

Prep Arts

By Lance Ray

In the New Year:

I Resolve To...

A new year always brings new resolutions to improve, whether in personal or professional areas. There's always something that we might do better and this can apply to new embalmers as well as veteran embalmers. As Rod Serling of "The Twilight Zone" might have said, "submitted for your approval" are 10 resolutions for 2015:

1. Read a good book

Sure, even an escapist fiction book could help stimulate the mind or simply force some needed relaxation, but there are a lot of good choices that can help you in your professional endeavors. One suggestion is "The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care" by Thomas G. Long and Thomas Lynch. Delving into topics such as the value and valuable aspects of a funeral, including how important it is for families to "go the distance" to the cemetery or crematory, this is a very enlightening read that is guaranteed to sharpen your perspective and ability to help families.

2. Open up minds

Educating families is vital and



there's nothing worse than hearing a family later regret that they did not know they could have done something if only they were told. Ensure that all your families are aware of all of their options. Educate them on the value of a visitation with a viewing – yes, even cremation families.

3. Participate in professional discussions

Are you a member of any LinkedIn groups? There are a number of groups specific to funeral service with daily posts and discussions that can provide you with ideas, tips or simply provoke thought. For example, in just one month's time, topics addressed in the "Funeral Service Insider" group included:

- Creative ideas for funeral homes to use during winter
- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's 5 stages of grief
- Using humor to market a funeral home
- How to better serve baby boomers
- The role of a funeral director after a natural disaster
- Funeral personalization
- How social media and the Internet are changing death

Besides learning from others, post some thoughts of your own, pose a question to the group, start a discussion – you'll gain the most if you participate.

4. Get out of the prep room

Attend a national convention such as the 2015 National Funeral Directors Association; International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association; or National Funeral Directors & Morticians Association, and attend seminars, see what's new or even get a refresher in products and services, or mingle with your peers. If you can't make a national show, attend your state association convention. Many organizations have special events, seminars and webinars in addition to their annual conferences. Freshen up your knowledge and skills.

5. Get into the prep room

Say what?! Well, if you haven't embalmed in the last six months, freshening up your skills in the prep room may be in order. After all, even athletes who are at the top of their game still go to practice day in and day out.

6. Host an open house

Invite the community to visit your funeral home. Host an old-fashioned ice cream social. Provide funeral planning guides. Give away

pens or other low-cost items so they remember who took the time to help them understand funerals, options, and the funeral planning process at a time when they are not experiencing grief that can cloud thinking.

7. Be a teacher

Seek an opportunity to speak at "career day" at your local high schools or community colleges about the rewards of the funeral service profession. Think back on what motivated you to join the profession and what rewards you on a daily basis. Tell your story, talk about how your services touch and help families. We need good people to enter our profession!

8. Exercise

Yes, I said it! Find a local 5K race or bike ride and participate. You will feel better about yourself, and it will give you time to clear your head.

9. Try a new fluid or embalming technique

You never know ... you might just like it.

10. Give your prep room a makeover

Invest in your prep room. Maybe some new lighting, ventilation, equipment such as a body lift or embalming machine. Even something as simple as a fresh coat of paint can improve the working environment.

I'm going to end with a bonus resolution: Pay it forward.

Consider providing a small scholarship or donation to a mortuary science student. That's a financial and supportive bonus for the student, a fulfilling bonus for you and a sustaining bonus for our great funeral service industry.

Happy New Year! •