



The Most Common Cemetery Sales Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Austin
Belfast
Boston
San Francisco

+1 857 301-7810
www.plotbox.io



Mistakes can be very costly to an organization. Handily, we've compiled a guide of the **15 most common mistakes that cemetery sales teams make**, so your team doesn't have to make them. You can thank us later.

This guide will help you:

- Identify mistakes being made in the sales process
- Handle any mistakes your team might be making
- Manage your sales team more effectively

"Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them yourself."

Eleanor Roosevelt

Avoid these 15 costly mistakes for cemetery sales success:

Mistake 1: Sales Staff Being 'Too Nice' to Close the Deal

Being too nice or too soft with customers is one of the most common reasons many sales staff lose the sale at the final hurdle. Your sales staff have spent weeks, possibly months identifying prospects, reaching out to them, nurturing and persuading them, and finally, getting them to that all-important quotation and close stage. It's only natural that they don't want to be too pushy and scare the customer off at such a critical time. So how can you train your sales team to confidently close the sale without coming across as 'pushy'?

Here are some helpful do's and don'ts:

- **DO** ask the closing question more than once! People can't decide on what they want for lunch never mind making the decision on what cemetery plot to take, so they need to be asked again and given more information if necessary.
- **DON'T** believe the objection - preparation is key to overcoming any objection.
- **DON'T** rely on customers calling back, they probably won't. In fact, they will probably expect some sort of call or follow-up from the sales team anyway.
- **DO** create urgency: Communicate to customers any upcoming price increases, shortage of locations or any other information that might mean they want to secure their plot sooner rather than later. Additionally, appealing to the customer's emotions may also be enough to close the deal - after all, do they really want to leave this to others to prepare?

Mistake 2: Judging the Book by its Cover

We've all done it: we take a look at someone and within a matter of minutes, we've conjured up a full story on them including their background, job, hobbies, likes, dislikes, family and friends. All based on what they look like.

But remember:

- Just because Joe Bloggs wears baggy jeans and drives a 1999 sedan that's had better days, doesn't mean he hasn't got the cash!
 - Similarly, there isn't necessarily a correlation between the customer's wealth and what they'll buy. Many cemeteries are starting to notice a trend towards the wealthier person buying simpler funerals, whereas some blue-collar workers still see the funeral as extremely important and want to buy into a more elaborate funeral and spend more money.
 - Finally, if you perceive that someone owns a lot, it doesn't mean that they have a lot of money, or that their friends and family (who often end up paying for their funeral) do.
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Mistake 3: Ignorance

Even the most experienced of sales professionals have been stumped by a customer who said, 'I want to think it over'. Remember that an objection will happen at each and every sale. Be ready.

Have they tried directly asking the customer what their objection is? Saying something like,

"That's understandable. Most of our customers need time to think it through. Could it be that you're worried about the cost or not being too sure about what you've heard from us?"

This could open up a dialogue between customer and sales, which allows them to address any concerns head on. For example if the concern is cash, payment plans can then be discussed.

Hard work is more important than talent and experience on their own. Having both is amazing. Broadway show actors do 8 shows a week, over 6 days. There are no shows on a Monday...but they still rehearse. Preparation is key!

Mistake 4:

Not Building Trust

Being late to a customer meeting and not doing what you say you'll do: these are all great ways to ensure lack of trust with the customer. Customer trust is arguably the most important element to securing the deal! After all, if the customer can't trust you to turn up to a meeting on time, how can they know they will get the best after-sales service? Especially in the funeral industry, where they themselves won't be there to ensure they got what they paid for when the time comes.

Other ways you can build trust with a customer include great communication, being consistent, keeping promises and exceeding their expectations.

Mistake 5:

Poor Presentation

Most funeral homes and cemeteries don't have a set customer presentation. Instead, they let sales improvise. Perhaps the presentation is too long and the sales person runs out of time? Maybe the presentation hasn't been customized and most of the information is irrelevant to this customer? A set presentation will ensure consistency and professionalism. It can be customised per prospect but will ensure that none of the key points have been missed!

It goes without saying, good knowledge of products, services, process and pricing are also a must! Sales teams need to know off the top of their head the monthly payment for each type of plot for the next 36 months. This will also ensure a successful customer presentation. This goes back to the same point being reiterated throughout this article: preparation is key!

Finally, consider implementing a 'meet the manager' program. He/she meets the prospect at the initial presentation to tell the customer they're in good hands with (person) and if they have time they may pop back in later (at this stage the manager can help out if needs be). This has the added bonus of helping the prospect feel valued and gives another point of contact for them.

Mistake 6: Talking too Much

We cannot overemphasize the importance of listening to customers!

This might seem obvious, however listening still seems to be very difficult for some. Too often, salespeople are waiting for their turn to talk or thinking about what to say next, instead of truly listening to the prospect. A GREAT skill to practice is active listening.

