



FUNERAL WOMEN LEAD

The State of Women in Funeral Service

2026 Pulse Survey Report

Findings from 555 women across the funeral and deathcare profession.

About This Report

This State of Women in Funeral Service report exists to share what women in the funeral and deathcare profession told Funeral Women Lead, in their own numbers and often in their own words, so their experience is reflected to the profession as a whole. Our hope is that the insights this report provides will be used to better support, advance and develop the women of funeral and deathcare. Our job was not to speak for the women who responded. It was to listen carefully, organize what we heard, and make sure it reaches the profession that needs to hear it.

From January through June 2026, Funeral Women Lead invited women across every stage of funeral and deathcare, from funeral directors and embalmers to cemeterians, pre-need sales professionals, educators, and owners, to share how they're really doing. The Pulse Survey closed with 555 respondents, spanning career stages from early-career to leadership and generations from Gen Z through Baby Boomers.

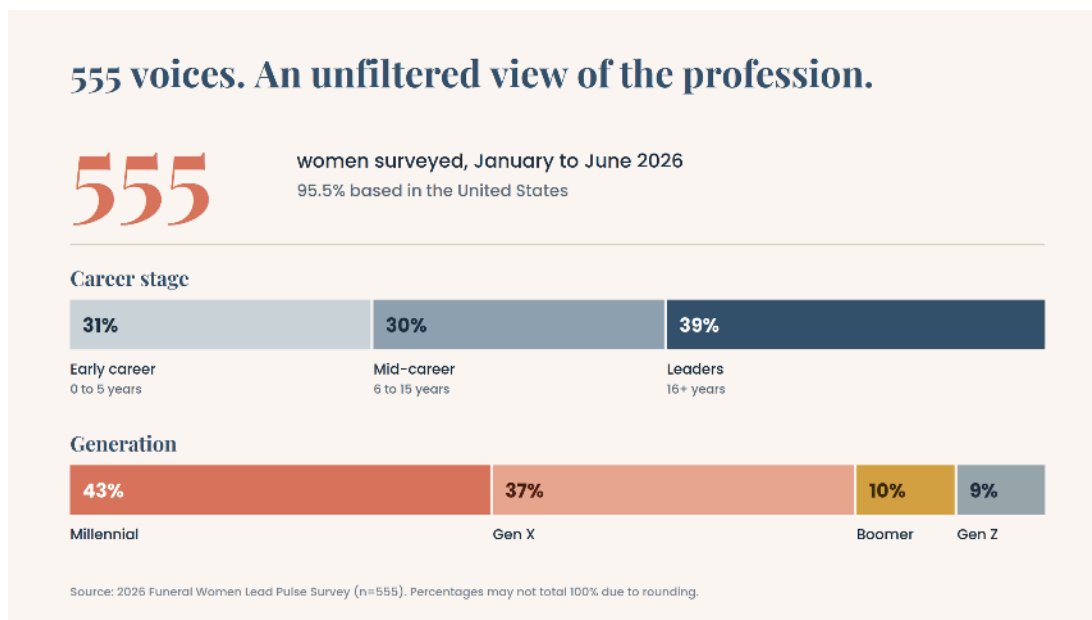
The survey was anonymous, so the numbers and quotes on the following pages reflect the profession in the aggregate, not any single person or firm. This report reflects our careful analysis, discussion and ultimate reflections on the stories the data was telling us.

Our first responsibility with this data is to reflect back what the women who took the time to answer actually told us, faithfully and without softening it. Five themes emerged clearly enough, and consistently enough, across the full data set to organize the story around.

About Funeral Women Lead

Funeral Women Lead Foundation is a 501(c)(3) foundation that believes women are key to the future and sustainability of the funeral and deathcare profession. It pursues its mission to unleash greatness in the women of the funeral and deathcare professions through outreach, coaching and mentoring, a leadership academy, wellness initiatives, and scholarships for professional development. Bringing together leaders, sponsors, researchers, and supporters, Funeral Women Lead champions women as essential architects of next-era leadership in funeral service. To learn more, visit www.funeralwomenlead.org.

Who Responded



Reading and analyzing the findings gives us insight into the women who answered these questions. Five hundred and fifty-five (555) women responded, and the breakdown below reflects the confirmed, closed data set.

How the Survey Was Conducted

The Pulse Survey was open from January through June 30, 2026, roughly six months. It was public and anonymous, no names or emails were collected, and Funeral Women Lead shared it widely and repeatedly over that window through social media, its newsletter, partner organizations, and board members. It closed at midnight Central Time on June 30, 2026 with 555 responses.

By Career Stage

Leadership makes up the single largest group of respondents, but early-career and mid-career women together account for nearly two-thirds of the data set, weighting the survey toward the parts of the pipeline the profession is most focused on developing and retaining.

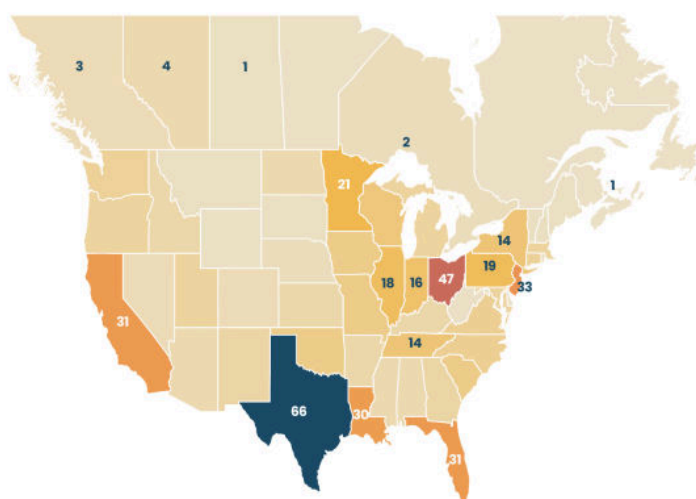
By Generation

Millennials and Gen X together account for roughly four in five responses (241 and 205 respondents), with Gen Z (51) and Baby Boomers (58) each making up a smaller, roughly similar-sized share.

A smaller generational base combined with a steeper mid-survey drop-off means some of Gen Z's question-level numbers in this report carry a wider margin of uncertainty than the other three generations.

Where Pulse Survey Respondents Are Located

U.S. & Canada Respondents by State/Province (n = 542)



Alaska (1) and Hawaii (0) not shown on map.

