Word for word, for the hardest day

The Four Conversations

You shouldn’t have to find these words from scratch. Use them as written, or make them yours. Say them early, in person where you can, plain and honest — and thank the people who made it worth building.

1 · Telling your employees

Do this first, in person, as a group if you can, before any rumor beats you to it. Be straight, be human, and tell them what happens next — uncertainty is the cruel part, so remove what you can.

Say it like this:

“I called everyone together because you deserve to hear this from me, directly, before you hear it any other way. After [years] years, we’re going to be closing the business. The short version: it can’t keep going, and I’ve made the decision to close it the right way rather than let it fall apart.”

“Here’s what that means for you, and what I’m committing to. Your last day will be [date]. You’ll be paid through [date], including [final pay / accrued time], and I’ll have that in writing for each of you by [when]. I’ll tell you what I know about [health coverage / unemployment / references] and I’ll help however I can.”

“And I want to say this plainly: this is not a reflection of your work. You did your jobs, and you did them well. I’m grateful — more than I’m going to be able to say without losing it — and I’ll be a reference for any of you, any time. Ask me anything. I’m not going anywhere today.”

Then stop talking and let them react. Stay in the room. Don’t fill the silence — sit in it with them.

> **See your attorney / CPA:** Final-pay timing, advance-notice (WARN) and continuation-coverage (COBRA) rules vary by size and state. Confirm your specifics before you name dates.

2 · Telling your customers

For the ones who've trusted you for years, a note or a call beats a sign on the door. Keep it short, thank them, and hand them off to someone good — that last referral is a final act of service, and it's how your name keeps its meaning.

A note or email:

"After [years] wonderful years, [Business] will be closing on [date]. This wasn't an easy decision, and I didn't want you to hear it from anyone but me."

"Thank you — truly. You trusted us with [what you did for them], some of you for a very long time, and that trust is the thing I'm proudest of. It's been an honor."

"So you're taken care of: any [open orders / deposits / gift cards] will be [honored / refunded] — please reach me at [contact] by [date]. And if you need [your service] going forward, the folks I'd trust with you are [referral]. Tell them I sent you."

"Thank you for letting us be part of [your work / your community] all these years. It meant everything."

If a customer has a deposit or gift card, make the refund easy. "I've lost enough already" is how they'll feel if you make it hard — don't be the last bad memory.

3 · Telling vendors & creditors

A call, then a letter. People you owe will work with you far more often when you come to them early and honest than when you go quiet. Goodwill here protects you later.

On the call:

"I wanted to call you directly rather than just send a letter. We're closing the business — the last day is [date] — and I take what we owe you seriously, so I want to be upfront about how I'm handling it."

"Here's where things stand: [the honest picture — what you can pay, and when]. I'm working through this in an orderly way with my attorney and accountant, and I'll have it to you in writing. I'm not disappearing on you. I'd rather have this conversation now than leave you wondering."

"You've been good to work with, and I wanted that on the record. Tell me what you need from me to close this out cleanly."

See your attorney / CPA: How and in what order you pay creditors when funds are limited has legal consequences — walk this through with your attorney/CPA before you make commitments.

4 · Telling your family

This one isn't logistics — it's the heart of it. With your spouse, it's a decision made together. With kids, especially in a family business, it's a chance to show them how a person closes a chapter with their head up.

With your spouse:

"I've been carrying this alone in my head and that's not fair to you — we built this together and we should decide this together. I think it's time to close the business. Here's what I'm seeing, and what I'm scared of, and I want to hear yours before anything's final."

"Whatever we decide, I want you to know: I'm okay. We're okay. This isn't the end of us — it might even give us back some of what the business has been taking. Let's figure out the next part the way we figured out all the hard parts. Together."

With your kids:

"I want to tell you something, and I want to tell you straight, because you're old enough to hear it and I'd rather you learn this from me. We're going to be closing the business."

"It didn't work out the way I hoped, and that's okay — not everything does. What matters is how you handle it. I'm going to close it the right way: take care of our people, pay what we owe, hold my head up. That's the part I want you to remember. Failing at a thing and failing as a person are not the same, and I'm not going to confuse the two. Neither should you."

That last line is the whole point of this kit. Closing a business the right way is one of the more honorable things an owner ever does. Let your family see you do it.
