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**SILICON VALLEY**

# **STARTUP AND GROW SERIES**

**What's in It for Me and the Team? –  
Discussing Your Company's Equity Compensation**

April 21, 2021

Zaitun Poonja | Thomas W. Kellerman

# Presenters

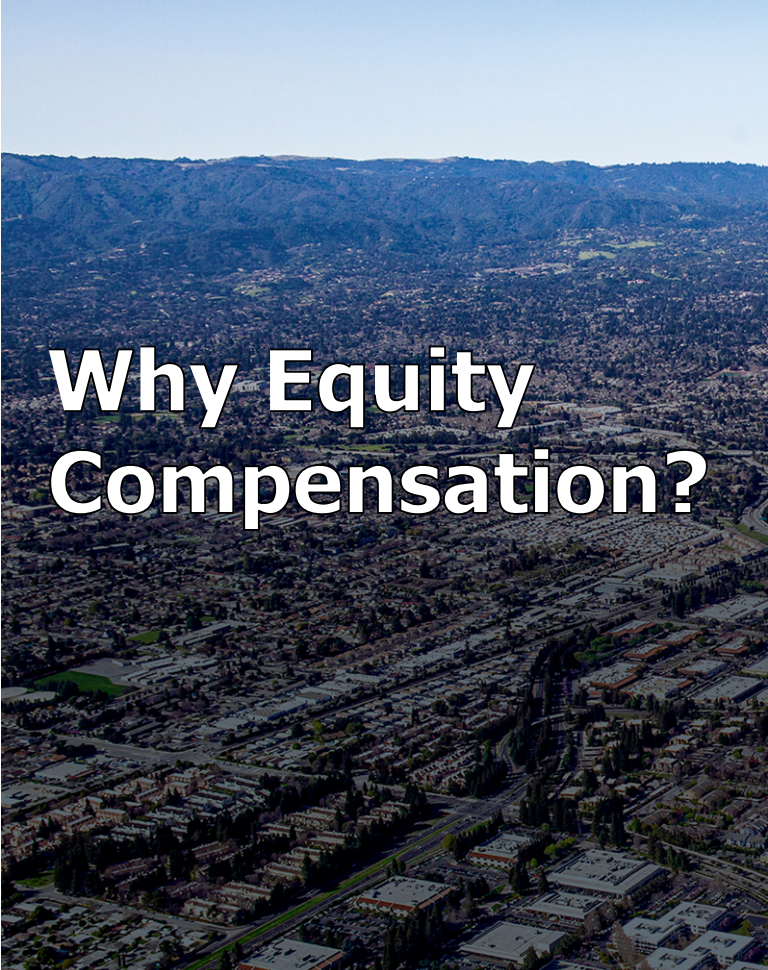


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# Why Equity Compensation?

**Most employees being hired into emerging growth companies expect to receive some form of equity compensation.**

- Most emerging growth companies do not have enough cash to pay competitive salaries.
- Employees want to get in at an early stage when the equity has a low value and work to help increase the equity value over time.
- Goal is to hold equity on a liquidation event/sale of the company.

**Expect to negotiate with employees over the amount, type and terms of equity compensation.**

**The following slides will highlight certain considerations as to the amount, type and terms of equity compensation commonly used in emerging growth companies.**

# Governing Law/Rules



**Internal Revenue Code**

**Securities Act of 1933**

**State corporate laws and securities laws**

**Financial accounting rules**

# EQUITY COMPENSATION IN CORPORATIONS

An aerial photograph of a city, likely San Jose, California, showing a dense urban area with numerous buildings, roads, and green spaces. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear blue sky. The text "EQUITY COMPENSATION IN CORPORATIONS" is overlaid in large, white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

# Equity Compensation (Corporate)



# Equity Compensation (Corporate)

## What is a Stock Option?

Right to purchase a fixed number of shares at a fixed price

## Types of Stock Options

Nonqualified Stock Options & Incentive Stock Options

# Nonqualified Stock Options

Must have exercise price not less than fair market value to avoid tax issues under section 409A of the Internal Revenue Code

May be granted to any type of service provider (employee, director, consultant)

No tax at grant

Taxable at exercise on the spread (fair market value of the purchased shares at the time of exercise, less the exercise price of the purchased shares) at ordinary income rates

Deduction for company at time of exercise



# Incentive Stock Options



May only be granted to employees



Must have exercise price not less than fair market value



Corporations Only



Other Internal Revenue Code requirements (e.g., hold shares for two years from grant and one year from exercise)



No tax at grant



No income tax at exercise (alternative minimum tax applies on the spread at date of exercise)



Taxable at sale of stock at capital gain rates if holding period requirements are met



If shares are sold before expiration of holding period, a portion of the gain is taxed as ordinary income