Outside U.S. & Canada: 13 respondents outside the mapped region

5

United Kingdom

1

Guam

1

Puerto Rico

1

Philippines

5

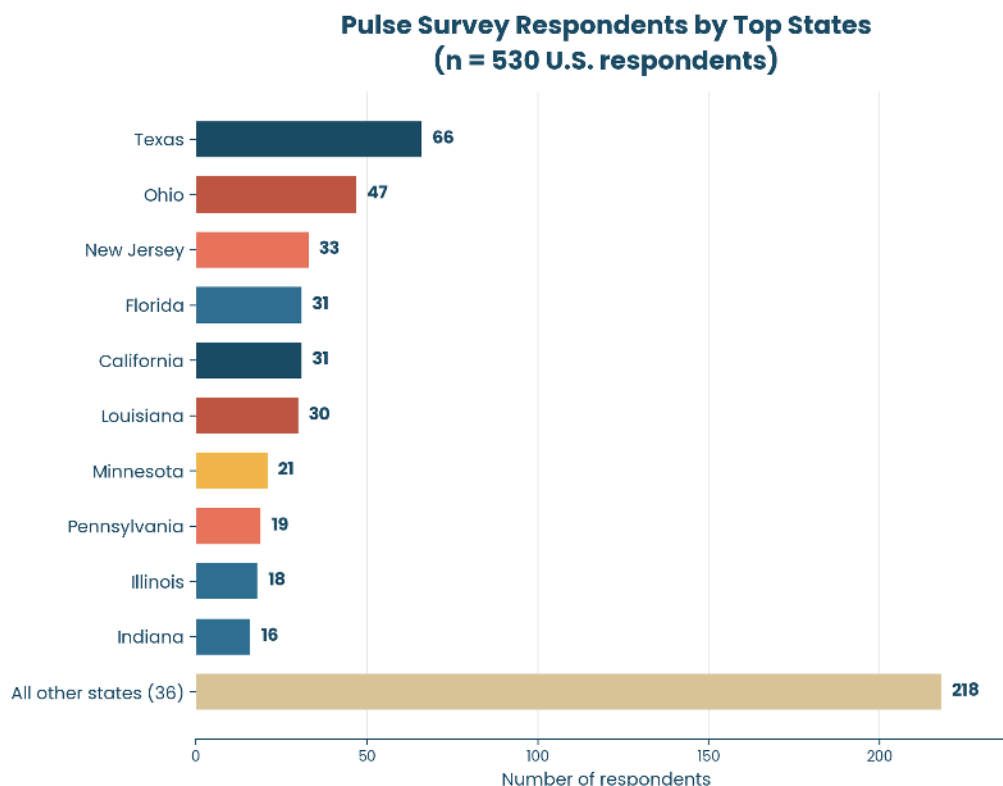
Unspecified / unclear

555 total respondents

530 U.S. + 12 Canada + 13 other



95.5% of respondents are based in the United States, with the remaining 4.5% spread across Canada, the United Kingdom, and a handful of other locations. The Pulse Survey reads overwhelmingly as a U.S. snapshot of the profession, any generational or regional conclusions should be read with that in mind.



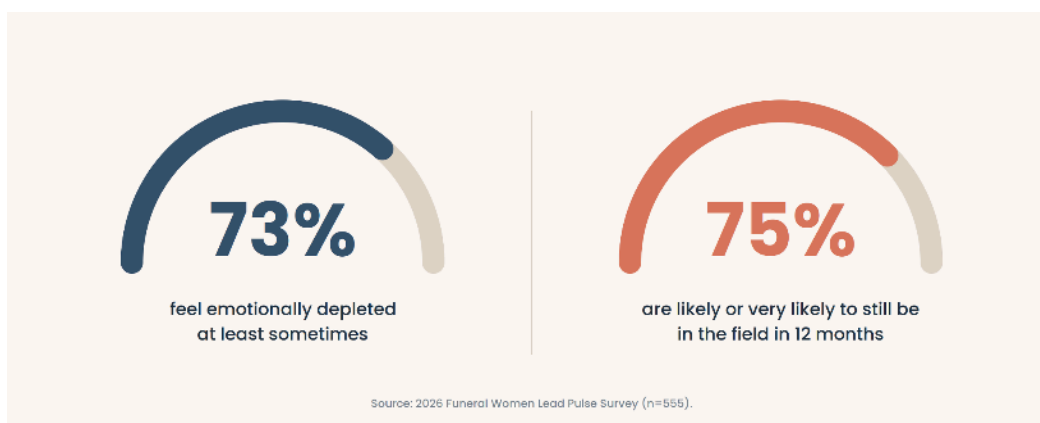
By Role and Title

The survey didn't ask about pay directly, so the team grouped respondents by likely pay level based on their job role and title, comparing roles that typically pay more, such as owners, directors and managers, with roles that typically pay less, such as apprentices, assistants and non-licensed staff. Read through that lens, women in higher-paying positions still reported meaningful stress and burnout, but also felt more fulfilled in their work. Women in lower-paying roles reported feeling less important and less supported. Career stage and generation aren't the only fault lines in this data; the kind of role a woman holds runs through it as well.

Five Emerging Themes

Taken together, five themes emerged. These themes tell one story: women are staying in this profession out of genuine passion, and staying depleted by conditions the profession hasn't yet fixed. It is less a retention crisis than a burnout, sponsorship, and pay crisis.

1. Passion Versus Depletion



73% feel emotionally depleted at least “sometimes,” yet 75% say they're likely or very likely to still be in the field in 12 months.

Women are staying, and staying drained. The love of this work is not in question; the sustainability of doing it is.

"I'm in a new job with a more manageable caseload. I was burned out at my previous job. I just couldn't admit it."