Gong.io worked out that the ideal talk to listen ratio is 43:57. It doesn't seem like much, but the point is to listen more than you talk!

Mistake 7: Overcomplicating

There are many ways you may fall into the trap of overcomplicating things as a sales person. Here are the most common traps as a cemetery and crematorium salesperson:

Trap 1:

Using too much jargon. Not everyone knows that a memorial is the same as a headstone.

Trap 2:

Showing the prospect too many options without having you there to guide them and narrow their focus. Ideally, get them down to 3 options and that will be much easier to manage.

Trap 3:

Asking the prospect to rate their choices. Think like an optometrist: They wouldn't ask you to rate 30 letters in order of clarity. Instead they would ask them what looks clearer: 1, 2 or 3, etc. Ask the prospect to pick their top 3 choices, rather than to rate anything.

Mistake 8: **Always Quoting the Lowest**

Perception is everything: Too often, if a sales person believes that something is too expensive for them, it puts them off suggesting it for their customer. Reiterating mistake 2, you have no idea what position a customer is in. It's a good idea to get your team to give a customer a range of offers (low, medium and high) to get a better idea of what they're after. Good salespeople who are more than capable, can get into a bad habit of closing low. One suggestion is to carry out a quarterly exercise of giving each salesperson a report on their average sale values by category vs industry.

Mistake 9: **Inadequate or no CRM System**

There are so many reasons a cemetery [needs a CRM system](#), not least because it will help to increase pre-need sales and will improve relationships both within the sales team and with customers. It'll also help to manage prospects and improve accuracy of sales forecasting.

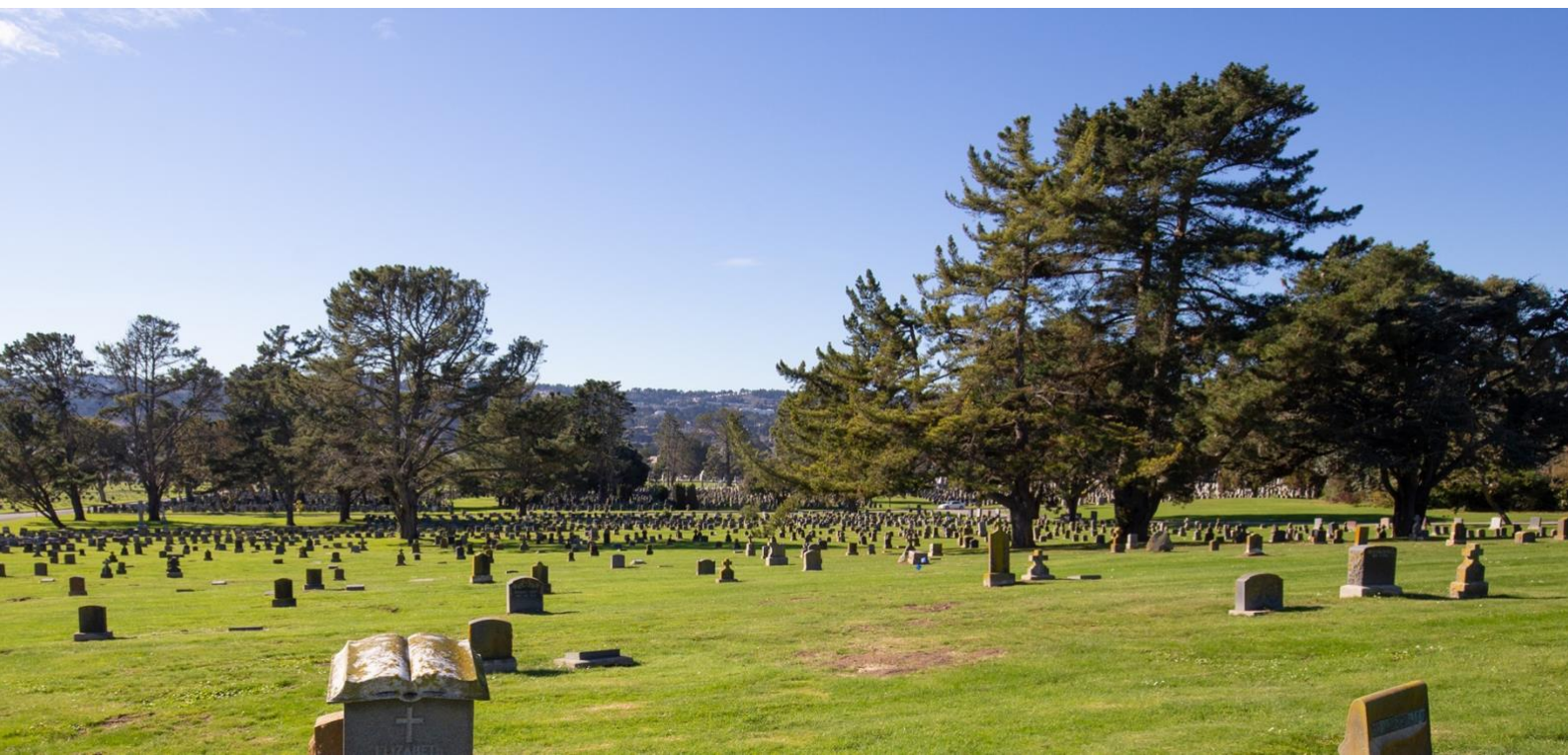
A further advantage of having a CRM system is that it can help you to manage your sales team. As a human being, you want to give people the benefit of the doubt. However, managing sales targets and KPI's through the use of a CRM system can help you to see the situation for what it is: individuals are either meeting their targets or they aren't. You can use this data to make management decisions, allocate commission and bonuses, and much more.