# Equity Compensation (Corporations)

## Example: NQSO Exercise

Stock value per share on exercise date	\$15
Minus exercise price per share	<u>-10</u>
Equals ordinary income per share	\$5
Times number of options exercised	X <u>10,000</u>
Equals ordinary income ("spread")	\$50,000
Less: income tax at exercise (45%)	<u>(20,000)</u>
Net value	\$30,000

# Equity Compensation (Corporations)

## Example: ISO Exercise

Sales price per share	\$15
Minus exercise price per share (basis in the shares)	<u>-10</u>
Equals gain per share	\$5
Times number of shares exercised	X <u>10,000</u>
Equals total gain ("spread")	\$50,000
Less: capital gain tax when shares sold (27%)	<u>(13,500)</u>
Net value	\$36,500

# Equity Compensation (Corporate)

## Potential advantages of ISO compared to NQSO:

- Lower tax rate (capital gain)
- Delayed tax (tax at sale of shares)

## Disadvantages of ISO compared to NQSO:

- Company has no tax deduction if employee recognizes capital gain
- Alternative minimum tax

# Stock Appreciation Rights

Employee receives the spread between the value of the stock at exercise and the exercise price

Must have exercise price not less than fair market value to avoid tax issues under section 409A

Taxable at ordinary income rates on the fair market value of net shares or cash issued on exercise

The spread can be paid in stock or cash

No tax at grant

Deduction for company at time of exercise



# Restricted Stock

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**Generally taxed at time of vesting at ordinary income rates**

## **83(b) Election**

- Freezes ordinary income at date of grant
- Must be made within 30 days of grant/irrevocable
- Especially important where employee has paid purchase price for unvested shares
- No further taxation until shares are sold

**Deduction for company at time of vesting or, if 83(b) election is made, at time of grant**

# Restricted Stock Units (RSUs)/Phantom Shares

Generally not taxed  
until distribution

Ordinary income; no  
83(b) election available  
because no property  
transferred until  
distribution

Deduction for company at  
distribution

Can be paid in cash or  
stock

Performance-based  
RSUs have vesting  
based on achievement  
of performance goals

Distribution can be  
deferred beyond vesting,  
must comply with section  
409A

# **EQUITY COMPENSATION IN LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANIES**





# Equity Compensation (LLCs)

## Appreciation In Value

- Profits Interests
- Options (Nonqualified only)
- Phantom Appreciation Rights (More common than full-value phantom awards)

## Full Value

- Capital Interests
- Phantom Award

# Equity Compensation (LLCs)

## Profits Interests

- Provide appreciation in value
- Can be transferred to an employee of the LLC without current tax
- Generally should make 83(b) election at grant
- On liquidation of the LLC immediately after the grant of the profits interest, the profits interest would NOT allow the recipient to participate in liquidating distributions – the recipient only has a share in the future profits and appreciation in value of the LLC following the date of grant

## Capital Interests

- Provide full value of membership interest
- Taxed at grant or vesting (similar to restricted stock)
- The recipient has a grant date economic right in the underlying capital of the LLC, as well as its profits and losses on a going forward basis
- Entitles the holder to share in the proceeds if the LLC's assets are sold at fair market value and the proceeds are then distributed in a complete liquidation of the LLC immediately after the interest is granted

# Equity Compensation (LLCs)

- Ownership of profits interests or capital interests generally makes the holder a “member” instead of an “employee” of the LLC, so income is reported on Form K-1 instead of Form W-2

# Equity Compensation (LLC)

## Options (Nonqualified Only)

- Entitles a recipient to purchase LLC interests at a later date for a purchase price that is at least equal to the fair market value of the LLC interests on the date the option is granted
- Option holder is generally not an equity holder for tax and state law purposes with respect to the underlying option equity until the date of exercise
- No income tax upon grant
- Under Section 409A of the Code, options cannot be granted with an exercise price below fair market value
- Profits interests and options on LLC interests are economically similar, but there are tax advantages for holders of profits interests

# Equity Compensation (LLC)

## Phantom Equity

- Can be an appreciation award or full value award
- Bonus awards that mimic equity
- Not really treated as equity for state law or tax purposes
- Employee can participate in the financial rewards of ownership without voting and other rights associated with equity ownership
- Generally subject to vesting, whether time-based or performance-based
- Taxed like a nonqualified deferred compensation plan

# KEY CONSIDERATIONS

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Berkeley, California, showing a dense urban area with a mix of residential and commercial buildings. A major highway, likely I-880, runs diagonally through the center of the city. The city is surrounded by green hills and mountains in the background under a clear blue sky. The text "KEY CONSIDERATIONS" is overlaid in large, bold, white capital letters on the left side of the image.

