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The Ways That People Can Make A Difference

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THE WAYS IN WHICH INDIVIDUALS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Michael J. Kendrick, Ph.D.

We live in a time in history when we are asked to believe that what is material, external, empirical, cognitive, rational and measurable constitutes the parameters of our universe. We believe we know how the world is going to work. Then the world doesn't work the way we think it should. We make assumptions: what is dependable/not dependable, what is safe/not safe, and what we would do/ would not do.

The seeds of change are inside people, not outside. A force is present that emits from within people outward. Individuals matter to the formation of human history, no life is lived without some consequence for others. On September 11, we saw that what individuals believe, think and place value on, what they are like as people, can result in momentous acts that make a difference to the world. The destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre and the attack on the Pentagon illustrated what one person does really makes a difference. It demonstrates that it's not power, authority nor money that makes the difference but what's going on inside of people. We see that people have the capacity to act, to change their world. Human beings can change their world because they have within them the will to so do and thus personal potency. The atrocity of September the 11th is an example of the fruits of negative thinking and its potency.

The world is not as fixed as we think or believe it to be. There is an assumption that our world will never change. It is therefore important to not give up on change in the face of continuing opposition based on the belief that it is hopeless. It is rather common to encounter in many people a sense of resignation about what they cannot do in human services, and perhaps even some futility about trying in the first place. It is very hard to argue with them, as they have inevitably had experiences that have left them discouraged and fearful.

Many people feel misunderstood, that they can't make a difference anyway. Most people struggle to some degree or other of self defeating assumptions and behavior. The discouragements that come from within can very much restrict our human, and to some extent our societal, potential. People think: 'I could never be an x, y or z'. Yet life is full of evidence to the contrary. Many of us are living lives we never thought possible. We have to consider that the thought that we cannot make a difference may not be true. If you're useless, you don't have too much to worry about: some people even get paid well to be useless. Maybe, just maybe, there is personal potency in all of us: who we are, what

we care about, what we think should be important will matter. It is useful to see personal potency as an intrinsic catalyst of personal gifts that might otherwise lie dormant and thus unavailable for useful service to others.

It is also the case that the battle is lost when we let ourselves become convinced that our efforts and vision do not matter. Movements for social change are easily defeated when they lack the resolve that lets them be tough minded in the face of adversity and failure. It is most certainly true that one can never gain the conviction and commitment of others if one has already given in to a sense of depression and defeat. If the convictions of the deeply unconvinced are to yield, it will necessarily be to those people whose faith and confidence remains more certain. In this we struggle not only with the convictions of others, but perhaps more with our own. If we crumble under the pressure of adversity, perhaps others will follow our example. Even in the small ways of our small lives it still matters what and whom we decide that the world and we are, and can someday become.

It may well be that there is no reason for the kind of optimism assured by favorable probabilities, but this does not mean that one is having no effect. Often, we do shift the world, one person at a time, and none of this will occur if we start with the premise that these small shifts are pointless because they do not quickly or inexorably lead to triumph.

Perhaps if we saw our goal more as changing the world by degree and increments, rather than as winning, we could take more solace in the fruitfulness of what we do achieve, rather than lament the changes that have yet to succumb to our efforts. One never really knows when the tides will change in the hearts and minds of people, and it may well be that a crucial corner may be turned, even when we least expect it. It may also be true that the personal commitments, of even one person, may be just enough to make the difference.

The variety of gifts and callings that people may show can vary widely, as will the places these are needed, and the ways they might express themselves. In many people the satisfactions they gain from finding where their gifts and personal potency is most needed and fruitful is unlike any other satisfactions in life. This is because the exercise of these gifts and personal potency goes deep to the heart of who they are and the meaning of their lives. It does matter what individual people think and do - the world that each of us makes. It touches other people's lives in ways we may not appreciate. We should all reflect what were we meant to do and to be? What gifts does my life bring to the world? What could your life be? There is good in all of us: so what good are we going to do with this? Each person has some capacity, and what people decide to do with the good is very important.

