

HOWARD D. CATCHINGS

'Little time' agent goes big time with burial policy

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Although he is a 17-year member of the Million Dollar Round Table, and eight time Top of the Table honoree, Howard D. Catchings does not consider himself a "big time" agent. He calls himself a "little time" agent.

He calls himself a "little time agent" because he reached the top selling small policies, also known as burial insurance policies.

"My experience has been that saying 'life insurance' turns off some people. They will tell me that they have enough life insurance, even if it's only \$5,000," Catchings told the 2003 MDRT Annual meeting. "But they comprehend perfectly when I tell them that burial insurance is for the funeral home and life insurance is for the family—even though both are really classified as life insurance."

Burial policies — also known as final expense, last expense, emergency fund or funeral insurance — cover the cost of a funeral, which Catchings said has escalated to more \$6,000 in the last few years. "It's now too expensive to live, too expensive to get sick and too expensive to die," he said.

Catchings sells a lot of burial insurance policies through payroll deduction to employees of school districts, state agencies and other organizations with 25 or more employees. he contacts them through personal visitation and letters.

He maintains his plan is "excellent" for smaller-income employees or blue-collar workers, since many of them do not have checking accounts.

"I am referring to people who are forgotten or neglected by many insurance salespeople— bus drivers, janitors, cooks, cafeteria workers, and so forth. Of course, I sell to certified employees, too, such as teachers, administrators, counselors, and so forth."

Approximately 85 percent of his clients are blue-collar workers.

Whatever their collar, their faith in him has enabled him to make it to the Top of the Table, in part because he treats the burial policy sale as a door opener.

"Once you get in the door with something that is appealing, you have the opportunity of selling larger policies. And, I am happy to sell big policies any time that I can. But suppose you sell a \$100,000 life policy, and I sell ten \$10,000 policies. If yours cancels, you have lost the whole thing. But if one of mine cancels, I still have \$90,000 left," he told the audience.

Catchings recalled once going to a home where he sold the wife a \$50,000 policy and the husband, a \$50,000 policy. "When I started to leave, I asked them if they had a burial plan. They said, 'No, but we've been thinking about that.' So I went back in and sold a burial policy, too. Selling the small policies seems to be my niche in the insurance industry," he said.

Catchings has served on various National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors committees and currently serves on the advisory council of Standard & Poor's.

The Catchings Insurance Agency was named Mississippi's 1989 Minority Firm of the Year by the Small Business Administration, and that same group named Catchings Mississippi's 1992 Minority Advocate of the Year.

His agency has sold more than 15,000 policies in the past 15 months at \$2.00 per week. Eighty-eight percent have been through payroll deduction, with 12 percent through bank draft. The agency's persistency is over 90 percent. Five of his agents who work in the payroll deduction market are members of the MDRT and have been for the past five years. □