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MAGAZINE

March 2024

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ICCFA Welcomes You to TAMPA

Pre-Convention Expo
Grief & Aftercare

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- ICCFA Expo Exhibits, Speaker & Workshop Agenda
- Grief Support Rooted In Southern Hospitality by Ben Harris
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- Laughter in the Face of Tears by Nancy Weil

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NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

by John W. Yopp

ICCFA Welcome's Attendees to Tampa and the 2024 Expo

The ICCFA Executive Board, Officers and Staff welcomes you to the Annual ICCFA Exposition in the great city of Tampa, Florida. The convention events, educational sessions and expo floor exhibits will be featured from April 10-13, 2024 and urge all to attend, even if for part of the convention. There is so much to learn, see and be a part of the networking and fellowship with your colleagues from cemetery, funeral and cremation profession.

The city is part of the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, Florida Metropolitan Statistical Area, which is a four-county area composed of roughly 3.1 million residents, making it the second-largest metropolitan statistical area (MSA) in the state and the sixth largest in the Southeastern United States, behind Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Washington D.C., Atlanta, and Miami. The Greater Tampa Bay area has over 4 million residents and generally includes Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Lakeland, Largo, North Port, Sarasota, Bradenton, Pinellas Park and Plant City.

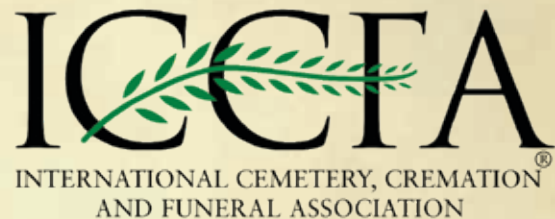
Tampa was founded as a military center during the 19th century with the establishment of Fort Brooke. In 1886 Vicente Martinez Ybor, founded Ybor City which became "the Cigar Capital of the World" as quickly as 1900. The factories were worked by mostly Cuban cigar makers, and to a lesser degree by Italians and Spaniards. By the early 1950's the cigar factories were gone.

Today, Tampa's economy is driven by tourism, health care, finance, insurance, technology, construction, and the maritime industry. The bay's port is the largest in the state, responsible for over \$15 billion in economic impact.

MISSION & HISTORY OF ICCFA

MISSION STATEMENT - *"Providing exceptional education, networking and legislative guidance and support to progressive cemetery, funeral and cremation professionals worldwide."*

The International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association is the only international trade association representing all segments of the cemetery, funeral service,



cremation and memorialization profession. Founded in 1887 as the Association of American Cemetery Superintendents, the organization was created by a group of 18 cemetarians whose goal was to improve the appearance and operations of their properties. Throughout its first century of operation, the association grew in size and mission and underwent several name changes, but it remained a national cemetery-only organization. In 1996, the association became the International Cemetery and Funeral Association, expanding its membership to include funeral homes and other related businesses and extending its reach beyond U.S. borders. In 2007, "Cremation" was added to the name to more accurately reflect the operations and goals of its membership.

Today, the ICCFA is composed of approximately 9,100 cemeteries, funeral homes, crematories, memorial designers and related businesses worldwide. It serves and supports these members through a host of benefits designed to increase their management proficiency and improve their businesses—from regular updates on government and legal issues, to educational meetings, to a variety of services and products tailored to meet their needs.

The ICCFA promotes consumer choices, prearrangement and open competition and has created more than two dozen model guidelines advocating state legislation on a variety of consumer-related issues. The association also assists consumers more directly through information resources, as well as through a complaint mediation service. For more information in regards to membership, benefits or the 2024 Expo, please contact ICCFA at **(800) 645-7700** or visit **www.iccfa.com**



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*“Coming together is a beginning;
keeping together is progress;
working together is success.”*

- Edward Everett Hale



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MAGAZINE

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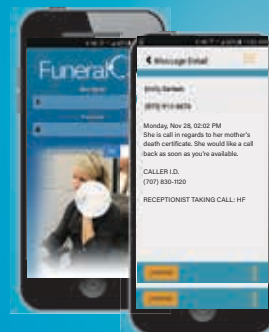


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- Optional, complimentary membership in the Pet Loss Professionals Alliance (PLPA)
- Optional (additional fee required), membership in the Jewish Funeral Directors of America (JFDA)
- Funeral Service Credit Union

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Tampa, FL

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& EXPOSITION**



Tampa, FL

April 10–13, 2024

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Schedule

AT A GLANCE

KEY

Meeting

Education

Registration

Event

Wednesday, April 10

8:00 am–7:00 pm
 8:30 am–12:00 pm
 12:00–4:00 pm
 2:00–4:00 pm
 4:15–7:15 pm

Registration Open

Committee Meetings

Educational Breakout Sessions

ICCFA Board of Directors Meeting

Expo Hall Grand Opening & Reception

Thursday, April 11

8:30 am–5:00 pm
 8:30–10:00 am
 9:00–10:30 am
 10:30 am–2:30 pm
 2:30–3:30 pm
 3:30–5:00 pm
 4:30–5:00 pm
 6:00–10:00 pm

Registration Open

Morning Welcome Coffee

ICCFA Annual Meeting of Members

Expo Hall Open/Brunch with Exhibitors

Keynote Speaker Shawn Achor

Expo Hall Open/Happy Hour Reception

New Board Orientation

President's Banquet

Friday, April 12

8:00 am–5:00 pm
 8:00–9:00 am
 8:30–10:00 am
 9:00–10:00 am
 10:00 am–1:00 pm
 1:00–5:00 pm
 4:00–5:00 pm
 5:00–6:00 pm

Registration Open

Prayer Breakfast

Morning Welcome Coffee

Keynote Speaker Brian Solis

Expo Hall Open/Brunch with Exhibitors

Educational Breakout Sessions

Organizational Board Meeting

Educational Foundation Reception

Saturday, April 13

8:00 am–1:00 pm
 8:00–9:30 am
 8:30 am–12:30 pm
 1:00–3:00 pm

Registration Open

Morning Welcome Coffee

Educational Breakout Sessions

Legal and Legislative Luncheon

WEDNESDAY | APRIL 10

8:00 am – 7:00 pm

Registration Open

8:30 am – 10:30 am

PLPA Committee Meeting

9:00 am – 10:00 am

CCSC Committee Meeting

9:00 am – 11:00 am

Sales & Marketing Meeting

10:00 am – 11:00 am

IMSA Business Meeting

Veterans Committee Meeting

10:00 am – 12:00 pm

JFDA Committee Meeting

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Membership Committee Meeting

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Women in Leadership Committee Meeting

Program and Schedule Subject to Change.

