

# Ask The Expert

[Industry leader]

## Constant Innovation is Key

Q&A with Kevin Czachor, vice president and family-member owner, ASD – Answering Service for Directors

**Ask Kevin Czachor, vice president and family-member owner of ASD – Answering Service for Directors, one of the biggest benefits of working with family is that you can put forth new changes and advancements without any unnecessary delays. It’s a sentiment shared by the membership of Selected Independent Funeral Homes, a leading association of independently owned death-care providers. It’s easy to understand, then, why ASD was recently named recipient of Selected Educational Trust’s 2022 Ambassador of the Year Award – Industry Partner Leader. *Patti Martin Bartsche reports***

-Established in 2021, the Ambassador of the Year Awards Program honors individuals for their outstanding contributions to the mission and vision of the Selected Educational Trust, their personal and significant contributions to the independent funeral service profession. Czachor (and ASD), along with 2022 Ambassador of the Year – Funeral Service Professional Charles M. “Chip” Billow, will be recognized during Selected’s 104th Annual Meeting, Sept. 21 to 24 in Washington, D.C. We recently chatted with Czachor about the value of being independent in business and more.



Kevin Czachor

**It’s hard to believe, but ASD is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. What is the secret to the company’s success?**

The two biggest drivers of our success are the people within our organization and our company’s commitment to constant innovation. Without the people that make up who we are, the technology would mean nothing to our funeral directors. Our success as a whole comes largely from the time we

devote to finding the perfect people – we would be nothing without them. It takes someone who is truly a diamond in the rough to willingly step into the darkness of a stranger’s sadness and pain in hopes of bringing in a little light. At ASD, we have made it our company’s mission to find, train and support that special kind of person.

In addition to our incredible staff, the thing that really has been a key ingredient to our success is having an in-house tech team that can build custom solutions for the funeral directors we serve. We are constantly looking for ways to enhance our service. We never sit still. We implement new ideas that sometimes work great and other times we find ourselves going back to the way we used to do things – but we never stop trying to make our service the best it can be. Our job is to think outside of the box for funeral professionals in order to anticipate their needs and determine what technologies would make their lives easier. As a company we allow ourselves to be under constant evolution and invest a lot of time in seeking out new solutions that can enhance the experience of our clients.

**Like the members of Selected Independent Funeral Homes, ASD is a family-owned business. What are the benefits of working with family?**

Blending familial values with business goals fosters an environment of shared collaboration, mutual

respect and innovative thinking. Every family business possesses its own unique rewards and challenges. However, there is a common ground we all walk on together. Leaders at family-owned businesses are more likely to be focused on the company's future over a long period of time rather than emphasizing quarterly sales or other short-term goals. As a result, family-owned companies are less likely to rely on limited-time offers that temporarily boost profits. Instead, family owners tend to value steady growth over years and seek input from their current customers to develop new solutions. They are also more likely to reinvest in the business continually.

### **How has being independently/family-owned benefitted ASD, especially when the pandemic struck?**

One of the biggest benefits of working with family is that you are able to put forth new changes and advancements without any unnecessary delays. Businesses with family leadership have more control over their company's day-to-day operations because they do not need permission from multiple gatekeepers to make business decisions. This greater flexibility can make all the difference in today's age where so many excessive protocols and red tape hinder progress. Having the ability to adapt quickly, especially in the face of a worldwide pandemic, is critically important. It is because of this that we were able to successfully transition to a remote office model almost overnight when COVID hit.

As time went on, ASD took additional steps to fully support our new work-from-home office

model including the development of remote hiring and training solutions as well as many hardware and software upgrades to our system at large. Then in 2021, like many other companies, ASD was faced with a staff shortage. ----In response to this challenge, we made a critical decision to hire and train employees in states outside of our local area. We had to make this decision fairly quickly to avoid our clients experiencing a drop in level of service.