Pulse Survey respondent

2. The Burnout Trio



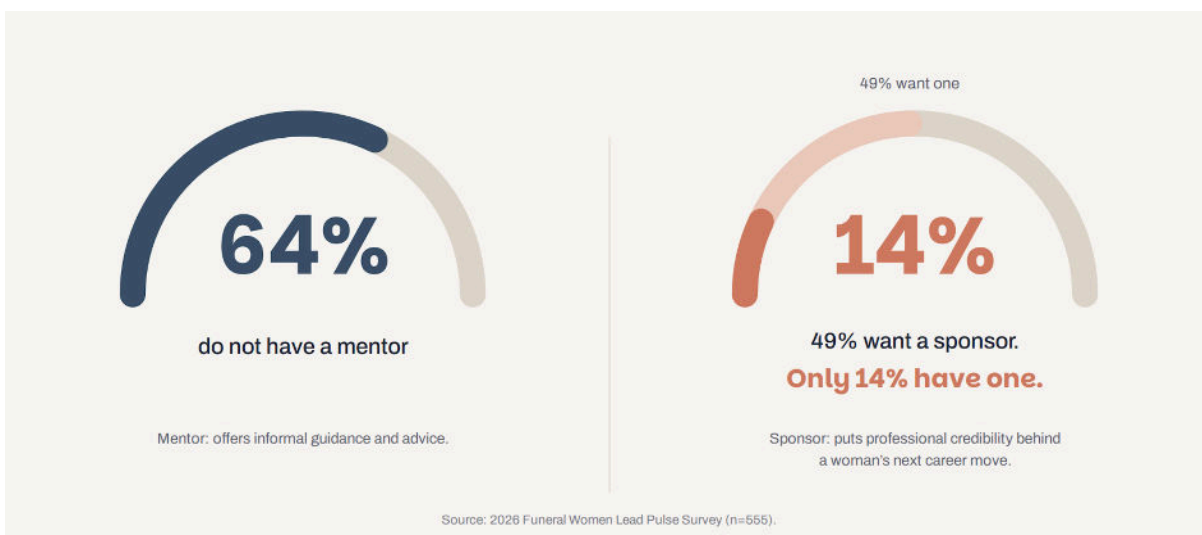
Better pay (36%) and more staffing (30%) top the list of what would most improve sustainability, well ahead of anything schedule-related on its own.

Burnout isn't three separate problems. It's one problem, wearing three faces: compensation, staffing, and schedule.

"I work a second job to supplement my income because \$15 an hour does not meet my bills."

Pulse Survey respondent

3. Some Mentorship Exists. Sponsorship Is Rare.



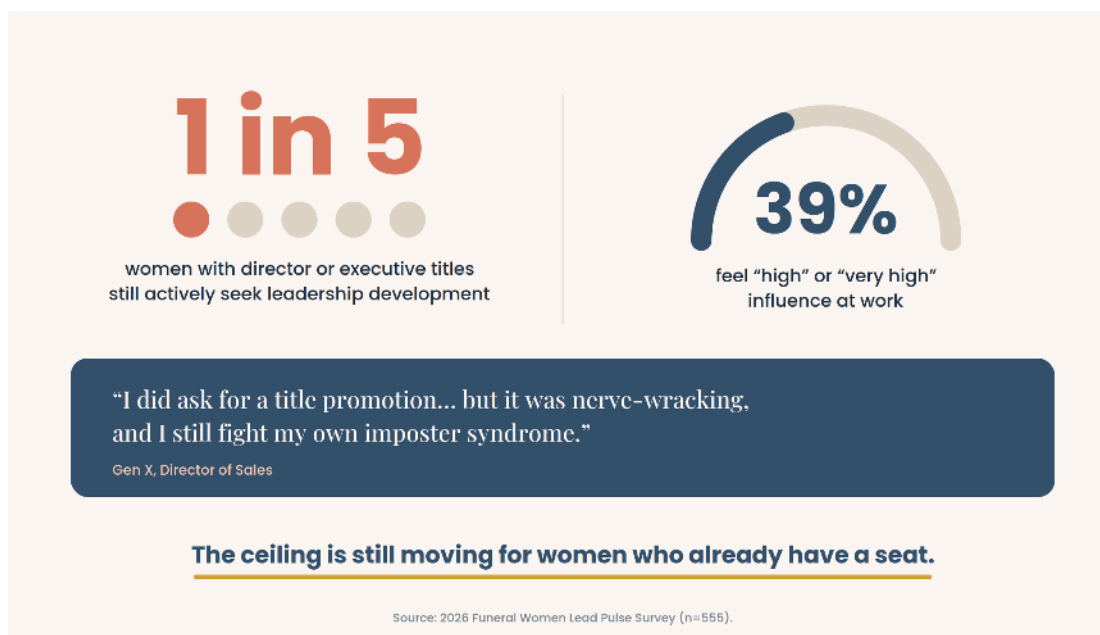
64% do not have a mentor, only 14% have a sponsor or advocate, bringing the total of women without a mentor or sponsor to 77 percent. Almost half of respondents at 49% say they'd want a mentor or sponsor.

The profession has informal guidance, but not the kind of advocacy that actually opens doors. There's a real difference between someone offering advice and someone putting their own credibility behind a mentee's next move.

"I can't see myself doing anything else, but I will never be able to afford a mortgage."

Pulse Survey respondent

4. Voice and Opportunity Aren't Evenly Handed Out



Only 39% feel high or very high influence at work, and stretch opportunities land unevenly by seniority in ways that don't track with experience.

Being good at the job and being seen as someone who should lead aren't the same thing yet.

A closer read of the open-ended answers backs this up. 6.7% of respondents named leadership development specifically as a goal or training need, and 4.4% named management skills or a management role. Tellingly, this ambition doesn't fade with seniority: women already holding director and executive titles were the most likely of any group to name it, at 18.2%, nearly one in five. The ceiling women describe in this data isn't just about getting a seat. It's still moving for the women who already have one.

"I did ask for a title promotion two years ago when I felt I was doing the work to warrant it, and got it, but it was nerve-wracking, and I still fight my own imposter syndrome."

I Gen X respondent, Director of Sales, Leader (16+ years)

5. Same Pressures, Different Fault Lines by Generation

The four themes above don't land the same way for everyone.

- **Gen Z's strain** shows up around mentorship and connection, not passion.
- **Millennials** carry the heaviest burnout and pay squeeze of any group.
- **Gen X and Baby Boomers** are the most stable, but the most vocal about wanting real respect and a voice in decisions.

One set of pressures, four different expressions.



I really thought that family owned, owned by a woman, would mean I would be guided into the director I am meant to be. I don't feel supported or guided, more thrown to the sharks and told at least you can do hair.

Gen Z, early career



No career or personal growth. Too many responsibilities without proper pay or title, workplace drama, superiors who know "it all" but are incapable of completing simple tasks without help. It is hard to survive in a male-dominated industry when the women who are in charge don't want you to win.

