

THROUGHOUT MY 35-PLUS YEARS of working in the family funeral business, I have written hundreds of pre-need contracts. I have also actively managed a multitude of sales counselors and sales managers. To grow our department, I had the opportunity to work with some of the most talented pre-need consultants in the industry, such as Gary O’Sullivan, Quinn Eagan, Rob Meredith, and others. During my funeral tenure, I funded our program with trust accounts and insurance policies, partnering with industry leaders such as Precoa and Funeral Services Inc.

So why do I share all of this with you? Because I’ve tried to take the best that all of them had to offer, and now, I want to share what I believe is key to success in pre-need and beyond. I call it the Four Ps of Success.

Purpose

Too often, we think of our purpose in a simple, task-driven way. For example, the purpose for making all these darn phone calls is to set an appointment with someone so we can make a presentation and maybe even a sale. But that is not the purpose I am proposing. If you have read Simon Sinek’s book, *Start with WHY – How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, then you know that he describes your purpose as your “why.”

In fact, the need for purpose is one of the defining characteristics of human beings. Humans crave purpose and can even suffer serious psychological difficulties when we don’t have it. Purpose is a fundamental component of a fulfilling life.

According to a 2018 *Harvard Business Review* study, 9 out of 10 people are willing to earn less money to do more meaningful work. The study reflected that ‘meaning’ is the new money.

As employee demographics change within funeral service, leaders need to realize that meaning drives productivity among

employees, as such we need to recognize what motivates those who ultimately serve our customers.

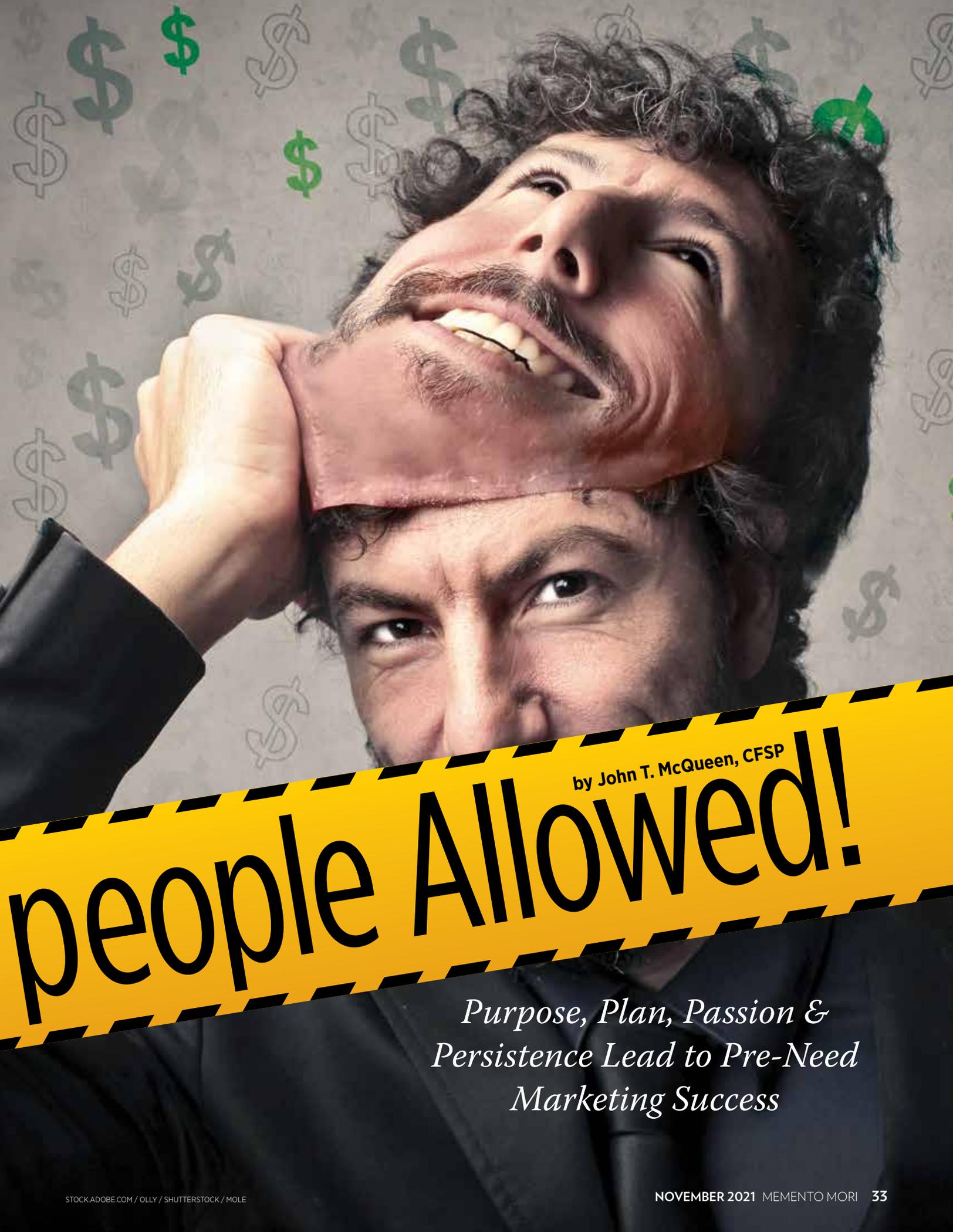
A recent survey of 2,000-plus American workers revealed the following statistics:

