

The Southerner

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN CEMETERY CREMATION & FUNERAL ASSOCIATION | FALL 2021



Spencer Hines
SCCFA President

Presidents Message

Dear SCCFA members and friends,

We are coming off one of the most successful SCCFA conventions in the history of the association because of you! The Southern was honored to have had Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in attendance with us. We were very appreciative to have 53 vendors attend this year's convention and help make it a dynamic event.

It's important to us to always remember WHY the Southern was started and how it continues to add value to all of our lives. Our mission: A not-for-profit regional trade association whose mission is to meet the needs of its members through service and education focused on industry issues and legislation in the region, to promote ethical practices, and to provide leadership in the memorialization industry. Like you, I've developed friendships through the association along with sharing best practices as it relates to our ever-evolving profession. The association has been and always will be about the people!

We are in the process of selecting and announcing a destination for 2022 convention! Our goal is to carry the positive momentum we have into the back half of 2021 and into 2022. We are grateful for your dedication, passion, knowledge, and willingness to continue to invest in the association to make it the best it's ever been. This wouldn't be possible without you. Looking forward to seeing you soon!

Life's short - be Southern

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Why ACTIVE Association Membership is So Important!

By Cindy Foree, Director of Operations for Park Lawn Corp. – Nashville Market,
Executive Director for the Cemetery Association of Tennessee, and Treasurer for the SCCFA

Many state, regional, and national industry associations can boast about having a strong membership. They are usually talking about their strength in numbers. But the strongest form of membership is Active Membership.

Paying dues is the first step to supporting your association. Membership dues help to support legislative monitoring, lobbying, educational opportunities for you and your staff, annual conventions and meetings, technical assistance for new or struggling cemeteries, networking opportunities and more. Without your membership dues your association cannot survive. What is more important is being an Active Member. Here are some things you can do to stay active:

- Read available newsletters or magazines and share this with your staff. They are often filled with stories, articles, and announcements to keep you informed of new ideas and happenings, and usually cover every aspect of your business. Volunteer to write articles to share thoughts and ideas with others in the industry.
- Plan for and attend annual conventions and periodic sales schools. Nowhere else can you find so much information related to the success of your business, delivered to you by some of the smartest minds in the industry and from outside the industry as well. You will also see many vendors to our industry who bring their new products, new concepts and new ways for you to make money and serve families better. See what things are out there on the cutting edge which you can incorporate into your own business.
- Monitor and support legislative efforts. Any strong industry association is always on the lookout for ways to pass new legislation which will benefit the industry, while protecting the consumers. They are also monitoring any legislation which could prove to be a detriment to your business. Stay informed about what bills they are working to pass and what bills they are fighting. Understand why and make your own calls to your local legislators to help educate them about how they should vote when bills come before their committees and to the house and senate floor. Become the expert on the cemetery industry and let legislators know who you are. They will likely call on you when a bill crosses their desk to ask for your input. What a great way to help your industry and your own business.
- Support the vendors who support your association. Many times, vendors contribute to your association in several ways, which help keep your dues at a reasonable amount. These

vendors pay dues to the associations, they pay registration fees to exhibit at annual conventions, and many go even further and sponsor events at sales schools and conventions to help offset the costs, and in many cases help the associations profit from the event.

- Call on your association office when you have questions. If they do not know the answer, they will usually know where to send you to find it. They can be a very valuable resource, whether you are new to the business, or just coming across a new problem. Chances are someone in your association has already run into the same issue and they can help you.
- Volunteer to serve on the board of directors. Associations do not run themselves. It takes a group of dedicated individuals to work for the membership in areas such as monitoring legislation, planning conventions, increasing membership, monitoring finances, and more. Even if you do not know how you can contribute, odds are there is a group of like-minded managers and owners already serving on these boards, who can mentor new board and committee members as you work together for the greater good of the association. I have seen several new board members volunteer, who had no clue how they could help. They all have one thing in common though, the desire for the betterment of their personal business, their profession and the families they serve.
- Share all the association has to offer with others in your area or state. Help grow your association by bringing new members in. Sponsor new members.

