An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry

A one-day course designed for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

By

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and

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Appreciative Inquiry Is:

- A post-modern approach to social science
- A method for engaging a small or large group of people in studying the best examples of whatever they are interested in creating more of
- A dialogic approach to organization development and change

“Almost without exception, everything a society has considered a social advance has been prefigured in some utopian writing.”

“We live in the world our questions create.”

“Every new affirmative projection of the future is a consequence of an appreciative understanding of the past or present.”

David Cooperrider
Case Western Reserve University
OBJECTIVES FOR THE DAY

Develop a basic understanding of Appreciative Inquiry

Experience the Appreciative Inquiry Discovery Process

Learn how to create an Appreciative Inquiry Discovery process

Begin the Appreciative Inquiry process in your leadership role within the Academy

OUTLINE FOR THE DAY (approximate times)

- Introduction and Overview (10)
- Opening Exercise (20 minutes)
- Lecture/overview (45 mins)

Break (20 mins)
- Experience the Discovery process (90 mins)

LUNCH (noonish – one hour)

*We will spend the afternoon working in pairs and small groups on an issue that interests you in order to learn how to:*

- Frame an inquiry: Creating affirmative topics. (60 min)
- Construct Appreciative Interviews (45 min)

Break (20 min)
- Work with Appreciative Data and Synergensis (45 min)

End around 4pm
INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE:

What Makes for a Great Professional Development Course?

Person A will interview Person B. Then B will interview A. Then you will prepare your “findings” (make a list of answers to the question)

Group 1 (Normal Inquiry)

Interview guide:

What do you think are the qualities of a great professional development course?
What do you think makes a professional development course awful?
What would you recommend to someone preparing a Prof Devt course?

Group 2 (Appreciative Inquiry)

Interview guide:

Tell me the story about the best professional development course you ever took.
What do you say this is the best course you ever took?
What was it about you and others that made it so great?
What does this story teach us about the qualities of a great professional development course?
RATE YOUR EXPERIENCE

To what extent did this inquiry…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>low</th>
<th>high</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Result in <strong>new ideas</strong> about the topic? 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase your sense of connection and <strong>rapport</strong> with the other person? 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave you feeling <strong>energized</strong> and excited? 1 2 3 4 5</td>
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An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry

Gervase R. Bushe Ph.D.
Professor of Leadership and Organization Development

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
October, 2016

Some Context

- Organization Development (OD) is about how to change organizations and make them better for people, profits and the planet. It emerged in the 50’s.

- Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a form of OD that emerged in the 80’s, challenged some of the key tenets of OD, and was a precursor to “positive psychology” and the “strengths-based” movement in American management.
A story about an early Appreciative Inquiry

How do we change an organizational culture that doesn’t treat women well?

• The Avon of Mexico Story

Key Points

• The questions we ask, and how we ask them, are critical to what happens next.

• Organizations move in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately ask.

• You tend to get more of whatever you pay attention to.

• People are more likely to engage in discussing things they are proud of and inspire them than things they are ashamed of and feel bad about.

• Knowing what is wrong doesn’t tell you what’s right.
Where it all began

- The Cleveland Clinic and the Department of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University

- David Cooperrider
  - and Suresh Srivastva, Ron Fry and Frank Barrett

- Organization Development emerged in the 1950’s and 60’s by challenging the predominant mechanistic metaphor (organizations are like machines) with an organic metaphor (organizations are like biological organisms)

- Appreciative inquiry (and other methods) emerged in the 80’s and 90’s by challenging the organic metaphor with a dialogic metaphor (organizations are like conversations).
What’s wrong with the organic metaphor?

- An intervention that makes an organism better is likely to work in other similar organisms
  - But an intervention that makes a group or organization better often does not work if simply copied in other, similar groups or organizations

- Once an organism is healed, it stays healed until something else changes
  - But any solution to a problem of organizing always creates a new problem

Some Basic Assumptions Underlying AI

- As social beings, humans are not simple stimulus response mechanisms. We are meaning making beings, and each individual is constructing their own meaning in every situation.

- This creates ambiguity, unpredictability and complexity.

- We use stories (examples, narratives) to make sense and to convey meaning to each other.

