

'I remember when...'

In all the years my family has been involved in the funeral profession, we have yet to see a person enter one of our funeral homes jumping for joy that they are attending a funeral or visitation. No one has fist pumped the air with a huge grin saying what a blast it was giving the eulogy of their late father, nor have we seen anyone rush to be the first in line at a visitation of their dear friend. The fact is, we as individuals do not like funerals or visitations. It is typically a time of sadness, mourning and much awkwardness felt by both the family and distant relatives and friends all jumbled together in one room. So then why go to a funeral or visitation? Better yet, what are we to do when we get there??

This is actually a very common question. Perhaps you have asked this to a friend or relative – “are you going to the visitation tomorrow night?” We ask this for the simple reason that although we want to show our love and support, we truly don't want to be there – as goes for anyone in the situation of a loss. If there was a way to avoid this all together, nearly all of us would likely opt out. So then why do we go to a visitation and/or funeral? A common reason is that we want to be there for the survivors, let them know we are here for them in their time of grief and ultimately make them aware that we care. While very important, it is also the same reason why everyone else is there, and this can become quite overwhelming to the bereaved. In addition, it shouldn't be so much about letting them know how we feel, rather we should let the family know how their loved one impacted our life and how they will never be forgotten for it. Perhaps the answer is to come to the funeral or visitation with a funny story, or a memory that we will never forget

of the one who has passed. Perhaps it was on the golf course, boat, or a sandy beach in the Caribbean. Whatever it may be, we need to make it a point to come to a visitation and/or funeral with the intent of sharing that special moment with the family and how important that individual was to our life. This shared memory not only shows the family that we are there for them and truly care, but that we appreciate the impact their loved one made in our life.

“Hold on Ryan, what if I don't know the deceased and only know one of the relatives?” For example, the one who has passed is the father of a friend at our place of work. In this case it is next to impossible to bring a story of the person who has passed, because we most likely had never met them nor any of their family members. When it comes time to approach this work associate, we may also be greeted by the widow, then the siblings and so on. This can create an awkward situation that ends up with us using the common phrase that the relatives have heard time and time again by nearly everyone ahead of us... “I'm sorry for your loss.” Fortunately, this awkwardness is being combated by conversational clues set up by progressive undertakers. Take a moment to carefully look around the room, we should then find objects that the family has provided the undertaker to display. This becomes our “road map” for the conversation with the relatives we may have never met before. Everything from golf clubs and gardening tools to decoys and fishing rods provide an opportunity to learn about the individual and ask the family to share stories about those items that are visual to us. “I see your husband enjoyed golf. What was his favorite course in the area?” or “Fishing must have been his pas-

sion. What was his favorite to catch?” This memorabilia allows the bereaved to gain a personal connection through sharing memories with each of us that attends. It eliminates that awkward nod and handshake that accompanies that oh-so-common phrase – “I'm sorry for your loss.”

It is not always about what's on display that can provide us with areas of discussion while attending a visitation or funeral. Today, it is common to see things such as wine bars, ice cream sundae stations, steel drum musicians, and home style settings and scents. Many funeral homes embrace the commemoration of every aspect of the deceased's personality, sharing favorite foods, music, and other items that made him or her unique.

While we have not yet seen the excitement from an individual entering a funeral home that one might see from a young child on Christmas Day, we have seen people walk out with a tear in their eye and a smile on their face. While the loss of a loved one is not easy for anyone, we, the distant relatives and friends, must be there to help the family in their time of need. Sharing memories is a wonderful way to let a friend in need know that they are being supported. The goal of every funeral professional should be to provide an outlet for friends and family to focus on a life lived and less on a life lost. Therein lies the key behind why we attend a visitation or funeral and what we should be doing while present: reshaping the phrase “I'm sorry for your loss” to become “I remember when...”

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