# Change Agent's Guide

Excerpt from the 2021 edition
From the Seven Stages of Change

Stage 1: RELATE

BUILD GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE PEOPLE YOU WANT TO HELP

The change agent must develop good relations with key members of the system and assist members to relate better among themselves to the point that they are capable of collective action. Clearly this does not all happen quickly. Rather, as the change effort proceeds, the change agent reaches out to more and more members of the system, and, as members come to grips with the concern and the challenge of problem solving, they become more interconnected and more able to collaborate.

Figure 1.1 THE ELEMENTS OF "RELATE"

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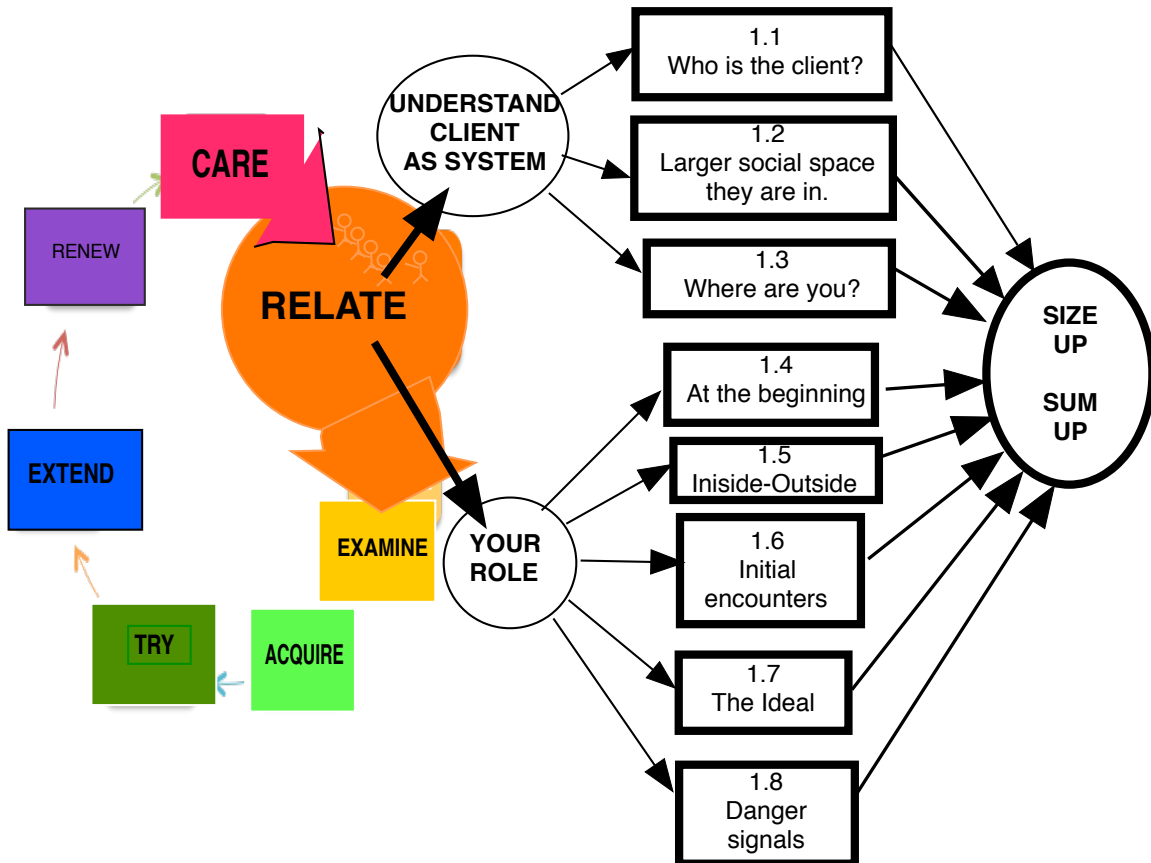
A strong creative relationship can carry a change program through the most difficult obstacles. Your relationship with a prospective client system must be carefully planned and thought through if you are going to succeed with a project. This stage provides some specific criteria to help you assess your relationship with a client. If you know where you stand and know how your client sees you, you will be in a position to build this relationship as the change effort progresses.

‘Relate’ involves two connected major tasks:
   One. Understand the client as a social system, *how the people relate* to one another, and to the larger social world in which they are embedded, and
   Two. Understand and manage *your relationship* to the client

Stage 1.1 WHO IS THE CLIENT?