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12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

Breakout Sessions

Cemetery Consumer Service Consumers Council Panel Discussion

Tom Daly CCE
CHS Consulting Group/Cemetery Helpful Solutions

Cremation: It's Not About the Price

Angelique Simpson
Matthews International

Exploring the Lost Art of Embalming

Shun Newbern CFSP
Metropolitan Mortuary

1:30 pm – 2:30 pm

Breakout Sessions

Cemetery Development in the 21st Century: Queen of Peace Cemetery

Zachary Rasmussen
Tribute Design Systems, LLC

Communicating with Ease: Building Trust Through Authentic Dialogue

Tiffanie Kellog

WEDNESDAY | APRIL 10

Creating a World-Class Customer Experience

Vincent Roberge
Johnson Consulting Group

Ways to Support Families Who are Helping Children Cope with Death

Ellen Sabin
Watering Can Press

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Breakout Sessions

Say Farwell, Their Way: The Case for Celebrants

Jennifer Muldoweny
Muldoweny Memorials

Unlocking the Future: Surprising Discoveries from Consumer Insights

George Owens
SoCal Approach

Digital Marketing is not Rocket Science...but it is Scientific

Troy Brake
Vertin Funeral Homes

Dealing with Conflict

Ron Clyde
Directors Investment Group

2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Board of Directors Meeting

4:15pm – 7:15pm

Exposition Hall Grand Opening & Reception

THURSDAY | APRIL 11

8:30 am – 5:00 pm

Registration Open

8:30 am – 10:00 am

Morning Welcome Coffee

9:00 am – 10:30 am

ICCFA Annual Meeting of Members



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2024 ICCFA Annual Convention & Exposition



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10:30 am – 2:30 pm

Expo Hall Open; Brunch Served

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

General Session Keynote Shawn Achor

Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises Our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being



Until now, we've been taught that to be successful, we must better ourselves and rise above others. The pursuit of fulfilling our potential has been individual and isolated.

Research now clearly shows that this self-focused approach to achievement puts a cap on our happiness and success. It is only by pursuing potential in an interconnected way that we are able to achieve the heights of our potential in business and education. Only by making others better as we grow, can we see what we are truly capable of. Based on Shawn's research, new findings using Big Data revealing the ripple effect of our actions, and his work in 50 countries, he outlines a five-stage strategy for achieving interconnected success and how to apply them to your work and home life for greater energy, productivity, and success.

Shawn Achor is the NYTimes bestselling author of The Happiness Advantage and Big Potential. Shawn is one of the world's leading experts on the connection between happiness and success

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and has worked with over a third of the Fortune 100 companies, and with places like the NFL, the Pentagon, and the U.S. Treasury. Not to mention that his TED Talk is one of the most popular of all time with over 16 million views.

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

Expo Hall Open; Happy Hour

4:30 pm – 5:00 pm

New Board Orientation

6:00 pm – 10:00 pm

President's Banquet



Please join fellow attendees and exhibitors for dinner, drinks, and a show at this year's President's Banquet. Featuring comedian Josh Blue, we have moved this

staple of the Annual Convention earlier in the week, so no one has to miss out! The evening begins with a reception followed by the annual Celebration of Remembrance and dinner. An additional highlight of the evening will be the induction of Fred Lappin, CCE, into the ICCFA Hall of Fame. This award recognizes those who have demonstrated unselfish service and outstanding contributions to the ICCFA, the deathcare profession, and the public. We will also recognize the 2023 KIP Award winners and at the conclusion of the evening, the ICCFA Presidential transfer will take place as Robbie Pape ends her term and welcomes Lee Longino as ICCFA's incoming President.

FRIDAY | APRIL 12

8:00 am – 5:00pm

Registration Open

8:00 am – 9:00 am

Prayer Breakfast

Join fellow worshippers for a morning of breakfast and fellowship. Thanks to generous sponsorships, the annual ICCFA prayer breakfast is free to the first 60 individuals who arrive on a first-come, first-served basis.

8:30 am – 10:00 am

Morning Welcome Coffee



Program and Schedule Subject to Change.

9:00 am – 10:00 am

General Session Keynote Brian Solis

Ignite Moments! How to Become a 'Customer Company'



What does 'great' look like to today's customer? How has their digital lifestyle or relationships with industry-leading brands changed their standards for what great

customer engagement and services look like? As 'the godfather of CX' and the author of one of the most transformative books on CX innovation, Brian will talk about what it means to become a 'customer company' in an evolving hybrid world, one where digital and AI are blurring the lines between physical and online experiences. It all starts by purposefully becoming a 'customer company', putting people at the heart of the business. In this exciting and captivating keynote, Brian will transform traditional customer touch points into 'ignite moments.' He'll demonstrate how ignite moments deliver personalization, 'warmth', and connected experiences that people love, remember, and share.

Brian Solis is a world-renowned digital anthropologist and futurist who has been called "one of the greatest digital analysts of our time." Forbes called him "one of the more creative and brilliant business minds of our time." He is also an award-winning author and global keynote speaker on disruptive trends and technologies and their impact on businesses, markets, and societies.

10:00 am – 1:00 pm

Expo Hall Open; Brunch Served

11:30 am – 2:00 pm

ICCFA Past President's Lunch

1:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Exhibitor Teardown

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Breakout Sessions

Embalming the Autopsy Case: Techniques That Work

Shun Newbern CFSP
Metropolitan Mortuary

Preserving Celebrations in a Cremation-centric World

MODERATOR: Kent Robertson
Foundation Partners Group

PANELISTS:

Barbara Kemmis, CANA;
Mark J. Krause, Foundation Partners Group;
Cole Waybright, Foundation Partners Group;
Joe Sharps, Musgrove Mortuary at West-Lawn

Digital Marketing: Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Welton Hong
Ring Ring Marketing

Navigating the Future of Deathcare: The Power of Mentorship in Our Changing Workplace

Lisa Baue
Your Funeral Coach

2:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Breakout Sessions

Honoring Lives Online: Weaving Digital Legacies into the Fabric of Funeral Planning

Robyn Sechler
GoodTrust

The Science of Leading People

Aaron Butler
Domani Preneed

Plan For Success and Succession In Your Business

Jake Johnson
Johnson Consulting Group

AI Tools That Save Time and Enhance Funeral Services

Curtis Funk
Tukios

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FRIDAY | APRIL 12

2:30 pm – 4:30 pm

A Simple Cremation Mistake

Don Ferfolia, Jr., Esq., CFSP
Ferfolia Funeral Homes Inc, Donald B Ferfolia Jr LTD

Poul Lemasters, Esq.
Lemasters Consulting

4:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Breakout Sessions

Establish Your Funeral Home as the Resource Your Community Needs

Brianne Niedermyer
Homesteaders Life Company

A Star Forever

Ana Palencia
Señoriales Corporación

Women in Leadership: Become the Leader You Would Follow

Robbie Pape
Sr. Vice President & Regional Partner, Carriage Services

The Power of First-Party Data: Your Website is Worth More Than You Think

Matt Powell, Tribute Technology
Tribute Technology

4:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Organizational Board Meeting

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Educational Foundation Reception



Join the ICCFA Educational Foundation for a special reception! Enjoy complimentary drinks and hors d'oeuvres with fellow attendees as we recognize

and give thanks to our generous Foundation sponsors and congratulate Jim Price, CCFE, CCrE, recipient of the 2024 Lasting Impact Award.

Throughout his storied career, Jim has made it his mission to give back to the profession and advance the future of deathcare through education. From 2015 to 2023, he took on the role of President and Chairman of the ICCFA Educational Foundation. Under his leadership, the Foundation experienced incredible growth in donations received, scholarships awarded, and impactful initiatives established. Price's commitment to service remains unwavering as he continues to serve as a Trustee for the ICCFA Educational Foundation, along with his membership in both the Government & Legal Affairs Committee and Veterans Committee.

Program and Schedule Subject to Change.

SATURDAY | APRIL 13

8:00 am – 1:00 pm

Registration Open

8:00 am – 9:30 am

Morning Welcome Coffee

8:30 am – 9:30 am

Breakout Sessions

Developing a Pet Program

Andrew Parsell
Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium

The Death-Positive Pipeline: A Modern Take on an Ancient Profession

Christa Ovenell
Death's Apprentice
Education & Planning

Viking Funerals and Star Trek — Dare to be Different

Joe E Pray
Pray Funeral Home, Inc.