Mistake 10: **Being Close-Minded When Hiring for Sales**

You only want the best staff, right? People who have worked in cemetery sales before: they know the business, will require little to no training, and can hit the ground running. But be warned: limit your options in this way and you could potentially be cutting yourself off from an excellent pool of talent. Maybe it's time to re-evaluate how you short-list potential sales staff. Why not try hiring those from within the industry but who have no sales experience, or someone with sales experience from the car lot? It could be the refresh that your sales team needs!

Mistake 11: **Not Managing Sales Closely Enough**

It's not enough to meet with sales staff weekly, nor every couple of days; this is a daily task. It takes DAILY time with each sales person to remedy problems. Try and use these meetings to focus on activity only, not sales: prospecting hours, appointments, presentations, etc. This also brings us back to mistake 9, and about how using a CRM system can help you to manage sales.



Mistake 12: Being Unprofessional

Having unprofessional staff can cause a company to have a bad reputation, cause leads not to convert, have a negative effect of profits, the list goes on.

There are many ways an employee could come across as unprofessional, and here are some of the most common pitfalls to look out for:

- Bad attitude.
- Poor quality of materials.
- Pitch unprepared. Top tip: Record each staff members' pitch and play it back to them...it will be obvious if and where it needs work.
- Don't forget about reception staff - often, they are the first point of contact for prospects, so their script needs to be up-to-scratch. Carry out the recording activity for them too - you will be surprised.
- Only selling in the office - sales should be out of the office to do effective pre-need sales.
- The final point is directed at management: crushing people with over harsh feedback. You need to express confidence in them at the start. The feedback will come, but they need to know you believe in them.



Mistake 13: Time Mismanagement

There are lots of ways to manage your time ineffectively; we're all guilty of it. Here are some great ways for the sales team to stay on top of the workload and optimise time:

- Always stick to your scheduled sales meeting. For example, the sales manager should begin regardless of whether 'boss is ready'.
- Stop putting off that big/daunting/boring/complicated [delete as appropriate] task.
- Do the big jobs before the small ones! We've all heard the sand and stones in a jar analogy, right? Spoiler: Put the stones in first!
- Stay flexible with working hours. Working 10am to 3pm on a Saturday could be a much more effective use of time to optimist cemetery sales. If you sweeten the deal with a Friday afternoon off in place of the Saturday, everyone's a winner.
- Incentivize staff to work the weekend - cemetery sales should be a 7 day a week operation. Precious opportunities can be lost if a cemetery is closed on a weekend, regardless of cemetery type.
- If you're doing aftercare, don't forget to ask for referrals! Otherwise you're wasting time after doing all the hard work.
- Set goals and stick to them! After all, 'hope' isn't a plan! 'I hope we have a good week' is not in your control. Activity is.

If you're worried your staff aren't using their time effectively, perhaps making some of the above suggestions to them will help. If all else fails, print out this document and place it strategically for them to find!



Mistake 14: Excuses

My daughter was sick
I keep getting interrupted
I was sick all day, I took the wrong pills
I've been waiting for a family to arrive
I wanted to knock on doors, but it was raining
I was getting myself organized
Everyone's on vacation this time of year
Let me explain, I do things a little different
I lost my mojo!
I'm going to do twice the number of prospecting tomorrow
I had to go home and wait for the cable guy

Any of these sound familiar? They have all been given as excuses as to why sales staff couldn't prospect at all yesterday (they're real)! While it's understandable that things will come up from time to time, none of these took 8 hours!

If you hear an excuse that you're not entirely happy with, do express concern, but don't be afraid to ask questions and set expectations for next time.

Mistake 15: Mismanaging Relationships with Other Staff Members

You need to get the admin head and superintendent on board with the sales objectives for two reasons:

- They can make a big difference to how the place looks.
- Admins can harbour resentment towards some sales people for lack of accuracy on files, prices etc. If they keep this to themselves, it can build up. It's a mistake not to listen and take their feedback on processes and administration.

Don't forget that digitizing and automating your processes with a [cloud cemetery management software](#) can drastically reduce inaccuracies and improve communications between teams.