



By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

## 12 Tips for Helping Families Find Value in Funeral Service

Today, more than ever, families are questioning the need for a funeral ceremony. As a funeral professional, you've probably seen it both ways—you've seen families who have celebrated a loved one's life well, and you've seen those who missed out on what could have been a deeply healing and meaningful funeral experience because they didn't understand the value of a funeral service.

Until now, we have relied on consumers to tell us what they want and need in a funeral service...but today, families are looking to us to articulate WHY funerals are essential and how the many elements of funeral ceremonies—from visitations and music to readings and actions—work together to create a transformative experience for families. In the article below, Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt, respected author, educator and expert on grief, shares 12 tips for educating families on the value of a meaningful funeral experience.

**1. Believe that you are an educator, not an order-taker.** This is the most important step you can take in helping the families in your community find value in funeral service. You are an educator—an evangelist, even. Today's families don't understand why we have funerals. So even if you provide excellent customer service, the uneducated family may leave the experience confused or ambivalent about some aspects of the funeral.

**2. Educate yourself about why we have had funerals since the beginning of time.** To educate families, you must first teach yourself. Read up on the history of funerals. Hold a staff in-service on the topic.

**3. Recognize that you are in the integrative phase of funeral service.** There are three natural phases of organizational maturity: Phase I-Formative, or just getting started; Phase II-Normative, or enjoying high productivity and profitability; and Phase III-Integrative, or struggling with flattening growth, profitability, and market share. Funeral service is in the integrative phase, which demands recreating the ways and whys of doing business

**4. Teach the value of each individual element of the ceremony.** As you know, funerals that include as many of the elements of ceremony as possible are

usually the most healing and transformative. But families who don't understand the value of, say, the visitation or the committal will often "skip" these pieces. During the arrangement conference, you have the opportunity to educate families about what each element involves and why it is meaningful.

**5. Don't confuse "making decisions" with "making choices."** Funeral directors sometimes tell me that their role is to help families make decisions. The problem with this understanding is that decisions can be made with limited information. An example of a decision families are often asked to make is, "Would you like to have a visitation?" The answer to this question is yes or no, black or white. But if you are helping families make choices, instead, you first take the time to educate them. The more information a family is given about each of the elements of ceremony, the more their decisions become true choices.

**6. Learn about how the "whys" of meaningful funerals help families begin to heal.** Make sure you understand the profound purposes of funerals. This pyramid, which I call my "Hierarchy of the Purposes of the Funeral," depicts how funerals help families with acknowledging the reality of the death, recalling the person who died, embracing support from others, expressing their many thoughts and feelings, finding meaning in life and death, and ultimately transcending their grief. These purposes interface with each and every funeral element, from visitations to the reception (and everything in between), creating myriad opportunities to mourn and begin to heal.

**7. Practice teaching families.** If you're not already in the habit of doing it (and most funeral directors aren't), learning to articulate why we have each individual element of the funeral and how that elements helps meet the six needs of mourning will take some practice. Schedule a staff training and take turns role playing. Have someone play the uninformed (or even defensive/unreceptive) family and walk through a mock arrangement conference step by step.

**8. Don't confuse efficiency with effectiveness.** Are you an efficient or an effective funeral director? If you are efficient, you get things done quickly and

competently, perform your surface-level duties with speed and reasonable attention to detail, try to be polite yet not waste time, and focus on reaching "the end." If you are effective, on the other hand, you do what you do with a higher purpose in mind, care deeply about the lasting impact you have on others, interact with genuine compassion and empathy, and understand that time spent helping families create a meaningful experience is never wasted time.

**9. Learn to overcome objections constructively.** Families who are uneducated about the value of funeral service often have objections to including some or many of the elements of ceremony. Again, the key to overcoming objections is to educate.

**10. Provide aftercare as a source of ongoing education.** Aftercare is your best opportunity to not only stay connected to families and help them at a time when they need help, but to continue to educate them about the role of funerals and other ceremonies for people who are grieving. You can create a truly exceptional funeral experience for the family, but unless you follow through, you haven't made the experience all it can or should be.

**11. Become an ambassador for funeral service.** I hope that you, as a gatekeeper of the funeral ceremony, are proud to be a part of funeral service. More than ever before, NOW is the time to let your community know why you do what you do. A number of factors have contributed to the public's lack of understanding of the funeral's place in our society. To turn this situation around will require public education. Herein lies your challenge as funeral directors. As caregivers, we have both a responsibility and an opportunity to re-educate our communities about the value of funerals through aftercare, presentations to community groups, and community workshops.