Millennial, mid-career



It would be nice to see women more respected in the industry, and shown the same amount of respect that all of the men in this industry get on the daily.

Gen X, mid-career



Gen Z

Lowest sense of voice
(4% high influence);
highest emotional
depletion (40%).

Mentorship and
peer connection.



Millennials

Heaviest burnout
squeeze.

Financial relief
(44% prioritize pay)
and **sponsorship.**



Gen X

Capable but
dismissed.

Real respect and a
voice in decisions.



Baby Boomers

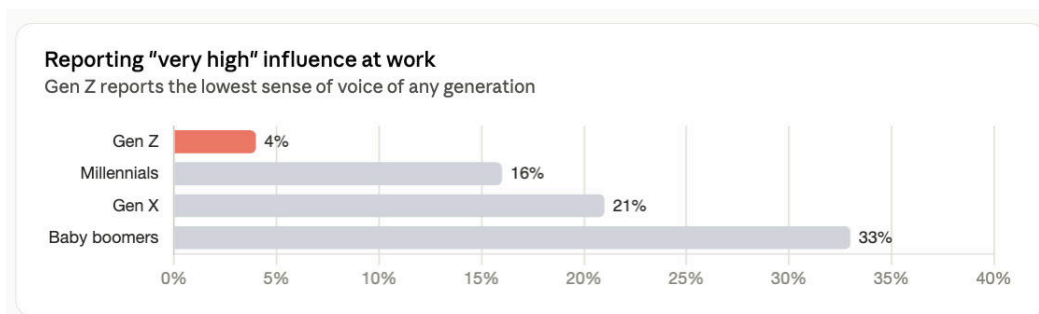
Fewest stretch
opportunities (36%).

A permanent seat
at the table.

Generational Insights

Career stage and generation tell related but distinct stories in this data. Generation shows where the emotional weight lands hardest; career stage shows where the structural squeeze sits. Both lenses are to be carefully considered in how the profession responds.

Gen Z



- **Reports the lowest sense of voice** of any generation: only 4% report "very high" influence at work, compared to 16% of Millennials, 21% of Gen X, and 33% of Baby Boomers.

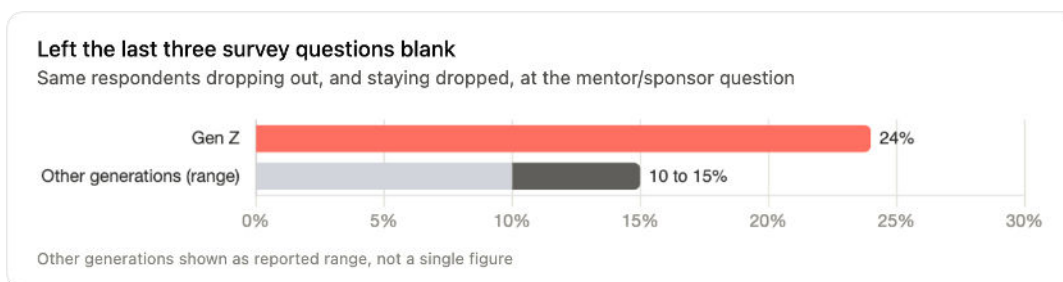
40%

Gen Z report feeling emotionally depleted "often" or "very often," highest of any generation

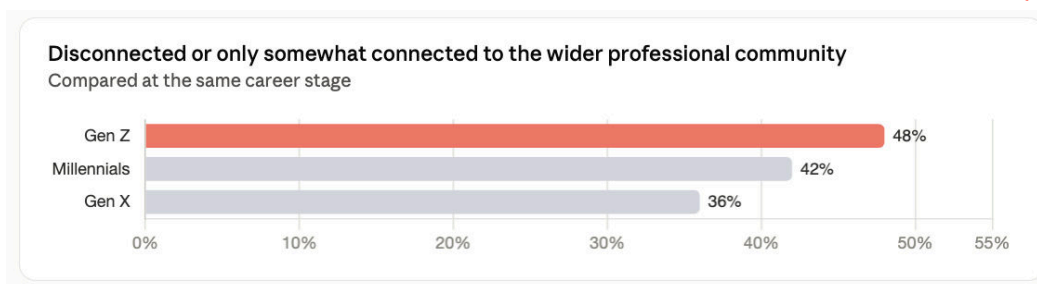
40%

Gen Z are "not confident" or only "slightly confident" they can advance without burning out, highest of any generation

- **Is the most emotionally depleted generation** (40% combined "often" or "very often"), despite presumably having the least tenure to be worn down yet.
- **Has the least confidence in advancing without burnout:** 40% are "not confident" or only "slightly confident" they can advance without burning out, the highest of any generation.



- **Finishes the survey at a much lower rate than everyone else:** 24% leave the last three questions blank, compared with 10 to 15% for other generations, and it's the same respondents dropping out and staying dropped, which points to one specific snag rather than a broader loss of interest. That snag sits at the mentor/sponsor question, suggesting this is about mentorship access, not disengagement.

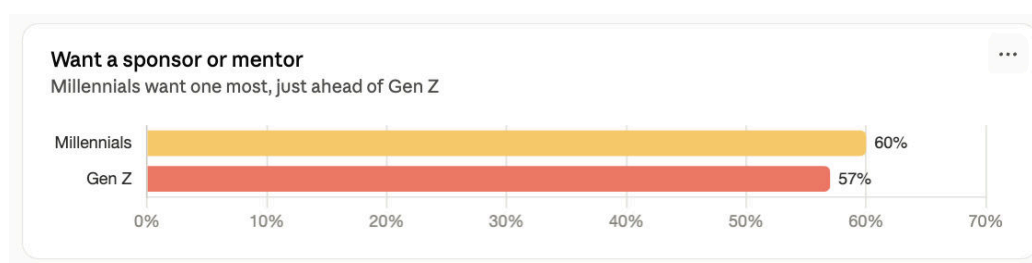


Importantly, this isn't about passion for the field. Gen Z respondents who did finish the survey filled their open-ended answers with "it's my calling" and "I love this work." And even against same-stage peers, Gen Z reports the lowest sense of connection to the wider professional community (48% disconnected or only somewhat connected, versus 42% for Millennials and 36% for Gen X at the same career stage). The throughline for Gen Z isn't lack of passion. It's lack of support and community around the work.