- We are as influenced by what we think will happen in the future as by what has happened in the past.
Contrasting the Usual Change Approaches & Appreciative Inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify the Problem</th>
<th>Value the Best of What Is</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analyze Causes</td>
<td>Envision - What Might Be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Possible Solutions</td>
<td>Dialogue - What Should Be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Planning</td>
<td>Innovate - What Can Be</td>
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</table>

**Basic Assumption:**
organizing is a problem to be solved

**Basic Assumption:**
organizing is a miracle to be appreciated

A Lot of Experiments

Hundreds of AI change efforts have been written about. AI has been used in many ways. For example:

- Community Development….Imagine Chicago
- NGO’s…..World Vision’s world-wide strategic planning
- Organization Development…Most large corporations
- Sustainable Development…Walmart’s most sustainable company in the world effort
- Social Development…Nepal’s AI National Network
- Global Change…United Nations’ Global Compact
Some things I have learned about what works

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Try to...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining the problem</td>
<td>Identify what you want more of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using dry, technical language</td>
<td>Use language that is evocative and inspiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing how we got into this mess</td>
<td>Create opportunities to uncover what we all aspire to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting data</td>
<td>Collect stories that are meaningful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging only a few people in gathering data</td>
<td>Engage all the stakeholders in interviewing each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking the experts for solutions and then trying to get the frontlines to implement</td>
<td>Develop a collective sense of where we all want to go and then ask everyone for ideas and proposals</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Work to...</th>
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<tr>
<td>Expecting leaders to provide visions and plans</td>
<td>Expect leaders to frame the right questions and bring the right people together to generate new ideas they will act on</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaders choosing which innovations to support and placing big bets on a few things</td>
<td>Encourage many experiments by the people with the energy and motivation to work on them, and then support, amplify and embed the ones that work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking that the main thing is to solve the problem</td>
<td>Use this problem to create an organization that is better at constantly learning and changing</td>
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Appreciative Inquiry “4-D Model”

- **Discover**
  (The best of what we know)
  *Appreciating*

- **Affirmative Topic**
  (What do we collectively aspire to?)
  *Co-constructing*

- **Design**
  (What can you and I do tomorrow?)
  *Innovating*

- **Deploy**
  (Try many things while leaders monitor and embed)
  *Sustaining*

What does “positive” mean in AI?

- Positive emotions (this is a little tricky)
  - Makes people more open to differences
  - Makes people more creative
  - Provides energy for change

- Identifying what is already working, what brings life and vitality to this group or organization

- Focusing on what you want more of, not less of

- Seeing the possibilities in people and systems (the mighty oak in the acorn)

**But it’s important not to use AI as a way to silence negative experiences that need to be voiced**
But Being Positive Isn’t Enough

- AI is transformational when it is “generative”
  - It generates new ideas
  - It generates energy and a desire to act

- AI is most generative when guided by a “generative image”
  - A phrase that lets people “see” new options for decisions and actions they couldn’t see before
  - A phrase that’s ambiguous but attractive – people want more of that

AI begins with... Discovery

- Decide what you want more of... and look for the best of it that already exists

- Get people to interview each other about their “best of” stories

- Use the storytelling process to build relationships, find common ground, and uncover powerful new images and ideas
**Steps in this learning exercise.**

- Interview someone using an appreciative interview guide (15 mins)
- Be interviewed by that same person (15 mins)
- Get together with another pair to “harvest” your insights about the affirmative question. (30 mins).
- Make comments and ask questions (15 mins)

**AFFIRMATIVE TOPIC:**

How can Academy members capitalize on their strengths to create a future where credentialed food and nutrition practitioners play an integral role in wellness and prevention?

As you interview the other person

- Listen closely and be curious. Get past the surface level understanding and dig deep into what was going on in this story.
- Don’t assume you already know. Assume that in this other person’s story are nuggets of new ideas and your job is to find them.
- Don’t get too lost in the story. Remember the purpose is to learn more about the Affirmative Question.
- Think of this as more of a conversation that an interview. Express your own reactions to what you are hearing. Use the list of follow up questions only as a guide – follow up where your curiosity and energy take you.
- Keep notes on ideas that come to you about how to answer the affirmative topic.

The hallmark of a great appreciative interview is that you both learn something new from exploring the story.

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As you are being interviewed

- Don’t pick just any story. Try to remember a high-point, best of the best story.
- Be curious about your own story. Be open to thinking about it from new angles.

