

BUY YOUR WAY OUT

A Practical Guide to Acquiring
Your First Small Business



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The financial examples in this book are illustrative and simplified. Loan rates, terms, and program rules change over time. SBA rules described here reflect the guidelines in effect as of October 2026; always confirm current requirements with your lender.

The "From the deal file" stories are based on the author's real experiences. Some names and details have been changed or left out to protect the privacy of the people and businesses involved.

Author's Note

For about a decade, I worked as a mechanical and manufacturing engineer in the medical device industry. It was a good career, and I was grateful for it. But I knew I wanted to build something of my own.

So I bought my first business: three assisted living homes, all at once. I didn't have it all figured out, and there were weeks I wasn't sure I would make payroll. But those first three homes grew into six locations, and over time I learned to build a team that runs the day-to-day, so I can be as involved as I choose.

That freedom is what lets me keep doing what I enjoy most: looking at new businesses, analyzing deals, and buying the next one. Each business I buy and set up to run well gives me the time to find the one after it.

This book is the guide I wish I'd had when I started. It won't pretend that owning a business is easy, because it isn't, and it isn't for everyone. But if you have a good career and you've been wondering whether there's another way, I want to show you how buying a business actually works, step by step, with real numbers.

Introduction

Who this book is for

This book is for professionals who already earn a good living, such as engineers, nurses, sales leaders, and managers, and who are wondering whether there's another way to build wealth and freedom. You may have savings or home equity, good credit, and years of experience leading people or solving problems. Those are exactly the things lenders and sellers look for.

It's also for people who are curious but cautious. You won't find promises of easy money here. Ownership brings real stress and real risk, and this book is honest about both.

The big idea: buy a business, not a job

A business is worth buying when it earns enough to pay someone to run the day-to-day, cover its debt, and still leave money for you. Below that line, you're buying a job with a loan attached. Almost every chapter comes back to this idea in some way.

How to use this book

The chapters follow the order of a real deal, from deciding whether ownership is right for you to running the business after closing. You can read it straight through, or jump to the chapter you need.

A few features appear throughout:

- **One example business.** A fictional home health agency with about \$2 million in revenue is carried through the book, so you can see how the numbers work at every step.
- **From the deal file.** Short stories from my own deals, including the ones that didn't work out, and what I took from each.
- **Checklists.** Every chapter ends with a checklist you can use on a real deal.
- **A glossary.** If a term is unfamiliar, you'll find it defined at the back of the book.

Take your time with it. The goal isn't to rush you into a deal. It's to help you make your first one a good one.

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Chapter 1: Why Buying Can Beat Building

I Tried Starting First

When most professionals picture owning a business, they picture starting one. An idea, a logo, a launch. That's what I pictured too, and I tried it twice before I bought anything.

The first time was an e-commerce business. I sourced products from Alibaba and sold them under my own label. I made my money back and a few thousand dollars on top, but I didn't know ads, SEO, or marketing at the time. I was learning everything at once, and eventually I closed it down.

The second time, I set out to start an assisted living home from scratch. That meant finding a house, remodeling it, and getting it ready to license. That's where the plan ended: in the remodel. The project stalled before it ever had a resident or a dollar of revenue.

I needed to make my money back, so I pivoted. I started looking at assisted living homes that were already for sale. I found three homes for sale together, and I went all in. There was no plan B. I wanted out of my engineering career, and I was willing to give it everything I had and not look back.

What Buying Gave Me

The difference was immediate. When I bought those first three homes, revenue was already coming in. The seller passed along some of her connections. I was operating right away, not waiting months for a remodel, a license, or a first customer.

With my startups, I had been trying to build every piece at once. With the purchase, most of the pieces already existed. My job was to run the business and make it better, and that was a job I could actually do.

From the deal file: My first assisted living homes

I bought my first assisted living homes because I wanted out of my 9-to-5 as an engineer. I had a good career, but I knew I wanted to build something of my own.

The opportunity came from a seller who needed out too. She lived a couple of hours away, the business didn't have proper processes in place, and running it from a distance had become too much for her. I lived about 45 minutes from the homes, so what was a burden for her was manageable for me.

That situation shaped the deal. I put 50% down, and she financed the other 50% at 0% interest over nine months. During those nine months, the business itself paid off the note. At the same time, I put in the systems they had been missing, and revenue grew 47% in less than six months.

I could put 50% down because it was a smaller acquisition. Knowing what I know now, that same money could have supported a much bigger deal with SBA financing or a seller note. That's a big part of why I'm writing this book.

