

Tool 9: Tapping Into Your Inner Social Entrepreneur

If you are like most social change agents, you will resist or respectfully decline participating in any sort of exercise that focuses on **you** rather than focuses on your work. Once a change agent has had a vision of what the future could be, they are anxious to get working on it immediately. They experience a tremendous sense of urgency and don't feel that they have the time to examine their own motivations or personal needs. Once they begin doing the work, they feel that the spotlight should be focused on the issue and/or the constituents. They prefer to be in the background of the story they are creating rather than the central character.

This mindset makes perfect sense ... to a point. When you are starting a new organization, whether it is driving social change or creating a profitable enterprise, it is important to recognize that you, the founder, are a critical element in the story. **Before you've developed a track record of results, you are asking people to invest in your vision and in your ability to make that vision come to life.** And, in order for any investor to be willing to take a risk in investing their philanthropic dollars in an innovative idea on paper rather than making a more conservative investment in an existing program with proven results, that investor needs to understand who you are and feel that they can trust you with their investment.

You and the Echoing Green Fellowship Application

The Echoing Green application contains a number of questions that are designed both to capture information about the issues and proposed solution **and** to provide our review committee with insights into the motivation, passions, commitment and knowledge of the applicant. In the past, to collect information about the applicant we asked two very direct questions "Why you? Why now?" Many applicants answered these questions with what they thought was a clever reply, "If not me, who? If not now, when?" Even though we no longer ask these specific questions, these responses oddly continue to creep into applications and we strongly caution against using them as justification of your qualifications to lead your proposed organization. If you think about the statement above, not only is it lacking in originality, it doesn't provide the reader with any useful information. In fact, the person reviewing the application may actually be able to come up with a long list of highly qualified candidates in response to the applicant's challenge of "If not me, who?" and the applicant will have done nothing to distinguish themselves from the others on that list.

Should you intentionally craft your application answers to include personal anecdotes and to provide us with telling insights into your character and personality? Yes and no. When used appropriately, personal stories absolutely can be useful information in an Echoing Green fellowship application or any other appeal for funding. However, if including information about your personal history isn't directly relevant to the issue or to the solution or if it feels unnatural, forcing this information into your application isn't the best approach. Instead of attempting to manipulate your answers, we suggest that you set aside a time to think about and answer the questions below. The more in tune you are with your personal connection to the work, your passion and drive, the more naturally it will come through throughout the remainder of your application.

About that resume...

Applicants should present a resume that highlights the relevant skills and experience that they are bringing to their work. The stronger applicants understand that we aren't asking for the resume to complete a generic application check list. We ask for the resume in order to get a better sense of who the applicant is and how well they are prepared to take on the role of leading their proposed organization. **Applicants should understand that they are, in a sense, applying for the job of Executive Director of the organization they are proposing and include an appropriate version of their resume that showcases their credentials for the job.** Weaker applicants include generic resumes that often list job titles, tasks, and, occasionally, career objectives, that aren't relevant to the role they wish to take on. Oftentimes the issue isn't that the applicants aren't qualified. Rather, it is that they haven't taken the time to determine how their past work and volunteer experiences have prepared them for this role.

Deepening Your Self Awareness: Reflecting on the *Why You? Why Now?* Questions

Not all of the questions below directly link to a question on the Echoing Green application. Rather, they are the questions that Echoing Green believes every budding social entrepreneur should reflect upon both when starting on their journey and throughout their journey. By developing a greater self awareness, you will ultimately become a stronger and more effective leader and this knowledge will contribute to the design of a more effective social change organization.

When and how were you drawn to this work?

Things to think about:

- Why this particular issue vs. another issue?
- Is this a new passion or a long time passion?
- Can you trace your inspiration back to a specific moment in time (at Echoing Green we call this a “moment of obligation”) or did it evolve over time?
- What research or activities have you undertaken to make yourself more knowledgeable about this issue?

As a social change agent, you are, no doubt, driven to take on this work in order to address an injustice, to right a wrong. But what is your personal motivation for taking on the additional challenge and risk of launching an innovative new organization? After all, you could have sought a position that would allow you to work on this same issue within a more established organization. If you were to look back on your work in 10 or 20 years, what do you expect will have brought you the most satisfaction?

Things to think about: people find their motivation in different ways. You may find yours among these three different areas:

- Transformative change:
 - Started something that outlived my participation
 - Changed individual lives deeply
 - Created change across a broad community
 - Changed laws or public policy
 - Changed behaviors
 - Ended a problem forever
 - Started a movement
 - Changed how others viewed their work or approached their work
- Professional goals
 - Led a creative and entrepreneurial organization
 - Learned new skills
 - Created several new initiatives or launched multiple organizations
 - Organized community members to be able to help themselves or to take action to better their own lives
 - Developed expertise that I could share with others so they could do their work more effectively
 - Became recognized as an expert in my field
- Personal Growth
 - Developed strong working relationships with my staff and colleagues
 - Maintained or deepened close relationships with my loved ones
 - Expanded my range of knowledge
 - Was a positive role model for others

Why this specific community? How will you establish yourself as a leader within the community where you intend to work or within your field of work?

