



Catholic Funeral & Cemetery Services

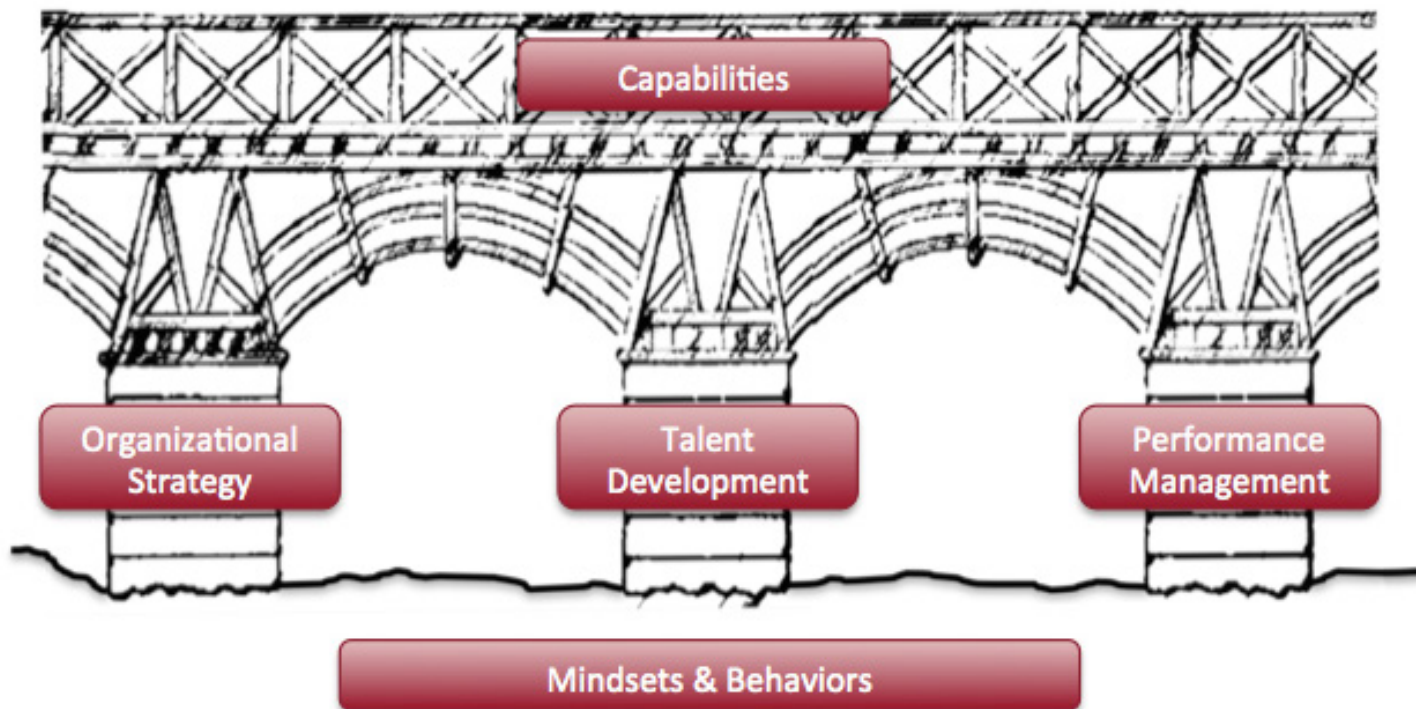
*Building the Framework for a Successful
Funeral and Cemetery Operation*

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There are significant cultural shifts driving the general revenue decline in Catholic cemeteries. In the past, families relied on their local Catholic funeral home, and could be assured that they would be guided through the rites of the Church. Today, with the variety of choices and for-profit competitors not necessarily looking out for best interests, our families may not know where to turn--thus resulting in the weakening of the Catholic cemetery system.

With the right framework in place, you can diagnose the gaps in your funeral and cemetery operating system that are contributing to this decline, prioritize new initiatives and build your

improvement plan with a clear end game in mind. This framework can be categorized into three levels: *capabilities, enablers and mindsets*, and the analogy of a bridge can be useful. Your *capabilities* are what the family members (your customers) see and interact with, like the roadbed of the bridge. The *enablers* are the core systems and processes that you use to manage your funeral and cemetery system, which like the bridge's pillars are rarely noticed by customers. The *mindsets and behaviors* of your team are the cultural drivers and ideals that keep the entire system functioning (the bedrock on which the bridge is built).



Capabilities

We view certain key capabilities of a cemetery or funeral organization as determinative of success. This includes the efficient application of certain processes and technology that reinforce and institutionalize these focus areas: operational excellence, sales processes, inventory planning and ministerial outreach. Very few organizations excel at everything; and it is most productive to focus on one or two at a time and drive organizational improvement in a focused way.

Enablers

Organizational strategy is a key enabler. Few dioceses revisit the original design and make the tough choices about which parts are keeping inline with the current strategy. Talent development is another key enabler. Many secular organizations have the legitimate “buy vs. build” decision. However, with a ministry as intimate as the cemetery and funeral industry, the choice about what can be outsourced must be approached very carefully. The first step is to hire and promote thoughtfully. This is not a place to scrimp and save. Next, train those people thoroughly, compensate them appropriately and continually develop their skills. Performance management, another enabler, involves what to do with that talent after it's hired/trained.

There is no point in hiring and training good people if you aren't going to monitor and reward/discipline certain behaviors. Oddly enough, this is where most sales strategies break down.

Mindsets and Behaviors

We refer to mindsets and behaviors in the same breath because they are cause and effect. They support the rest of the framework. They need to be surveyed and understood and occasionally needs to be reshaped in order to keep supporting the enablers and capabilities. Mindsets can be organizational beliefs that grow out of a group's shared experiences or the diverse beliefs that individuals bring with them. Either may dramatically impact how they act with each other...and with your families. It is most important for managers to remember that everything they say passes through that mindset filter. All people, equally well intentioned, will carry out the same instruction differently. Having a strong framework will guide your goal formation and keep your team focused on those goals on a day-to-day basis.