The strongest associations are not necessarily the ones with the most members; they are the ones with the most Active Members. Support your association and your association will support you. For more information on how you can get involved in your state or regional association, feel free to give me a call or better yet just reach out to your association director or a board member.

My office is in Nashville, Tennessee. I have been in the business since 1992, and have served in management in the cemetery and funeral industry, as cemetery trust officer, association executive director, and as association board member and past president during my 29 year career. You can reach me by email at cindy.foree@afamilylegacy.com or call me at (615) 714-9605. I am always happy to help a fellow cemeterian.



Customer Service

By: David Sharp - SCCFA Board Member

In all the years that I have been working and with all the industries I have served, having a strong core value of customer service is always a winner. Some may ask, what is the core value? My core value is treating individuals like they are not a stranger. This may be partly because of the hospitality industry where I worked. However, sometimes I have to realize that things are not always rainbows and unicorns. Mistakes happen, whether made by me or my made by my team. When mistakes happen, all you can do is swallow your pride to correct a wrong. We are all humans. We are prone to mistakes, weaknesses, and mental breakdowns. However, when we are addressing the customer, these should be far from visible. I used to work for a company many years ago providing services for at-risk youth. The program was designed to help clients with many issues they faced in life and learn coping skills to be successful. One day, while having issues with the clients, my supervisor pulled me aside and said "David, you can predict the weather". Being young and bullheaded at the time, the phrase went over my head. After thinking about what he said, it dawned on me. My attitude was hindering my success. My attitude and mental state were being pressed on the minds of my clients. Thus, they were reacting to my reactions. Since then, I have always found an outlet to release my issues before I met with customers or staff. Our problems should never be the problems of the ones who we are helping.

Some may also say, that customer service is strictly limited to the office, taking phone calls, or even addressing problems. That isn't always the case. Every person in the company should be a customer care/service representative. In this industry, "going the extra mile", holds so much more water than doing the basics. The difference between having good customer service and great customer service comes down to want. What do you want your end goal to look like? If you are just going through the motions and minimal is fine then stay in the basic mentality. However, I believe that most want to be the best, having a desire to achieve that status, one would need to go the "extra mile". Every person on your team needs to believe in the same principles and have the same goals associated with customer care. During the onboarding process, those expectations need to be reviewed and consistently improved. The difference between good and exceptional customer care is how we treat people. It is always my personal goal to treat the families and customers with the same level of respect each time they come. This core value is expected by all members of persons employed with our company. The reality is, people will always find a reason to complain or show some distaste. The more proactive we are and the better we handle the issues, the less we are to have a negative review or a negative outcome. When customers leave the facility, they should have the satisfaction of being treated by the best, with the best service and care.



Asking Questions to Spur Cremation Sales

By: Dyanne Miller SCCFA Board Member



Cremation has taken quite a slice out of the traditional burial revenue for cemeteries and, I am sure for funeral homes. I can only speak from the cemetery's perspective, however.

I have a favorite statement/question to ask a family when they announce, usually rather smugly, that they have chosen cremation and they won't be needing any burial spaces. I say, "That's great! Now that you have decided on cremation has anyone ever taken the time to explain to you all of your options?" I got that question from Julie Burn and it has turned many a nay-sayer into a believer of having a final resting place. There is something about saying that, "it's great" that throws people off track. I think they expect an argument! But then following up with the question of, "has anyone ever taken the time to explain all of your options to you?" that piques people's curiosity. Many people still think their only options are to scatter or to keep an urn at home. So, having the chance to go into detail with the myriad of possibilities is of great value to my families that I serve and to me.

Some people are concerned about cost, but many are not. Most cemeteries now have columbaria, but there are so many other options, too! We have added fountain posts, butterflies, a scattering garden, columbaria with different themes such as religious, seasonal, and family, an urn garden, cremation benches and cremation rocks.

