

Canadian

FUNERAL NEWS



JANUARY 2024

TACKLING STAFFING SHORTAGES



GEORGE DARTE SPEARHEADS FUNERAL CEREMONY ASSOCIATE PILOT PROGRAM



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George Darté

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"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." ~ Mahatma Gandhi

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Pat Ottmann

HOW MUCH PROTECTION?

by Pat Ottmann

"To point with pride, view with alarm and occasionally recommend."

I perused with amazement the BAO's year-end report and address in its newsletter *Lifeline*. The headline read: "The BAO's continuing evolution is well-positioned for 2024."

Board chair Leith Coghlin's opening statement: "The Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) enters its eighth year fulfilling its mandate to **protect consumers in the province.**"

When you then read on through the newsletter, interim CEO/registrar Jim Cassimatis addresses the increased fees that will be charged to all licensees and establishments in the province. He goes on to explain the rate increases and the fact that BAO has added 10 positions now totalling 38 skilled employees.

Thirty-eight skilled employees to protect the consumers being served by the bereavement sector in Ontario. My question is how much protection can the consumer afford? And why?

My position on this has been clear for years. The profession has served people and their communities since the beginning of funeral service as we know it today. These families need no more protection from the local funeral director than they do from any other business or service providers in their communities. Yet, the funeral profession has been singled out as some sort of threat to the consumer, regulated with a heavy hand and, at times, through a lens that is almost impossible to understand.

The other observation to be made is that when you compare provinces, the same outcomes are basically observed between the heavily regulated jurisdictions and those with little to no regulation. The profession runs with honour and dignity to the highest levels, and yes, from time to time, bad people infil-

trate the ranks, but the level and number of times that things go wrong does not correlate to the amount of regulations. Nor does it correlate to the number of inspectors or to the amount of taxes the consumer pays for that protection.

Let's call it what it is. A mandatory fee is a tax. The business will pass it on to the consumer. It must be paid and therefore (we can argue about semantics) is a tax or at least the equivalent of one. It is now agreed that it can be shown as a line item on the contract. And then taxes can be paid on the regulatory fee, adding insult to injury.

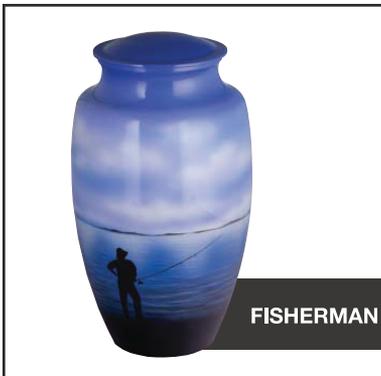
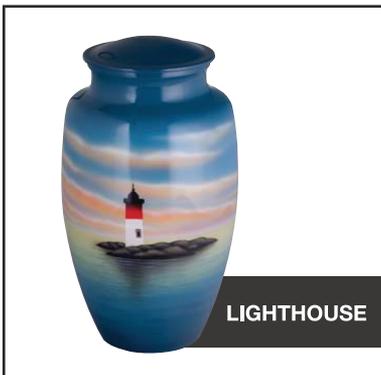
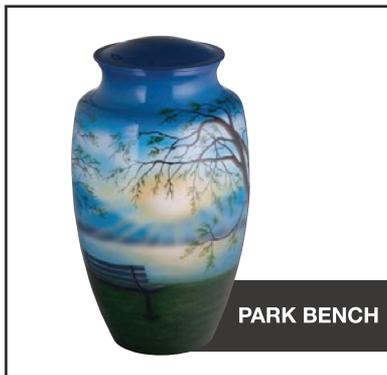
Every time we increase the fees on the services provided by the profession, the consumer struggles just a little more to purchase them. It would appear the obvious decision for the consumer is to buy fewer services and trend toward forgoing the healing value the funeral (ritual) has provided from the beginning of time. If this is what consumer protection has become, I just don't get it. The basic math would show that we tax approximately 121,000 families in Ontario every year to protect what? A handful of complaints that are typically dealt with by some communication?

And as we have seen in history, fees and taxes never go down, they only go up. Perhaps the minds that have dreamt up this need for protection should allow the consumer to opt in or opt out of the protection they are being provided and then live within the means that the consumer is asking for. Kind of like insurance on a rental car. The cost per complaint is astronomical by any calculation and one I don't think most consumers would agree to.

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TACKLING STAFFING SHORTAGES

GEORGE DARTE SPEARHEADS FUNERAL CEREMONY ASSOCIATE PILOT PROGRAM

by Lisa Johnston

Over the last few years, the funeral profession has been tasked with longer days and heavier workloads due to a lack of qualified employees. Some regions of Canada, such as northwestern Ontario, have been particularly hard hit. With no light at the end of the tunnel in sight, funeral home owners and managers are grappling with different scenarios to help relieve the burden. St. Catharines, Ontario's George Darte believes he may have come up with a partial solution: the introduction of funeral ceremony associates through an innovative pilot program.

The idea behind the new staff role was entirely created by Darte, who did extensive research before approaching the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) for approval.

"As a result of staff shortages and the demands of current funeral directors, I studied the Funeral, Burial and Cremations Services Act (2002) to see if you needed a funeral licence to run a funeral service in the province of Ontario," says Darte, a licensed funeral director since 1972 and co-owner of George Darte Funeral Chapel. "I could not find such a stipulation in the legislation anywhere."

Following his research, Darte approached then BAO registrar Carey Smith. "As soon as I suggested what I was thinking of doing, Carey said, 'George, I like that idea, but of course, I need to check with my board and legal.' I expected that and was pleased when he got back to me in a timely fashion and said it was a go."



George Darte

In February 2023, Darte started the pilot program with the hiring of his first two funeral ceremony associates (FCAs). Unlike other unlicensed roles at the funeral home (reception, cleaners, drivers and the like), the funeral ceremony associate works hand-in-hand with the funeral director to reduce their



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workload. They can help with any non-licensed task, including greeting families, working out service details (flowers, drivers, etc.) and leading the funeral itself, thus freeing up the funeral director to focus on licensed tasks such as arrangements and embalming duties.

“I am surprised by how much difference it has made so far,” says Darte. “Their addition to our staff has been such a success, I would like to add two more for a total of four.”

Barbara Reid serves as one of Darte’s funeral ceremony associates. A former nurse with innate skills of compassion, empathy and care, Reid says if she knew how rewarding such a position would be, she would have made the career change decades earlier.

“George said he had an amazing opportunity for me, and I didn’t know what that entailed, but with time, patience and really good mentors, he was right,” says Reid, who facilitated grief support groups in the past following the loss of her eldest son. “I’m not doing this for the gratification, but just to know I made a difference in someone’s worst day is incredibly rewarding.”

As a fourth-generation owner, Darte has seen many changes in the funeral profession over his long tenure, which keeps him mindful of the need to continually adapt.

“If my funeral home – or in fact any funeral home in Canada – isn’t relevant, it will become irrelevant,” says Darte. “I want us to continue on. I need us to continue on ... and a smart owner will figure out how to do things differently.”

Darte has always been one for voicing his opinion at association meetings and bringing new ideas to the table. Besides piloting the funeral ceremony associate program, he will soon introduce a fossil-free cremation unit and launch AI capabilities to help families prearrange on his website. Darte says his “George-atar” will eliminate the need for at least one director, allowing him to reposition his staff to where they’re needed most.

The BAO is 100 per cent behind Darte’s pilot program, with interim registrar Jim Cassimatis spotlighting it in a recent communication throughout the province. Cassimatis stated, “The benefits of having an extra set of hands to perform essential tasks at a funeral home can’t be underestimated.”

According to David Brazeau, manager of communications with BAO, Darte’s solution is one of many planned initiatives to help reduce current staffing shortages.

“It probably won’t be one thing that fixes the whole issue, as it’s been going on for many years, especially in the smaller communities and primarily northwestern Ontario, but we see



George Darte with Tim Purves at NFDA's International Convention & Expo.



George Darte's funeral ceremony associates, Barbara Reid and Pat Hardy.

The funeral ceremony associate is just one of many solutions the BAO has shared in recent months. Other proposed options include online and hybrid education; the addition of more colleges offering programs; starting apprentices earlier in the program to provide more hands-on learning; and recognizing qualifications from other North American jurisdictions.

it as part of the potential solution,” Brazeau states. “It is also something that is already on the table. It is nothing new and does not require a change to the laws because it’s perfectly permissible: celebrants and clergy have been performing funeral services for years.”

Brazeau adds, “But the part of actually purposefully hiring someone to be an associate to work under the funeral director is a little bit different, though. We haven’t seen that idea pop up directly before, so that is why we thought it was worth sharing to get the discussion going.”