"The hardest part about being a young woman in this industry is that people don't take me seriously. Even when I introduce myself as a funeral director, people will refer to me as "the staff" or "the helper.""

Gen Z respondent

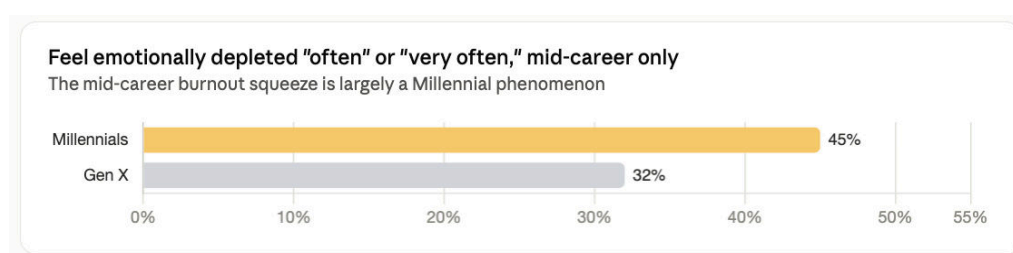
Millennials



- **Most want a sponsor or mentor**, wanting one most at 60%, just ahead of Gen Z at 57%.

44% say money matters most

- **Money matters most to this generation:** "Better pay/benefits" as the top lever for sustainability peaks with Millennials at 44%.



- **Carries the heaviest burnout and pay squeeze of any group:** Within mid-career specifically, Millennials report 45% "often" or "very often" depleted, versus 32% for Gen X at the same stage.

- The mid-career burnout squeeze found across the full data set turns out to be largely a Millennial phenomenon.

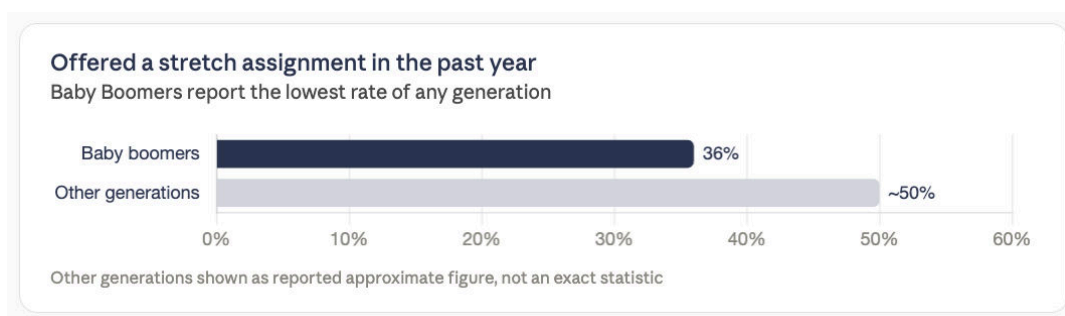
Language from Gen X and Millennial respondents carried the sharpest tone in the open-ended comments: the clearest language about being dismissed, disrespected, or unheard came from these two generations, not Gen Z.

"If you are not a man in the facility I work at, you are undervalued."

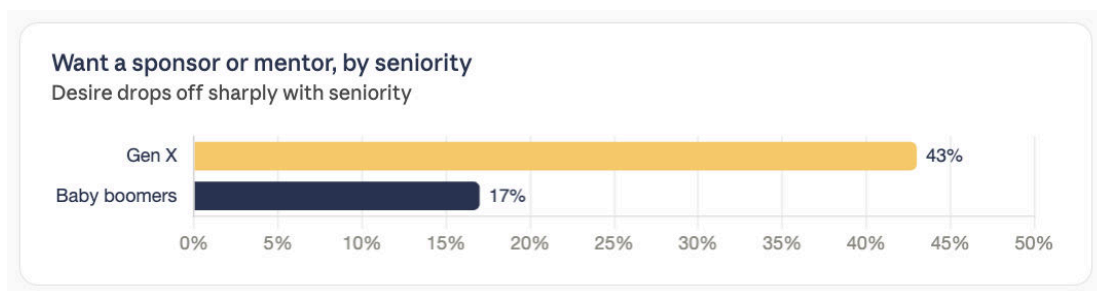
Millennial respondent

Gen X and Baby Boomers

- **Are the most stable group** across almost every measure in this survey.



- **Get the fewest stretch opportunities of any generation:** Baby Boomers report the lowest rate of being offered a stretch assignment in the past year (36%, versus roughly 50% for every other generation), likely reflecting that many are already in leadership roles where a “stretch opportunity” may not apply.