What I took from it: a seller's situation matters as much as the asking price. Her urgency was real, and I could solve her problem. And a business that's struggling because of weak processes, not a weak market, can be one of the best things you'll ever buy, because the upside is in your hands.

Why Buying Can Beat Building

Starting a business can work, and some of the best companies began that way. But for a professional with a good career, a family, and limited time, buying an established business often makes more sense. Here's why.

You get cash flow from day one. A startup can take years to turn a profit. An established business already has customers paying it. That income is what pays the loan, the staff, and eventually you.

The demand is already proven. You don't have to wonder whether anyone will buy what the business sells. The financial records show you, month by month.

You inherit a team, customers, and relationships. Employees who know the work, customers who come back, and vendors who already extend terms. Building those from nothing takes years.

You can finance it. Banks rarely lend on an idea, but they do lend against a business with a track record of earnings. That's what makes it possible to buy a business without a large pile of cash, which we'll cover in Chapters 8 and 9.

You start in the middle of the story, not at the beginning. The hardest early chapters, finding the first customer and surviving the first year, have already been written by someone else.

Buying isn't risk-free. You can overpay. You can inherit problems the seller didn't mention. You take on debt, usually with a personal guarantee. Much of this book is about protecting yourself from exactly those risks: reading the numbers, verifying what you're told, and walking away when a deal doesn't hold up.

An Honest Look: This Isn't for Everyone

I love owning businesses. It has shaped who I am. But I'd be doing you a disservice if I made it sound easy. The stress is real, the thinking about the business never fully stops, and the responsibility for other people's paychecks is heavy.

From what I've seen, a few things make ownership especially hard for some people, no matter how much they earn or how much money they have:

- **You can't handle uncertainty.** In a job, the paycheck arrives every two weeks. In a business, some months are better than others, and problems show up without warning.
- **You can't let go.** If you need to do everything yourself, you'll end up with a job you can't quit. The business only grows when other people can perform without you.
- **You don't work on yourself.** The business grows only as far as the owner does. Reading, learning, and getting better at leading people isn't optional.
- **You don't have discipline.** No one sets your schedule or checks your work. You have to show up and follow through on your own.

None of these are permanent traits. I had to work on several of them myself. But if you read that list and feel resistance rather than recognition, take that seriously before you sign a loan.

From the deal file: The payroll week

There was a week early on when payroll was due and I didn't know if I was going to make it. People were counting on that money for their rent and their families, and the weight of that is hard to describe until you've carried it.

I had to learn, quickly, how to get a loan through QuickBooks, which was the best option available to me at the time. The money was in my business account almost by the next day, and I made payroll.

What I took from it: the stress is real, and it doesn't care how good your plan looked on paper. Know your fast-funding options before you need them, and understand that the quickest money usually costs more than a bank loan, so it works best as a backup, not a plan. That week is why I keep a cash cushion now, and why I want a deal to cover its debt with room to spare, not just barely.

What It Takes

The good news is that a professional career prepares you for more of this than you might think.

Engineering gave me two habits I still rely on every day: being organized and thinking critically. Organization meant I could put systems in place where a business had none. Critical thinking meant I could look at a deal, a problem, or a set of financials and ask the right questions before reacting.

What engineering didn't give me was sales and marketing. I had to learn both, and honestly, they became my favorite part of the work. If there's a skill you're missing today, that's normal. Most of what an owner needs can be learned, and some of it you'll come to enjoy more than you expect.

One idea changed how I think about all of this. In their book *Who Not How*, Dan Sullivan and Dr. Benjamin Hardy suggest that when you face a goal, the better question is usually not "How do I do this?" but "Who can help me do this?" As an engineer, I was trained to figure out the how myself. As an owner, the biggest leaps came when I found the right people instead: a seller who would finance part of a deal, a lender who understood my industry, and later an operations manager who could run things without me.

What I'd Tell My Engineer Self

If I could go back to the day before I bought those first assisted living homes, I'd tell myself: just go for it. You'll figure it out. And if you don't, that's on you.

That last part isn't meant to be harsh. It's freeing. Once you own a business, there's no one else to blame and no one else to wait for. The results are yours, good and bad, and that's exactly what makes it worth doing.

Going all in worked for me because I was fully committed. But commitment isn't the same as ignoring the numbers. The rest of this book is about making sure the business you buy can carry its debt, pay the