

# Memorial Business Journal

THE WEEKLY RESOURCE FOR PROGRESSIVE FUNERAL DIRECTORS, CEMETERIANS AND CREMATIONISTS

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## The Quest To Be Top Of Mind

WACO, TEXAS – Keeping your business top of mind with today's consumers is much more complicated than even a decade ago, with all the clutter thrown at readers now by regular mail, email, pop-up ads, remarketing and so on. But it is certainly still a worthwhile quest since once your brand has found that place in a consumer's mind where it can live rent free, you know that your message has risen above the clutter.

For Texas funeral director Brent Shehorn, the road to standing out from the competitors led him to create The Cremation Network, which will bring partnered funeral homes the familiarity and convenience to stay a step ahead of competitors. "It's top-of-mind awareness and enhancing your brand," he said. "This is what wins more calls, and it's the thought behind The Cremation Network."

Since 2008, Shehorn, a licensed funeral director and embalmer since 1991, has owned, along with



his wife, Carri, Lake Shore Funeral Home & Crematory in Waco.

The concept behind The Cremation Network is simple. It uses funeral the industry-specific vanity phone numbers 1-800-CREMA TE and 1-800-FUNERAL to get inside the collective heads of consumers. The plan is to roll out a nationwide network connecting members with exclusive rights to use and advertise a toll-free 800 number within a specific market's area code.

"We all know how to bring calm to folks when they are in dire need, but we must stand out from the competition to those in need of our professional services," said Shehorn. "We must get remembered by someone who is under great emotional strain."

For a membership fee, a funeral home can join the network and be given the 800 vanity phone number in their area code that will ring directly to the

funeral home's main number. For an area code in New York City, say 212, all calls made within that area code to 800-CREMATE or 800-FUNERAL will be automatically routed to the firm's existing phone number. The Cremation Network allows members the option to obtain multiple area codes. Membership also provides the exclusive right to the vanity number or numbers in their area.

According to Shehorn, members can form a network with a unique marketing strategy – an easy-to-remember 800 phone number exclusive to a funeral home by area code that can be used in a firm's regular marketing and advertising. "Ending your messaging with 'Call 1-800-CREMATE' is easy enough to remember," said Shehorn. "When someone calls 1-800-CREMATE from inside your area code, they will be routed directly to your business phone."

He launched The Cremation Network in December and has quickly compiled a growing list of members, with several prospects awaiting membership.

The idea came to him, of all places, in a parking lot about four years ago. "We were repaving our parking lot and all the paving company's vehicles and heavy equipment had a toll-free vanity number [for the pavement industry]."

Shehorn found this very intriguing and spoke with the contractor, who told him that he rents the vanity number. "It actually has turned his business around," he said. Shehorn likens the effectiveness of the vanity number to 1-800-Flowers, which consumers no doubt easily recognize. It's this same top-of-mind awareness Shehorn believes can happen with The Cremation Network.

He acknowledges that the vanity number idea is not a new one, and there was even a flirtation with the idea in funeral service in the 1980s and 90s, before cremation became "the animal that cannot be tamed," Shehorn said.

But things have also changed technologically since then. One of the most attractive features about The Cremation Network is the tracking metrics on the calls Shehorn receives. "The technology has advanced and is giving more data than ever before," he

said. "The data from your phone calls is important in a service-oriented industry such as ours."

In real time, the member receives an email immediately when a call is received. It provides the origination of call and whether it's from a landline or cellphone.

"The software can integrate with your website and offer a unique number to each visitor to the site; then you track the caller and the page they called you from," Shehorn said. It also notes who ended the call first, which is a very important piece of information for staff training. Web traffic is also being addressed. Multiple options are available and can be discussed on an individual basis with your website vendor.

Some of these features are included in the membership, while others, which are more detailed, are extra. "Each member's needs are unique," Shehorn said. "Therefore, if you have interest in learning more, we can set up a live demonstration with the phone programmer and also discuss any specific needs the firm may have.

"We have established the concept of a nationwide network of connecting members with exclusive rights to use in all advertisements a toll-free 800 number within a specified market and area code," he said. According to Shehorn, consumers have a 77% better recall rate for a vanity phone number than a numeric number.

To the general public, the easy-to-remember number will allow The Cremation Network member to stand out even more in a competitive market. "So easy to remember – it should indeed be the first phone call made by the client," Shehorn said. The number can be incorporated into a firm's existing advertising (whether it's TV, radio, print, outdoor, online, Google or social media), website or other marketing channels.

