person. If you dig deep enough into their history, you’ll uncover someone who came before: a guide, a teacher, a “Mr. Miyagi,” if you will. Steve Jobs had Mike Markkula. Oprah Winfrey had Maya Angelou. J.J. Abrams had Steven Spielberg. Even Mother Theresa had mentors, including Father Michael van der Peet.

Having a mentor as you enter a career can make a huge difference to your success. Mentoring is a tried-and-true



practice, and most successful people are backed by support systems that include mentors.

THE BENEFITS OF MENTORS

But do you need a mentor as a funeral service professional? After all, you're probably not planning to design the next wave in consumer technology or become a saint. But mentors aren't just for those who end up on the red carpet or in the history books; they're for everyone. And deathcare professionals especially can benefit from these types of relationships for many reasons.

Mentors provide accountability. Simply telling someone about your goals and agreeing with them that you'll work toward those efforts increase your chances of success by 65%. And if someone is checking in with you regularly, success rates jump to 77%.

Career mentors understand your challenges. Having a mentor experienced in your niche is important because he or she can provide empathy that goes beyond regular support. Your family and friends can be supportive, and that's often important for success and career satisfaction, too. But when you want to talk out a challenge, vent about your day or get feedback on potential solutions or decisions, mentors hit the ground running. You don't have to provide an elaborate backstory or explain the mechanisms of your job before they can be an accurate sounding board.

Mentors have traveled the path before. The right mentors have traveled a path similar to the one you're on. While their challenges faced and lessons learned won't align completely with yours, they can provide a foundation so you don't have to make the same mistakes they did. Think about it as if you're both climbing a mountain. If you climb without a mentor, you do all the work every step of the way. If you climb with a mentor, however, you can sometimes take advantage of the ropes and pins they've already placed.

Familiarity with the specifics of your career is even more important when it comes to funeral service. As someone who works with grieving families, you might experience social and emotional challenges other professionals don't. Mentors in your niche have firsthand experience with those same issues and can offer a compassionate ear and proven advice.

HOW TO FIND MENTORS FOR YOUR CAREER

More than 75% of professionals think a mentor is important to success, but less than 40% actually have one. One reason for that discrepancy is people don't fully understand how mentorship relationships occur and how to find someone willing to enter into such a journey. Here are some tips for finding mentors:

Consider your education. For those just starting out, teachers and others involved in their professional education can provide mentorship. If your educators are unable to fulfill such roles, they might be able to connect you with someone who can. If a mentor is important to you, you must be willing to initiate the relationship and ask for assistance. Be kind and courteous when doing so. You might say: "I'm starting a

job at Smith Funeral Home soon, and I'd appreciate a chance to talk to you about what that might look like and any advice you have. Can I buy you coffee?"

Ask within your organization. If you're already interning with a funeral service firm or have an affiliation with one, look to people there. You can specifically ask for their guidance, but you can also observe how someone does their job, balances it with their life and/or approaches certain challenges, and learn from that.

Use social media. Follow people in the profession. Read their content and the content to which they link. Comment on their posts and develop relationships that create an opportunity to reach out for more personal connections. A mentor doesn't have to be someone you know in person; you can get advice, accountability and support via direct messaging, phone calls and video chats.

Mentors provide some accountability. Simply telling someone about your goals and agreeing to work toward them increases your chances of success by 65%.

Widen your network. Join industry and local organizations and be prepared to network with others. Also, offer your support since mentorship isn't a one-way street. If you meet someone who's speaking at an event, show your support by being in the audience and then providing positive feedback. By developing this type of rapport, you create communication and trust that let you reach out to the person for advice in the future.

Be aware of organically occurring mentors. Not every mentor relationship happens because you set out with that goal in mind. Mother Theresa met Father Michael van der Peet at a bus stop. Their bus stop chat eventually developed into a life-long friendship. Be open to chance meetings and growing relationships that can become mentorship options in your life.

Mentorship relationships come in all types, and they don't have to be officially recognized as such to matter. As a burgeoning funeral service professional, being aware of these types of relationships and fostering them throughout your career can help increase your chances at success and even overall happiness in life.

Welton Hong is founder of Ring Ring Marketing (funeralhomeprofits.com), as well as a regular contributor to The Director magazine and author of Making Your Phone Ring With Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes (second edition).

