

The top 5 qualities of a successful faith-based social entrepreneur

BY LINDA KAY KLEIN

When I recently heard Reverend Dr. Paula Williams, former CEO of one of the largest church-planting organizations in the country, discuss the qualities church-plants should look for in a pastor, I was struck that the qualities were a near mirror image of what I know social venture capitalists and social entrepreneurship incubators look for in individuals poised to launch the next big social venture.



Experts believe that in the earliest stages of launching a new venture—when an idea is new, there is little or no money for it, no structure, and limited understanding of the idea in the culture—the personal qualities of the individual founder are among the leading indicators of success. But what are those key qualities? Having spent time in faith-based and secular start-ups, I offer the following characteristics as the top five qualities of a successful faith-based social entrepreneur—whether from the academy or the nonprofit or church plant sectors:

1) Purpose-driven

When building the plane while flying it—which every faith-based social entrepreneur must do—*purpose* is both a fuel tank and a guidance system. Research shows that people who are *internally* motivated (by a self-identified sense of purpose, curiosity, etc.) are more likely to have long-term success than those who are *externally* motivated (by money, a desire to be seen as a good person, a fear of being seen as a bad person, etc.). And that clear sense of purpose becomes critical when the complications of founding a church, nonprofit, social business or

hybrid create clouds of directional doubt, insecurity, and temptation.

2) Resilient

The faith-based social entrepreneur needs resilience when the work gets hard, and the work *always* gets hard. The entrepreneur and their idea *will* be tested. They may need to scrap initial ideas and assumptions based on something they learned in the pilot and begin again; change-up their team in ways that hurt; even pass the leadership baton on to someone else when they are getting in the way of the change they hoped to create in the world. For this reason, investors often consider someone who has demonstrated personal resilience—facing trials in their past and coming out on the other side—to be a “better bet” than someone whose resilience is untested.

3) Two-channel thinking

Faith-based social entrepreneurs are able to see and compel others with a clear vision for the future. It’s as though they are simultaneously on two channels—at once

seeing the muck and mess of today, and the beauty that *could* be tomorrow. This two-channel vision allows them to believe, and to convince *others* to believe, in a vision for a better future while remaining strategically engaged in that which stands between them and that future

4) *People-centered*

One of the differences between those who do charity work, and those who do innovative, system-changing faith-based social entrepreneurship is how they see those they serve. Faith-based social entrepreneurs do not see themselves as saving anyone, but as co-creating a better world for us *all*. They cull the wisdom of, and work alongside, those they serve. They also make intentional efforts to form relationships with those working on their issue in other sectors (i.e., the business world) and with other populations (i.e., internationally), never assuming they have all of the answers.

5) *Outcomes-oriented*

Faith-based social entrepreneurs address the root causes of an issue, not the issue's symptoms, knowing this

ensures a more lasting impact. Meanwhile, they are constantly on the look-out for ways to measure their efforts' influences on those root causes. And when the data reveals their work is ineffective, or is even having negative unintended impacts, they adapt, committed to doing whatever it takes to have a positive impact.

If you don't have all these qualities, but feel called to start a social venture and already have a break-through mission and model in mind, perhaps consider taking on a co-founder who has some of the qualities you lack.

And if you have all the qualities on this list, as well as interest and an idea, consider this a holy nudge. It might just be time to bring your big idea into the world.

If you need some support, you may want to join a catalyst community like [DO GOOD X](#), which helps Christian leaders clarify their purpose, accelerate their ideas, connect with mentors, access resources, and build the skills they need to build faith-based social ventures to do good in the world.



[Linda Kay Klein](#) is a writer, consultant, and social entrepreneurship expert. Her book, *PURE: Inside the Religious Movement that Shamed a Generation of Young Women—And How We Broke Free*, is due out in summer 2018.