The term "client" simply designates the group of people who you are trying to help. This group may be referred to as a "system" if they seem to have common goals and are trying to work together to achieve those goals. Sometimes it will not be entirely clear just who the client is. We often find that we cannot work effectively with one group unless, at the same time, we are working with others to whom they are related. This network of relations can get pretty complicated and unmanageable. Therefore, it is important at the outset to define who the client is. This boils down to three basic questions:
   • What group are you going to work with *directly?*
   • What are other key *groups* related to your direct client?
   • What expectations do you have, if any, re such other groups?

What are the norms of the client system?

Boundaries define any client system to separate *'members'* from *'outsiders .'* Some boundaries are physical and obvious - like the wall and the barbed wire fence - but most boundaries are less visible. For example, the members of any social group share a number of common beliefs, values, and rules of behavior. These shared ideas or thoughts are the "norms" of the group. They delineate what it means to be "us" instead of "them." A change agent should become familiar with as many of the norms of the prospective client system as possible. He or she should know how sharply these norms are defined and how strictly they are adhered to by different members. Although these shared beliefs and behaviors are seldom unique, they may be viewed as unique and valued by the members. Most social systems maintain their group identity partly through the mechanism of *local pride,* which identifies what "we" have as special, as high status, as most important and most relevant. This belief that "we are unique" can be a major stumbling block to any program for change; it may hinder both the awareness of a need for change and the acceptance of innovations from "outside."

Who are the leaders?

In attempting to establish a satisfactory relationship, an understanding of the formal leadership structure is also important. Some systems are only loosely and vaguely structured while others have a strict chain of command. The more clearly defined and structured the leadership pattern, the more critical it is for us to establish solid relationships with the leaders.

Who are the influentials?

In addition to the formal chains of command, there are many *informal channels and*

leadership structures. It is most important that the change agent know the informal leaders. You should know the "influentials," those key people to whom others turn for new ideas. Most social systems contain such "opinion leaders," respected friends and colleagues who set the standard for the group even though they may not have formal status as "leaders" or "supervisors."

Who are the gatekeepers?

The change agent may also find certain individuals who hold key strategic positions with respect to the flow of new ideas and information. Such gatekeepers play a critical role in innovation and they may be distinct from the formal leadership and opinion leadership. In Education, the librarian, the guidance counselor, or the assistant principal may hold little formal power, but they may still be in key positions because they control channels of information on certain topics.

With whom should you choose to work?

Most change agents find themselves in the position of having to select from the entire client system only a few members with whom they will be able to work *directly* throughout the change effort. Successful change agents have found it wise to try to include people who represent the following system characteristics:

- opinion leadership,
- formal authority,
- representative of major factions or vested interests,
- public relations ability, and
- credibility and respectability.

By keeping in mind these major characteristics you can identify *direct* clients who will be very effective in aiding change efforts. With such people working on your side, you will have a good chance of influencing the entire client system. In choosing this "change team," however, you should not forget a sixth criterion, which in some ways is more important than all the others. This is **compatibility with you.** If you cannot work together effectively as friends and colleagues, your project will be in trouble.

Stage 1.2 Relating To The Larger Social Space

What are the norms in the community?

No group of human beings is completely isolated from the influence of "outsiders." All systems and organizations exist within a context of other systems of which they are a part and upon which they are dependent. Therefore, as a change agent you must not only consider the characteristics of the particular client you are serving, but you must also consider the nature of the community, the larger social system of which your client is a part.

Assuming that you are new to the system and are just beginning your relationship, there are three questions about this larger system that you must be able to answer with some degree of specificity:

- Who are the most powerful and influential people in the community?
- How do these people usually react to change (e.g., open, neutral, defensive)?
- How can these people be influenced to endorse the change effort?

Who are the influentials in the community?

If you are able to review the history of the community, you will usually be struck by the prominence of certain groups - pressure groups, key individuals, and basic institutions - that have had a very strong influence over what has gone on in the past. Business owners, school board members, local political leaders, department chiefs, clerics, social clubs and charitable organizations of various kinds each may have a say or a stake in any kind of

change. What is their relative strength to advance, interrupt, or redirect a change effort? Inside or outside pressure from any source, *(including you!)* can lead to increased conflict within the client system; it can create an atmosphere of rigidity and complacency. You must be sensitive to the likely effects of these different "outside" pressures, for you will need to be able to make a quick assessment of the relative potency of various forces while you are in the process of developing the relationship.

