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A central graphic shows a hand with fingers spread, holding a large white arrow that points to the right. A yellow arrow points downwards from the hand. The background is a blurred image of a road with white lines, set against a warm, orange and yellow gradient.

What kind of Person Manages Change?

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Change is tough for organizations, and helping people navigate through change takes a special kind of person. There are of course leaders that need to champion and sponsor change. But there are also people that need to actually manage the change and help people in the organization work through the transition.

There is a lot of hard work involved in helping people in an organization change the way they work. So what are the characteristics of great change managers?



- 1. They're empathetic.** The ability to continuously ask and answer the question “what would I want and need if I were in their shoes” is a critical skill for an effective change manager. Having empathy and understanding what others are experiencing and what will help build commitment is the core of managing change. When it comes down to it, anyone who has a good strong sense of the golden rule (“do unto others as you would have others do unto you”) has the basic stuff to be a good manager of change.
- 2. They're good communicators.** That may seem obvious, but it is really an important skill for successfully managing change. Good change managers communicate simply. They interpret complex messages and distill them down to simple, easy bits. Effective change managers tailor their message to their audiences, and they use lots of different communication vehicles well.
- 3. They are naturally influential and generate informal authority.** Effective change managers naturally draw others to them. They don't need formal authority to have influence over others and they are able to leverage their networks to make things happen. They are persuasive and likeable.

4. They have courage. It is not always easy being on the front lines of an organizational change. Change managers are often times put in a position to be “representing” the interests of the people impacted by change with the people who are creating change. That can put the change manager in situations where they need to say and do things that are unpopular. They may need to tell leaders and or associates things that they don’t want to hear. Change managers need to be willing to call things like they see them, even if it is unpopular and not typically expected in an organization.



5. They are discreet and maintain confidences. Change managers can be put in positions of having sensitive information. During focus group meetings, interviews, or just hallway conversations, it is not uncommon for people to share specific information about specific individuals with change managers. If a change manager divulges information that they have agreed to keep private even once, they lose credibility and trust. It is imperative that change managers know how to keep a secret.

6. They’re organized. Some people assume that managing change is mostly art and little science. But managing change usually requires tremendous exercises in logistics and orchestration. Being organized is a critical skill for effectively managing change.

7. A bias for action. Change management has a bad reputation among people who think managing change is only about asking questions and analyzing people. Managing change is both art and science. While questions should be asked and assessments made, real change comes when action takes place. If someone doesn’t actually do something with the results of assessments, the exercises are moot.



8. They get their hands dirty. Change managers can be speaking to executive committees in the morning, and stuffing envelopes in the afternoon. Good change managers are not afraid to roll up their sleeves and get stuff done. Anyone who is not able or willing to dig into the nitty gritty (editing a poster, developing talking points for leaders, editing an agenda for an important meeting) is not going to be as effective managing change as someone who is.



9. They are subject matter experts in the field of organizational change management. They understand the human and organizational dynamics of change, as well as the many methodologies that describe ways that change can be managed. In addition to general change management understanding, great change managers have experience in several different change environments to see how change unfolds. Having “stories” to share is always helpful when managing change.

10. They are personally comfortable with ambiguity and change. An effective change manager can navigate through ambiguity relatively well, and is more comfortable than others working in a changing environment. Being part of a change project is by its very nature an environment of change. But it is also true that most changes are not linear, stable activities. There are ups and downs, periods of acceleration and periods of deceleration. People who are not comfortable with the ebbs and flow and the ambiguity of change (scope changes, a new leader that enters the picture, changes in direction) will have a tough time effectively managing change. An effective change manager quickly assesses a shifting situation and adapts to the new environment. And they don't get upset or anxious about it.

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For more information about organizational change management or building a change management competency, contact Change Guides at guides@changeguidesllc.com or visit www.changeguidesllc.com.