

Review: Change Agents



Steve Chalke's *Change Agents* is literary finger food. Basically it is a series of 25 articles of the kind you would normally find on a blog somewhere as Steve Chalke, the leader of the church.co.uk and Oasis networks in England gives some snippets, some insights, some self-indulgent catharsis, and the occasional gratuitous anecdote. It's a good "toilet book" – by which I mean the sort you leave in that smallest of rooms to pick up and dwell on when you have a moment of necessary leisure.

And by all this I mean that this book is good – quite good actually. Light, but good.

The 25 lessons are short and honest and occasionally give you that hit between the eyes (or is that a smack on the back to stop you choking?). By way of example consider the following titles for some of these lessons:

"Action leads to insight more often than insight leads to action."

"Vision and frustration are the same thing."

"Success is three days between two crises."

"People follow people not disembodied principles."

"If it ain't broke, break it."

Indeed, it is the *honesty* of the book that gives it it's value. I have come to value honesty – emotional honesty in particular – as a significant virtue in others and an aspiration for myself. Chalke exhibits this. Consider this from the lesson entitled "Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood."

"I've got some stuff to get off my chest... Someone that I spend a lot of time working very hard to help complained that

they felt undermined by me. Half an hour later, another friend casually remarked that he sees me as a guy with good people skills who is just too busy to use them. That was a clever one; the mother of all backhanded compliments – and the straw that finally broke the camel's back. I'm tired. I'm busy. I'm fed up. I'm overworked. I'm exhausted. I'm exasperated. I feel overwhelmed and undervalued. It seems like nothing I do is so simple that it can't be misunderstood. Am I condemned to spend my life working myself into the ground for people intent on misreading my motives, misinterpreting my actions and, no doubt, misrepresenting my character behind my back?" (pp97-98)

His leadership pseudo-motivational speaker stuff is quaint (he even quotes Covey at one point). His theology is only implied and is somewhat questionable. And the Bible is not, shall we say, right at the centre of his discourse. But the honesty allows you to leave what is bad and take what is good – and there is much of that.

It is worthy of a place next to your toilet.

