**Education: “Change and Prospecting”**

Hello this is Todd Van Beck

Once again before we start I’d like you to know that I’m not going to try and tell you how to live your life – that’s none of my business – that’s your business. Nor is this staff meeting and this information a mere collection of pleasantries, and I am not a Pollyanna. However we have a mutual interest and love for funeral service, or we ought to have, so getting together to commiserate on our beloved profession seems to me a worthy idea. So let’s get started.

Let’s take a moment to review the points that we covered in our last get together: Here they are:

1. Thomas Edison said that “I never did a day’s work in my life, it was all fun.”
2. Nothing is more contagious than enthusiasm, except the lack of it.
3. There is truth behind the statement, “actions speak louder than words.”
4. There is high risk and definite consequences when somebody “runs out of steam.”
5. There is a great link between the money you and I earn and our real bosses (our families we serve) getting an once-in-a-lifetime experience in return for their cash.
6. There are high risks when funerals become routine.
7. The changes in our society call out for our creative imaginations and dreaming possibilities.
8. Everything in life starts out as a dream, and people do fulfill dreams. We are all living examples of this truth – we all became funeral people.
9. Our great goal in funeral service is one thing: family satisfaction

Have any of you noticed that things have changed and are continuing to change in our great profession? It is a hard thing to miss – right?

It is not worth our time to list all the changes that we are experiencing and heaven knows people in every profession are coping with and trying to figure out what is going on in the real world. However one thing is for sure – things have changed, and my personal observation is that they will continue to change – I personally see no end to it, but of course I might be wrong – what do you think?

In my years of work I have been mighty interested in this thing we call change and my interest was piqued when I realized just how much stress and anxiety change causes people. It seems a safe thing to say that people really don’t like change very much, and most times human beings just cannot handle rapid change at all. Also I need to share that I have found that anybody who declares that changing is an easy task or experience is – well I just don’t believe them. I have found that change is very difficult, and very challenging to embrace, but yet things just keep changing. So there is the dilemma – things change and we don’t like change. Interesting predicament it is not?

In my personal search for a method of coping and embracing change I discovered that change has a nature to it. It’s true – change can be observed and understood and for me understanding the nature of change has been extremely helpful in improving my attitude towards change. I always liked funeral service the way it was – the old-fashioned way, but of course that attitude doesn’t seem to work very well for me today or I don’t believe works very well in any other profession for that matter.

Here are some quick points that I found out about the nature of change: You might want to write them down.

1. Change is perpetual, it never stops – ever. The proof of this is easily seen by just watching a clock tick. The second hand never goes backwards.
2. Change is cyclical – history repeats itself, but people who are unaware of this fact tend to believe that their problems with change and changing are the worst in human recorded history, but of course that is not true it just feels true to us in the present. In other words our ancestors in funeral service had their own problems and difficulties in dealing with change.
3. Change is unchangeable – in other words once things change they never ever go back to being exactly as they were before, no matter how hard we wish.
4. Change always has a good and bad nature to it. So it is not surprising that people who focus on the bad have a difficult time changing where as people who focus on the good deal with change much more effectively – which category to you fall?
5. Lastly, change always creates tension – even good change. Getting married, or having a baby tends to change things in a big way and is there ever tension present when somebody gets married or has a baby?

So there you have it friends. Change has a predictable nature all of its own.

People frequently ask me at my seminars about how to deal with change, and they also want to know will change in funeral service ever stop. I know it will never stop, but it took me a long time to figure that truth out over twenty five years to be truthful, but for our purposes today I would like to focus on the most important aspect I have discovered in wisely and effectively embracing this issue of change, and as I just said friends it took me a quarter of a century to arrive at this one idea: here it is. PEOPLE WHO MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR OPPORTUNITIES IN LIFE DEAL WITH CHANGE THE MOST EFFECTIVELY. I will say it again: people, you and I, who make the most of our opportunities in the here and now, deal with and embrace change with the greatest ratio of success. Those good folks, who dismiss, ignore, fight, or argue with their present life opportunities simple do not change – in other words they are stuck, these folks tend to go nowhere.

I know this idea sounds terribly idealistic and really simple, but my friends I have also concluded that the quest to simplify things in life possesses great wisdom because I think is safe to say that we have made many things in life which in their essence are simple highly complex issues, and I believe that many aspects of funeral service reflects this observation – we have made complex, things that in their essence are truly simple. Let me give you an example of what I am talking about.