The funeral ceremony associate is just one of many solutions the BAO has shared in recent months. Other proposed options include online and hybrid education; the addition of more colleges offering programs; starting apprentices earlier in the program to provide more hands-on learning; and recognizing qualifications from other North American jurisdictions.

Current Ontario Funeral Service Association (OFSA) president John Cunningham applauds Darté’s creativity but also cautions on the importance of maintaining high standards when it comes to both funeral education and serving families.

“OFSA has always advocated for very high standards of approved licensing in Ontario,” notes Cunningham, owner of Community Alternative and Ashburnham Funeral Homes. “That was a big discussion when we last updated our legislation 20 years ago to ensure we maintained the highest standards in Canada. I compliment George on his progressive thinking and for trying something outside the box to benefit the profession, but we also need to ensure people are properly trained in everything a funeral director needs to know when conducting a service.”

Cunningham adds, “I also think right now when a family signs a contract with a funeral home, there is an expectation they are dealing with a fully licensed, fully trained professional who

will be with them through the funeral ceremony. As a result, we need to really study this further. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered, but George might be on to something here for alleviating the shortage of qualified people. While we haven’t had a formal discussion at the board level yet, I feel confident OFSA would support this as long as our high standards are maintained.”

At press time, Brazeau says there is no intent on BAO’s part to create an official position with mandated education. Currently, all training of Darté’s funeral ceremony associates is done on site at his St. Catharines location. He doesn’t believe a formal education program is needed, as each funeral home will know what training will best serve their clientele.

“I’m still learning every day along with my two FCAs,” states Darté. “We have a training manual but it is currently open-ended. There is some basic foundational learning, but I don’t think there needs to be a formal course. Each funeral home will have the best idea of how to deploy these assistants.”

FCA Barbara Reid explains some of the tasks she can assist with in service to families. “The funeral director no longer needs to greet the families for the visitation. They no longer need to drive the lead car. They don’t even have to attend the funeral service,” she explains. “The funeral director basically does the planning, the financial contracts and the embalming, but running or directing the funeral is what I do.”

The program has been so successful it is no longer considered a pilot at George Darté Funeral Chapel. It’s become a permanent part of the staff roster, enabling funeral directors to make better use of their time which has improved work-life balance while keeping staffing costs lower.

When asked if other funeral home owners have reached out with questions, Darté says the phone has not been ringing as often as he thought it would. “Either they are not having a job shortage, they are not aware of this pilot program or they’ve already taken the idea and ran with it.”

Whatever the reason, Darté strongly recommends the use of funeral ceremony associates within funeral homes.

“I’ve been in funeral service for 58 years, 52 as a licensed director,” concludes Darté. “As much as I would like things to go back to the way they were when I first started, I know that’s not going to happen. That ship sailed long ago. Necessity is the mother of invention. So, this is basically one funeral home owner’s reaction to the staffing shortage and how to best serve our families and community in a different fashion.” 



Michael Brooke

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS?

EVALUATING FUTURE AND CURRENT EMPLOYEES

by Michael Brooke

Last month, I discussed the concept of testing for values. For this issue, I'd like to examine how companies can test potential employees' strengths and how they will operate when performing tasks.

There are several valuable reasons for using tests. They can be more objective than resumé screenings and pre-interview calls. A well-designed test can provide measurable results. Tests are also standardized, and all candidates are given the same questions. They allow everyone the same opportunities to present themselves. The very structure of a test gives employers quantifiable insight. These "hard numbers" mean people rely on something other than their gut feelings regarding hiring.

Unfortunately, issues can also arise. For example, a test might be able to assess specific job knowledge, but it can't predict how willing someone is to learn or how they'll fit into a company's culture.

Another problem is that candidates can fake their answers or practice taking the test to score a good mark. Potential employees want to present themselves in the best possible light, so getting a truly accurate portrait can be challenging. Tests can also be ambiguous, leading to unreliable results. The other issue with tests is that people come in all shapes and sizes. Unfortunately, tests can't capture variation because they assume we all respond similarly to external ideas and situations.

I did hear from one funeral home that has had great success with a test called Caliper (recently rebranded as Talogy). "We have used it in the hiring process when we have time. It's a great tool to see if people are good for the profession and also a good fit for us," the funeral home owner wrote to me.

The Talogy test consists of 180 questions and takes about two hours to complete. It is primarily multiple choice and comprises two sections: abstract reasoning and personality. Seven

different areas are covered: leadership; active communication; interpersonal dynamics; decision-making; problem solving; process management; and self-management.

If your score is between 60-90, you are considered a natural fit for the position. If you score from 40-59, you are a moderate fit, and then from 1-39, you are a weak fit for the position.

In my journey to examine my strengths, I discovered the CliftonStrengths Assessment. The history of this test is just as fascinating as the test itself. When Don Clifton returned from the Second World War, he wanted to spend the rest of his life pursuing something positive for humankind. He believed most psychologists studied what was wrong with people and rarely examined why they excelled.

Clifton studied how to assess and identify specific traits and the framework for developing those traits. This work eventually led to the books *Soar With Your Strengths* and *Now Discover Your Strengths*.

The original Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment arrived in 1999, and just under 19,000 people took it. Now, over two million people take the test every year. I am one of those people, and I'd like to share some of my thoughts with you.

It's easy to go online and take the test. It costs about \$80, takes around 30 minutes and features approximately 180 questions. My top three results showed that I was all about connection, creating ideas and taking action. Upon diving into the results and recommendations, I had two thoughts cascading through my mind:

1. Why didn't I take this test at 29 instead of 59? It would have saved quite a lot of grief and frustration!
2. I am so happy I took this test at 59 because it will save me a lot of grief and frustration!

The results of the StrengthsFinder are more than numbers-based. Each evaluation comes with a detailed analysis. To give you a brief taste, take a look at the following words that revolve around the idea of having a connection:

“You have faith in the links among all things. You believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has meaning. Chances are good that you hold tightly to your core values. They form the foundation of your day-to-day existence. Your internal moral compass always points toward what is right, proper, and true. You trust your strong convictions to direct you to the right path, regardless of the obstacles you face.”

These words resonated with me, and the overall test painted a very accurate portrait. I can understand some people’s reluctance at the cost of this test. Should you wish to avoid investing the \$80, there is an alternative. It’s called the High5Test; and it’s owned by the same folks who own the StrengthsFinder. I took this test as well. It gave me slightly different results than the StrengthsFinder, but provided some valuable insights.

The StrengthsFinder test provides several critical pieces of information for companies. At the top of the list would be the ability for individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their natural talents. This self-awareness can lead to positive change and growth, both personally and professionally.

Since the test focuses on people’s strengths and not their weaknesses, it can lead to increased self-confidence and a sense of purpose. People can leverage their strengths to maximize their potential.

When an employer knows the strengths of the various people on their team, it can help with organizational development. Conversely, when team members know each other’s strengths, it can make things much more cohesive, leading to more significant achievement. This knowledge also fosters better communication and can assist in conflict resolution.

Understanding my top three strengths has increased job satisfaction. I find myself zeroing in on what I do best, which has made me more productive and happier.

Dozens of other tools are available to assess current and future employees. For instance, the Kolbe A™ Index revolves around conative ability (people’s instincts and behaviours when faced with problem solving or a need to take action). This test is a reasonably good predictor of behaviour. One cannot study for a Kolbe test. You answer a series of roughly 40 questions, and it accurately determines how you will behave in any given situation.

The Kolbe test measures four different categories on a scale from one to 10.

1. Fact Finder: how individuals gather and process information. Some people prefer to collect detailed information before acting (high fact finder). Others are more likely to make quick, intuitive decisions based on their gut or general knowledge (low fact finder).

2. Follow Thru: how people relate to organizations, systems and implementations. People with a high follow thru score prefer a more organized and structured workplace. Those with a low score may choose a more flexible and improvised approach.

3. Quick Start: an individual’s willingness to take risks and embrace change. Those with a high quick start are more comfortable with change and uncertainty. Those with a low quick start indicator feel much more comfortable in a consistent and predictable environment.

4. Implementor: how an individual deals with the physical world and manual tasks. In a funeral home, high implementors most likely enjoy things like setting features in the prep room. They want hands-on and physical activities. Those who score low may prefer intellectual or non-manual tasks.

The most intriguing thing about the Kolbe Index is that you can’t score one or 10 on everything. There is no “ideal” score because the test recognizes everyone has unique strengths and abilities in each category.

I took a Kolbe test at the end of September and the insights were illuminating. I wound up with a Kolbe score of 4/2/10/2. Translated into English, I gather information quickly and efficiently. I am not overly concerned with in-depth research or detailed information unless I write for *Canadian Funeral News!*

I do not have a strong inclination for structured organization and prefer a flexible task approach. I am spontaneous, innovative and comfortable taking risks and making rapid decisions. Trust me when I say this is both a blessing and a curse. It’s non-stop action and ideas. Sometimes, things go great and other times, I want to shut down my monkey mind.