I usually try to tell a few stories about the importance of a final resting place. One of my favorites is about my Aunt Nancy. She was sitting at home watching TV, in front of the fire on a Saturday night. She felt kind of cozy—with my Grandma Mary, my cousin, Jimmy and my Uncle Johnny all in their urns on the fireplace mantle. And then suddenly it dawned on her!! Who would want four urns when she died? She didn't want to burden my cousin Nan with four urns! And Nan certainly did not want that responsibility—what would she do with them? Attic? Garage? Closet? Nan didn't want them on display—she even felt kind of weird seeing them at her mom's house. And her young children didn't really like to see them either—they thought they were spooky. Then she remembered our conversations about the importance of a final resting place, even if you are cremated—and, she bought burial spaces the very next day. Now all 4 of my relatives are together in the cemetery where all of us can visit and honor the memories of our loved ones. My cousins are relieved that they can spend quiet time with their family members without explaining why to anyone. And they love the memorial marker that records their birth and death dates permanently, along with their names and religious beliefs for generations to come.

Find your story of importance for final resting places, or feel free to use mine...it makes a difference!

Hilton Head 2021 Summer Convention



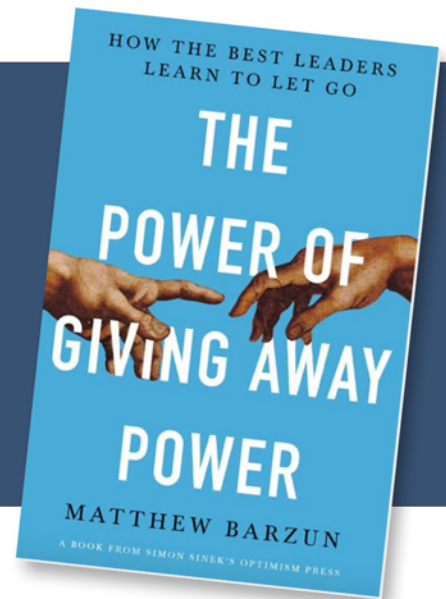
Hilton Head 2021 Summer Convention





Are You a Constellation Leader?

By Michael Higgs,
Cave Hill Cemetery & Cave Hill Heritage Foundation , Louisville, KY



The basic tendency of human nature is wrapped around the tenants of societal roles. Every community, i.e. neighborhood, church, club, group of friends, often without the explicit labels of such, is split between the roles of leaders and followers, each crammed with a myriad of interpretations. Most commonly, the two are identified as the "person in charge" and "the people doing the work."

Our free-market economy identifies commonly with this pattern, as do most of our companies today. The pyramidal leadership style is easily defined by the appointment of a "leader" that sets the strategic direction and implements a pattern of power with very little to no room for variance in interpretation. This style of leadership has led to the accomplishment of many things that we enjoy today. It is the most easily understood and observed within society and in "top-down" organizations.

When these roles begin to merge and things become a little unfamiliar from what is normal, our internal bias is challenged. A holistic approach to leadership, recognizing the power of the whole rather than the power of one, is commonly referred to as the constellation leadership style. If done properly, what we once perceived as success can easily be redefined as our myopic tendencies are lessened and our ears listen to what is going on around us. Matthew Barzun, in his new book, *The Power of Giving Away Power*, carefully lays out the tenants of this leadership style that has the potential to unlock greatness and an unprecedented level of growth.

One of the most uniform times that people are encouraged to be a leader is during a commencement speech. Most of us have listened to business and community leaders promote similar messages that are meant to propel us into immediate action using our internal fortitude and the degree bearing our name. This charge is often wrapped around common themes, as Barzun identified, that are pyramidal in scope (p. 188):

- Change the world
- Listen to your inner voice
- Work hard
- Don't give up
- Embrace failure

When you begin to examine these messages carefully, it is very easy to see yourself as the master "agent of change." We are taught to believe that our singular tone and newly forged identity have the power to make a difference, and someone, perhaps everyone, should listen to our voice and follow suit. What is lacking here is creative prowess and a charismatic spirit that compels others.

