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### ACHIEVING CHANGE THROUGH APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: A BOOK SUMMARY

*The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*  
by Diana Whitney & Amanda Trosten-Bloom (2003)



Think about the last few projects you have worked on or the last couple of meetings that you have attended. How many of the projects were designed to "fix" something? How many of the meetings were called to "address the problem of (fill in the blank)?"

In *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*, organizations are advised to shift their problem-solving paradigm and approach the change process by focusing on what the company does well. In so doing, organizations can achieve innovation, improved productivity, increased employee satisfaction and increased profitability. The book provides step-by-step suggestions for how to implement an Appreciative Inquiry approach in your organization. Tips for creating an Advisory Team, scoping an AI project, developing an inquiry strategy, and beginning to engage large numbers of people in a long-term AI process are discussed. The authors utilize case histories to demonstrate the flexibility and potential of the Appreciative Inquiry approach. In particular, the authors explore their experience with Hunter Douglas Window Fashions – a company that was able to achieve a 15 percent improvement in their bottom line and created a new strategic direction and culture using Appreciate Inquiry.

### IMAGINING A POSITIVE FUTURE CREATES A POSITIVE FUTURE: A MESSAGE FROM MICHELLE WECKSLER

#### **The Key to Positive Change is Right in Front of You!**

*To a hammer, everything looks like a nail* – Abraham Maslow

It is the new year and for many of us it is a time for reflection. We look back and ask ourselves what we could have done better; what mistakes we have made, how we can prevent ourselves from making the same mistakes again. On January 1st I started asking myself some of these very questions and then I decided that my approach was all wrong! Instead of focusing on what was wrong, I chose instead to start the new year by asking myself questions about what was *right* – What did I do well during the past year? What were my successes and how had they come about? What "worked" for me? I have to admit, that these questions seemed more difficult to answer than the negative ones that usually command our attention. Sometimes, it seems, it is easy to point out what is wrong than to focus on what is right.



My traditional approach to my own reflection is a practice many organizations go through in order to effect change. Traditionally, organizations look at their shortcomings and problems to try and motivate change. They focus on areas that are failing or “gaps” in performance. It is no surprise that the more you ask about problems, the more problems find you. Fundamentally, whatever we focus on expands. So what if we shifted the focus? What if, instead of a problem-oriented approach to change, an organization chose to focus on its own past successes? This is exactly the approach that Appreciative Inquiry advocates as a process for achieving positive organizational change.

Developed in 1987 by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivasta, two professors at Case Western University, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to organizational development that focuses on what works rather than what doesn't. Cooperrider and Srivasta observed that during the last 50 years, managers, consultants and researchers had viewed organizations as “problems to be solved,” so much so that organizations have become problems personified. AI proposes a different view. Instead of viewing an organization as a problem to be solved, why not approach an organization as a mystery to be embraced?

Cooperrider defines Appreciative Inquiry as the art and science of ferreting out the best in an organization through skillful questioning, and bringing key stakeholders together with that knowledge to plan the future or change the present. The main objective is to look at an organization as a positive force, understand its strengths, and figure out how to refine and enhance what it – or a system within it – is already doing well. It is a process for achieving change that works from the assumption that whatever you want more of already exists in all organizations.

In the June 1999 issue of *Training* magazine, Cooperrider stated, “The problem-solving paradigm may once have been the most effective approach for enhancing an organization's performance, but it is out of sync with today's reality.” Cooperrider cited a number of things that are wrong with the problem-solving approach to management and organizational change: It is painfully slow; it always asks people to look backward at yesterday's failures and their causes; and it rarely results in a new vision. He also believes that problem-solving approaches are “notorious for placing blame and generating defensiveness.”

The Appreciative Inquiry process can be approached in a number of different ways. Most simply, the 4-D process can be followed: Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny. Prior to these four steps being carried out, a group must first “form” the topic, create the “right” questions that inspire positive stories, and conduct interviews to elicit stories. According to Cooperrider, figuring out the right questions may be the most critical part of an appreciative-inquiry cycle. “The questions you frame and ask, from the very first one to the very last one, are an intervention in themselves. And they frame the way people come to look at the topic.” In effect, the change process begins in the course of the interview as individuals are asked to remember everything about their peak experiences at work and how they occurred.