Social Conversations and Self-Expression in the Digital Universe

By Edward J. Defort

It was late-night talk show host Conan O'Brien who first quipped that there is big consolidation afoot in the field of social media, joking that Twitter, YouTube and Facebook were going to merge, and the resulting firm would be known as "You Twit Face."

One challenge social media brings to the table is learning how to use it. Not only is this a challenge in and of itself, but so is deciding on which options to invest your time. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube remain as the three most top-of-mind options. Fallen by the wayside is MySpace, which is still active but has been retooled to be a shell of its former self. Apple's iTunes venture into social media, Ping, which was designed to allow fans to connect with musical artists, failed to generate any buzz. There were additional attempts, including ConnectU, VitalSkate, The Hub, Yahoo! Buzz, Friendster and others.

It's true that as the average age of a typical Facebook user increases, a new communication frontier emerges. If I am to go by the teenagers I know, they have embraced the mini-reality series of Snapchat. Has anyone been contacted by their "text-door neighbor"? This is when you receive a text from someone whose cell number is close to yours. For instance, if your number is 123-4567, you might get a text from 123-4566, -4568 or other nearby numbers.

While the format and tone of language changes with the generations, the purpose is still to effectively communicate information, thoughts and ideas to an audience.

Every generation has its nuances to consider, but doesn't it seem like some people seem to have their own language? And I'm not talking just about millennials (although I still remember the crooked look I gave my niece the first time she used the phrase "on fleek" to me). But while the format and



tone changes, the purpose is still to effectively communicate information, thoughts and ideas to an audience.

THE DIGITAL UNIVERSE

Have you ever seen or read something that brings to mind something long forgotten? That happened to me while reading the article by Bill Ford, president and CEO of SESCO Management Consultants, which appears later in this issue. It made me realize that it was nearly five years ago that a 30-year-old woman was fired for allowing her picture to be taken in front of a sign at Arlington National Cemetery that read "Silence and Respect," posing as if she were yelling at someone and making an obscene gesture. Surprise! The photo found its way to Facebook and other social media ports, which means, of course, that it will never go away.

At one time or another, we've all said or done something we thought was going to be a laugh riot, only to have it fall flat. I understand that humor is subjective, and I suppose the actor here might have been going for a modern-day interpretation of the image of the guy leaning against a pole under a sign that reads "No Loitering."

But this woman lost her job because of the complete disconnect between funny and shocking disrespect. Of course, we can't be sure of her motives. Did she have illusions of the photo "going viral" and perhaps securing a mention on one of those cable TV shows that spotlight foolish behavior found on the internet? Who knows?

The woman did issue an apology, saying it was a "spur-of-the-moment total lapse of judgment" and that she "wasn't reacting to the place, she was reacting to the sign."

Reacting to the sign? Again, for the record, the sign said "Silence and Respect" and "Arlington National Cemetery." While I can accept the "total lapse of judgment" comment,

I can't see how she missed the cemetery's name on the very sign she was mocking. Did she forget where she was?

One thing is certain: She was not the first, nor will she be the last, to be terminated for such behavior. The internet is unforgiving, and if you do have second thoughts about something you said or did online, well, you're rolling the dice that no one took a screenshot.

While the general issue of a company's influence over an employee's behavior in the employee's off hours has been debated in many circles, this woman made this decision pretty easy for her employer since she was on a company-sponsored trip to the cemetery. The woman's photographer co-worker was dismissed as well.

Just a few years ago, funeral directors could bank on the

majority of end-of-life services being traditional funerals. Much has been said and written about baby boomers' tendencies to be more individualistic than previous generations. Looking well down the road, Gen-Xers and millennials might even be more individualistic than boomers. And one of the keys to arrangement conferences is to consider who is in the room and what their needs are as far as communication and input.

Too often, people try to communicate with people without considering what type of language and presentation they are comfortable with. Too often, people are spoken at rather than spoken to.

Edward J. Defort is editor of NFDA Publications.



Education: The Direction of Your Profession

By Daniel M. Isard

There are three ways to create a career in funeral service. Your education must prepare you for the various opportunities you will face.

