Пройти через крах, сохранив уважение к себе: зачем предпринимателю доула смерти

Закрытие бизнеса принято считать провалом. Но его можно пройти достойно — бережно к команде, клиентам и себе

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Going Through a Collapse with Your Self-Respect Intact: Why an Entrepreneur Needs a Death Doula

Shutting down a company is generally considered a failure. But you can go through it with dignity, gracefully, with care for your team, your clients and yourself.

By Alena Bocharova · Reminder, Work section · October 19, 2026

What does it mean to close a business with dignity — and why is it so hard for entrepreneurs to make that call, even when the outcome is obvious? In a culture that

talks about growth and success, shutting down a project is often seen as defeat. But is it possible to go through this experience and keep your money, your reputation, your relationships with your team, and your own mental health?

Alena Bocharova — a coach and consultant to creative entrepreneurs, co-founder of Beat Film Festival, and the originator of the TOK conference — reflects in this column for Reminder on what it means to close in a way that is caring toward yourself and your employees, and why it matters to make room in the process for grief, shame, and even joy.

Why we don't know how to end things

Modern society doesn't talk about death — it's kept at a respectful distance. The whole culture of entrepreneurship has historically been built on an ideology of growth and numbers. Whoever isn't growing is a loser. People who close their businesses are only talked about in the hallways. Meanwhile, identity in big cities is built around careers, and people make many decisions as if they were matters of life and death.

Losing a client, a change in leadership, leaving a company — these are all small deaths we're not used to mourning. So nothing prepares us for potentially bigger losses. And when they approach, we meet them with an underdeveloped emotional apparatus and without the skills we need to cope with loss.

We know how to design a business's launch, its growth, and its scaling. But we hardly know how to design its ending. What if ending a business could also be a success, and the ability to wind one down were as much a management skill as the ability to launch and grow one? And who would we learn it from?

In 2022 I came up with the TOK conference, which is now owned by Tochka Bank. Its main goal was to bring entrepreneurs together in the face of the challenges of a new era: nothing makes sense, but we keep working. In 2026 the agenda has changed, and the key question for small business has become: will I have to close, and what do I do in the face of this black hole?

This year I would invite to a small-business conference not only those who are growing their businesses against the odds, but also those who have successfully closed a business while preserving their financial assets, reputation, and mental health. And also a bankruptcy specialist — and a person whose profession inspired me to write this piece: a death doula for business. But first things first.

Who are death doulas for business

Last year our cat died. It was a great grief for our family and for my children. That's how I learned about the profession of pet death doulas.

By then I already knew that end-of-life doulas, or death doulas, exist. They accompany a dying person and their loved ones through the last stage of life — from drawing up a will and carrying out final wishes to emotional support, especially when the dying process is long. They also help people say goodbye and live through the loss. A pet death doula helps assess how comfortable or how hard things are for an animal in the terminal stages of illness, teaches owners to recognize the animal's pain and stress, and supports them in making difficult decisions.

When we put an animal to sleep, we are essentially taking on the decision to end the life of another living being. That comes with guilt and doubt. But the profession of pet death doula itself surprised me.

Watching what was happening in small business this year, I thought that such a doula would be useful for entrepreneurs who are now facing the need to close their businesses. When I came up with the idea of a death doula for business and started imagining what one might do, I learned that such specialists really do exist — in America. They combine two kinds of expertise: that of death doulas and that of business consultants. They help entrepreneurs find the courage to look the numbers in the eye, make decisions in time, talk with their team, and communicate openly about what's happening.

Death doulas for business view a company's life cycle by analogy with a human life and work with both natural and unnatural endings of that cycle. In Russian conditions — tax reforms, economic crisis, and political instability — small businesses often face closure as if from illness or accident. But there are natural causes too: the founder retires, passes the business on to their children, the partnership the company rested on falls apart — and many other circumstances.

Whatever the reason, behind a successful business closure — when employees aren't let go overnight, when there's a clear dialogue with clients and the audience, when reputation and financial assets are preserved — lies a great deal of inner work. Without professional support, inside the company or outside it, that work becomes a serious burden for the entrepreneur and their loved ones.