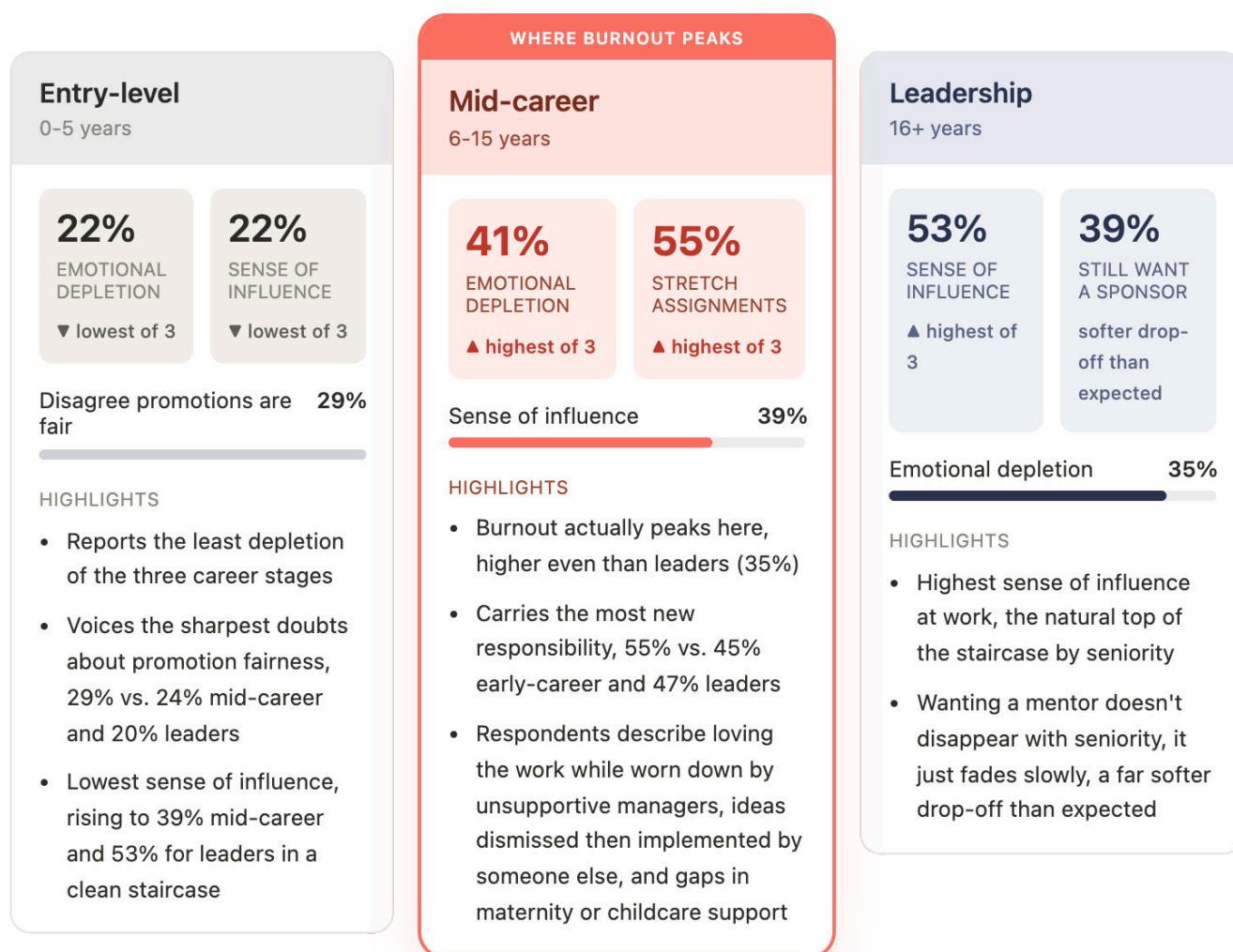
- **By seniority,** their desire for a sponsor or mentor drops off sharply (Gen X at 43%, Baby Boomers at just 17%), and “better pay/benefits” drops off hard for Baby Boomers (16%), who instead cite “other” reasons at a notably higher rate (22%) than any other group.

What both generations want most, and say loudest, is real respect and a voice in decisions.

"The ability to be heard is more important than a solution to the current landscape in deathcare leadership."

Career Stage Insights

Career stage is arguably the more actionable lens in this data: it points to where the profession should focus first in the employee lifecycle.



Entry-Level (0-5 years)

- **Reports the least depletion of the three career stages:** 22% report being emotionally depleted “often” or “very often”, the lowest of the three career stages.
- **Voices the sharpest doubts about promotion fairness:** 29% disagree or strongly disagree that promotions are decided fairly, compared with 24% mid-career and 20% for leaders. It's the newest

people forming their first impression of the system, not the veterans voicing the sharpest skepticism about it.

- **Reports the lowest sense of influence at work:** 22%, the lowest of the three stages, rising to 39% mid-career and 53% for leaders in a clean, expected staircase.

Mid-Career (6–15 years)

- **Is where burnout actually peaks, not entry-level or leadership:** 41% report being emotionally depleted “often” or “very often”, higher even than leaders (35%). This is the classic middle-manager squeeze: people who've proven themselves enough to be handed more, but haven't yet reached the authority or support that comes with real seniority.
- **Also carries the most new responsibility:** 55% report a stretch assignment in the past year, versus 45% for early career and 47% for leaders, meaning the middle of the pipeline is carrying the most new responsibility right as its depletion numbers peak.

Several mid-career respondents described loving the work while being worn down by unsupportive managers, watching their ideas dismissed only to see them implemented later by someone else, usually a man, and juggling the job against gaps in maternity benefits or childcare support.

Leadership (16+ years)

- **Wanting a mentor doesn't disappear with seniority, it just fades slowly:** 39% would still want a sponsor or advocate, a far softer drop-off than expected. Mentorship programming shouldn't be pitched as an early-career-only offering.
- **Reports the highest sense of influence, as expected:** 53% report high or very high influence at work, the natural top of the staircase by seniority.

Gen Z's Depletion Is About Generation, Not Just Tenure

One question this data helps answer: is Gen Z's experience about being new to the profession, or about being younger than other respondent groups? The evidence points to generation. Among early-career respondents only, controlling for career stage, Gen Z reports 34% “often” or “very often” depleted, compared with 21% for Millennials and just 15% for Gen X *at that same stage*. A Gen X person in year two of the profession is far less likely to feel worn down than a Gen Z person in year two.

The survey completion pattern confirms it. All three career stages show nearly identical completion curves through the survey, even though early-career respondents skew younger. Millennial and Gen X respondents at the exact same career stage both complete the survey at 95%. Same starting point in the profession, very different willingness to finish. Something about entering the field right now, for this generation, is harder, and it isn't about tenure.

Retention numbers echo this: only 48% of Gen Z early-career respondents say they're “very likely” to still be in the field in 12 months, versus 64% of Millennials and 51% of Gen X at the same career stage. Millennials starting out are notably more bullish about staying than either of the other two groups. That

raw figure should be read alongside the completion-adjusted retention view in the Analysis section, which corrects for Gen Z's higher non-response rate on this specific question.

Analysis

Beyond the themes and the generational and career-stage patterns above, a few things stood out about how women engaged with this survey itself, and what that engagement says on its own.