And as my wife has consistently reminded me for over three decades, I have no inclination for hands-on, physical tasks!

I thought it appropriate to leave the final word to David Garvie, who spent decades managing several funeral homes. “The more we can explore the skill sets of those being hired along with their potential fit with the mission and vision of the funeral home, the better for all.” 

Michael Brooke is both a writer and former publisher. He now turns people’s memories into magazines. Contact Michael at mbrooke@timeformystory.com.



Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP



GOT TIME?

by Jeffrey Chancellor, CFSP

There are a lot of old sayings and adages about time. Time flies. Time is money. Time marches on. There is no time like the present. Time and tide wait for no man. With all this talk about time, may I ask where did your 2023 go?

I dare say that 2023 saw more job openings advertised in death care than I've ever seen before. Almost everywhere I travelled, I was asked: "Do you know any embalmers and funeral directors looking for a move?" Retirements and burnout were the most popular reasons given for experienced staff departing.

Several of the seasoned funeral professionals who successfully "escaped" death care shared that it was the culture change in funeral service that made them retire early or just leave. "It's becoming more like the culture of the coroner or the medical examiner and less like funeral service culture" was a common thread in our discussions.

How much – and why – our professional culture has changed is up for debate, but I am sure we can all agree on one topic: this manpower and experience shortage means that everything takes longer, so we need to look at new ways of leveraging our time.

With all the job openings, I thought it would be interesting to go sport fishing for jobs. You know, catch and release. Any person who enjoys fishing knows it's all about the bait. Is it attractive to the fish? If it is, the fish will surely bite. Then what? We get the fish in the boat. Sounds good, right? Well, it may be good for us, but is it good for the fish?

As I (and my secret mystery shopping team) explored job openings, it was interesting to discover that most of the employment propositions were really more based on what you won't have to do if you work there. Imagine how great your work-life balance will be if you join us! No more being on night call; we have an answering service for that. Imagine, no more

late-night house calls; we have a transfer service for that. No more weekend embalming. Sounds pretty sweet until compared side by side with the reasons most folks got burned out and left.

Compartmentalization was frequently cited as a cause for burning out. It's not my job, that's not my department, combined with there being only so many hours in a day, has changed the fabric of our relationships with families and the quality of our service delivery. This has changed our overall daily work experiences.

One of my favourite funeral professionals shared with me that her time was up. She'd had enough. It was time to leave. She said she (and many folks like her) were "drawn into death care because they wanted to make a meaningful difference in people's lives, but as we (as a profession) have modernized, centralized and compartmentalized, we also dehumanized."

She said she missed the days of continuity of care for families and the bonds developed between clients and caregivers. How being there from the first call, through the arrangements, preparing the body and attending the visitations and ceremonies, reinforced that what we do is important. How the paycheque was one element of her job satisfaction, but it was the personal relationships and feeling of making a difference combined with the opportunity for artistic expression in the embalming arena that made it the best job she ever had. She compared that era with working in today's modern "death-care silo."

Every experienced embalmer knows happiness is a fresh case. Is it the same as a fresh family to an arranger? I dare say yes. In today's death-care silo, there are few fresh families and few fresh bodies because both have a chance to chill awhile before meaningful care begins.

Let's compare the journey of a body and a family when a house call comes in after hours on a Saturday night. Firm A is a

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Viewing our daily experiences through the lens of meaningful moments is a useful way to train new staff members. Kairos moments are defined by the quality of the emotions people experience and not merely by the number of ticks of the clock.

compartmentalized model with specialists available only during core hours, while Firm B is an urgent care model populated with generalists.

Firm A. Answering service takes the call. Dispatcher sets an appointment for Monday for arrangements and the transfer service is deployed.

Both the remains and family marinate in their own juices over the weekend.

When the family arrives, the arranger knows nobody and instead of relationship building, they work to “un-plan” what the family had two days to plan by themselves. Perhaps this is not the best recipe for great sales and creativity.

Then the embalmer meets a cold body and tries to stop nature and unwind the post-mortem changes. This may also not be the best recipe for excellent outcomes.

Firm B. An engaged, knowledgeable generalist takes the call and opens the relationship, shows up at the family home, intensifies the relationship, assesses both the family and the body for urgent needs and counsels or advises the client towards understanding the best way forward to serve their individual needs.

Upon return to the funeral home, the fresh body is prepared with best outcomes in mind.

When the family arrives to make arrangements, the relationship is open, trust is already well established and they know who you really are because you’ve already spoken, met and even prepared their loved one for their reunion and some healing time.

Now let me ask you, if you were a customer, what firm would you prefer to experience? Remember, there are two kinds of customers: internal (those we pay) and external (those who pay us). If you were drawn into death care as an occupation with a heart filled to serve others, which place would you prefer to be employed?

Consider that there are different notions of time. Since the invention of the modern clock, it’s hard to imagine any other way to measure time than counting the hours, minutes and seconds. That kind of time is called chronos.

The ancient Greeks distinguished between the time on the clock and the “right” time to do something. They called it kairos. Kairos could be defined as the perfect time to do something. It has more to do with the quality or propitiousness of the moment. Kairos time aligns well when creating experiences of synchronicity.

How do you measure time in your service business? From a chronos perspective, we would measure our time in terms of how many ticks of the clock it took to accomplish a task like embalming or arranging.

From a kairos perspective, it is identifying the best moment or period of time when the performance of the task will produce significantly better outcomes. Once that moment is over, it is going to take longer and the outcomes will likely suffer too.

Viewing our daily experiences through the lens of meaningful moments is a useful way to train new staff members. Kairos moments are defined by the quality of the emotions people experience and not merely by the number of ticks of the clock.

Kairos moments show up all the time and provide the perfect moment to evaluate our business processes for the opportunities that can help us align the flow of our services with our natural human way of experiencing life.

Let’s face it, there is increasing complexity in regulation, inspection, compliance, continuing education and documentation coming our way. There are a number of staff members approaching retirement or burning out. All that will no doubt be adding more time to our work. May I ask you, where will that time come from?

If you’d like to see where you can lever more time, have greater impact and better outcomes, give us a call. We will be glad to put time back on your side. 

Jeff Chancellor serves as director of education, training and research for Eckels and welcomes your opinions.

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Dr. Bill Webster has written a new 40-page booklet designed for people in the early days of grief after bereavement. "Grief: The Unwelcome Journey" is an ideal resource to include in a stationery package or as a personalized token of your support to your families.

After a mere three months, the booklet is already in second edition in the U.K., and has been described as "... a masterpiece, covering all aspects of grieving in a most practical and helpful manner." (J. West, West & Coe, London)

Dr. Bill will introduce this product to the Canadian market in the fall of 2023, at less than the cost of a sympathy card.

To receive a complimentary copy for your consideration, please email Dr. Bill Webster (info@griefjourney.com) with your name and funeral home details.

Visit www.griefjourney.com for more grief support resources.



Dr. Bill Webster

THE THREE LEVELS OF LEARNING

by Dr. Bill Webster

“**Y**ou live and learn” is a familiar statement. We learn things from our birth till our death. Happy is the person who learns early that they are loved, that they are of value and that satisfaction in life is not just found in our achievements but in who we are and what we have become.

Sadly, not everyone gets to that point. Many, even from early childhood, take in negative messages, whether from family, teachers, caregivers or peers, about self-worth, potential and deservingness of unconditional love. “You’re stupid. You never do anything right. You’ll never make anything of yourself. You’re overweight. You’re not good looking or as clever as someone else.” These are just a few of the negative comments heard in childhood. Other similarly harmful learnings resulted from abusive, neglectful or even ambivalent relationships which over the years have affected our sense of self and our perception of life and the world in which we live.

Remember?

But even into adulthood, we can be affected by negative evaluations, sometimes rooted in earlier beliefs, though not necessarily. How many times have you written yourself off or passed up opportunities by thinking: “There’s no way I’m qualified for this. I’m too old to do that. I just can’t overcome the challenges. I’ll just fake it till I make it. Nobody likes me anyway. I deserve the bad things that happen to me.”

Some of these beliefs come from trusted authority figures such as teachers or professors. Others arise from colleagues or business leaders. They may even be heard in job reviews or seen on social media. One would hope the sources we choose to believe could be trusted to provide accurate information that would serve us well in life, but sadly that is not always the case.