Differences between clinical and appreciative interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>clinical interviews</th>
<th>appreciative interviews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gather information</td>
<td>generate insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be detached and objective</td>
<td>be involved and empathetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitor other's emotional response</td>
<td>monitor own and other's emotional response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>withhold own views and feelings</td>
<td>share own views and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be rational, stay with the facts</td>
<td>be intuitive, allow imagination to play with the facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>search for truth</td>
<td>search for inspiration</td>
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Interview Guide

Tell me a story about the time you most exceeded your own expectations as a credentialed food and nutrition practitioner in helping a client or population improve health. This experience is one where you were surprised at how positive an impact you had. It might not have been the biggest impact you ever had, but it was the one that most surprised you because you didn’t think you would be as influential or that it would turn out as well as it did.

Possible follow up questions:

- How did this begin?
- What happened?
- What was the positive impact?
- Why was that surprising to you? Why is this the example that most exceeded your expectations?
- Without being humble, what do you think it was about you that resulted in this impact?
- What do you think it was about the other people that led to a positive outcome?
- What was it about the situation that made any difference?
- What does this story tell us about how to create a future where credentialed food and nutrition practitioners play an integral role in wellness and prevention?

(Interviews can only last 15 minutes each)
Harvesting for Discovery

1. Meet with another pair who have just completed their interviews.

2. Begin by introducing the person you just interviewed and give a summary of their story and what most struck you about it.

3. Once each person has been introduced, have a conversation about what you think Academy members and this organization can do to create a future where credentialed food and nutrition practitioners play an integral role in wellness and prevention.

If you are so motivated, have a few members keep a list of the ideas that come up. You will have an opportunity to talk about these with other people tomorrow.
An appreciative approach can be used in different ways to answer different kinds of questions. Appreciative Inquiry is particularly useful for working on “adaptive challenges”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TECHNICAL PROBLEMS</th>
<th>ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy to define.</td>
<td>Difficult to define (sometimes easy to ignore).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lend themselves to operational (cut-and-dried) solutions.</td>
<td>Require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, &amp; approaches to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often can be solved by authority or expertise.</td>
<td>People with the problem have to be involved in solving it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires change in just one or a few places; often contained within organizational boundaries.</td>
<td>Requires change in numerous places; usually across organizational boundaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are generally receptive to technical solutions they understand.</td>
<td>People generally resist adopting other-defined values and beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions can often be implemented quickly by changing rules or work processes.</td>
<td>Adaptation requires experiments and new discoveries as well as wrong turns and dead ends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical problems stay solved until something else changes.</td>
<td>Adaptation creates new problems that will have to be adapted to.</td>
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Adapted from the writings of Ron Heifitz and colleagues at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University with help from Eric Svaren

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Steps in this learning exercise.

1. Is there an issue you would like to use this afternoon to think about? If there is, great. If not, look over the list of possible issues and see if one interests you. If not, you can act as a coach to someone else and work on their issue (5 mins)
2. Find one or two other people interested in working together. (5 mins)
3. Your group will work at creating an affirmative question out of an adaptive challenge (30 mins)
4. Comments, questions and answers. (10 mins)

If you don’t currently face an adaptive challenge to work on, here is a list of potential issues related to the Association you could work on for learning purposes:

- Member engagement
- Building the leadership pool
- Synergy between Academy organizational units
- Integration into multidisciplinary medical practices
- Increasing our influence with other health providers
- Affordable dietetics education and training
- Building workforce capacity
- Diversity within the profession
- Inclusivity/embracing differences
- Leadership resilience/burnout
To frame affirmative topics you need to think about:

1. What is the issue and what do you want more of?
2. What about it do most stakeholders care about?
3. How can you frame the issue in a way that engages and interests people in an inquiry about what you want more of?
4. Can you identify and incorporate a generative image for this topic?

Examples of Affirmative Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive challenge</th>
<th>Affirmative Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do we create more efficient, timely work processes that meet customer needs when we have so many interdependencies, unclear roles, multiple points of customer contact and conflicting expectations placed on employees?</td>
<td>How do we create stress free customer service?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do we re-engage a combative and cynical district of teachers and refocus our interactions on the welfare of our students?</td>
<td>What do we know about learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to harness our employees’ inherent motivation to provide a good service to our customers in a way that will gives us a competitive advantage over other airline companies?</td>
<td>What are exceptional customer arrival experiences?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. What is the issue you want to work on?

Stop here and wait for further instructions

2. What do you want more of?
3. Which stakeholders are affected by this issue? Which of them will have to change for any change to work? (don’t spend more than a few minutes on this)

4. What common interests do these stakeholders have? What do they most care about in common?
5. How does what you want and what your stakeholders care about intersect? What is it everyone wants more of?