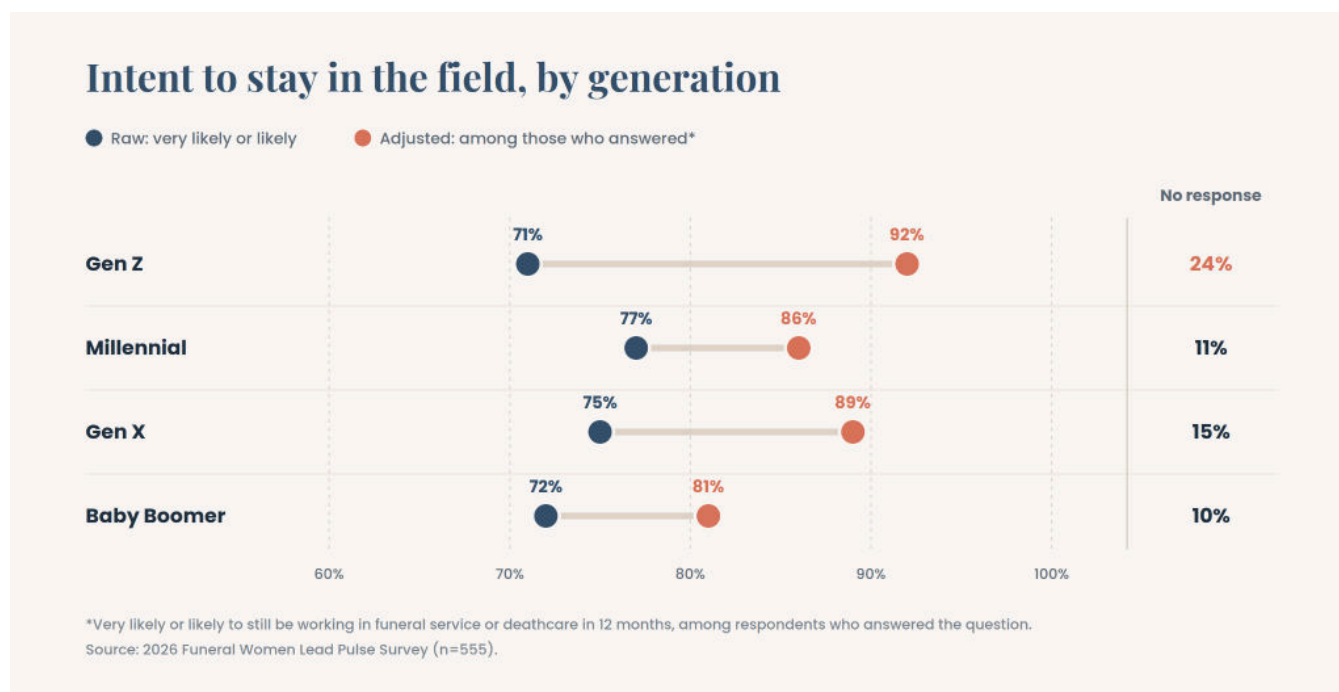
Respondents Wanted to Talk

479 of 555 respondents, 86 percent, left at least one open-ended answer.

That's a notably high response rate for a survey this length. Paired with the tone of what they wrote, mostly candid, specific, and often generous with detail, it argues against a tired or checked-out respondent base. The women who took this survey had things to say, and they said them.

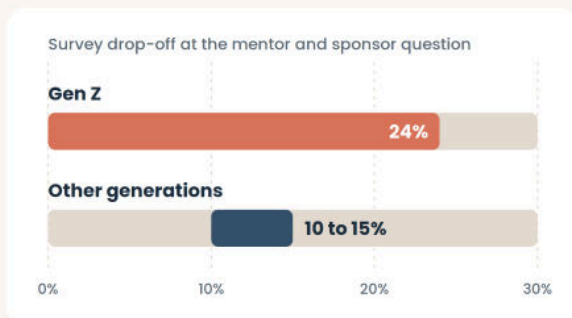
Retention Looks Different Once You Adjust for Who Answered

Gen Z left the 12-month retention question blank at more than double the rate of every other generation (24%, versus 10 to 15% elsewhere), which is enough missing data to distort a raw comparison. Correcting for that, by looking only at respondents who actually answered, changes the story.



*Very likely or likely to still be working in funeral/deathcare in 12 months, among respondents who answered the question.

The data anomaly



Gen Z dropped off the survey at a 24% rate at the mentor and sponsor question, compared with 10 to 15% for other generations.

The reality check

92%

of Gen Z respondents who answered the retention question plan to stay in the field

**Their commitment to the field is strong.
Their patience with unsupportive systems is thin.**

“Even when I introduce myself as a funeral director, people will refer to me as ‘the staff’ or ‘the helper.’”

Pulse Survey respondent

Source: 2026 Funeral Women Lead Pulse Survey (n=555).
Gen Z retention figure reflects respondents who answered the retention question.

Once non-response is corrected for, Gen Z has the highest intent to stay of any generation, not the lowest. The earlier concern about Gen Z and retention was never really about women signaling they want to leave; it's about a much larger share of Gen Z not answering the question, or the survey, at all. That distinction matters for how the profession reads Gen Z's relationship to the work: the open question isn't “do they want to stay,” it's “why aren't more of them finishing the conversation.”

Ownership Is a Held Wish, More Than an Active Plan

51 respondents already own a business. Another 58, about 1 in 10, signaled they want a path to ownership: 48 checked it as the change that would most improve their sustainability, and 10 more wrote about it in their own words. Only a handful describe concrete steps, such as “I'm planning on taking some ownership within the next year” or “My family owns the funeral home and I plan to take ownership within the next 10 years.” For most, ownership reads as a quiet aspiration, not yet a plan with steps attached. The interest skews Millennial (33) and Gen X (19).

Set the current owners aside and the remaining ratio is nearly four to one: for every respondent describing active steps toward ownership, roughly four checked the box and stopped there. Ownership reads as a quiet aspiration for a lot of women in this field, not yet a plan with steps attached. The signal also skews heavily Millennial and Gen X (49 and 29 of the 89 respondents); Gen Z and Baby Boomer respondents made up a much smaller share (5 and 6), which fits the broader pattern that Millennials in particular are the generation actively trying to climb, not just stay.

