

OSEN :: Entrepreneurial Questionnaire

Entrepreneurial activity is not for everyone. It's business. Businesses are willing to invest money in projects in order to gain a return on investment. They are willing to follow the whims of the market, which may include laying off workers when business is slow. They are willing to take calculated risks, such as taking out loans, which may end up putting existing projects at risk. That's not the mentality of most social service organizations.

However, as the public sector increasingly pinches off funding, the opportunities for meeting social needs may be getting scarce. You may be scratching a bald spot into your head as you wonder how to continue meeting your mission. You owe it to yourself to think about trading some social services thinking for business thinking.

Before you tread deeply into this notion, though, let's take a temperature-reading of your organization. Ask the executive director to fill out the following questionnaire.

1. What happens when you face risk?

- a) I feel young again.
- b) I exhale slowly 10 times, then start filling out a list of pros and cons.
- c) I make sure my laces are double-knotted, then I run the opposite direction.

2. How much appetite do you have for stress?

- a) Stress is nature's way of letting me know I am fully alive.
- b) I can go far with a little anesthetic and visualization exercises.
- c) Knock me out. I can't stand anything ugly.

3. How adventuresome are your board members?

- a) If we aren't shaking things up, plowing new territory and breaking molds, they want to know what's up.
- b) They're pretty passive, basically following the lead of the executive director.
- c) They've never met a new idea they could trust.

4. If your organization lost a bunch of money, how would you feel?

- a) Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I can devote a slice of the budget to trying new things without crippling the organization.
- b) Lousy. But I'd learn from the experience.
- c) We don't have a nickel to lose.

5. Do you have the necessary talent to launch a business – or the budget to hire the key people?

- a) Yep, we have available board members, staff members and money.
- b) Our staffing is tight, but our board will pitch in. Plus, we can raise money for new hires.
- c) Everyone is stressed, the budget is tight, and I'm sick of begging for money.

6. As executive director, how willing are you to do things differently in order to accomplish your mission?

- a) I'd much rather do something different than do things the same old way.
- b) I'm generally willing to look at different ideas, but my current emphasis is on keeping the agency afloat, not in seeking new opportunities.
- c) I've wasted too much time with lame-brained ideas to be sucked into that again.

7. Are you willing to compete in the marketplace?

- a) Let me at it!
- b) If I have to, I'll try.
- c) I'd rather apply for a grant.

8. Why are you considering a waste-based recycling business?

- a) My community is overflowing in trash, and I'm looking for additional approaches to meeting our mission.
- b) Somebody asked us to do it, and we are a can-do organization.
- c) We want to help the environment.

9. What is your reputation in the community?

- a) We innovate, we deliver, and we've done it for a long time.
- b) We get more publicity for our fundraising events than for our programs.
- c) We're kind of low-profile.

10. How does your staff feel about change?

- a) They stay here because they know there's always a new challenge coming.
- b) Under the right circumstances, and with the right preparation, it doesn't scare them.
- c) They're as tradition-bound as turkey at Thanksgiving.

11. Can your reputation afford a failure?

- a) Yes. Our projects are winners most of the time, and the community knows that.
- b) Maybe. But we'd rather succeed.
- c) No. We are out to build our reputation, not trip over it.

Scoring:

Give yourself **4** points for "a" answers; **2** points for "b" answers; **0** points for "c" answers.

If you scored 35 or above: You're at the top of the class! You're ready to find market-based solutions to social needs, your organization has the stomach for a well-calculated risk, and you have the right assets and circumstances. A waste-based recycling business might be the right arena to delve into. Consider attending the Oregon Symposium for Entrepreneurial Nonprofits' [training seminar](#) (link to training page) to find out more about different kinds of waste-based businesses and the most strategic way to establish one.

If you scored 20 to 34: You are in a gray zone. As you find out more about waste-based social enterprise, be open to falling on either the go side or the no-go side. You'll need to hone in on your weak areas, gather more information, and make some fundamental decisions about future direction. Do you want to move the organization toward entrepreneurship? What steps would you need to take, and how realistic are they? You may want to re-evaluate where your organization could use more help, either by increasing its own capacity or seeing partnerships with other organizations. For more guidance, read SVDP's manual on waste-based social enterprise development, which will be available soon.

If you scored 19 or below: Save yourself some unnecessary angst: stick with the tried and true. Trying to set up a business as complicated as waste-based recycling is not the right match for a nonprofit that is heavily immersed in a social services approach, has never ventured into entrepreneurial territory, lacks enterprising spirit and acumen on its board and staff, and just isn't in a strong enough position to take on a big task that carries risk.