EMBALMER: Embalming is a very noble and often thankless job. You take

human beings who died from any number of different causes and help restore the appearance of their bodies so their family can see their deceased loved one in the best possible way one last time. Each case will be somewhat different, and the 25 or so embalming cases required to graduate is inadequate to prepare you for your future responsibilities. Talk about stress!

FUNERAL DIRECTOR: A funeral director works with the living to help them plan the funeral event. The people with whom you meet are fighting sleep deprivation, stress, anger, fear and a hundred other human emotions. Your job is to help them get to the conclusion of the funeral service. You are further challenged to do everything right, make sure nothing goes wrong and ensure that no one, whether they're under your control or not, screws up.

MANAGEMENT: A manager supervises funeral directors and/or embalmers, as well as administrators and vendors.

Based on education and experience, their role is to keep everyone under their purview operating properly and to make sure compliance and financial tasks are performed correctly. This is not unlike a three-ring-circus master with no cages, nets or fire extinguishers. You have a whip, but you best not use it and anger the trainers, jugglers, lions or clowns.

So, which route to take? In some states, you are required to be a funeral director/embalmer, as those states have just one license. Other states offer two or "split" licenses. (Colorado is license free!)

Unfortunately, licensure and your career might be at odds. For example, imagine you want to be a funeral director and use your mind to help the living, but you don't want to be an embalmer. If your firm is small and needs someone to embalm, and you have that license even though you don't want to pursue it, then you are going to be unhappy. This might cause you to find an exit strategy out of that job or out of funeral service entirely.

Since more than half of all funeral home jobs are located

Like the ministry, funeral service is still a job, and your desire to repair the world and those who are hurting must be tempered with the desire to stay gainfully employed.

in rural settings, moving from one funeral home to another might require uprooting your family. If you are in a two-worker household, that can put even more pressure on the relationship.

Funeral service is a calling for most. Whether working as an embalmer, a funeral director or both, most people enter the profession with a lay-ministerial motivation. Like the ministry, however, funeral service is still a job, and your desire to repair the world or those who are hurting must be tempered with a desire to stay gainfully employed.

This gainful employment represents a quid pro quo between the employee and employer. The employer is obligated to provide an accurate job description, training and safe working conditions. The employee is obligated to act according to the employer's rules and in a professional way. For that, there is consideration, i.e., your wages or salary.

SO, WHAT MAKES AN EMBALMER WORTH MORE?

Experience and competency are the two components that drive compensation amounts. An experienced embalmer with an unsteady hand will not be well compensated. This is a technical, surgical profession, and you will need to make decisions about chemicals, techniques and other things affecting tissue, gases and the flow of fluids. Embalming difficult cases is the only way to gain the experience you need.

There are some advance classes offered by master embalmers, but you might not see cases like the ones they present for many years. Moreover, the embalmer's art is fading as fewer bodies are embalmed each year.

SO, WHAT MAKES A FUNERAL DIRECTOR WORTH MORE?

That is a highly complex question, but I think it is about revenue. Funeral directors meet with families, and if those families are satisfied, they not only pay their bill but also pay it quicker, which positively affects revenue. In addition, funeral directors who get out into the community attract patronage, which also drives revenue.

Please understand that I don't endorse funeral directors who upsell or persuade families to buy more merchandise than they can afford. In fact, I have rarely seen this, but I know who some do it. On the other hand, I don't want a family to learn a week after the funeral that there were ways they could have memorialized or celebrated the life of their loved one about which they were not told. "Every option, every family, every time" is the credo to live by.

In many states, funeral directors also sell preneed. In those states, the funeral director with a better arrangement style and the willingness to handle the rejection of sales is more valuable. While this doesn't promote revenue today,



it does drive tomorrow's patronage, thus driving future revenue.

The modern-day metaphor is that employers want to get everyone "on the bus." The best passengers (employees) will sort out where their seats are located, but the driver (the employer) will still pull the bus over at times to train people how the bus works. And sometimes, the driver will pull the bus over to let someone off.

I like employers that give employees written reviews at least annually. A job description upon hiring is the start, but once a year, at a minimum, employers should tell an employee how well he or she is doing at meeting the requirements of the job description.

It could be that the employee just needs added training, and this is the time to plan that out.

