

EULOGY HELP



IMMEDIATE AND PRACTICAL HELP

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The Problem

You don't know where to start.

You've been asked, or you've chosen, to speak at a funeral or memorial service and you want to give a eulogy worthy of the person being remembered.

You've been to funerals before, and listened to tributes that you have hardly been able to hear. The people giving them seemed to be mumbling or speaking to themselves, or they've been so nervous and spoken so fast that it was basically unintelligible.

You want to make sure that your eulogy is relevant to everyone who will attend, and you want to deliver it in a way that will help them through their grief.

The Solution

You've already taken that vital first step.

By reading this, you have shown that you are willing to learn. For most people, public speaking is not something that comes naturally. Like most things, it's something that has to be learned.

You have to learn how to select and choose your materials, how to overcome your nerves and emotions, and how to speak in a way that can be heard and understood by everyone present.

I'm going to take you through each of these stages in turn.

I'm aware that time is of the essence, so I'm confining the solution to things that can be mastered quickly.

I have been involved in public speaking for over forty years, and during that time I have spoken in theaters with a seating capacity of several thousands, have appeared on the television, and on the radio. I've also taught in colleges and led seminars in business settings.

Of course, speaking at a funeral is different (I've done that many times too) but the basics are the same.

Select and Choose Your Materials

We've probably all been to funerals where we've wondered if the person ministering at the funeral had ever met the person being remembered.

I went to a funeral once where the person being remembered was known by everyone as 'Angel'. Her parents had called her that as a child; her husband always called her that, as did her work colleagues. The only ones who didn't call her 'Angel' were her teen-age children, and they knew her as 'Mum'.

The Minister insisted on calling her 'Mary' throughout (technically correct as that was her real name) and the name 'Angel' never featured once. Somehow, it was like being at someone else's funeral and not at 'Angel's'.

That's where a good eulogy can help.

The eulogy is a place to cut through the formality, and to remember someone as they really were, and there is nobody better placed to do that than you.

You have unique memories of the person being remembered. The type of memories that made you love them, or be their friend, or respect them. The type of memories that deserve to be heard.

The eulogy will be of greatest help the more personal it is.

Start with their life. Who they were. What they did. Then conclude with what they meant to you as an individual, or to you as a family.

Starting with their life, you could go through some (or all) of the following:

- Who were their parents and Grandparents?
- Where did they grow up and go to school?
- Who were their Brothers and Sisters, Aunts or Uncles, Nephews and Nieces?
- Did they go to college or university?
- When did they leave school and what was their first job?
- Have they ever been in the Armed Forces?
- Did they have a trade or profession?
- Who were their best friends?
- Where they married and did they have any Children, Grandchildren, Nephews or Nieces?
- What hobbies or pastimes did they have?
- What sort of personality did they have?

The above list is just that, a list. You don't have to use it all. It may not all be relevant to your circumstances.

Any list is pretty impersonal, so having provided a brief outline of their life; you now need to gather together the information that makes it more personal.

Move from the general to the personal, and express what they did for YOU, how they helped YOU, what they felt about YOU, what YOU felt about them, and what YOU will miss most about them.

Tell them how much they have influenced you, how much they helped you.

Tell them how much you love them, and how much you'll miss them.

Tell them how proud you are of the things they achieved in their life.

Tell them you are going to uphold their values, and that you're going to make them proud of the things you will do in your life.

Another way of doing this is to find just one or two qualities that sum up who they were, and try to sum these up in just one or two words. Qualities such as funny, loving, caring, family oriented, persistent, sharing, hard working, etc.

What is it about them that you will most remember?

Can you sum this up in a few words?

For instance, the thing that most people may remember is a sense of humor. I know it's a funeral, but if the person being remembered was best known for their sense of humor, then what better than to remember something that they found really funny.

Similarly, if they were caring, give some personal examples.

So you've got a list of major events in their life, and you've got some personal experiences, but what do you do with them?

How do you start?

How do you end?

Starting and Ending

You could start or end with a poem or a eulogy story, and you'll find a selection of these on our website at <http://www.funeral-poems.net>

There are poems there suitable for all sorts of people.

You could, though, just start and end with a short simple statement that sums up the person being remembered.

I remember ... today because he is the funniest man I know.

Or, I remember ... today because she was the most caring person I ever met.

Then outline their life.

Then a couple of examples of their sense of humor or caring nature.

Then finish exactly the same way that you started.

I remember ... today because he is the funniest man I know.

Or, I remember ... today because she was the most caring person I ever met.

This method can be particularly effective because it provides a line at the start and end that people will remember and take away with them.

When Martin Luther King said "I have a dream", he said a lot more besides, but the phrase sums it all up and brings it all to mind.

When John F Kennedy said "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country", he said a lot more besides, but the phrase sums it all up and brings it all to mind.

Is there a single phrase that sums up what everyone knows about the person who has died? You could use that phrase to start and end your eulogy.

Whatever method you use to start and finish, you need at this stage to write everything down and to try and get things into some sort of order.

How Long?

When you consider how long the funeral will last, and what it's already going to contain, you soon realize that, unlike a seminar, you only need to speak for a few minutes.

Five minutes would probably be about right. One or two minutes less would probably still be OK, but one or two minutes more would probably be too long.

A poem – 1 minute

A brief history -2 minutes

A couple of illustrations – 1 minute each

A concluding word or concluding poem or story – 1 or 2 minutes

Now things don't look so daunting.

Learning Practice

You should have the eulogy in two formats.

1. Have the whole thing written down word for word.
2. Have it summarized, with one word or phrase to summarize each paragraph.

Now, hopefully, you've got a day or two to practice.

