

| ENTREPRENEURSHIP |

# Here's how to exit from daily operations



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When most entrepreneurs hear the word “exit,” they think of selling their business. But the entrepreneurial journey actually includes several “exits” all founders must move through before arriving at this closing event. The first is arguably the most important and the most difficult: the exit from daily operations.

Many entrepreneurs have gotten stuck working *in* the business rather than *on* the business. There comes a moment in every entrepreneur’s journey when they must ask themselves, “What is my best contribution to the business?” When trapped in daily operations, a founder’s time and energy is spent reacting—putting out fires and fixing problems as they arise—at the expense of proactively priming the business for success. This keeps them shackled to the daily grind, unable to delegate and believing they must carry the responsibility of growing their business alone.

When Charlie Meyer and Mark Riggle co-founded their private equity firm Threefold, they decided to do things differently from the beginning, building their business upon the ethos that would create the opportunity for such an exit: Create and empower a leadership team.

Here’s how to empower others so you can exit from daily operations:

**1. Build a healthy and aligned leadership team.** Most entrepreneurs start their business as a team of one. But there comes a point in every founder’s journey when

they realize they can’t grow very far alone.

Upon reaching this point, a big mindset shift must take place: The best way the founder can add value isn’t by staying embedded *in* the business but rather by working *on* it. Founders can’t achieve this level of freedom without delegating operational decision-making—and they can’t delegate without first creating and developing a leadership team. Meyer and Riggle decided to hire talented leaders and give them the authority to make big decisions right away—so they could get out of the way.

When building out your team, hire first to cover your weaknesses. Then teach and develop your strengths in others. Next, work together to create and cast a shared vision for success. This will provide a necessary filter your leadership team can use to run the business day-to-day—and ensure everyone is running it in the right direction.

**2. Listen to learn and ask to empower.** With a healthy and aligned leadership team in place, the next step is to empower and equip those leaders to make good decisions—without you. As such, founders who lean on a traditional “command-and-control” management style will never escape daily operations. When founders tell the team what decisions to make, the team won’t learn how to arrive at those decisions themselves.

The key is “listening to learn” and “asking to empower” rather than “hearing to fix” and “telling to solve.” When you “listen to learn,” the goal is simply to listen deeply and learn—not to come up with a response. Then you can ask questions that

create pathways to deeper understanding and “aha” moments.

This leadership practice is baked into Threefold’s culture. By operating out of the core value that “trust beats control,” Meyer and Riggle inspire others to find creative solutions to problems—then trust them to make good decisions.

**3. Let go of the wheel so you navigate.** The final step to exiting daily operations is both the most difficult and most simple:

letting go of the wheel and trusting your team to steer the day-to-day. You’re now responsible *to* the company, not *for* it.

With the leadership team focused on the barriers to growth, each leader can delegate, predict and repeat a scalable infrastructure to handle demands for new

processes and procedures. This frees the founder to focus on the marketplace and on navigating challenges that may lie ahead.

Founding Threefold on the notion of empowerment and a very supportive partner in Riggle has enabled Meyer to make the ultimate “exit” from daily operations: a seven-month, seven-continent trip with his wife, daughter and two sons. Meyer is still available to his team, but as an adviser rather than an operator.

By creating a culture that prioritizes teamwork and trust, Meyer can be confident in his partnership with Riggle and his team’s decision-making—giving him the freedom to contribute to the leadership of Threefold from all over the world. •

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