The Cremation Network also allows members to connect with each other. "[The] Network forum allows members access to a private platform [where they] can provide and receive marketing support and tips and share ideas within the membership. [There

is also] eligibility for buying discounts through a growing number of vendors that are part of The Cremation Network. After all, we are all in this together.”

Shehorn said the benefits of the program are clear, offering what he called “one of the best tools to ‘get remembered’ in the mind of the consumer.”

After a firm expresses interest in joining The Cremation Network, its funeral and cremation professionals are prescreened and prequalified. “We verify they are licensed in their respective states, carry

mortuary liability insurance and, most importantly, meet our network’s standards,” emphasized Shehorn. “Even though our group is in its infancy, we have denied membership to some because they did not meet our vetting standards. Client families can be assured that they are reaching a reputable funeral or cremation provider. After all, trust and credibility are two of the most important factors when choosing a funeral or cremation provider.”

To learn more, visit [thecremationnetwork.com](http://thecremationnetwork.com).

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## Top Challenges Managers Face and How to Deal With Them

By William E. Ford

*SESCO Management Consultants*

**BRISTOL, TENNESSEE** – If you’ve been in a management position, you understand that it’s the most difficult position in the organization. Although management may have its perks, managers are normally the ones who have the most responsibility, are under the most stress, work the longest hours and are responsible for the organization’s success and bottom line.

Being a manager also means you must deal with the most difficult issues. Following are the top eight issues managers face on a daily basis.

### **1. Confronting an employee performance problem**

Dealing with performance problems will always be the major source of a manager’s stress. SES- CO recommends: clearly articulating, in writing, a position’s responsibility; training and orienting the employee to the job; holding the employee accountable; and effectively rewarding or coaching the employee for better performance. Postponing discussions or avoiding coaching or discipline makes things much worse.

**2. Terminating an employee** For obvious reasons, terminating an employee is something managers don’t like to do. Ensure that the employee handbook is clear and properly articulated and that the

employee is not surprised by the termination.

**3. Making the right hiring decision** Generally, a manager has a dire need to fill a position, as most organizations are staffed very leanly. As such, the stress of an open position could lead to a “fast hire,” without the proper vetting of the candidate to include reference checks, background checks, and personality and skills testing. Hire slow, fire fast.

**4. Making a difficult decision** When making a hard decision, ask yourself: Can I live with this decision long term? What if this decision was made public company-wide? How would I feel if this decision affected me?” Always count to 10 when making tough decisions – even sleep on it overnight.

**5. Challenging your boss** We all report to someone, and we don’t always agree with the direction or goals they establish. The best thing to do first is try to put yourself in your boss’ shoes. If you ever feel you do need to challenge your boss, do so in a way that will help him or her achieve their objectives – by submitting an idea or solution, for example.

**6. Team conflicts** Team or individual conflicts are a way of life in the employment environment. When complaints arise, try to distinguish between a job-related complaint and a personal conflict. Task conflict can be healthy and lead to consideration and development of alternative ideas. Personal conflict is toxic, however, and must be addressed either through

coaching, disciplinary action or even termination.

**7. Losing a highly productive employee** Don't wait until your star employee(s) shows up with an offer letter or letter of resignation. By then, it's too late. Make sure your highly productive employees are paid what they're worth, are challenged, are supported by you and are learning. Most important, let them know you care about and appreciate them.

When complaints arise, try to distinguish between a job-related grievance and a personal conflict. Task conflict can be healthy. Personal conflict, however, is toxic.

**8. Burnout** Managers work long hours under stressful conditions. Front- and middle-line managers take the brunt of customer, employee and operational expectations. Take care of your health and always keep a perspective on the things in life that really matter (faith, family, friends). If, however, you don't like what you're doing, life is too short; plan to do something else.

#### 10 COMMON PHRASES SUPERVISORS USE THAT TURN EMPLOYEES AGAINST THEM

Sometimes you just don't know how an employee will react to a certain phrase, but there are some that managers should always avoid. Even the most basic of phrases, with no intent to be off-putting, could be perceived negatively. For example:

**"That's above my pay grade."** You have essentially told an employee that you not only can't solve his or her problem but that you are also afraid to go to bat for the employee by going to someone else in the organization to seek a solution.

**"Hold that thought."** This basically tells the employee "I'm not interested in what you're about to say" or "I do not have time for you."

**"Because we pay your salary."** Such a statement is usually uttered by a boss who either can't articulate a good reason for issuing an assignment or is simply incompetent.

