



The Concept of Precare

**Arranging the story,
not just the service,
ahead of time.**

BY GABRIEL NGO

“Begin with the end in mind.”

– Stephen Covey, *American leadership expert and author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

I am friends with a retired funeral home owner and operator in Illinois. He ran an incredibly effective aftercare program that families loved. This gentleman, whom I greatly admire, employed a full-time licensed grief counselor and offered free grief counseling up to one year after a loved one’s passing. This aftercare program generated a multitude of leads for preplanning and prearrangement, but it also became a competitive advantage. He was providing the highest level of high-touch service, so he was able to justify higher prices than his competitors.

Many thought leaders have written about how well-designed aftercare programs can help owner-operators boost pre-need business. And many others have explained why pre-need sales truly benefit businesses long-term. Depending on your competitive market, they can benefit you either defensively or offensively. But this article is about none of these things.

In funeral service, we are called upon at the end of an individual’s life to help their family tell their story. However, the most meaningful stories are those that begin being told before the service. Rather than prearrangement being about preselections, what if the value proposition centered around how the individual would like to be remembered, how they would like their story to be told?

There is no shortage of rhetoric regarding the value of educat-

ing families during arrangement conferences. But prearrangement conferences are actually your greatest opportunity to educate. During these meetings, there is less emotion and more opportunity to engage the person sitting in front of you, to hear the story of their life the way they want it to be told.

Please allow me to share a personal anecdote. When the younger of my two older brothers passed away somewhat suddenly in 2024, he had not prearranged. Luckily, our family, in particular his nuclear family, knew him deeply enough to assist the funeral home in personalizing his service. We were able to execute a service that reflected and honored my brother in the way he very likely would have wanted to be memorialized. My niece, who was director of human resources for a publicly traded company in our profession at the time (she’s now senior vice president – bragging just a little bit here!), was very adamant about the music during the visitation. Music – regardless of style, genre or period, – has always been a huge part of our lives in House Ngo.

In any case, my niece and nephews procured a playlist that they felt aligned with what my brother would have selected. It included The Beatles, Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Bee Gees, French songs, Vietnamese songs and more, and it played on repeat during my brother’s visitation. At one point, when there was an ebb in the number of guests, the song “I’d Really Love to See You Tonight” by Dan Seals came on. My niece, nephews and I were standing near one another at the moment, and someone asked aloud, “What is he singing during this part of the song?” The lyric in question was from the chorus. One of us blurted, “I’m not talking ’bout millennium.”

Someone else added, “Yeah, that does sound like it.”

Then, realizing we all have smartphones, one of us looked up the actual lyrics. For reference, they are: “I’m not talking about movin’ in/ And I don’t want to change your mind/ But there’s a warm wind blowin’ and the stars are out/ And I’d really like to see you tonight.”

My point being, none of us knew the lyrics very well, but we did know my brother liked the song, and it provided a very touching moment for us to bond over something that was special to my him.

But what if a family, due to differences in culture or plain happenstance, was unable to be close together and their loved one had not preplanned? Or, even if their loved one had preplanned, what if the prearrangements focused solely on what types of services and method of final disposition they wanted? The individual’s legacy, wishes, and love of photography, art or even one specific Dan Seals song might get lost along the way.





What is it that I am talking about here – this idea of “precare”? It begins with making the most of your prearrangement conferences. By no means am I saying that what’s being done currently is “bad,” but we can always be better. I am certain this concept of precare is being done somewhere by somebody; however, I have not personally heard about or observed it. I must give credit where credit is due, though, because this idea is based largely on SCI’s deployment of at least two professionals – a funeral director/arranger and a cemetery sales counselor – for conferences at its combination locations. (At least this is what I have gathered from my extensive experience with funeral homes and deaths in my family over the past four years.)

Even though my idea is based on funeral home-cemetery combos and the presence of two representatives at prearrangement and arrangement conferences, it very much applies

to what I am about to outline for you. If your funeral business has someone with an insurance license to sell prearranged funerals on staff, then you do not need two people in your prearrangement conferences. However, if you have an assigned sales counselor who sells preneed for your business, I propose that you (or someone on your staff) attend their prearrangement conferences to learn and preplan the stories that clients would like told. If the tandem approach does not work, there’s always an opportunity for a follow-up “memory-planning session” after the initial prearrangement conference.

Many preneed plans cover funding but not personalization. So, the idea is to engage the client in a voluntary legacy conversation – *their* legacy conversation. This lets you demonstrate the enhancements your funeral home offers. The funding plan can be handled by the sales counselor, but your funeral home can provide the nonfinancial preplanning layer via complimentary

storytelling sessions or personalization appointments.

If meeting in tandem for a prearrangement conference is not possible, the following is a potential workflow:

- Client meets with preneed sales counselor to discuss insurance and funding.
- Funeral home follows up with a personalization appointment or storytelling session.
- You and/or your staff record:
 - Short interview
 - Archive of hobbies, photos and/or music
 - Tribute preferences
- Files are stored for future services, and you become the steward of that individual’s story.

With this approach, your funeral home can be the keeper of memories, not just preneed contracts. Why does this matter to clients and their families? Firstly, the preneed client feels heard, and you establish and foster your relationship years in advance. Secondly, services down the line hold more meaning when you engage direct participation up front. Precare affords you the opportunity to build brand loyalty from beginning to end. This could be a subtle yet important paradigm shift for both you and the families you serve. ☰

Gabriel Ngo is director of transaction and advisory services at Foresight, a Florida-based business and management consulting firm that specializes in succession planning, representation of buyers and sellers, financing, and valuations. Ngo can be reached at 602-274-6464 or gngo@TheForesightCompanies.com.

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