



THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP: HOW FULL ENGAGEMENT ACCELERATES PORTCO GROWTH

In the lower middle market, capital alone is no longer a differentiator. The true competitive advantage of private equity sponsorship lies in the tools, resources, and expertise a sponsor brings and in whether the portfolio company CEO chooses to engage deeply with them. When CEOs lean in, they accelerate growth, compress learning cycles, and build enduring businesses. When leadership fails to engage, opportunities are missed, scaling slows, and value creation may be diluted.

At the center of this engagement is a true partnership between the CEO and the private equity sponsor. That partnership depends on trust. Without trust, the sponsor's capabilities may become underutilized, and the CEO can find themselves isolated in the face of pressure. With trust, both sides can operate as true partners, advancing bold initiatives with greater speed, clarity, and confidence.



MORE THAN CAPITAL

Today, there is considerable variation in the role, resources, and capabilities that a private equity sponsor may bring to a new investment. While all sponsors offer financial acumen and investment experience, some go further, bringing a wealth of internal and external resources to drive value creation within their business.

These more engaged sponsors act as much more than financiers. They offer support in areas such as:

01

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Playbooks and networks for recruiting, assessing, and scaling leadership teams in an AI-driven world.

02

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Digitization, workflow redesign, automation, and efficiency models.

03

DEMAND GENERATION

Advanced marketing strategies, digital tools, and customer insights to attract and acquire customers more effectively.

04

M&A

Experienced M&A teams and tools that accelerate and optimize acquisitions and integration.

05

MARKET INTELLIGENCE

Data-driven insights to enhance pricing, targeting, and expansion decisions.

06

STRATEGIC SUPPORT

Planning processes and perspectives informed by building and scaling across multiple sectors.

For CEOs who embrace this support, the sponsor becomes a strategic accelerator. But this potential can only be realized if the CEO and sponsor first establish trust and alignment on how those resources will be deployed—together. That alignment often rests on a CEO who is required to be not only driven, but also bring a strong growth mindset and a collaborative, low-ego approach.

PRINCIPLES THAT UNLOCK VALUE

CEOs who fully tap into their sponsor's experience tend to share three defining principles:

01

CULTURE OF CURIOSITY AND LEARNING

Asking questions, challenging assumptions, and exploring new areas like AI and advanced analytics.

02

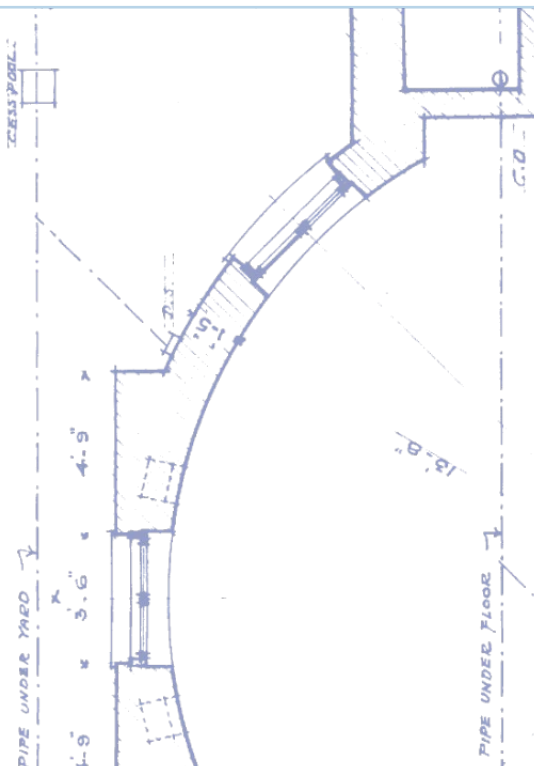
MINDSET OF ADAPTABILITY AND ITERATION

Testing, learning, and refining rather than clinging to "what worked before".