Remember people who touched your life twenty to thirty years ago, the way their acts

live on in our lives now and will do so to eternity. Everyday, mundane lives are pregnant with the sense of moral possibility. The interconnectedness and interdependence of things sometimes seems a bit mysterious, but has been appreciated by peoples and cultures for eons. Our own western culture has created a world view that sees people as much more separate and individualised than interrelated, and this has tended to diminish our insight into how we interact to influence each other. We should ask ourselves how do things lead to one another and recognise that they do. Reserve the right to think for yourself and not to let bureaucracies do it for you.

Collectivities of sincere people who mutually embrace and strive for a worthy goal can collectively help entrench a shared “manner of being” or ethos. This is true of the service system or any other part of existence! You need to ask what would set things right? We need to consider the critical question of what is the right thing I should do if I could do it? Did I live up to my potential to do the right thing? What could, should, ought to be done? What might I still do? From these basic questions you will feel and see what it is that is needed.

It is always instructive to reflect on how much it matters that a particular person was present in a situation in terms of what flowed from those moments. The kinds of qualities they bring may be priceless in their own way in terms of the good that occurs. Think about Gandhi.

The cynical won't do much. Be open-minded to the possibility of change, progress, individual contribution and personal potency.

'The real voyage of discovery
consists in not seeing new landscapes,
but in having new eyes.'

Mike Lancelot

*Some strategies for
bringing about change
~ Michael Kendrick ~*

- The seeds of change are inside people, not outside. Human beings can change their world because they have within them the will to so do.
- The world is not as fixed as we think or believe it to be. There is an assumption that the NHS will never change. It is therefore important to not give up on change just because some other people think it is hopeless.
- People think: 'I could never be an x, y or z'. Yet life is full of evidence to the contrary. Many of us are living lives we never thought possible.
- The battle is lost when we let ourselves become convinced that our efforts and vision do not matter.
- We can't gain the conviction and commitment of other people if we do not believe that change is possible.
- Start small and don't expect change to be fast. Often, we do shift the world, one person at a time.
- Change can happen in the hearts and minds of people when we least expect it.
- The personal commitments, of even one person, may be just enough to make the difference.
- People have a great variety of gifts and personal potency, and we get great satisfaction in learning what they are and finding ways to use them. There is good in all of us, and the decision for each of us is what to do with the good.
- You need to ask what would set things right? What is the right thing I should do if I could do it? Did I live up to my potential to do the right thing?

SOME STRATEGIES FOR BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE

Michael J. Kendrick PhD

Every person is a philosopher, a theorist. Everyone has theories about change. Sometimes they're not very good ideas, though, which is why sessions like today are good for revisiting theories. I want to try to bring together the ideas and theories that I have found over the years help people to make changes in the culture and practice of human services, and to reflect on some of the ideas we have discussed today.

We all make choices. There is a choice about which changes we want to see happen - which aspects of the world as it is today we think should be different. There is also the choice about whether we are going to do something about it.

Change happens because individual people decide to take action to make something different

One of the theories that is unhelpful is that change comes from organisational structures, that change is impersonal. My belief is that it is what happens within people that is the root.

The assumptions that people make often make life more difficult for us: for example, believing or feeling that everyone is against you, so you don't see the friends you actually have. Or that change happens through groups of people or organisations and structures. We are not used to seeing the potential individuals have to make a difference. This is about what an individual can do. Good people can be helped to do good things, and these are some images that generally help.

Human services systems have strengths, but they also have imperfections. People find they have to get good at change to get the system to work the way they want. When people find change difficult, they get discouraged.

So the issue then becomes how to unlock the people and free them up to what might be possible for them.

Start with something you can achieve

Change happens because people personally want it to.

