

The Makings of an Entrepreneur

No assessment, no matter how involved, can tell you for certain whether you will succeed as an entrepreneur. All it can do is give you a sense of where you stand in relation to those who have successfully become self-employed. Even having all the qualities of an entrepreneur doesn't guarantee success. It does, however, provide a starting point—a way to gauge where you stand with regard to self-employment and how much work it would take.

Given the potential risks involved, it is important to know your strengths and weaknesses before you pursue any self-employment options. If you scored in the low or average range on the preceding assessment (any score below 84), you may want to carefully reconsider your options. People with low scores (50–66) should especially talk with family, friends, and professionals before quitting their day jobs. While there are very few barriers that you can't overcome (you can always learn what a business plan is, improve your math skills, or work on your time management), it is arguable that some people's personalities simply aren't suited for self-employment. For example, if you are uncomfortable taking risks; prefer to be told what to do; and don't have one single idea for something you could create, sell, or improve, then self-employment is probably not for you. (Of course, if you are that person, you probably knew that long before you read this chapter.)

If, on the other hand, you scored in the high range (84–100) or feel you have what it takes to start your own business, then it is important to explore your options and begin making plans. The remainder of this chapter (and the rest of this book) can help.

The Self-Employment Dream

If you decide to become self-employed, you should feel passionate about the work you will do. When considering your options, don't limit your thinking. Suppose that you are good at and enjoy gardening. Businesses related to gardening might include such things as opening a lawn and tree service, a greenhouse, a flower shop, a landscaping service, a landscape design service, an orchard, or a Christmas tree farm.

EXERCISE

Answering the following questions might help you identify some self-employment possibilities:

1. As a child, what did you dream of doing when you grew up?

2. What activities have brought you the most satisfaction over the last five years?

3. What do you think you are better at than most people? What do other people say you are good at?

Your answers to these questions will give you valuable insight into the best type of business ventures to pursue.

A COMMITMENT TO SUCCESS

Entrepreneurial endeavors are not without their disadvantages. Other than the obvious monetary costs, you can expect a variety of personal costs. You should be prepared, at the very least, to make the following commitments:

- **Working steadily:** Self-employed individuals must have self-discipline and a willingness to put in the hours needed to succeed. While you can set your own hours, you must be willing to work without someone standing over you telling you what needs to be done and when. It's important to stay focused and have a healthy work ethic.
- **Working alone:** Home-based business owners must be especially willing to sacrifice "people" contact. This isn't to say that entrepreneurs are completely isolated—only that it can be harder to fill social needs through your work when there isn't someone in a cubicle next to you.
- **Maintaining your professionalism:** Your professionalism will pay off for you in terms of customer satisfaction. Nothing hurts a small business more than being inconsiderate and rude to its customers. This is especially true for the home-based business owner who must rely on word-of-mouth advertising to gain even more business.
- **Paying your own benefits:** You will probably have to purchase your own health insurance and start your own retirement plan. Many home-based business owners pay into individual retirement accounts (IRAs), and most insurance companies can offer individual health insurance. Still, with the rising cost of health insurance and the questionable future of Social Security, these are no small sacrifices.

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