SO, WHAT MAKES A MANAGER WORTH MORE?

A manager needs job experience. You need to know how to guide people through routine and not-so-routine matters. The two greatest skills I think a manager needs are confidence and communication.

A good communicator can transmit his or her confidence in getting things done to staff and families. A good communicator will train co-workers properly and in advance of need.

Confidence is critical because "when you know that you know, you fear no one and nothing!" You can only get confidence by doing, however, so place yourself in many different areas of the job.

As for communication, I love Toastmasters for teaching public speaking. I believe it's critical to be well-read, too, since managers often communicate in writing to families and staff members.

So, what course should you pursue post-graduation? Start backward and look at yourself at age 67, when you have retired and are collecting Social Security. What are the trap-pings around you? How happy are you? Did you bring joy to the world and those with whom you worked? Did you help families? What are the things you did to be happy?

A client's son recently told me he is leaving funeral service because he never really wanted to go into it and did so just as a favor to his father. Well, his father died and now the son wants to be a dairy farmer. I'm glad he figured this out now rather than at age 67!

Life is too short. Be happy. Find a job that is a passion, not just work.

Dan Isard is founder of The Foresight Companies, which has served thousands of funeral homes nationwide for the past four decades. Contact Isard at 602-274-6464 or danisard@theforesightcompanies.com.

You Want to Manage Your Employees' Cellphones and Social Media? Good Luck!

By William E. Ford

There are many employees who feel they must have their cellphones on at work so their children can contact them. Leaving aside the obvious question, "What did you do when there were no cellphones?" this issue involves other serious workplace issues as well,



such as loss of productivity, clients made to wait, photos or videos taken at work and posted online or shared with co-workers, customers who receive poor service, improper or sexually charged emails, and sexting.

Some employers prohibit employees from bringing cellphones to work. Others have a policy prohibiting cellphones from being turned on at work. Still others allow them to be turned on but only in the vibrate mode. (The problem with this provision is that it is difficult to enforce and you still don't know what the employee is accessing online.)

If cellphones are allowed to be used at work, some employees may abuse the privilege and use the phone for other reasons, such as making appointments, ordering groceries or, the "unkindest cut of all," looking for another job on company time.

From our seat as management consultants, it's best not to allow cellphones at work if that policy is reasonable for your workplace.

Cellphones aside, there's also social media and social networking, which gives people the ability to interact with others and even reconnect with old friends or those with similar interests. Some of the more popular sites are Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. While not an actual social networking site, YouTube can also be a major source of employee problems at work. There is no cost to join and you have virtually unlimited access.

So what's the problem? Problems at work are legion and continue to evolve. For example, if someone writes on your "wall" or if some event occurs, such as a friend's birthday, Facebook can send a notification to your computer or smartphone.

Suppose a male supervisor of a female employee accesses her social networking page and sees pictures that are, shall we carefully say, "not work related"? The male supervisor

then either writes on her wall or, in conversation with her the next day, tells her how much he likes her pictures. The employee, feeling threatened and "creeped out," tells her mother, who just happens to know a personal injury attorney, who then

contacts both the company and the supervisor and... well, the story would most likely not end well.

Or perhaps a disgruntled employee goes home from work one night, accesses his social networking site and writes on his wall, "My boss is a real jerk, and this is the worst company I've ever worked for. They treat me like a dog and don't pay me enough to live on." The supervisor sees the post and promptly fires the employee, who then files an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), claiming that the posting was "protected concerted activity." (Under NLRB regulations, employees do have the protected right to discuss wages, benefits and working conditions.)

Employees now come to work armed with smartphones that have voracious networking capabilities, not the least of which is ubiquitous Facebook.

Or, again, suppose an employee, on the weekend, during nonwork hours, visits an auto dealership to buy a car and has a bad experience. She tweets to her friends, "This is an awful dealership. They treated me rudely, lied to me and tried to charge me extra fees." The trouble is, this auto dealership is a customer of the company for which the employee works. The dealership hears about the tweet, gets a copy of it and cancels its account.

Suppose two employees are horsing around at work and one of them makes an obscene gesture. It's all in good fun,

except that a third employee was watching and took a video with his smartphone, which he then emailed to all of his friends, one of whom posted it on YouTube and... the employee is embarrassed and the public relations fallout for the employer could be significant.

