

# Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

Carpe Diem.. Every Diem


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# Carpe Diem ... Every Diem

by Todd D. Mannix



Here we are in 2016 and no doubt there have been countless articles published that talk about lessons learned from 2015, and countless more offering practical advice for effecting change in the new year. These articles use the new year as an impetus for discussion. On the surface, there is nothing wrong with these articles and many offer interesting perspective and even sage advice. The fundamental flaw is the conventional wisdom that it takes a mile marker to take notice and focus on change or improvement.

Using a specific point in time as the catalyst that determines how we approach moving forward should come as no surprise to people in our profession. Funeral directors guide people through this almost every single day when a family is coping with the loss of a loved one. The importance of the funeral process and ceremony is not only that it honors the decedent, but that it also creates a definitive moment in time during the grieving process after which the family can focus on moving forward. The funeral ceremony is for those left behind and it helps to create closure. This is not unlike what happens every year at year end. People reflect back on the previous calendar months and think about what went well and what they want to improve. Ever notice how gym businesses spend an increased amount of their marketing budget in late December and early January? They have built into their business model the fact that people use the end of the year as a delineation of time to change or improve themselves going forward. All those people who decide, "This is the year, I'm going to get in shape" are more receptive to gym membership advertising during this time. It's not just gym memberships. People use the end of the year as a natural demarcation to make all sorts of changes.

However, there can be some pitfalls in waiting for the end of the year to change things that need to be improved. Funeral directors have seen their share of families torn apart by loss when family issues or conflicts had not been resolved prior to the decedent passing. Things were left undone or unsaid resulting in remorse and regret and even strained relationships of those left behind. In these instances, it is even more difficult for the family to move forward because the loss is compounded by the complexity of aspects of a life that were left unresolved in some way.

The real tragedy in these instances is that in most cases, the additional pain could have been avoided. Conflicts

and issues can often be resolved if addressed head on as they occur. The longer people let things fester, the more difficult they are to remedy. It's human nature to wait for a catalyst as a reason to force change and move forward (as in the case of those looking to get into shape do at the end of the year). The hard part is when that catalyst is death, in many cases, it's too late. At that point the stubbornness and pride turns into "stuff" that people end up carrying the rest of their lives because perceivably, their chance to resolve the issue is gone. Now there are ways people heal and eventually move forward in being happy, but not without a large amount of unnecessary pain that can sometimes take years to put aside.

Funeral directors are in a unique position to recognize the impact of missed opportunities and put that perspective to work in their own lives. The important lesson learned here is that we don't need to wait for the new year (or any other milestone for that matter) to impact change. Every day offers an opportunity to resolve issues or impact change and we don't need to wait for an outside catalyst to force the issue. Perhaps it's the realization that there is no time like the present, or perhaps, it's the perspective obtained after having comforted a family that is suffering regret on top of their loss. Regardless, this profession most of all should understand the importance of making positive change every day, because nobody knows what tomorrow may bring.

The point of this article is not to be morose, but rather to trumpet the tagline from the 1989 film "Dead Poet's Society; "Carpe Diem," or Seize the Day! The movie actually shortened the quote which was from Horace, a Roman lyric poet during the time of Augustus. The full quote, "carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero", can be translated as "Seize the day, put very little trust in tomorrow (the future)". The ode implies that nobody can predict the future and that people who put off things for the future leave many things to chance. In order to create a better future, people should relentlessly work on it today.

Okay, great easy concept to understand; Every day can be a day of change, and if we don't take advantage of it today, we are leaving our future happiness up to chance. The difficulty becomes, how do we incorporate this thinking into our daily routines and how do we turn it into action? Here are 5 easy things we can all do to as daily reminders to impact change in our lives.

**1. Identify what needs to be changed**

Change can be considered on multiple levels. It can be considered on a business level, on a personal level, or even on a spiritual level. Change can involve our families, our work environment, or just ourselves. The important thing is to understand what it is that needs improvement. Its also important to understand why you are deciding to impact this change. Is it to have a better relationship with your children, to create greater sales or profits at work, or is it simply to be a happier person. Whatever the reason, it's important to take the time today to identify what needs to change and why. Change for the sake of change can be a dangerous undertaking for two reasons. First, if it is unclear why you are changing, the process of making changes can be difficult to understand. When it is clear why you are making the change, you can become laser focused on what needs to be done and make adjustments as you are met with varied results along the way. The second reason it is important to understand why you are making a change is that if you don't know why you are doing it, it may lose priority and be dropped to the side when things get busy. If something is important, well defined, and has real, positive impact, it will always be seen as a priority.