Constellation leadership theory was introduced formally through the work of Mary Parker Follett. As an ardent scholar that studied the leadership style of political leaders and groups, she built a framework around the central tenant that, "all our work in life is interdependent." (Barzun, p.59) This is a

quick reality check to the commencement speech advice that seems centered on self rather than reliant on others.

The realization of interdependence is central to what Follett described as the one true good that should ever come from our efforts- integration.

"Integration...only happens when all member of a group make a new thing together. This new thing is truly yours as an individual and truly the product of the group. You are in it. It is of you. And your individuality is not diminished as a result. It is enhanced. This outcome is not a melting pot. It is not a salad. It is a Constellation."

Barzun, p. 61

With integration at the helm, there are a range of new possibilities. What we defined as success earlier can be largely shaken because our myopic tendencies are not as deafening. As funeral service professionals, we often cite reasons for our chosen career path that are centered upon the need to help others. The realization of selfless service is what drives many of us, and Follett provides three expectations that should be at the forefront of our actions if we intend to be constellation leaders (Barzun, p.71):

Expect to need others
Expect to be needed
Expect to be changed

Reinterpreting the common commencement advice, but from the constellation leadership perspective, you will find sound leadership principles that truly can make a difference in you, your company, and its community presence (p. 190).

- ~~Change the world~~—Change your mindset
- ~~Listen to your inner voice~~—Share your inner voice
- ~~Work hard~~—Work through hard things together
- ~~Don't give up~~—Give up power (to make more)
- ~~Embrace failure~~—Embrace uncertainty

Most succinctly, the constellation style of leadership involves active listening, interpretation, a widening of perspective, and an intentional need for relationships. When we realize the absolute value of people and are willing to move beyond societal definitions, then we are able to take the leap of becoming a constellation leader. Are you ready?

Matthew Barzun's book, *The Power of Giving Away Power*, is readily available in most major bookstore and on-line.



By: Jodie Dupree – SCCFA Board Member

A lot has been said about 2020 and the world wide pandemic called covid-19. For those of us in the funeral and cemetery business it has been an unprecedented time but also a time that has fostered more change and innovation in our industry than we have seen in a generation. Funeral directors and cemetery folks are by nature a fairly traditional lot, very much focused on doing things the way we have done them seemingly forever because we assume that is what people want. At a time of uncertainty, like during the death of a loved one, we all tend to cling to things that make us feel more certain and tradition is often one of those things. The danger in that lies in the fact that if we are not looking for new and better ways of doing things then progress may pass us by. The former chairman of GE, Jack Welch, said that "all businesses change. You either, change on the front end and set the course for the future and profit from the change or you resist and change on the back end out of necessity and at a point when the only profit is merely survival." In other words, the truly successful businesses and people, "Change before you have to." Those unwilling to change or determined that the old ways of doing things are perfectly fine will find themselves on the losing end of life. We have all heard that drastic times call for drastic measures but the reality is that most change, good or bad, happens little by little. Some changes in profitability happen so gradually that we make excuses or write it off as just the way things are these days. But remember what Ernest Hemingway said in his book, "The Sun Also Rises." "...bankruptcy happens gradually and then suddenly." Those people and businesses determined to resist change and hold on to their same old business model suffered more than most during the pandemic and many did not survive financially. Those businesses that did sustain and survive did so because they changed. Restaurants found creative ways to put tables outside during the pandemic in order to seat more people safely and now that the danger of the corona virus has lessened they are, in many places, keeping the outside seating because they found that people liked it. Funeral homes that never had a Facebook page suddenly got one so they could broadcast Facebook live funerals and now that is a standard course of business. Change is everywhere.

Most funeral homes have the capacity to offer catered events now when 20 years ago it was rare and most of those same funeral homes had signs that said, "No food or drink allowed." Cemeteries are offering many of those same things either because they decided to try it or were forced to when their competition started doing it. Getting staff to embrace change starts with the leader embracing it and letting folks understand the "why" behind any new initiative. Simply operating under the old "because I said so" method might still work with your kids but not with employees that you want to truly motivate to be their best. Sometimes a cemetery or funeral business is not positioned to change when necessary because the owner has not invested in equipment, computers, buildings or staff that is needed when change needs to occur. Those that wanted to broadcast live funerals found that they had not kept up with the latest innovations in computers or something as simple as not having upgraded their bandwidth with their internet provider. So these are the steps to take now related to change.