So, we allow those “messages” to become “learnings” and global judgments about who we are, trickling down to affect specific situations we may be facing and holding us back from what we are actually capable of achieving. Because we allow them to define our self-image and self-esteem, and because they hide below the level of our awareness, they unconsciously dictate our decision-making, behaviours and attitudes.

Whether those assessments are accurate or not, the real problem is that we allow ourselves to be affected and even defined by them. And that can haunt us all of our lives.

G.K. Chesterton wrote, “The chief object of education is not to learn things, but to unlearn things.” The logical extension of that statement is to say that learning sometimes requires unlearning, which creates relearning, and all three are essential elements in education.

Some people, as illustrated above, learn and are affected by many negative messages. But even when our experiences have been more positive, life is never perfect. Some human experiences such as loss or bereavement can adversely affect us, and affect the way we see ourselves and our world.

But it’s not what happens to us, it’s how we allow ourselves to be affected by what happens that defines us. I read an article where researchers had asked approximately 200 people who’d been hurt by someone or something to write about either the traumatic aspects of the events or things they felt they had gained as a consequence. Those who wrote about what they’d learned or how they’d grown described feeling less angry and bitter than the other group. Other insights included that they had become less selfish, or had discovered unexpected strengths in themselves, and in light of their “traumatic growth,” were also more likely to forgive.

Rather, forgiveness means “not being affected by it any longer.” Holding on to resentment, a trauma, a grief or a hurt can affect you, your mental health and your happiness for years, or in some cases, forever.

Now there’s a real “unlearn, relearn” illustration. Someone hurts you. Many don’t want to “forgive” because they think they would be saying the offender did nothing wrong. Or they feel forgiveness would require reconciling with the person who mistreated them. But the word doesn’t mean either.

Rather, forgiveness means “not being affected by it any longer.” Holding on to resentment, a trauma, a grief or a hurt can affect you, your mental health and your happiness for years, or in some cases, forever.

We must “relearn” that when you forgive, you don’t absolve anyone of responsibility. Forgiveness is not about the perpetrator. Rather, you are letting yourself off the hook. That person did something that hurt you, but with forgiveness, you are saying that you refuse to let yourself be affected by it or allow it to control you any longer.

Forgiveness involves realizing and accepting that you were wronged and hurt by what happened; but even more importantly, it is deciding to move on from that wound and find healing. In other words, you’re letting it go.

I’ve realized that unlearning and relearning are just as important as learning, because to unlearn something is to be more conscious of what we have actually learned and also our ability to change it when it doesn’t work anymore.

So, where do we begin in the transformation of negative beliefs? We need to ask ourselves three questions:

What have I learned in my life that is still working well for me?
What do I have to unlearn that is no longer working for me?
What do I have to relearn in order to change things in my life for the better?

Life is a school for learning, and some of the lessons are painful ones. We can’t avoid being hurt, but we can decide not to let our hurt overshadow the rest of our lives. Unlearning negative messages and transforming those negative beliefs will

change you by bringing about a more mature understanding of yourself. And the bonus effect is that you will become more compassionate toward yourself and toward others.

When you do these things, your new year will go much better. 

Dr. Bill Webster is the director of the Centre for the Grief Journey, and can be reached at www.GriefJourney.com, and on Twitter @drbillwebster.



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HUMBER UPDATE ON THE FUTURE OF FUNERAL SERVICE EDUCATION

In the fall of 2023, Humber's Funeral Service Education (FSE) program was approved to engage in two pilot studies to look at possible changes in the delivery of education to help ease the licensed funeral director shortage across the province.

"I'm so grateful we were given the green light on offering the pilots," says Michelle Clarke, FSE program coordinator, Humber College. "Humber heard the feedback coming from the field loud and clear and immediately shifted focus to find ways to help without changing the standard of education for funeral directors in this province."

The first pilot was approved for up to five students. These students were given remote access to the learning materials for every course in the fall term. This was accomplished by providing access to courses from Humber's transfer services sales representative (TSSR) and funeral director (FD) programs.

"All theoretical knowledge was achieved via remote access to learning and then students were scheduled for intensive lab days on campus to build the skills associated with year one of the program," explains Clarke. "Students unable to reasonably access Humber's North Campus due to the distance they live from Toronto were able to secure exam proctoring at a community college or another approved facility closer to them."

These students were also given the option of working in a concurrent internship during semesters one and two with a requirement that they needed to work a minimum of 19 hours/week in addition to their coursework in the program. This option has continued into the winter semester (semester two) in a similar manner to what was done in the fall, with students coming on campus for labs and final exams.

The second pilot was offered to all students in the regular program who were planning to work in a funeral home for a minimum of 19 hours/week while going to school.

"In fall 2022, the program delivery changed to a hybrid model so students were on campus Monday to Wednesday and then learning moved remote (online) for Thursday and Friday unless a student was required on campus for labs or exams. This enabled students to work Thursday to Sunday because any remote classes were recorded so students could watch them any time. With all this said, the second pilot has enabled students who were already planning on working a minimum of



Michelle Clarke

19 hours per week from Labour Day until the last week of April to register as concurrent interns. Successfully doing so will enable all these students to meet the learning outcomes for semester three of the program while also completing semesters one and two."

Clarke adds, "Any of our current students who, at the end of April, have met the year one course requirements and completed the requirements for the concurrent internship will enter the summer semester in May, ready to start semester four of the program. Successful completion of year one courses and the concurrent internship will enable these students to complete the program outcomes and be eligible to graduate and write entry to practice exams roughly four months faster than usual."

Clarke extends her gratitude to Associate Dean Judy Martin and Senior Dean Jason Powell for approving these pilots for the 2023-24 academic year. "It has enabled me to learn so much that has helped me have more clarity on a proposed pathway for the future. Without trying various things and being able to glean the benefits and consequences of them, it would have been far more challenging for everyone involved to really see what possibilities exist for the future of FSE at Humber."

More information on how these pilot projects may impact the future of funeral service education at Humber will be coming soon. 



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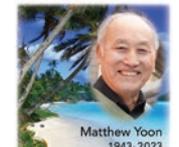
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HEAPED IN TRADITION

LAUREN FRASER EMBRACES HER ANCESTRAL ROOTS IN SERVICE TO FAMILIES

by Lisa Johnston

Growing up on a sixth-generation dairy farm in Harwoodlands, Nova Scotia, Lauren Fraser had long learned the importance of family. It was only when she joined Ettinger Funeral Home after enrolling in the funeral program at NSCC (Nova Scotia Community College) that she truly understood the depth of her roots.

“I never really knew all my ancestry growing up,” says the 23-year-old. “My mom is non-native, and my biological father is native, but as he was never part of my childhood, I wasn’t in touch with that aspect of my culture. All I knew was the farm. It wasn’t until I started working at the funeral home that I began growing into who I am today, and that is thanks to the teachings of my colleagues at Ettingers and my experiences serving both native and non-native communities.”

Fraser enrolled in the funeral service education program after exploring career options with a high school guidance counsellor. She then connected with longtime family friend, Alan MacLeod Jr., who co-owns Ettinger Funeral Home with his father. She gained employment and enrolled in school in 2019 and graduated in 2021, the first to complete the program with a Mi’kmaq background.

Never having lived on the reserve, however, Fraser felt disconnected from the Sipekne’katik First Nation. That all changed when families she served from Sipekne’katik began to discover her Mi’kmaq heritage.

“I’d help families at the funeral home and they would ask me who my parents were,” recalls Fraser. “My biological father’s roots instantly provided a connection which continued to snowball.”

Fraser was given her first traditional ribbon skirt by a member of the Mi’kmaq community during a funeral. The skirt – an Indigenous garment representing resilience, survival and identity – is often worn during funerals, ceremonies, times of healing and importance.

“A community member came outside during the visitation while I was loading our service vehicle and she told me to put it on so that the family and community recognized me as not only family but also a member of their community. I wore



Lauren Fraser

that skirt proudly as I led the funeral procession by walking in front of the hearse to the cemetery with the chief and other community members.”

Now that Fraser has been embraced by the Mi’kmaq community, she wears her ribbon skirts at every funeral service held there. She also helps Indigenous families incorporate more traditional components into their services.

“In the last four years, there has been a lot of change in the way we do funeral services,” explains Fraser. “When I first started, most of the native funeral services were Roman Catholic and were held in the church in Sipekne’katik. Many of our community members went to or have relatives who attended the residential school in Shubenacadie and were raised Catholic,

but there has been a breakaway from the Catholic Church following the well-publicized discovery of the unmarked graves across Canada which has led to more traditional services.”

A traditional service, Fraser explains, includes the casketed body being brought to the family home. Over the next three to four days, the deceased is never left alone as a family member stands guard to keep spirits from interfering with the body. A sacred fire is lit and tended to day and night, no matter the weather, for the entire visitation. On the last day, the casket is closed and there is a service performed by either an elder or a medicine man, with drumming, smudging and prayers over the casket and the family members.