Immediate Solutions to Solving the Sales Puzzle

Jorge Vara II
Fairmount Memorial Association

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iccfa.com/annual

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Breakout Sessions

Pet Loss Pointers: How Small Gestures Can Create Comfort & Enhance Brand Loyalty

Andy Lopez
SoCal Approach

Blocked, Burned Out, Blasé: How to Engage Your Staff to Become Creative and Enthusiastic Professionals

Glenda Stansbury
Insight Books

Brent Patterson
Tribute Memorial Care Southwest

Adding Natural Burial to Your Funeral or Cemetery Business

Emily Miller
Green Burial Council

Tech and Tears: How Grieving is Transformed by Technology

Mandy Benoualid
Keeper Memorials

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Breakout Sessions

Recruiting, Developing and Retaining an Engaged Workforce

Karen Sheean
Everstory Partners

SATURDAY | APRIL 13

A Snapshot into Your Consumer: Attitudes and Behaviors That Define Your Future Business Model

Chris Cruger
The Foresight Companies

The Invisible Force — How Organizational Culture Impacts People and Profit

Gary O'Sullivan, CCFE
Gary O'Sullivan Company

Decades of Green Burial, What We Did Right

Ed Bixby
Global Green Burial Alliance;

Elizabeth Fournier
Cornerstone Funeral Service

1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Legal & Legislative Luncheon

Poul Lemasters
ICCFA



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Registration Information

What Does Your Registration Include?

Full member, non-member and supplier/professional registrations include admission to all Expo Hall functions and Convention educational sessions, as well as the President's Banquet.

The ICCFA Prayer Breakfast is complimentary, thanks to sponsorships. Entry to the prayer breakfast is limited to the first 60 attendees to arrive.

The Spouse registration is offered only to individuals not employed in the cemetery, funeral service, and related professions. It includes daily admission to all expo hall functions and to the President's Banquet.

Registration Policies

Attendees registered by March 1, 2024, will receive the early registration discount. Only registered individuals with a badge or ticket(s) may attend convention events.

Notes About Special Events

President's Banquet: Each full attendee and spouse registration includes a ticket for the President's Banquet on Thursday, April 11, 2024. Non-registered individuals may purchase a ticket via the Convention registration form or on-site at the ICCFA registration desk. Tickets may be purchased up to 24 hours prior to the event.

Educational Foundation Reception: Thanks to generous sponsorships, each full attendee and spouse registration includes a ticket for the Educational Foundation Reception on Friday, April 12, 2024.

Continuing Education Credits

Funeral directors can earn up to 13 CE hours at the convention, pending individual state approval. Please note that due to onerous filing and/or fee requirements, the ICCFA no longer applies for CE credits from Pennsylvania, Texas, or Virginia. Attendance certificates will be available at the ICCFA registration desk and ICCFA staff will validate your certificate on-site.

Dress

Business casual attire is the norm throughout the convention for daytime events. A light sweater or jacket may be helpful when attending educational sessions, as session rooms may be chilly.

Photography/Videography Policies

No photography or videography will be permitted in the expo hall except by pre-approved members of the trade press and the official show photographer(s), who will be identified as such by their badges. Unauthorized

cameras, as well as electronic devices such as cell phones that are being used to take photographs/videos, will be removed from the expo hall.

Cancellation Policies

Cancellations must be received in writing via email, fax, or mail no later than March 1, 2024, to receive a refund. Full registrations are subject to a \$100 cancellation fee per registration. Purchased event tickets are subject to a \$10 cancellation fee per ticket. No refunds will be given after March 1, 2024. No-shows will not receive a refund. Send cancellation requests to: ICCFA Meetings Coordinator Erica Baker at erica@iccfa.com, fax 703.391.8416, or mail ICCFA, 107 Carpenter Dr, Ste 100, Sterling VA 20164

Badge Replacement Policy

Persons requiring a badge to be reprinted for any reason prior to entering the expo hall and breakout educational sessions will be charged a \$20 replacement fee.



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Tampa Transportation Options

Enjoy your journey in Tampa Bay where it's easy to get mobile with a mix of transportation options. The free TECO Historic Streetcar carries you from downtown's glittering towers to the brick streets and cigar boutiques of Ybor City. Hop on and off the Pirate Water Taxi at stops along the Hillsborough River and Garrison Channel. Take Tampa Bay on two wheels by renting from Coast Bike Share or quickly and easily navigate the city on a motorized scooter.

Ybor City (aka Cigar City)

Tampa Bay's historical and cultural roots lie in Ybor City. Many of the buildings echo the charming brick exteriors of converted cigar factories, in homage to the area's celebrated history as the Cigar Capital of the World. Tantalize your tastebuds with new flavors as you explore by yourself or with Ybor City Food Tours or Hop on the TECO Line Streetcar and enjoy a free ride into historic Ybor City just over a mile from Downtown.

www.visittampabay.com/districts/ybor-city/

Tampa Marriott Water Street Hotel

The Tampa Marriott Water Street Hotel is the location of the President's Banquet on Thursday, April 11th from 6-10pm. While the room block has been filled, we have other options listed on the Annual Convention website iccf.com/annual. Please continue to monitor the website for the most up-to-date information about the event.

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GRIEF SUPPORT ROOTED IN SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY

by Ben Harris

As a Georgia gentleman, born and raised in the heat of South Georgia, I'm grateful for the Southern hospitality that was not just practiced by my family to all we came across, but instilled into me and my brothers by our parents.

My earliest memories are of bearing witness to the warmth and hospitality on display at our home-away-from-home, Harris Furniture. The furniture store was my parents' business and a pillar of our small-town community, where "The Store That Gives You More" wasn't just a slogan, but a promise – a promise my parents made sure we kept.

My dad, Phil, was a man whose presence was as commanding as his heart was large, and he taught me the art of making fast friends. Visitors to Harris Furniture were greeted by the aroma of his cigar smoke, the playful chaos of my three brothers and me, and Dad's booming voice, cutting through the air. "Howdy, howdy!" he'd say to greet guests in our store. I remember watching him from the front office, charming the customers, making up expressions seemingly on the spot, cutting up with new friends, and leaving trails of laughter behind him.

But growing up in a small South Georgia town, I also learned about hospitality from the times I experienced its lack. Bullied for years for the lisp I carry to this day, I discovered a deep drive to show respect and kindness to all while doing my best to lift others up, despite their differences. (I trace that back to a core root of Southern hospitality.)

My earliest business venture did this to the best of my abilities. "Newsflash" was a community-focused newspaper that explored real stories of teenagers across Coffee County. It was my first experience of holding space for folks, at least in an institutional way, and of helping people to share their stories, hopes, and dreams, their heartaches and triumphs.

With the newspaper's success, I learned that if I trusted in the values my mom and dad had instilled in me, I could help people feel less alone – a thread that carries through in the work I do to this day. (Because let's be honest, grief can feel like one of the most isolating experiences imaginable.)

After the paper, I decided I was going to leave Douglas and go to Atlanta to attend Emory University. This wound up being a hugely formative time that further shaped the values I hold in business and life. I joined Delta Tau Delta fraternity, (we referred to ourselves as the "Gentlemen's Fraternity") and served as our Honor Board Chair, ensuring we lived out our vows to be "Committed to Lives of Excellence."

Partway through my time in college, however, my story and my role in our family took a sudden change. My father died during my junior year, and this loss, my first true experience



Everly co-founder Ben Harris shares stories about life, loss, and legacy in the South



with grief, as staggering as it was, would – unfortunately – prove to be the catalyst for further losses in our family.

