



Do Not Let Others Decide What Comes Next

By Claudia McIntyre

At a certain point, many business owners begin to hear a familiar chorus. You have earned the right to slow down. It is time to step away. You should finally rest.

Often these messages are well intentioned. Sometimes they come from people who care deeply and have your best interest at heart. Other times they come from those projecting their own ideas of what a “good next chapter” should look like.

But for founders and long-time owners, those voices can miss something important. You are wired to build, to contribute, and to carry responsibility. That does not simply disappear because a season changes.

Founders are not wired to disengage

Most owners are problem solvers, builders, and decision makers. For many, the business has been a place of purpose, challenge, and service to others.

When outsiders suggest that fulfillment now looks like disengagement, it can feel deeply misaligned. That tension is not immaturity or stubbornness. It is identity.

The question is not whether you stop contributing. It is how contribution evolves.

Meaning does not come from leisure alone

Research consistently shows that purpose and contribution matter deeply to long-term well-being, especially in later seasons of life.

Studies on happiness and aging, including work summarized by Arthur C. Brooks and others, point to several consistent findings:

- Continued contribution is a stronger predictor of long-term happiness than income or leisure alone
- Owners who shift from achievement to mentoring, teaching, advising, or service often report higher life satisfaction
- Complete disengagement after a long career is associated with lower fulfillment and higher risk of depression
- Purpose tends to come from being useful and needed, not simply from having fewer responsibilities

Rest matters. But for many founders, meaning is sustained through contribution that evolves, rather than disappears.

What comes next does not have to look like what came before

One of the false choices owners are often presented with is this: either stay fully involved or walk away completely.

For many owners, the most fulfilling next chapter lives somewhere in between full engagement and full exit. It may include:

- Mentoring rather than managing
- Strategic involvement instead of daily decision-making
- Developing leaders rather than carrying every outcome
- Investing more intentionally in relationships that may have taken a back seat during the building years
- Serving causes, boards, or communities that reflect deeply held values
- Choosing a pace that is sustainable, rather than driven by urgency or habit

This season is not about clinging to the past or proving relevance. It is about choosing intentionally how your experience, perspective, relationships, and energy are best stewarded now.

Do not confuse stepping back with stepping aside

Stepping back from day-to-day operations can create space. Stepping aside from purpose rarely does.

Owners who thrive in their next chapter often do so because they thought carefully about what gives them meaning, redefined contribution rather than eliminated it, let go of control without letting go of purpose, and designed a future instead of defaulting into one.

Support can help you define what is yours to define

Because these questions are personal, they are not always easy to navigate alone.

Many owners find it helpful to work with trusted advisors or mentors who can help them reflect without agenda, challenge assumptions, and explore possibilities honestly. An outside perspective can help separate expectation from desire and fear from opportunity.

The goal is not to decide quickly. It is to decide well.

A helpful resource

For owners wrestling with identity and purpose in later seasons, *From Strength to Strength* by Arthur C. Brooks offers a thoughtful exploration of how people can move from achievement to contribution with clarity and fulfillment.

Closing

The next chapter does not need to be smaller or less meaningful. When approached with intention, it can be one of the most impactful and satisfying seasons yet.