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

Take it From a Former Owner, This is How it is Going to Feel - *Part One*

**Recognising when your ego is getting in the way of an EOT's success
requires brutal self-awareness.**

Because many founders are deeply attached to what they have built, often over decades, ego can creep in subtly, disguised as 'protecting the business' or 'ensuring high standards'.

In 2019, I transitioned a business that I had co-founded, to an Employee Ownership Trust, and some six years later in 2025 I transitioned the CEO role. In this new series, I share some of my journey and the things to note and look out for as a vendor.

Here are my top tips on how you can spot the warning signs that your ego is driving rather than supporting the Trust.

1. You feel resentful when things work without you

The Red Flag. If the leadership team or the Trust makes a successful decision or implements a new process without your input, and your immediate internal reaction is irritation rather than pride, your ego is talking.

The Shift Required. True stewardship means celebrating when the machine runs smoothly in your absence. If you secretly want or need them to struggle so they ‘need’ you, your ego has taken the wheel.

2. You confuse ‘My Way’ with ‘The Only Right Way’

The Red Flag. You find yourself dismissing alternative approaches proposed by new leaders or trustees simply because they don’t align with how you spent years doing it.

The Shift Required. An EOT is designed to bring diverse perspectives. If you treat difference of opinion as incompetence or a personal challenge to your legacy, you are significantly stifling the company’s evolution.

3. You retain control out of fear, not strategy

The Red Flag. You hold onto key decisions, information, or relationships under the guise that “no one else can handle this yet”, when in reality, you are just afraid of becoming redundant.

The Shift Required. Empowerment requires risk. If you refuse to let others step up because it threatens your sense of indispensable importance, you are prioritising your ego over the trust’s long-term sustainability.

4. You take constructive challenge personal

The Red Flag. When trustees, the board, or employees question your ideas or hold you accountable to the trust’s governance rules, you feel personally attacked or disrespected given everything you have sacrificed for the company.

The Shift Required. In an EO structure, everyone is accountable, including the founder. Separating your personal identity from corporate governance is essential for healthy debate.

5. You dominate the room

The Red Flag. You notice that when you speak in meetings, everyone stops talking, agrees with you quickly, or looks to you for validation before forming an opinion, and you enjoy that power dynamic.

The Shift Required. Consciously stepping back, asking open questions, and creating space for quieter voices to lead is the antidote to founder-centric ego.

By keeping these warning signs in check, you ensure that your presence as a former owner remains a stabilising asset rather than an emotional anchor holding the company back.

Conclusion. Keeping your ego in check for the trust's future

Ultimately, navigating the transition to an Employee Ownership Trust is a test of a founder's self-awareness. Recognising the red flags, whether it is feeling resentful of success without you, clinging to control out of fear, or taking institutional accountability personally, is not about self-criticism, but rather it is about self-preservation for the business.

When you learn to separate your personal identity from the company's daily evolution, you trade the fragile, exhausting burden of being the absolute boss for the enduring legacy of being a trusted steward. Although experiences vary between EOTs, that mindset shift is what ensures the trust thrives long after you step away.

Feel free to get in touch with me at bhorner@pnfp.co.uk for more information or visit paradigmnorton.co.uk/eo

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