

Inside the Mind of a Small Business Seller



JOSEPH NOBLIT

Founder and Former Business Owner,
a Teamshares Client Success Story



When I first thought about selling Yankee Mattress Company, I knew it was a long shot. Like most small business owners, I knew the statistics, and they were discouraging. 80% of small businesses fail to sell when the owner retires, and I was one of many owners who didn't have children interested in taking over. I also knew that most people who wanted to run a small business didn't have the money to purchase it and allow the owner to retire comfortably. Meanwhile, those who do have the money usually aren't interested in running the business themselves, which leaves the future of the business (and its employees) up in the air.

It didn't help my odds that I was unusual for a company owner. I had worked in all aspects of my industry before becoming an owner, which would be hard to replace. I started my career on the manufacturing side, working in a mattress factory to learn the ins and outs of quality craftsmanship. I transitioned into a sales role after years in the factory, a new experience that helped me to truly understand customer expectations and the value of great service. After working in it for decades, I knew the mattress business well, and I was very passionate about it. That depth of knowledge gave me the confidence to fulfill my dream since college: I started my own mattress company. It was a small operation for the first few years, and I do mean small: I made, sold, and delivered every mattress myself. Over the next two decades, I built Yankee Mattress into a full-size manufacturing and retail operation with four locations across Massachusetts. I didn't want my life's work to disappear overnight.

My longtime accountant recommended working with a business broker, strongly advocating for one broker in particular: Ron Ekstrom at George & Company. After years of collaboration, I trusted my accountant's input, but I needed to see for myself if Ron was the right fit for me. Our first meeting was all about learning his perspective and process and trying to see how well it aligned with my own. From the moment we met, Ron seemed like a nice, easygoing guy, and I was impressed by the depth of his questions and character. As we talked, a million different thoughts were running through my head, but I kept coming back to one in particular. I finally asked: "Will this company I've built be worth anything to anyone else?" He responded immediately.

“I THINK I CAN DO SOMETHING WITH YOU.”

This was the start of a very fruitful partnership.

Yankee Mattress Company was the culmination of so many hopes and dreams—my life’s work. I needed a buyer who understood that and a broker who would take the time to find that buyer. Ron proved to me that he understood what I was looking for. He took the time to walk me through the process and the expected valuation. He asked me hard questions that prepared me for due diligence, and he took great care in explaining the details of the different offers, as well as providing his honest assessment of the pros and cons of each.

Thanks to Ron’s valuable perspective, I ended up going a route that I hadn’t even considered when I first put the business up for sale. I sold Yankee Mattress to a company called Teamshares, which transitions small businesses to employee ownership without costing the employees a dime. I loved the idea from the moment I heard it. Their structure ensured that the company wouldn’t be stripped for parts, keeping everything running while making sure that our 14 employees—many of whom were family (or felt like it)—would be taken care of. They brought in a president with a strong business background instead of attempting to find someone with my depth of industry knowledge. It seemed counterintuitive, but I quickly realized that Yankee’s best new president would be somebody who respected our legacy, was eager to learn, and had the business skills to shepherd it through a new era and its next stage of growth.

The sale process and deal terms were different from a traditional third-party sale, but my broker helped me understand my options and lay it out in clear terms. With his help, I was able to see that this was the best path forward for myself, my business, and my employees. Ron’s willingness to roll up his sleeves and get into the details of numbers, timelines, and assets made an enormous difference. The due diligence process was very thorough, and having a broker who truly understood the nature of the business was more important than I even expected. I leaned on him in those moments, and he always came through for me.

It's been almost two years since the sale went through, and I couldn't be happier with my decision to partner with Teamshares and make employees owners. We didn't lose any employees in the transition, and the new president is growing the business. I'm able to enjoy my early retirement with the peace of mind that my former employees will reap the benefits of the sale for many years to come.

As a former small business owner, my advice for brokers is simple: take the time to understand what we value most and consider buyers that may be a little out of the box. My company is so much more than a workplace to me, its employees, and its community and customers. It is my life's work, and it matters in ways that I still can't put into words. I'm incredibly grateful that my legacy lives on through employee ownership and that Yankee Mattress is here to stay.

***Joseph Noblit** is the founder and former owner of Yankee Mattress, a Massachusetts-based mattress manufacturer and retailer. After fulfilling his dream of starting and growing his own mattress company, Joe sold the company to Teamshares in 2021 in order to transition it to employee ownership. After decades of hard work, he is enjoying an early retirement.*

Teamshares¹

Founded in 2019, **Teamshares** is an employee-owned national financial technology company with a distributed workforce of 150 employees working towards 10,000 employee-owned small businesses and \$10B in new wealth for hard-working Americans. The aim is to support a generation of business owners through confident retirement and create stronger, enduring companies through equity alignment and the Teamshares platform.