

DIER DRILLS

People keep dying. Everyone knows that every body will inevitably cease to function. Yet a widespread phenomenon of inattention and unpreparedness for this eventuality often causes logistical chaos in the midst of acute grief.

Following a loved one's death, when in a state of stunned disbelief, disorientation, and disarray, family members are also apt to feel dismayed. Suddenly, matters needing to be addressed descend on them like wildfire. Decisions and arrangements must be made. Information is needed. An awareness of what they wish had been communicated to them by the deceased loved one often ensues.

Just as safety upon occurrence of a fire can be secured as a result of previously practiced tactical plans, this aspect of death upheaval can be averted by adopting certain prudent strategies in anticipation of unforeseen death. Everyone at any time can engage in short exercises to establish a network of avenues to be followed by beloved family members who will be suffering. Providing data and details about wishes preemptively is so much easier in contrast to the scavenging that families must undertake when there has been no edification and posthumous consultations are impossible.

Of course, any period of time can be chosen for commencement of preparatory measures. But pinpointing a month affords structure for utilization of a timeline to encourage diligence and the likelihood of goal fulfillment.

October has been earmarked as National Fire Prevention Month — a time when countrywide attention is directed toward raising fire safety awareness to ensure families have a plan and are ready for the unexpected. In the same vein, since October 30th has been designated as “Create A Great Funeral Day,” maybe this is also an appropriate month to direct attention to “demise surprise” prevention. Taking proactive end-of-life steps will ensure families have a plan and are ready for the unexpected.

Within the framework of a calendar, prescribed activities can be broken down into manageable objectives:

DEMISE SURPRISE PREVENTION MONTH

Choose any day of the month to begin a process of intention leading to realization. Identify measured portions of desired actions for incremental fulfillment of goals. Begin with a loosely designated time frame of four weeks, but be prepared to alter it as circumstances dictate.

DAY 1

Inform family that you are participating in a community campaign to prevent demise surprise. That is, you have committed to doing whatever you can to prepare ahead of time for the end of your life so your family won't need to tear their hair out figuring out what to do when the time comes. Ask for ongoing feedback as you compile material for them, consulting them as needed during the process.



DAY 2

Set aside a few minutes to imagine today's probable scenario if you had died yesterday. What would be going on among your family members and close companions? Presuming they would be engaged in all sorts of tasks and decision-making related to your death, identify actions you could take now to make it easier for them. With this in mind, compose your own customized "to do" list that reflects your circumstances and wishes; if you favor structure, format it as a checklist with lines preceding each entry.

DAY 3

Decide on a reasonable period of time to set as a goal for completion of the tasks you have identified... if not a month, then within what delineated time frame? Choose one easy mission to complete today. Then place a checkmark next to the entry on your list.

DAYS 4 through the end of four weeks or a pre-determined time span

Continue in the same manner... each day tackling another endeavor and notating when it has been accomplished.

DAY 30

Assess your progress. If all of the activities have not yet been completed, calculate a structured extension of time and continue the process while staying moored to a regular schedule. Add items to your list if there are more matters you want to tackle. There is no need to feel overwhelmed by the volume. But remember that every action you've already taken... every piece of preparation you've already provided... will become a welcome asset in the end. Just keep adding value to your contributions.

DAY 31

If all of your objectives have been met, revel in a satisfied feeling of achievement. If you haven't done so already, decide how you will inform your family members about specific elements of the gift you have prepared for them. Contact them and ask for feedback about what you have done and the preferences you have determined. Be sure they know where the data you have collected can be accessed.

Once you are satisfied with the outcome of your initiatives, joyfully and thankfully bask in the realization that this exercise was just a drill and you are fully alive. But now you can live your life more at ease, knowing you are prepared for the day when it will end... knowing that you have provided your family with a procedural kit and informational gear. You will have enabled them to douse the embers of potentially flammable end-of-life management, sparing them from a flaming emotional inferno stoked by neglect.

FOLLOWUP MEASURES

Review each item on the list to determine which ones warrant further exploration and action. This step may entail additional online perusal and on-site visits to providers. Filter the list and extract certain ones to establish a new list for broader investigation. Begin tackling the items in a more detailed manner on a regular basis, but according to your preferred schedule. You are apt to be pleasantly surprised by the expansive options and innovations in the funerary domain.

Once all the entries on your list have been addressed and completed to your satisfaction, contact family members to arrange a means for communication about your additional input.