Upon completion of the service, water is poured over the hot stones from the sacred fire to create a mist that is used to purify the casket and the remains. The casket is then taken to the cemetery for burial, where the community does tobacco offerings, drumming and prayers. Those in attendance also pay their final respects by placing handfuls of earth and tobacco on the casket or urn, signifying that they are returning the loved one into the care of Mother Earth.

“Most families also sing the honour song which pays tribute to our ancestors and those who have come before us,” says Fraser. “What is interesting is an eagle almost always flies overhead during the song connecting us and our prayers to the spiritual world.”

Fraser says most Indigenous funerals are well attended by the community. Connection is something she promotes for all families, regardless of their beliefs.

“We have families who come in just wanting to have direct cre-

mation,” she says. “Services can be pretty minimal but it is important to work with all families to create something personal and meaningful. To have that sense of community that brings people together significantly impacts how a family mourns.”

Fraser’s dedication has not gone unnoticed. This past summer, she was honoured with a surprise ceremony at the funeral home when the Sipekne’katik community thanked her for the care by presenting her with a new ribbon skirt, a vest and a peaked cap.

“Knowledge keepers and elders say the peaked caps convey a woman’s place in her community,” says Fraser. “With different meanings for each colour, the black cap signifies that the woman is a leader or distinguished in the community.” The designs on Fraser’s garments show two curves pointing inward and the point in the middle curling outward, representing that in death, life continues.

Fraser is currently working on having traditional Mi’kmaq verses inscribed onto stationery to use at future services. She finds meaning every day as she continues her own journey of discovery.

“I often think that had I not pursued funeral service, I wouldn’t be where I am in my career and who I am in my community and also spiritually,” concludes Fraser. “Working in funeral service has brought me a lot closer to my community than I think would have ever been the case if I hadn’t started working in this profession. I am grateful to my family, the community members of Sipekne’katik First Nation, Alan MacLeod Sr., Alan MacLeod Jr. and the staff at Ettinger Funeral Home, who have been here to help me. I don’t think I could have done any of this without them.” 

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Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

COMPLICATED GRIEF: UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINS

by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD

So, how is it that some people end up in a wilderness of grief that is more rugged and perilous than the wildernesses of others? Why are some grief terrains more treacherous? In other words, how do some people's grief journeys get extra complicated?

In this article, we will take a look at those naturally complex life and loss circumstances, which range from cultural contributors to circumstances of the death, the griever's relationship with the person who died, family systems influences, the funeral experience, and many others. These are the variables that – alone or, more often, in combination with one another – commonly result in complicated grief.

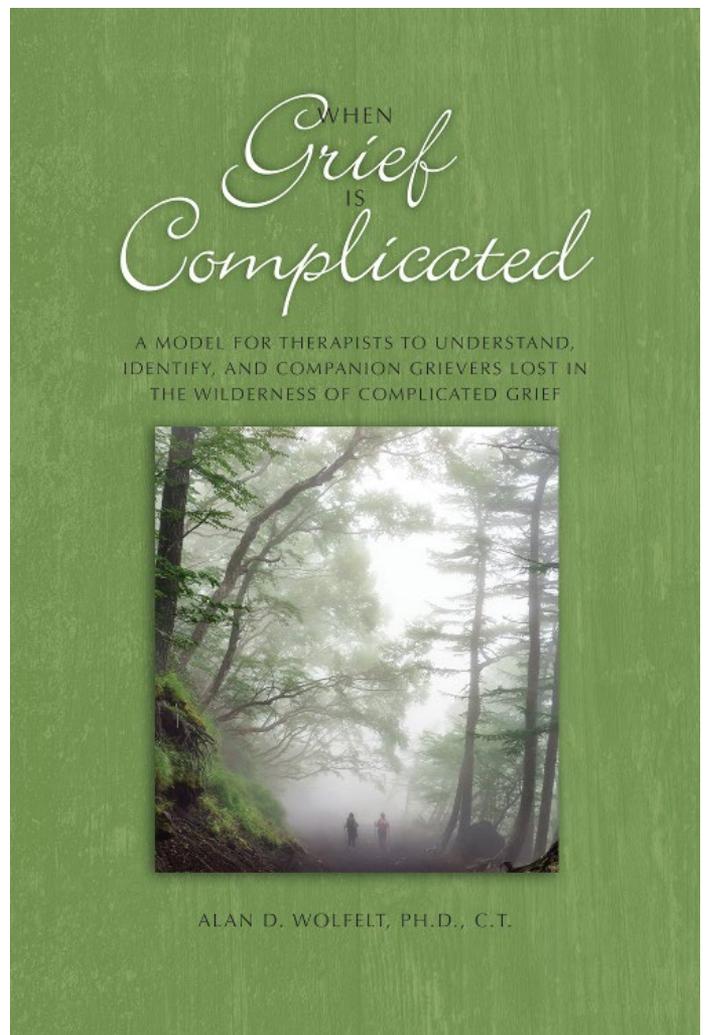
As we go over each of the influences on complicated grief, let's remember that "normal" grief and complicated grief are not truly distinct responses. Rather, we have agreed to understand that complicated grief is normal grief (which by its very nature is always complicated) that has got extra complicated somehow. It's a matter of degree, feature prominence, functional impact, and, sometimes, duration.

Complicated Grief Influences and Risk Factors

Please keep in mind that the grief influences and risk factors listed below do not necessarily result in complicated grief. For example, multiple concurrent stressors is one of the influences that may contribute to complicated grief, but for various reasons, not everyone in seemingly high-stress circumstances will end up becoming lost or stuck in the wilderness of complicated grief.

1. Societal contributors

Here in North America, we live in a culture that does not "do" death and grief. And when death and grief are taboo, as they are here, our normal and necessary mourning is often stigmatized and suppressed. Our grief is, as Lutheran minister and



This article is excerpted from *When Grief is Complicated: A Model for Therapists to Understand, Identify, and Companion Grievers Lost in the Wilderness of Complicated Grief*. To order, visit www.centerforloss.com.

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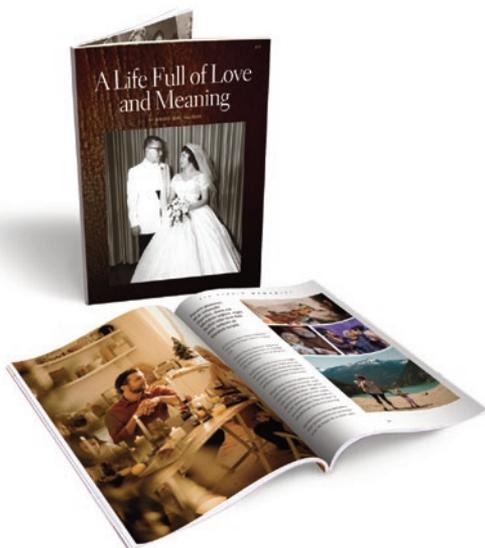
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professor of gerontology Dr. Kenneth Doka coined, “disenfranchised.” In other words, our natural impulse to grieve and mourn is taken away from us.

2. Circumstances of the death

As you are well aware, certain loss circumstances tend to be exceptionally and understandably challenging and complicated, making the experience of complicated grief more likely. These include:

- Sudden, unexpected death
- Before-time death (death of a young person)
- Out-of-order death (e.g., death of a child before a parent)
- Means of death (e.g., SIDS, homicide, suicide)
- Uncertainty surrounding the death (cause/circumstances of death are unclear)
- Physical distance from the death (death occurred far away)
- Self-blame for the death (guilt surrounding having contributed to the death in some way)

3. The griever’s unique personality

Grievers with any of these issues are more likely to come to you with complicated grief:

- Mental health issues
- Physical health issues
- Addiction
- Challenges caring for self
- History of conflicted or abusive relationships

4. The griever’s relationship with the person who died

The stronger the griever’s attachment to the person who died, typically the more challenging and painful their grief. Also, the more complex the attachment, such as in conflicted, abusive or disenfranchised relationships, the more complicated the grief journey may be.

The stronger the griever’s attachment to the person who died, typically the more challenging and painful their grief.

5. The griever’s loss history

Each new grief experience is built upon all former grief experiences. The complicated grievers who come to you for support have a loss history that is just as important as a patient’s medical history is to a physician. They are experiencing complicated grief in the present, yes, but their current complicated grief is always, at least to some degree, affected by their loss, grief and mourning experiences in the past.

6. The griever’s access to and use of support

Does the griever have close friends and family members who provide assistance and regular contact? Is the griever engaged in social, community and/or spiritual groups? Does the griever have at least one other reliable, compassionate person to spend time with and open up to? Has support continued beyond the first month or two after the death? Unless the answer to all four questions is “yes,” the griever’s support may be insufficient, increasing the likelihood of complicated grief.

