

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Page 1 of 4



KEN SATTERLY NATIONAL PRESIDENT BIFD
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE,
CARDIFF, OCTOBER 2009.

Honorary Officers, Immediate Past President, honoured guests, fellows, fellow members, colleagues, and friends, it is my very great pleasure and privilege to speak to you this morning as President of the British Institute of Funeral Directors. Firstly, may I take the opportunity of thanking Simon and Martine and their team for hosting this weekend. I'm sure we have all enjoyed our time together.

I never imagined when I first joined the BIFD, that one day I would become President of the organisation. But, of course that is like so many things in life. Something makes us take a first step, and then as we become more interested in what we discover, and more confident in the path we are treading, new doors open, new opportunities present themselves, and we find ourselves doing new things and also widening our circle of colleagues and friends. That has certainly happened for me. Now, not only am I President of the organisation I first joined in 1987, twenty-three years ago, but during those years it has been my privilege to meet many more colleagues in our profession and also to make many new friends. And, as this process has taken place, one of the things that has struck me very forcibly has been that while we do all work in the same profession, and obviously deal with very similar issues, in many ways we are all so very different.

Some time ago, those differences got me thinking. Not just the more superficial differences, such as how we look and how we choose to dress, although those things do of course reflect something of our inner selves, but more on the various gifts that we all bring to life, both our personal lives and our professional lives. In fact, when I think about that – our differences and the many gifts we bring – I sometimes find it quite overwhelming. After all, how can it be that with so many billions of individuals in the world, they are just so ... well ... individual?

Let's think about those individual gifts for a moment. Some people, for example, are very creative – either in their thoughts or in what they produce – philosophers, inventors and artists for example. And, I expect you've noticed by now that I'm a bit of a philosopher myself. Other people do wonderful things with their physical bodies, and here we can think of great athletes. Others have a way with plants and the world of nature – and indeed I'm a bit of a gardener myself. Others are great administrators and can organise complex meetings and events that would have some people totally confused and running for cover.

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Page 2 of 4



There are other people whose gift is compassion, and I know that in our own profession we meet many such individuals. I certainly meet them for example whenever my work takes me into local hospices, and indeed I never fail to be humbled by some of the wonderful people who work in those marvellous places. And, of course, compassion is also an attribute that we need to be particularly aware of and to nurture and develop in ourselves. It's all too easy to get bogged down in administration, or to just regard the arranging of funerals as a form filling procedure to be got through as quickly as possible, and to forget that part of our job is about listening and about compassion for those who cross our professional paths.

But – with so much talent, so many gifts, and with so much individuality, sometimes we are so eager to 'do our own thing' that we forget that old saying – United we stand, divided we fall. After thinking about this for a while, I looked up the word Unity in an Internet dictionary. I found there were two definitions. The first, was, "The state or quality of being one; that is, singleness." And, the second was, "The state or quality of being in accord; that is: harmony."

That seemed to me to fit very nicely with what I had previously been thinking, that although people have many talents and abilities they sometimes don't consider the importance of working in Unity, in harmony, and of course, as a team. So, on this basis, I have decided that the theme of my presidential year will be Unity and Diversity. In fact, it will be Unity in Diversity.

What is it, though, that so often stops us diverse folk working together in Unity. Well, if you had asked me that question a few months ago, I would probably have said something like "Well, I work hard, I have some great ideas, I'm always trying to encourage my colleagues but they are just so difficult," or "They never do what they say they will do," or, "They are just so unreliable." To be honest, I might have been a whole lot ruder, I might have said, "you know that so-and-so is just a pain in the posterior." But, then, a while back I came across a story in a magazine that set me thinking.

Oddly enough, it was about a funeral. It wasn't a funeral that took place here, in fact it was in America. But, I think the message is appropriate to everyone, in every place, and also not just to folk in our profession. It happened in St. Louis, Missouri, and it took place in a large company. But, that of course, is not the point. It could have been anywhere. When the employees of this certain company returned from their lunch break one day, they discovered that a large sign had been posted on the main door of their offices. It said, "Yesterday the person who has been hindering your growth in this company passed away. We invite you to pay your last respects to the deceased and we have turned conference room into a temporary Chapel of Rest. Well, as you can imagine, those employees were pretty shocked, and at first, most of them were reluctant to go anywhere near the conference room. But, then, as is usually the case, curiosity took hold of them.



They were also intrigued to know just who was this person who had hindered their own progress? Most of them could think of quite a few individuals it could be, and although they were sad to learn of the death, they also couldn't help feeling a little quickening of the heart. Things are bound to get better now, they thought, now that that so-and-so is out of the way, I am bound to be taken more seriously.

So, eventually, one by one, they made their way to the conference room. Once there, they took a deep breath and sidled up to the coffin, a little apprehensive, but quite eager too. But - when they looked inside they became speechless. Then, they stood over the coffin, shocked and in silence, as if someone had touched the deepest part of their soul. For, what they saw was - and I wonder if you can guess? They saw themselves. Yes, inside the coffin, rather than a dead body, there was a mirror. Each person found themselves confronting their own face.

There was also a sign next to the mirror which said: "There is only one person who can set limits to your growth and that person is YOU". You are the only person who can revolutionize your life. You are the only person who can influence your happiness, and your success. You are the only person who can help yourself. Your life does not change when your boss changes, when your friends change, when your parents change, when your partner changes, when your company changes. Your life changes when YOU change, when you go beyond your limiting beliefs, when you realize that you are the only one responsible for your life."

And, to me, one of the biggest limiting beliefs is our unwillingness to sometimes step back a little and to be aware that we need to stop pushing our own agendas, or thinking that it is ourselves alone who can get a job done, and to start thinking of how we can all pull together. And, just as we need to listen to our clients when they come to arrange a funeral we also need to listen to each other. And, by this, I don't mean just a cursory nod in their direction. But to really hear what each person is saying. Then to consider their words. Then to think about their words and ideas. And then, to consider how we can all work together – in harmony – to promote our Institute, to help each other, and thereby help ourselves.

I want to tell you of one of the projects I intend to undertake during my year as President. I hope you will be excited by it, I hope you will want to join in, and I also hope that you will come to me to share any thoughts and suggestions you might have about it yourselves.

It is my plan, and I've had this in my mind for a while now, to put on four, three day road shows next year, where we can take the BIFD out to the British public. (February, April, June and August, subject to approval by the Board of Directors). The plan is to hire a bus, to fill it with information about who we are, what we do and how we serve the people who come to us for professional services.

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL DIRECTORS PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Page 4 of 4



These road show buses will travel to as many BIFD regions as possible, and once there I very much hope that local funeral directors will come to take part in meeting the public. I would also like to invite all those many other people who we work with in one way or another. Maybe these will be local crematoria or cemetery staff – maybe they will be local florists - maybe they will be funeral celebrants, both religious and secular. So, come and tell me what you think ... and if you want to offer your own talents to the project, then I will be more than happy to welcome you to my team.

So, finally, I would just like to say this. That in my year as President of the BIFD I will do my very best to set an example. I will listen to you, I really do want to hear all about the many gifts and talents you possess and that you can bring to our organisation. But, more than anything I'd like to help us to use those talents and gifts in harmony with each other – how we can work together to build and grow. Indeed, how we can truly become an organisation where Unity in Diversity can flourish.

Thank you.

-Ends -