9 TIPS FOR CHANGE AGENTS

The job title on Chris Turner's business card simply reads "Learning Person."

"It's like 'citizen of the world,'" she says. "Ultimately my hope is that people in all parts of XBS will see themselves as Learning Persons."

As nonhierarchical as her job title sounds, Turner's role at XBS is that of "chief change agent." Here are her nine lessons for would-be change agents.

1. **Be open to data at the start.** "Even if you think you know what you're doing, chances are you don't know what you could be doing. Open up your mind to as much new thinking as you can absorb. You may find different and better ideas than the ones your organization started with."

2. **Network like crazy.** "There is a network of people who are thinking about learning organizations. I've found you can get in touch with them easily. People say to me, `I can't believe you talked with so-and-so! How'd you do it?' The answer is, I called him."

3. **Document your own learning.** "People in the organization need to see documentation for their own comfort. The smartest thing I did was to create a matrix of ideas from leading thinkers. I documented two categories of thinking -- the elements of a learning organization, and the pitfalls to avoid."

4. **Take senior management along.** Turner's own education included benchmarking trips to Saturn, Texas Instruments, Motorola, General Electric, and other companies known for their innovative approaches to learning. "Some of the people in the senior group were very skeptical," Turner says. "It helped to take them on these benchmarking trips to show them other companies that were actually doing some of the same learning practices."

5. **No fear!** "You've got to be fearless and not worry about keeping your job."

6. **Be a learning person yourself.** "Change agents have to be in love with learning and constantly learning new things themselves. Then they find new ways to communicate those things to the organization as a whole."

7. **Laugh when it hurts.** "This can be very discouraging work. You need a good sense of humor. It also helps if you've got a mantra you can say to yourself when things aren't going too well."

8. **Know the business before you try to change anything.** "I don't think you can do this work if you're just a theorist. I've been a sales rep, I've been in a marketing job where I worked with the operations side. So when I go about the work of creating a change strategy, I already have an understanding of the people in our organization and what they do."

9. **Finish what you start.** "I made a list of change projects we'd started and never finished in the past. We called it 'the black hole.' I determined early on I didn't want to be part of a second-rate movie."

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