

# It's Time to Get Engaged!

Wayne Stellmach, Director of Marketing, Wilbert Funeral Services, Inc.

Although the holiday season is indeed a popular time for couples to get engaged, that is not the topic at hand. Rather, this article addresses engagement with families and breaking through the natural barriers of communication as you present merchandise and service options and work with families towards meaningful funerals for their loved ones. If you fail to connect with every individual, you can inadvertently create strife instead of creating a good experience. First, it's likely that nearly every person sitting in front of you does not want to be there. Their natural state in this circumstance is emotional stress and they are overburdened with everything that must be done. They are not in the best frame of mind to be making major decisions, yet they must. So you already have your work cut out for you in terms of clear, two-way communication.

On top of that, different people learn differently. Some do fine with just verbal communication but others may be more visual learners. Some may even learn best by hands-on experience. Ideally you will find a way to engage all of these different learning styles. But how do you know who might be one versus the other? There may be clues based on their behavior. One person may be intently watching and acknowledging you and it seems as if you are communicating well. However, another family member may be paying more attention to a brochure or looking around at wall graphics. Still another may already be wandering around touching merchandise. While you might think these last two appear uninterested, they may actually just be learning as they best learn.

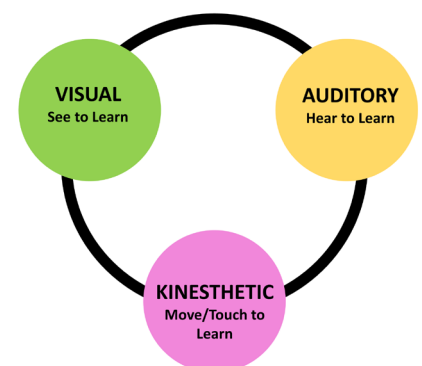
Research has found that there are essentially three different learning styles:

- Auditory Learners learn best through hearing information
- Visual Learners learn best when using pictures, graphs and other visual stimuli
- Kinesthetic Learners use touch and movement and learn best by "hands-on"

In addition to drawing on your professional expertise to counsel and talk to families, do you utilize additional tools that supplement what you are saying? Does your

arrangements conference room and/or selection room have up-to-date visuals, whether printed graphics or digital, or both? Are your burial and cremation merchandise displays attractive and reflective of today's trends and tastes, including the desire for highly individualized experiences that would be addressed with examples of personalized carapaces on your vault miniatures? Do you use the power of videos to educate families, in your arrangements room, your selection room, on your website?

Video merits particular consideration as it can engage equally with auditory and visual learners, and to a certain extent, even kinesthetic learners who can interact through starting and stopping the video. Forrester Research estimates that one minute of video is equal to 1.8 million words and according to the Insivia Consulting group, people retain ninety-five percent of content when they watch it on video compared to ten percent when reading it. Video also engages with all age groups and is perhaps the most popular medium for communicating information today. For example, video accounted for seventy-three percent of internet traffic in 2016 according to Cisco research, with projections to eighty-two percent by 2021. Funeral professionals who utilize videos while with families report that most people stop whatever else they may be doing or looking at to watch the video. Communicating all of the aspects and choices of outer burial containers can present particular challenges. Many families are initially confused about the need and function of OBCs, and then are faced with decisions on graveliner versus burial vault, differences between burial vault units, personalization options, and how burial vaults can even be an important component of a committal service. Added to confusion is fatigue, given that burial vaults are often one of the last items discussed with families. So



how do you effectively communicate all aspects and options of burial vaults with all of the family members who may have different learning styles? Here are some ideas.

1. Keep it simple. Explain OBCs and burial vaults in terms that everybody can easily understand: cemetery requirements, different levels of protection, product beauty, personalization options
2. Show and tell. Don't just talk but use video, graphics, and product samples to help convey the information. Invite family members to touch the vault miniatures to appreciate the exterior treatments and internal liners.
3. Involve the family. Ask them if they could think of special photos, images, poems or verses that they might like on the vault to create a truly treasured tribute to their loved one.
4. Slow down. It's tempting to rush through the burial vault presentation because you know the family is nearing fatigue, but this is an important component with financial implications and the family deserves time to understand everything. This is another area where a good video can help – for example, Wilbert has a purely educational (non-sales) video that explains everything in only two minutes. Some funeral professionals simply let the video do the vault presentation while they step away, which has the added benefit of taking pressure off the family and letting them learn and focus in private.
5. Don't assume. Ask the family, throughout your presentation, if they understand the information and if they have any questions. Also don't assume what a family might want – or don't want. Presenting complete information and giving them time to think about it will result in a more satisfied family because the decision was theirs.

Just as it is important for funeral professionals to engage all family members and educate them as efficiently as possible, it is also helpful to appreciate the factors that go into their buying decision. Regardless of the product or service, all basic buying decisions are made with three primary factors that combine to get to the core of **perceived value**.

Price is often believed to be the main factor in a buying decision, and it may be for some people, but surprisingly it is not the most important factor for a great many. Whether you are shopping for a major purchase such as a new car or a mundane purchase such as a toaster, there

is a certain level and expectation of quality. Even more important may be the third factor, experience. Experience that will be derived has an extremely powerful impact on the buying decision. Experiential factors include performance, comfort, convenience, enjoyment, safety, uniqueness, and individualism. When buying burial vaults, or any funeral products or services, families go through the same buying decision process leading to their perception of value. Many families see the value of the protective qualities of a vault versus an unlined graveliner box. Others see value in the memories and treasure the final tribute to their loved one that is reflected in a personalized vault cover. Cost is secondary.

In summary, appreciate that you may be presenting difficult information on OBCs to people who learn differently. Use available tools that can help you connect with the three different types of learning styles. Educate families so that they understand all their options and know that it is a combination of price, quality and derived experience that will go into their choices that are ultimately about perceived value. The better you understand learning styles and the common thread of buying behavior, the better you will connect with families – and potentially improve your revenue stream.

*Wayne Stellmach is Director of Marketing for Wilbert Funeral Services, Inc. since 2011 and provides marketing support for other Wilbert Group organizations. Wayne has 40 years of marketing, sales and management experience in various industries. He currently serves on the boards of the International Memorialization Supply Association (IMSA) and the Funeral and Memorial Information Council (FAMIC) and chairs the marketing committees of both. Wayne can be reached at [wstellmach@wilbert.com](mailto:wstellmach@wilbert.com).*

