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## What are the options for striking out on my own?

Get into self-reflection mode. Do you find it hard to seek or take advice? Are you unable to make hard decisions about money? Are you a risk-taker?

"You really need to understand the personality you bring into this venture," says Barbara Reinhold, career coach and former director of Smith College's Career Development Office.

Reinhold suggests this exercise: Make a list. On the left, detail everything you know and care about doing. On the right, identify potential consumers.

"It becomes clear when they've written all this down where the passion is and who might pay something for it," says Reinhold, author of *Free to Succeed: Designing the Life You Want in the New Free Agent Economy*.

Now, she advises, identify the holes, the parts of your personality that could jeopardize a new enterprise, and enlist people who have

the skills and mindset that you don't to help you. "People—especially women—are very prone, pathologically prone, to underestimating their own strengths," she says.

Reinhold tells of a friend who started two socially responsible businesses that failed. The entrepreneur had a hard time managing the money and, overall, balancing too many roles. Reinhold told her that she needed to collaborate with people whose talents supported hers.

Now with a partner who has a banking background, Reinhold says, the woman is building support from local government and business leaders for a consultancy or nonprofit that would train low-income women to repair windows on historic buildings, boosting energy efficiency.

**When considering your own undertaking, Reinhold says, explore the alternatives. Do you hope to be an independent consultant? Do you want to start a nonprofit? Do you have an idea for a for-profit endeavor with a social purpose?**



### ON THE FRONT LINES

#### What does it take?

Social entrepreneurs take initiative and create nonprofit or for-profit ventures for the greater good. Can you count yourself among them?

The Skoll Foundation describes social entrepreneurs as:

**Ambitious.** They tackle major social issues, from increasing the college enrollment rate of low-income students to fighting poverty in developing countries.

**Mission-driven.** Generating social value—not wealth—is the central criterion of a successful social entrepreneur.

**Strategic.** Social entrepreneurs see and act upon what others miss: opportunities to improve systems, create solutions, and invent new approaches that create social value.

**Resourceful.** Social entrepreneurs must be exceptionally skilled at mustering and mobilizing human, financial, and political resources.

**Results-oriented.** Social entrepreneurs open new pathways for the marginalized and disadvantaged and unlock society's potential to effect social change.



**"Before you run off and do something you'll regret, take a deep breath and think about what you need to launch your enterprise successfully. If you don't have enough information and market research to point you in the right direction, now's the time to get it."**

JAN NORMAN author, *What No One Ever Tells You About Starting Your Own Business: Real-Life Start-Up Advice from 101 Successful Entrepreneurs*

## PROFILE Gordon Johnson



**“Focus less on making money and more on satisfying a personal goal.”**

GORDON JOHNSON

### Gordon Johnson decided to change the system.

During a decades-long career protecting abused and neglected children, he had seen families torn apart in a system of foster care that too often made things worse.

Even as chief of Illinois' Department of Child and Family Services, Johnson knew that to change the system he had to leave it. Having led the state agency and a Chicago nonprofit serving at-risk families, he felt ready to make the move.

“These experiences gave me the confidence I needed to set up my own nonprofit,” says Johnson, now 76. “I would not have done it, however, without the full emotional and monetary support of my wife, Deloris.”

By pooling their resources, the pair was able to come up with the start-up funding for Neighbor To Family.

Johnson formed the nonprofit foster care agency in Daytona Beach, Florida, in 1998. The organization focuses on keeping siblings together, while providing quality care. Johnson's innovation: providing foster parents a salary and benefits for full-time parenting and accountability.

Neighbor To Family has opened shop in five other states—Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia—with programs pending in Ohio, Washington, and Nevada.

Johnson's advice to those starting out: “Focus less on making money and more on satisfying a personal goal or mission. Start small; many nonprofits fail in the first two years because they attempt too much. When you lack a necessary expertise, reach out to others.

“Take your time to make sure your first steps are in the right direction, and finally, be persistent.”

### PRACTICAL TIPS

#### Working your idea

With a million and a half nonprofits in the United States, how will you know whether the one you want to start is unique enough to thrive? The National Council of Nonprofits identifies some first steps:

**Get help.** It takes more than a solo founder to keep a nonprofit alive. Having lots of people willing to help—such as board members and volunteers—can signal broad community support.

**Determine feasibility.** Develop detailed business and strategic plans that include mission, organizational structure, budget, fundraising, marketing, governance, and staffing.

**File paperwork.** Initial filings generally involve incorporating at the state level; securing federal tax-exempt status; and filing operational paperwork at the state and local levels.

**Find quality professional assistance.** Seek an attorney or accountant who has experience working with nonprofits.

**Consider other options.** Instead of starting a nonprofit, think about sharing your idea with an existing organization or volunteering to create your idea as a new program.



### INFORMATION

#### Essential resources

- **How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas** David Bornstein
- **Life Entrepreneurs: Ordinary People Creating Extraordinary Lives** Christopher Gergen and Gregg Vanourek
- **The Nonprofit Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Start and Run Your Nonprofit Organization** Gary M. Grobman
- **Starting and Managing a Nonprofit Organization: A Legal Guide** Bruce R. Hopkins
- **Finding the Sweet Spot: The Natural Entrepreneur's Guide to Responsible, Sustainable, Joyful Work** Dave Pollard

**1.5** Number, in millions, of nonprofits in the United States.  
*National Center for Charitable Statistics*

**52%** of small businesses are home based.  
*U.S. Small Business Administration*