



How to Look Forward to Death

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

Note to Readers: Here's another offbeat e-update on business communication and current events from Write Company Plus, a corporate training firm located outside Philadelphia. In respect for your busy schedule, writers and editors have arranged seven at-a-glance ideas at the end of this article. Skip directly there if you lack the time to read the entire document.

My guess is that you spent an hour or so last week making resolutions for the New Year. Your self-improvement goals may have included actions like getting fit, learning Spanish, traveling the world, applying for a new job, getting an MBA, watching less television, having a baby, training the dog, reading more books, paying off credit cards. All of them focused on life. Not mine. Mine focused on death.

Throughout adulthood, my resolution every Jan. 1 has been to stop the deafeningly loud march of time. To be truthful, it's not the noise that bothers me. Since most clocks today are digital, it's actually unusual to hear the minutes, hours, and days click by. What makes me cuckoo about changing calendars every Jan. 1 is that I realize I'm getting closer to Death -- a location I have no interest in visiting, much less permanently relocating to. It doesn't hold a candle to this wonderful world. As far as I can determine, the Other Side is devoid of anything even vaguely resembling the Grand Canyon, the Taj Mahal, or the Swiss Alps.

As you probably realize, so far my annual New Year's resolutions to eliminate Death have been a complete bust. So this year I'm taking a different approach. I'm launching a pro-bono marketing campaign giving Death something it desperately needs: an image upgrade. My decision definitely falls into the if-you-can't-beat-them-join-them category.

Considering how long Death has existed, I think it's a disgrace that its advertising executives have never thought to apply the traditional 5 P's of marketing: product, price, place, promotion, and people -- not to mention positioning and psychology. So I'm going to. During the next 12 months, in fact, I hope to make kicking the old bucket the hot new thing -- especially to me. Some ideas that I intend to present to Death's executive committee during an upcoming conference call:

Define the product. What the heck does Death look like anyway? Is it more like a beachfront resort in the Bahamas or a hillside villa in Tuscany? And what goes on in Limbo -- are dead people forced to throw out their backs by doing that stupid under-the-pole dance for all of eternity? Surely, Death's budget is big enough to commission photographs of the best tourist attractions. I dare say that you and I would never buy a house in Telluride, Colo., or a villa in Barcelona, Spain, without first seeing a few air-brushed pictures.

Resolve price issues. Death has suffered for centuries for being free. As a result, it has no value in the eyes of consumers. I suggest setting up a tiered-price structure suitable for different income levels. The cheapest Hell-goers, for instance, will stand around sweating profusely in polyester bathrobes. Their wealthy neighbors will lounge in deck chairs in flame-retardant leisure suits, available in several colors. Heaven will feature a deluxe section for animal lovers, regardless of income. They'll receive accommodations spacious enough to house all the dogs and cats they have ever loved. Flooring will be 100 percent accident-proof.

Improve placement choices. One reason I have zippo inclination to journey to Death is that there are no cheap tickets available on Travelocity or Priceline. In two words, distribution sucks. If



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you input www.death.com into your computer, all you get is a list of links for decidedly somber businesses selling caskets, urns, and cremation. Where are the companies trying to put the FUN back into FUNeral?

Promote the glamour. Alas, many people show up at Death's Door with their butts hanging out the back of wrinkled hospital gowns. Can you imagine getting off a plane for a vacation in Honolulu in a get-up like that? Under my plan, every man and woman will receive a designer outfit suitable for walking the white carpet to Death and, if they wish, answering questions from assembled paparazzi. A makeup artist and hairstylist also will be available for a modest additional fee, cash only of course.

Value different kinds of people. For centuries, Death has gotten away with hiring a homogenous workforce. How on earth am I supposed to be excited about my final trip when I've never seen a single woman depicted in a high-level position? In my opinion, female angels appear to be token window dressing, assigned to low-paid work fluttering around in the background. I suspect people from different ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations share my reservations.

Position for all ages. By primarily targeting the elderly, Death automatically discourages young people from looking forward to the trip. Personally, I've been turned off for decades, ever since I noticed that images of Heaven, in particular, never contained residents who looked as interesting as Bette Midler or Madonna. Surely, there must be a way to include opportunities for youth-oriented activities into the travel package. OK, maybe ice climbing and snowboarding would be difficult in Hell, but you get the idea.

Keep customers psyched. Interactivity is the name of today's marketing game. To keep clients engaged, Death needs to create a system where individuals can decide in advance their preferences on details such as seats, meals, and lodgings. If I go to Heaven, for instance, I'd like a room with a balcony to watch the pretty clouds drifting by the Pearly Gates. I also want vegetarian meals to avoid adding to the carbon emissions created by raising and killing livestock. And, it goes without saying, I intend to be among the first to sign up for what I consider my best marketing idea of all: a frequent dier program!

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