Imagine how much worse this could be if some kind of activity took place at a company party, where one or more employees had a few too many libations and one “playfully” engaged in some sort of sexual behavior, which another employee caught on video, sent to friends, with one of them putting it on YouTube and... you know the rest.

Since there are lots of social networking alligators in the digital swamp, a comprehensive social networking policy is strongly recommended.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The digital universe is still expanding, so we anticipate that other unexpected and undesired situations will evolve in the workplace, and management must be prepared to handle them. After all, this is what managers do.

As one manager told me, however, “When you’re up to your elbows in alligators, it’s hard to remember that your main objective is to drain the swamp.” And since there are lots of social networking alligators in the digital swamp, we strongly recommend that you have a comprehensive policy regarding social networking at work. Some of the provisions could include:

1. Prohibit cellphones or smartphones at work or, if not prohibited, place specific guidelines on their use.
2. Some employers have a designated phone line for family members to call in the event of an emergency.
3. Prohibit employees from using cellphones to take pictures or video at work.
4. Prohibit employees from accessing social networking sites at work, both on cellphones and computers.
5. Do not allow supervisors to access the social networking sites of their employees or “friend” employees.
6. While we cannot prohibit an employee from posting any and all information, we can caution them to be prudent.
7. If the company has a Facebook or Twitter account, be sure to thoroughly train and advise the employee in charge of it with respect to the benefits, pitfalls and proper use of these social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WORKPLACE

Someone might rightly refer to the following statements as “a tremendous grasp of the obvious.” Nevertheless...

The proliferation of social media and social networking continues to move at warp speed, pushing ahead so fast that we can hardly keep up with it. News, messages, texts, emails, tweets – all instantaneous and mobile, and all with great opportunity for good or ill.

Ours is a digital society, and we know that the workplace mirrors society; that is, what’s going on in society will, ultimately, make its way into the workplace. Thus, our employees now come to work armed with smartphones that have voracious networking capabilities, not the least of which is the ubiquitous Facebook.

If employees use Facebook to talk about their personal interests, that’s one thing, but if they use Facebook to talk about work-related activities, we suddenly find ourselves in an entirely different arena because employees might post derogatory information about their employer, their work, their pay, their co-workers, their supervisor or their clients.

If they post in this way, what can we as employers tell them and what restrictions can we require? The answer is very little and very few, respectively, owing to the NLRB’s regulations on “protected concerted activity.”

PROTECTED CONCERTED ACTIVITY ON FACEBOOK

For the most part, according to the NLRB, employees have the right to engage in “protected concerted activity,” which is where two or more employees discuss their wages, benefits and working conditions. Employees have the right to engage in this activity, and as employers, we cannot prohibit it.

An example would be where two or more employees discuss their pay rates with one another – employees have this right and employers are not allowed to have a policy prohibiting it. They have this right at work, at the water cooler, on the job and... on Facebook. As strange and objectionable as it seems, this right even extends to offensive language about an employer or supervisor.

In order for the behavior to be “protected concerted activity,” however, it must meet the following criteria. It must (1) concern wages, benefits and/or working conditions, and (2) two or more employees must be involved. Thus, if an employee posts something to the effect of “My supervisor is a purple people-eater” and other employees respond with their own postings, then the behavior has met both criterion and is thus “protected concerted activity.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WORKPLACE

From a human resources standpoint, the best recommendation is to leave the Facebook pages of employees alone as much as we can. We strongly recommend that supervisors do not access the Facebook pages of their employees, do not “friend” employees on Facebook (we know we’re in trouble when a noun becomes a verb), do not comment about the Facebook pages of employees and do not post on the Face-

book pages of employees (this is TWTH – trouble waiting to happen).

We also don't recommend an employment policy that instructs employees about proper posting on Facebook, as this moves us ever closer to the protected category. If absolutely necessary, a few words about caution and prudence might be all right, but in general terms, the less said about employees' personal Facebook pages, the better.

