



ACPA's Presidential Taskforce on Sustainability

Change Agent Abilities Required to Help Create a Sustainable Future

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)
“Social Entrepreneurship”
“Servant Leadership”

Resources and References:

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