

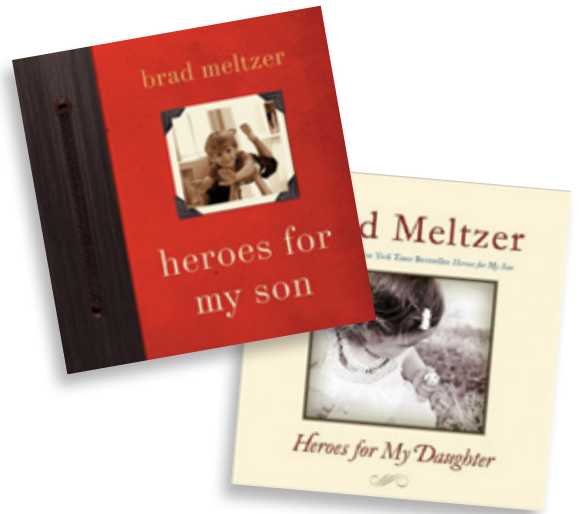


**“Separate what you do for yourself from what you do for others.
What you do for other people, that’s your legacy.”**

What's Your Legacy?

Bestselling author **Brad Meltzer** says we live on by helping and serving other people

Keynote sponsored by



Longing to live forever? Brad Meltzer can tell you how. The bestselling writer and host of the History Channel's "Brad Meltzer's Decoded" series shared his recipe for eternal life plus his thoughts on what makes a hero during a far-ranging and fast-paced keynote address at the State Education Convention.

"What we're going to talk about today is heroes because I'm talking to a room full of heroes. You are all heroes," Meltzer began.

But before discussing heroes, he took a lengthy digression to examine end of life issues, starting with his own obituary. After writing his parents' obituaries, he began to wonder what his would look like and hired a newspaper reporter to put one together. The writer was called away on assignment before he could finish so the piece ended with the words: "He was a ..."

The answer to that question, Meltzer said, will reveal something we don't always think about but should — our legacy.

"Separate what you do for yourself from what you do for others," he added. "What you do for other people, that's your legacy."

Punctuating his comments with funny stories about life as a famous author of political thrillers, Meltzer defined four types of legacies: your impact on your family, on friends

and acquaintances, on community and on complete strangers. He shared his legacy from his parents, their love, support and trust. Then there was his legacy from a beloved ninth grade English teacher, who recognized his gift for writing and worked hard to foster it.

After the release of his first best seller, *The Tenth Justice*, he went to visit her and thanked her for contributing to his success. Overwhelmed, she began to cry and told him she was about to retire, discouraged because she thought she was not making an impact on her students. She taught for 13 more years and he went to her retirement party.

"Sometimes we have no concept of what our legacy is, no idea of what we left behind," Meltzer said.

He used the example of Jumbo's, a soul-food restaurant in Miami, to illustrate the concept of a community legacy. The restaurant was the first in Miami to integrate and hire African American employees. Because of this, it was left untouched during devastating race riots years later. It is still open today and is recognized as a landmark of the civil rights movement.

When he talked about legacies left for complete strangers, he told the story of Frank Shankwitz, a police officer whose act of kindness for a dying boy helped lead to the creation of the Make-A-Wish

Foundation. Meltzer reminded his audience that their work in public education meant they were leaving their own legacies every day without realizing it.

"All of you are helping people and you will never know who they are," he said.

As part of his own legacy to his son and daughter, Meltzer has been working on a series of books about real-life heroes. The first two, *Heroes for My Son* and *Heroes for My Daughter*, grew out of a desire to counter a mass media culture that idolizes badly behaved pop stars and athletes and money-mad celebrities. He researched and retold the stories of ordinary people who accomplished great things through hard work and perseverance. The first two in a new series of children's books that tells the stories of some of these heroes as children were just released.

"I believe ordinary people can change the world. That is my core belief," he said.

He encouraged his audience to do their part to change the world, starting with two small steps: find someone who has helped them and thank them and find a way to help just one other person.

"Go say 'thank you' and go help one person and you won't just live a good life, you will live forever." ■