

Applying Entrepreneurial Tools to Your Association

By Elizabeth Clarke



There has been much discussion lately on the subjects of entrepreneurship and teams within not-for-profit organizations. I noted with great interest Jim Pealow's Learning Link column in Associationä (December 2006/January 2007), which asked the question: How Entrepreneurial Savvy is Your Association? It took me back to the early to mid 90's when unemployment was at an all time high in Canada and our business was moving forward rapidly.

Our product was skills training to the unemployed and with six full time programs in operation in Eastern Ontario, primarily focused on employment and entrepreneurship, we were well positioned to be very influential in the lives of the unemployed. No one takes this responsibility lightly. As a team, we embarked upon a journey that would encourage us to examine the ways in which we moved forward, from an entrepreneurial perspective and in running non-profit, government funded programs.

At that time, John B. Miner, an industrial psychologist from the U.S. was conducting research studies over a period of 20 years involving 100 established entrepreneurs using interviews, personality questionnaires, visits to their businesses and lengthy discussions with them. He applied the same approach to over 150 students enrolled in an MBA-level entrepreneurship course. In his book, "The 4 Routes to Entrepreneurial Success", Miner developed a new view about entrepreneurs and why they succeed or fail. He stated:

- "First, there is not a single type of entrepreneur, but rather, there are four different types, each with a distinct personality.
- Second, each type of entrepreneur must follow a distinct career route to succeed, and each must relate to the business in a different way."

The results of the studies that John Miner conducted revealed four types of entrepreneurs, the route that each must take to be successful, and how organizations can use this information to assess themselves and build effective entrepreneurial teams.

In 1995, at the height of our business success, I was determined to meet John (Jack) B. Miner. Despite the fact that my primary focus was on not-for-profit associations, I was so inspired by his studies and by his assessments of entrepreneurial traits that in 1995, I invited Dr. Miner to meet with our team of trainers and association staff in Ottawa to present a workshop on the four types of entrepreneurs. Over a period of two days, Jack Miner provided me with more inspiration and motivation than anyone I have met since. Not only that, he provided us all with the tools and means to guide our teams in managing the business of association management. As well, I was able to apply what I learned from him to the staffing of every non-profit association we managed until I sold our business in 2003.

John Miner's findings demonstrated that there are four types of entrepreneurial personalities:

1. The Personal Achiever
2. The Supersalesperson
3. The Real Manager
4. The Expert Idea Generator

Each type brings with it a fundamental trait that his research revealed as necessary to achieve business success. In applying these fundamental traits to the associations I have worked with over the past ten years, it has been proven time and time again that success truly can be achieved by keeping these simple strengths in mind when forming teams. One statement that John Miner inspired me with was that, "To be successful, the entrepreneur's personality and behaviour must fit together."

My experience was a little diverse in some situations - not clearly defined. For example, when taking on the management of one national industry association we faced enormous challenges including a lack of funds and serious indebtedness, lost confidence in the association by members and decreased membership, negative brand recognition in the community, and a perception of incestuous leadership and out-of-control spending. It was clear to me that the only way we would be able to save this association was to keep Dr. Miner's findings in mind and apply his research results to our team building.

1. Our Personal Achiever was me. I fit the profile of having a need to achieve and as a result, I think I brought the necessary energy to the team. I also didn't mind putting in long hours and I thrived on planning and setting goals. I was committed to the organization and believed strongly that my actions controlled my situation and not the actions of others. I thrived on putting out fires and dealing with crises, wearing many hats.
2. Our Supersalesperson was our administrator. She was front line and possessed the feeling for people that was necessary and possessed a need to help. The administrator sold our vision as front line on the telephones and definitely used the soft-sell approach with regard to our intentions and our sincerity in supporting the association's grass roots.
3. The Real Manager was our Finance Manager. She took charge and provided the stable decisiveness and authority necessary to support an association in trouble. Not only did the finance manager manage the finances, she also stepped in and provided marketing and sales in the management of creditors. She was the biggest factor, I believe, in the success of the association in the end. Her approach was truly different than that of the Supersalesperson (as Dr. Miner predicted), but she worked independently and steadfastly and brought another important element to the team.
4. The Expert Idea Generators were our Board of Directors. There were many. They developed the vision and strategy. They possessed the dreams and plans and were strongly drawn to the world of ideas. Sometimes they got a bit carried away by their enthusiasm, but with the support of legal experts and financial specialists, caution was brought into play which Dr. Miner noted is necessary in this personality trait.

The bottom line is that we achieved the unachievable! Over a period of six years we were able to turn the association around. I truly believe that without the right mix, without

the right qualities and without the understanding and contributions of those qualities among us, it would not have happened.

I attribute, to a large extent, the success of our associations to the understanding of what kind of team we needed to pull together. Whether a major project, a conference or convention, a Board of Directors or a Committee with a serious charge, ensuring the “Four Types of Entrepreneurs” are applied to the challenges faced by your association will contribute greatly to the achievement of your goals.

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References: John B. Miner, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., *The 4 Routes to Entrepreneurial Success*, 1996.