**"I'm really busy right now."** Employees are your most valuable asset and don't deserve a quick brush-off. If you are busy, schedule a time to follow up.

**"I need it done yesterday."** This cliché is demeaning to the employee who is seeking a serious, meaningful deadline. If something is urgent, say so with a brief explanation of why and ask the employee if there is anything you can do to help him or her achieve this goal.

**"Great job."** This phrase is fine if it's sincere and used when really warranted. Overuse dilutes its effectiveness and it becomes meaningless to the employee.

**"I only took off XX days last year."** The boss who says this is either inviting everyone to pity him or her or trying to elevate his or her own work ethic above his or her employees. Either way, employees don't want to hear a manager's woes, especially if you are not willing to listen to them.

**"Why did this mistake happen?"** This question works if it is directed squarely at the system, not the people in it. Otherwise, it could look like you are seeking out a scapegoat.

**"I don't believe in giving employees a perfect review."** This performance review downer is a great way to convey that there's really no point in truly excelling. It's a misguided motivational technique that serves only to champion mediocre behavior.

**"Let me know if you need help."** Again, in itself, these words are just fine, even commendable. But tone is what matters. When they're just empty words, they essentially mean, "Good luck and don't bother me."

**MBJ**

*William Ford is president and CEO of SESCO, an NFDA Endorsed Provider for human resources.*

# OSHA Issues Stronger COVID-19 Workplace Guidance

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – OSHA has issued stronger worker safety guidance to help employers and workers implement a coronavirus protection program and better identify risks that could lead to exposure to and contract of the virus.

Last week, President Joe Biden directed OSHA to release clear guidance for employers to help keep workers safe. “Protecting Workers: Guidance on Mitigating and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in the Workplace” provides updated guidance and recommendations, and outlines existing safety and health standards. OSHA is providing the recommendations to assist employers in providing a safe and healthy workplace.

“More than 400,000 Americans have died from COVID-19, and millions of people are out of work as a result of this crisis,” said M. Patricia Smith, senior counselor to the secretary of labor. “Employers and workers can help our nation fight and overcome this deadly pandemic by committing themselves to making their workplaces as safe as possible. The recommendations in OSHA’s updated guidance will help us defeat the virus, strengthen our economy and bring an end to the staggering human and economic toll that the coronavirus has taken on our nation.”

Implementing a coronavirus protection program is the most effective way to reduce the spread of the virus. The guidance recommends several essential elements in a prevention program:

- Conduct a hazard assessment.
- Identify control measures to limit the spread of the virus.
- Adopt policies for employee absences that don’t punish workers as a way to encourage potentially infected workers to remain home.
- Ensure that coronavirus policies and procedures are communicated to both English and non-English-speaking workers.



- Implement protections from retaliation for workers who raise coronavirus-related concerns.

“OSHA is updating its guidance to reduce the risk of transmission of the coronavirus and improve worker protections so businesses can operate safely and employees can stay safe and working,” said Jim Frederick, principal deputy assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health.

The guidance details key measures for limiting coronavirus spread, including ensuring that infected or potentially infected people are not in the workplace, implementing and following physical distancing protocols and using surgical masks or cloth face coverings. It also provides guidance on use of personal protective equipment, improving ventilation, good hygiene and routine cleaning.

OSHA will update this new guidance as developments in science, best practices and standards warrant.

According to OSHA, its guidance is not a standard or regulation, and it creates no new legal obligations. It contains recommendations as well as descriptions of existing mandatory safety and health standards. The recommendations are advisory in nature, informational in content and intended to assist employers in recognizing and abating hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm as part of their obligation to provide a safe and healthy workplace.

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## The Notebook

**FUNERAL DIRECTORS LIFE** has promoted Jeffery “Stewy” Stewart from director of sales development to regional sales vice president for the Atlantic region. Stewart has accumulated more than 20 years of experience in sales and marketing. He spent a majority of that time serving in the funeral industry as a preneed sales professional and regional sales manager.

**THACKER CASKETS** has acquired **QUALITY PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTS**. – Founded in 2007 by Ron Cook, QPP is the largest acquisition in Thacker history and creates a new Thacker/QPP co-brand. “We have silently watched and very much admired the ability of Quality Professional Products to grow their market share so significantly in such a short period of time,” said C.J. Thacker, owner and CEO of Thacker Caskets.

