

See Yourself In 4-D: How to Use Appreciative Inquiry To Ignite Positive Change
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Is your organization currently in the midst of making changes? Are you looking for ideas to improve your processes while increasing employee satisfaction and retention? If you are ready to discover new ways to maximize your organization's productivity and efficiency, then all you need to do is ask the right questions. Appreciative Inquiry allows you to do just that.

So what is Appreciative Inquiry? It's a verbal science that's been around since the 1980's, that shows us how to ask questions in a way that will elicit positive responses. By using this model you can gain a fresh new perspective and spur positive change within your organization. The reality is that wonderful things can begin to happen when you stop focusing on the negative and start focusing on the positive.

Why is this new method of gathering information effective? Because, it's different than how we've done things in the past. Because most people think thoughts that are 70-90 percent negative or of no use to them, it's very easy to understand why we tend to ask questions that focus on what's wrong, rather than asking questions that focus on what's right.

We ask "who made the mistake," rather than asking, "What options do we have to fix things?" We ask "who can be blamed for this," rather than asking "what did we learn from this?" Or, we ask, "what's wrong with this picture," rather than asking, "What am I doing right?" In short, in the past we had a "what was I thinking," or "what were they thinking," mentality.

So who invented Appreciative Inquiry? Two professors, David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. To date, hundreds of people have been involved in co-creating new concepts and practices for applying the spirit and methodology of Appreciative Inquiry into organizations all over the world.

The Appreciative Inquiry Process consists of a 4-D cycle: Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny.

By using these four steps, you too can begin to use this positive process to grow your organization.

Discover: The first step in the Appreciative Inquiry cycle focuses on identifying "what is." To uncover the current situation, you will begin by asking carefully constructed positive-focused questions. Here, among other things, your goal is to discover what drives success, contributes to employee satisfaction, and helps maximize productivity. The purpose of the questions asked during this stage in the process is to discover how the organization is most alive and successful. The goal here is to create an open-dialogue where information flows freely. Here is a sample of questions designed to help you illicit positive responses during the discovery stage:

Share a time with me where you felt the happiest/most successful at your job?
What first attracted you to this job?

Tell me about a time when someone has recently helped you succeed at a task?
What makes your work meaningful?
What do you find most exciting about your position?
If I asked your friends to share with me three of your best qualities, what would they say?
Where do you gain your inspiration?
If you were the manager of the organization, in what area would you focus more of your time?
What is most pleasing to you?
What do you feel confident about?
Tell me about a time where you felt reassured?
What three things have you liked most about your time here thus far?
What do you value most about the nature of your work?
Tell me about a time where you felt your organization was most connected to its patients?
What do you think draws people to work here?
If you could talk to the President of the organization, what is the one thing he/she could do to make your job better, faster, or more enjoyable?

Dream: After identifying the current situation or “what is,” the next step in the Appreciative Inquiry process allows you to focus on “what might be.” Here are some positive-focused questions that will help you to navigate this stage:

Imagine and tell me what your perfect shift would look like?
What are your deepest desires for the organization?
If you could wave a magic wand and have exactly what you desire, what would that be?
If a genie granted you three wishes pertaining to your job or organization, what would you ask for?
If you could fast-forward three to five years into the future and imagine that your highest hopes and dreams for your organization have become a reality, how does the organization look? How is your work or day different?
What are some of the ways that you’re interacting with others in the organization that are working for you?

During the Dream step, the possibilities are endless. Give yourself and members of your organization the gift of no boundaries in order to dream your biggest dreams.

Design:

Once you’ve discovered strengths and possibilities in the last two stages, you’ll want to find ways to achieve these dreams. So now that you’ve discovered “what might be,” your job in the Design phase is to discover “how can it be.” Here, you’ll generate “possibility statements,” also termed “provocative propositions.” Possibility statements are designed to stretch the status quo, be grounded in the organization’s history, and, most importantly these statements focus on the desired future. The result of this stage is that you will have a series of paragraphs that outline how the Dream will be realized. The big question to ask at this state is “how can we go about achieving what we envisioned in the Dream phase?”

Destiny:

Now, that you have generated a list of possibility statements, its time to make your dreams a reality. This step focuses on “what will be.” At this point in the process, you will choose what you will move forward with. You will begin to incorporate the possibility statements with your job, your team, and your organization. Here you’ll find ways to apply overall Appreciative Inquiry process to your overall culture. Destiny is not an end to the process, but the beginning to a whole new way of doing business.

Appreciative Inquiry just makes sense when you stop to think about it. People tend to gravitate in the direction in which they are focused on the most. Therefore when you focus on the negative, your problems will just get bigger and more overwhelming. However, by giving yourself and your organization the gift of Appreciative Inquiry, you will focus on the positive and begin to be awed by the differences it can make. Remember, small changes to questions you may already be asking or small changes to your current outlook will help you ignite positive change.

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