



323 Buttonwood Lane
Tallahassee, Fl. 32317
Telephone: (850) 219-0800
Fax: (888) 565-5805
www.piercecfo.com

Proactive Management

By Bob Pierce

I have been out of funeral service for three years and I came back to a completely changed world. I am not sure that the world has changed, however, as much as my perspective has changed.

My transformation came in a way that indicates that I was looking for a change. I read something by Mel Payne of Carriage Services. It said, to the effect, that Carriage looks to other service industries for its operations managers.

The message here is not that the funeral industry lacks talent. The message here is that a funeral business is just that, a business. It is a service business not unlike a hotel or spa. And, it has the same issues and opportunities of other service businesses.

The funeral world has changed around us. Consumer attitudes are changing. Consumer expectations may render the traditional funeral model obsolete in coming generations.

The economic model of the funeral home is also changing. You don't believe me? Do a financial model of your business with the same trends to lower revenue funerals that you are experiencing today. Many of us will not be in business into the next generation.

Ok, I have lost one half of my audience. I was not going to influence them anyway. The rest of you, please stay with me.

The answer lies in recognizing that funeral homes are businesses and that they will respond to sound business management as well as any other business. We can make a difference by simply applying sound business management techniques.

Funeral home owners have to recognize our changing environment and build their businesses to be successful either because of the changes or in spite of the changes. If we could look twenty years into the future, we would find fewer funeral homes. The ones that had recognized and built their businesses to take advantage of the changes will be stronger than ever. The others will be gone.

Uh Oh! I just lost another half of my audience. But, I will be happy if my message gets across to one entrepreneur. I believe that the person who stays with me will still be with us in 2030.

So, what does the executive entrepreneur who faces the challenges that we now face do? The answer will sound too simple. Apply sound business management techniques to his or her funeral home. Let's explore the practical.

First, dig yourself out of the administrative quagmire. The executive entrepreneur cannot be effective working in a tar pit. This sounds simpler than it really is.

Then spend the time that you have built for yourself to build a vision for your funeral home that will make it successful taking the changing world into account. Make your business a benefactor of the changes that are happening. Don't fear them. Use them to your advantage. Think outside of the box.

I will give you a clue. To be effective in our changing environment, the business has to gain market share to replace the revenue that is lost as our traditional funerals decline.

Once the vision is clear the executive moves to the next step, implementation. He or she must establish clear and measurable objectives for his or her team and motivate his or her employees to carry the banner. One will not succeed if the banner is not carried by the whole organization.

Then measure, recognize and reward the accomplishments of your team and its individual members.

That is still not enough. One must test the business plan to be sure that it is still viable. One must know that the plan still responds effectively to the evolving expectations of the consumer. One must continue to think outside of the box. Test paradigms every day. Change your plan or its implementation as circumstances warrant. Communicate with your team and your families. Incorporate their needs and ideas into the vision. Allow your strategies to evolve as the situation changes.

Don't get me wrong. The ways of the past are still important. Rotary is, and probably always will be, an important part of a funeral home. Community outreach is important, very important. But the answer no longer is in the ways of the past. The Executive who is stuck in the past will become part of it.

Give me the courage to change things that I can and the perseverance to change things that I cannot.