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Welcome Issue 13: July 2008

Welcome to the summer edition of the Changefirst newsletter. Hopefully, as many of you are reading this, you will be getting ready to enjoy your summer break! I know I'm looking forward to recharging the batteries with some rest and relaxation.

It's been a busy time in the Changefirst office. The new version of the PCI Practitioner's Programme was released in June, with many hands on deck finalising workbooks and slides! It's looking great, and with feedback from you, the practitioners, we hope to make further improvements in the future. We've had a number of courses run since its release, for clients and public courses, and the reaction has been very positive.

There are some new faces on board - Debbie West has joined as PA and Field Co-ordinator and Jenny Viccars has replaced Mary Kemp as CFO. And of course Audra Proctor has returned after a year off – I won't say any more as there is an interview below with Audra!

The main article in this edition is about Super Change Agents. Is there such a thing? Well I think many people like to think so, and look on in awe at those Change Agents who really do seem to be invincible! Therefore Audra and I gave some thought to what really distinguished these 'Super' Change Agents from the rest. You'll be pleased to know that they don't have kryptonite in their pockets! Just like any skilled professional, they have honed their craft through a lot of practice and through the clever use of their toolkit. I hope you enjoy the article, and if you have any thoughts on the subject please do share them with your Changefirst community.

Now where did I leave that suntan lotion?

Best wishes, Lisa.

Lisa Koning
Changefirst newsletter editor.
Lisa.Koning@changefirst.com

Public Programmes Dates

September 9–11th
London
Few spaces left!

October 29–31st
London

What distinguishes a great Change Agent from a good Change Agent?

By Lisa Koning with contributions from Audra Proctor

Why do some Change Agents deliver against all the odds? Are they superhuman? Do they know some time-honoured secrets only shared amongst a sacred few? Here at Changefirst we have worked with a number of outstanding Change Agents over the past ten years. We therefore decided to draw out some of their distinguishing features and we hope these will serve as useful tips for all Change Agents looking to improve their performance.

1. Focus on what's important

All Change Agents are busy; with an endless to-do list and most of it seems important. A great Change Agent knows where to focus his or her attention. Nine times out of ten, what needs focus is that difficult activity that you have been putting off. Perhaps it's that conversation you need to have with your Sponsor about their involvement. Or it's meeting that influencer who is not supporting your change.

But how do you know what is most important? PCI provides an extensive toolkit with techniques and methods that help prioritise and get to those critical items quickly. A great Change Agent knows what tool to use and when, and this knowledge comes from regular use of the PCI toolkit. As with any skill, the more you practice the better you become. When these tools become a regular part of the Change Agent's life, the more useful they become, providing a wealth of information (both legacy and present). The Change Agent also builds up an understanding and can quickly interpret results, reacting quickly and appropriately.

But it's not just our own experience that can help us. A great Change Agent works as part of a network, a network that supports each other. An active network allows Change Agents to leverage off each other, sharing ideas on past approaches, as well as experiences with various tools and techniques used to tackle similar issues. Be prepared to give as well as take. Any network is only as good as the people who are part of it, and a strong network thrives on active contributors.

The Changefirst website is another good resource. At Changefirst we realise the supportive role we can play in bringing Change Agents together, and the website and Change practitioner community are important areas for future development.

2. Be clear about your role as a Change Agent

A great Change Agent understands what is expected in the role and is clear about what they can achieve within a change context. Your PCI practitioner manual is a good starting point for the definition of the Change Agent role and typical expectations. But you also need to understand the specifics of the role within your organisation.

An important question to ask when considering the role of the Change Agent is: What is a Change Agent NOT? A Change Agent is not a Sponsor and one who tries to take on these duties will struggle. As Change Agents it is tempting to do everything, particularly when we do not get support from those around us. Which takes us back to our first point. Focus on what's important. And getting others on the Change to do their role is very very important!

3. Truly understand the network for your change

It's tempting to pick up the organisational hierarchy chart and hope this replicates the change network for your change. Rarely is this the case and great Change Agents live and breathe their change network map.

But why understand the change network? The change network map details how the change truly unfolds. The organisational structure provides one valid aspect for the change terrain, but there are a number of structures at play in any organisation. There is the political structure: who has influence and who doesn't, and the project structure influencing planning. A great Change Agent knows where to leverage for best results, to identify and resolve issues quickly and comprehensively. An up-to-date change network map that is a true representation, is a powerful tool for any Change Agent. It is a great starting point for planning, highlighting who needs attention and who are the true stakeholders.

4. Contract well with your Sponsors

Not always an easy task, but a Change Agent's relationship with their Sponsor is key to success. At the beginning of any change initiative, the Sponsor and Change Agent should establish the how of their relationship. What do you each expect from each other? What forms of communication work best?