What is the community leadership like?

Is the leadership *cohesive?* Does it work as a *harmonious* system or is it *factional* and strife-ridden? Or is it merely *diffuse* and weak? Can an outside change agent safely make contact directly or should he/she work through emissaries? If leadership is factional, are all factions approachable? Furthermore, are there specific kinds of conventions that must be observed when dealing with the leaders of each faction?

How much effort should you dwell on these outside forces?

The effort you expend in identifying and dealing with these outside social forces will vary greatly from case to case. Sometimes, it may only be necessary to make a casual accounting of these external forces. Nevertheless, the testimony of countless change agents suggests that these outside forces are almost invariably underrated in the early stages of a project.

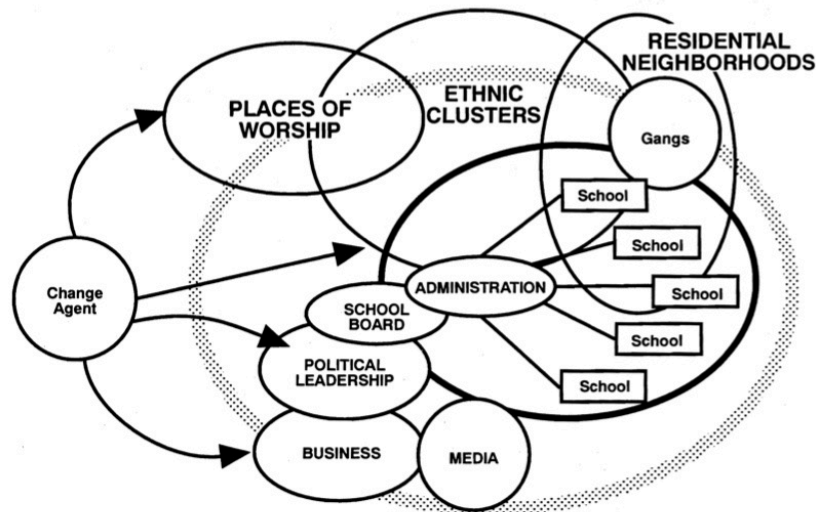## Figure 1-2: RELATING TO THE LARGER COMMUNITY

Figure 1-2 suggests some of the complexity of social forces which can effect change within the environment in which you find yourself. It does not indicate which forces are likely to be dominant in any given situation. This will probably vary depending on the **concern** on which you have chosen to work on. Some of these groups will have a viewpoint and identifiable norms relevant to this change topic or any change in general. Some may be merely irrelevant. Others may be sleeping giants that you may not want to awake. As in the case of Figure 1-2, take out a piece of paper and try listing the outside forces and groups that might be relevant to your situation. If possible, show how they overlap and inter-relate.

Then ask yourself these questions:

- How strong are connections between your client and the larger community?
- Where does the real power lie? Who is really in charge? Who calls the shots?
- Are there community factions which toss issues back and forth?
- Are there certain issues on which there is community-wide consensus?

1.3 WHERE ARE YOU? Defining And Managing Your Own Role

With whom should you choose to work?
Most change agents find themselves in the position of having to select from the entire client system only a few members with whom they will be able to work *directly* throughout the change effort. Successful change agents have found it wise to try to include people who represent the following system characteristics:

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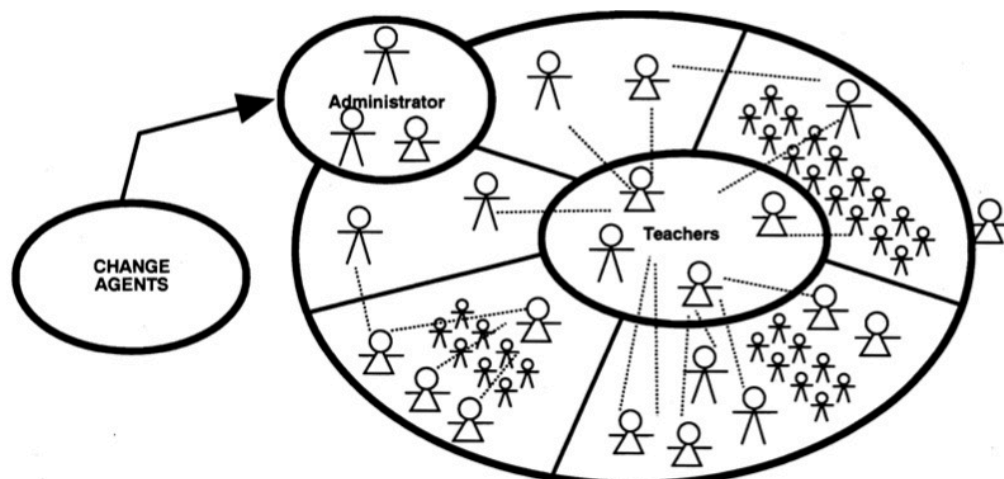## Figure 1-3: The Change Agent And The Primary Client