How to close a business with dignity

While researching my idea of death doulas for business, I came across an American platform called Death Doulas for Business — yes, that's really its name. And I immediately

wrote to its founder, Adam Katz, an entrepreneur and business consultant who, like me, once owned a company that produced live cultural events. He closed it during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was his first, but not his last, experience of ending a business.

I got on a call with Adam to ask him more about the profession of death doula for business. Here's what he told me:

> “The work of end-of-life doulas isn't only caring for the dying at the bedside, holding a person's hand in the last moments of life. It's also helping draw up advance directives that help the people around them and those closest to them understand the person's wishes: how to handle their body, how to bury them, what ceremony or ritual to hold. The same is true for a business: we help a business prepare for death a little ahead of time, rather than when there's nowhere left to retreat.”

Adam decided to train as a death doula after closing his second business. He ended it in an unusual way that surprised and even impressed the local business community. In a LinkedIn post, he explained the reasons for closing his agency, Imprint Projects. Here is how they read:

- Our original mission has become commonplace.
- As leaders, we want to try new ways of living and working.
- We are doing this now because we have the opportunity to wind down responsibly and with dignity, supporting all of our employees and clients.

Adam and his partners were able to give the team advance notice and offer every employee a support package that included severance pay and health insurance. Over the three months the closing process took, they brought in recruiters, coaches, and a wide network of professional contacts to help employees prepare for their next jobs. In addition, to support young companies working in the creative sector, the partners made the archive of all their projects and all of the company's business documentation publicly available — permanently.

Even by American standards, a closure like that was a luxury, to say nothing of Russian ones. Adam's post spread quickly through local news media, and for the first two years afterward, entrepreneurs who were planning to close their companies called him for advice.

Why it matters to learn how to say goodbye

According to Adam, his interest in business death goes far beyond the technical skill of closing companies.

> “I'm interested in working with the culture of living through a company's death. It matters to me that people have a language, a paradigm for thinking about it. And also an embodied experience of living through grief and loss in a part of life where they aren't losing a loved one and aren't losing their own body. I think this skill is becoming more and more important in today's world. For example, AI is already driving a huge professional transformation: not just individual professions or companies could disappear, but entire industries.”

While training as a death doula, Adam met many people who work with deaths that aren't human. For example, one doula organized a farewell ceremony for a roller coaster at an amusement park. The ride was being decommissioned, and for people who had been coming to the park since childhood, it was important to say goodbye: to cry, to march in a small parade.

Against the backdrop of stories like these, the profession of death doula for business no longer seems so strange or exotic.

Six tasks of a death doula for business

Legal and financial support for closing a business has traditionally come from liquidators, bankruptcy specialists, lawyers, and accountants. But almost no one offers emotional support. The founder usually goes through the closure alone — at best with the help of a therapist and friends.

Closing a business isn't a topic for small talk or a conference talk. It's seen as a professional and personal failure, almost like a death to be avoided at any cost. Because of this, entrepreneurs, as Adam puts it, simply drive their business off a cliff. Or, instead of closing, they sell it in a way that contradicts the very reason they built it in the first place.

People lack the imagination to picture it: you can close a business while there's still money in the account, settle with employees in line with ethical principles and the law, meet your obligations to clients and contractors, and preserve relationships that will be useful in the future. There are many strategic opportunities in this moment of transition, but entrepreneurs avoid it because it's unpleasant and associated with failure. Instead of preserving resources — money and relationships — they put off the decision until much has already been irretrievably lost.

The Death Doulas for Business website lists six services the company provides. In my view, the list on its own is already a useful anchor and a practical checklist for an entrepreneur who is closing a business.

1. **Decision-making.** When to close, what to prioritize, how to sequence the wind-down.
2. **Planning.** An operational wind-down strategy: letting employees go, terminating leases, managing finances, handling paperwork.
3. **Communication.** Preparing and delivering difficult messages to employees, investors, clients, customers, and the wider public. Transparent, careful communication helps preserve relationships and reputation.
4. **Facilitation and mediation.** Working through conflicts, unprocessed emotions, and competing interests among co-founders, partners, and other key stakeholders.
5. **Meaning-making.** Shaping a story of the closure that reflects the business's contribution, growth, and legacy. Helping create rituals, documentation, and a farewell.
6. **Psychological support.** A safe space to make sense of and live through the difficult emotions that come with closing: shame, a sense of failure, relief, loss of identity, and regret.