Technocratic ideas equate to a preoccupation with organisations, systems and money: they are important, but these do not trump individuals getting in and making things happen. We can feel a bit overwhelmed by these big systems, which is why most of us do not thankfully try to change everything all at once.

A good starting point is to find some piece that you can work with, and get started on that. There are extraordinary examples of people being effective on small pieces of the problem - one relationship, in one place - that have in time lead to lots of people working differently.

Any great change requires consciousness raising.

Most of us drift through changes without being conscious of what is happening or of our role in it. We may have been in the middle of a big change but had not noticed it. Would we recognise a revolution?

The first thing we often have to do is get people conscious, get them mindful of what they are doing. Think about one of the points, that systems look at people in a way that makes them less than people, without realising it. Once you are conscious of that mindset, it becomes harder to ignore it.

We also need to be conscious of our role as the change agent.

It helps to think about all our experiences of being effective and ineffective. William Blake said 'I've been a fool long enough to become wise'. Sounds like my life, more the latter. There is a huge personal element in making change happen. So we need to think about what we do and how we do it.

Changes always involve consciousness raising; all change movements are involved in changing the way people see the world. Get the conscious and the mindful people around you. Being unconscious is generally not very helpful for guiding, making change. But pay attention to the issue and things will happen. Consciousness is a huge asset.

Having a positive vision, theory, and set of assumptions is very important

All worlds are based upon ideas. Part of being an agent of change is starting from a different premise, a different way of seeing the world, and sharing that new vision with

other people.

So being open to new ideas and realising that they will be new to other people too, is an integral part of making changes.

Part of the problem is that when we work in a profession, that professional world is based on certain premises that are often so ingrained we no longer think about them. The roles assigned to professionals are based upon the assumption that professionals know something and have relative authority, not transcendental knowledge and authority. Professionals are flesh and blood too. People who are in a professional role who are going to be part of leading the changes will find themselves drawing on the people part of themselves. They are likely to find themselves working from a different premise - at least until the others catch up.

Nobody creates change all by themselves

Change always requires alliances and some strange bedfellows. We need to accept that we are going to have to get into bed. Change requires many constituencies.

The art of alliance making is a constant art and challenge. You need to get people with you, and you need to get people not to oppose you. People need to consent to your initiative and leadership.

Look for affirmation as confirmation of your effectiveness. This might come from outside the system rather than within it. Look for the signs you know yourself. Remember that when you look at a big programme that now has lots of people or organisations involved, that at the start there were one or two people who had the idea or did something that led to it happening.

Don't dive alone. People coming together does help. But it can be a small group of friends; it isn't all mass movements.

Your strategy here could be:

How do you get people on side with you?

How do you motivate the individuals?

Plan around the resistance; don't let it overwhelm you.

You also have to think about the defenses people have against change:

- It can't be done (even when there is evidence that it has been done).
- Incuriosity - don't look elsewhere, don't wonder about how the world could be
- No-one can ever change - or the people here won't change.
- It doesn't happen in places like this or to people like us - but smaller cities are often good locations to try things. People don't get noticed, or are not so worried about what other people think, or don't know it is supposed to be impossible.

You only need to get one white crow to show that not all crows are black

People need to turn a corner. The need to see an example, even of a tiny change.

It doesn't matter what the change is, as long as they can understand it and see that it relates to the real world as well as to the abstract.

When the Wright brothers flew for the first time, it only lasted eight seconds. But that showed that powered flight was possible. It was that first example that changed forever people's assumption that flight was not possible. The next stage was to extend the new phenomenon - to ten seconds, then to sixteen seconds, then to thirty two, and one day to jet aeroplanes.

Aim to start small, to turn a corner, establish small beachheads. Then you - or other people - can extend from there and a whole new universe will unfold.

Get people interested in the example - feeling it is something they have helped to create.

It helps if the example makes a real difference to them. So find their world, find a place in that to make the example work and do it there. For some people it will be better if it is the centre, their biggest worry or most important issue. But often it is easier for them and you if it happens on the fringes, as it is safer to try new things where there is less attention.

