

New Owner's Guide to Riverbend Brewing Company

Getting Started: Your First 90 Days

A practical transition roadmap for new ownership

Before Day 1: Pre-Close Preparation

Documents to Secure

- Executed purchase agreement with all schedules
- TTB Brewer's Notice transfer application (submit 60+ days before close if possible)
- Virginia ABC license transfer application
- All insurance policies with named insured changes prepared
- Bank account setup (new accounts or transfer authorization)
- Payroll service continuation or setup
- Access credentials: email, banking, POS system, BeerSmith, Google Drive

Introductions to Schedule

Request that current owners arrange introductions during your first two weeks:

Contact	Role	Why It Matters
Lorraine	Bookkeeper	Knows financial rhythms, payroll, tax filings
Jerry	Equipment tech	Only person who knows our systems inside-out
Tom (Shenandoah Malt)	Primary malt supplier	Relationship affects allocation and pricing
Top 5 wholesale accounts	Key revenue	Personal relationships drive retention
Nina	Taproom shift lead	Institutional knowledge on taproom operations

Knowledge Transfer Agreements

Negotiate transition support before closing:

- **Elise:** Minimum 90 days post-close availability (ideally 6-12 months part-time)
- **Margaret:** Minimum 60 days for account introductions and financial handoff
- **Both:** Availability for phone/email questions for 12 months post-close

This is the single most important thing you can negotiate. The SOP documents significant knowledge gaps—their continued involvement bridges those gaps.

Days 1-30: Observe, Learn, Don't Change

Primary Objective

Understand how the business actually operates. Resist the urge to improve anything.

Week 1: Orientation

With Elise (Production):

- Full facility walkthrough—every room, every piece of equipment
- Observe complete brew day start to finish (8-10 hours)
- Review equipment maintenance logs and known issues
- Understand tank scheduling and current production calendar
- Learn location of all documentation (recipes, TTB records, manuals)
- Get access to BeerSmith and review recipe library
- Identify equipment quirks: "What do I need to know that isn't written down?"

With Margaret (Business):

- Review all active wholesale accounts (spreadsheet walkthrough)
- Understand invoicing process and payment tracking
- Review current A/R aging—who owes money, who pays slow
- Walkthrough of Google Drive folder structure
- Introduction to banking relationships and account access
- Review insurance policies and coverage
- Calendar all upcoming renewals (licenses, permits, insurance)

With Lorraine (Finance):

- QuickBooks walkthrough—chart of accounts, typical entries
- Payroll process and schedule
- Tax filing calendar (excise, sales, income)
- Understand monthly close process
- Review last 12 months of P&L for patterns

On Your Own:

- Read complete SOP document (you should have done this pre-close, but read again)
 - Introduce yourself to all employees individually—ask about their role, tenure, concerns
 - Spend 2-3 hours working the taproom (observe, help where you can)
 - Ride along on delivery route with Marcus (full day)
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Week 2: Shadow Operations

Production (minimum 20 hours):

- Observe second brew day—ask more questions this time
- Participate in canning session (hands-on)
- Learn keg washing/filling process
- Observe cellar work with Dave (transfers, dry-hopping)
- Attend Elise's sensory evaluation of a batch ready for packaging
- Review QC checkpoints—understand what gets measured when

Sales & Accounts (minimum 10 hours):

- Joint calls with Margaret to 3-5 key accounts (in-person visits)
- Sit in on a new account pitch or inquiry call
- Review wholesale rate sheet and understand pricing logic
- Observe how a wholesale order gets processed start to finish
- Understand limited release allocation process

Taproom (minimum 8 hours):

- Work a Friday or Saturday evening shift (shadow Nina)
 - Observe opening and closing procedures
 - Learn POS system basics
 - Understand tip pooling and staff scheduling
 - Meet regular customers (Nina will introduce you)
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Weeks 3-4: Deepen Understanding

Financial Deep-Dive:

- Review trailing 24 months of financials with Lorraine and Margaret
- Understand seasonal cash flow patterns
- Identify largest expense categories and trends
- Review all outstanding debt and payment schedules
- Understand current working capital position
- Map out upcoming large expenses (equipment, taxes, renewals)

Supplier Relationships:

- Phone introduction to Tom at Shenandoah Malt (Elise facilitates)
- Understand hop contracting process and current commitments
- Review all standing orders and auto-ship arrangements
- Get contact list for all vendors with account numbers
- Understand backup supplier options for critical inputs
- Meet Jerry (equipment tech) in person—tour facility with him

Compliance Review:

- Verify all licenses/permits are transferred and current
- Review TTB reporting process with Elise
- Understand ABC compliance requirements
- Confirm insurance certificates are updated with your information
- Review workers' comp policy and classification
- Calendar all compliance deadlines for next 12 months

Customer Insights:

- Review Untappd feedback (last 6 months)
- Ask taproom staff: "What do customers complain about? Ask for?"
- Ask Marcus: "What do accounts say about us on deliveries?"
- Identify top 10 accounts by revenue; understand each relationship

Day 30 Checkpoint

By end of Day 30, you should be able to answer:

- How does a brew day work, start to finish?
- What are the top 5 wholesale accounts and who's my contact at each?
- What are our monthly fixed costs? Variable costs?
- Who are the critical suppliers and what are lead times?
- What equipment is most likely to fail?
- What are the biggest risks in this business?

- What do employees worry about?
- What do Elise and Margaret think I should focus on?

Deliverable: Write a 2-3 page summary of what you've learned and what concerns you. Share with Elise and Margaret for their reaction.

Days 31-60: Participate, Build Relationships

Primary Objective

Become a contributing member of operations while building independent relationships with employees, accounts, and suppliers.

Operations Participation

Production:

- Run 2-3 brew days with Elise present but not leading
- Lead a canning session (Dave available for support)
- Handle a cellar transfer independently
- Make one supplier order independently (malt or packaging)
- Participate in monthly inventory count

Taproom:

- Work 2-3 taproom shifts (not just observing—actually working)
- Handle a customer complaint or issue
- Manage a busy Saturday with minimal support
- Approve a staff schedule

Wholesale:

- Ride delivery routes 2x (different routes)
 - Make account check-in calls independently (start with friendly accounts)
 - Handle an account service issue (late delivery, quality question)
 - Process a new account inquiry from first contact through first order
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Relationship Building

Employees:

- 1:1 conversations with each employee (30-60 min)
 - What's working well?
 - What frustrates you?
 - What would you change if you could?
 - What should I know that nobody's told me?
- Begin building direct working relationships (not always through Elise/Margaret)
- Learn personal details—families, interests, career goals

Key Accounts:

- Solo visits to top 10 accounts (with Margaret's introduction completed in Month 1)
- "Just checking in, wanted to introduce myself properly"
- Ask: "What do we do well? What could we do better?"
- Document relationship notes in account files

Suppliers:

- Direct phone conversations with primary contacts at each major supplier
- Understand their perspective on the relationship
- Ask about industry trends they're seeing
- Confirm you're now the primary contact

Documentation & Systems

Start Building Your Own Knowledge Base:

- Create personal notes file: "Things I've learned that aren't in the SOP"
- Document any process you observe that differs from SOP description
- Note questions to follow up on
- Start mapping relationships (who knows whom, who trusts whom)

Process Improvement Identification (observe only, don't implement yet):

- Where do I see inefficiency?
- What workarounds exist because of broken systems?
- What do employees complain about repeatedly?
- What seems fragile or risky?

Resist implementing changes. You don't understand the system well enough yet.

Financial Management

- Review Month 1 financials—ask questions about anything unexpected
 - Process payroll with Lorraine (learn the process)
 - Pay bills independently (Margaret available for questions)
 - Make a purchasing decision over \$1,000 (with Elise/Margaret input)
 - Understand cash position and manage it for one pay cycle
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Day 60 Checkpoint

By end of Day 60, you should be able to answer:

- Can I run a brew day without Elise present (for a core beer)?
- Do employees come to me with questions/problems?
- Do I have direct relationships with key accounts (not just through Margaret)?
- Can I make routine financial decisions confidently?
- Do I understand why things are done the way they are?
- What would I change? (Keep this list private for now)

Deliverable: Updated concerns/observations document. 30/60/90 day plan refinement for your specific situation.

Days 61-90: Lead, Improve Carefully

Primary Objective

Begin making decisions independently. Implement 1-2 small improvements. Prepare for reduced involvement from sellers.