My little brother Christopher – my best friend growing up – would die exactly

4 years and 1 week after my father. (You'll see his black BOSS baseball cap hanging behind me on my Zoom calls, right above the picture of him and me at the Hard Rock Cafe London, both of our arms crossed, looking almost like twins.) He'd experienced Dad's passing years before and was never the same afterward.

Following this, our youngest brother, Michael, would die, too, during his service in the Marine Corps. Michael's death was perhaps the hardest on me, both because of the nature of cumulative losses and because I had a big-brother/father-figure role to my relationship with him.

After Dad and Chris' deaths, I'd worked to pull the family back together. Michael had, after his high school graduation, followed me out of Coffee County and up to Atlanta to attend Emory University. That was, before he decided to join the

United States Marine Corps and travel beyond our shores – all the way to the Sangin Valley of Afghanistan.

Joining the brave men of 2/8 Echo Company ("America's Battalion") as a Machine Gunner, Michael and the men of 2/8 helped locate and detonate (safely) more IEDs than any other company in the Afghan War.

Sadly, the intense months of warfare that Michael experienced left a terrible mark on his life and psyche. He found himself experiencing PTSD, and, at the time, our family was unaware of the warning signs of a man in need. Michael would ultimately die by suicide on February 6, 2012.

As you can imagine, experiencing three deaths in our family has reshaped the structure of our family immeasurably – and it's reshaped me just as much. In the beginning, I was so focused on caring for others that I didn't take care of myself. As they say, "Put on your own air mask before you help someone else." Gradually, I began to balance the experience of caring for others with attending to my own needs. And it was the hospitality of others that helped me to truly live again.

I experienced tremendous care from innumerable friends in the wake of Christopher's and Dad's deaths, but it was following Michael's military death that I was first introduced to true grief care through the organization TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors).

TAPS is a nationally-recognized nonprofit where I would ultimately meet my business partner Gabriel Rao, a fellow Gold Star Family member.



And it's here at TAPS that I first shared Michael's story, four months after his death. Not of how he died, but of how he'd lived. And I've found that sharing his stories, and Chris' stories, and Dad's stories gives me new life.

So, allow me to introduce my life's work to you – but as an homage to my father, I think the best way to share Everly with you would be to introduce it through a story.

So, if you can, imagine this: a young man has recently lost his father. Maybe it's 3 weeks later, or maybe it's 3 years later, but when we find him, he's going through an assortment of boxes, perhaps in an attic.



Looking for something else, possibly, he stumbles upon an old leather-bound journal inside a cardboard box.

He removes it from the box and opens it, and the first thing he sees inside it is an envelope with his father's handwriting.

He pauses.

His hands tremble, and his eyes begin to fill with tears.

He opens the envelope and is met, in his heart and mind, with the voice of his loved and dearly-missed father.

"Son, I'm proud of you. I'm grateful for the time I had with you. And I know you're going to be successful, whatever you do. If you're reading this, know that all you've ever had to do to make me proud is to just trust your heart and keep your word. You're a good man. I love you."

That's the essence of Everly – preserving words for future generations. Here's how we do that:

1. We start each purchaser off with an app-based digital Legacy Vault. Through our tutorials and prompts, we guide each purchaser through uploading cherished digital heirlooms like home videos, voicemail recordings, and photos. The Everly platform allows for uploading text, audio, and video messages of love, wisdom, and support, tagged to exactly who you want to receive each artifact or message, and delivered right on time, securely and safely – even posthumously.
2. When our purchaser passes away, everyone they love is given lifetime access (through a QR code shared in the funeral program, livestream, obituary, social media, etc.) to the digital Legacy Vault contents shared with them.
3. Further, we provide a one-year subscription for video-based "Grief Care for All" to every single one of the people grieving the purchaser's passing.



We partner with funeral and pre-need sales professionals who share the same passion for providing compassionate service to their clients, and we've already had a great reception to our platform from the agents who've signed up to bring Everly to the communities they serve.

And in the warm reception we've received, I'm reminded again of Southern hospitality.

I was at the 2023 Georgia Funeral Director Association summer convention in St. Simons Island this past summer. It was, admittedly, our very first convention season where we would be introducing Everly's Digital Legacy Vault and Grief Care for All to my state's funeral industry and grief care professionals.

Working to kill some time and maybe meet a new friend before the welcome reception started, I grabbed a seat in the lobby and, before I knew it, I was talking with a gentleman sitting to my left. (My wife would have no surprise whatsoever that I wound up striking up a conversation with a neighbor – the gentleman I was speaking with seemed to be in similar spirits).

"What's your name?"

"Ben Harris."

"Where were you born, Ben?"

"Douglas, GA."

[Silence for a moment or two]

"Your daddy's Phil Harris. I buried your dad. I was good friends with your dad."

Amazingly, at my very first funeral industry professional event, I'd found myself unwittingly striking up a conversation with Chuck Sims, a former Georgia House Representative and a man who'd been friends with my dad 20+ years ago (Dad died in November 2001). In fact, Chuck and Sim's Funeral Home had been given the honor and responsibility of ensuring not just my father's safe passage home, but my brother Christopher's as well.

I take this as a sign that I was in the right place.

We hope to repay the warmth and support we've received from the funeral industry with our two key differentiators:

First, our business model stands out because we don't rely on charging fees to our partners. Instead, we've built Everly to grow our partners' revenue while offering our market-defining platform to your preneed clients.

The second reason I believe our business stands apart is for our unique approach to grief. Everly is built on the belief that we can positively impact grief ahead of a death. Our users are actively engaging in intentional conversations about their wishes and preserving their words and digital heirlooms* to be delivered to their loved ones when they need them most. This is the first look at the shift from reactive grief care to what we're calling "proactive grief care".



Ben Harris is a 3x entrepreneur and 3x survivor of loss. The co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of Everly, Ben lives in Decatur, GA, with his wife Gabi, and their two dogs, Lyra and Milo.



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Using AI to Enhance, Personalize Grief Support

by Welton Hong



These days it's par for the course to stop mid-scroll and be met with a realistic AI-generated image of a Siamese cat driving a Tesla or a video of the U.S. president doing a TikTok dance trend.

And you're probably already used to—if not reliant on—being presented with a wide variety of AI-powered Netflix suggestions for what TV series to binge next based on what you've already watched before you've even finished watching it. Or maybe you regularly indulge in a playlist AI crafted to fit your music taste.

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology can tell your fortune (to its best ability), choose your spouse's next birthday gift or write a best man speech—and a whole lot of other tasks you'd never consider outsourcing in the past.

And while I suspect none of these rather frivolous capabilities are likely to help your funeral home, their common thread is personalization—something that can, in fact, assist funeral directors in a more serious capacity.

In deathcare, one of the most promising and versatile ways to integrate AI technology is providing personalized grief support.

Now you might be skeptical about using AI in this arena—especially after the examples mentioned above. As you're well aware, grief is a deeply personal journey, and what offers

solace to one person might be ineffective for another. The personalized nature of grief, though, is what makes AI useful in this realm. I'll explain.

By leveraging data on an individual's preferences, cultural background and even their interaction history with grief support resources, AI can tailor recommendations specifically for that person—from reading materials to support groups to coping strategies. More importantly, it's available around the clock. As we all know, grief can't tell time.

With that being said, AI is no human. It doesn't have feelings; it can only try to understand them, not experience them. This is why I encourage you to think of AI as an addition to the grief support you're already offering, not as a replacement.