In addition, we recommend that you exercise extreme caution when considering whether to discipline or reprimand an employee for a personal Facebook posting. That's not to say it can't be done, but if it is done, we have to be very, very careful. We might come out ahead at the end of the day,

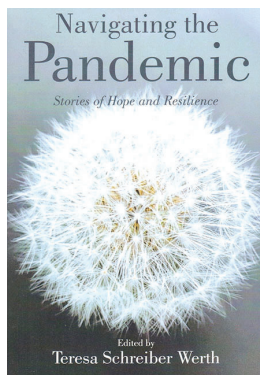
but sometimes we can spend a lot of money just to prove we were right.

The question of using smartphones at work is similar issue. Some employers completely prohibit their use at work, while others allow restricted use. Without question, employees should not be allowed to use their smartphones to access social networking sites while at work or to take pictures with their smartphone cameras, as this is another instance of TWTH.

William Ford is president and CEO of SESCO Management Consultants in Bristol, Tennessee, an NFDA Endorsed Provider for human resources.

Navigating The Pandemic

By Edward J. Defort



Editor's note: Teresa Schreiber Werth, a retired communications professional, freelance writer, author, editor, and funeral and wedding celebrant, published a new book addressing the pandemic of unresolved grief. She recently discussed the new anthology, Navigating the Pandemic: Stories of Hope and Resilience, on which more than 30 writers collaborated.

By this time, most people probably thought they would be looking at the coronavirus pandemic in their rearview mirror. However, a resurgence of the virus due to new variants has determined that COVID-19 is still very much in our presence.

Once COVID reached the United States in early 2020, Teresa Schreiber Werth's initial concerns focused on addressing the needs of families whose loved ones were dying alone. She soon realized that the scope of the pandemic was a complex prism of challenges and suffering experienced by diverse communities in diverse ways. Through an extended network of creative and generous people, she solicited essays, memoirs and poems based on both professional insight and lived experiences.

You have a great perspective on funerals, and, of course, the nature of the funeral has changed so much over the years. Thinking about the first funeral you officiated, how would such a service be looked at now, 50 years later?



WERTH: The first funeral at which I officiated was in the early 1970s. It was for an elderly woman who was in a poetry class I taught at a senior center. She told me what she would like, and we planned it together several weeks before she died. By today's standards, it was very traditional: several of her favorite Scripture readings, the Lord's Prayer, a short meditation, a blessing and benediction. Because it was at the graveside, there was no music.

Fifty years later, I invite the family to begin with a Candle of Remembrance for predeceased family and friends. Readings are more often secular than scriptural. I encourage friends and family to participate as readers or to give the eulogy, and family and friends are invited to share remembrances. There are photo boards, videos and memory tables. There can be music in the funeral home before, after and as part of the service, and also graveside.

One granddaughter gave a modern dance tribute to her grandfather. I have had a motorcycle at the gravesite, a beloved pet, a cherished hot rod – even a bottle of blackberry brandy to pass around for a toast. There really are no rules. What might seem outlandish to some people can seem very appropriate to others when considering the person they are remembering. I listen to the family, ask a lot of questions and help create a unique remembrance.

Could you provide some further detail about what led you to study to become a certified funeral celebrant?

WERTH: When I became aware of the certified celebrant training program, I decided that earning that credential would give funeral directors more incentive to give me a chance to work with their clients, and it would give families more confidence in working with me. The value in having a celebrant on a funeral home's officiant list is the funeral director's ability to optimally match a celebrant to a family's style and needs.

NFDA's consumer research (as well as PEW research) shows that religion is becoming less influential in the lives of more people. Do you agree with that statement? What has been your observation when it comes to religious services, personal services and celebrants?

WERTH: When I became certified [2009], the funeral celebrant was a fairly new option in western New York. Without being on the staff of any one funeral home, funeral directors had to be persuaded to allow me to represent their business as a freelancer. This was also the time when more and more people in the United States were identifying themselves as "unchurched."

It seemed logical to me that such families would be more comfortable working with a celebrant who could help them plan a spiritual/humanist/secular service as opposed to a clergy person who had a singular, denominational approach. I have definitely found this to be true.

Many directors have made it a point to make sure that the phrase "cookie cutter" is not used to describe their services. Has there been much pushback over the years or have you found that what you offer is what families have been looking for in a service but perhaps didn't realize it?