**12. Step into your role as gatekeeper.** Funeral directors hold the keys to the future of funeral service. For families in need, you stand at the gate that can lead them to death ceremonies that are meaningful and healing. No, your role isn't to just do whatever families say they want. Instead, your role is to provide them with in-depth information and education, helping them make choices that are good for them. For funeral service as a whole, you stand at the gate that can lead to a rewarding future for funeral homes in general. Be a strong and visionary gatekeeper. We're all depending on you.

*Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., is a respected author, educator, and consultant to funeral service. Among his many books are Funeral Home Customer Service A to Z, A Tale of Two Funerals and Creating Meaningful Funeral Experiences: A Guide for Caregivers. For more information or to receive a descriptive brochure, call the Center for Loss at 970.226.6050, visit [www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com), or e-mail Dr. Wolfelt directly at [drwolfelt@centerforloss.com](mailto:drwolfelt@centerforloss.com).*

# Legacy Serving One Family at a Time LEDGER

FALL 2017

LEGACY'S 100TH LOCATION  
MAKING IT PERSONAL  
REVIVAL IN TEXAS CITY  
LEGACY CELEBRANTS  
LEGACY SPONSORS WOLFELT  
MANAGER BOOT CAMP  
12 TIPS FOR HELPING  
FAMILIES



## Legacy Acquires 100th Location



Michael Soper  
Legacy President  
and CEO

Perri Soper,  
Michael Soper,  
Elizabeth  
Galloway, John  
Galloway, and  
Andy Galloway

Legacy is proud to announce the acquisition of Galloway Funeral Homes and Angelus Funeral Home located in Beeville and Three Rivers, Texas, and a chapel facility in George West, Texas. Galloway Funeral Homes have been around for almost 100 years and have built a reputation on being honest, respectful, considerate and straightforward. Under the guidance of third generation funeral director John Galloway, the Galloway Funeral Homes have provided the death care needs of families in the Beeville area for many years with care and compassion.

Pictured above, Michael Soper and son Perri welcome John Galloway, his wife Elizabeth and son Andy. We look forward to embracing our new Legacy family members as we "Serve One Family at a Time."

Please join me in welcoming John

Galloway and Galloway Funeral Homes. This acquisition marks location 103 for our Legacy family. Congrats to all on achieving this milestone for our company!

In this month's Legacy Ledger, Dr. Alan Wolfelt gives us 12 tips for showing the value of funeral service to the families we serve. To truly show the value of funerals to the new funeral consumer, we have to go out of our way to provide meaningful and personal services for families. Our Legacy brand promise is to ensure that every guest leaves our facility saying, "That's the way I want to be remembered."

If we want to stay in business and stay relevant to the new funeral consumer, we have to do more than provide cookie cutter funerals. We have to create value for them, and the best way to create value is to provide

meaningful services. We have to "Make it Personal!"

Many of the articles in this issue feature some of our professionals who are going above and beyond to make it personal for the families they serve. In addition, we have also hosted many Legacy workshops and training sessions for key personnel to deliver meaningful services to our families.

I want to thank each and every one of you for continuing our mission of waiting on one family at a time. It is truly an honor to serve others alongside you.



Keep the small company feel.

3103 SACKETT ST. | HOUSTON, TX 77098 | (713) 529-5770

## Making It Personal

This year, we've already had several Legacy funeral directors who are knocking it out of the park when it comes to "Making It Personal" for the families we serve. A recent service held by Webb & Roderick Chapel & Crematory in Independence, Kansas, was a real home run for family and friends of the deceased.

"The service was for Tim, a friend of mine who was a well-known umpire and coach in our community. He had always been involved with baseball in some way," said Shawn Shomaker, Managing Funeral Director. "I suggested to his brother that we could have the service behind home plate. The family and several people who attended told me that it was the most fitting service we could have had for him."

Shawn said that a few people even commented that they didn't know we could do something like this. "It really did not take a lot more work that we normally do," said Shawn. "And it meant the world to the family because it was so personal to Tim. There is no reason why every funeral director could not do something like this. We just have to think outside the box."