At the beginning it is easy to focus on the practicalities: what needs to be done, who is going to do it. It's easy to avoid the people side until things get messy and it cannot be ignored! A great Change Agent realises the importance of the 'social relationships' and addresses these at the beginning, recognising that they are just as important as the practicalities.

5. Change Agents are generous teachers

We frequently get feedback that our course facilitators are great Change Agents. We've asked why and the response is: they share their experiences, both good and bad. While some Change Agents may not view themselves in the typical 'teacher' job, coaching is an important part of the Change Agent role. Great Change Agents coach and help others. They share their successes and failings and view learning as a

Few spaces left!

December 3-5th
London
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To book a place on any of these dates please call +44(0)1444 450777 or contact Jane Mellor at jane.mellor@changefirst.com

New look PCI Practitioner Programme

The new look PCI Practitioner Programme was released in June 2008, with a number of new clients using the updated workbook and accompanying slides. The feedback has been very positive, and we look forward to working with all our existing clients to discuss potential transition paths.



Audra Proctor Interview

Hi Audra and welcome back to Changefirst after your twelve months leave. First of all, congratulations on your daughter! I imagine over the last twelve months you've experienced some very big changes! Do you think your personal attitude to change has altered from this very special, but also very challenging, experience?

Yes becoming a parent is a very big change, and it meant that I had to do a lot of adapting and adjusting. Now that I'm back at work and thinking about our workshop delivery and learning applications I'm reflecting more closely on the individual (beyond the skills we are there to transfer) and how they often need to adapt and adjust so as to be more credible, confident, empowered to use and develop (with) PCI.

It must be interesting for you to view Changefirst through 'fresh' eyes after your time off. How do you think Changefirst has changed over the years?

Over the years we have become clearer and somewhat evangelical about what we do and what makes us unique; i.e. we equip people to get better at managing change for themselves. We've built an enviable client list (major international companies) and at the last count 7,000

two-way process. Great Change Agents are a source of information: what has happened in the past, what has worked, and what hasn't worked so well.

We view them as generous teachers because they want to share their skills and expertise. They view their failings as part of their own learning process, and endeavour to create an environment for effective change within their own organisation.

These are our top 5 tips but there are of course many more. We would love to hear your ideas on what you think distinguishes those Superman and Superwomen Change Agents amongst us. **Please email your tip to lisa.koning@changefirst.com and we will share all your tips in the next Changefirst newsletter.**

And the winner is...



Congratulations to Susie Allwood from Fujitsu who won a Nintendo Wii games console after successfully using PCI[®] Tools Online.

Change Agent Assessment – What are people using it for?

As discussed in our previous article, understanding the Change Agent role is one of our top tips. The Change Agent (CA) Assessment is an important tool in the PCI toolkit to help us do this.

Here are some examples of where Change Agents have used the CA Assessment very successfully:

1. Sponsor Mary had an important change initiative in need of a Change Agent. There were a number of experienced candidates; all were keen and all interviewed extremely well. It was becoming very difficult for Mary to decide between them. One of Mary's colleagues recommended the CA assessment, and with this tool she was able to identify each candidate's strengths (and weaknesses) as it related to the change and then determine the most suitable person for the role.
2. Sponsor Geoff has a number of Change Agents delivering multiple Changes across his organisation. Geoff attended a sponsor workshop and was exposed to the CA assessment. Geoff felt that he had a varied team of Change Agents with some more capable than others, but he had no real evidence to understand why. Geoff was keen to understand the strengths of the good Change Agents so that he could replicate those in the other Change Agents.

Geoff decided to do two things:

- He asked his local Sponsors to complete the CA assessment for their local Change Agent
- Together with the local Sponsors Geoff built development plans to improve the level of performance of all Change Agents.

In the short term Geoff felt that it helped focus on the role of the Change Agent and improve standards. In the longer term, the organisation has benefited by having a clearly defined role of Change Agent, and Sponsors better understand the characteristics needed of effective Change Agents.

Change Agent John was an experienced Change Agent who had attended PCI training and had been involved in a number of Change initiatives. However on his latest change he was struggling, and was even starting to doubt his own change management skills. John decided to complete the Change Agent assessment to see if he could understand better where he was going wrong. His findings were very interesting: it was not about improving his change management skills (questions 4 to 9 typically) but he identified that it was his place in the organisation and his lack of real organisational credibility / ability to influence (questions 1-3) that he had to address. Armed with this knowledge John was able to work on these issues and over time he found he had better influence and also enjoyed the role of Change Agent a lot more.