The first three are about consulting. The death doula for business's job is to identify needs and help people access the resources they require: financial, tax, legal, and regulatory compliance. This also includes strategic communications and work with the brand and community.

Asked why business owners turn to such specialists rather than managing on their own, Adam answers that by the time of closing, a company often no longer has marketing staff, and it can be hard for the founder to speak completely openly with the people who remain.

The last three are about coaching, therapy, and doula practices. Their aim is to create space for reflection and for working with emotions: fear, sadness, shame, guilt. But also with joy — which, as Adam confirms, many people don't let out because it seems inappropriate. In his experience, closing a business comes with the full spectrum of emotions, though society approves of far from all of them. Feelings come in waves and pass.

> “The range of emotions a person leading a business is even allowed to have is very narrow, and that's hard. Founders are rewarded again and again for being able to operate within that narrow range: not too crazy, not too sad. So in moments of intense emotion, it's very hard even to notice those feelings. But it's important to give them room

> — so that afterward a person can communicate with their team or negotiate with investors," says Adam.

Back to the basics

Adam names consistency as the main principle of closing a business: ending it in line with the goals and values it started with and lived by. That's why it's so important to return to the basics when an entrepreneur is closing a business, or only planning to.

- Why does the company exist?
- What values lie at its core and are never called into question under any circumstances?
- What strategic goals and achievements are key for it?

At the moment of closing, many are ready to wave these questions away, but they are exactly what helps people move through the ending meaningfully. In some companies, openness is a value and part of the culture: employees share numbers, plans, and doubts. It follows that an open conversation is needed at the moment of closing too. But that's precisely when the founder often shuts everyone out — emotionally and physically — and doesn't want to let anyone in. The team is left to guess, and that's how rumors and speculation arise that damage the founder's reputation.

In Russia in 2026, an entrepreneur faces a great deal that's out of their control: taxes, marketplace rules, lost shipments. All of it creates an enormous burden. But how they tell the team and the outside world about the closure is up to them. It's consistency, respect for the work done together, and care for relationships that make it possible to live through a closure as a transition.

If you're in Russia

Adam works in America, while the readers of this piece are in Russia, where an entrepreneur often lives with the feeling that control over reality has been lost. The rules sometimes change faster than a business can adapt to them. It can be hard for an outsider even to imagine these conditions. So the idea of what it means to close with dignity may not be universal.

But perhaps the need to go through a collapse with your self-respect intact is universal.

It's important for Russian entrepreneurs to find their own understanding of dignity, and for that, to start an open conversation on the subject. For me, closing with dignity means going through the experience with respect for the process itself and for everyone it touches, and, where possible, preserving your own resources: financial and mental.

In my next piece, I'll tell the story of two Russian businesswomen who faced the closure of their businesses but made opposite decisions: one closed hers and is now happily employed, the other continues to work for herself. Yet — spoiler — both recognized the importance of a few principles:

- rely on the numbers to make decisions in time, and treat them as the main barometer of reality;
- don't leave employees feeling abandoned;
- where possible, help them find their next job and give them references;
- don't disappear, don't invent excuses, and speak honestly;
- don't destroy yourself emotionally.

Adam told me that when he joined the death doula community, he was struck by how lively, smart, and funny these people are. “Those who are often close to death are actually truly in touch with life,” he says.

I see parallels with business here. The idea that mistakes and failures are experience — and therefore valuable and worth telling publicly — has already taken firm root in the minds of today's Russian entrepreneurs.

The next step is learning to talk about the life and death of a business. If closing a company is seen as potentially the biggest failure, perhaps it can also become the most important experience an entrepreneur gains in their profession.

English translation of “Пройти через крах, сохранив уважение к себе: зачем предпринимателю доула смерти,” published by Reminder on October 19, 2026. Adam Katz's quotes are translated back from the Russian and won't match his original English wording exactly. “Read also” links and site navigation were left out.
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