

# Change Agents: Pathfinders for Change

By Ranjit Sidhu, of ChangeQuest



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## Introduction

Any organisation with tough change challenges ahead needs boots on the ground ... motivated, enthusiastic, persuasive employees who can lead the way and help others through the stresses and strains of transition.

They are your army of pathfinders, able to assess your organisation's readiness for change and the severity of its impact. Ready to support colleagues and help people support each other.

And they can learn these vital skills through an exciting new qualification, APMG's Certified Local Change Agent.

It's for everyone who helps to make change happen.

## What is a Change Agent?

*The term 'change agent' describes someone who acts in a way that helps change in an organisation to happen, and who does so without the formal authority to give instructions to others.*

### Could it be you?

Anyone can be a Change Agent, no matter what level they are at in the organisation. You don't have to have a formal role in change or delivering projects, you can be in any business area.

## Why do we need Change Agents?

JP Garnier, the retiring CEO of GlaxoSmithKline, was quoted as saying: *"Getting people to change – one by one – is the only way to change organisations. After all, every change is personal."*

It's true that ultimately change happens one person at a time ... when each person chooses to make that change.

It takes immense effort, energy and time. And with the sheer amount of change we're facing today, it's not enough to rely on just a few people (leaders or a programme delivery team) to bring about transformation

The pace of change is increasing as well – we're being hit with more and more change at a faster pace.

It's easy for companies to falter in the face of this exponential increase. In recent times household names such as Toys R Us, Jaeger and Just for Pets have gone into liquidation.

(Our exponential age has been dubbed the 4th Industrial Revolution).

So to deal with constant, fast paced, high-volume of change organisations now recognise that they need to involve many more people.

They need to call in reinforcements and have boots on the ground.

These are the Change Agents.

## What do Change Agents do?

- They sit in the business areas, so they have local knowledge and expertise.
- They have the trust of their colleagues, and they're accepted as one of them.
- They're good at building relationships – connecting with people.

Engaging with and supporting their colleagues through the rollercoaster of change, they have good influencing skills, they share ideas and they make sure everyone knows what is going on.

They communicate upwards, down and across.

## Continuous learning

It's about continuous learning.

How do you get on with supermarket self-service checkouts? I'd hazard a guess that quite a few customers found them frustrating at first, and that's why many of the stores have staff members on hand to help.

The support staff are there for hand-holding. They'll step in when you're fumbling with your loose tomatoes or multi-discount products.

They are Change Agents.

Change Agents are there to:

- Bring about change more smoothly – it's less stressful
- Raise levels of adoption – it's not so scary
- Help sustain the change – repeated practice, because once is never enough

They are pivotal to successful change. Local because they're down at the grassroots rather than sitting in the Boardroom.

## Objectives of the Certified Local Change Agent qualification

- Understand how individuals are affected by change
- Understand the Change Agent's role and the role of others involved in change
- Develop techniques for helping yourself and your colleagues through change, including:
  - Active listening – Influencing skills – Facilitation skills
- How to assess the impact of change
- How to assess the readiness for change in your area
- Develop a local change plan





## An Example: Jamie's Food Revolution

Jamie Oliver gives us a fascinating example of Change Agents in action.

You may have seen the programme where he tried to create a “food revolution” in Huntington, West Virginia. His mission was to change the eating habits of a community labelled the unhealthiest in the US, with very high rates of diabetes and heart disease.

Food's an interesting topic – emotions around food run deep, and it's closely tied to culture.

Jamie is a larger-than-life character and very passionate about healthy food, but he realised that no amount of cajoling would force the people of Huntington to change their habits.

To quote the cook in the school cafeteria: “Get outta here and let me microwave my nuggets!”

She'd been in a tough job for years and didn't welcome a stranger telling her what to do.

It turned out that Jamie had to do the learning first.

Rather than be pushy, he listened, set up a kitchen and offered free cooking lessons. He had a win with a campaign to get children to eat more peas.

It was a small step, but a huge breakthrough in shifting mindsets.

## Build a network of influencers

To galvanise momentum Jamie developed a network of influencers:

- Teachers the children trusted
- The local DJ, who had mocked him initially
- Some of the teenagers – early adopters, who motivated the other kids

They were his Change Agents!

(The school also introduced knives and forks. They weren't needed with the previous menu.)

Of course, there are still overweight people in Huntington, and if the community overcomes one challenge, there will be many more to follow (such as rebuilding the economy).

Your own company will go on to face other problems as well. But once you learn how to change habits and get an organisation to “eat its peas,” you'll soon be ready to take on new challenges — whether that means eating tomatoes or eating the competition!

## What will I learn on the CLCA course?

Here is a taster of what the CLCA course includes:

### Supporting people through change

There can be a mismatch when those delivering change are ready to go, but those at receiving end are only just processing it and not ready to hear about more exciting plans. They still need time to be listened to before “letting go.”

### Influencing

Change Agents don't have authority so you'll learn influencing skills, such as the difference between PUSH (Jamie when he first arrived) and DRAWING IN (Jamie once he'd learned his lesson). A Drawing In approach appeals not just rationally but emotionally.

### Facilitating

You'll learn a process that will prevent change meetings turning into whingeing sessions that go nowhere. Instead you'll be able to move forward to reach a decision with clear actions.

### Engaging stakeholders

Different communication mechanisms work best at different stages of the change journey: just as Jamie took people in Huntington from AWARENESS about the food, to MORE INTEREST, to a DESIRE to do something about it, then a COMMITMENT to changing their habits. You will learn how to do this.

### Learning

Once we've been supported through those supermarket checkouts and practised a few times it gets more comfortable ... then automatic. Once your people have the mindset to learn, you'll be able to overcome ...

### Resistance and disengagement

You'll discover how resistance ranges from audible unhappiness (the cook and her nuggets), through inertia to anxiety. Moving from an individual office to shared space bruises ego, dents status and raises all sorts of emotions below the surface. And you'll learn how to spot the disengaged people on the sidelines.

## Conclusion

The CLCA qualification is a highly practical course, full of useful examples, and tools and techniques that can easily be applied in any change situation, at any level in the organisation.

I have had fantastic feedback from the organisations putting their people through this certification, particularly about how valuable and relevant these skills are in helping people build the confidence and motivation to deal with constant change.

Ultimately we want everyone in the business to treat change as “just what we do”. **And developing an army of Change Agents is the way to start.**

***“Without employees at all levels having a stake in the outcome, the transformation might well be doomed”***

McKinsey survey, February 2017

## About the author

An industry leader, Ranjit Sidhu works with a wide range of public and private sector companies, providing practical support, guidance and advice for teams to develop capability and bring about organisational change.

She was one of four experts who developed the first Change Management Body of Knowledge (CMBok) for the Change Management Institute. She contributed to the Effective Change Manager's Handbook and is author of Titanic Lessons in Project Leadership.

Ranjit is an accredited trainer for APMG-International's AgilePM®, Change Management and Facilitation Skills qualifications. She is also a certified SCRUM Master, a coach and certified trainer of NLP.

She is passionate about personal development and growth and set up [ChangeQuest](#) 10 years ago to help people and organisations learn and grow.



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