Diagram your client as a social network
and then place yourself in relation to that network

Take a look at Figure 1-3, suggesting a school as a possible client with two key subgroups and a variety of connections, weak and strong. This figure shows the change agent's first approach to a client system, which might be a school. The most accessible point initially

might be the office of the principal or it might be one or another teacher; rarely, if ever, a student. An important consideration will be the degree of internal integration and the real center of power with regard to the type of innovation you have in mind. Is it the principal and administrative staff or is it the teachers? Regardless of which it is, the change agent will also need to know whether these two potential sources of power are:

- well-connected to each other,
- in harmony or conflict, and
- fully in charge of the system as a whole.

Can you chart such a diagram to represent *you* and *your* prospective client?
1. Try to identify opinion leaders and other key actors on your chart.
2. Then pinpoint your own position and who you are connected to.
3. Then, looking at your chart, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I connected to people who can really change this system?
- Are the internal connections among subgroups, including teachers to students, strong enough to support effective communication and commitment to a change process?
- Are the barriers to outside influence (represented by the solid ellipses) permeable enough that I can get a fair hearing for new ideas?
- What changes in internal structure or connections or barriers would make this a better system (consider both weakening and strengthening)?

1.4 WHERE ARE YOU STARTING FROM?
What Is Your Relationship at the Very Beginning?

A new change project seldom represents a completely new beginning. Here, as in most of the affairs of life, past is prolog. The success of a client's past encounters with change and with change agents will greatly color the success of future relations with you. When starting out on a new project, you are likely to be in one of four situations:

- the blank slate, no prior relationship with the client;
- reestablishing a formerly good relationship;
- reestablishing an uncertain or ambiguous relationship; or
- redefining an existing on-going relationship.

Each of these situations has special advantages and disadvantages..

The blank slate

A good relationship is a complex and delicate bridge, very difficult and expensive to build and very important to maintain. One can only really appreciate this fact when starting a completely new effort. In a relationship, nothing can be taken for granted. You must be acutely aware of norms and values, leadership, influence patterns, and so forth, while at the same time you are maintaining an image of complete trust and serene confidence. The number of concerns which will tax your energy and absorb your attention is greatly multiplied.

A completely new relationship is beset by a host of uncertainties and unknown quantities. The change agent is faced with the task of acquiring information from every available source, while at the same time making crucial decisions about the project. Such

decisions will inevitably be based on partial and distorted knowledge which may make or break the project. Needless to say, it is a delicate task.

On the other hand,, there are many benefits in the brand new relationship. First of all, the new change agent is not initially identified with any special internal faction. Thus, the change agent may have a chance to become and to remain an objective observer as well as a friend. Secondly, the change agent may derive special benefits from his or her initial "guest" status. For a complete newcomer, even potential enemies will be polite and will not try to shout him/her down or shove him/her out without a fair hearing; he/she may be granted a kind of honeymoon period during which he/she is relatively free from critical scrutiny and harsh judgments. If you sense that most members of your client system start out with this open-minded attitude, you should take full advantage of the opportunity to assure all factions of your own open-mindedness and eagerness to bea friend and helper to all. A new face may suggest to the clients that new things are truly possible, whereas an old face with new ideas may merely be seen as an old face with *old* ideas.

Re-establishing a *good relationship*
If the client already knows you and values your past service, you have a very strong base from which to begin a new change project. Such an advantageous starting point, however, should not be taken for granted. The cautious change agent might ask the following ques-tions in preparing for a new project with an old client:

- Does the client still view that former relationship as positive?
- Are aspects of the relationship in need of improvement?
- Have there been any intervening events which could have muddied the waters (e.g., change of leadership, changed fiscal climate)?
- Could the nature of the prior relationship lead the client system to any erroneous expectations (e.g., were you seen as a change agent before?)?