Then make sure you tell people what you have done in a way that helps the change along

Once they see it, the meaning of the example has to be clear to them. So you have to create the example and give the interpretation of the example.

It's important to make explicit what works, visit examples and work out why. What happened? We need to challenge our own and other people's assumption that

our society is unchangeable.

'Become a possibilitarian. No matter how dark things seem to be or actually are, raise your sights and see possibilities... always see them, for they're always there.' Norman Vincent Peale

People who create change are the people who stick with it

We need to think about long-term results when we are dealing with a long-term problem. Changes often happen when people have persevered in a strategic sense. Build up momentum. History is full of people who dabbled, who put in a lot of effort but didn't achieve anything that lasted. A brick wall will fall down with a bit of banging. Stick with it, change strategies will bubble up.

Change also needs competency, and there can be a strategy to this too. There needs to be competency in the new ways of doing things. We want the new things we do to be the best they can be. And we also want other people to respect and to emulate them.

We also need to develop competency in the change agents, to hone their craft. Getting the ideas and the vision is part of it - doing what you are doing today. Look out for other opportunities to develop your craft - the training and learning that is available to people who work in the system, the training for the community activists, and the learning we get

from each other.

Can you stand being in the world while you change it?

Some people burn out because they can't stand the failings of the world, or the system, that are still around them. The approach that I've found that works is to accept, not necessarily agree, but let go. You will have to find your way to make it work. But don't spend your energy on things that won't help make the changes.

Effective change agents save their energies for the battles, and in their fighting there is an element of compassion and forgiveness. They don't carry the huge weight of grudge. They let go their own failings, don't be burdened by profound inadequacy.

Take the long view:

Accept you have to put up with people resisting and being difficult - for all the reasons we know and try to understand.

Don't take it personally.

Don't let it tie up so much energy that you can't do the positive things.

Change requires investment

Change requires catalysts, and we need to invest in the catalysts. This involves finding and nurturing the people and the opportunities that will help move things on.

It also includes investing in yourself. Sometimes people get stuck when they can't make the changes in themselves. Think about what will help you to grow: take stock, learn open-mindedness and flexibility.

Getting change to happen involves getting consent

Once you have convinced people that change is necessary, and your idea is a good way to go about it, you need to then get them to do what you want them to.

Bringing people to this decision will require formal and informal processes.

The formal processes are the policies, working with the managers, the bureaucrats and the formal procedures.

The informal side is people making personal decisions: what happens in the culture of the organisation, what people feel. Most of the time we give our attention to the formal processes. But it is the informal changes that usually happen first.

So when you think about getting change to happen, think about bringing people to a decision, and then get them to make that decision.

Change begins inside people

Institutions are changed fundamentally from the inside out. Change begins inside people, and then gets reflected in the structures and the procedures. Many people focus just on the external strategies. Do this, but also ask people to make their internal changes - speak to their spiritual and moral values.

I mentioned that I'd been thinking about Gandhi earlier. Gandhi had the capacity to get Hindus and Muslims to work together and to trust each other. He spoke about qualities and values such as trust, credibility, truth, justice and decency.

I hope that there is a new Gandhi real soon, that we can recover some understanding of each other.

Find a vocabulary that is inclusive.

Don't be afraid to talk about values.

Keep learning.

Keep listening.

People will teach you.

*The ways in which individuals
can make a difference
~ Michael Kendrick ~*

- Change happens because individual people decide to take action to make something different.
- Start with something you can achieve.
- Any great change requires consciousness raising.
- Having a vision, theory, a set of assumptions is very important.
- Nobody creates change all by themselves.
- You only need to get one white crow to show that not all crows are black.
- People who create change are the people who stick with it.
- Can you stand being in the world while you change it?
- Change requires investment.
- Getting change to happen involves getting consent.

- Change begins inside people.

‘Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.’

G K Chesterton