AI TOOLS FOR PERSONALIZED GRIEF SUPPORT

Here's some AI tools worth looking into for your funeral home:

- **Chatbots for Immediate Assistance:** While you might wish you could serve grieving families in your community 24 hours a day, you're only human. AI-powered chatbots can provide immediate, 24/7 support to those in need. These chatbots, which are equipped with natural language processing abilities, can offer empathetic responses and guide individuals to the appropriate resources when you're unavailable.

- **Data-Driven Grief Counseling:** AI can analyze data from counseling sessions to help identify patterns and tailor the approach to each person. This ensures the individuals you serve get the most out of each session.

- **Customized Content Delivery:** AI has a knack for building personalized media recommendations—just look at Netflix and Spotify. This becomes handy in grief support, because AI can curate and suggest grief resources (e.g. articles, books, videos and more) that might be helpful for someone based on his or her individual preferences. AI might share content based on the nature of the loss, such as losing a spouse or losing a child.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR USING AI IN GRIEF SUPPORT

All the aforementioned tools might sound incredibly helpful. But, after giving it some thought, you might be wondering if it's even ethical to use AI for grief support.

It's a fair concern—and one you should certainly take seriously. My response to it lies less in "if" you use it and more in "how" you use it.

One of the primary concerns with using AI in grief support is the emotional sensitivity required in dealing with grieving individuals. While advanced in processing and analyzing data, AI lacks the innate empathy and emotional intelligence inherent in human interactions.



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This gap reiterates what I mentioned earlier: AI is best used as a supplement to human-led support, not a replacement. The personalized nature of grief means a one-size-fits-all approach, often inherent in algorithm-driven solutions, might not be appropriate for everyone. The role of funeral directors and grief counselors remains crucial, as you provide a human touch, a deep understanding of emotions, AI simply can't replicate.

Another ethical consideration arising with AI is privacy and data security. Grieving individuals share deeply personal and sensitive information, and it's imperative their data is handled with the utmost confidentiality and security. That's why I recommend full transparency with the families you serve. Clear AI data policies are the key to building trust and ensuring individuals feel safe using your services.

There's also the risk of over-reliance on technology—a dilemma you've probably run into a time or two after your Wi-Fi lost signal or you spilled coffee on your laptop. Like any technology, AI can be an asset, but it's essential to maintain a balance. My advice is to keep the human element central in grief counseling and support.

Implementing AI in funeral services isn't just about installing technology; it's about integrating it in a way that enhances the human elements of the service. And the key to

accomplishing this is training staff on how to use AI tools effectively and ethically.

THE FUTURE OF AI IN GRIEF SUPPORT

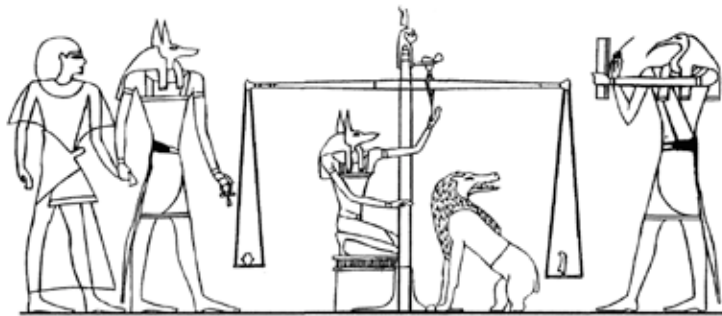
AI is only getting better, and we have to adapt accordingly.

You can expect AI's role in grief support to expand as it increasingly becomes more sophisticated. This could look like virtual reality experiences that help people process their grief to predictive analytics that anticipate individuals' needs during the grieving process.

AI's emergence in the funeral industry signifies a shift toward more personalized and accessible grief support. By embracing this technology, you can offer a new level of death-care that's not only deeply rooted in your emotional intelligence and empathy, but also augmented by the precision and personalization AI provides.



Welton Hong is the founder and CEO of Ring Ring Marketing, a marketing firm specializing in solutions for deathcare firms, and the author of *Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes*.



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The Healing Power OF ESTATE CLOSURE



by *Nikki Anne Schmutz*

Many funeral directors wonder if it's their responsibility to help their families with estate matters. It isn't something that has regularly been done in the past. Usually, efforts in this area are ultimately geared towards preneed sales - and rightfully so. Preneed is one of the driving forces in the death care industry. So, why should estate help be something funeral homes offer? Think for a moment about the recent changes to traditional funeral service over the past few years... the trends suggest more and more people are moving away from tradition and choosing cremation, non-traditional services, or private gatherings for scattering. Staying relevant in a changing world will require out-of-the-box thinking. What services can a funeral home offer if people aren't choosing traditional services? One answer is an aftercare program that focuses on estate matters.

Losing a loved one is an emotionally overwhelming experience, and grief can manifest in various ways. Amidst the pain and sadness, there lies a practical aspect that often gets overlooked in the initial stages of mourning – estate closure. Engaging in tasks related to settling a loved one's affairs might seem daunting, but it can be a crucial step in the healing process. There is an indelible connection between taking care of estate closure tasks and the alleviation of grief after a loved one's passing. Many families put off tasks for months or even years, which can cause many problems for the surviving family members.

DISTRACTION AND FOCUS

Estate closure can provide a necessary distraction from the intense emotions associated with grief. The myriad of

tasks involved, such as handling paperwork, organizing assets, and communicating with relevant parties, requires focus and attention. This shift in focus allows individuals to temporarily step away from the all-encompassing sorrow, providing a respite and helping to break the cycle of overwhelming grief.

A SENSE OF CONTROL

The aftermath of losing a loved one can often make individuals feel helpless and out of control. Engaging in estate closure tasks provides a structured framework where individuals can actively participate in the process of organizing and settling affairs. Taking control of these responsibilities, no matter how small, can empower individuals to navigate the challenges of grief more effectively, contributing to a sense of autonomy during a time of emotional upheaval.

CLOSURE AND COMPLETION

The completion of estate closure tasks symbolizes the closure of a chapter, both practically and emotionally. Wrapping up legal and financial matters, distributing assets, and finalizing affairs can provide a tangible sense of closure that aligns with the emotional journey of mourning. It allows individuals to acknowledge the reality of the loss and gradually move toward accepting the new normal without their loved one.

HONORING THE MEMORY

Many estate closure tasks involve decisions and actions that can be directly linked to honoring the memory of the deceased. Distributing assets according to their wishes,

donating to charitable causes they supported, or preserving and organizing personal belongings are ways to pay tribute to the life and legacy of the departed. By engaging in these activities, individuals can find solace in the thought that they are continuing the legacy of their loved one.

SUPPORT NETWORK AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Estate closure often involves collaboration with family members, friends, and professionals, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. The collective effort in handling these tasks not only lightens the load for individuals but also strengthens the support network. Interacting with others who are going through similar experiences can provide comfort and companionship, reinforcing the idea that one is not alone in the journey of grief. Families greatly benefit from the help of professionals as they walk this path.

SERVICE-BASED AFTERCARE

There is a growing number of funeral homes that now offer “Service-based Aftercare”. This new industry term refers to an aftercare program that provides more than cards, texts, or phone calls to check in on the family during the year after passing. Service-based aftercare offers comprehensive help with estate matters and notifications to provide peace of mind and allow the family to deal with grief without worrying about all the next steps. This can be done by a staff member

who meets with every family, or by a company like Full-Circle Aftercare which partners with funeral homes to provide comprehensive support to every family who uses the funeral home. Going above and beyond is a great way to create loyalty and an impression that will last.

