



An Interview with Rick Allnutt

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Rick Allnutt sold his Colorado and Nebraska based firms to SCI in August of 2017. The core of Rick's locations is in the Northern Colorado metro areas of Fort Collins and Greeley. Overall his business consists of 12 standalone funeral homes and 1 combination funeral/cemetery property performing approximately 2,400 funeral cases and 200 interments. We sat down with Rick to discuss his experience and to get his advice for others that may be considering succession planning.

How did you come to a decision to pursue a sale?

My decision to sell was not immediately clear. We were thinking about downsizing and selling one of our locations and as we thought more about it, we said, why not look at selling all of them? This led to a discussion with our children about their interest in taking over ownership of the business, and it was clear they were not interested. So the question was not if, but when? Personally, my wife, Susan, and I decided we were ready. And the past few years have been great for valuations.

Someone once told me that many business owners wait until they're older to sell, and they just don't work as hard at the business, so the numbers decline. So not only do they have less time to enjoy their retirement, but the value of the business declines as well. I did not want that to be me.

What led you to select SCI for your sale?

You know, it's interesting, I did not enter the process wanting to sell to SCI. The prospect scared me a little bit. I wanted to ensure that our firm would be taken care of and looked after, and I had the perception that because SCI is such a large company, our businesses would not be given the proper attention. In the process of talking with SCI, I realized that I was completely wrong about that! I found exactly what I was looking for in SCI and their approach to partnering. It was clear that all of our interests would be aligned. One of the things that stuck with me was they said that they are only as good as their last acquisition. In evaluating all the firms we met with, SCI gave us the best opportunity to grow our firms and our people, both of which were important to me.



What was your experience working with SCI during the sale process?

It was a very easy process. I never once felt like there was much negotiation at all. Rather, the SCI team and I were all working together toward a common objective of closing the transaction. This surprised me. We had a weekly meeting with the SCI team, and we quickly realized they were great people that were there to help us in the journey. We also used Johnson Consulting Group, who helped pull all the information together, which was a big help.

What has your role been since the sale?

I have stepped back from day-to-day operations because I was really selling to slow down. I appreciate that SCI respected my goal to spend more time away from the business. That said, I still am connected. I get daily reports on who is having a funeral, so I can be present for families I personally know. I still walk into each location and feel like I own them. However, now I enjoy visiting with families and our team without the stress. Otherwise, I visit somewhat regularly with SCI's market leader for our area, Michele Heusel. She is very good about running decisions through me, but, honestly, I have become very comfortable with her leadership and decision making.

How has your team and firm adapted to the sale?

We just had the one-year anniversary of our sale, and we had a big town hall meeting to commemorate that milestone. The room was really crowded and I made a comment to the team that it is satisfying to see that everyone is still here a year later! Everybody seems content, and the beauty is they are still on the same mission and vision we instilled into the business. They are dedicated to our firm, but they also know they have this umbrella of Dignity over them. Of course, there were some challenges with people looking at a different computer screen and putting in different data, but there was a lot of support from SCI to help us get through that.

What have you most enjoyed about partnering with SCI?

Well, there are a lot of things, but if I had to point out one thing, it is that everything they told me and promised to do, they have done. There is not one commitment they made to me that they haven't followed through on. Here is a great example. We had plans to build a new location in Greeley, and I was so amazed when SCI said they wanted to fulfill that vision after partnering. And for them to jump right in and start construction on a new facility for our company, it shows that they follow through on their commitments and do what they say they are going to do. That facility is under construction now and is going to be a great addition to the community and families we serve.

What advice would you have for others considering a sale?

I really did not learn this lesson until after I sold, but I would say to business owners, ask yourself what you really want out of life, and what do you want to be doing? I didn't do that enough. I was married to our business and working it to the detriment of my relationships with friends and family. In our profession, there are always events to go to that kept me from leading a balanced life. Now I am able to be there, and it has re-energized me. I really couldn't be happier. I have reinvigorated friendships from years ago. I am able to spend more time with my parents and kids. I can take vacations and not constantly be worried about things back home. And the nice part is that I have been able to keep many of my professional relationships. I go on trips with my professional network like before, and so I really have the best of both worlds.