



THE ON-RAMP TO A PLAN:  
*And Maybe Even A Plan B*

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a·cu·men

ə'kyoomən, 'akyəmən

Noun

*keenness and depth of perception  
discernment, or discrimination,  
especially in practical matters*

from Merriam-Webster

## INTRO

At numerous levels, owning a funeral home is an enormous responsibility. Those of us who have done so know firsthand the joys and the challenges – and the risks and rewards – of all that goes into that.

Some find their way into ownership through family channels; some, like I did, bought the business from their employer. Others have started their business from the ground up.

Whatever the circumstances that result in ownership, it's probably safe to say that most owners put far more thought and preparation into buying their funeral home than they have ever put into any degree of planning or preparation to transition out of ownership one day.

## WORKING IN THE BUSINESS OR ON THE BUSINESS?

Out of necessity, owners need to continually educate ourselves about countless business-related matters. Rules and regulations abound in OSHA, Pre-Need, and the FTC. Cremation headwinds are getting stronger. Website and social media content is a newer wrinkle that takes time and expertise. And there will always be price shoppers, Continuing Education hours, hiring staff, training staff, retaining staff...we know it all too well. Oh, and we also go on death calls in the middle of the night, meet with families on the worst day of their lives, work evening visitations, and coordinate and conduct meaningful funeral events.

Ours is a calling, an oft exhausting labor of love that we're only too willing to expend day after day after day... because we've answered the calling. And our communities depend on us.

For many owners, though, the daily demands of our role require so much time and energy and resources that we are often reduced, despite our very best intentions otherwise, to working IN the business far more than we can work ON the business. As a result, for most of us, little to no margin remains to even begin contemplating what transitioning out of ownership might even look like one day.

## CIRCUMSTANCES CAN CHANGE

At the age of 40, I finally realized my long-time professional dream of buying a funeral home. THE Plan (there was no other) was to work hard, serve my community well and pay it off before retiring somewhere around age 60. The glide slope would, according to my plan, begin at about age 55.

Eleven years into ownership, though, cancer abruptly derailed my otherwise intentional plans. Facing very challenging physical circumstances and plenty of uncertainty, I realized quickly enough that although I had a Plan... I had no Plan B.

Even if you have a plan started or in place, it's essential to recognize that circumstances can – and often do – change.

## BE GOOD AT WHAT YOU DO

Abraham Lincoln is known to have said, "Whatever you are, be a good one."

Most funeral directors I know are really good funeral directors – and that's really good for funeral service and for those we're honored to serve. But most of the *owners* I know don't have extensive – if any – experience in selling funeral homes.

As funeral directors, we intentionally educate our communities about things they may not know about funeral and cremation options. Our Business Development team is likewise intentional in educating owners about things they may not know about the process of transitioning out of their business someday.

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD PLAN?

The reality is that every owner will transition out of ownership. Someday. Some will be fortunate enough to do so on their own terms, while others, like me, will have their plans upended by circumstances we never even imagined. Others, for any number of reasons, will become their own client before they make any transition plans.

The need for some degree of good planning is self-evident. And we believe that good planning is built upon the solid foundation of good information – and good information is where we can help.

## EXPERIENCE + KNOWLEDGE = INVALUABLE RESOURCE

Like you, we value highly the integrity and the future of funeral service. Actively involved in acquisitions since the 1960's, SCI has decidedly more experience in funeral home and cemetery transitions than anyone. Since 2010 alone, and not including Stewart locations, we have acquired over 400 locations in the U.S. and Canada.

Not unlike the transitions you're helping people work through every day, ownership transitions are a process – not an event. We know what this process entails. And we know how to help owners through it – and prepare for it.

## PLAN. REVIEW. REPEAT.

You're good at what you do; you wouldn't be where you are if you weren't. So keep on doing that and take good care of the families you're called upon to serve. You are the standard bearer for our profession.

But even as you advise others to consider their own planning on a daily basis, it just might be worthwhile to take pause for a few minutes someday soon and think about the plans you'd be wise to make. Or review. Or update.

Or just plain start.

Because we all know that everyone benefits from having a Plan. And some of us know firsthand that good to even a Plan B.



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David Deuth, CFSP, has been a licensed funeral director for over 27 years. A funeral home owner for nearly a dozen of those years, he brought his firm into the SCI family in 2017.

Dave later joined our Business Development team in 2018. He can be reached directly by email at [David.Deuth@sci-us.com](mailto:David.Deuth@sci-us.com) or by phone at 563.293.6920. All communications strictly confidential.

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