



Saint Louis Chapter

Value Acceleration: The 'Prepare' Gate

Panel Discussion · EPI St. Louis Chapter · 22 April 2026

Session Summary

Panelists from the EPI St. Louis chapter discuss preparing small-to-mid business owners for a successful exit, focusing on the Value Acceleration Methodology's "Prepare" gate. The discussion covers the critical need for owners to shift their mindset, address emotional and identity-based hurdles, and transition from being operators to architects of scalable, systemized businesses. Key themes include the importance of predictable, recurring revenue over owner-dependent models; disciplined 90-day execution sprints to build momentum; and meticulous documentation (SOPs) to de-risk the business for buyers. Panelists stress that what makes a business more sellable—strong leadership, clear KPIs, and reduced owner reliance—also makes it more profitable and enjoyable to run, often leading owners to postpone their exit. Aligning personal post-exit goals with business readiness is crucial for a successful transition.

Additional Summary

The session's central paradox is worth stating plainly: the work that prepares a business for sale is the same work that makes an owner want to keep it. Two panelists put numbers to it — roughly one in five owners who intend to sell actually transact, and about two-thirds of one panelist's clients choose not to sell once the business has been repaired. Preparation is therefore better framed to owners as building a scalable business than as getting ready to exit. The language matters, because the resistance is emotional before it is operational.

Underneath that, the panel was consistent on sequence. Identity comes first — an owner who cannot answer "who am I without this business?" will stall the process no matter how sound the plan. Execution comes second, and the prescription was narrow and repetitive by design: a handful of goals, 90-day sprints, weekly accountability, and an early win engineered on purpose. Documentation and metrics come third, kept deliberately lean at six to ten KPIs and SOPs built top-down rather than exhaustively.

For advisors, the practical takeaway is that the Prepare gate is less about analysis than about installing rhythm. The failure mode named repeatedly was not bad strategy but plans that

were unowned, unscheduled and over-ambitious.

Panelists and Participants

- **Moderator, EPI St. Louis Chapter.** Framed the discussion around the Value Acceleration gates (Discover, Prepare, Decide). Emphasized that buyers value predictability and that making a business “scalable” is synonymous with making it “saleable.” Guided conversations on KPI adoption, 90-day execution, risk mitigation, and aligning the owner’s personal readiness with the business’s market attractiveness.
- **Betsy Grzybinski, Executive Coach, One Percent Today.** Focuses on leadership development, accountability, and the psychological hurdles owners face. Her core message is that the biggest barrier is the owner’s identity shift and emotional readiness. She advocates for raising self-awareness, defining a post-exit purpose, and focusing on one high-impact action to build momentum.
- **Barry Gleeson, President, The Kelsey Group.** A coach and advisor focused on alignment, culture, and execution. He highlights that few owners who intend to sell actually do, due to late preparation and misconceptions about value. He stresses disciplined 90-day and weekly rhythms, shifting from working in to on the business, and using a lean, top-down approach for SOP documentation.
- **Larry Weiss, Founder, Weiss Advisors.** A financial leader with expertise in value acceleration and operational readiness. His core message is that execution trumps strategy overload. He advises forcing hard prioritization into realistic 90-day sprints, engineering early wins, and educating owners on “good vs. bad” revenue. He also notes the importance of the “wealth gap” and spousal alignment in exit decisions.
- **Chris Coulter, Raymond James Wealth Management.** A new CEPA designee and panel questioner who probed buyer-type expectations, the emotional aspect of owner decision-making, and evolving CEOs from problem-solvers to framework creators.
- **Lauren Groda, Groda Enterprise Value Advisor.** Guest and participant who introduced her services and probed the panel on handling real-life obstacles and maintaining flexibility in planning.
- **Brian, Chapter Board.** Provided chapter announcements regarding upcoming sessions and curriculum planning.
- **Mark Rinsky.** Attendee introduction.

Key Points

- **Owner mindset and identity are the primary hurdles.** The biggest challenge in exit preparation is the owner’s emotional readiness and the need to disentangle their personal identity from the business. They must proactively design a post-exit life with clear purpose and hobbies to ensure a fulfilling transition.
- **Execution over strategy.** The “Prepare” gate is where strategy becomes execution. Success hinges on ruthless prioritization, realistic 90-day sprints, and weekly accountability rhythms to build discipline and create early wins.
- **Predictable revenue drives value.** Buyers pay a premium for predictable, recurring, and

defensible revenue streams (“moats”). Project-based, owner-dependent revenue is heavily discounted. Boosting short-term profit by cutting investment in systems and processes backfires during due diligence.

- **Owner independence is paramount.** A business’s value is inversely correlated with its dependence on the owner. The most critical step toward transferability is building a capable leadership team and systemizing operations to remove the owner from day-to-day tasks.
- **Documentation de-risks the business.** From a buyer’s perspective, if a process isn’t documented (SOPs), it doesn’t exist. Formal documentation of “tribal knowledge” is non-negotiable for making value tangible and transferable.
- **KPIs must be simple and actionable.** KPI adoption should focus on a minimal set of actionable metrics (six to ten) tied to desired outcomes. Overloading with metrics overwhelms teams and erodes execution.
- **Selling prep revitalizes the business.** The process of making a business attractive to buyers — improving systems, strengthening leadership, and reducing owner reliance — often makes it more profitable and enjoyable to run, causing many owners to delay their exit.
- **Alignment is a prerequisite.** A successful exit requires alignment on both the business vision and the personal post-exit plans of the owner and their spouse or partner. Misaligned expectations can derail deals.