7. Other concurrent stressors in the griever’s life

Sometimes the concurrent stressors are multiple deaths within a relatively short period of time. When several loved ones die in quick succession, there’s no time to acknowledge, embrace and express one grief before the next one arrives uninvited. This is also called loss overload, and it’s a common cause of complicated grief.

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Contrary to popular belief, the funeral is not a rite of closure but a rite of initiation. A full, personalized, inclusive, timely funeral that provides ample opportunities to dose those in attendance with the six needs of mourning helps put the griever who may be at risk for complicated grief on a healthy path to healing.

Whether they are secondary losses that directly stem from the primary loss or concurrent but technically unrelated challenges, other significant changes during a time of intense grief can have the same effect. Job loss, relocation, life-altering or life-threatening health challenges, financial upsets, family upheavals such as discord, unintended pregnancy or addiction – any such turmoil during a time of intense grief understandably compounds stress, distracts from mourning and delays healing.

8. The griever's cultural/ethnic background

When it comes to complicated grief, you may need to dig deeper to understand any cultural or ethnic influences that may be contributing. The question is not so much what any culture or ethnicity dictates; the question is what this unique griever finds important, meaningful or possibly unhelpful when it comes to cultural grief norms.

9. The griever's religious/spiritual/philosophical background

Grievors who are significantly conflicted about their faith and their grief and mourning will experience this as a complication in their grief journey. You will need them to teach you about what this experience is like for them, and they will need you to listen, bear witness, encourage and be a sounding board for any problem-solving ideas they may have.

10. The griever's family systems influences

Grievors raised in a closed family system often lack self-awareness, emotionality and communication skills. They may have been taught that death and grief are inappropriate to discuss, let alone express feelings about, and that it's best just to "get over it" and "move on." They may also believe that seeking the help of a counsellor means admitting "weakness." Such conditions make complicated grief more likely.

11. The griever's participation in meaningful ceremonies

The funeral ritual and other ceremonies that honour the loss and remember the person who died can have a major influence on a griever's grief journey. In my estimation, this risk factor for complicated grief is often underestimated.

Contrary to popular belief, the funeral is not a rite of closure but a rite of initiation. A full, personalized, inclusive, timely funeral that provides ample opportunities to dose those in attendance with the six needs of mourning helps put the griever who may be at risk for complicated grief on a healthy path to healing.

No funeral, on the other hand, or a cookie-cutter service, does not give mourners a good start. Rushed ceremonies and those that are long delayed are usually insufficient as well. The trend toward party-style memorial services is also detrimental, as these parties typically do not help grievors acknowledge the reality of the death and encounter the pain of the loss. By educating about, advocating for and helping plan full funeral ceremonies, you are giving complicated grievors the best possible start to their naturally challenging grief journeys.

I hope this list of risk factors for complicated grief helps you understand why some grievors who come to you for funeral planning and disposition of a loved one seem particularly challenged by the loss. As you see, the cause of death is not the only contributing factor. Indeed, there may be many reasons why some grievors need extra understanding and support.

In the next article in this series, we'll look at the common symptoms and behaviours of complicated grief. When you see family members exhibiting these symptoms and behaviours, you will be alerted to the probability of complicated grief, and you will be better prepared to provide them with the special support they need. 

Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt is a noted author, educator and grief counsellor. He serves as director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado, and presents numerous workshops each year across North America. Perhaps best known for his companioning model of caring for people in grief, he is the author of *Companioning the Bereaved*, *Companioning the Grieving Child*, and *When Grief is Complicated*, from which this article is excerpted. For more information or to order Dr. Wolfelt's books, visit www.centerforloss.com or call 970.226.6050.

UPCOMING EVENTS 2024

ALBERTA FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION (AFSA)

AGM & Conference

April 25-27, 2024

Deerfoot Inn & Casino

Calgary, AB

BRITISH COLUMBIA FUNERAL ASSOCIATION (BCFA)

Annual Conference & AGM

April 30 – May 2, 2024

Westin Wall Centre, Vancouver Airport

Vancouver, BC

CREMATION ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA (CANA)

Cremation Symposium

February 14-16, 2024

The Linq Hotel + Experience

Las Vegas, NV

Cremation Innovation Convention

September 11-13, 2024

Fairmont Chicago Millennium Park

Chicago, IL

FUNERAL AND CREMATION SERVICES COUNCIL OF SASKATCHEWAN (FCSCS)

Spring Symposium

May 23 & 24, 2024

Saskatoon Inn & Conference Centre

Saskatoon, SK

FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (FSAC)

Annual Conference & Trade Show

June 11-13, 2024

Winnipeg, MB

INTERNATIONAL CEMETERY, CREMATION & FUNERAL ASSOCIATION (ICCFA)

Dead Talks

January 16-18, 2024

Park MGM

Las Vegas, NV

Convention & Expo

April 10-13, 2024

JW Marriott Tampa Water Street

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ICCFA University

July 19-24, 2024

Emory University

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NATIONAL FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION (NFDA)

Consumer Trends Conference

February 22 & 23, 2024

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March 19-22, 2024

Washington, DC

Professional Women's Conference

April 28-30, 2024

The DeSoto

Savannah, GA

Embalming & Restorative Arts Seminar

May 2 & 3, 2024

Pittsburgh Institute of

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July 29 – August 1, 2024

Ponte Vedra Inn & Club

Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

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October 20-23, 2024

New Orleans, LA

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CEMETERY AND FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS (OACFP)

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In Honour OF THE CHILDREN OF AAMJIWNAANG

Memorial Restorations and The Fabhaven Group help bring residential school memorial to life

By Lisa Johnston

A new residential school memorial stands amid a park-like setting on Aamjiwnaang First Nation lands, five kilometres south of Lake Huron, within the city of Sarnia. Brought to fruition with the help of Memorial Restorations and The Fabhaven Group, the memorial will stand as a lasting tribute to the Aamjiwnaang children whose lives were forever changed by residential schools.

“The Aamjiwnaang First Nation recognizes the dark legacy that has shadowed our community,” reads the engraving in the marble memorial. “Today and moving forward, we wish to honour all the children that endured the pain and loss of community, connection and culture.”

Formerly known as Chippewas of Sarnia, the Aamjiwnaang is a First Nations community of about 2,500 Chippewa (Ojibwe) Aboriginal Peoples. In the mid-18th century, Aamjiwnaang territory covered a vast expanse of land on both sides of the waterway between Lakes Huron and Erie, supporting a population of 15,000 people. According to the Aamjiwnaang website, the community of Sarnia continued to encroach upon the north end of Aamjiwnaang. Through a series of treaties, the lands were reduced from over 10,000 acres to

approximately 3,100 acres. Today, Aamjiwnaang remains a vibrant and prosperous community, interacting on excellent terms with its surrounding neighbours.

Hired to serve as the general contractor for the residential school memorial, Tom Klaasen used his vast experience as president of Memorial Restorations to bring together all the elements of the project: landscaping, pathways, signage, a central fountain, a totem pole and lattice-work in addition to a large granite memorial carved with the names of children from the nation who attended residential schools from 1870 to 1996.

“I initially met with the folks from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation in the winter of 2021, listened to their thoughts and then prepared a proposal,” says Klaasen, who followed drawings provided by the Aamjiwnaang to tie all the pieces together. “They had a vision of what they wanted and were looking for someone to help bring it to reality.”

When it came time to construct the actual memorial, Klaasen contacted his longtime friend and business colleague, Fabian Di Maria, president of The Fabhaven Group.



“Tom called us with this project and went through the scope of it,” says Di Maria, who jumped at the opportunity to join Klaasen in donating some of his team’s time and services to keep costs at a minimum. “We did the initial drawings and the group liked what we came up with.”

It took Fabhaven approximately four months to create the memorial, including the etching of an eagle and over 160 names of residential school attendees. Fabhaven was also responsible for installing the monument in its permanent location.

Officially unveiled this past September, the memorial is located on unceded land close to the Aamjiwnaang Community Centre, the site of the annual powwow, near a splashpad, pavilion and sweat lodge. A stone pathway leads up to the central fountain, which is surrounded by garden boxes and lattice fences with the three-piece black granite memorial situated at the rear.

“It was an honour to be part of something this monumental,” says Klaasen upon seeing the project come to completion. “It will always be a place to go to show respect. What makes it extra special is that this is a local memorial. The names of the people etched on the side panels are not from across Canada; they are from our own backyard. These children either didn’t come home or if they did, they are now dealing with the ramifications of attending residential schools.”