Some stores are so good that they never grow old. One of them is the old story called “Acres of Diamonds.” No one knows who told it the first time. It’s supposed to be true, and of course it is in that it’s happened thousands of times to thousands of people in thousands of different situations.

But the man who made the story famous in this country at least was a gentleman named Dr. Russell Herman Conwell, who lived from 1843 to 1925 and who, by telling this story from one end of the world to the other raised $6 million with which he founded Temple University in Philadelphia and thus fulfilled his dream to change things and build a really fine school for making the most out of his opportunities for poor but deserving young people.

Dr. Conwell told this story “Acres of Diamonds” more than 6,000 times and attracted great audiences wherever he appeared. If you are familiar with this story I beg your patience, if you are not I beg your attention. The story isn’t really so important in itself, the important thing is that we apply the principle of the story in our own lives and particularly in realizing its impact in our confronting and coping wisely with change in funeral service.

The story is about a simple farmer who lived in Africa at the time diamonds were discovered there. When a visitor to his farm told him of the millions being made by men who were discovering diamonds mines, the farmer promptly sold his farm for anything he could get and quickly left to search for diamonds by himself.

The farmer wandered all over the African continent, he found no diamonds, and, as the story has it, finally penniless, in poor health, and now despondent threw himself into a river and drowned himself.

About the time this despondent farmer took his own life, the new farmer who had bought the farm had found a large, unusual-looking stone in the creek-bed which ran through the farm and put it on his mantel as a curio. When the same visitor who had told the original farmer about the diamond discoveries stopped by one day he examined the stone and told the new farm owner that he had discovered one of the largest diamonds ever found, and that it was worth a king’s ransom. To his surprise the new farmer told him that the entire farm was covered with stones of that kind, and to make a long story short the farm which the first farmer had sold so that he could go look for diamonds turned out to be one of the richest diamond mines in the world – the Kimberly Diamond mine.

The point Dr. Conwell made was that the first farmer had owned acres of diamonds but had made the mistake of not examining what opportunities he had before he ran off to something he hoped would prove to be better, yes he changed but he went from something to nothing because he thought the grass was greener on the other side – and as most of us know sometimes it is, many times it is not.

Dr. Conwell would then point out that each of us is like that first farmer. No matter where we live, or what funeral home we work at, we are surrounded by acres of diamonds and the only thing we really need to change is our ability to simply look for them right where we are. Like the curious appearing stones which covered the farm our opportunities might not appear at first to be diamonds but with a little change in our attitudes, with a deeper examination of who we are and what we have to give, and some attitude polishing opportunities usually will reveal themselves for what they really are, and that my friends in funeral service is positive lasting change. Not going from nothing to nothing, but going from something to a worthy ideal of service to humanity – there is a tremendous difference between the two.

The experts out in the world say that each of us has deep reservoirs of ability which we habitually fail to use simply because we don’t change, we don’t change to develop ourselves to our true stature and we don’t change from be stuck to being prospectors for our own acres of diamonds which are lurking right under our own feet, right now, right where we are, but one will never know until we prospect, explore and dig, and discover that the best, most lastly, and beneficial change is within ourselves as human beings.

Let’s review our information covered in this meeting:

1. We said that change has a nature all its own, made up of five things:
2. It is perpetual, it never stops.
3. It is cyclical.
4. It is unchangeable.
5. It always has good and bad to it, but we can choose the good in change.
6. It always creates tension.
7. We said that one of the best ways to embrace and cope with change is not to get stuck, but instead to look for ways to make the most of changing our opportunities right where we are.
8. We covered the problems of not changing and being stuck.
9. We addressed the concept of making complexities out of simplicities.
10. We told the great story about the “Acres of Diamonds.”
11. We talked about the issue of creating meaningful change.
12. We concluded with the concepts of prospecting in our lives, exploring change, and digging for opportunities where we are.

Discussion questions:

1. Do you agree with the five characteristics of change? How have you experienced each one?
2. If a person is stuck do you think changing it into looking for and making opportunities is a great way to deal with “stuckness?”
3. Have you ever felt stuck? If so how did you deal with that situation?
4. Do you agree that many times simplicities have been made into complexities? Can you offer some examples of this in funeral service?
5. How do you react to the “Acres of Diamonds” story? Is this true or just a nice fable?
6. Is the grass usually greener on the other side?
7. Is the idea of making meaningful opportunities as a means of dealing with change a good idea?
8. What are your thoughts about prospecting for your “Acres of Diamonds?”
9. Does prospecting work?
10. How can you prospect right where you are at this time?