Insights by Panelist

Betsy Grzybinski

- The biggest hurdle is identity: “Who am I without this business?” This question must be addressed for an owner to act decisively.
- Owners’ actions are driven by emotions, which stem from thoughts. By examining unwanted results, they can trace back and change the underlying thought patterns.
- Focus on “the one thing” with the biggest impact in a 30–90 day window to create momentum and overcome overwhelm.
- A strong leadership layer is crucial for identifying blind spots and ensuring alignment on vision.

Barry Gleeson

- Only a small minority (estimated at 20%) of owners intending to sell actually transact, often due to late preparation and misconceptions about what buyers value — sustainable, transferable performance, not just revenue.
- Shift from working in the business to on the business through a disciplined 90-day and weekly execution rhythm.
- Use a lean, top-down approach for creating SOPs to mitigate “tribal knowledge” risk.
- Use a three-circle filter (passion, competence, profitability) to assess adjacent diversification opportunities without diluting focus.

Larry Weiss

- Execution is the main shortfall. Force initiatives into 90-day, 6-month, and 1-year buckets, then narrow further to engineer an early win.
- The “wealth gap” — business value against the owner’s financial need — is the primary driver for the grow-or-exit decision.
- About two-thirds of his clients decide not to sell after preparing their business, because it becomes fun and profitable again.
- Owner and spousal alignment on post-exit plans is crucial; deals can stall if partners have conflicting retirement dreams.

Moderator

- The Prepare gate bridges clarity (valuation) and decision-making (exit readiness).
- Buyers pay for predictability and discount uncertainty. Preparation aims to reduce that uncertainty.
- Framing exit prep as making the business “scalable” is a more palatable approach for owners than focusing on “selling.”

Other Participants

- Chris Coulter highlighted the key leadership shift from being the best problem-solver to designing decision-making frameworks for the team.
- Lauren Groda advocated for assessing realism, identifying obstacles, and building flexibility into plans to handle life’s disruptions.
- The chapter is building a forward curriculum, piloting AI transcription to broaden access, and integrating new CEPA members into the ecosystem.

Discussion

What is the biggest mindset shift or emotional barrier for owners moving into the “Prepare” phase?

- **Betsy Grzybinski.** Owners must confront their identity being separate from the business. Emotions surface as preparation becomes real. It is crucial to raise their awareness of their own thoughts and feelings to enable action.
- **Larry Weiss.** Many owners lack a viable post-exit plan. He pushes them to develop hobbies and “practice retirement” to test assumptions — daily golf, for example, may not be as appealing as imagined.
- **Barry Gleeson.** Involving spouses and family in post-exit planning is critical. He uses a personal vision exercise where partners independently write their 10-year post-exit plan to uncover and resolve misalignments.

How do you help an owner prioritize improvements when everything seems important?

- **Larry Weiss.** Force categorization (90 days, 6 months, 1 year), then narrow to fewer items. Design the first 90 days for a win to build momentum, acknowledging resource limits. Create a realistic roadmap with target dates.
- **Betsy Grzybinski.** Reframe overwhelm. Choose one high-impact action and execute over 30–90 days. Delegation must be specific and focused.
- **Barry Gleeson.** Use 90-day and weekly rhythms with a handful of goals. Weekly status checks drive wins and build new discipline, shifting focus from in to on the business.

What are the biggest misconceptions owners have about business value and revenue?

- **Barry Gleeson.** Owners often think revenue alone is the holy grail. Buyers seek sustainable, transferable revenue and systems, not just a high topline number.
- **Panel consensus.** Predictable, recurring revenue is valued far higher than project-based, owner-dependent revenue. Many SMB owners misunderstand valuation, over-indexing on profit multiples while under-investing in the systems that create durable, transferable value.
- **Larry Weiss.** Cutting systems to boost short-term income backfires in due diligence. He teaches owners about “good vs. bad” revenue and the importance of building a “moat” around protected earnings.

What is the best way to introduce documentation (SOPs) and KPIs to an owner who has never tracked them?

- **SOPs.** The key is to make it easy. Start with a lean process like mapping a core function on sticky notes. Use modern tools like video recording and AI to generate formatted SOPs. Success requires discipline and top-down support from leadership.
- **KPIs.** Start with six to ten simple, actionable metrics derived from desired outcomes. Begin by asking the owner what “feels” like a good week or month to translate their intuition into measurable data. Tailor how metrics are presented to the owner’s comprehension style.

What is the most common reason 90-day sprints fail, and how do you prevent it?

- **Panel consensus.** Failures stem from a lack of clarity, ownership, and accountability. Prevention requires embedding weekly check-ins, ensuring top-down emphasis and alignment, and realistically planning for team capacity by deprioritizing other work.

How do you evolve a business owner from being the best problem-solver to a creator of decision frameworks?

- **Betsy Grzybinski.** It requires an incremental shift in awareness. Help the owner assess if their current behaviors are producing desired outcomes and at what cost, then explore alternative methods.
- **Larry Weiss.** Coach the owner to require team members to present problems with proposed solutions — for example, a free option and an unconstrained-cost option. This

tests the team's thinking against core values and builds the owner's confidence in their decision-making.