While grief is a deeply personal and unique experience, attending to the practical aspects of estate closure can significantly contribute to the healing process. Engaging in these tasks offers distraction, a sense of control, closure, and an opportunity to honor the memory of the departed. Moreover, the shared responsibility among a support network can provide comfort and companionship during a challenging time. As individuals navigate the complexities of estate closure, they may find themselves on a path toward healing and eventual acceptance of their loss.



Nikki Anne Schmutz is the Director of Operations at Full-Circle Aftercare. She was born and raised in Utah. She is a published writer and has spent many years working with special needs children and adults as a caretaker and Registered Behavior Technician (RBT). In 2019, Nikki joined Full-Circle Aftercare, where she has been happily directing her funeral home and hospice clients (and their families)

through the maze of non-legal personal estate settlement.

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MATTHEWS MEMORIALIZATION LAUNCHES RADIANCE DIAMONDS BY MATTHEWS™

Pittsburgh, PA) – Mathews Memorialization today announced it has launched Radiance Diamonds by Mathews™, a new line of diamonds created from a loved one's personal carbon. Radiance Diamonds™ enable spouses, children, and other family members to own a one-of-a-kind, deeply personal, and eternal treasure of their deceased loved one that they can wear and keep close to their hearts.

Radiance Diamonds are a premium product line offered exclusively via Mathews Aurora Funeral Solutions' and Mathews Cemetery Products' customers. The lab-grown diamonds are created from a loved one's personal carbon, which can include cremated remains, a lock of hair, a piece of beloved clothing or even funeral flowers (also available for pets). Diamonds are available in sizes ranging from .25 carat to two carats or larger, and in radiant colors including blue, amber, yellow, green, and colorless. Fine jewelry settings include rings, earrings, and pendants available in 14K yellow, white, or rose gold.

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"We are pleased to launch this premium offering to our Funeral Home and Cemetery customers," said Marty Strohofer, Mathews Aurora's Vice President of Marketing and Product Development. "Families are increasingly choosing keepsakes that are reminders of their loved ones. Radiance Diamonds by Mathews™ are truly one-of-a-kind since they are produced from the personal carbon of your loved one. This is a highly personal memorial that engages the family throughout the creation process."

Mathews' customers may learn more by contacting their Mathews Aurora Funeral Service Consultant or their Mathews Cemetery Products Field Sales Manager.

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ROSENACKER ANNOUNCES ALASKAN CONTINUING EDUCATION SEMINAR



Cincinnati, OH — Frank B. Rosenacker, founder and CEO of Rosenacker & Associates (R&A), has announced that his firm will be conducting its first-ever continuing education seminar in Anchorage, Alaska. The 2024 Rosenacker Continuing Education Seminar, Alaska: A Funeral Frontier, will be hosted at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Anchorage from July 21 through July 23.

“Scott Janssen, AKA – the Mushin’ Mortician, my friend and owner of Janssen Funeral Home in Anchorage, has been encouraging me for years to come hold a seminar in his city,” stated Frank Rosenacker. “After thoughtful consideration, we decided to launch this Con Ed event to offer funeral professionals a new and different educational experience.”

Among the topics to be featured at the seminar are:

- Succession Planning
- Mergers and Acquisitions
- Legal Issues
- Funeral Home Accounting
- Preneed
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Arlington National Cemetery

The cost of the seminar includes a Welcome reception on the opening night and a Happy Hour reception on the second night. The seminar will feature an all-star line-up of speakers including Frank Rosenacker, Sue Gilkey, Ann Rosenacker, Scott Janssen, Jack E. Lechner, Jr. CFSP, Kurt Rosenacker, Doug Hoog, and Curtis Funk.

Rosenacker & Associates has partnered with Megan’s Amazing Adventures to assist with the seminar logistics. A block of rooms has been negotiated at rates well below the hotel’s standard summer room rates for attendees and their guests. As the number of rooms is limited due to capacity,

attendees are encouraged to book their rooms as soon as possible. In addition to helping with the travel and accommodations for the seminar, the Megan’s Amazing Adventures team has put together several excursion packages with pre- and post-conference availability.

“The topics for this seminar are germane to what is happening in the funeral profession today,” added Rosenacker. “I know attendees will enjoy this unforgettable journey through the beauty and wilderness of Alaska as they explore groundbreaking issues in funeral service.”

The seminar has been submitted for approval of continuing education credits – with 12 credits currently pending. For more information on the Rosenacker Continuing Education Seminar 2024, please visit www.rosenackerconed.com or call (513) 923-5230.

About Rosenacker & Associates:

For more than twenty-five years, Rosenacker & Associates has been a national consulting firm that exclusively serves the funeral profession with a staff of licensed funeral directors, lawyers, certified public accountants, enrolled agents, tax experts, and business management executives. R&A services include legal, succession planning, business plans/policy manuals, business appraisals/evaluations, sales of funeral businesses, regulatory laws regarding final disposition, taxes, cooperative efforts, and funeral professional liability issues. More information at info@rosenackerconed.com.

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“WHAT’S NEXT?”

5 WAYS TO BE AMAZINGLY HELPFUL AFTER A FUNERAL

by Payton Thompson

Even if you don't hear it out loud, “What's next?” is the question almost every family asks after a funeral. They've spent so much time focused on honoring the life of their loved one, but they're lost on what exactly happens afterward.

Unfortunately, there haven't always been a lot of answers. Traditional aftercare models were built primarily around sending a thank you card to families, while most of today's models are focused on one end goal: online reviews. Sending notes and asking for reviews are great things to do, but it does raise the question as to what families need most after a funeral.

And what families actually need most is help. Research shows that after a funeral, families have two universal needs: resolving their loved one's estate matters and navigating the fog of grief. These families end up being underserved by

aftercare models that lack consistency or take a one-size-fits-all approach that is neither extensive enough nor detailed enough to meet their full range of unique needs.

Funeral homes are experts at building trust with families and delivering remarkable and memorable experiences. I'd like to share five ways to extend your level of service by creating an amazingly helpful aftercare experience. Not only will families be more than happy to talk about your funeral home both online and in person, but you'll receive more return business and create lifelong advocates for your brand.

1

HELP WITH THEIR ESTATE

There is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to estate management. We often talk about the 125 tasks that need to be completed before a funeral, but there are hundreds of details to take care of after a funeral as well. The size and complexity of estates can vary significantly, and everyone has different needs. Every family also has a different preference on how much help they want – from DIY to full-service estate assistance.

And even with the DIY approach, there are all kinds of pitfalls and mistakes people can easily avoid with some guidance. For instance, research shows that 82% of people never receive their full benefits such as life insurance or veterans benefits, and over 2.5 million estates are victimized by identity theft each year.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Continue the outstanding care you're known for by providing customized estate help that considers each family's specific circumstances. This includes helping families prioritize the tasks that are most urgent like notifying credit bureaus or walking them through how to memorialize social media accounts.

And for families who have questions or would rather have someone take care of their estate tasks for them, it's important to develop creative options so they can receive the guidance they're looking for.

When you can provide the answers and point families in the right direction, you go above and beyond and become a memorable source of guidance.

2

HELP WITH THEIR GRIEF

Many families have great support systems right after a loss and during a funeral. But a week or a month later, that support can – and often does – fall away.

This is complicated by the fact that there is no single road-map that works for every family or even every family member you serve. It's also true that up to 20% of families are affected by complicated grief – painful emotions of loss that don't improve with time – which requires even more support and care.