By preparing in advance to deal with such potential snags, you can insure that your relationship will continue to grow -from a solid base.

Re-establishing an uncertain relationship
It is difficult, but not impossible, to make a fresh start with a client with whom the prior relationship was problematic. In such a situation it is mandatory to create a positive atmosphere and confidence in the *'new you.'* The client must be led to believe that the prospects for success are now much better. You can evaluate the probabilities for success by answering the following questions:

- Have you made any analysis of problems in the prior relationship?
- Has anything been done in the interim to correct any of these?
- Have you attempted to build a new image of yourself as a change agent, and to instill new expectations among your clients?
- What, if anything, has happened to the client in the interim that would alter the prospects either positively or negatively?

If the previous encounter was, in fact, a failure, it would be unwise to begin all over again

before the problems in that relationship are resolved and new expectations are instilled. Even then you should have evidence that a new start is likely to be successful despite past experience. Examples of such evidence might be:-
- a major change in the leadership of the client system;
- a change in the political climate;
- a change in the fiscal climate;
- an improvement in your own status;
- recognition, (sincere; verbal, preferably public) by the leadership that you are now seen in a new role and are accepted in that role.

Redefining an existing, ongoing relationship
Very frequently, in assuming the role of change agent, you are moving out of a previously held role with which the client system has firmly identified you. This is almost always true of the change agent who emerges from the client system, itself, as the teacher or administrator who becomes director of a new project or program. Special suspicions and resentments can build among peers if it is perceived that:
- you are gaining power over others, especially your peers;
- you are receiving special recognition, perhaps undeserved in the eyes of peers;
- you have access to resources (financial or other), that others don't have, or that they feel they have equal claim to;
- you are being relieved of other, perhaps onerous, duties in order to perform in your new role.

Modifying or redefining an existing relationship may require a good deal of diplomatic skill and sensitivity to human relations. The change agent has to be especially aware of the perceptions of all the key persons and interest groups who constitutes the client system and of the relevant outsiders as well. To properly reconstitute your image you may have to consider doing each of the following:
- Inform key persons that you have assumed a new and different role.
- Solicit concrete signs of recognition from key persons that their relationship to you is new, and that they accept this fact.
- Make sure you are sufficiently comfortable in performing this new change agent role so that you will not slip back -into "old role" behavior if, for example, your associates start making demands of you to perform in your old role. The need for training and practice in the skills of relating WELL. to clients is nowhere more apparent than in the situation which requires
- you to modify an existing relationship.

Stage 1.5.1 Assembling Your Change Team
From the moment that you, as a change agent, enter the scene of any new project, you should be thinking "***team.***" Serious change requires the collaboration of a group of people working together over a period of time. As the CA gradually assembles and expands such a team, serious consideration needs to be given to three attributes of member qualification: (1) inside-outside status, (2) process skills, and (3) content expertise.

Inside-outside Status. A good change team should include <u>outsiders</u> to give perspective and access to external resources, and <u>insiders</u> to provide solid intra-system connections,

institutional memory, credibility, and caring, and to be boundary spanners to provide intersystem linkage and team cohesion.

Inside Connections are vital
>   to maintain authority (especially if you are not "the boss") and
>   to reach lower levels of the system (especially if you are "the boss.") so as to be
>>   fully aware of needs and attitudes of end users and other groups that might
>>   be affected by the contemplated change.

Outside Connections are vital
>   to maintain the trust and acquiescence of powerfulauthorities,
>   to maintan access to both current and potential *financial* resource*s*,
>   to remain cognizant of relevant *knowledg*e sources

Process Skills. Team members should all have some understanding of the total process, represented by the seven stages of the Guide. Different skill sets may be required for different stages in the evolution of a project. Experience with change and the adoption of innovations in other systems, and other change projects.

Content Expertise. It is important to include team members who are experienced in the kind of change that is contemplated. The type of expertise requires may also change as the need becomes further defined (Stage 2) or even redefined, or as new change objectives arise within the total process.

MANAGING INITIAL ENCOUNTERS

A relationship builds on the first encounter. What happens in the initial contacts between you and the client, how he or she sees you and how he or she feels about you initially will determine whether or not you will be able to proceed into any other stage of problem-solving. In a sense you are a package which the client is going to buy. Most clients want to look the package over and read the label first. The first contacts are used by the client and by you to size up each other and take a quick first reading. Therefore, you must plan and prepare for these encounters with special care. Four considerations are paramount: *friendliness*, *familiarity*, *rewardingness*, and *responsiveness*.

