

Change Agent Abilities Required to Help Create a Sustainable Future

© ACPA – College Student Educators International (<http://www.myacpa.org/>)
in collaboration with
the U.S. Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development
(www.uspartnership.org)
May be reproduced for educational purposes with credit given

In order to be a successful sustainability change agent, an individual must have the following:

1. Knowledge of the environmental, economic, and social issues related to sustainability (understanding);
2. A value system and self-concept to support and under gird the actions of a change agent (motivation); and
3. Change agent abilities (skills).

Change Agent Abilities:

The following is a listing of change agent abilities compiled from numerous sources. For ease of use, these sources have all been acknowledged at the end of this document.

Change agents are:

- Resilient
- Optimistic
- Tenacious
- Committed
- Passionate
- Patient
- Emotionally intelligent
- Assertive
- Persuasive
- Empathetic
- Authentic
- Ethical
- Self-Aware
- Competent
- Curious

They can:

- Communicate ideas clearly, concisely, and precisely both orally and in writing
- Listen to others and incorporate their ideas and perspectives
- Accommodate individual differences (cultural, socioeconomic, global, etc.) in your decisions and actions and be able to negotiate across these differences.
- Engage in self-assessment, self-reflection, and analysis
- Reflect on what is happening to make meaning, gain perspective and understanding
- Engage in civil discourse and debate
- Mediate and resolve conflicts

- Analyze power, structures of inequality, and social systems that govern individual and communal life
- Recognize the global implications of their actions
- Span boundaries
- Challenge the status quo effectively when appropriate
- Creatively and collaboratively solve problems using critical thinking skills; search for “families” of solutions for complex multi-faceted issues
- Collaborate, network, develop alliances and coalitions, build teams
- Involve others, inspire and excite participants, engender support and commitment
- See the big picture and the larger goal and understand the need for systemic change
- Adjust to the diverse and changing needs of both individuals and society as a whole
- Set realistic and clearly defined goals and objectives
- Be both a leader and a follower, as necessary
- Analyze and influence group dynamics
- Make ethical decisions which incorporate responsibility to self, community, and society
- Help envision, articulate and create positive scenarios for the future of society
- See the paths, small steps, for changes needed for a more sustainable future, convert it into a tasklist and timeline, and follow through effectively
- Tolerate ambiguity and cope effectively with change

They have:

- Insights into the functioning and interconnectedness of systems
- A commitment to finding solutions to societal problems
- Political efficacy, a belief that what they think and do civically and politically matters
- Integrity
- Courage
- An understanding of “organic” change

Useful Theoretical Models:

“A Social Change Model of Leadership Development” (1996)

“Systemic Leadership” (Allen & Cherrey, 2000)

“Reframing Organizations...” (Bolman & Deal, 2003)

“Relational Leadership” (Komives, S. R., Lucas, N., & McMahon, T. R., 1998)

Resources and References:

A social change model of leadership development: Guidebook (Version III). (1996). Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles Higher Education Research Institute.

Allen, K. E., & Cherrey, C. (2000). *Systemic leadership: Enriching the meaning of our work*. Washinton, DC: University Press of America.

Astin, A. W., & Astin, H. S. (2000). *Leadership reconsidered: Engaging higher education in social change*. Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2003). *Reframing Organizations: Artistry Choice and Leadership* (third ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Colby, A., Ehrlich, T., Beaumont, E., & Stephens, J. (2004). The role of higher education in preparing undergraduates for lives of civic responsibility. In K. Ferraiolo (Ed.), *New Direction in civic engagement: University avenue meets main street* (pp. 51-58). Charlottesville, VA: Pew Partnership for Civic Change.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Komives, S. R., Lucas, N., & McMahon, T. R. (1998). *Exploring leadership: For college students who want to make a difference (1st ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Loeb, P. R. (1999). *Soul of a citizen: Living with conviction in a cynical time*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Loeb, P. R. (Ed.). (2004). *The impossible will take a little while: A citizen's guide to hope in a time of fear*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lorde, A. (1984). Learning from the 60s. In *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches* (pp. 134-144). Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.
- Musil, C. M. (2006). *Assessing global learning: matching good intentions with good practice*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Recklies, D. What Makes a Good Change Agent? Retrieved December 19, 2006, from http://www.themanager.org/Strategy/change_agent.htm
- Rowe, D. (2002). Environmental Literacy and sustainability as core requirements: Success stories and models. In W. L. Filho (Ed.), *Teaching Sustainability at Universities*. New York: Peter Lang Scientific Publishers.
- Rowe, D., Bartleman, D., Khirallah, M., Smydra, M., Keith, G., & Ponder, M. (1999). *Reduce cynicism and apathy and create positive change agents: Essential and missing components of our educational curricula*. Paper presented at the Chair Academy Conference Proceedings, Long Beach, CA.
- Stein, K. (2006). University of Delaware IFST Capstone Course Syllabus.
- Thomas, N. (2004). Educating for citizenship in a diverse and interdependent society. In K. Ferraiolo (Ed.), *New direction in civic engagement: University avenue meets main street* (pp. 43-50). Charlottesville, VA: Pew Partnership for Civic Change.
- Komives, S. R., Lucas, N., & McMahon, T. R. (1998). *Exploring leadership: For college students who want to make a difference (1st ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.