Change management by changing management

Liz Lockey, Chief Officer at Hambleton Community Action

[00:00:00] Hello, folks. My name's Liz Lockey. I'm the chief officer at Hambleton Community Action. Now, I'm sure Mike at Community First Yorkshire, who hosts these podcasts, will give this recording a funky or even provocative title, but basically, I want to talk about change and some ideas around change management.

Now, if you already know me, you'll know I can be a bit unorthodox. So here we go.

I think change and change management is really fascinating, especially in relation to the charity sector. Most of us have come into the sector wanting to make a difference, which to me implies change and lots of it. And yet, as a sector, we often seem quite cautious, quite nervous about change.

The other big irony is that so many people within the [00:01:00] sector and working with us through statutory agencies and in the big wide world beyond, are still basing their practice on some quite old theories and models. And in some cases, they just don't seem to fit the world we live in today.

I'm not going to try and change your mind today, though. I'm simply going to invite you to reflect on your own experiences of change.

Take the model, I can't remember the name of it, but anyway, take the model that suggests people are on a spectrum with a few anti change people at one end and a few pro change people at the other end and the majority somewhere in between. This model suggests we can't influence people at either end, whatever we might do. Because their minds are already made up. And it says, instead, we should focus all our efforts on identifying and bringing around the people in the middle, usually by changing their attitude or thinking.

But in practice, I find people aren't pro change or anti change; people generally like the changes they initiate or suggest, and they [00:02:00] rail against the changes imposed upon them.

So, what that means is if we want to make a change, we need to explore it collectively. And in doing so, we'll probably get a better model and a better outcome when we implement. Another trap that I think traditional models pull us into is assuming that change is always good and the status quo bad, despite history showing us time after time that it isn't always the case.

We know deep down that change and stability work together. Not so much as needing to be balanced at any given time, but we're actually always cycling between them, and I guess the trick is not to be drawn into overdoing one at the expense of the other. A lot of these models also assume that the person in a management or leadership role in the change scenario knows best.

There's an arrogance to these methods. Not just in thinking that we, as the change agent, have the best judgment, but also in thinking that it's our job, or our manager's right, to [00:03:00] change people's minds, their thinking, and their attitudes. There's an assumption in change management that attitude change leads to behavioural change.

Just think about it in any non-work context, or even a work one. I suspect you'll find that changes in behaviour actually tend to lead to attitudinal change. Think about working in a call centre, for example. The smile when you dial. It actually makes you feel happier. Just that change of behaviour. Not the change in thinking.

So, I think that in effecting change, making a difference, leadership is really about creating the conditions for change. It's about giving people autonomy to identify and suggest where things could be better. It's about identifying and involving stakeholders throughout, co-designing and co-producing if you prefer.

It's about encouraging behaviours that support change and about recognising when it's time to consolidate and stabilise. And most importantly, [00:04:00] I think, is never assuming that you, as a leader, have to know best.

So, that's me. Thank you for listening. Thank you for giving it a few minutes of your time. I hope I haven't changed your mind, but, maybe it'll change your practice.