Friendliness

A change agent is an intruder, and as for any intruder the client must ask: "Does this person mean us well or ill?" The question may seem absurd to the change agent; after all, you know *you're* a nice person. To the client, however, there is nothing obvious about this unless he or she starts with a high trust for strangers. On the other hand, initial criteria of friendliness are usually not hard to meet: a smile, a firm handshake, a straight look in the eye, a warm greeting, making a firm mental note of the name of the person we are greeting and using the first name whenever we can. It also helps to make some positive and sincere comment of recognition such as some special attribute or accomplishment of the school, the place, or preferably the person himself. Most of this probably falls in the category of etiquette, but it is not a trivial in the first encounter.

Familiarity

As a person who has deliberately chosen to make himself or herself an agent, you are different, Yet effective change agents are usually similar to their clients in most respects or are seen so by the client. Therefore, a change agent should try to be a familiar object to the client in ways that are not important to his/her mission. In most cases this means at least in dress, outward appearance, speech, and bearing.

It also may help to identify some common interests, which are far removed from any change project, such as sports, entertainments, or politics, that is, if you are both likely to be on the same side of an issue. Jokes or humorous comments, which are likely to be shared, are especially effective in draining out some of the tension that will inevitably be in the situation. In any case, small talk, even about the weather, helps to make you a familiar object in initial encounters.

Rewarding-ness

The change agent should find the earliest opportunity to do *something* for the client that will be perceived as helpful or useful. The point of such an act is not the help itself, but the idea that is planted that "this person can be helpful." Usually this token reward can be merely in the form of a useful piece of knowledge relevant to a problem that the client is concerned about. It might be a book or a pamphlet or perhaps a useful lead to a person or technique, which the client had not thought of.

Responsiveness

The change agent should always be a good listener, but this is especially true at the beginning of a relationship. Most importantly, you should *show* that you are a good listener by nodding if you understand, by asking for clarifications when you don't, and by indicating verbally and non-verbally that you are interested and care about what the

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client is saying, share their feeling, and want to be helpful in whatever way you can. One specific way in which the change agent can indicate responsiveness without commitment to solutions is by repeating back to the client what the agent thinks the client has said but in different words. This gives the client a chance to hear his or her own thoughts from another and to correct misunderstandings. In any case, it shows the client that the change agent is at least *trying* to listen.

This echoing type of response communication is a special skill that should be practiced and learned by all change agents until it comes naturally. It is especially worth the effort where:
- client is about to make a major commitment of time, money, people, or effort;
- you need to get across a rather complicated set of ideas;
- you suspect that the client is having a hard time hearing your message;
- there appears to be a conflict between you and the client over a key issue.

These first steps in relating to a client might fit in the category of "good politics" or "good public relations." Such steps should not be taken as the substance of change agentry but only as preliminary and sometimes nonessential preliminary niceties. As soon as possible you should start moving toward a serious dialogue on problems. This dialogue might be seen as a series of cycles of problem-solving, starting with something small and manageable which the client sees as manifestly urgent. Successful problem-solving at this micro level cements the relationship and builds the trust necessary to move on to issues that are more serious, more systemic, and perhaps more controversial.

WHAT IS THE IDEAL RELATIONSHIP?
Good relationships have no formula and each has its own unique dimensions, but the best have several common features. We suggest nine attributes that would make an ideal base for change agent-client relations. Use these nine points as a checklist and a yardstick to assess your relationship. And don't just do it once; look at this list again and again as you progress through the change project and ask yourself if you are continuing to relate well to your client, improving on weak areas, and making the relationship ever stronger in the service of the change.

Reciprocity
The relationship should be one in which both parties are able to give and take. To the extent that there is transfer of information, there should be transfer both ways, from agent to client and client to agent. This reciprocity increases mutual appreciation of the problem and makes diagnosis more accurate. One-way relationships breed dependency and inhibit the initiative of the client to help himself or herself.

