



Finding Efficiencies and Improving Collaboration to Dramatically Reduce Costs and Improve Client Satisfaction



ORGANIZATION

Horan & McConaty



INDUSTRY

Funeral Service



ABOUT

Horan & McConaty is a family-owned funeral service organization with multiple funeral homes and crematories in Denver and surrounding areas.

CHALLENGE

Horan & McConaty (H&M) was founded by John Horan, who believed that his funeral home's most valuable asset was its strong reputation for providing high-quality service to families of the deceased. Leveraging this reputation, H&M grew from two locations in 1986 to seven locations serving the entire Denver metro area.

As H&M opened new locations, expanded its geographic footprint, and hired additional employees, it encountered difficulties in scaling its culture and processes. With these challenges came poor communication, conflict between departments, functional silos, and employee dissatisfaction. Valuable employees became frustrated and left the company. Not surprisingly, these problems hurt the quality of H&M's service to its customers, dragging down customer satisfaction and, along with it, H&M's reputation. As a result, H&M's costs rose while revenues and profitability fell.

“Using Arbinger’s programs to systematically implement an outward mindset in our work has dramatically improved the experience our clients have with our firm and the experience our employees are having with each other.”

DARREN FORBES

Chief Operating Officer | Horan & McConaty

The internal conflict came to a head in 2013, when the three core functions—funeral directors, scheduling, and operations—stopped working effectively with each other. The funeral directors complained that they were not in charge of their own schedules, scheduling blamed the funeral directors for providing poor service, and operations blamed the funeral directors for all of the company's problems.

SOLUTION

Realizing that the very future of the company was at risk and familiar with *Leadership and Self-Deception*, H&M's leadership turned to Arbinger for help. After conducting exploratory work to assess the situation, Arbinger proposed an initial two-day workshop for the leadership, followed by the training of two of those leaders as internal facilitators to train and support the rest of H&M's employees.

The training had a significant impact on H&M's leaders. They began to systematically apply Arbinger's self-awareness, mindset-change, and collaboration tools. Utilizing these tools, they re-examined the persistent conflict among scheduling, operations, and the funeral directors. Doing so prompted them to ask how they themselves might be contributing to the problem and to start looking for ways that they could change how they worked in order to resolve it.

H&M's leaders started to carefully listen to the needs of employees across the company, learning things they had never known about their employees' day-to-day work. This newfound understanding led them to reconsider policies, procedures, and common practices as well as examine data that they had previously ignored.

As a result of this reexamination, they were surprised to learn that their newest funeral director had the highest customer satisfaction scores and was generating the most revenue. Digging deeper, they realized she was only working with two funeral homes 20 minutes apart, not with multiple, more widely-dispersed sites like the other funeral directors. They spoke to her to learn why she was so effective and learned that she benefited greatly from working with only two funeral homes and spending little time traveling between them. This allowed her to quickly develop positive relationships with the staff at both locations, become intimately familiar with the differences and quirks of each location, develop long-term relationships with families, and oversee more funerals per day. As a result of this discovery, H&M decided that funeral directors should work with only two funeral homes and arrange their own schedules to meet families' needs and build a more cohesive, concentrated team culture.

RESULTS

With the funeral directors in charge of their schedules, not only were funerals scheduled more quickly, but H&M was able to eliminate the scheduling function, which helped reduce costs. As they were now required to spend less time driving between facilities and had begun to think about their work in terms of their impact on others, the funeral directors also felt more empowered and motivated. So, rather than avoiding calls from bereaved families, they now welcomed those calls. They also began volunteering to help colleagues and training new hires, things they had neglected previously.

The shift in evaluating one's work in terms of impact on coworkers and customers occurred across all functions, not just with funeral directors. Teams spontaneously began collaborating to meet the needs of families and each other. "Support and Followup," an indicator the firm tracks with its clients, improved 10%. Not surprisingly, H&M's Net Promoter Score (NPS) increased commensurately by 10%. As a result of providing improved service through increased collaboration, employee satisfaction and engagement improved while overtime and employee turnover fell. According to H&M's CFO Dan Frakes, "We discovered that there is a direct correlation between collaboration and decreasing costs." With lower costs and higher revenues, H&M is now more profitable than ever and is growing the collaborative culture the families they serve depend upon.