

Interview with Change Agent

1. Your work, briefly.

I'm Craig Johnson, President and CTO of Change Agent, an AI workspace built for organizers, advocates, unions, and progressive groups. We're based in Aldie, Virginia.

Change Agent grew out of my consulting practice, Unfiltered Media, because I kept running into the same problem. Organizers and advocacy staff are brilliant, under-resourced, and buried in work AI could realistically take off their plates. The commercial AI tools either ignored them or actively worked against them. So I built Change Agent.

We pair frontier-model AI with the civic data, organizing tools, and integrations progressive work actually runs on: voter files, advocacy CRMs, action networks, fundraising platforms, lobbying disclosures. The point is to let an organizer move faster without giving up judgment.

Our users are the people doing the work: comms directors drafting rapid-response messaging, researchers pulling background memos, field directors planning member outreach, digital teams spinning up campaign sites and calculators without a developer on retainer.

What drew me to the movement is fairness. I got into politics in college. My first campaign was knocking doors for a local city council candidate, and I never really left. I got a master's in Political Science with a specialty in voting behavior, then worked for the Alliance for Retired Americans (a union affiliate), then for Americans for Tax Fairness (a nonprofit created by AFSCME), before starting Unfiltered Media, which eventually spawned Change Agent.

The through-line has always been the same: politics is about the power to do good, and I want to do good. Building tools that help other people do good at scale is the most direct way I know how to do that.

2. What hostile actors do well.

Everything. And the irony is that conservatives aren't conservative about embracing business and money and getting ahead. They spend VC money and double down on what works. Russian bot armies, Cambridge Analytica, for-profit politics, adjacent social media networks so profitable they spawn

more of the same. They bought the media and the algorithms, and now they've got an overwhelming media presence even though most of their positions are incredibly unpopular.

I've personally tested automated engagement networks and the Cambridge Analytica-style, social-media-for-profit playbook. It works. The problem is I did it without support, which is the whole difference. They're not conservative or ashamed about tactics. The movement is.

3. The opportunity for unions.

The biggest opportunity I see for unions is treating technology as organizing infrastructure. That's the whole thesis behind Change Agent.

For example, Change Agent gives a union comms or research team three extra staffers on demand, without surrendering data privacy. An organizer asks "what's the lobbying history of this employer group we're bargaining against?" and gets a pulled-together brief from Senate LDA disclosures, FEC donor records, IRS 990s for affiliated nonprofits, and any active federal litigation. A press release drops Friday evening. The union has a counter-memo, social copy, and member mobilization drafted and queued before the comms director gets home. What used to take a research cycle now happens the same afternoon.

The biggest opportunity still going unused: treating the membership list as organizing infrastructure, not a fundraising file. Unions have the most valuable dataset in progressive politics: members who already trust the brand and have consented to hear from labor. Change Agent sits on top of that data with the action network, advocacy CRM, and member-comms integrations to actually use it. A research director should be able to slice the membership by worksite, issue, or legislative district and have talking points, action alerts, and member-to-member scripts ready the same afternoon.

Change Agent owns the AI stack end-to-end so a sensitive membership list never has to leave the union's control. No commercial AI terms-of-service exposure, no data leakage risk. That's the part members care about when you ask them to hand over their contact info.

4. Where it's easy, where it's hard.

Our main experience is with SEIU national which from our perspective and relative to the larger movement is extremely fast and thoughtful about tool usage. They are heavily involved in our adoption program and that has been

extremely helpful in getting around the standard road blocks that can be in the way.

5. What unions misunderstand.

Providing technology does not mean that people adopt it. Since we specialize in AI, AI adoption is something that we obsess about. I also think this applies to other software, but software adoption is a continual thing, it's not a one time investment in a bootcamp or change management consultant.

Tools and technologies change over time and that education, including meeting staffers where they are at in the technology journey is far more important than people realize. That plus the time and space to experiment have been the most important variables to a successful technology adaption.

6. Being better partners.

I think it's staff preparation and buy in. The ability for union leadership to set up an environment that encourages cross departmental experimentation, collaboration, and specifically development of internal tie-in of the adoption of the technology into a strong vision and mission of that union.

7. Preparing for the future.

Union tactics are generally conservative. The rapid pace of technological development means that it can no longer stay this way. The pressure to adopt to a new technology is at a premium, especially since even the current technologies are rapidly changing and the future is increasingly opaque when it comes to what the future holds, especially around genetic engineering and quantum computers.

8. What Unions 21 could do.

I think the thing Unions 21 could do is demystify AI, especially around job replacement. The media has done an incredible job lying about the actual capabilities of AI and the actual impacts. The scary impacts that the media has propagated has led to widespread fear among workers, justifiably. The thing with AI is that the workers can control and own the technology and not be reliant on big tech companies and that's what we are doing at Change Agent. This means AI doesn't have to be scary.

9. Anything else.

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