Construct affirmative topics focused on that. Test your affirmative topics asking yourself, “will the stakeholders that need to be in this conversation find this a compelling conversation to be part of?”

Notes on Q&A.
Appreciative interviews almost always start by asking for a high point, peak, personally meaningful, best of story from the person’s past.

- We teach, learn and construct meaning through stories
- Telling and listening to personally meaningful stories builds connection and rapport
- Stories level hierarchy; sometimes the best stories come from surprising sources
- There will be clues and possible answers in the story
- Everyone has a “best of” story, even if the story isn’t about something as great as they would like

After getting the person’s story, an Appreciative Interview Guide will often foreshadow the rest of the AI process by asking questions related to Dream, Design and Deployment, in that order

Affirmative Topic: What do educators do that create exceptional learning experiences?

1. Tell me the story of the most powerful learning experience you ever had in a classroom or other educational setting?
   a. What was it about the teacher that made this such powerful learning experience?
   b. What was it about...etc?
2. When you think about the future of your school, what are you deepest hopes, dreams and visions for creating the richest learning environment and the highest quality learning experiences for students? How would things be different from how they are now?
3. What specific actions and changes do you think need to be made to create these hopes and visions?
4. What will have to happen for people in the school to take on the challenge to change in these ways?

You can find many examples of interview guides at:
https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/toolsQuestions.cfm

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Generative Questions

Appreciative Inquiries are more likely to be successful in generating new ideas with energy if they begin with “generative questions”.

I have found 4 elements to highly generative questions. It is hard to create questions that meet all four criteria, but always generative when you do.

1. They are surprising.
They are questions that people haven’t discussed or thought about before. They are questions that cause people to reflect and think. This in itself increases the generative potential of the question.

2. They touch people’s heart and spirit.
The questions take people back to memories that are personally meaningful and have deep emotion attached to them. They take people to memories that touch their spirit – what most matters to them. This is generative for a couple of reasons. 1) Whatever gets discovered is more likely to be meaningful and impact meaning-making. 2) It unlocks a great deal of energy, which will be required for generative action.

3. Talking about and listening to these stories and answers will build relationships.
As a result of these questions people will feel closer to each other. They will think they have revealed something important about themselves and learned something important about the other person. A greater sense of vulnerability and trust will be engendered by asking and answering these questions. There are many possible indirect effects from this on generativity. The direct one is the open mindedness, and greater willingness to publicly dream, that is more likely when people feel safe and affirmed.
4. **The questions force us to look at reality a little differently.**

Either because of what the question asks us to think about, or because of who we are listening to, we will come away from this interview with a new perspective or changed beliefs. Sometimes reality can be reframed by the way a question is asked. Sometimes reality gets reframed because the person we are listening to is saying something very different from current assumptions, stereotypes or mental maps. The linkage to generativity is obvious.

**Examples**

**Affirmative Topic: How can we create a forum where leaders of the world’s religions can gather in mutual respect and dialogue?**

Religious leaders from around the world, interviewing each other for the first time: *Can you share the story of a memorable moment where clarity about life purpose emerged for you— for example, a moment where your calling happened, where there was an important awakening or teaching; where there was a life-changing experience, or where you received clarity around some guiding vision?*

**Affirmative Topic: How do we increase a community’s interest in and ability to educate the heart of children?**

Small groups of neighbors in group interviews: *Tell me about the greatest act of compassion you ever experienced toward you as a child, or witnessed as a child, and how this affected you.*

**Affirmative Topic: How do we increase the excellence, learning and spirit in our medical school and allied institutions?**

All levels and occupations at the medical school: *Spirit is connectedness. It is the life giving force of the organization, the value or factor that compels the system to excellence. It is the essential essence without which the system would flounder as it moves with intention towards its desired future. Please describe a time when you experienced your organization’s spirit, i.e. its connectedness, its life-giving force.*
Identify the types of experiences you could ask people about that might provide insight into your affirmative topic.

Think about which experiences would most likely result in a generative question.

Write the “tell me a story” question you think would do the best job of beginning an appreciative interview into your affirmative topic.

Share and discuss with another group (15 mins)
There are many ways to complete the Discovery process. The best for you will depend on what you are trying to accomplish, the resources you have, and the culture and expectations of the group or organization you are working with.

At one extreme, Discovery can be part of a multi-day, large group process where people talk in small groups about what they are learning from their conversations with each other but no attempt is made to capture that. It is assumed that people will carry their learning into Dream and Design.