**2. Change your perspective**

Understanding what you want to change and why it is important is critical to providing the vision of where you want to go, but it does not address the process of how to make it a part of your daily life so you don't become one of those people who sign up for a gym membership, but never go after the third month. In order to seize the day and make the change a way of life, you have to break out

of normal routines, or create new routines that support the necessary time or perspective to make the change real. One way to do this is to break the status quo. If you are one who dives into work and immerses yourself fully in the busy tasks of that fill the day, take a daily break from your desk or funeral home and get out, even if it is only 15 minutes. A daily activity to physically take you out of the norm can be all it takes for you to step back and take inventory of how its going. Years ago, I found a little trick that helped me when I felt stuck or had problems setting aside the pressures of the day. I found that as I was going through my day, I was focused not only mentally, but physically on the norms of the day. My mind was on what had to be done, and my eyes would be drawn to the familiarity of my surroundings. I found unconsciously, my eyes would be drawn to what was familiar. I would see the same things as I walked to the coffee shop, the same store fronts, the same traffic signals, the same sidewalk or crosswalk. In this sense, my eyes were helping my mind to stay in the same place, making the walk to the coffee shop almost an unconscious effort. I found that if I raised my field of vision by 10%, I saw a whole different picture. Instead of not being mentally present or aware of my surroundings, all of the sudden, my eyes were being stimulated by things that were always there and I must have seen peripherally, but never really noticed. The second story of buildings I walked by hundreds of times came into focus. Businesses, apartments, architecture all became mental candy for my eyes that snapped me out of the rote and into a conscious presence of my surroundings. It was like turning on a light switch. I discovered that when I did this with my eyes, my mind broke out of its cycle of task management to explore greater things, like change. If you want to impact change and make it a part of your daily being, try this (or whatever works for you) to snap you out of the normal routines that keep you from seeing things differently.

**3. Surround yourself with positive instruments of change**

Any good plan for change requires nourishment and reinforcement. Since change by its very nature requires things to be different, it is important to give your mind things to think about as the process ensues. If you are making a management change, reading articles or books on the type of change you are undertaking can provide input and stimulus and increase your likelihood of making it a part of your daily routine as well as increase your chances of success. Chances are you are not the first to tackle this change and others can assist in providing well thought out feedback from their own experiences that not only can increase your likelihood of success, but make the process shorter if you are able to avoid common pitfalls or missteps.

Another tactic people employ to foster positive change, is to find a mentor or peer to meet with regularly to share your progress, brainstorm roadblocks, or simply just explore ideas. Meetings should be scheduled regularly both to provide the above benefits, but also to keep you honest. Back to the gym, if you have a workout partner you meet at the gym every day, you are more likely to go than if you simply go it alone. You have an obligation to the other person, and usually those are harder to break than obligations you make to yourself. As with the workout at the gym where both you and your partner receive the benefit of the workout, these meetings should be mutually beneficial where the other person also works through objectives they are trying to tackle.

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**4. Reflect and Adjust**

As with any new process, it's important to set regular stops along the way to understand if the desired objectives are being met. Part of this process should be to understand if the initial assumption still holds true. Sometimes issues we perceive as needing a big shift actually require minimal effort. Similarly, sometimes we find as we become more educated on what we are trying to accomplish, we realize our initial assumption was incorrect and an adjustment is needed. It is important to check and recheck along the way to make sure the goal you set out to achieve is still what needs to be addressed. In many cases it will be and the process of reflecting and adjusting will simply be course correcting and doing some things differently based on new inputs or results. Change is hardly ever independent. There are usually many outside factors that can and will influence your choices along the way. Change can be swift and direct or it can be methodical and subtle. It depends on the what and why as well as the how and who.

**5. Celebrate successes.**

The last point is as much a motivator in making thought provoking change a part of your daily ritual as much as it is making it an enjoyable exercise. If a positive outcome is achieved, even if the full objective has not yet been realized, take a moment to recognize and feel good about the fact that you have impacted a positive change. Even if it is just the process of getting out of your routine to think about change, that is something you did not do prior to starting this process. If it's a positive experience, and you allow yourself to feel good about it, your mind will want to experience that feeling again. Accomplishment feels good to the mind and identifying short term and long term successes can make a seemingly long and unsurmountable task both achievable and manageable.

In summary, funeral directors know more than most about the importance of seizing the day. The problem we all have is it becomes too easy to simply coast through life and never get to the things we feel are worth achieving. This could be building a replica of the Statue of Liberty with popsicle sticks with your children/grandchildren to fixing broken relationships or making more healthy lifestyle habits. By taking the above into consideration and making the effort to take control of your desired achievements as a daily mantra, you can seize the day and the next time that calendar flips, it will be nothing more than another day you have taken advantage of to be happier, healthier, or made someone else's lives better (the last being something funeral directors do regularly). **FBA**



*Todd Mannix is in funeral and cemetery trust administration, and is the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Cooperative Funeral Fund, Inc. (CFF). CFF specializes in the management of preneed and perpetual care fund accounts. CFF has provided a program for the*

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