# Options/SARs

## Advantages

- Gives employee appreciation in value without employee having to make an investment or pay tax currently
  - No tax at grant or vesting
- Employee can choose when to exercise the option/SAR
  - Employee can control date of taxation
  - Most employees wait until a liquidity event to exercise options/SARs because they don't want to pay for stock that may never be liquid
- ISO can result in capital gain if shares are held for holding period
- Often used for private companies

## Disadvantages

- Options/SARs can go underwater (if fair market value is less than exercise price)
- Financial accounting charges are based on Black-Scholes value

# Full Value Awards

## Advantages

- Employee receives existing value of the shares/units, not just the appreciation
- Full value awards do not go underwater
- Financial accounting charge correlates to value delivered
- Restricted stock/Capital interests:
  - Can lock in tax event at grant or vesting, so future appreciation is capital gain
  - Often used for founders shares
- RSUs/Phantom equity
  - Postpone tax until distribution date
  - Often vest based on performance goals

## Disadvantages

- Employee receives existing value of the shares/units; reward for breathing
- Employee has little control over when the shares/units are taxed
- Employee may have to pay tax before a liquidity event



# Terms of Equity Grants



**Vesting**



**Fair Market Value**



**Repurchase rights by  
the corporation/right of  
first refusal**

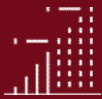


**Non-competition  
covenants/  
clawbacks**



**Change of control**

Single trigger/ Double trigger  
Need flexibility to cash out  
equity grants



**Levels of equity  
grants**



**Hiring a new  
executive**

What form of equity?  
How much equity? Terms?



**No backdating!**

Importance of  
contemporaneous  
documentation

# Accounting Consequences of Equity Compensation

## FASB ASC Topic 718

Compensation cost for full-value awards is based on the market value of the stock on the date of grant, and amortized over the service period

- Restricted stock
- RSUs settled in stock

For securities issued on the vesting of restricted interests, a company is generally required to amortize over the vesting period a compensation cost equal to the fair market value of the underlying securities on the date of the award

Compensation cost for options and stock-settled SARs is estimated at grant date using an option-pricing model (usually Black-Scholes) and amortized over the service period

- Stock options
- SARs

Compensation cost for liability awards has to be remeasured at the end of each reporting period until exercise or settlement (variable accounting)

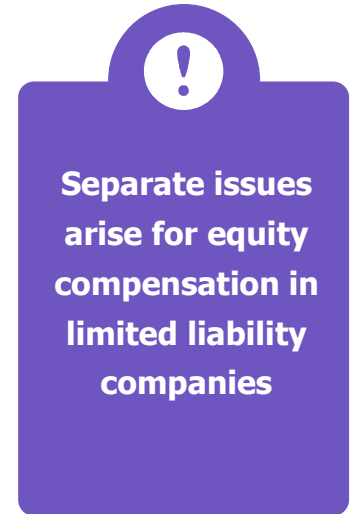
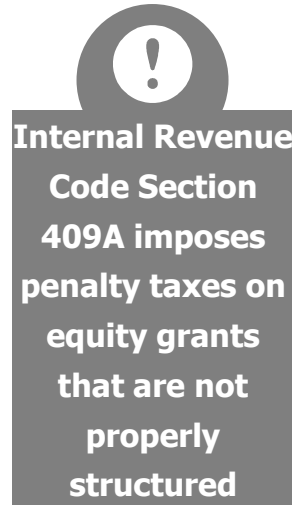
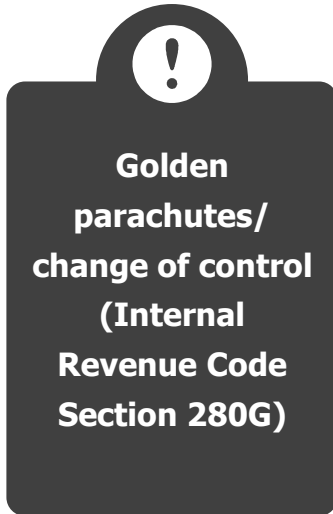
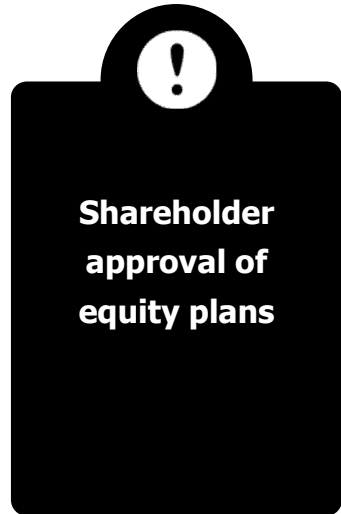
- Cash-based SARs
- RSUs settled in cash

