

**Life is interdependent.** Transition to Employee Ownership. Bring work to life.



**Your weekly blog on all things EO  
with Barry Horner**

Episode 4 | Series 1

## **A Guide to Telling your Story (Announcing your Employee Ownership Journey)**

**Transitioning your business to Employee Ownership (EO) is a monumental step – a commitment to your team, your legacy, and a sustainable future. But once the decision has been formally agreed by the Board, the next crucial step is communicating this transformative news to others.**

**Today's 'Know-How' builds on my earlier 'Big Reveal' blog and addresses both internal and external communication.**

How do you ensure your message resonates, inspires and clearly articulates the profound benefits of this new chapter?

It all comes down to a clear, consistent, and values-driven communication strategy, tailored for both your internal team and your external audience.

I will share some accepted best practice together with how Paradigm Norton addressed these key communications, when we transitioned our business to EO in 2019.

## **First, Tell Your Team. The Heart of Your EO Story**

Before a single press release goes out, your employees – your *new owners* – must hear it from you directly. This isn't just about good practice, but rather it's about respecting their newfound stake and fostering immediate buy-in.

Deliver the news in stages. Even the mere mention of change will be a challenge to some of the team.

Gather everyone together and host an All-Hands/Town Hall Meeting. This allows for a personal announcement, a chance to share and explain your 'why' and lead an immediate Q&A session. If all you do is manage to communicate the 'why' and answer the key questions from this initial announcement - then regard this as a success.

Explain that the initial meeting is one of many that will be arranged, and there will be ample opportunities to ask further questions and gain deeper insights into what is likely to change - and what isn't.

The real goal is to start the EO transition even before it has become legally set in stone. You know your team well, so deliver the news in stages at a pace that you know will land well. Transparency at this stage is paramount.

Articulate your motivation. Was it about preserving culture, rewarding loyalty, securing a legacy, or a strategic succession plan? Most likely it will be a combination of all of these factors. Be authentic about what led you down the EO path.

Next you detail the 'How'. Whilst you don't need to dive into every legal intricacy, explain what EO means for the team. What does it mean for their roles, responsibilities, and potential future benefits? These will be the questions that are uppermost in the minds of the team.

Provide clear and well-crafted resources. Create an internal FAQ document, designate a point person for questions and set up a dedicated internal portal where employees can learn more. Reinforce that this is a journey you are all on together.

The Paradigm Norton team really appreciated our FAQ document, where we sought to answer every possible question arising from the proposed change. This served to ensure that it was the facts that got communicated and not ‘hear say’. Our FAQ document still sits on our intranet some six years after the transition to EO, so new joiners have access to the reasons why the decision was made to become EO.

Finally, **Celebrate!** This is a huge milestone. Mark it with an internal celebration – a lunch, a team day, a team event. Make the team feel valued and excited. Celebrate all of the team becoming owners/Partners.

## **Then, Tell the World. Engaging Your External Stakeholders**

Once time has passed and your team has been informed and engaged, it’s time to craft your external narrative. This message needs to be clear, consistent and highlight the unique benefits of your new EO status for each audience.

We were overwhelmed by positivity from our clients, when we transitioned in 2019. Financial planning is all about planning for the long term, so our clients were incredibly reassured to know that we were not preparing to put up the ‘for sale’ sign and that the team that they had come to rely on and depend on, would be there for the long haul.

### **1. Your Clients/Customers. Continuity and Enhanced Service**

Your clients are primarily interested in how this change affects them. Reassure them and highlight the positives. Remember that most people are change averse so any change may not be immediately welcomed.

Focus on continuity & stability. Emphasise that the same great team, products and services remain. EO enhances, rather than disrupts, your commitment to them. Paradigm Norton’s clients were hugely reassured to know that we were not selling out to a large competitor or consolidator where the outcomes of these transactions most certainly are not done in the best interest of clients.

Highlight an enhanced service. Explain that employee-owners are typically more engaged, more committed, and more invested in client success. This often translates to higher quality service, greater innovation, and a deeper partnership.

Reinforce shared values. Your EO transition most likely aligns with your company's existing values (e.g., sustainability, community, excellence), so draw clear connections.

One of Paradigm Norton's four core values is 'Building for the Future'. Our website says, "We encourage our clients to think long-term in their planning and we do the same", so our decision to go EO was an obvious one and one that resonated internally, externally and with our values.

**Messaging Idea.** "We are thrilled to announce that [Your Company Name] is now employee-owned! This exciting transition means our dedicated team now has a direct stake in our collective success, reinforcing our commitment to delivering exceptional [products/services] and ensuring a stable, client-focused future. Let me explain what this means for you..."

## **2. Your Suppliers & Partners. Reliability and Long-Term Vision**

Your partners need confidence in your stability and long-term vision.

**Emphasise stability & growth.** EO often means less risk of disruptive sales or acquisitions, signalling a stable and reliable partner for the long haul.

**Highlight shared goals.** Employee-owners are more motivated to succeed, which benefits the entire supply chain through consistent demand and reliable relationships.

**Discuss vision.** Share how EO supports your long-term strategic goals and continued investment in your partnership.

**Messaging Idea.** "As an employee-owned business, [Your Company Name] is building an even stronger foundation for sustainable growth and long-term partnerships. We believe this structure enhances our stability and commitment, making us an even more reliable partner for you and here is why..."

## **3. Your Community & Industry. Leadership and Impact**

Position your EO transition as a positive development for the broader community and an example for your profession/industry.

Showcase your ‘Why’. Explain how EO aligns with community values, creates local wealth and fosters a more resilient economy.

Be a thought leader. Share your journey. Your experience can inspire other businesses considering EO. Participate in industry events, write articles, or offer insights.

Highlight ESG/social impact. If your EO transition is part of a broader commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles or B Corp certification, ensure these connections are clear.

**Messaging Idea.** “We are proud to join the growing movement of employee-owned businesses. This transition strengthens our commitment to our team, our community, and to building a more sustainable and equitable economy right here in [Your Town/Region]. Here is how we plan to achieve this...”

Here are the key communication channels that we leveraged as we sought to share the good news with our wider stakeholder group.

1. **Press release.** A formal announcement for media, industry publications, and financial outlets.
2. **Website update.** A dedicated page explaining your EO model, FAQs, and perhaps a message from the key leaders of the business.
3. **Social media.** Share the news across all platforms, using visuals and engaging language. Consider a short video message.
4. **Direct outreach.** Personalised emails or letters to key clients, partners, and community leaders.
5. **‘Meet and Greet’.** When Paradigm Norton transitioned to EO in 2019 we crafted a clear comms message whereby all our key clients were contacted, and the CEO provided a clear message on what the transition would mean for them. This communication was delivered a month before the legal process completed and was very well received.
6. **Internal communications platform.** Keep your new employee owners regularly updated on progress and celebrations.

The overarching message needs to be authenticity and enthusiasm.

Regardless of the audience, your communication should be authentic, enthusiastic, and clearly articulate the benefits of employee ownership. This isn't just a change in corporate structure, but rather it's a profound statement about your values, your people, and your vision for the future.

Go and tell your story with pride.

For more information or to discuss anything in this latest Know-How;  
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