ASD now has a remote southern team with more than 100 call specialists located in South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee or Georgia. This would not have been possible without myself and my siblings working together to brainstorm the best solution for our company. ASD's proactive approach to the unprecedented staffing challenges of last year has opened the door for our company to provide an even higher level of service to our clients, especially to thousands of funeral homes located in the southern United States. We always wanted to establish a southern team and this quick decision allowed us to turn a bad set of circumstances into a positive opportunity for our company.

### **When did ASD begin its partnership with the Selected Trust?**

ASD has been a Preferred Provider of Selected since 2016 and began our partnership with the Selected Trust in 2019.

### **Why has this been an important relationship for ASD?**

I believe it is fundamentally important to encourage more people to enter the funeral profession. Most children don't say

they want to be a mortician when they grow up but that is largely because many young people are not educated about the opportunities that exist within the death-care field. It's no secret that the funeral business does not have a glamorous appeal, but it is absolutely essential to our society. We want to do all we can to help and support those exceptional individuals who choose to take the path less traveled that leads them to pursue a career in mortuary science. With the recent shortages of licensed funeral directors, this has never been more important.

### **Earlier this year, the Selected Educational Trust named you as its 2022 Ambassador of the Year – Industry Partner Leader. Your thoughts on this recognition?**

I feel proud and humbled to receive this recognition. At every Selected event, I come away feeling as though I have had an opportunity to interact with the best of the best in the funeral service profession. There is always a focus on long-term, sustainable growth over generations which I believe is a key factor in helping independent businesses succeed. It is truly remarkable to see firsthand everything Selected has done to promote independent funeral homes and to empower its members.

Like Selected, ASD has a proven track record of representing the best interests of funeral professionals. We were the first answering service to allow directors to listen to their calls and to know what ring each call was answered on. We have consistently promoted fair and transparent business practices. This is big factor, I believe, in why my siblings and I always feel right at home when we attend Selected events. It is

wonderful and highly rewarding to have a seat at that table where we can swap ideas with thought leaders who share our values.

### **What is your definition of a leader?**

A good leader should encourage others and bring out the best in those around them.

### **What are the traits of a good leader?**

Remaining open to feedback and change: A good leader should be willing to listen to suggestions and ideas from others with an open mind.

Commitment to physical health: I firmly believe that good physical health leads to good mental health and improved immunity is so important these days.

Humility: I have never been very big on titles. My siblings and I wear many hats and believe that no detail or job is too small. I don't think a true leader ever puts him or herself up on a

pedestal. You need to be in the weeds to truly measure the success of your business (and I mean that both literally and figuratively because it's not too uncommon a sight to find me outside our building pulling weeds). I have crawled in the mud next to my employees (at our Team ASD Tough Mudder race) and that's probably the best description I can offer for my personal leadership style.

### **You are being honored for your outstanding contribution to the profession and your communities. Why is contributing and giving back so important?**

ASD is very dedicated to supporting educational initiatives through many different charitable organizations because we believe in the power of learning. Education is the leading driver of progress in our world today. Yet, there are so many disparities that prevent people from having access to equal educational

opportunities. Primarily, our focus has been on three main areas we feel especially driven to support: funeral service education, values-based education for young people and grief education for children.

In many communities around our area, many people feel they have no educational options beyond public school for their children. This is why we support the organization BLOCS (Business Leaders Organized for Catholic Schools), which connects the business community and Catholic schools to establish financial assistance for families in need. We have been a proud supporter of this organization for more than 15 years.

Most people don't realize just how many young people today are impacted by grief. This is why ASD is also a longtime supporter of the Eluna Network which provides comprehensive grief education and resources to families experiencing grief or substance abuse. Eluna also offers bereavement programs and camps for kids who have been impacted by a loss or addiction.

### **As a Selected Trust ambassador, you are also being recognized for your commitment to the advancement of the profession. Can you talk a little bit about what you've learned from funeral professionals over the years?**

Most people can pretend they and their loved ones will live forever, not funeral directors. Almost every minute of the day, they are reminded how fragile life can be. Funeral directors have a different mindset than most. They have taught me to plan for an amazing future with everything you do. However, appreciate every moment as much as possible, because it truly could be your last. I really think this mindset is why I like funeral directors so much. •

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