Operational Leadership

Production:

- Run brew days independently (Elise available by phone, not present)
- Make a recipe adjustment decision (minor—hop variety substitution or similar)
- Handle an equipment issue without Elise (call Jerry if needed)
- Lead QC tasting and make a packaging decision
- Manage production schedule for 2+ weeks independently

Sales & Accounts:

- Handle new account from inquiry through setup independently
- Make a pricing or terms decision
- Handle an account problem without Margaret
- Conduct account reviews for top 10 (solo visits)
- Begin managing A/R independently

Taproom:

- Manage a full weekend of taproom operations
 - Handle a staffing issue (call-out, scheduling conflict)
 - Make a minor operational decision (hours adjustment, event booking)
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Small Improvements (Pick 1-2 Only)

Choose improvements that are:

- Low-risk
- High-visibility to employees (shows you're engaged)
- Quick to implement
- Unlikely to disrupt operations

Good candidates:

- Implement a simple inventory tracking improvement
- Fix a small recurring annoyance employees have mentioned
- Improve a communication process (staff scheduling, account updates)
- Add a small employee benefit or perk
- Fix something physically broken that's been tolerated

Avoid for now:

- Pricing changes
- Product changes
- Personnel changes
- Major supplier changes
- Significant policy changes

The goal is to demonstrate thoughtful leadership, not to fix everything. Big changes come after 6+ months.

Transition Planning

Reduce Dependency on Sellers:

- Identify remaining areas where you still need Elise/Margaret
- Create plan to close each gap (documentation, training, hiring)
- Agree on post-90-day support structure (hours, availability, compensation)
- Document "emergency contact" scenarios (when to call them)

Hire for Gaps (if needed):

- Assess whether you need additional help (production, admin, sales)
- If hiring, begin process now (finding good brewery people takes time)
- Consider part-time or contract options before committing to full-time

Document Your Learning:

- Update SOP with corrections and additions based on your observations
 - Create "new owner lessons learned" document
 - Document any commitments you've made (to employees, accounts, suppliers)
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Day 90 Checkpoint

By end of Day 90, you should be able to answer:

- Can the business operate for a week without Elise or Margaret involvement?
- Do employees see me as the leader (not a temporary visitor)?
- Do accounts call me directly (not asking for Margaret)?
- Do I have a plan for the next 6-12 months?
- What's my first major initiative (after 90 days stabilization)?
- Am I confident this was the right decision?

Deliverable:

- First 6-month strategic priorities (1-3 initiatives maximum)
 - Transition completion checklist with Elise and Margaret
 - Updated risk assessment based on what you've learned
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Quick Reference: Who To Call

Issue

First Call

Backup

Equipment emergency	Jerry (equipment tech)	Elise
Production question	Elise	Dave
Account issue	Margaret (first 90 days) → then you	Marcus (delivery context)
Financial/payroll	Lorraine	Margaret
Compliance/licensing	Margaret	Accountant
Taproom crisis	Nina	You
Supplier issue	Elise (production) / Margaret (terms)	Relevant supplier contact

Common New Owner Mistakes

Moving too fast: You don't understand the system yet. That "obvious" fix might break something you don't see.

Changing things that work: Employees will tell you what's broken. If they're not complaining about something, it might be working fine.

Ignoring the culture: This business runs on relationships—internal and external. Efficiency gains that damage relationships are net negative.

Undervaluing institutional knowledge: Elise and Margaret know things that aren't written down. Extract that knowledge before they're gone.

Overcommitting: You'll want to prove yourself. Don't promise things you can't deliver. It's better to underpromise and overdeliver.

Neglecting self-care: The first 90 days are exhausting. Pace yourself. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

90-Day Success Metrics

You're on track if:

- No major operational disruptions
- No key employee departures
- No account losses (beyond normal churn)

- Cash flow remains stable
- You feel confident in daily decision-making
- Employees express confidence in your leadership
- Elise and Margaret feel comfortable reducing involvement

You need to course-correct if:

- Employees are anxious or looking for exits
- Accounts are asking "what's going on over there?"
- You're still calling Elise/Margaret daily for basic questions
- Cash flow is tighter than expected
- You feel overwhelmed or out of your depth

It's okay to slow down. Better to extend the transition than to rush and break something.

Congratulations on your acquisition. The first 90 days set the foundation for everything that follows. Take your time, learn deeply, and respect what's been built.