WHY FOUNDERS GET STUCK

THE EXIT IS JUST THE BEGINNING.

What nobody tells founders about life after the sale.



Oliver Villwock · Advised over a hundred private clients · Facilitated for organizations such as YPO

YOU'VE MADE IT. NOW WHAT?

The champagne goes flat. The money changed. You didn't. And underneath sits the quiet question: is this it?

THE NUMBERS.

2025 Yale case study of 52 post-exit entrepreneurs, each with a net worth of $10M or more.

22% foresaw what life after the exit would be like.
Almost 4 in 5 were blindsided.

41% found a new purpose, on average six years on.
Most were still searching years later.

$65M Their 'enough' number rose from $10M to $65M.
The finish line moved with them.

The money arrived. The meaning did not.

WHAT IS HAPPENING.

Hedonic adaptation: the high of the win fades back to baseline.
Brickman and Campbell, 1971 (the hedonic treadmill)

The arrival fallacy: reaching the goal does not bring the lasting happiness we expected.
Tal Ben-Shahar, Happier, 2007

The five hidden losses (Jahoda): work gave you more than income.
Marie Jahoda, latent deprivation model, 1982

STRUCTURE · PEOPLE · SHARED PURPOSE · STATUS AND IDENTITY · A REASON TO GET UP

The exit keeps the money and takes the rest.

WHAT FOUNDER CIRCLES DON'T TALK ABOUT.

Every wisdom tradition, from rites of passage to the Hindu forest years to the making of a knight, follows these three movements. For founders, something ends at the exit, but nothing is properly closed. Without a real ending, nothing new can open.



I ENDING

The deal closes. The role, the team and the old identity end, usually without a proper close.

II THRESHOLD

A deliberate phase of inner work, the one most founders skip or go through without a guide. Old drives lose their grip, and a truer self is reborn.

III RETURN

Only if the first two are done well: you come back changed, with a purpose and a gift to give.

THE COST OF SKIPPING THE MIDDLE.

Skip the threshold, and you take the old self with you. Within a year you're back in the game: a new venture, a board seat, a fund, anything with a scoreboard. Not because you need the money, but because you don't know who you are without it. Your family gets the same distracted version of you, now with no excuse. And one day you wake up at 55 or 65, richer than ever, and the question is still there: *is this it?*

64%
of recent sellers want back in the game.
Not for the money.
They miss 'the people, the rhythms, feeling useful, putting points on the board.'
Yale SOM case, 2025

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

PART TWO

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

THE FIVE STEPS ACROSS.

Drawn from rites of passage research: van Gennep, Turner, Bridges, Foster and Little

1 LET IT END

the old identity, not just the company.

A facilitated ritual of ending, held the way the traditions held it, so the old identity is truly released.

2 STAY IN THE VOID

long enough to hear what was running you.

Solitude and identity work: see the patterns that ran the first climb, and what is left without them.

3 MEET A REAL TRIAL

one your old strategy cannot win.

A night alone in the desert, or a challenge money cannot buy.

4 MAKE A VOW, WITNESSED

in service of something larger.

A vow that rises from your depth, not your old ambition, spoken before people who will hold you to it.

5 RETURN WITH A GIFT

bring back what you found, in service of others.

Work that flows from who you have become: mentor, fund or steward something larger.

WHAT BECOMES POSSIBLE.

Crossed well, the threshold gives back what the first mountain never could: freedom from needing to prove anything; a purpose you choose instead of one that drives you; energy and presence for the people you love; and a body of work that outlives you. *The traditions call this person twice-born. The world needs more of them.*

NO ONE INITIATES THEMSELVES.

- In the old traditions, the passage was held by someone who had walked it.
- You cannot see the pattern you are living inside.
- A vow needs a witness: research shows reporting progress to others improves follow-through (Harkin 2016).

> *A shaman in the Amazon knows the threshold, but not your world. A business advisor knows your world, but not the threshold. You need a guide who knows both.*

THE PURE POWER WAY.

An ancient initiation, rebuilt one-to-one for founders with the highest standards. You close the old chapter properly, find what is truly yours, and return with a purpose worth the next twenty years.



Your guide: *Oliver has stood in both worlds.* A fintech director at 28, he left his career at the peak for 4,000+ hours of silent meditation, with solitary retreats of up to 49 days. A meditation teacher in the lineage of Ramana Maharshi, he has advised over a hundred private clients and facilitated for organizations such as YPO.

FOUNDERS WHO CROSSED.



Chad Rubin, sold Skubana. Redefined success, then raised $2.3M and built and sold his next venture.

'Hiring Oliver was one of the best decisions of my life.'



Kayvon Bina, founder. After his exit, embarked on a deep inner journey and today leads a 100-person company.

'I'm feeling unstuck, energized and more trusting in the Universe, and am seeing an almost overwhelming volume of opportunities appear since I became open through our work together.'

The first mountain was about proving yourself. The second is about becoming yourself.

BOOK A PRIVATE CONNECTION CALL

30 minutes, private, no pitch.

cal.com/olivervillwock/connection-call

READY TO CROSS THE THRESHOLD?

A free 30 minute conversation for founders after the exit.

Book your call

cal.com/olivervillwock/connection-call

Or DM me "SECOND" on LinkedIn



Oliver Villwock

Private advisor to founders after the exit

I've advised over a hundred private clients, facilitated for organizations such as YPO, and spent 4,000+ hours in silent meditation.