

“APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY” NOTES

I. Definitions

- A. “Appreciative Inquiry”(AI, not to be confused with “artificial intelligence”!) is an emerging body of soft business science that takes the idea of “feed the winners and ignore or starve the losers” to an exhaustive level to insure successful implementation of ideas that you know should work, but so far have not.
- B. Quote: “AI asks us to pay special attention to “the best of the past and present”— in order to ignite the collective imagination of what might be.” David Cooperrider
<http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org/>
- C. What it is not; what we could do instead:
 - 1. Troubleshooting for what isn’t working smoothly and fixing it. This is necessary and good activity for process quality, but it uses “deficit language” that can unwittingly infect groups with negative energy.
 - 2. By example, if 94% of employees are “happy” with their jobs and 6% are not; why focus on trying to make the 6% happy when nothing will help them, because their solutions are within and up to them. Instead, what if we focused on the top 5 to 10% who are super-happy and try to find more people like that or help others who want to become like that.
 - 3. We are good at talking about what doesn’t work, but we aren’t good at understanding why good stuff is good and happening.

II. How it conceptually works

- A. In sports, the brain doesn’t hear “not” as in “don’t hit it into the water or the rough”, so we get tight and often do what we were hoping to avoid. If we instead only visualize the perfect shot and don’t let any negative thoughts enter our mind, then in theory we do better.
 - 1. Crowding out the negative completely is easier said than done on a first attempt, but with practice consistent, fearless, positive imaging starts can happen and start to work.
 - 2. The longer a belief or deficit thinking habit is held and practiced, the longer it takes to supplant it with a new positive approach.
- B. In psychological change, Jung pointed out that an important problem is rarely solved, instead it is outgrown, as newer, stronger interests come along to crowd out the old problem. People adjust to new life forces like plants grow toward the sun.

III. Guidelines for Experimenting

- A. Stir up memories of energizing moments of success
- B. Draw from those experiences vision statements that can now be readily seen and felt by all.
- C. Push the “wheel of learning” (high performance video module 5.7) and make “good mistakes”(module 5.8) towards the vision with every traditionally seen negative being reframed as a positive gift for another AI turn of the wheel.

IV. Case Study examples

- A. Recount great service encounters that led to important new business relationships.
1. What made those moments happen:
 - a. Did an informed, prepared mind bump into an opportunity that they recognized and seized?
 - b. Did someone have data available that it was a key or target account?
 - a. Had someone anticipated or articulated a need that a customer might have and prepared for it in advance?
 - b. Can we sort these moments into different categories and generate other hypothetical scenarios that might happen with our current target accounts to pre-determine who might be able to do what if those future opportunities arose?
 - c. Does everyone who could make an heroic effort feel like they have the power, the back up, the skills to do something extra if and when an opportunity might come along?
 2. Can we come up with provocative phrases and terms to describe this new vision exercise?
 - a. Statements that keep our best at a conscious level.
 - b. Stories with punch lines that are based on real examples and role models.
 - c. Does “make the heroic extra effort for the core, whale or gazelle account” get everyone sustainably excited? If not, what does?
- B. Do the same exercises at a management meeting reviewing the hiring process for the very best employee the company has in each job category. What can we do going forward to only hire terrific employees?
- V. Read more about AI on the web, if you google the term in quotes, there are lots of resources.