

The Role of the Executive Service Corps

The Executive Service Corps is a non-profit agency with highly skilled volunteer consultants, mainly retired, whose experience is in the corporate sector. ESC volunteers also have deep experience in sheltered workshops.

We can assist with strategic planning, system design and implementation.

Because we are volunteers and have a low cost structure, we can help you at costs well below the costs of comparable private management consulting firms.



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Sheltered Workshops And Business Risk

Second Paper In A Series
on Sheltered Workshops

Freedom's Just Another Word For
Nothing Left To Lose.
Nothing, I Mean Nothing, Honey,
If It Ain't Free.

Janis Joplin *Me and Bobby McGee*

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Sheltered Workshops and Business Risk

Although unstated, Janis Joplin is singing about risk. “Nothing left to lose” is the ultimate outcome of unmanaged risk. But, the sheltered workshops have plenty to lose – jobs for developmentally disabled, assets and much more. So, how to cope with a changing market environment that demands risk-taking by the leadership?

A recent survey of successful entrepreneurs, defined as those whose businesses had survived five years, turned up a fascinating tidbit. Almost to the person, these people rejected the idea that they had taken risk in starting their businesses. They felt they knew the business and had performed adequate due diligence. As a result, they said they had little or no risk in their new venture. They are, of course, wrong, but that’s what they said.

ESC recently conducted a telephone survey of about 30 sheltered workshops in Missouri. What we found was very little movement on the part of the managements – still concentrating on subcontract work with their businesses in slow decline and all complaining about their work “going overseas.” Many blamed their boards for the lack of action.

Most people managing sheltered workshops are not entrepreneurs, but in today’s environment they are faced with making entrepreneurial decisions – sub-contracting relationships to terminate, new businesses to plan and execute, rehabbing and re-layout of existing plants and the assumption of debt to pay for the improvements. The alternative to entrepreneurial execution in many cases is the slow death of a thousand cuts.

If you are the leader and can’t bring yourself to act like an entrepreneur perhaps you should take a close look at yourself. What is stopping you? Is it the risk of failure or the risk of personal embarrassment that is stopping you? If you don’t like your answers, perhaps you should step aside and let someone else assume the leadership. Positive change has to be done by someone!

But, what about your board of directors? Most sheltered workshop boards are pretty conservative and even risk-averse. The good news is, we see very little proactive initiative from the boards. Most respond to the materials and initiatives proposed by the management. If you, the executive director, are convinced of the need for entrepreneurial action, your job is to convince your board.

This is where the Marines’ *One Good Man or Woman* enters the equation. If your board falters and won’t take on the hard job of governance in these times, you don’t have to replace the entire board. Just appoint one forceful and knowledgeable person to your board — Someone who understands the economic situation, has an entrepreneurial bent and will take an active role along side you in moving the board as it needs to move. You will be amazed what *One Good Man or Woman* can accomplish!