Openness
Openness to new ideas is the *sine qua non* for innovation. Both the client and the change agent should be willing and ready to receive new inputs from each other. There are several dimensions to openness that should be considered, e.g.,
- openness to *receive* new ideas;
- active eagerness to *seek out* new ideas;
- willingness to *share* new ideas with others;
- openness to *listen* to the problems and ideas of others;

- openness to give *authentic feedback* to each other; and
- an active desire for *self-renewal.*

Realistic expectations

All too often the client will entertain the belief that the change agent is some sort of miracle worker, and sometimes the change agent will not discourage this view. The client may imagine that enormous benefits will come from the innovation. At later stages of the change process these unrealistic expectations may return to haunt the project, giving undue disillusionment and discouragement to the client and change agent alike. An important rule of change agentry is, therefore, to set reasonably realistic expectations from the outset. Do not oversell yourself or the innovation.

Expectations of reward

The change agent should not, on the other hand, set expectations too low, because it is equally important to give the client some reason for optimism, an idea of how much better things would be if the innovation were to be successful. The change agent must be seen as providing a valuable resource which will solve problems and provide the client with a significantly improved state of affairs. Sometimes it may be necessary to start out the relationship by providing some token to the client of a future reward. Demonstrations or pilot programs sometimes serve this purpose because they show the client what can be done without committing to major involvement in time and expense. The client needs some tangible evidence that you are a helpful person. If you can provide the client with even the smallest bit of such evidence, you will be nurturing the belief that the relationship will be rewarding in the long run as well as the short run.

Structure

Successful relationships must have some structural basis, some definition of *roles,* working *procedures,* the *flow* and integration of *tasks* and responsibilities, and expected *outcomes*. There will always be the question of how much structure is advisable and at what stages. Judging how much -structure lies at the heart of skilled change agentry. Some degree of definition of the situation and the understandings between the parties is always desirable, but it is also desirable -to be somewhat open-ended, to leave room for changing the relationship as you go along, expanding it in some areas and perhaps contracting it in others.

The formalization of structure in a *contract* is often advisable, particularly where the change agent sees certain aspects of the relationship as problematic, as, for example, when there is reason to doubt the commitment of the leadership of the client system. In any case, such contracts should probably be open-ended on a reciprocal basis. That is, they should specify a sequence of points in the process at which the project could be terminated or redefined by mutual consent.

Equal power

It is difficult to build a successful relationship between parties of grossly unequal power. This is perhaps the overriding consideration in including an outside agent in a change agent team.   When the power of the two parties is equivalent, power itself no longer plays the same role in bringing about change, and its distortive effects on the process are minimized. Where there is an unequal distribution of power, the *appearance of* change may be brought about by the compliance of the weaker partner without the commitment

necessary for lasting change. Under most circumstances, neither the change agent nor the client should have the power to compel the other to do anything.

Minimum threat

The very idea of change is threatening to most of us, particularly when presented by a outsider who is billed as a world pretty much the way it is, 'warts and all,' and we look upon changes first as potential *disturbances* before we see them as potential *benefits*. It is, therefore, most important that the change agent do whatever is possible to minimize the perception of threat.

Confrontation of differences

The change agent and the client should have the ability to talk out their differences. They need to be able to be frank with one another on critical matters which disturb them about their relationship. Suspicion of hidden motives should be frankly discussed and fears of exploitation brought out into the open. A relationship which tolerates the honest confrontation of differences may be a stormy one at times, but it will also be a healthy one and a strong one when the going gets tough.

Involvement of all relevant parties

As noted earlier, the change agent must relate not only to -the client but also to those others in the community who are most directly influential in the client system. In school settings this usually means the school board and perhaps the local chamber of commerce, the newspapers, and the houses of worship. It is most important that these other relevant parties be involved to a degree, but it is not so easy to decide what degree is appropriate. Those "others" whom you have initially identified as highly potent should at least know that you are there, know *why* you are there, and *approve* to some degree of your being there.

There are few change agent-client relationships that will live up to all of these criteria. One must usually settle for less than the ideal. Nevertheless, it is well to keep these nine points in mind in making the best of what you have. Be aware of where you are weak and how you can make improvements as the opportunity arises.

DANGER SIGNALS

At best, the change relationship can be an exciting and rewarding experience, but there can be times when it degenerates into a stagnant and meaningless exercise which produces only frustration and disappointment. Sometimes, you may feel that you have to go ahead with a project regardless of an unpromising relationship. However, there are other times when it is really important for you to question whether to start at all. Below, we have listed a few circumstances which should tip you off to the existence of a bad relationship and a probable failure of your change effort.