- Majority of respondents stated they would forgo 23% of their future lifetime earnings to have a job that was always meaningful.
- 80% would rather have a boss who cared about them finding meaning and success in their work than receive a 20% pay increase.
- Employees who find work meaningful experience significantly greater job satisfaction. Retention rates among employees increase, driving down turnover costs.

My wife, Nikki, and I determined that our purpose for Anderson-McQueen was not about selling funerals, cremations, or cemetery property, but rather it was about *‘where the healing begins’* for families we serve and for our community.



No ‘Slick’ Sales



by John T. McQueen, CFSP

people Allowed!

Purpose, Plan, Passion & Persistence Lead to Pre-Need Marketing Success

Embracing our newfound purpose allowed all our staff—pre-need, at-need, aftercare, administrative, accounting, cemetery, and maintenance—to approach every interaction with our customers, and potential customers, in a different light.

We were not about selling caskets, urns, and more; rather, we were about helping families heal. It also allowed our team to work together more closely, rather than the industry typical “us versus them” mentality that occurs between so many at-need and pre-need staff members.

Pre-need counselors knew if they did their jobs well it would make the funeral director’s job easier, while relieving unnecessary stress and burdens for the family. In turn, the funeral directors put forth additional effort to help pre-need counselors secure aftercare appointments, pick up on cues about pre-need, and more.

As leaders, we need to evoke the emotions of our employees about the “why” in funeral planning that will in turn evoke the emotions of customers to buy what we have to offer them. As Simon Sinek reminds us, people don’t buy what you do or how you do it, but rather they buy why you do it. Let me share a quick example using Papa John’s Pizza.

Papa John’s now offers their Shaq-A-Roni pizza that uses former NBA giant Shaquille O’Neal to promote this pizza where \$1 from every pizza purchased goes to the Papa John’s Foundation benefitting local and national charities—such as The Boys and Girls Club of America, the United Negro College Fund, and the Baltimore Hunger Project.

“We all must suffer one of two pains in business and life, the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. The difference — the pain of discipline weighs but ounces whereas the pain of regret weighs tons.”

So what they’re selling is pizza; how they’re selling it is through Shaq’s promotion; but why the customer is buying it is because it makes them feel they are doing something good. The customer is getting something bigger than just pizza for dinner. That’s purpose!

Plan

Few successful endeavors in life happen by chance. As Winston Churchill said, *“He who fails to plan is planning to fail.”* Developing a plan and working your plan is instrumental in accomplishing your goals, because a goal without a plan is just a dream. Your plan is your GPS, it won’t guarantee that you’ll miss all the bumps or avoid all the roadblocks, but when that detour occurs, your plan will get you back on the right track faster.

We can all agree that having a plan is vital, but more importantly, having the right plan is critical to achieving success. Many of us who have been in funeral service for years have a system that works, but do we have people who work the system?

Often, we meet and hire individuals

for pre-need sales who want to make money and have entrepreneurial desires, but we shut them down by not allowing them the opportunity to implement their ideas. Once they shut down, they stop listening to you trying to beat your way of doing things into them. They become frustrated and ultimately leave your employment.

To resolve this problem, I implemented throughout our company what I called the *“Days of Thunder”* proposition. You may remember the 1990s movie by the same name, starring Tom Cruise and Robert Duvall. Cruise was the new hotshot NASCAR driver and Duvall was the experienced crew chief (think of Cruise as your new counselor and Duvall your sales manager).

Cruise wanted to drive the car his way at his speeds and didn’t want to be told how to do it. Duvall, on the other hand, knew that it takes good tires to win a race. To resolve the issue, Duvall made Cruise a deal, he said, “You drive 100 laps any way you want, then we’ll change tires, and you drive 100 laps the way I want. In the end, we’ll see whose tires are in the best condition.”