SAMPLE LIST of Possibilities for Daily (or Periodic) Tasks

- ___ Notate locations of important documents and personal data, including vehicle registrations and insurance documentation.
- ___ Write biographical summary, including details needed for death certificate.
- ___ Gather and notate all computer passwords.
Sign up for a password manager service if desired.
Record answers to common security questions for various accounts.
Record numeric combinations for properties and belongings.
Note locations of keys, entry alarm codes, phone lock numbers, etc.
Determine place for storage of numbers and keys for easy accessibility by family.
- ___ Make a list of emails and phone numbers of family, friends, and other people from current and previous stages of your life who should be notified of your death.
- ___ Find and print a list of matters generally needed to be addressed after someone dies. Notate a computer link to the file to render accessibility for family members.
- ___ Record instructions specific to household tasks that will need to be managed immediately after your death.
- ___ Decide which means you prefer for documentation of your end-of-life wishes. Explore digital services for storage of personal data, preferences, and arrangements; if one is chosen, sign up to begin using it. Otherwise, use whatever sort of communication channel you choose, even a simple handwritten document or audio recording.
- ___ Learn about options for bodily disposition (traditional burial, green burial, cremation, alkaline hydrolysis, natural organic reduction, aka human composting, etc.). Consider options for bodily utilization (donation for medical education, scientific research, forensic studies, polymer-modeling education, etc.). Note your choice/s, and contact the relevant organization/s if arrangements must be made ahead of

time. Note how you feel about organ and tissue donations; register as a donor if desired. Also, note whether or not autopsy would be acceptable if circumstances dictated a need for it.

___ Fill out a questionnaire about preferences or choices for funerary arrangements accessible via various channels.

___ Watch informative videos and read about embalming prior to notating whether or not you would want your body embalmed.

___ Identify features important to you in choosing a funeral home. Explore funeral home websites and note preference/s. If arrangements for payment will be or have already been made, indicate location of paperwork and receipts.

___ Explore cemetery and memorial park websites. Note preference/s.

___ Read about alternative funerary approaches, such as family management at home (home funerary care) and natural burials. Note any aspects of them that appeal to you, even if you or your family would be opposed to the physical care of your body. If desired, determine availability of support services and/or sites in your locale.

___ Choose photos to use for obituary notices and commemorative purposes.

___ Record any main points you would like included in an obituary.

___ Explore possible alternative channels for obituary publications.

___ Fill out forms for advance directives dictating preferences for end-of-life care. Choose a healthcare agent (and alternate) to act on your behalf in case circumstances pose a need.

___ Explore hospice options in your community in case of need.

___ Explore websites of providers in your community who offer supplemental services, such as end-of-life support personnel and funerary celebrants. Become familiar with their roles and notate preliminary impressions.

- ___ Use an online resource or contact an attorney to prepare a legal will. Prepare a power-of-attorney document, appointing someone to manage your business and legal affairs if you are unable to do so.
- ___ Compile a “helping hands” list of participatory contributions that would likely be appreciated by family, to be readily accessed following your death when caring folks ask what they can do to help.
- ___ Write an ethical will to convey your viewpoints and wisdom.
- ___ Explore creative alternatives to standard recipients of memorial contributions, with an eye toward focusing on ones that would reflect your personage.
- ___ Establish a POD, payable upon death (Totten Trust) bank account, or TOD, transfer upon death, investment account, naming a beneficiary to assure immediate access to funds upon death.
- ___ Explore possible sites for commemorative affairs.
- ___ Identify elements you consider important for inclusion in funerary observances (religious, cultural, military, personalized, etc.).
- ___ Make a playlist of musical favorites.
- ___ Review bereavement literature and/or services. Identify certain resources for loved ones.
- ___ Beyond biographical data, write details pertaining to your life about which you would like family to know.
- ___ Meet with a financial planning or estate planning advisor to formulate a wrap-up plan.
- ___ If your choice is for reduction of remains, launch online window shopping to discover the vast array of urns and other containment options. Consider distribution or scattering preferences. Alternatively, if burial is planned, peruse traditional as well as novel casket/coffin merchandise. Consider what type of outer burial receptacle you prefer (basic concrete or more costly vault) if such a

purchase is likely to be necessary. Note product preferences and include photos of any merchandise you especially favor.

- ___ If you are opting for reduction of remains, scavenge through websites to discover multitudinous ways they can be incorporated into items or utilized in novel manners. Note any that might be possibilities for you.
- ___ Play with words to formulate possible epitaphs for a headstone or grave marker.
- ___ Look online at pictures of memorial stones. Note your preferences and include photos if any seem especially desirable.
- ___ Write your thoughts and ideas for dissolution of your dwelling, including donation suggestions, family dispersal strategies, and contact information for downsizing and estate-sale businesses.
- ___ Walk through your home, identifying belongings you would like passed on to loved ones as keepsakes. Make a list of them and take pictures, including names of potential recipients. Note any special significance and/or history of items.
- ___ Think about objects that relate to your associations with people in your life. Peruse online businesses that sell mementos. Note any things you might want given to guests at a commemorative event or to certain individuals because of their inherent significance.
- ___ List valuable items you own and assign monetary values. Gather purchase receipts. Take pictures of the items.
- ___ Check protocols for each of your social media accounts. Identify your wishes for memorial oversight or closure. Make a list of the accounts, with instructions for a family member to manage the ones that can be perpetuated after death.
- ___ Write your thoughts pertaining to how you would like to be remembered. What would you like your legacy to be?

___ Make a list of other matters you would like to address that relate to your own distinctive circumstances.

“Protective gear” is readily available. Abundant online resources can be easily accessed for information.

If you need assistance for navigating along avenues toward your goals, messages of inquiry can be sent to...

Signature Sunsets: ponderingleaves@gmail.com.