

Making Burial Vaults Personal

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68% of burial families are interested in personalization of the burial vault.

➔ Does this line up with your percentage of personalized burial vaults? ➔

Industry journals are rife with articles and examples about the desire of many families to create highly-personalized services for their loved ones. Funeral directors only need to look at their own experience with families to affirm this. Years ago one didn't even see photo boards at visitations where now it's rare to see a service without physical or digital photos. Many services today include family and friends relating stories of their loved one where in the past it was solely the minister who spoke and wove a few words about the deceased into an otherwise routine homily. Personal mementos are often placed around the room or even with the deceased. Their favorite music is often played. A casket may be chosen that reflects the spirit of the person. And yet the burial vault is so often provided as a bland box with no personalization – even though many people who have experienced a graveside service that incorporated a personalized burial vault are deeply touched by this final tribute.

“We never knew we could do this. We took pictures of the vault, we participated, we cried, we laughed... we're so grateful you told us.”

*(From a family served by Mel Wideman,
LaGrone Funeral Chapel,
Roswell, New Mexico)*

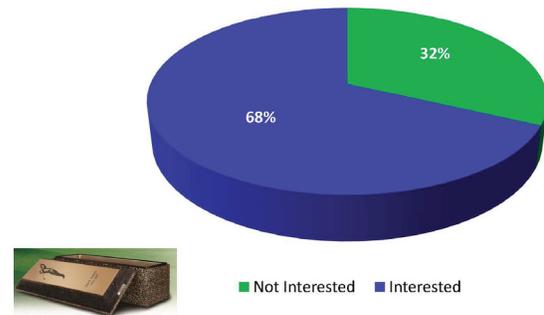
“When they see the vault cover that has been personalized to represent that person's life, you could just see the emotion on not only the immediate family but usually everyone else there. It really does add to the acknowledgement of that person.”

*(Joan Billman, Fleming-Billman Funeral
Directors, Ashtabula, Ohio)*

“As funeral directors, we have the responsibility to suggest things to families. They look to us to help them.”

(Mel Wideman)

Majority of those choosing a burial vault are interested in personalization



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Q. Please indicate your level of interest in personalizing the burial vault with words and symbols of what your loved one had a passion for (such as in the photo above) for display at the graveside service.

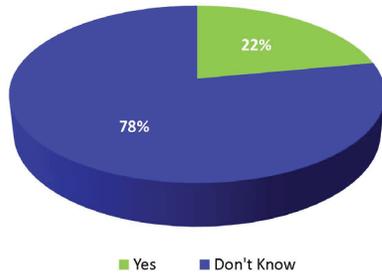
Perhaps because the burial vault is often the last item discussed during an arrangements conference, a thorough education on vaults and personalization options may be overlooked by funeral directors sensing family fatigue. Yet with the right tools, education can be concise. Research validates that families do care about the protection provided by burial vaults and are actually very interested in personalizing the burial vault to reflect the life of their loved one. Families do want to know their options – and their educated choices may surprise you.

In a 2013 survey of burial-inclined families, independent marketing research firm Product Acceptance & Research (PAR) found an extreme lack of knowledge regarding burial vaults. However, with just minimal education, families expressed preference for burial vaults over unprotected grave boxes and a high level of interest in personalization.

The survey began with the very fundamental question of whether participants knew the difference between a grave box and a burial vault. Seventy-eight percent said that they did not know the difference, even among

those who had made prior burial arrangements. In fact, over a quarter thought that both a grave box and a burial vault were needed.

78% of burial families do not know the difference between a burial vault and a grave box



Q. Is there a difference between a burial vault and a grave box?

After establishing this baseline of knowledge, the researchers then asked participants to watch a brief video explaining the differences between grave boxes and burial vaults as well as some of the personalization options available on many burial vaults. (To view the video, go to

<http://vimeo.com/89840961>.)

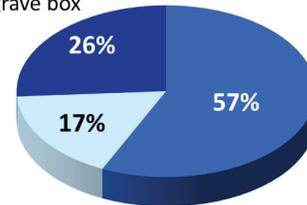


After watching the video, **only seventeen percent chose a grave box**. This rather enlightening finding challenges the level of unlined boxes being sold in the marketplace. Considering that the only education provided was a two-minute video, with no human intervention, this was a remarkably low percentage. As the chart indicates, eighty-three percent would choose or consider a burial vault. The value of education cannot be emphasized enough.

Why did such an overwhelming percentage of study participants choose a burial vault? Predominantly it was concern for **protection** and desire for **personalization**. Sixty-eight percent said protection of the grave contents from the weight of the earth was important while sixty-four percent indicated that protection against groundwater, earth and insects were important.

After learning the difference between a grave box and a burial vault, only 17% chose a grave box

- 57% chose a burial vault
- 26% needed more information before making a decision
- 17% chose a grave box



■ Vault ■ Grave Box ■ Unsure

Q. After having viewed the educational video, if you were making burial arrangements in the future would you choose a burial vault or a grave box?



Personalization was of interest to a majority of survey participants with sixty-eight percent expressing a desire for personalization of the burial vault with graphics, words and/or photographs to commemorate their loved ones at the committal service. Even among the remaining thirty-two percent were many who first wanted to know how much personalization might cost before making a decision. Since many do not charge extra for personalization as it is generally included on better-quality burial vaults, it would be logical to assume others in the undecided one-third would likely select personalization to make the service memorable.

“One of the things we have done is to find out what the person’s hobbies or interests were and then put something that reflects this on the vault as a surprise to the family. We did a service for a man who loved hunting and our Wilbert partner put a hunting scene on the vault and we didn’t tell the family. They loved it and it made the committal service very special.”

(Chris Robinson, Robinson Funeral Home, Easley, South Carolina)

The bottom line is that families value personalization on burial vaults – which also increases **your** bottom line as this is only available on lined burial vaults. But the need for education is critical, even at the tail end of the arrangements conference. Take advantage of resources such as the two-minute video used in this research study which can educate families quickly and consistently on outer burial containers and the personalization available on burial vaults. It’s important to families and will be long remembered by all who attended the service.

“Customization on burial vaults opens up an opportunity to really celebrate that person’s life and their interests rather than just conducting a funeral ceremony.”

(Chris Messina, West Cobb Funeral Home & Crematory, Marietta, GA)

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by A.A. Milne

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