At the other extreme, Discovery can entail detailed write-ups of each interview that are then put through a qualitative analysis by a small group of researchers, leading to a report identifying best practices and innovations worth considering.

There tend to be trade-offs to how much rigor you put into analyzing the interviews versus creating a positive and energized climate, how many people are engaged in doing so, how time and effort is channeled, and what is done with the outcomes.

Some questions to consider:

- What do you want to occur as a result of Discovery?
- How useful or important is it to produce a concrete depiction of the best of what is?
- How useful or important is it to produce positive feelings and a sense of community in this group?
- What is the best way to engage this group so that they will be ready to Dream together?
Think about the group you would do this appreciative inquiry with and decide what the most important outcomes you want to create are.

- What limitations and constraints do you face in bringing people together to interview one another and harvest learnings from the interviews?

Hear about a type of Harvesting called Synergenesis (15 mins)

Discuss how Synergenesis could work for the Academy’s AI process (15 mins)
Synergenesis
Taking a Bath in the Data to Inflame the Imagination

Synergenesis is a technique for generating new ideas from appreciative interviews that research has shown is effective in stimulating generativity during appreciative inquiry. It is a kind of modified brainstorming where a small group (5-10 people) uses stories gathered from the AI to stimulate idea generation. It requires that people write up the “best of stories” from their interviews.

Steps in Synergenesis

1. If you haven’t already, turn the affirmative topic into a question. Ensure the group agrees on the question you are trying to answer. Write the question and have it visible for all group members to see. Make sure people understand the purpose is to stimulate new ideas/answers/solutions, not to analyze what people said.

2. Read one of the interviews together. Everyone must read the same interview. Perhaps have someone read it out loud. If there are a lot of interviews you may want to decide ahead of time which ones seem to have the richest potential for stimulating the group’s thinking. Start with those.

3. Individuals propose ideas to answer the affirmative question. Those are captured on the flip chart (or other technology that allows everyone to see everything that’s been listed). Ideas do not have to come from the story itself – any idea stimulated by the discussion is valid. Do not use formal brainstorming rules but allow for a freewheeling and energized conversation. Continue to do this until you run out of ideas.

4. Go on to the next interview and do the same thing. Continue to do this until no more ideas are being stimulated by the interviews. Check among the group to see if there are any ideas in any of the interviews that have not been used before bringing this to a close.
Benefits of Synergenesis

- Having to write up a story ensures people listen closely
- The process of writing another person’s story opens people up to new perspectives
- It focuses the group on producing innovative ideas rather than agreeing on a model
- It brings people into a possibility oriented conversation
- People do not have to have been in interviews to participate
- It can stimulate a ripple out of conversations across the system
- Sometimes it’s where key innovations that come out of the AI begin

Things you will need:

- A deck of stories
- A space where the group can discuss without distractions
- A flip chart, markers, masking tape and wall space to tape charts as they fill up
- The key question written and put up where everyone can see it
- Someone who can do a good job of quickly writing up people’s ideas
- A plan for what will happen with the list created
Writing Up Stories for Synergenesis

The most generative write ups are interesting stories that contain useful ideas, innovations and points of view, stories that will give some people a different perspective on the issue.

The stories should be written in the 1st person (that is, write it as if the interviewee were telling his or her story)

Make it an interesting story to read, with a beginning, middle and end. In the interview, the person probably went back and forth in time as you asked questions and dug into the story. You will have to re-organize your notes into a story. This is NOT a transcript of what they said. It is creative non-fiction.

Make sure you include all the key points from the story that are relevant to the affirmative topic

Each write up should identify whose story it is and who wrote it up and the date. After you write up the story, give it to the interviewee to alter, adjust and add to in any way they want. They have to be comfortable with others reading their story.

This is what not to do in a write up (from an inquiry into great leadership). It will not produce a generative conversation:

BAD EXAMPLE

Tom thinks leadership is about honesty; it is about gaining trust and respect. Tom entered his new job and worked hard to gain his employees trust and respect by having an inspiring vision. Good leaders have a vision. They create followers and get people excited; they create fun. Leaders must give people a reason to follow them. It must be recognized, however, that leaders do not know what is going on at all times, nor can they foresee what will go on in the future because the world is constantly changing. Leaders can only have a notion of where to go, yet they must be able to excite people towards that notion and must equip them with the abilities to deviate from that notion when appropriate.