WERTH: When I say that I don't offer "cookie-cutter services," that's exactly what I mean. I don't have a script in which I insert the name of the deceased person, read a prescribed list of Scriptures and offer the same prayers for every service. Each service/life tribute/celebration of life on which I work with a family to create is unique. I have a library of resources, plus whatever ideas and resources they may bring to the table.

I have found that most people prefer to be able to customize the service. They're often surprised and pleased to know that they can have the music, the readings, the special touches that truly reflect the person they are celebrating.

I always encourage the family to offer a simple [printed] program so that those hard-of-hearing attendees can know what is being said, so they have something to send to far-away family and friends, and so they have something to keep and reflect on later. It's a small thing that ends up meaning a lot.

NFDA recently surveyed families that suffered losses during the pandemic and found that those who had a visitation and burial rated the services more satisfying and healing than families that had a visitation and cremation. What is cremation missing that doesn't give families as good a head start on their grief journey as burial?

WERTH: Cremation dates back at least 17,000 years. Alternative death rituals that emphasize one method of disposal – burial, cremation or exposure – have gone through periods of preference throughout history. The trend toward cremation in the United States began long before the pandemic and was, I believe, largely based on cost savings.

And it has never been an either/or situation. The public might not be aware that there have been/are many options. For instance, you can rent a casket for calling hours/viewing and then have the body cremated and buried afterward.

But what your survey revealed is one of the most pervasive aspects of the pandemic. We all lost a lot. We lost many different things: our freedom to travel and shop, go to events, gather with family and friends, visit loved ones in nursing homes and hospitals, go to work, send our kids to school and on and on. Each of those losses feels like grief to us.

The grief journey happens when you acknowledge your feelings of grief, take time to work through them and arrive at a place of meaning or acceptance.

In our culture, when we cannot be with someone to say a last goodbye or witness their passing, to see their physical body one last time, we feel grief. Cremation, for some people, might exacerbate that loss. To be denied these things, it feels as if the loop has not been closed. The end of their life feels to be somehow incomplete. This feeling is often described as "unresolved grief," but such feelings can occur after visitation and burial, as well as after cremation with no visitation.

In all cases (viewing/funeral/burial, direct cremation/burial, viewing/cremation/burial, cremation/no burial), I believe that the critical element is a memorial service/celebration of life that acknowledges the person's whole life, triggers memories or experiences we shared and allows us to feel and share the reality of the loss.

Do you think there should be a national day of recognition for those who died during the pandemic? Not necessarily from COVID-19 itself, but during the time when families and friends could not gather in the numbers or the manner they would have liked?

WERTH: I have never really thought about this. I know that some funeral homes hold an annual day of remembrance when they honor everyone they have buried during the preceding year. That kind of service could encompass all who died since the beginning of the pandemic but not necessarily from COVID-19. In the same way that annually reading the names of those who died on 9/11 is a cherished remembrance, I can see how such a memorial service could be healing. Remembering a loved one in any meaningful way can be a source of comfort.



But I'm not sure I can see a way to structure a national day that would be inclusive and specific enough to genuinely capture the hearts of all Americans since we experienced our losses in so many different ways and at so many different times between January 2020 and today.

Tell me about your involvement with the Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers. What led you to them?

WERTH: When I started writing the book and inviting other writers to donate their work, I had already decided that the book was not going to be a for-profit venture. Instead, I wanted profits from the book to be donated to a worthwhile charity. In this way, the book would not only be doing good by inspiring people with its words and images, it would also be helping people through the work of some national or international charity partner.

Initially, this was one of my biggest challenges and disappointments. I reached out and spoke with people from most of the major charities doing impressive work during the pandemic. What I found was that I had to personally guarantee to donate anywhere between \$10,000 and \$50,000 during the first year of book sales in order to use their name and logo on the book. This was financially impossible for me to do since I was self-funding the book.

One of our incredible writers, Jim Sutton, is executive director of the Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers (*refugee society.org*). I asked him if they might be willing to be our charity partner. He wrote a proposal that he presented to the organization's board of directors and answered their questions. They agreed to receive our donations and any other donations that readers chose to give in exchange for using their logo and sharing their mission in our anthology.

The society is a dedicated group of medical providers, nurses, social workers, researchers, coordinators and many other professionals that spend much of their workday caring for newly arriving refugees. Their mission is to educate, coordinate and provide a forum for communication by which members can become more informed about best practices in refugee healthcare.

