

Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

Traits of a Successful Leader:
The Funeral Directors Standard

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Traits of a Successful Leader: The Funeral Directors Standard

by Ann Marie St. George



Working in sales I often find myself traveling long distances in my car. My listening preferences are an eclectic collection of music, however to keep awake and make the time fly I enjoy listening to motivational speakers, yes one of my guilty pleasures. This particular drive to the New York State Funeral Directors Convention involved a plethora of success stories from people like Warren Buffett, Andrew Carnegie, Stephen Covey, Henry Ford, Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Getty, Napoleon Hill, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, J.W. Marriott Jr., Anthony Robbins, Eleanor Roosevelt and Zig Ziglar. 50 Success Classics (2004) by Tom Butler-Bowden comprises the works of many stimulating pioneers of success and leadership throughout history, this trip I was only in the car long enough to hear 25 of the 50 stories, a good and bad thing at the same time.

Sifting through what most of these well admired individuals had to say I found a common thread of what I would call "characteristics of success". Since Dave Letterman isn't available I will present to you the "Success Trait Top Ten"

1. Creating optimistic thoughts and actions - always focusing on the positive
2. Willingness to work - success doesn't just happen
3. Discipline - ambition with humility

4. Trusting your intuition - following your gut feelings
5. Prolific reading - leaders are readers - scholars of success
6. Risk takers - "nothing ventured nothing gained"
7. Well rounded (this has nothing to do with eating too much)
8. Love - Listen - Learn (this group of 3 characteristics seem to be more complete as one)
9. Captain of your fate - "taking the bull by the horns"
10. Focusing on a single purpose - Jack of all trades master of none (not a good thing)

Unbeknownst to me my success laden drive was the precursor to the four day event that I was heading to. I have always been a proponent of belonging to some type of local, state, or national funeral organization. I have been lucky in the sense there are some associations that will allow affiliate members to join the group. Affiliates are licensed directors (sometimes non funeral director vendors) that are allowed to join an association even though the funeral home they work for is not a member or maybe that individual does not work for a funeral home however wants to still keep their license active. If your association does not allow for this I would highly recommend it for it can be a wonderful opportunity for both the association



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and the affiliate members. Like minds with like motivation and focus can move some pretty big mountains together.

Every time I attend any of these events I am truly touched, motivated and proud to be the best funeral director that I can be. Sometimes, we funeral directors can be unkind to a competitor in our local community just because of the nature of the beast. However, when you bring a group of funeral directors together with an agenda and focus the energy and selflessness holds no bounds. This particular event there were plenty of speeches where the words, "thank you" were used in abundance. These men and women were humble and genuinely grateful for those around them and the encouragement that they had received for and from each other.

These leaders, whether it was the president of the association or members of established committees, of this group appeared to have stepped off the pages of the Success Trait Top Ten list. Witnessing these trailblazers in action only reinforced everything I had been listening to on my way to the conference. These funeral directors took chances and chose to create opportunities outside the box of what their fathers and grandfathers traditionally did. They saw the writing on the wall and made cremation a focus in their businesses sometimes going to the extent of changing the names of their facilities to include the word "cremation."

I listened to men and women give speeches focusing on the positive in our industry not the negatives. When I spoke to any one of these leaders they truly listened. I got a sense of their love for their profession by the excited way they expressed their intentions for their businesses. So many of their colleagues talked about the endless hours these

individuals worked without complaint helping to ensure all of our livelihoods as funeral directors. Whether it would be motivating others to get involved or working tightly as a group to make sure legislation coming down the pipe would not harm our industry. Not only preventing damaging legislation, they were progressive as they succeeded in moving our profession forward by introducing the Electronic Death Registration System throughout the state.

Funeral Directors as a whole can often be found in leadership positions in their communities. We intuitively seem to assume these positions. Are we born with these traits? Is this what helps us to gravitate towards the funeral industry? Or do we have to work at achieving these characteristics on a daily basis or what I truly believe is that it is a little bit of everything. The one trait we all see to struggle with is focusing on being the best at one thing. We want to do it all and this is our struggle. We don't see this as a fault however our true focus needs to be: What does the family want and how can we as funeral professionals give it to them? It is never about us it always about the families. A truly successful leader is a mixture of ambition, love and humility.

As I mentioned before I didn't get through all 50 of my new success guru friends, I left a few for another time and perhaps this time to a local association CEU meeting. Finding something or someone that moves us to visualize our success helps us in realizing it more readily. As a fellow funeral director I highly recommend finding a way to make time to listen to your own choice of motivational speakers whether it is in your car, mowing the lawn, or in the prep room it is essential to our life journey as funeral directors. We are all leaders in our own right and should be proud of what we do. I know I am. **FBA**



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