

## How to turn the loss of a client into an opportunity

Nobody likes losing a client.

It's an unfortunate fact of professional life and it usually comes as a bolt from the blue that in many circumstances leaves accountants scratching their heads as to what they could have done to prevent it. Often, there's nothing that could have been done. One of life's certainties – death – cannot be forestalled by even the most proficient and experienced accountant. However, there are events, that while you cannot prevent them, you can capitalise on them.

One scenario that you may see coming but are helpless to prevent, causing you to simply stand by and watch impotently as the iceberg looms ever larger, is when your client is being purchased by another business.

More often than not it is a large fee and one that has been with you for many years as you watched it grow and perhaps became more involved. You knew in your heart that they would sell out or have to "trade up" to a more prestigious firm at the behest of their bank or to enable them to pitch for ever larger contracts.

Instead of watching with a sense of foreboding you can turn the situation to your advantage, as the sale of a business presents 2 lucrative opportunities for an accountant.

The first is helping the business to become sale-ready, often termed as "grooming for sale". You'd be surprised how many business owners are blind to the problems that exist right under their nose or perhaps haven't got the head to confront them. These issues can materially affect the value and therefore the ultimate sale proceeds of the business. Your accountancy skills within the context of trusted business adviser are ideally placed to work with your client in the run up to selling.

The second is to roll your sleeves up and get involved with the sales process. It can often get messy and drawn out, either as a result of the buyer attempting to squeeze the price directly or their solicitor doing their best to put up artificial objections under the guise of protecting their client's interests.

While this is their task they often lose sight of commerciality and the fact that both the buyer and the seller actually want to complete the deal. Accountants are ideally placed to use their experience and insight to support their client in bypassing the solicitor and explaining the realpolitik of the business directly to the other side.



A job well done could even lead the buyer to continue using your services or perhaps even moving their own business to you, depending on the bigger picture. Even if not, it is an ideal opportunity for you to showcase your business skills and perhaps use your input as a case study to other clients and beyond.

Finally, as clients draw nearer to retirement you can also confront them with the reality that if they leave it too late to sell their business the value can evaporate without them even realising. It may sound like "turkeys voting for Christmas" but aren't you duty-bound to dispense the best proactive advice possible?

It's a win-win for everybody.