What is important to note is that Duvall allowed Cruise to do it his way first, provided Cruise would agree to honestly try it Duvall’s way next. In the end, Cruise learned how to do it right from Duvall and was willing to listen to him from there on.

When it comes to our pre-need counselors, or even at-need directors, let them try it their way first if that is an important desire to them. It could work out great and you’ll have another potential avenue for making sales. However, if it works out poorly—as it often does—the counselor will develop a mindset that will be more open to learning the existing way if he or she wants to make a living. Failure can be a great motivator—without it, there is always another excuse.

Passion

This is a key ingredient to your success in marketing pre-need effectively. You must have a true passion for helping people. Customers know when you are engaged and committed to helping them, regardless of the industry. We’ve all experienced the disengaged employee that makes you feel that you’re doing business with them is an

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imposition. We've also experienced dealing with a salesperson who was more concerned about earning a commission rather than finding the solution for you.

Nikki would refer to this as the dreaded "commission breath" that customers could smell a mile away. In both cases, unless what the customer is seeking is an immediate need, the outcome is usually a lost sales opportunity.

Our daughter, Bailee, is a performer and working on her MFA in Performing Arts at Savannah College of Art and Design. Bailee's passion for the various roles she plays is what brings her characters and music to life and engages those in the audience.

When we are selling or interacting with customers, we are "on stage" and it is our opportunity to make it a hit performance. Regardless of the role you play in funeral service, your passion will equate to the effort you expend. Your passion will engage your customers and create an experience that invokes emotion and ultimately sales. After all, we all buy on emotion and then justify with logic.

To help engage your passion, Nikki always told our staff, you must "**visualize your victories**." In other words, the more passionate or vivid the image in your mind, the more prevalent the opportunity for success. What she was saying is, "Believe in yourself, believe in your product or service, believe in your worth, and believe in helping the customer." If you do all of those, the sale will usually come because people buy from people they trust and like.

Don't believe it? Well, according to my good friend, Mark Panciera—who is both a funeral home owner and the CEO at The Pacific Institute where he works with Fortune 500 companies, Navy Seals, athletes, and others on how to succeed using your mind—shares that it's not only true, it is a scientific fact!

Mark teaches that the human mind cannot tell the difference between what's in your subconscious and what's reality. The proven scientific formula is $I \times V \wedge e = R$. In other words, Imagery x Vividness Raised by Emotion equals Reality.

You must vividly see your success. That's why athletes will visualize each bounce of the ball, each stroke of the swim, and each tackle on the gridiron before they ever enter the game. The same is true of sales. So the

next time you prepare for that presentation, be sure to take some time to get your "game face" on by visualizing your victory.

Persistence

I have learned a lot about persistence—not just in business but through our son, Josh, who was a Division 1 swimmer for Florida Atlantic University. As college and professional athletes will attest, the key to success is found on the practice field not on the battle ground.

As an example, Josh would swim on average 15,000 yards a day Monday through Saturday, totaling 90,000 a week. He would do this 50 weeks a year for a total of 4.5 million yards. Why is this important? Well, Josh was recruited as a mid-distance swimmer to compete in three events: 200 Free, 200 Fly, and 500 Free. Josh could swim all three events totaling 900 yards in under eight minutes, yet he would swim the equivalent of 45,000 football fields a year to perform for less than eight minutes in his conference championship meet.

As funeral professionals, whether at-need or pre-need, we may not exert the same kind of physical efforts an athlete does in the pool, on the field, or on the court, but we still need to exert the energy and efforts needed to perfect our skills if we want to perform at our peak when sitting across the table from a prospective client.

Practicing cold calls, rehearsing ways to overcome objections, know the value customers receive from various services and merchandise offerings. All of these need to become so engrained in our minds that our responses are automatic. That is why athletes practice relentlessly to build up what is known as muscle memory, which, in our case, is the muscle between our ears.

Unfortunately, many funeral professionals are unwilling to expend the energy needed and therefore fail when called into battle. In fact, it's been proven that in sales, most people tend to stop trying one phone call before success. They fail because they forget that defeat is only temporary, so they stop trying and simply give up.

Please note that I said, "in sales, most people fail" as opposed to "most salespeople fail." This is an important distinction because we are all in sales, from the groundskeeper to the CEO. Each one needs

to know their part and perform at their peak if success is to lie ahead for the organization. ■

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DID YOU KNOW?

The ICCFA pays a retainer so that all members in good standing can benefit from telephone consultations on:

- employment law,
- labor relations and
- human resources management.

IF YOU'VE GOT QUESTIONS, CONTACT

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