

Cooperative Funeral Fund Inc.

PreNeed Event Planning

as seen in:



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Preneed

By Ann Marie St. George



You might be asking yourself, *“What the heck does the above fortune have to do with preneed?”* Maybe nothing.

I love fortune cookie quotes and I thought it was a catchy way to start another article on preneed. I was hoping to stop you from turning the page. Did it work?

Maybe the question you are asking yourself is not about forbidden fruit or jam, but what the heck does event planning have to do with preneed?

While attending the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association convention in April, I made note of a common theme running through many of the presentations. According to the experts, funeral directors need to rethink what we do and how we do it if we are going to stay relevant. Several speakers insisted that touting ourselves as event planners was key to our survival. Now, before you roll your eyes and say, “What the heck were they smoking?” (which I was totally guilty of), I would like you to keep an open

mind as we take a closer look.

The first thing I did was Google the meaning of event planning. Do any of you remember actually having to go to the library to look up anything, ugh, I love Google! Anyway, the process of planning and coordinating an event is usually referred to as event planning, which can include budgeting, scheduling, site selection, acquiring necessary permits, coordinating transportation and parking, arranging for speakers or entertainers, arranging decor, event security, catering, etc. I even found a list of skills an employer was looking for in an event planner job posting:

- Liaise with clients to identify their needs and to ensure customer satisfaction.
- Conduct market research, gather information and negotiate contracts prior to closing any deals.
- Provide feedback and periodic reports to stakeholders.

- Propose ideas to improve provided services and event quality.

- Organize facilities and manage all event details, such as decor, catering, entertainment, transportation, location, invitee list, special guests, equipment, promotional material, etc.

- Ensure compliance with insurance, legal, health and safety obligations.

- Specify staff requirements and coordinate their activities.

- Cooperate with marketing and PR to promote and publicize events.

- Proactively handle any rising issues and troubleshoot any emerging problems on event days.

- Conduct pre- and post-event evaluations and report on outcomes.

- Research market, identify event opportunities and generate interest.

Wait ... are they not referring to what we do as funeral directors all day long?

The point here is who better to plan your final event than a funeral director? We have followed the tried and true for years. However, what was commonly referred to as “traditional” has been replaced by “untraditional” as the norm. The families we now serve are looking for a service that will reflect the life they led, not those of their great-grandparents. Where better to plan this event than in the preneed process?

We are doing our families a disservice if we are not allowing them to share their life stories with us during the preneed arrangement conference. Actively listening to what is being shared will help us better serve them and those left behind. These conversations will help us design the personalized service they are seeking.

Common now is the phrase “celebration of life.” Surprise, surprise – it

even has its own hashtag. Not surprisingly, families are looking outside the funeral home to have these celebrations. When they think of funeral homes, they are not thinking of us as the perfect place for a celebration because apparently, we are just too morbid. Obviously they have never been to a funeral conference. We need to find resourceful ways to embed ourselves into the coordination of these events. If you do not have a designated reception area/room, why not creatively work with event centers, catering halls or local hotels? Have a plethora of information available to help these families plan this once-in-a-lifetime event. Do some research on what is needed to plan a wedding, anniversary or birthday party and twist it to suit a celebration of life. The only thing stopping you from facilitating a death gala is your inability to look at the celebration possibilities from all angles.

Funerals are family and friend events, are they not? Part of the pre-arrangement process is reminding people that funerals are for the living, and as such, we need to consider the needs of those they love along with their own. Encourage people to share their wishes with their family and friends because they may have some amazingly important input. As the National Funeral Directors Association initiative embodies, “Have the Talk of a Lifetime.”

Hey, this idea isn’t for everyone. It is meant to be thought provoking and maybe a way to look at your business a little differently. Maybe it opens a dialogue that you never thought you would have and maybe you never want to have it again. If nothing else motivates you, maybe the fact the average event planner in the United States earns \$63,008 compared with the average funeral director, who earns \$48,552 a year, does.

Boy, is it a good thing we do what we do because we love what we do. Please allow me to share one last fortune cookie quote, “Men do not fail ... they give up trying.” On that note, thank you for hanging in there with me – and yes you can turn the page. Just stop rolling your eyes! •

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