Adding an extra special touch are the orange handprints visible in the inner circle of the fountain. “We had a day when we were pouring the cement that members of the local community could come down and put their hands in the wet cement circling the fountain. Now when you look at this inner circle, it is full of orange handprints which correspond to the national Every Child Matters initiative. We tried to replicate that theme with the orange handprints of close to 200 people who came out that day.”

Today, the newly constructed memorial has become a focal point of the Aamjiwnaang community. A place of reflection and beauty, it will serve as a lasting tribute to the local children of the residential school system.

“When we build monuments, they become standing memories to ensure we never forget,” concludes Klaasen. “They become hallowed ground. A tribute to the past, a reflection of the present and a path forward for the future.”

The etching on the memorial summarizes it best, “To these children: you are our legacy, and for this we will forever respectfully recognize your part of our history. Your bravery is a reminder to us how far we still must go. And as survivors, you will keep talking to us long after you have gone. May your past become the beginning of our healing journey.”

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ASSOCIATION UPDATE

OACFP's Unique Value: Leading a Resilient Bereavement Sector in Ontario

By John Perrotta, OACFP President, Board of Directors

What does OACFP deliver to its members that is unique? What are we better able to do as a collective than we could do on our own as individual companies?

OACFP's executive committee recently contemplated these questions as it developed our new value proposition strategy.

Another focal question is, what unites us? OACFP's commitment to excellence in the bereavement sector is not just a strategic plan; it is a shared commitment to leading our profession, supporting elevated standards of care across Ontario, and building resilience for the companies and people within our sector.

My own personal takeaway brings this home. OACFP will be successful when our members are strong, supported and thriving. Let me share with you some key components of the strategy that you will see more of in the months ahead.

Meeting Challenges with Creative Solutions

At the core of our new value proposition lies a profound dedication to service by our member organizations and professionals. This commitment is not just a duty; it is a calling, a recognition that our work transcends mere business transactions. Our work requires special people – and OACFP is committed to supporting our member companies to find and prepare these people for what lies ahead. This requires partnerships, awareness-raising and ingenuity, and OACFP is ready to embrace this long-term challenge.

Leading the Bereavement Sector

No matter what we aim to do, OACFP must remain – and grow even stronger as – the leader of Ontario's bereavement sector. This strategy undertakes this in several ways.

At the core of our new value proposition lies a profound dedication to service by our member organizations and professionals. This commitment is not just a duty; it is a calling, a recognition that our work transcends mere business transactions.

1. Being a leader and trusted resource for the bereavement sector

OACFP is committed to serving our sector in ways that go beyond the basics. With financial management tools, market research insights or innovative solutions to human resource challenges, our goal is to provide leadership that empowers our members to survive and thrive in an ever-changing business environment.

2. Equipping member companies to innovate and solve problems

The importance of continuous learning emerged as an important theme during our discussions. This is about more than meeting licensure requirements; it's about solving the challenges facing our sector and equipping the next generation of leaders.

Our association aims to be a knowledge hub, offering a comprehensive program that includes workshops, seminars, conferences and certification opportunities. This commitment

Now, we can look forward to getting even better: at listening to members' needs, at raising our voices together with influence and at providing better, direct and meaningful support that all businesses and professionals in our sector can use.

to lifelong learning benefits our individual member companies and their employees and contributes to the overall elevation of our sector.

3. Advocacy that goes beyond policy and legislation to drive success in the sector

Through collaborative efforts with government bodies, regulators, community stakeholders and the public, our advocacy will extend far beyond policy discussions. It will be about raising awareness of the invaluable contributions made by cemetery and funeral professionals to our local communities and society at large. We will speak up about the need to build for the future, ensuring that the sector has the resources and flexibility it requires to solve problems, grow and stay resilient.

A Journey to Grow

Through the consultation, research and work we put into developing our new value proposition, it became clear that OACFP is moving into our next plan from a position of strength.

Now, we can look forward to getting even better: at listening to members' needs, at raising our voices together with influence and at providing better, direct and meaningful support that all businesses and professionals in our sector can use.

As I wrap up this first president's message, I am filled with optimism as I envision the positive impact our new value proposition will have on OACFP and the entire bereavement sector in Ontario. But we need your support to make it happen. Write, download, click, open, watch and engage. Then tell us what you think.

You, the members of OACFP, are its owners. So, join me, our committed board and our administration team in making our organization as valuable to you and your business as it can be.

Drop me a line any time. 



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Ken Munday



ASSOCIATION UPDATE

By Ken Munday, WCCA President

I find it difficult writing articles for a January issue when I have just finished decorating the house for Christmas. Instead of being busy listening to Christmas music, watching holiday movies, wrapping presents and really looking forward to the festivities, I am writing an article that will come out with Christmas already behind us. I find that a bit depressing. However, when I look back on 2023, that all goes away. I am very proud of what the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA) accomplished this last year.

WCCA had an incredible year. We had many successes that we can build upon in 2024, with a lot to look forward to. Highlights included our new WCCA newsletter created by our vice president, Soraya Timmerman; a full WCCA board; an amazing conference; and continuation of our webinar series.

We continue to offer our supplier members the opportunity to provide our cemeteries with an educational webinar. This is a great way for our suppliers to not only get in front of our entire membership, but to also demonstrate their expertise. In addition to our webinars, suppliers can also take advantage of our newsletter by submitting articles or pictures.

In 2023, Soraya put together the WCCA's first newsletter. The intent behind the newsletter is to provide a way for our cemeteries and suppliers to support each other by submitting articles and/or pictures that would be of interest to our members. We are hoping to release a newsletter at least once or twice a year. The frequency will be determined by the amount of content submitted.

We are hoping that our newsletter and webinars will complement our annual conference. In 2023, our conference was one of the best attended in years. We had a great lineup of speakers and came out of the conference with a full board for the first time that anyone can remember. We received great feedback from attendees regarding our speakers, the agenda, location and the overall feel of the conference. We heard more

than once that the conference had a family feel to it. We are looking to build on this in 2024.

The next year is going to be an exciting one for WCCA. We are hoping to release more newsletters throughout the year and host a few more webinars as well. The biggest news for 2024 so far is that we will be partnering with the Funeral Service Association of Canada (FSAC), the Manitoba Funeral Service Association (MFSA) and the Canadian Funeral Trade Association (CFTA) for a conference in Winnipeg! Instead of having separate annual conferences, FSAC, MFSA, CFTA and WCCA will be working together, and we will all be attending the 2024 FSAC Summit and Exhibitor Showcase June 11 and 12.

This all started back last April at the British Columbia Funeral Association's annual conference when I spoke to Pam Moss, executive director of FSAC, after hearing that their next event would be in Winnipeg. Knowing that WCCA was also leaning towards Winnipeg in 2024, and having discussed the idea of having a joint conference with provincial funeral service associations at WCCA board meetings, I mentioned the possibility of having a joint conference with FSAC. Pam thought this would be a great idea and we kept in touch throughout the year. WCCA surveyed our membership about the possibility of moving our conference to June and about linking with FSAC and/or funeral service associations. WCCA membership responded in favour of both options. While we are unable to have a full joint conference, we came to an agreement for a partnership that will allow WCCA members to attend the 2024 FSAC Summit and Exhibitor Showcase. At our November WCCA board meeting, the WCCA board made the partnership official by voting in favour of joining the 2024 FSAC Summit in Winnipeg. More information about this exciting event will be released soon.

Until then, on behalf of the Western Canada Cemetery Association (WCCA), board members and administration, happy new year! 

A LIFETIME DEDICATED TO CEMETERY MANAGEMENT

Gary Rogerson receives OACFP's Award of Merit

By Lisa Johnston

Serving 27 years as vice president of operations and development for Arbor Memorial, Gary Rogerson has always been a cemetery man. His dedication, commitment and willingness to take on volunteer roles for the continued advancement of the death-care profession was recently recognized with the presentation of the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals (OACFP) Award of Merit.

The honour was bestowed at the beautiful Deerhurst Resort during the association's annual conference in October.

"It was a total surprise," says Rogerson, who has retired from his VP position at Arbor but remains active with the company as a consultant. "I was sitting with the rest of the crowd and my wife, Jo-Anne, listening to the presentation when all of a sudden, things started to sound familiar. I hadn't prepared an acceptance speech, but I was truly honoured."

Longtime friend and colleague Paul Taylor presented the award, making the honour even more special.

"The first association event I ever went to I met Paul and his wife, Cindy," says Rogerson. "It has been great to build such strong relationships, not with just Paul, but with all kinds of people. We would share notes and compare problems over the years. It's great to have someone to bounce around ideas."

Rogerson has always worked hard building relationships from the first moment he joined Arbor Memorial as a student. Over the years, he worked his way through several positions to the esteemed role of vice president, while always keeping a close eye on the day-to-day operations.