# Securities Law Requirements



**State securities laws (“blue sky laws”)**

# Executive Compensation Issues





# Key Takeaways

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## **Restricted stock may be best for founders shares**

- Do not forget 83(b) election; very short time frame

**Options usually best for private company after stock starts to appreciate**

**It is worth the investment to have the equity plan and procedures set up correctly**

**IRS is auditing equity compensation, so it is important to keep accurate, contemporaneous board of directors minutes documenting equity grants**

**Expect to negotiate with the employee regarding the amount, type and terms of equity compensation**

# Questions?

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# Biography



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A member of Morgan Lewis’s cross-practice global workforce team, Zaitun Poonja counsels in all areas of executive compensation for startups, emerging growth companies, and public companies. She advises large multinational corporations, and publicly and privately held companies in numerous global industries—including technology, pharmaceutical, and life sciences—on implementation of equity compensation programs in US and foreign jurisdictions. She counsels public and private companies in connection with merger and acquisition transactions, spin-offs, initial public offerings and venture financing.

# Biography



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Thomas W. Kellerman represents companies, investment banks, and venture capital funds, advising technology industry clients on public offerings, mergers and acquisitions (M&A), venture capital and other private finance transactions, and corporate governance matters. Having practiced in London for four years, Tom has experience in cross-border transactions for technology companies. He represents companies interested in developing and investing in clean energy technologies, including sustainable fuel vehicles, power supplies and infrastructure, in M&A, financing, and general corporate matters.

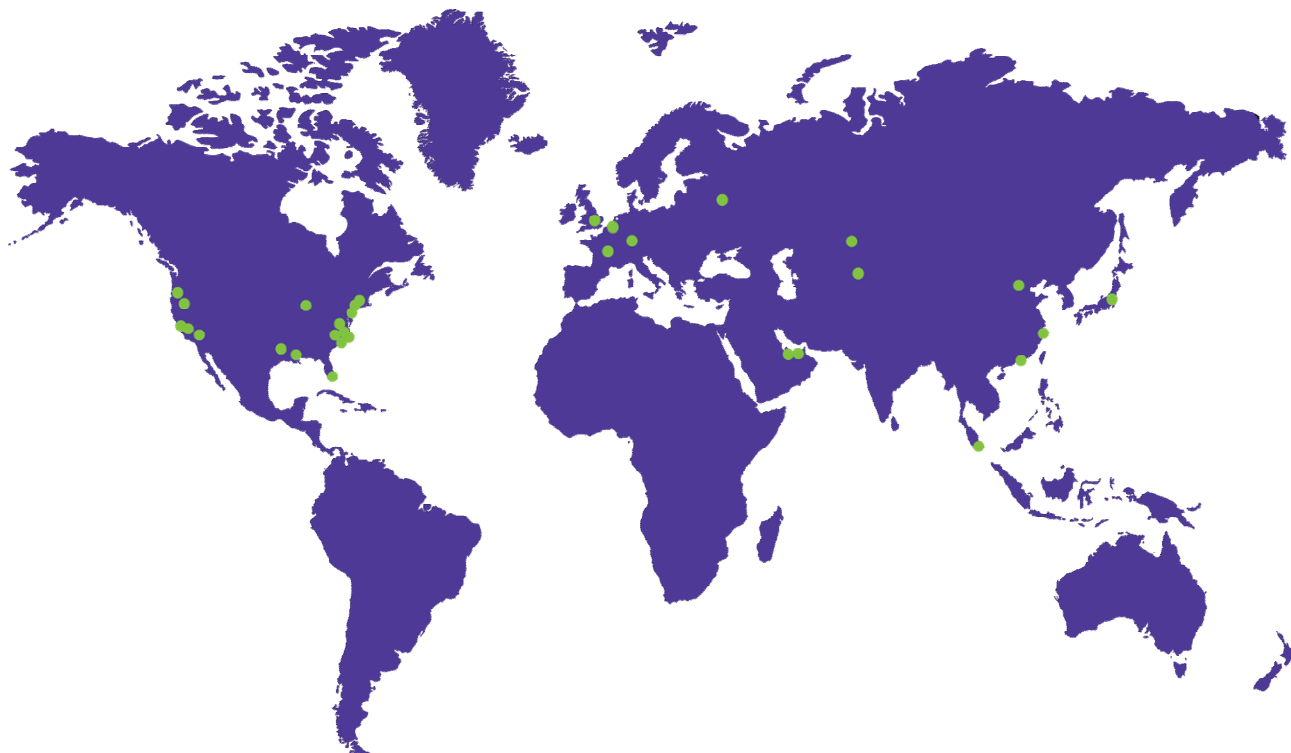


## Our Global Reach

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Latin America  
Middle East  
North America

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Frankfurt  
Hartford  
Hong Kong  
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Los Angeles  
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