

The Founding Story of Broadleaf

Scratching the itch, taking the risk, and building what didn't exist

From university through the corporate world, there was a consistent theme: one day, I would build and run my own business. Every role, every project, every late night was treated as training, learning how businesses worked, what created value, how culture formed.

The roles were good. The trajectory was good. Nothing was broken. But inside, something didn't sit right. I didn't want to be a passenger on someone else's bus.

WHERE IT BEGAN

Broadleaf didn't begin with a grand plan. It began with an itch. Walking away from something "good" is harder than walking away from something broken. But the itch needed scratching.

Three Years of Searching

The original six-month window passed. Then twelve months. Then three years. During that time:

- No income for three years
- Three young children at home
- Constant doubt and refinement
- Conversations with shareholders and advisors shaping the structure before the business fully existed

It wasn't glamorous. It was necessary. The focus eventually narrowed to service businesses with recurring revenue, trusted client relationships, and owners quietly carrying succession risk.

Dean's Internal Conflict

Dean had just completed his Executive MBA at Harvard. He had built a strong financial planning business and cared deeply about his clients and team. But he was feeling something familiar: the desire to build something bigger. Not bigger in ego. Bigger in impact.

The dilemma: how do you pursue something larger without abandoning what you've worked so hard to build? The answer wasn't either/or.

Build Broadleaf and pass the baton of the financial planning business to the Next Generation of leaders. The model had found its natural industry, and we had found our partnership.

The Journey in Four Moments

2015

The Search Begins

Left corporate life with a 12-month runway. Six months to make something work. It felt responsible and terrifying.

2017

The Model Clicks

Presenting at a TEC CEO session, the idea of applying the model to financial planning surfaced clearly for the first time. Dean and the partnership followed.

2019

First Investments

On 1 July 2019, the first two investments settled. The blank-sheet design process, minority ownership, elastic registers, no forced exit, became real.

Today (April 2026)

Still Building

13 partner businesses, 19 next-generation leaders in ownership, 74 shareholders onboarded. Growth deliberate, not rushed.

Designed From a Blank Sheet

For 18–24 months, one question drove everything: if you had a blank sheet of paper and wanted to build the ideal partner for financial planning business owners, what would it look like?

Not what private equity would design. Not what aggregators were doing. What would genuinely be best for owners, next-generation leaders, clients, and long-term continuity?

- Minority ownership
- Elastic share registers
- Wide shareholder base
- Siloed debt, no forced exit

The Simple Truth

There was no single defining moment. Just:

- A willingness to leave something comfortable
- A tolerance for uncertainty
- A partnership built on trust
- A long-term view of what great could look like

Broadleaf exists because we believed there was a better way for good businesses to last.

We still believe that. And we're still building it.

"Broadleaf is not a transaction vehicle. It's the product of an itch that needed scratching, a three-year search, a friendship that became a partnership, and a belief that better ownership models are possible. It's the life's work of its founders. And we're just getting started."