You're bound to be a bit nervous the first time you speak in public, but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. The adrenalin will be flowing, and will help you through.

The other thing that helps is knowing that you are well prepared.

- Read through the material you have written word for word
- Put the material down and try to remember as much as you can
- If you forget, look at the summary
- once you've got through it a couple of times, try speaking it out loud
- only refer to the full notes as a last resort!

If the eulogy only lasts about five minutes, you should be able to go through the above process about three times in about 20 minutes.

If you can do that two or three times a day, you will find that you will be able to remember it without having to refer to your notes.

That's about an hour a day between now and the funeral.

Don't panic! Even two days should be time enough to learn a five minute eulogy.

If you are using a poem at the start or end, you don't need to learn the poems off by heart. You could just read them. But the more you know of them, the less you will need to look at your notes.

Performance Practice

Speak the eulogy out loud.

One of the best ways of practicing out loud is to speak as if to someone in the next room.

You don't need to shout, they're in the next room not the next building. Just imagine there is someone in the next room, and speak loud enough for them to hear.

Another way of practicing is to imagine yourself at the funeral actually giving the eulogy. Imagine yourself full of confidence, looking directly at the congregation and speaking directly to them.

Another way of practicing is to imagine someone you already admire as a public speaker. Imagine how they would give the eulogy, and then pretend that you are them.

There is no substitute for this sort of practice.

Practice out loud, and 'perform' the eulogy as often as you can. You're going to be giving a performance. Let the 'public' performance be the twentieth time you've 'performed' the eulogy, not the first time.

Nerves!

Fear's a funny thing, and so is your mind.

I know someone who was scared stiff of going into a lift.

Whenever they did, their heartbeat increased, they felt flushed, they began to sweat, they felt faint and thought that they were going to die.

Even thinking about getting into a lift brought the same symptoms. They'd avoid the lift whenever possible, and if it was unavoidable they'd get out of the lift at the earliest opportunity, usually within seconds.

Then a therapist pointed out to them that no harm had ever come to them in a lift, and they didn't know anyone else that had been harmed either.

Yes, their heartbeat had increased, but they had never had a heart attack. They had felt faint, but had never actually fainted. They had felt they were going to curl up and die, but they actually lived through it all unscathed.

Then the therapist took them to a store that had a lift, and they stayed in it for five minutes, riding up and down with the therapists support and encouragement.

For the first couple of minutes, my friend had all the familiar symptoms, and an overwhelming desire to get out whenever the lift stopped. But they persevered, and as the minutes passed, so the symptoms diminished.

After five minutes my friend felt fine, and after ten minutes (far from feeling faint) they felt completely bored.

They have never looked back, and they now get into lifts without giving them a second thought.

By getting out at the first opportunity, the fear was reinforced. By staying in the lift, the fear was removed.

EVERYONE starts off afraid of public speaking (what if this... and what if that...) and sometimes people do say embarrassing things. But so what?

Don't let the fear put you off. Speak through the fear and emerge triumphant the other side.

Emotion!

It's far better to have someone nervous speaking from the heart, than someone whose speaking is polished and professional.

The first comes over as sincere The second can come over as unfeeling. So don't worry about showing your emotions.

You will have practiced so that you can give the clearest and best possible tribute, but if you didn't care you wouldn't be there.

Facing people who are emotional or crying, can not help but move you emotionally.

It doesn't matter.

Just take a deep breath. Look up, and carry on, tears or not.

Eulogy Performance

If you have followed all the above points, you will find that you have not only learned the eulogy off by heart, but you have practiced it out loud many times.

Throw the detailed notes away, and just take the summarized notes.

If you can manage without looking at your notes, so much the better. But if you do need to refer to them, don't be ashamed of them. Hold them up at eye level, read what you want, then lower them again. The worst thing you can do is to look down at them. If you talk to the floor nobody is going to hear you!

The most important mourners will be at the front, and the mistake that most inexperienced speakers make is to speak only to the people at the front.

What you should do, even if speaking directly to the front row, is to imagine you are speaking directly to the person furthest away. If the person who is furthest away (on the BACK row) can hear you, everyone in between you and them will hear you too.

So find the people who are standing or sitting furthest away from you. Look at each one in turn, or over their head or over their shoulder, and speak directly to them. If they can

hear you clearly, then so can everybody else. Imagine them standing in the next room if it helps.

I know there may well be at time during the eulogy when you may want to look at, and speak to, close relatives directly. That's fine ... but don't lower your voice. You are still also talking to everyone. Still also talking to the person at the back.

This is the single most important eulogy advice I can give you.

It's no good having the best words in the world, at having remembered them and practiced them, if nobody can hear them correctly.

You've practiced many times, so head up, look to the back, and speak with confidence.

Well, that's it. There's only so much that I can teach you. The rest is up to you.

I can advise you, teach you and help you, but you're the one who has to do it. The only way of learning something practical is to do it.

Ten Stage Plan

Ten Stage Plan.

Here's a summary of the 10 stages you've learned.

1. Collect all the basic information about their life
2. Add your own personal reminiscences
3. Select a suitable funeral poem or eulogy story (if required)
4. Write everything down in order
5. Write a summary. One word or phrase to summarize each paragraph
6. Learn the material word for word
7. Practice speaking out loud as often as possible
8. Throw your notes away (just keep the summary)
9. Never look down and never speak to the floor
10. Speak with confidence to someone at the back

I've used this system to teach many people how to speak in public, and it never fails. I know that, if you follow all the advice you've been given, you will do fine.

Follow Up

I'd be pleased to hear how you got on.

You can let me know by emailing me at info@funeral-poems.net