03

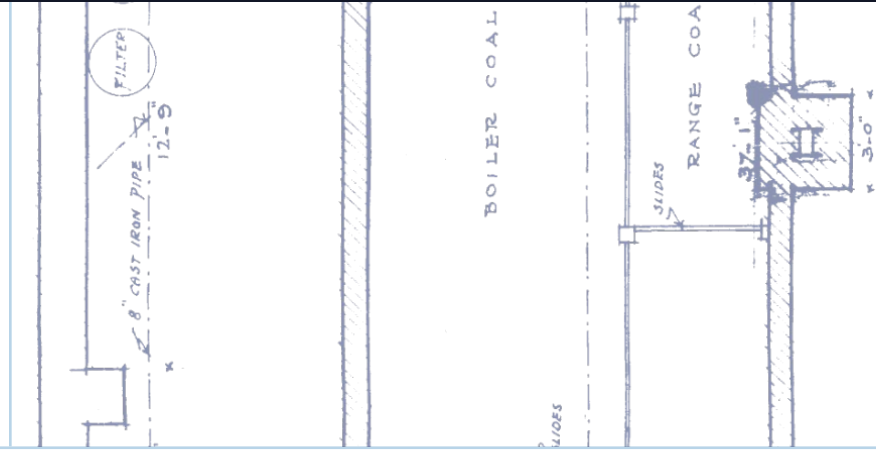
COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

Prioritizing shared goals, open communication, and a low-ego mindset that values outcomes over authorship.



These principles build more open, productive working relationships and help unlock the full advantage of sponsor support. But at the heart of each is one common thread: trust, the willingness of the CEO to lean in, and the responsibility of the sponsor to meet that commitment with consistency, transparency, and respect.

WHY SOME CEOS RESIST



Not every CEO will lean into this kind of partnership. Some common blockers include:

01

ENTREPRENEURIAL INDEPENDENCE

A “fixed mindset” that can view sponsor input as interference.

02

EGO AND INSECURITY

Discomfort admitting gaps or being coached.

03

CHANGE FATIGUE

Feeling overwhelmed by rapid initiatives layered onto existing pressures.

04

MISTRUST OR MISALIGNMENT

When sponsors don’t clearly communicate their value, engagement can feel optional.

These dynamics can lead to lost time and underused capabilities. Overcoming them requires both parties to actively invest in trust, not only during good times, but especially during periods of change or uncertainty.

THE POWER OF ALIGNMENT: FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

**FOR CEOS AIMING TO
BUILD OUTSIZED VALUE,
IT'S ESSENTIAL TO ALIGN
EARLY AND CLEARLY:**

What are we building?

How fast?

With what resources?

What approach will we take?

At Access Holdings, we use a structured process called Destination Planning to create alignment between sponsors and their portfolio companies from the start and to adapt that alignment as needs change over the course of the investment.

With a “work backward” mindset, starting with the end-state in mind, we help define what success looks like and what it will take to get there. This approach helps clarify where to play, how to win, and how to allocate effort.

With a concrete destination plan, portfolio company leaders and their sponsors can focus on advancing the right initiatives, resourcing accordingly, and adjusting course as new insights emerge. But even the most robust planning only works when built on trust and reinforced through consistent, open communication. It's not just about having a plan; it's about believing in one another's intent and capability to deliver it.

The result is faster expansion, reduced risk, and more defensible growth.

CONCLUSION: PARTNERSHIP AS THE DIFFERENTIATOR

In today's private equity environment, capital is a commodity. What sets sponsors apart is the strength of their partnerships and the value they co-create with portfolio leaders.

For sponsors, this means showing up consistently with clarity, transparency, and follow-through. For CEOs, it means leaning in with curiosity and a collaborative mindset.

The result is more than growth in scale; it's growth in resilience — a business defined by shared vision, mutual respect, and the compounding force of trust.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



SCOTT R. ELKINS

Scott R. Elkins is CEO of Zeus Fire and Security, a national network of tech-enabled fire protection and security providers recognized for operational excellence across diverse markets.

A leader in the security industry, he has pioneered innovative business models that scale emerging technologies into practical solutions. Scott serves on the Boards of The Monitoring Association (TMA), the Electronic Security Association (ESA), is Chairman of NetOne, and formerly chaired Valley Forge Educational Services.

Scott holds a Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics from the University of Pennsylvania.



KEVIN MCALLISTER

Kevin McAllister is the Founder and Managing Partner of Access Holdings, which he launched in 2013 with a philosophy of building and owning essential service-based businesses.

He leads all aspects of the firm's value-creation strategy, guiding its growth into a \$2.8 billion private equity platform with a concentrated North American portfolio. Kevin and his team raised a \$340 million inaugural fund—among the largest of its kind in the Mid-Atlantic—marking Access's rapid expansion from an independent sponsor to an established investment firm. With more than 20 years of private equity experience, he previously held senior roles at American Capital Strategies and top consultancies.

Kevin holds an MBA in Finance from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and a BA in Economics from Dickinson College.