The society is open to anyone interested in issues related to refugee healthcare, a growing movement to provide high quality, equitable healthcare in resettlement cities in North America, as well as around the world.

What are some takeaways from the experience of the pandemic that funeral directors and families can use to enhance the whole dying/death/grief experience?

WERTH: One of the most crucial lessons is that we must learn that grief and loss are not the only result of death and dying. How our many pandemic losses translated into grief has often not been acknowledged and, therefore, not addressed. Not all grief is the same. Learning how to identify many kinds of grief and strategies for dealing with them are important.

Many funeral directors have learned to pivot their business model to accommodate changes forced on us by the pandemic and still provide meaningful service. Employing technology (video, streaming, recording) and offering options gave families the opportunity to figure out what options best met their needs.

The benefits of preplanning and knowing how a person would like to be remembered became obvious.

The importance and effective use of online resources was validated.

Similarly, what are some takeaways you want readers to realize from your book?

WERTH: Perhaps first and foremost, our anthology is a valuable, real-time, historic record of what happened during the first several months of the pandemic written by people from personal experiences and professional encounters.

The stories, poems, songs, reflections and images will resonate with readers because they shared similar experiences.

There will be other crises, perhaps even other pandemics, and this book offers guideposts for navigating those challenges.

We are at a crossroads, faced with health challenges, economic challenges, climate challenges and the unresolved challenges of structural racism. This anthology presents articulate insights into each of those problems and nudges us to ask the hard questions and invest ourselves in finding the best answers.

Navigating the Pandemic: Stories of Hope and Resilience is available at local independent booksellers and on Amazon. The paperback is 312 pages, and the book is also available as an e-book. Werth invites readers to reflect on their experiences of the pandemic and compare them to those of more than 30 writers, ages 18 to 80, who donated their work to this historic and humanitarian project. All proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to the Society of Refugee Healthcare Providers (*refugeesociety.org*).

Ed Defort is editor of NFDA Publications.

From the Editor's Desk



ROTFLSUTIHMHOTCT

By Edward J. Defort

Maybe no one should speak publicly anymore. Perhaps we should all just send texts, instant messages and emails or constantly update our status on Facebook. I think it will be a much happier world.

Think about it. How many times have you seen LOL either typed in a text message, in an email, on Facebook or in an instant message? People sure are cracking up at the printed word. I don't see nearly as many people laughing out loud outside of a Jim Gaffigan performance as they seem to do in these other communication outlets. In fact, I have even seen the letters ROFL disproportionately more than I have actually seen someone rolling on the floor laughing.

In fact, now it seems that LOL and ROFL have been replaced by emojis of a character laughing so hard it's crying. Every new operating system update includes a detailed description of new emojis. In the past decade, we've gone from your basic "ha-ha" to LOL and ROFL to a laughing cartoon with tears spouting from its eyes.

Such is the evolution of social media. In 2010, one of the top box office attractions was *The Social Network*, the Aaron Sorkin-penned screenplay about Mark Zuckerberg and the creation of Facebook. I have always been a fan of Sorkin's work.

Over the years, we have seen how social media has played an increasingly larger role in our personal lives, as well as in our professional careers. By now, most funeral homes have a social media presence.

Notwithstanding all the posts we see from our Facebook friends about how tasty the cupcake they had at lunch was, social networking has also become central to the grieving and memorial processes. At the same time, social media has given all of us a platform on which to sound off on topics of consequence, in addition to the quality of that cupcake.

In addition, while this new avenue of communication offers many bonuses, such as an inexpensive way to reach targeted audiences, there are some pitfalls. For one, when you interview for a job, many companies ask about your social media usage. Part of your background check could very well include some cyber-stalking of your social media past. Also, once you get the job, you have to be very careful about how you use social media moving forward.

And now I will adjourn to inform my Facebook friends that I have completed the editorial for the Winter 2022 edition of *The Director.edu*. And while I'm online, maybe I'll see a post that will cause me to ROTFLSUTIHMHOTCT. (As if I need to explain, that means "roll on the floor laughing so uncontrollably that I hit my head on the coffee table.")

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