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FINDING JON SNOW: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR HEIR TO THE THRONE

In “Game of Thrones,” Jon Snow is the character who captures your heart and wins your respect. Fans of the TV series know—and those who haven’t watched don’t necessarily need to when hearing the qualities that make Jon Snow so admirable.

“Game of Thrones” bears resemblance to an entrepreneur’s journey in building, running, growing and eventually exiting a business. Who do you trust and who do you question? Who is loyal and who is not? And above all, who is worthy of being next in line to continue your legacy? Regardless of whether you watch “Game of Thrones,” you’re looking for your Jon Snow—someone who has:

Integrity

While other characters may seem like fit leaders, they reveal ulterior motives that corrupt their pursuits. Jon Snow has no personal agenda other than to be true to the greater good. He's not interested in power or glory, but instead focused on serving, protecting, and upholding. A business owner needs to see the same unwavering integrity in a right-hand person before ever considering that person as a potential successor.

Work Ethic

Leadership takes intensity. Even seemingly calm leaders have an internal fire and endless motor. You can't teach and can't fake work ethic. But because you're an entrepreneur, you can spot it pretty quickly. Your Jon Snow will choose to work when others would not, because it's just what they're wired to do.

Drive

Work ethic and drive are not the same. Work ethic is how hard someone will work. Drive is the reason they work that hard. Drive is what fills their battery. Some people are driven solely by money. Others, partly by money. And few, not by money at all. Yes, we all need to make a living, but usually, the most authentic and impactful leaders are driven by purpose. In "Game of Thrones," Jon Snow puts the cause first, including when that means putting his safety last.

Communication

Business owners often struggle to train, delegate and trust. Some of the reluctance stems from simplicity; it's easier and more controllable to do it yourself. But more of it comes from a place of not knowing who is capable of what. In the search for an honest and genuine successor, you're simultaneously using your street smarts to read and weed out pretenders. Your Jon Snow will communicate to you and your team—with words and more importantly with actions—that they have your back and everyone else's.

Accountability

With all of the above pieces in place, you come to the rarest, most elusive trait of all: a willingness to accept leadership and the accountability that it brings. In an already-small pool of people who have the character and intangibles, you will find some who are simply and understandably afraid to fail. At the end of the day, Jon Snow accepts his fate and his duty.

It will take time to find your Jon Snow, but the search is worth it. When you can hand your kingdom to someone you trust, Exit Engineering[®] is a lot easier. And if you're selling your business to someone else, that buyer will want to see key personnel in place. Finding someone who can rise to the responsibility of being Jon Snow will make your team stronger, your business more valuable, and your exit more attainable.