

Business planning outside of the context of the lifecycle of the business, and importantly, its owners' life stages can ignore vital issues that influence business success and the needs of the owners. If you look at your business lifecycle first, you can quickly highlight key issues to think about.

Use the checklists below to explore the questions you might consider, depending on where you are in the business lifecycle. If you think you might want some impartial and expert input on any of the items on the checklist, please do get in touch with McBrides. An initial conversation is free and without commitment. Our experts have helped many business owners define their goals, structure their businesses, find new finance and successfully achieve an eventual exit.

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STARTING OUT

Focus: winning new business and managing cash

- What is the business idea or USP?
- What is the best business structure: sole trader, partnership, limited liability partnership, limited company?
- Have your business plan and financial projections been reviewed by an objective and independent 3rd party?
- What are the working capital and cashflow requirements? These are key survival factors!
- Who are the right advisers for your business? (Define needs, ask for recommendations and meet the people).
- What other resources does the business need?
- Have you any personal funds that can be used for investment in the business?
- What are your business risks and how can they be mitigated?

GROWTH

Focus: harnessing funds, refining systems and plans

- Have you revised your marketing/sales plans?
- What measures are in place for asset protection?
- Are supplier, customer and employee contracts right?
- How can you fund growth? Consider asset financing, bank and credit facilities, factoring, invoice discounting or equity finance.
- Have you updated your business plan and financial projections?
- Are key systems and procedures in place – including accounting and reporting systems, responsibilities and controls?
- What are you doing about team building and retention of good people? For example, skills development, staff incentive schemes, share options schemes, professional HR practices?

MATURITY

Focus: maximising profit and/or reward

- Have you reviewed your product/service and market positioning?
- What's your assessment of the competition? How should the business respond?
- How can you improve cost controls and efficiencies?
- What can you do to refine and develop support structures – especially IT?
- What are you doing to incentivise employee performance and loyalty?
- What are your personal goals ... lifestyle and financial?
- What actions can you take to reduce tax?
- What plans and policies are in place for 'key executive' retirement or incapacity?
- Have you updated your business plan and financial projections?

WHERE NEXT?

Focus: strategic decision on future direction

- What is now important to you?
- Is your financial standing in line with your personal and business aspirations?
- What new markets/products/services or routes to market are you considering?
- Should you hive off any non-core activities or divisions with view to a sale?
- Could the business grow by acquisition or merger? Would this fit in with your personal goals?
- Who will you hand the business on to? Have you considered existing management, family, or the trade?
- Should you prepare the business for sale? What can be done to maximise its value?
- Will you need to refinance for the exit route chosen? And how will you fund your retirement?
- Have you updated your business plan and projections?

EXITING

Focus: achieving your personal and financial goals

- How do you find a buyer for your business?
- How will you withdraw capital from the business?
- How long do you want to stay working in the business after a sale?
- What, if any, ongoing relationship will you have with the business post sale? And how will that be structured?
- Is this your first time selling a business? If so, how will you go about it and who can help?
- Will you be re-investing business sale proceeds?
- What ongoing income will you have?