"I came straight into this industry like so many others have and really grew with the company," notes Rogerson. "I am quite proud that I started as a student, which I think keeps me very tuned into the daily challenges of our operations staff because I, too, did that work at one time."

Rogerson has never been one to shy away from any kind of involvement, amounting in several volunteer roles throughout the years. In addition to serving on multiple OACFP committees, Rogerson was association president in 1996. He played a role in helping develop the first cremation



Gary Rogerson, left, receives the Award of Merit from Meghan Henning, past president of OACFP, and good friend Paul Taylor.

workshop for the profession and more recently, helped lobby the Ontario government to allow cemeteries to be exempt from pesticide bans. Any time he can share his knowledge, he is willing to lend a helping hand – something he will continue as he inches closer to full retirement.

"Over the years, I have been invited to speak on ethics in our profession," says Rogerson. "It has always been a strong point of mine. It is so important that we all operate with ethical behaviour and business practices. I think that is critical for our profession to maintain our standards."

Past chair of the Funeral Profession Coalition Council of Canada, a national think tank that helped amend Canada Post standards for shipping cremation remains through the mail, Rogerson currently serves on the Integrated Pest Management Council of Canada, and is involved in the community as a board member for his curling club and as a City of Hamilton cycle committee member.

"I feel really strong about volunteering with both industry events and in my personal life," says Rogerson. "There is great value because of the networking opportunities which really allow you to draw on friendships to make sure you stay on track. If someone asks me to join any future endeavours, I'm more than happy to comply."

His go-to attitude and willingness to always step up makes Rogerson the perfect candidate for OACFP's Award of Merit. **N**

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SELLING TECHNIQUES

FIVE TIPS FOR GETTING IN FRONT OF DECISION-MAKERS

by Jeff Mowatt

One of your biggest selling challenges may be how to reach the actual decision-making customer. When organizations bring me in to deliver my Trusted Advisor Selling® seminars, I reassure participants that getting in front of buyers is relatively simple when you keep in mind these five tips.

Tip #1 – Start Higher Up the Ladder

The higher you start up your customer's chain of command, the more likely you are to reach someone with the authority to say "yes." Unfortunately, sales reps often settle for easier to reach lower level managers who aren't authorized to make significant operational changes or large purchases. In order to say yes to your offering, they'd have to ask a higher-up for permission. They are, however, empowered to say no. So, it makes sense to start with job titles of people with buying power such as regional managers or division vice presidents. They may redirect you to talk with someone lower. But then at least you'd have their permission – and tacit endorsement – to do so.

Tip #2 – Skip Small Talk and Puffery

The three quickest ways to annoy senior managers: waste their time, feign familiarity or look like you're hiding something. A poor way to start a phone conversation: "Hi Mary, how are you today?" Their response will likely be terse or worse. Instead use: "Hi Mary, my name is (first and last name). I'm with ABC company based out of (location). The reason I'm calling is..." No small talk. Introduce yourself fully. Get to the point.

Tip #3 – Communicate Distinctive Value

Most upper level managers don't answer phone calls from strangers. Still, you'll have more impact getting a manager's attention with a phone call than by sending an email that gets buried or filtered to junk. Ditto with trying to direct message them via social media. A phone call gives the advantage of leaving a voice mail, followed up with an email. That means you need a compelling reason for them to want to explore this



Jeff Mowatt

further. So, before you dial, you need to know the distinctive value you can bring to their company. Keep in mind you may need to leave this as a voice mail message.

Tip #4 – Follow Up, Follow Up

Send the email, and follow up by phone as promised. If you reach their voice mail again, then reference your last phone call and email, and add, "I'm guessing this isn't a good time for you. So, I'll call back (add a day and time). Meanwhile my phone number is..."

Phone later as promised. If they still don't respond then leave a voice mail and email again asking if this is of any interest, or if there is someone else in the organization who you can connect with.

Tip #5 – Help Employees to Help You

When managers send lower level employees to collect your info and prices, you need to be diplomatic. There's no way that person – who's only gathering information for some higher-up – will convey your value the way you can. So, don't send prices or brochures. Ever. Instead, explain that you'll be happy to provide pricing/options but there are a number of variables you'll need to ask about to determine accurate pricing. Suggest a virtual meeting and ask, "Is there anyone else involved in this project who it would make sense to invite (a.k.a. their boss), so we can make sure we don't miss any critical issues?" They can always say no, but you at least extended the offer without causing offence.

Bottom line: Many potential sales are lost when reps either start too low down their customer's chain of command, or they give up too soon. Remember – it's just a phone call or email. I hope these tips make it easier and more profitable for you and your team members. Let me know if I can assist. ☐

For more sales and service tips by Jeff Mowatt, call 1-800-JMowatt or go to www.JeffsBusinessTips.com.

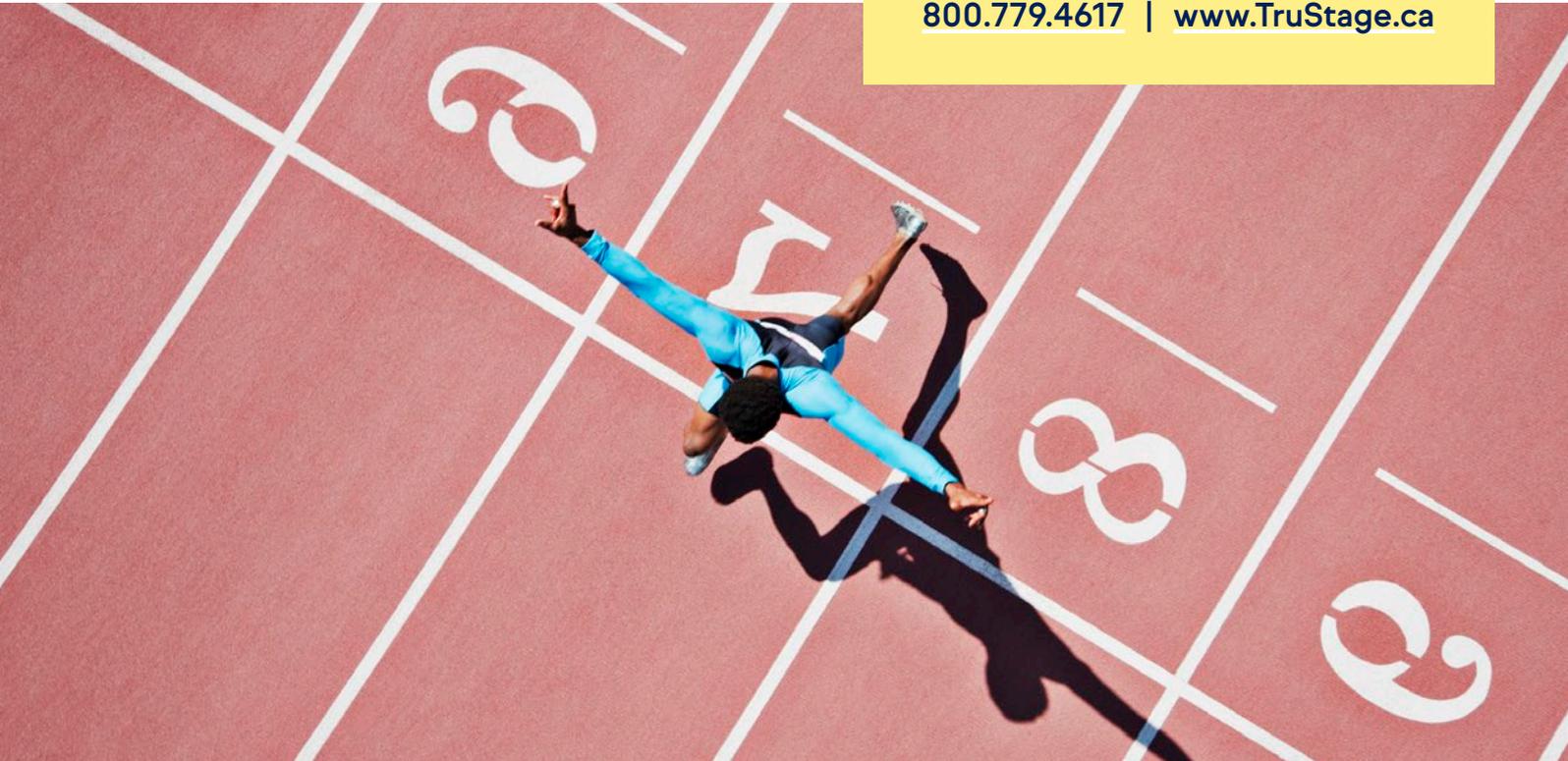


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