

BEYOND THE ACQUISITION: CRAFTING A DEAL THAT PRESERVES WHAT YOU'VE BUILT

Crucial steps to take during the M&A process
to protect your company's core values

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At a certain stage in every successful company's development, a business owner faces the decision to sell. For some, this choice signifies the conclusion of an accomplished career, while for others it represents a tactical progression into another phase. Irrespective of individual motivations, transferring ownership has implications that reach beyond the transaction value. A successful business sale is not only defined by financial metrics but also by the preservation of the organization's culture and legacy. Owners should recognize that a company encompasses more than its financial statements. It reflects years — and many times, generations — of commitment, innovation and valuable relationships established with employees and the surrounding community.

In the contemporary business environment characterized by financial engineering and consolidation, companies are frequently regarded as assets for acquisition. Emphasis is

placed on factors such as synergies, market share and cost optimization, often at the expense of human considerations and organizational heritage. This transactional approach risks diminishing the distinctive culture, core values and community relationships that are integral to a company's identity.

Owners who overlook these aspects may inadvertently undervalue both their achievements and the contributions of their teams. Conversely, owners who actively safeguard their organization's legacy contribute to its enduring narrative, thereby offering sustained value to all stakeholders.

THE OWNER'S ROLE IN M&A

An essential aspect of preserving a company's legacy is for the owner to articulate the organization's history and outline the factors contributing to its success. Establishing a clear and coherent narrative not only reflects the owner's vision but

also presents potential buyers with an insightful perspective on the business's continued progress.

By thoroughly documenting the company's milestones, pivotal decisions and core values, the owner provides a comprehensive understanding of what has shaped the business over time. This transparency can build credibility and trust among prospective buyers, highlighting not just past achievements but also the foundational principles that drive ongoing innovation and resilience.

Moreover, sharing stories of overcoming challenges or adapting to market changes demonstrates the adaptability and strength of the company, reassuring buyers of its long-term sustainability. Owners might also include testimonials from clients, detailed accounts of successful projects and descriptions of unique cultural practices. All these elements together create a rich tapestry that sets the business apart, ensuring its legacy endures through future leadership.

Furthermore, commitment to preserving legacy should be a core discussion with prospective buyers. Owners are encouraged to seek out buyers that not only value the company as an asset, but also recognize its unique culture and historical significance. Expanding the pool of potential buyers increases the likelihood of finding a successor capable of upholding and advancing the established legacy.

However, even when selling a business, there are no guarantees on what a buyer does with the business after taking over. It is essential to convey the significance of these factors at an early stage, presenting them as integral components of the company's distinct value proposition. Additionally, identifying a buyer with a proven track record in successfully transitioning businesses and honoring post-sale commitments is crucial.

DUE DILIGENCE ON BUYERS

To further safeguard the legacy, it is essential to conduct a certain level of

due diligence on prospective buyers, seeking organizations with a proven track record of respecting and nurturing the businesses they acquire. Owners should look for successors that demonstrate integrity, transparency and a genuine commitment to continuity — not just in words, but in their past actions. Engaging in candid conversations about expectations and explicitly including legacy-preserving provisions within the sale agreement can also help ensure the company's culture and reputation are maintained post-transaction.

Ultimately, selecting a buyer that has a positive history in transitioning businesses and that consistently follows through on their promises after the transaction is complete can significantly increase the likelihood of a successful handover. By taking these steps, owners not only protect what they have built, but also provide reassurance to employees, customers and the broader community that the company's values and impact will endure under new stewardship.

Preserving a company's legacy indicates that its work is viewed as significant beyond financial results. This action communicates to employees, customers and the wider community that contributions are acknowledged and that there is an intention for the organization's positive influence to continue. For owners, transferring leadership thoughtfully provides a sense of conclusion. It recognizes that the efforts invested in developing the company were not solely for individual benefit, but also for establishing something intended to last.

In environments where innovation is often prioritized over continuity, deliberately maintaining legacy represents a considered approach to business stewardship.

THE FINAL FAREWELL

The finality of a business sale can be deeply emotional, akin to a parent watching a child leave home. The owner has poured their heart and soul into building something remarkable, a

testament to their vision and resilience. Yet, the feeling of apprehension about letting go can be eased by a thoughtful approach to succession. By planning early and making legacy a priority of the exit strategy, owners can transform what could be an ending into a meaningful continuation. They move from being the company's sole author to ensuring its best chapters are yet to be written, secured by a new steward that honors the past while building the future.

In the end, the feeling of apprehension about letting go can be eased by a thoughtful approach to succession. By planning early and making legacy a priority of the exit strategy, owners can transform what could be an ending into a meaningful continuation.

Engaging in open conversations with potential buyers and conducting thorough due diligence to find the buyers that genuinely appreciate and respect the company's culture can further ease the transition.

By approaching succession as an opportunity to curate and protect the company's legacy, owners move from being the company's sole author to ensuring its best chapters are yet to be written. They secure the future of what they have built by entrusting stewardship to a buyer that honors the past while building toward new achievements. In this way, the sale is not merely a conclusion, but a strategic and heartfelt transition — one that preserves the organization's identity and allows it to thrive in a new era. ■

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