



Jim's Profit Accelerator 65: The Art of Departure

Departing for a CEO, especially a veteran, can look a lot like the actions of the rufous-sided towhee—a seven-inch bird that hops, scratches, climbs trees, and pokes around for its food. The bird is seldom still, and its path is unpredictable. Similarly, a departing CEO has so much to manage that it can look uncoordinated to the outsider.

Here's a menu of the departing CEO's challenges:

1. **Keep the business performing:** Even though everyone (employees, customers, and suppliers) eventually knows that the CEO is leaving.
2. **Keep key leaders inspired, with their shoulders to the wheel:** They can't help looking around to see what's going to change, who the new leader will be, what the new rules will look like, and so forth, yet they have to get on with the work.
3. **Keep suppliers pushing for good service:** Suppliers are hypersensitive to problem customers, who may be slow to pay, change specifications unreasonably, cut prices, demand new services, and so forth. There are many reasons to slow down, step back, and size up what the new relationship might mean, even before there's a new leader.
4. **Keep customers happy:** When the leadership door opens a crack, legacy customer problems seem to burst forth vigorously, seeking either reassurance or better terms and service. Worse, prospects may delay committing to new orders until they can see the shape of the new leadership.
5. **Keep employees committed and focused:** Unlike top leaders, they value security and consistency above almost anything else, and a new leader threatens both.
6. **Build a working relationship with the new CEO:** It's a myth that the departing CEO disappears into the ether, like a fog.

SPEED BUMP: Where will you get the support that this vast change demands?

What's the success formula? Shift your picture from driving (or pulling) people to succeed, to supporting and helping them in their daily work. Their feelings want reassurance that things will be okay (and that they will be too). Although you can't guarantee that (and never have been able to), you can still provide critical support as they carry on.

Here are three factors in the success formula:

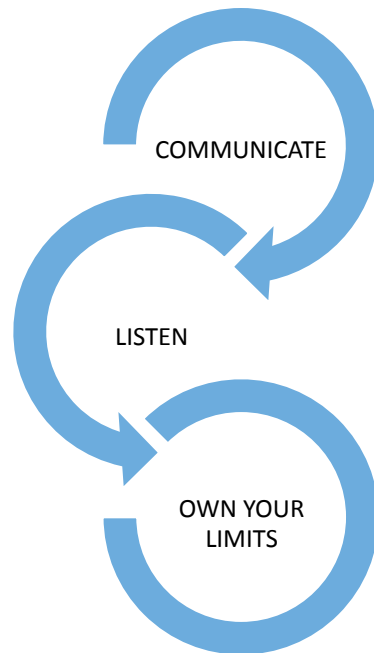
1. **Communicate:** immediately after announcing your departure, volunteer your answers to these questions:
 - Why are you leaving?

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- Will the business work without you?
 - Will you be available for advice?
2. **Listen:** Shift most of your time to face-to-face listening. Move to the agenda of the other person by asking them questions. Stop, sit down, and look at them. Drink deeply of who they are, just as you would if they were your top sales prospect. Answer as little as possible, except where you are certain of your answers. It's okay that they know that you don't know either. (Who i can predict the future?)

In one of the companies where I worked, the founder was a crusty guy who shot straight, sometimes with collateral damage. He was revered by folks in the firm. After his retirement he would show up unannounced, and word of him flew through the people like a whirlwind. The lift in their step and firmer set of their chins was visible, regardless of their position or even their relationship to him. He represented a reliable guy in the fight with them, bringing powerful insights and encouragement to do better. Even though he had left the company, he never left their hearts, and that seemed to be as they wanted it to be.

3. **Own your limits:** It's awkward to move suddenly from driver to passenger, even though we see it daily. That transition can have these steps:
- Back-Seat Driver: Nervously calling out instructions to a driver who may ignore them.
 - Back-Seat Mutterer: Same instructions, but mumbled under his breath, making the ride uncomfortable for everyone in the car.
 - Delighted Passenger: Happy to be along for the ride, curious about the trip, offering comfortable support and gratitude for the driver.



SPEED BUMP: Which kind of passenger will you be?

Here's the payday: Look after the new CEO like she was your own daughter. That means consciously letting her do things you disagree with, sometimes violently. That means checking in and listening, for the sole purpose of supporting her. Remember that when you were CEO, there were precious few folks who could listen with enough knowledge and patience to be safely helpful. You can do that, if you will.

ACCELERANT: When do you start listening with support and patience?

For more information on how you can accelerate revenues and profits in your business, please call or email me.

For more information, visit www.grewco.com.

Jim Grew is an expert in CEO-level strategy and executive leadership whose clients refer to him as the Business Defogger and Accelerator. Jim helps leaders swiftly discover the hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Nearly three decades of success as a COO and CEO coupled with his experience running nine thriving businesses provide the foundation for his consulting work as president of the Grew Company. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights on his blog, BizBursts.com: <http://bizbursts.com/>. He holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University.

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