**FUNERAL SERVICES INC.** (FSI) has announced sweeping enhancements to PRISM, the company’s online trust recordkeeping and administration services platform. The new features, which include a more mobile-friendly platform, will ensure that deathcare firms are equipped with the tools, resources and real-time information they need to serve consumers in an increasingly digital environment.

In addition to its new mobile interface, PRISM now allows clients to set up and process one-time and recurring consumer credit card payments online. State associations also now have the capability to process member checks and other forms of payment through PRISM. As clients navigate the platform’s new look and capabilities, FSI added a live chat feature so clients can speak directly with an FSI team member online during business hours.

PRISM’s new mobile interface and enhanced dashboard is now available for seamless use across all smartphones, tablets and the majority of browsers. Since the platform is entirely web-based, no app downloads or frequent updates are necessary. PRISM gives deathcare professionals total control of their trust and sales programs. With just a few clicks, funeral directors and cemeterians have complete access to program details, including the status of every preneed contract, trust transaction history, regulatory reporting deadlines, the market value of an entire trust account and more.

FSI is actively working on several new features and plans to announce additional enhancements to PRISM and other tools in the near future. For more information on PRISM, visit <https://fsitrust.com/online-contract-management.html>.

**GRACE HOLDINGS LLC**, the newest entry into the funeral home, cremation and cemetery acquisition space, has announced its first acquisition, **BOONE FUNERAL HOME AND CREMATORY** in Bossier City, Louisiana. Established in 1972 by Charles and Margaret Boone, the funeral home has been caring for families and celebrating the lives of loved ones in greater Shreveport for almost 50 years. Ginger Hartman will remain on staff to run the funeral home. Hartman began her career in the funeral profession 20 years ago and joined the Boone staff in January 2009.

The executive team of Grace Holdings – COO James (Jim) Ford and John Yopp, senior vice president of acquisitions – have deep experience in funeral service. Ford has held senior management positions with Service Corporation International, Stonemor and Foundation Partners Group. Yopp has a strong family tradition in the funeral profession as owner and publisher of *Southern Funeral Director* magazine and owns several funeral homes and a preneed marketing company.

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## From the Editor's Desk

### Trip Around the Sun

The coronavirus has nearly completed its first full trip around the sun. With its impact on day-to-day life and the major events of our year, COVID has certainly altered behavior. Last year, restrictions were in place for St. Patrick's Day celebrations, Easter, Memorial Day, 4th of July and on to Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's.

Now feeling its wrath is the Super Bowl. Perhaps it's because of the pandemic or maybe because my team is not in the big game, but my enthusiasm just isn't there this year. It seems I may have gotten my sports fix by watching episodes of *Ted Lasso*.

Normally about this time, in addition to the game, I would be checking out the hype for the new big-budget TV ads that would run. Companies shovel millions into commercials and airtime with the hope that their respective ads will be the ones that the "I just watch the game for the commercials" crowd would talk about for the next few days.

While Super Bowl Sunday is also usually considered the Super Bowl of TV commercials, less than a week before the game, there are still advertising slots available, which, in previous years, would have been unheard of this close to game day. The impact of the pandemic is apparent as advertisers are aware that they may not have the same number of captive-audience partygoers as in previous years. Plus, such an expenditure might not be seemly as the economy struggles. Of note, some of the regular big-bucks participants like Coca-Cola and Budweiser will not be participating (Budweiser will spring for ads for its other brands: Bud Light, Bud Light Seltzer and Michelob Ultra).

Instead, Budweiser will donate to a vaccine awareness ad campaign rather than cough up \$5.5 million for a 30-second commercial. Coca-Cola said it's passing on this year's game in order to "invest in the right resources during these unprecedented times."

While some big companies stay on the sidelines, some rookie advertisers are suiting up for the big game this year, and their messages will have a definitive COVID influence. For example, Scotts Miracle-Gro will remind viewers that the backyard is a refuge for people forced to stay home. And companies that broke through in the past year, such as DoorDash, will attempt to keep the momentum going.

Many ads are likely to be somber, reflecting the times, but certainly there should be time made to celebrate heroes like first responders and funeral directors who rise to challenges every day.

 **EDWARD J. DEFORT**  
**EDITOR**

## Memorial Business Journal

13625 Bishop's Dr.  
Brookfield, WI 53005-6607  
800-228-6332 or 609-815-8145  
www.nfda.org

### EDITOR

Edward J. Defort  
(edefort@nfda.org)

### MANAGING EDITOR

Dawn M. Behr  
(dbehr@nfda.org)

### GRAPHICS

Brooke Krishok  
(bkrishok@nfda.org)

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