A long history of unresponsiveness to change
If the client is persistently indifferent, showing no interest either in changing himself or herself or in accepting innova-tions of any sort, then there is probably little point in spending much energy trying to help him or her. "Interest," of course, is sometimes hard to measure and you should not assume that the first try will be greeted with enthusiasm. Nevertheless, even though you may view your change agent talents as unique and your ability to bring about change as impressive, you would do well to study the past history of your prospective client in dealing with similar change efforts. If the system has persistently responded to change efforts with indifference or rejection, it is probably a signal that the system is a poor bet for future efforts.

The client wants to use you as a *pawn*
Sometimes clients will be eager to seek outside agents only to serve their special purposes in an internal power struggle. The change agent should be very wary of this common type of exploitation.
• *In rare instances, if you have your eyes wide open, you may be able to turn such a situation to your own advantage.*

The client is already committed to a *particular position*
Sometimes a client will be eager to enlist the support of a change agent only to help prove a point or to affirm a position to which the client is already committed. Under such circumstances there is little opportunity for genuine reciprocity and real innovation in the client system.

The client is powerless in his or her own house
Sometimes the contact person in the client system will be eager to invite a change agent into the system, and will be open to new ideas and wholeheartedly committed to cooperation, even though he or she has no real power to effect change in others. Some client systems, for example, will be completely dominated by a remote and inaccessible leadership which is fundamentally hostile to change, while it allows a certain degree of latitude to the membership to "play games." This pattern is frequently found in bureaucratic business organizations controlled by conservative boards of directors or school districts controlled ultimately by unprogressive school boards.

The client shows many signs of pathology or major incapacity
Change agents should learn to recognize certain signs of pathology in a client system which will make a continuing relationship difficult or impossible. Among such signs might be excessive rigidity or obsessive concern with particular kinds of issues, an excessive tendency to externalize conflicts and to see issues in rigidly black-and-white terms. The system may also suffer from some sort of incapacity, such as an inability to

effectively assemble resources when needed, to communicate clearly, to assemble key members for important meetings, and to provide financial and administrative backup for inside members of the change team. Regrettably, such signs of incapacity may only reveal themselves long after the project is underway. However, if such signs do appear *in large number* in very early stages, it may signal to you as the change agent that your efforts will be wasted. On the other hand, no single one of these signs would necessarily indicate a "no-go" situation. Indeed, various signs of pathology and incapacity may be singled out by the change agent as targets for change effort.

Client responds negatively to your well-managed initial encounter
The initial encounter is partly a test of the client as well as the change agent. If you feel you have done everything right in presenting yourself as "friendly," "familiar," "rewarding," and "responsive" but are then greeted with hostility or indifference, this may bode ill for the future. On the other hand, you should be very cautious in drawing such a conclusion. Sometimes a tough exterior is simply one of the client's norms in dealing with initial encounters. It is important to assess the *true* feelings of the client, which may be at variance with outward appearances.

1.9 SIZE UP - SUM UP
HOW TO SIZE UP YOUR RELATIONSHIP

In Stage 1 we have tried to identify the major facts that should be considered by the change agent in establishing a good relationship with the client. We recognize, however, that most readers of this **Guide** will already be committed to various types of relationships that exhibit varying degrees of stability and promise. For such readers to make maximum use of the material presented here, they might ask themselves five questions to help size up their present relationship and give clues on how to make improvements.

- Have you managed to build an inside-outside team?
  - Probably the most important single building block of effective change.
  - Your answer?
    _____

- Have you worked out a strategy for initial encounters?
  - Does it include friendliness, familiarity, reward, and responsiveness?
  - Your answer?
    _____

- Can you identify in your situation the nine features of the ideal relationship?
  - Can you rate where you stand on each of these nine dimensions?
  - Your answer?
    _____

- Do you suspect that any of the danger signals apply?
  - If yes, can you mitigate their effects? If too many are applicable, can you exit gracefully?
  - Your answer?
    _____

- Assuming an on-going relationship, are you doing all that you can to protect and maintain that relationship?
  - Maintenance is far easier than rebuilding.
  - Your answer?
    _____

SUMMARY OF STAGE 1

Unquestionably, the successful relationship is the key to successful planned change. We hope that this chapter has provided a useful introduction to the essential features that make up such a successful relationship. We recognize, however, that the chapter cannot stand alone. A good relationship continues to build as it goes along. It will be strengthened by a successful collaborative effort in diagnosis and resource acquisition, and in selecting and installing the innovation. It will also be heavily dependent upon the personality and the skill of you, the change agent, and upon how clearly and adequately you have defined your own role.