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Example of an Appreciative Interview Write-up for Synergenesis

Jason’s story of what gives life and vitality to work
Written by Marsha Little
Date:

My best work experience was on a project I worked on in the US mid-west. A large commercial client was having my company build an enterprise wide system to run its business. The scope and size of the project were huge, the project had a budget in the hundreds of millions of dollars. I was sent there from home to work on it.

Upon arriving I noticed that things were moving quite slowly and that there were definite frictions between the group responsible for understanding the information and the group responsible for how it was used. The chief architect and project director figured out that the way things were going it was impossible to meet the first deadline. They brought together the key players from each of the groups. The head of my team (who went on eventually to lead the project) asked me to attend with him. At that meeting they decided to establish a strike team of the best and most experienced experts from the regular project team. Their goal was to get the first release of the system developed on time and delivered no matter what the costs. I was selected as one of the database modelers. We had our work cut out for us. We had to develop over 1600 programs in four months. The team got to work quickly in a large boardroom with desks and computers around the outside edge and a large table at the center for discussions. The table actually became more of a community locker room and kitchen. We referred to the room affectionately as the pig-pen.

The team was very diverse from several ethnic backgrounds, lifestyles and ages. This did not cause any problems as one might suspect. For some reason the team instantly gelled and was able to hit the ground running. Everyone had a very focused and common goal. At the time we all thought the project was hell on earth. We had to put in outrageous hours, sixteen to eighteen hour days were the norm and we still looked forward to getting in to work the next day. Our work space became a garbage-dump, but we never noticed. A number of times during the project someone would say “hey, this place is a mess, we should clean it up”. We were all so focused on the need to complete the system that we were oblivious to the extreme demands placed upon us and the appropriateness of our working conditions. Everyone thought that delivering the first system on time would be impossible. This made it a task I wanted to take on.

One of the reasons that the team got along so well is that everyone was given a choice whether they wanted to join the team or not. Not joining was not a bad thing as the other eighty team members would be working on components for the second release of the system. Therefore, everyone who was there had a choice in their situation. It was this choice that raised people’s level of commitment and made the project a success. We became a very close knit group of friends on that project.

The team often ate lunch together and occasionally got together in small groups outside of work. Management was also supportive. They understood the difficulty of the task they had asked us to complete and were committed to providing us with what we needed to get the job done. The effort of all members of the team rose far above what is expected in day to day professional life. A good example
was our single mom. Quite a few team members became baby-sitters for her kids to allow her the time
to stay late and work on completing critical modules. That was another reason why this was such a good
experience. I found it much more satisfying than the everyday type of work I encounter. Another
amazing thing is that our company and the customers were very large very bureaucratic organizations. I
did not expect to have so much fun within these organizations.

I was assigned to this project at a point in my career where things seemed to be slowing down. The
immediate challenge and the strenuous effort required to complete this project vitalized me and has
kept my spirits up for years afterwards. The project showed me that a team that has difficult or
seemingly impossible tasks set before it that determines that it will succeed can perform miracles. The
system we developed was ready one week ahead of schedule and the client was impressed with the
level of quality and capabilities provided in the first release.

It was really the interaction with other team members on the project and the success we had in the face
of an impossible schedule that made this such an exceptional experience for me. Being part of a group
of competent and focused people that are dedicated to doing a good job is a privilege. Working
together against adversity builds strong bonds and dedication between the team members. It is like
gaining a new family as part of work life and events such as these are ones to be cherished. If we had
failed it might not rank as such a best experience for me but we succeeded and exceeded our goals.
Success in the face of what is considered as impossible gives me a feeling of how powerful I can be when
I work with a group of like-minded, competent people. Acceptance of and the successful taking on of a
challenge is fulfilling and makes for best experiences. But it is really the people and what they can
achieve together that makes organizations fun, exciting and interesting places for me to work.
FURTHER EXPLORATION

Recommended How-To Books:


If you want to increase your competence at using AI for organizational change:


Websites

The AI Commons, hosted by Case Western Reserve, is a treasure trove of articles, presentations, cases, tools, and links for all things related to appreciative inquiry:

https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/

All my articles on appreciative inquiry are on my website. For those looking for an academic overview I suggest you download *Appreciative Inquiry: Theory and Critique* from this site. For a brief description download http://www.gervasebushe.ca/the_AI_model.pdf:

http://gervasebushe.ca/appinq.htm

David Cooperrider’s personal website has links to some of his articles as well as links to many videos highlighting inspiring stories of positive change from around the world:

http://www.davidcooperrider.com/