1. Figure out where you are relative to your competitors. Are you the one changing on the front end or are you changing on the back end out of necessity?
2. Identify the areas where you can improve and where you must improve.
3. Start changing some things immediately even if they are small changes. Remember that small changes now are better than big changes later.
4. Be flexible and adapt.
5. Involve your employees and co-workers. Unless you are a one person business you will need others to buy into what you are trying to do. Give them the "why".

Very few people like to change because there is a measure of comfort in consistency. Never change for change sake but find areas where improvements can grow your business or grow you as a person. President Kennedy said, "Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past and present are certain to miss the future."



Community Outreach with Hospice

By: Lauren Blevins – SCCFA Past President

Working with hospice can cause a funeral home to pause. Figuring out how to say the right thing or how not to apply pressure. First things first, your intentions need to be correct. We are not trying to solicit calls. Let them know that. Be transparent. It will alleviate all of the pressure you may feel and put the hospice staff or facility at ease. That is precisely what we did.

As one of my mentors told me, "I'm not asking anyone to recommend me. I'm just making sure that they know more about my firm than anyone else." He quoted that in a seminar to a room full of hospice workers. At first, I was a little shocked. After the initial shock, I realized that it is just transparent and truthful, and they appreciated him for his honesty. We have lived by transparency, and it works.

However, being transparent is not enough. You have to engage with the different hospice workers and facilities. We engage in multiple ways, but the three that we find work most often are: adopt a family or hospice worker, luncheons, and tours.


Adopting a hospice worker is a program that derived out of our adopt a family program. The basics of it are each member of your staff is paired up (to the best of your staffing availability) with a hospice worker at one facility. Over the time that you designate, usually several months, you take that one-to-one ratio, and you tell your team to, as we say in the south, "Love on 'em." Whether that means breakfasts, lunches, or small kind, thoughtful acts, they get to know them. The idea here is they know you better than anyone else. After months with one hospice facility, you choose another and another and so on in rotation. This process will hopefully acquaint you and your staff with all the caregivers in your area.

The luncheon aspect is widely used with seminars. We adapt this seminar to hospice-specific topics and invite an entire facility. Note, only invite one hospice at a time. They are like funeral homes; people typically do not care to sit amidst their competitors.

The seminars we present can be at odd times since they have early staff meetings; we accommodate their schedule by doing breakfast at 7:00 AM, opposed to a luncheon. The topics most often discussed are "What's the Difference" and "Why Pre-Plan." Lastly, we do tours like I am sure most facilities do. However, for hospice facilities, we do a specific tour entitled "What happens after the removal." We also try to ensure that anyone new from any hospice goes through it. We will take them anytime they hire someone. This tour is based on items that you do not usually show the general public. It goes through what we use to do the removal, the cooler we use, the tagging system, and we introduce them to the gentlemen we send on removals and our removal team. That is vital. The people who do your removals are imperative. We have had recommendations based on the sole fact of our removal team. They know them, they like them, and they know what it is like to work with them. Our removal staff does a stellar job. You should know what happens on your removals! After you show them what happens in the back, you walk them through what the family will go through, showing them where the arrangement will occur. Knowing what happens to a family that a caregiver is caring for is calming to them. They will answer questions that a family asks based on what you show them. They will be able to tell their families, "well, I'm not sure how they do it other places, but at Williams Funeral Home, this is how they do it." That is what you want.

Make sure they know more about you than anyone else.

This is what we have found are the fundamentals of building a good hospice relationship with various hospices in our community. There are so many other ways to do this that we continue to explore, but implementing anything and being consistent with your program ensures results. Being willing to be the go-to resource for any questions they may have, along with being extremely transparent, will help not only families in your community but the caregivers you seek to educate.



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