John Keath, Managing Funeral Director at Loran Fawcett Funeral Home in Noedessa, Kansas, recently planned a service for someone who loved to fly. The funeral featured a plane and an air show in honor of the deceased.

There are so many ways to "Make It Personal" for the families we serve. What is your story?



## Legacy Celebrants

Congratulations to our newest Certified Legacy Celebrants!

Legacy Funeral Group recently hosted a Certified Celebrant Training Program in Houston, TX, offered through the InSight Institute, a recognized leader in Celebrant training. Legacy funeral professionals from Las Vegas to Orlando were brought in to attend the three-day intensive training session.

"Being a Celebrant is all about telling someone's life story," said Bill Wimberly, Legacy Senior Vice President, who facilitated the training event. "This training goes along with our goal to 'Make it Personal.' We want to take our service to the next level and be able to provide more personalization for families who want something different."

"The Celebrant training program helps us promote the value of a meaningful funeral," added Bill. "There are many families who think a funeral isn't for them because they may not have a religious faith. We want them to know that they don't have to be religious to have a beautiful ceremony and celebrate the life of a loved one."

Throughout the training program, attendees learned valuable takeaways for making each life event meaningful and personal for the family of a lost loved one. After successful completion of all aspects

of training, each participant received the Celebrant Certification.

"We are so proud of our newest Certified Celebrants! Please join us in congratulating them and recognizing their hard work and dedication!" said Bill.



Alexis Luque, James Chambers, Mildred Plato, Brian Kester, Jani Ross, John Burgess, Nancy Olivera, Joe Denham, Neal Haynes, Rob Bittle, Steve Lyons, Dennis Sparks, Bill Wimberly, Doug Stansbury, Glenda Stansbury.

## Legacy Sponsors Dr. Alan Wolfelt as Keynote Speaker at Annual Hospice Convention



Steve Lyon, Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Michael Soper, Brian Nichols

Legacy Funeral Group was proud to sponsor Dr. Alan Wolfelt as the Keynote Speaker at the annual Texas and New Mexico Hospice Organization convention on February 24th in Houston.

The convention offers small, independent, largely rural hospice workers the opportunity to gain CE credits, attend seminars, and visit vendor exhibits. "Many of these hospice organizations are small, non-profit organizations," said Steve Lyon, Legacy Director of Training and Development. "This year, they really wanted to bring in Dr. Alan Wolfelt as their keynote speaker, but it was out of their budget. Because of his relationship with Legacy, Dr. Wolfelt suggested that they contact us. Legacy was happy to sponsor Dr. Wolfelt to speak for the event."

Because of Legacy, many hospice workers in rural areas throughout Texas and New Mexico were able to benefit from Dr. Wolfelt's expertise and expand their knowledge of death, dying, and grieving, and how their role as a terminal caregiver fits into the whole process.

## Legacy Holds Second "We Make It Personal" Revival in Texas City

On April 28th, Legacy held its second "We Make It Personal" revival training seminar at Emken-Linton Funeral Home in Texas City.

"We had an opportunity to fine tune our program," said Doug Ray, Legacy General Manager for Central Texas. "We doubled our class size from eight to fourteen. It worked out really well as we had more stories to tell from those who had already been through the program."

Legacy's goal with the "We Make It Personal" campaign is to personalize services for families honoring the deceased in such a unique manner that family and friends leave thinking, "Now, that was a good funeral!"

Doug stated, "Our funeral directors in this program have done an amazing job! 'Making It Personal' doesn't have to be a big, extravagant thing. It can be something small that is meaningful to the family. We are finding that the funeral directors really like it. They are spreading the word and encouraging others to do it. When everyone gets into the spirit of making it personal, it causes excitement within the funeral home."

Legacy is planning to do another "We Make It Personal" revival session in September. If you have any questions, contact your regional manager.



Our top funeral directors gathered at Emken-Linton Funeral Home on April 28th for a "We Make It Personal" revival training seminar.

## Manager Boot Camp

Our 2017 Manager Boot Camp was held at Emken-Linton Funeral Home in Texas City, Texas, from August 14th to the 17th. Ten funeral home managers and key staff were invited to participate in the boot camp and accepted the challenge! "Legacy leaders and experts from outside covered a variety of topics for our funeral home managers," said Steve Lyons, Director of Training & Development. "We've seen tremendous success from this program. Participants leave with an array of tools to help them grow as leaders."



Manager Boot Camp 2017