

*"Life is deep and simple,
and what our society gives us is shallow and complicated."*

Fred Rogers

My approach to the field of funeral service would allow each family the chance to celebrate the life of their loved one in a deep but simple way. I believe that the family needs someone who can gently guide them through the initial decisions following death. I would be a funeral director who would guide at a level beyond the ordinary by incorporating three ingredients. I would listen to the family, I would show compassion toward the family, and I would commit to excellent service for the family.

Listening sounds simple but is rare in our society. Funeral directors often err by feeling compelled to dominate or control the conference verbally. It should be our priority to hear what the family is saying more than telling them what we feel they need. Good questions can direct a discussion in such a way that the family actually makes the choices and decisions. Funeral directing does not mean giving orders. It means you know the course ahead and merely help the family walk the route. They will tell us what they need for this service if we are willing to listen more than we speak. It's our job to assist in making their wishes a reality.

The second ingredient is compassion toward the family. You've heard their story about their loved one. We need to remember that these people aren't around death every day. Our daily immersion in this area causes numbness at times. It is undeniable. We

must learn to rise above it for the sake of the people we serve. Life is empty and shallow without love for people. A funeral director must learn to set aside personal feelings and be willing to show the family love as they serve them. Compassion involves realizing that these are moms, dads, brothers, sisters or children who have passed away, and now those who were closest to them hurt. We must empathize and care about the pain they may be experiencing though we can't necessarily feel all of it. Keeping this understanding first and foremost will allow the funeral director to be the person of compassion that a family needs at this time.

Lastly, we must commit to excellence in our service to the families. We have heard their desires and should truly care about what they are experiencing. The only proper response is excellent service. Excellence involves going beyond the expected responsibilities. We must be resolved to give the time and energy necessary for each family's situation. Our best does not include sloppiness, cutting corners, or half-hearted efforts in any area of business. Giving our best means that the package deal is the bare minimum, and our goal should be to provide all that and more.

Listening, compassion, and excellence are three simple ingredients that can provide an extraordinary and meaningful funeral. I will do my best to display these qualities toward each family I meet when I enter this profession. My hope will be that my services to the families will transcend the shallow and complicated experiences society offers them regularly and create the meaningful memory picture they need as they begin their journey toward healing.