The 4-D process begins with *Discovery*. *Discovery* involves exploring the themes of the “peak experience” stories. It is often done in an open-meeting format with participants interviewing one another in small groups. The second stage, *Dreaming*, involves taking the information from *Discovery* and using it to speculate on possible futures for the organization. This step may start with a dreaming exercise. For example, “Imagine that you have fallen asleep today and you wake up 5 years from now. At the time you awaken, this organization has become exactly the place you would like to be. What do you see that is different and how do you know that it is different?” *Dreaming* usually concludes with the drafting of a statement that summarizes the organization's vision, purpose and strategic intent. Based on the dream, participants move to *Design*. During *Design*, the driving concepts and principles of the dream are identified. Finally, during *Destiny*, participants may write action plans and build strategies. However, this stage is

the one that has evolved the most since Appreciative Inquiry was first introduced. As Cooperrider states, “What we discovered, quite honestly, was that the momentum for change and long-term sustainability increased the more we concentrated only on giving AI to everyone, then stepping back and letting them apply the process on their own throughout the organization.”

Whether it’s positive personal change or positive organizational change that you are looking for, remember that if you look for problems, you will find more problems. However, if you look for success, you create more success. May the coming year create many opportunities for success for you and for your organizations. Remember, the seeds for the success you are seeking already exist within you and your organization!

## GET BEHIND THE 8 BALL

The eight assumptions of Appreciate Inquiry are:

1. In every society, organization or group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities.
4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.



## LEVERAGING WHAT YOU DO WELL FOR BOTTOM-LINE RESULTS

The August 2003 *Harvard Management Update* reported on how companies are getting bottom-line results by leveraging what they already do well. Utilizing the Appreciative Inquiry approach, numerous companies have successfully captured financial improvements.

Roadway Express held an AI pilot project in which one project team was able to generate a savings of \$10,000 per month in driver delay reductions and more than \$70,000 per year in other cost reductions. The Santa Ana Star Casino had their entire 820-member staff participate in an AI project focused in an effort to reposition itself as “The Hometown Casino.” As a result, the company made a \$10 million turnaround in operating profits in fiscal year 2003. Green Mountain Coffee Roasters utilized AI and was able to successfully reduce its operating costs by 25 cents per pound of coffee, roughly a 7% reduction in gross costs. As all of these companies experienced, Appreciative Inquiry can contribute directly to *measurable* results.



Explore how Appreciative Inquiry can help your company! [www.adrgi.com](http://www.adrgi.com)

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

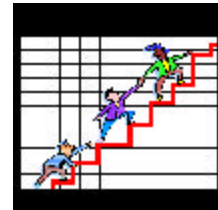
“People only see what they are prepared to see.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson



## A CHALLENGE TO YOU: UTILIZE AI IN THE WORKPLACE

How can you adopt Appreciative Inquiry in your workplace? Anne Radford, a London-based AI practitioner and editor of the *AI Newsletter*, emphasizes that AI depends very much on the participation of everyone in an organization. Employees *are* the process. AI is not something that is *done to them*.



The book *Appreciative Inquiry: Change a the Speed of Imagination* suggests the following 5-step approach for the AI process:

### 1. Make the focus of the inquiry positive

In seeking out what is good and right in an organization, you need to ask the right questions. For example, if you are seeking to improve customer service with a problem-oriented approach, you might ask “What can we do to minimize customer complaints?” In an AI approach, the question instead would be, “When have customers been most pleased with our services, and what can we learn and apply from those moments of success?”

### 2. Elicit positive stories

Utilize interviews to elicit stories that illustrate the organization’s strengths. This type of storytelling generates excitement and supports creativity and imagination. Ask “When our organization is at its best, what characteristics are present?” “What successes have we achieved over the past year and what did we do to accomplish those successes?”

### 3. Locate themes that appear in the stories

Search the stories for common elements. What do all of these stories of greatness share? The goal is to begin to identify themes or characteristics that underly the success stories. As a result, individuals can begin to imagine what the organization would be like if these exceptional moments that were uncovered in the interviews became the norm in the organization – the rules, rather than the exceptions.

### 4. Create shared images for the future

This step builds on the previous step. Imagine and create a future in which the exceptional moments from the shared stories are made into the everyday reality for your organization. Articulate your “dream” and design the structure for achieving it (ie the policies, business processes, resources, etc.).

### 5. Find innovative ways to create that future

Identify and carry out measures to begin to make the “dream” real. Examples might include new training programs, new ways of connecting to customers, new technology, designing a new performance appraisal system – whatever your

organization needs to achieve its dream.

You can apply this 5-Step Approach to the entire organization, to your own workgroup, or even to your own personal life. Go ahead...we challenge you!

*Share your success stories with us! If you utilize this 5-Step AI Approach and find that it works for you, please e-mail us and share your story. We would welcome the opportunity to highlight your successes in our upcoming newsletters! E-mail us at [info@adrgi.com](mailto:info@adrgi.com).*

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