The last thing you want to do is leave your families on their own once they walk out the doors of your funeral home. You've guided them this far through the grieving process, and it only makes sense to continue to care for them. It's for this reason that a lot of funeral homes provide grief resources.

But here's the problem: many grief resources do not provide the full range of support families need. Some families handle grief on their own, others seek education and resources, while still others need individualized help from a professional.

Another way to think of this is in terms of expectations. Families don't often know what to expect after a funeral or where to go for answers. But funeral homes, being deathcare experts, are in the best position to help.

When you can provide a platform that meets the full range of families' grief needs so they have helpful educational resources and options, you exceed expectations and continue building on the relationship you've already developed.

3

DON'T JUST FISH FOR REVIEWS

Did you know that as many as 85% of consumers report placing as much trust in online reviews as they do in personal recommendations? It has also been found that 91% of consumers say positive reviews make them more likely to do business with you.

In today's increasingly online world, the importance of online reviews is hard to overstate. They're essential for local businesses, and the data supports the benefits of proactively reaching out for reviews. Indeed, 77% of families say they would leave a review if requested by a business.

The danger, however, is when this gets treated like a transaction. While a review request for most businesses is transactional – a service is provided and a review is requested – the funeral profession is much more delicate and sensitive.

Requesting a review days or even weeks after a funeral is too soon for some families. You risk coming across as insensitive, no matter how nicely you frame a message.

SO, WHEN'S THE BEST TIME TO ASK?

After you've gone above and beyond through aftercare. When you offer and, more importantly, follow through with estate and grief help that actually helps, you create value. Whether that's a program that helps families cope with their grief, information on estate closure, or just a caring, honest message of empathy, you're doing something unexpected that families will deeply appreciate.

Families look to funeral homes to guide them through a life-changing event. By providing expert help they can trust, your funeral home can continue being at the center of their journey through loss.

4

BE CONSISTENT

How often do you stay in touch with families after a funeral?

Unfortunately, the answer is different for every funeral home and every family. A lot of families will receive a check-in text message or a sympathy card, which is great. But the challenge comes when you don't have a framework for reaching families and providing value after those initial touchpoints.

While it's not always easy to find a perfect medium for every family, there should be a measure of consistency so that you're not just reaching out randomly and then dropping off contact altogether.

SO MUCH OF IT COMES DOWN TO PURPOSE.

When you're driven to help families through your after-care model, you're more inclined to organize the experience

around every family's journey through loss. You put the needs of families first.

And because families will be settling their estates for weeks or months after a funeral, not to mention the unpredictable ups and downs as they journey through grief, it's important to create enough content and communication to truly be helpful.

A good place to start is by providing multichannel touchpoints (e.g., web platform, email, text messages) while also giving families all the information they need. Help them know which estate tasks need to be dealt with first, how to begin navigating grief, and where to go for additional support or help if needed. You'd be surprised by how quickly this will unify your messaging and make every touchpoint with families more meaningful.

5

BE SINCERE

We've all heard it before:

- "Let me know how I can help."
- "I'm just checking in."
- "I'm sorry for your loss."
- "My deepest sympathies for what you're going through."
- "Please don't hesitate to reach out."

Receiving these messages can be a source of comfort, and it's nice to know people are there to help if you need them.

The trouble is that these messages also shift the burden onto the bereaved to ask for help. Again, it's very well-

intentioned, but people often struggle to reach out for help even when they really need it. Partly this is because asking for help is often thought of as a weakness. It's a vulnerable moment, and it feels uncomfortable, which gets magnified even more when you're grieving.

A more helpful approach is to find out what people need and give it to them.

The difference between adequate and amazing aftercare is that you've already thought through how you can help, and you've created a clear framework for providing that help that consistently exceeds expectations.

CONCLUSION

Families have already seen the level of care and attention your funeral home is capable of. So when they inevitably ask, "What's my next step?", they're hoping for answers. After all, you've proven that you know what it's like to be in the shoes of someone who's lost a loved one. Families are assuming you'll be the expert who can help them navigate the challenges they face after a funeral as well.

Meeting this moment with an amazingly helpful experience will truly set you apart. Your funeral home will gain a distinct advantage because you win the appreciation of families and continue building your relationship with them. Not only will you receive more high-quality reviews, but more families will be dedicated to elevating your brand as some of your funeral home's biggest advocates.



Payton Thompson is co-creator and general manager of Everything After, winner of the 2022 NFDA Innovation Award. Through his leadership, thoughtfulness, and compassion, Payton and his team work with hundreds of funeral homes across the country and empower them to help families through life's most difficult moments after a funeral. He is dedicated to creating amazingly helpful and consistent

experiences that meet the full range of families' estate and grief needs. In addition to innovating on behalf of funeral homes, Payton treasures time spent with his wife and children, and he enjoys journaling, reading, sports, and traveling.

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LAUGHTER IN THE FACE OF TEARS

by Nancy Weil

The funeral professional sees both tears as well as laughter. We sit quietly while the tears flow and the bereaved tries to form words to express the depth of their grief. It is found when a story is shared at a funeral service and those in attendance laugh at the memory of a joyous time in their loved one's life. While we know intrinsically that laughter is good, the question to ask is "Why is laughter found in the darkest of times?" Better still, how can you use the power of laughter to help your clients, your staff and yourself?

Viktor Frankl wrote in his book, **Man's Search for Meaning**, "To discover that there was any semblance of art in a concentration camp must be surprise enough for an outsider, but he may be even more astonished to hear that one could find a sense of humor there as well; of course, only the faint trace of one, and then only for a few seconds or minutes. Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds."

Laughter is one of the best stress relievers as it reduces cortisol levels and other stress hormones that are responsible for much of the stress-related illnesses. It also boosts the immune system, promotes deep breathing, stimulates both sides of the brain, creates a mini-aerobic workout and feels great. All of this is readily available at any time with no need for an appointment or a co-pay. All it takes is a willingness to laugh – no matter if it is authentic or fake, your body will recognize the sound and take over from there. If you are not comfortable laughing for no reason, but still want some of the benefits, take your pen and place it between your teeth and don't let your lips touch. This simulates a smile and, when held for a few minutes, will begin to produce chemicals in the brain that reduce stress and create a calm feeling. Even

taking some deep breaths can help you to achieve the relief you seek when the day gets challenging.

It can be a struggle to meet the emotional needs of your clients while balancing your business and financial needs. There are days when the piles of paperwork seem to grow each time you answer the phone. At the same time, you are required to practice the art of presence each time you meet with a family. This double-edged sword is the knowledge that each day may contain the unexpected. While it keeps your professional life from becoming routine, it also creates situations where having a plan for the day is impossible.

Being short-staffed also adds to the misery. There is not enough “you” to go around. You’ve likely experienced periods of stress where the workload of the gotta-do’s are not going to get done unless you stay late or get to the office early. We work in an industry where the time clock is never punched and there is no such thing as a true day off as long as you remain in your city. And the strange thing is: we would not have it any other way. This industry gets into our blood. There is immense satisfaction in knowing that we are able to help our clients at the worst moment of their life. We work in a field that most people avoid even thinking about, much less face each day: death. Yet, for us, there is simply no better way to make a living.