Things to think about:

- How strong is your connection to this community? Where are your connections the strongest? Among the community leaders or among the community members?
- Do you already have the trust of the community or will you need to gain it? If you need to gain the community's trust, how will you accomplish that?
- If you are from the community where you intend to work, are you already seen as a leader or will other community members perceive it as presumptuous or arrogant if you take on a leadership role?
- If you are from outside of the community, how much time have you spent working in or living in that community? How will you establish your credibility among both community members and others who are working in that community?
- Will your work be perceived as threatening either to community members or to others who work within the community? Who will be your allies or collaborators?

Why are you committed to act on this issue at this time?

Things to think about:

- How long have you been developing your innovative idea for change? If you have been thinking about this for some time and have not yet acted or have only been able to commit to this idea part time, why are you now ready to make a full time commitment?
- Has something in the environment changed (e.g., enactment of new legislation, spike in incidents of disease, release of new statistical data) that makes the need for your work more critical than before?
- Has there been a change in your own life that makes this the ideal time for you to “take the plunge”?

How long are you willing to commit to this work?

Things to think about: We highly recommend that you be brutally honest about your response to this question – no one will see your answer with the possible exception of your coach and then only if you choose to share it. Please note that amongst the answers below we have included responses that we would consider red flags, indicators that you need to seriously consider if this role is right for you at this time or if your commitment is less than what will be required for your proposed organization to be successful.

- Running a start up organization is difficult and requires long hours. Growing and sustaining a social change organization can be just as demanding, or even more demanding.
- This may be your life's passion and you are planning to commit to spending the rest of your career working on this issue. Or you may have many passions and while you are strongly committed to this issue, you feel a calling to work on other issues as well.
- You have a passion for start up organizations but you know that your attention will wane when the organization becomes more established and stable. Your plan is to build the organization to a certain level of stability then to pass it to a new leadership team better equipped to grow and scale the organization.
- You are young and without many attachments. You are willing to commit to the rigorous workload of launching a new organization for now but know that when you decide to have a family, your priorities will change.
- You are simply in a holding pattern right now. You love the idea of running the show and getting the title of “president” on your resume but three years from now you'll be applying to graduate school.

What energizes you?

Things to think about: In order to maintain your stamina, you'll need to identify your energy sources and ensure that your day to day responsibilities enable you to stay energized, rather than drain you. Examples of energy sources may include:

- Motivating and inspiring others
- Seeing tangible results from my work
- The opportunity to change people's minds or helping them to gain a new perspective
- Winning positive outcomes for my clients
- Creating deep, personal connections with others
- Challenging long held beliefs
- Developing creative solutions
- Working with others – OR, conversely – working alone
- Creating something from nothing
- New challenges every day: the chaos of an emerging, constantly changing organization
- Raising money
- Working with others who firmly believe that positive change is possible.

What aspects of this job are you prepared for and where will you need help?

Things to think about: This image of the lone entrepreneur, working away in isolation in their garage until their big breakthrough moment is a myth. The most successful social entrepreneurs are well aware of their strengths and their weaknesses. They play to their strengths and surround themselves with others who can enable them to overcome their weaknesses. They'll either recruit team members who have the strengths that they themselves lack or they'll find a mentor or a coach to help them acquire the skills that they need. The various roles that the leadership of an effective social change organization must take on include but are not limited to:

- Evangelist: The ability to motivate and inspire others
- Visionary: The ability to see possibilities where others do not
- Pragmatist: The ability to get things done
- Recruiter: The ability to find and recruit resources in terms of staff, board members and volunteers
- Team Leader: The ability to engage people and to help them reach their potential
- Fund Raiser: The ability to attract and retain financial support
- Financial Manager: The ability to run an efficient organization and to remain solvent.

Who comprises your personal support network?

Things to think about: most change agents focus their energy on identifying what their constituents need rather than on what they themselves need. The people whom you care about and who care about you will come on this journey with you and will support you every step of the way. They may think you are crazy but they'll support you none the less. But your support system won't simply maintain itself. You need to identify who is in your support network and proactively engage its members in your work. These relationships must be mutually supportive.

Your support network may include:

- The Family You Come From: parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, etc.
- The Family You Create: spouses, life partners, children
- Friends
- Professional Colleagues
- Community Members
- Your Staff
- Your Board of Directors

- Mentors and Coaches
- Spiritual Advisors