THE PROCESS OF PROFESSIONALIZATION

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In a Nutshell…

Professionalization

Credentials

Cultural Authority
Cultural Authority

“Doctors and scientists and theologians are still treated as “authority” though their expertise may be challenged, their doctrines overturned, and the purposes to which they lend their expertise may be found to diverge from the public’s own purposes.”

Burns (1978)
Credentials are “short-hand”
Funeral Service Practitioners have no such credentials to communicate their cultural authority. The public doesn’t know if we have years of education or none at all.
What’s In A Name?

• Lack of clear identity due to various job titles
  ◦ Funeral director
  ◦ Embalmer
  ◦ Mortician
  ◦ Undertaker
  ◦ Funeral Service Practitioner
  ◦ Funeral arranger, concierge, assistant, etc.
  ◦ Direct disposer

• Confusing to public; confusing to us
Profession vs Professionalism

- *Professionalization* is a very specific process
- It is not an aspiration to social status
- Wishing does not make it so
- Medicine, law and theology achieved their status by intentional design; no accident
- Funeral service needs to make up its collective mind
Elements of True Professions

• Abstract Body of Knowledge
  - Broad/general education before specialized/professional preparation
  - Cognitive, institutionalized education
    - Not vocational or “trade” school; not OJT or apprenticeship

• Credentials
  ◦ Extensive education proved by examination
  ◦ Licensure
  ◦ Continuing education – a commitment to excellence

• Code of Ethics
  ◦ Including “Practice Standards”
The Role of Licensure

- Licensure is sanction by the state/government
- Recognition that only certain people are qualified to perform duties
- Grant of monopoly; special protection against interlopers for the greater good of society
The Role of Licensure

“The primary method by which professions maintain barriers to unwelcome entrants is licensure. Sanction by the state in the form of licensure is a means by which society agrees that only certain, especially skilled individuals can engage in a given occupation.”

Freidson (1986)
Confusion About Funeral Service Licensure

• Funeral service has not been able to attain uniform licensing laws throughout the states

• There is no clear, singular definition of the term “funeral director”

• As a result, funeral service boundaries are increasingly porous
We need to resolve…

- What does it mean to be a funeral service practitioner?
- What knowledge, skills, and abilities are required?
- What do the various titles we use mean?
- Who is authorized to perform what work?
- What credentials are required for various roles?