The respondents taking active steps toward ownership offered these perspectives:

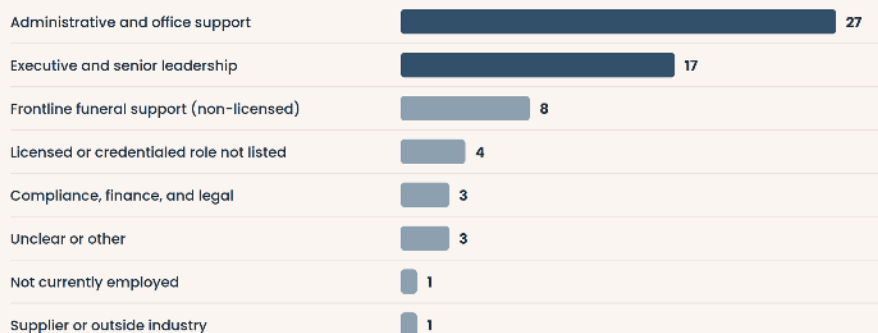
Job Title	What they wrote
Funeral Director	<i>"I'm planning on taking some ownership within the next year"</i>
Licensed Funeral Director & Embalmer	Training wanted in "...ownership, succession planning...."
Funeral Director/Embalmer	<i>"I would like to perhaps get my business degree and maybe operate my own one day."</i>
Location Manager	Training needed: <i>"Funeral Law and owner responsibilities"</i>
Funeral Director and Co-Owner	Training needed: <i>"Ownership only training"</i>
Director	<i>"My family owns the funeral home and I plan to take ownership within the next 10 years"</i>
Director of Sales and Strategic Development	<i>"It's a passion project that keeps me rooted and moving forward with a goal of ownership."</i>

A Blind Spot in the Survey Itself

The job-role question had no write-in field, so the 64 respondents who selected "Other" were re-sorted using their separate Job Title answer as a proxy. The picture is more varied than a single miscategorized group, but two clusters stand out.

Who selected “Other” for job role

64 respondents, grouped by the role they wrote in



Source: 2025 Funeral Women Lead Pulse Survey (n=555). Counts reflect respondents who selected “Other” and described their role.

Administrative and office support and executive or senior leadership together account for two-thirds of the “Other” responses, and neither was an option on the standard checkbox list. That means a meaningful slice of the profession, over a tenth of all respondents, had nowhere accurate to click. There's a small irony here: the instrument meant to capture where women sit in this profession ran into the same categorization gap that shows up in their career paths more broadly, no clean lane for admin-to-leadership tracks or non-owner executives. We will address this in our next survey.

Summary

555 women told Funeral Women Lead exactly how they're doing this year. They described passion and depletion living in the same sentence, mentorship that exists without the sponsorship that actually moves careers, and pressures that land differently depending on their generation, their career stage, and their paycheck. One respondent, a mid-career professor in the field, put it more plainly than any statistic in this report could:

"Our voices as women are getting louder, yet we are still moving quietly through the industry."

Pulse Survey respondent, Millennial, mid-career

That's the feeling this report is built to work against. The themes, the generational and career-stage breakdowns, and the analysis above are Funeral Women Lead's attempt to turn 555 individual answers into something the whole profession can thoughtfully consider and apply. We made every effort to present them in the words and with the numbers these women actually gave us, not an overly polished or sanitized version of them.

The Wider Landscape

None of this is happening in a vacuum. The broader labor market is naming many of the same pressures this survey surfaced, at a slightly different scale.

- **Gallup's 2026 State of the Global Workplace report** found that only 20% of employees worldwide were engaged in 2025, the lowest level since 2020, and estimates that low engagement cost the global economy roughly \$10 trillion in lost productivity. Manager engagement saw its steepest year-over-year drop on record, falling from 27% to 22%, and leaders report more stress, anger, sadness, and loneliness on a given day than the people they manage, a trend which echoes this survey's mid-career squeeze. [1]
- **SHRM's 2026 State of the Workplace report**, drawn from more than 1,800 HR professionals and 2,000 workers, names burnout a shared crisis that workers, HR professionals, and executives all agree needs addressing. 72% of HR professionals say workers now hold higher expectations of their employers, and 72% of workers say their organizations could still be doing more. Organizations that meet employee needs well enjoy roughly double the job satisfaction of those that don't, 91% versus 44%, which tracks with the gap this survey found between women who feel fulfilled despite the strain and those who feel unsupported on top of it. [2]

Funeral service isn't uniquely broken. It's living inside the same engagement and burnout reckoning the rest of the working world is naming right now, compounded by a profession that runs on call, carries grief every day, and has a documented history of paying its women less to do it.

Sources

[1] Gallup. "State of the Global Workplace 2026." [gallup.com/workplace/349484](https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484).

[2] SHRM. "2026 State of the Workplace: Insights to Shape the Future of Work." shrm.org/topics-tools/research/state-of-the-workplace-summary-and-report.

What Funeral Women Lead Is Already Doing

Several respondents named Funeral Women Lead directly in their answers, unprompted, as part of what's already helping. That's not a coincidence: some of what this data points to, Funeral Women Lead is already building toward.

- **The Women's Leadership Academy** is an 18-month leadership development program built to close the exact gap this survey found between mentorship, which is present, and sponsorship, which is scarce. It pairs women with the kind of advocacy that moves careers forward, not just advice.
- **Community Membership** was launched in fall 2026 to give every woman in this profession, regardless of career stage or income, a low-cost way into the peer connection Gen Z respondents said they're missing most.
- **The Unleashed Leadership & Wellness Summit** puts burnout, resilience, and pay conversations on the same stage as leadership development on Sept. 28 to 30, 2026, rather than treating them as separate problems. This is an ongoing, annual event.
- **Partnerships** with associations and organizations are being pursued to help build resilience and prepare women as they enter the workforce and work in it, not after they've burned out by it. We plan to work with a wide variety of professional organizations to effect change in the areas of concern. From educational programs, scholarships, advocacy programs, webinars and joining with others who wish to partner to enhance job opportunities for women in the profession today.

- **This report is part of the answer too:** an annual, public accounting of what's actually happening for women in this profession as reported by women in this profession is itself part of how that changes. Funeral Women Lead is the first organization built entirely around changing the trajectory for women in funeral service, with year-round programming behind it.

"After attending PWC in May, I am so thankful for the community Funeral Women Lead is establishing. I am so happy to be a part of such a vibrant group of women that have pulled me out of the depths of burnout and reminded me of my passion and my purpose, while also reminding me I'm not alone."

Pulse Survey respondent, Millennial, mid-career

The women who answered this survey are not a problem for the profession to solve on their behalf. They are already doing the work: showing up, staying, building community with each other, and telling the truth about what they need. This report exists so the rest of the profession can't say it didn't know.

© 2026 Funeral Women Lead. All rights reserved. This report presents aggregate, anonymous data from the 2026 Pulse Survey. Brief excerpts and figures may be cited or quoted for external publications, media, or presentations, provided full attribution is given to Funeral Women Lead. For more information or media inquiries about this report, please contact taylor@funeralwomenlead.org or visit www.funeralwomenlead.org.