THE ROLE OF A CHANGE AGENT

"I can help you change…….if you choose."

The State of Colorado spent $625 million on corrections in 2007. The number of clients supervised under parole was 11,086. There were 77,635 clients /offenders on probation and 22,666 in prison.[1] The statistics demand that we review and institute change in our systems of incarceration. Motivational Interviewing and Evidenced based practices are proven effective. There is extensive research on both topics (some of which is located in this manual). Clearly, something needs to change.

We need a change. A people fueled by passion, and inspiration with a strong ability to self-motivate and understand. An identified group that is willing to teach and administer the process. Individuals dedicated to a cause who will posture and elevate an organization to an improved operational level. Members beginning with the end result in mind. A genuineness is present with the attitude and desire to change for the better. Herein lies the Role of the Change Agent.

The term *Change Agent* has many meanings. In the EPIC project the term *Change Agent* (CA) means a person working in an agency that serves people on supervision in the criminal justice system, who is willing, ready and able to model day-to-day learning of Motivational Interviewing (MI) and other evidence-based practices (EBP's). This may sound simple enough. However, it turns out, learning an EBP like MI is not done overnight and there are many different subcomponents and skills to learn in order to be reasonably good at MI. Learning MI and other EBP's is more like learning how to do watercolor painting or play a musical instrument; it takes time and commitment. The unique task of CA's in the EPIC project is to deliberately make that commitment more visible or transparent.

You have been chosen by your agency supervisor as acting or having the potential of a Change Agent. The respect that you have earned in your current capacity is fodder for promoting and encouraging those around you to enlist your help with steeping your site in evidenced based practices and motivational interviewing. A critical component of this project is your presence and example. It is your ability to be transparent enough to lead while remaining strong enough to support the transition and re-educate resistance. This team is honored to work with you!

There is a fear of "change" and concerns are valid.

---

[1] *Bureau of Justice Statistics, Correctional Surveys (U.S. Department of Justice) 2) Census, State Population Estimates; 3) Administrative Office of U.S. courts; 4) Bureau of Prisons (U.S. Department of Justice); 5) Pew, Original Data; 6) National Association of State Budget Officers, State Expenditure Reports*

"Resistance to change comes from a fear of the unknown or an expectation of loss. The front end of an individual's resistance to change is **how they perceive the change**. The back end is how **well** they are **equipped** to deal with the change that they expect." [2]

You are participating in this project with numerous Change Agents from various agencies and locations.   There is also an Advisory Team, Training Coordinators, and multidisciplinary professionals aiding each other through coaching, training, and advisement. The transition and ongoing education necessitate a living community of practice.   In human service agencies, line-staff generally work together in informal teams, no matter if it's a treatment agency or a corrections facility. People learn about their job and their organization most easily, from other people by observing and talking informally – thru the water-cooler culture, so to speak. Mutual engagement – the absence or suspension of any regard for external hierarchy – reinforces social bonds and more complex, enduring relationships. Doing things together and interacting in a reciprocal fashion builds shared trust, a valuable commodity and essential for high performance.

A term for these casual networks is *Community of Practice*.   It is through their own natural *Communities of Practice* (CoPs) that CA's can make their change and learning efforts most visible – as models, guides and coaches for MI.

There are three common elements to any CoP: 1) joint enterprise; 2) mutual engagement; and, 3) a shared repertoire.   As a joint enterprise, members of a CoP, (whether they are a crew selling crack on a corner or legislative analysts), negotiate and fine-tune their local responses to the day-to-day situation. They collectively moderate or set the rhythms of their tasks, help adjust members' interpretations of the business at hand and in the end, establish some real forms of mutual accountability. We will become a community learning from each other about how to implement practices that are essential to reducing recidivism and increasing public safety.

In the EPIC project, local agency administrators were asked to identify a few staff that had some of the following attributes: openness, energy, resilience, and people skills to become CA's. The assumption is that people with these natural characteristics, once trained and carefully coached into proficiency in MI (and able to elicit change talk or self-motivating statements from clients), will model these new skills and learning and positively influence various members of their respective, natural CoP's.   In addition, with further coaching the CA's may be able to nudge and shift their CoP's to become more focused, engaged and willing to share and amplify the modeling of MI skills. On some level the CA's represent a viral strategy for transferring the MI innovation or at any rate are the linchpins that bind MI learning to different CoPs within the participating agencies.

---

[2] *Reh., John F. "Managing Change: Managing People's Fears – Change is unpredictable but, manageable. 05 May 2010, <management.about.com/es/people/a/MngChng 092302.htm>*

A growing body of research has shown that the MI techniques referenced above are excellent for building strong and effective working relationships with clients, who in turn, when motivated tend to build the necessary skills and support to solve a myriad of different problem behaviors. Therefore anytime a human service agency has staff ramping-up these skills that should be a good thing. However the scope and ambition of this project goes somewhat beyond building and installing high fidelity MI competencies in any agency.

The ultimate goal in this project is to empower the Change Agents and in turn, their communities of practice to become sufficiently agile, transparent and collaborative to support a variety of future and subsequent EBP implementation initiatives. There is an emerging science on implementation that clearly indicates successful implementation depends on attention to specific drivers and steps. The project hopes to bring training and coaching on how, when and where to work with these drivers to all the CA's and their agencies. In this sense, MI is but a vehicle to implement a larger strategic goal – building implementation capacity.

Thank you for your commitment to sustained, managed, and evidenced based change!