By utilizing the power of humor and laughter, you will be better able to maintain a positive outlook. A humor break can be taken in a matter of minutes, yet the benefits can be experienced for the rest of the day. Have a joy basket in your office. Fill it with small toys like bubbles, yo-yos, slinkys, or other trinkets that you can play with for a few minutes when you need a break. Keep funny jokes or stories saved in your computer or print them out and keep a folder that you can refer to when you need to lighten up. Go on youtube.com and type in your favorite comedian and take a mini vacation watching some of their funniest skits. Keep your desk drawer stocked with clown noses, funny stickers, or other silly items that you can enjoy. Download and listen to funny books written by comedians or humorists when you drive, take a walk or go out for a run. Having a Humor Plan of Action (HPOA) in place allows you to quickly access tools that can restore a sense of well-being and provide you with the stress relief you need.

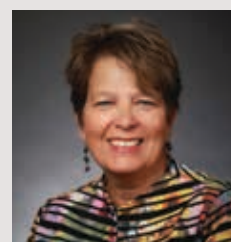
At the cemetery where I once worked, we had a bitter cold well-below-zero-why-am-I-living-in-Buffalo-day. I gave our superintendent of grounds a clown nose to wear as he drove around the cemetery checking on his crew who were out preparing graves for burials. As he drove by and waved, all of the guys laughed. It helped them to cope with the miserable conditions and boosted their spirits. They joked about it for the rest of the day. It was a simple gesture that had immediate, positive results.

How can you use this knowledge when working with your families? First of all, understand that there is a place for laughter when grieving as much as there is a time for tears. In fact, tears of laughter and tears of grief have a different chemical composition. Our bodies know what we need in order to release our stress. It is not your job to make the family you are serving laugh. Sometimes the discomfort of being in the presence of deep grief creates a desire to lighten the mood

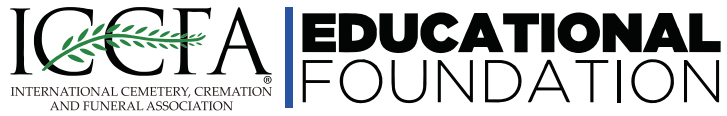
with jokes. This is not the purpose of therapeutic laughter. Healthy laughter in the bereaved originates from the mourner, not from outside forces. If a person needs to cry, our job is to be there and allow them their emotions. While they may feel that they need to be strong for others and act as if they will be okay, our clients should feel safe enough with us to authentically feel their emotions.

The healing benefits of laughter should be understood and related to our clients at the appropriate time. It is okay to laugh. In fact, for the bereaved, laughter can boost their depleted immune system, relieve their stress and help them to concentrate better. It brings them back into the present moment, which is the only place where respite from the grief resides. Grief is a process of looking back with regret and forward with fear, but by returning to this moment now, the bereaved find a small bit of relief.

This is the gift that laughter provides. It is not about telling jokes or being a comedian. It is simply the act of giggling, guffawing or chortling because, in doing so, healing takes place and joy replaces stress, even if only for a moment. After years of studying and incorporating laughter into my own life, I can state that laughter works. It helps the families you serve cope with a difficult time. It helps you and your staff cope with the challenges of your chosen career. It can also be a great trust and business builder because, as the always funny and incredibly talented Victor Borge (check him out on YouTube), said, *“Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.”*



Serving as Member Resources Director for the International Order of the Golden Rule, Nancy Weil brings her years of experience working in funeral service to funeral directors across the globe. Her professional experience includes serving as Community Outreach Director at Veterans Funeral Care in Clearwater, FL. With certifications as a Grief Services Provider, Grief Management Specialist, Funeral Celebrant and Laughter Leader, Nancy is uniquely qualified to bring new perspectives into how to best meet the needs of the families you serve. For more information, email Nancy at NWeil@OGR.org




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DEAD RINGERS LAUNCHES ONLINE COURSE IN RESPONSE TO FTC PHONE SWEEP

Cincinnati, OH – Dead Ringers unveils new on-demand online course to provide training, education, and practical understanding of FTC phone compliance for every person involved in the funeral industry. Dead Ringers has always been training to FTC compliance—but the apparent need and urgency of funeral homes to know the Funeral Rule and to adhere to it is paramount. In response to the FTC's unprecedented phone sweep announcement on January 25, 2024, Dead Ringers immediately moved to offer complimentary webinars, and continues to support deathcare firms by equipping them to adequately train their staff for compliance. Dead Ringers is moving beyond passive webinars and is now offering on-demand online courses designed specifically to train and equip funeral homes how to respond to price shoppers according to the Funeral Rule.

The *Funeral Rule* lays out specific do's and don'ts for deathcare professionals when discussing funeral services over the phone. Failure to adhere to these guidelines comes with a hefty fine up to \$51,744 per violation AND the firm's information being posted on a public list of violators. These moves by the FTC are immediately damaging to businesses, but the lasting implications of a public violators list will damage businesses long after the infraction.

"After placing thousands of calls to hundreds of locations, we know for certain that Funeral Rule infractions are happening—daily. Maybe it's a bad case of laziness that causes professionals to omit required pricing elements on the phone, or maybe it's a lack of knowledge: what IS required, and HOW does it need to be presented, and WHAT IF it's wrong? We can't fix laziness—but we can address a lack of knowledge by equipping deathcare professionals with understanding of what they can say, what they can't say, what they MUST say, and how," states Dead Ringers COO Mandie Hungarland.

Dead Ringers' on demand online course officially launches March 1, 2024. It is accurately priced to the number of employees being supported and can be accessed by team members individually and on their own time. This course includes videos featuring deathcare attorney and Dead Ringers founder Poul Lemasters, Esq., as well as customer experience expert Nicole Wiedeman. Further information—including preorder options—can be found on the Dead Ringers website at www.deadringers.co/FTC.

About Dead Ringers

Dead Ringers was founded by Poul Lemasters in 2015 as the only mystery shop provider for the deathcare profession. They are the customer experience experts for deathcare firms. The mission is simple: improve the deathcare customer experience, one phone call at a time. Dead Ringers provides customer experience analysis and training solutions for funeral homes, cemeteries, and associations — including mystery shopping, on-site and remote training sessions, consultancy services and speaking engagements.

Please Contact

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www.deadringers.co



50 YEARS AND COUNTING!

Lee's Summit, MO – The year 2024 marks an important milestone for Lamcraft, a company well-known in the funeral home and cemetery industry for its lamination supplies and services. The company is celebrating its 50th Anniversary and invites customers to share in the celebration with upcoming sales, new products and other surprise announcements.

Founded in 1974 by Mike O'Malley and Bob Sabin, Lamcraft has evolved through the years to meet the ever-changing needs of its customers. In 2023 its ownership changed to Tara and Erik Swanson. The Swansons are committed to keeping Lamcraft's products *Made in the U.S.A.*, sourcing all raw materials from American manufacturers and producing everything on-site or through contracts with nearby manufacturing partners. Putting customers first continues to be their focus and mission.

"We don't foresee any big changes in operations," Erik emphatically states. "Lamcraft is served best by its seasoned employees, many of whom have worked decades for the company. Our sales team is committed to listening to and collaborating with our funeral home customers—they're our bread-and-butter, especially independently owned ones."

As Lamcraft moves toward the 50-year mark, it continues to grow by offering new items to the funeral home market. The company recently has released a much-expanded 8-up Micro-Perforated Prayer Card line, featuring traditional religious designs as well as scenic landscapes (including our Southern Scenes prayer cards), flowers, and special interests such as fishing and golf, among other topics.

Keep following Lamcraft in 2024, as it rounds the half-century mark and anticipates a promising future! For more information, a catalog or samples, call 1-800-821-1333 or visit www.lamcraft.com.

Please Contact:

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