

We Asked, You Answered

Out of the Office, Entrepreneurs Open Up

A record number of entrepreneurs gathered in the nation's capital in September for the 27th Inc. 500/5000 Conference. We polled 30 of them about their worst traits, their hiring plans for 2009, and the last person they called boss.

What's your take on the financial crisis?

"Obviously we're concerned, but we feel like our business is somewhat recession-proof." "The tougher the economy, the more innovation is in demand—so it's actually good for our business." "I can't say for sure, but we had a low number of closes last week despite a high number of leads." "It's not catastrophic, but we'll find ourselves in a nice pile of crap for a while."

How fast do you expect your company to grow this year compared with last year?

Faster 46 percent
Slower 35 percent
Same as last year . . . 19 percent

Have you received a buyout offer?

Yes 75 percent
No 25 percent
"Every day." "I stopped returning the calls." "I sold half of my company and then bought it back."

How many people do you plan to hire next year?

More than 50 22 percent
21 to 50 9 percent
11 to 20 22 percent
10 or fewer 48 percent
None Zero

How would your employees describe you?

"Tenacious." "Shrewd."
"Scary." "Calm and deliberate."
"A capitalist pig." "A softie—they say I'm not critical enough."

Tell us something that would surprise your staff.

"I really like them." "I have the corporate logo tattooed on my arm." "A lot of people don't know I'm the owner of the company."



FACE TIME: The entrepreneurs we interviewed included (clockwise from top left) Stefania Aulicino, Harold "Trey" Pounders, Morgan First, Shree Yerramsetti, Jason Duff, Mike Guevremont and Darla Frye-Guevremont, Michael Simmons, Elizabeth Grace Saunders, Dale Van Dellen, and Corey Bell and Steve Savage.

At what age did you start your first business?

After I turned 30 27 percent
In my 20s 43 percent
When I was a teen . . . 10 percent
Before I hit puberty . . 20 percent

What did you learn from your last boss?

"How not to treat people." "The devil is in the details." "I've never had a boss." "My last boss was my dad—he fired me."

What's your morning ritual before heading to work?

"I sit on the couch with my husband and our laptops, checking e-mail, drinking coffee, and watching Fox & Friends." "I eat the same breakfast every day: three pieces of thick-cut bacon. Limp." "I drop the kids off for school." "I read the Bible and write in my prayer journal." "I read the San Jose Mercury News and drink Peet's coffee." "I don't know if I can say that in Inc."

What do you do to relax?

"Cliff diving." "Meditation."
"Xbox Live." "I make lists."

What's your worst trait?

"I'm incorrigibly optimistic."
"Impatience, fanaticism, paranoia." "Micromanaging." "Being street smart: Certain things aren't as palatable on the moral side but are necessary for business."

Would you ever work for someone else?

No 57 percent
Yes 43 percent
"Never." "Sure, I used to be a great secretary." "No. I want my tombstone to read, 'Doesn't play well with others.'" "Whoever said yes, you need to put a tag on them, so I can find them and get them to work for me."