

# What's the Good Word?

By Melanie Loyd

You would surely agree, “demonstrating” the best is required, to be competitive; that’s edge. When serving families we have to differentiate ourselves from the competition in many areas. Language is one of them. Just make a random call to a nearby Funeral Home, ask what it costs to be cremated, and you will clearly see what a distinct difference you can make by using “compassionate” language.



So, what’s the good word? Actually the better question is, “What are the best words to describe the services we provide that speak care and compassion to our families

So often, when we talk to families we tell them they will receive “closure” as a benefit of having ceremony. “Closure....closure.” Have you considered what that word could potentially communicate to a grieving family? The mother who lost her 16 year-old is certainly not looking to “close” or be, “done with,” anything and there is certainly not anything that is going to be “closed” within the scope of 3-5 days of involvement with us or a funeral ceremony. Hearts are gaping wide, memories flooding, wishes it were a dream; but there is little that “closes” in these days.

The term, “closure” is often prescribed too quickly. Instead, it is more comforting to talk about how a service or ceremony can be the time when the family pauses in memory and honor of the one who has died. The ceremony is the first gathering without the presence of the loved-one where they experience a difference in the dynamics of the group. It is the beginning step in the changed life without that one. It is an intentional time to pause and acknowledge the life lived, garnering soul support of others who care. Rather than using the term “closure,” it is more comforting and effective to explain the benefits of the ceremony experience.

“Edge,” is also about making difficult decisions. Intentionally breaking out of habitual verbiage can be difficult. However compared to how the words may affect the one who has experienced death . . .

There is risk in misinterpretation in a word. Like the 8 year-old Preacher’s son whose kitty died. He was performing the burial ritual as he had heard his dad do so many times. As the little guy sprinkled the dirt over the grave, he said, *“Unto the father, unto the son, and unto the hole he goes!”*

A professional with “edge” must act it and sound like it. Let’s consider a few other “industry”



terms and better, more compassionate expressions. First, is it better to say something followed by, “Well you know what I mean?” or is it better to explain the intended meaning, first-hand, leaving little to interpretation? Like toothpaste, once we squeeze out a word, it’s nearly impossible to get it back . . . into the tube!

Second, do we learn our “lines” by occasionally practicing or only when “on?” Behind the scenes, off-site, and as a part of our daily exchange, is “rehearsal.” Remember we practice for performance. If we are using clinical, industry terms among staff, when not speaking to families, the risk of using the same language is much greater when meeting with them.

We provide many tasks and services for families that have a common industry term. To begin with, there is the “first-call.” Someone unfamiliar with our “lingo,” (a family) may not understand that it means, “We received a call notifying us your loved-one had died.” Does that sound better; more compassionate?

Our next service response is the “pick-up,” er, I mean the “removal,” what I meant to say is the “transfer.” Hmmm. Is one of those terms any more compassionate than the other? I’m from Wyoming. A pick-up is what we drive that has a bed in the back, er, I mean a truck bed . . . “Well, you know what I mean!” Or, of course, we pick up a cat by the back of its neck or we pick up dry cleaning! Removal is what I do to take off fingernail polish or a spot on a suit. Transfer . . . generally from checking to savings or college to university. Wow, what do I say? “We brought your loved-one into our care.” Yes, just like a member of our own family!



So, “Into our care, we brought the remains, uhm, the body. No that isn’t it.” Let’s keep it simple. Whenever referring to the deceased, use their name or the relationship with whomever you are speaking. When we care for our families, keep in mind, that everything we do is relationship based. In that, respecting the relationship of them and their loved-one is reflected in our acknowledging the person, rather than what is left . . . remains, body. So, “Into our care, we brought your mom.” The way we treat the memory of a person can build a valuable, subtle trust we require from each family.

When speaking of interment, do we, “dig the hole,” or, “do the opening and closing?” Don’t we actually, “Prepare the site for your Uncle Ron’s final resting place?” To really build value and provide complete details of what is involved; we review the records to identify the exact location, mark the boundaries, verify the property with the family and finally with the cemetery superintendent. In time for the committal, the sod and earth are moved away from the site to allow for the placement of the burial vault. Then, there is the tent, chairs, water . . .

The good “word” is Edge. Stretch beyond what comes so easily when communicating to families. Rise above the competition as a professional that leaves the others in the vernacular vortex.



As you are creating your statements and providing explanation, listen to how your words will be heard. What kind of “feeling” and “images” are you creating? If an 8 or 9 year-old would be comfortable and understand your word choices, you too can feel confident it is being heard . . . free from, “Well, you know what I mean.”