



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.13 FUELLING A POSITIVE FUTURE

Appreciative inquiry helps you to use the positive energy of the past and present to fuel a new future for your organisation. It is a way of expanding your vision beyond the limitations that you or others may have.

IN OUR LAST article, we spoke about the *art of dialogue* and how it can inspire meaningful conversations that lead to aligned action. Another way of fostering communication that creates energy and momentum is *appreciative inquiry*¹. In an article titled *Appreciative Inquiry: A Transformative Paradigm*², the underlying concepts are explained as:

Appreciative inquiry seeks what is “right” in an organisation. It is a habit of mind, heart and imagination that searches for the success, the life-giving force, the incidence of joy. It moves toward what the organisation is doing right and provides a frame for creating an imagined future that builds on and expands the joyful and life-giving realities as the metaphor and organising principle of the organisation. It is about freeing ourselves to explore beyond what we already know and understand.

We first experienced this process in a large group setting during the 2002 *Spirit in Business* conference held in New York City. The conference became much more than just “listening to speakers,” as each person had a chance to share their most inspiring work experiences and to be a part of creating a positive future for business.

While we experienced appreciative inquiry in a large group setting, it can also be practised one on one with another person, or with small groups within your organisation. The two key elements to the process are: first, have each person reflect upon and share stories about the positive aspects of their past, their values, and their hopes for the future; and second, create statements as a group that describe a positive future for the organisation.

To begin, it’s best to formulate a first set of questions that are appropriate to your organisational setting. For example, you might ask each person to reflect upon:

Recalling a time in your career when you did your very best work – when you felt the most alive and fulfilled – what were the circumstances and motivating factors? Who was involved? What was your inner motivation at the time?

¹ For more information on this concept, you can refer to: <http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu>

² By Jane Magruder Watkins and David Cooperrider in *OD Practitioner*, Volume 32, 2000. This article can be downloaded from <http://www.odnetwork.org/odponline/vol32n1/transformative.html>

What do you value about this organisation? What do you feel it has contributed to your life? And to the world?

What three wishes would you make to heighten the vitality and health of this organisation?

Then, divide the group into pairs and have each person share their stories, experiences, and points of view one-on-one with one other person. This provides everyone with the opportunity to feel that his or her experiences have been fully listened to and valued.

Once this process is complete, focus this energy by bringing the whole group together and begin to look for the themes and topics that are common to the stories that people told. These themes and topics then become the focus of the next step, which is to begin building positive future statements for the organisation. As described in the article *The Appreciative Inquiry Summit*³:

These are affirmative statements of the future organisation, stated in the present tense, that stretch the organisation toward its dreams.

Ultimately, bringing forth the positive spirit and vision of the organisation in everyone is the mark of a true leader, one who takes care of the long-term future of the company and all of society. Ramón Ollé, President of Epson Europe, a Japanese-based corporation, once told us:

Our responsibility as leaders is not about making the company survive for even the next few years. Our responsibility is to insure that the company will survive and thrive for the next 120 years. When you begin to think this way, you are really entering into the spirit of family, into the spirit of a multi-cultural environment, and into the spirit of humanity as a whole.

As a leader, appreciative inquiry begins within – to your own dreams of spirit and vision. As Ramón Ollé also told us:

Success for me means realising my dreams, making them happen. If those dreams can permeate in the organisation, then I know that I can transform the organisation.

So, ask yourself: *How can I engage myself and others in an appreciative inquiry to elicit our most inspiring and energising experiences? How can I focus this energy on creating the most positive future for the organisation and everyone touched by it?*

³ By Diana Whitney and David L. Cooperrider in *OD Practitioner*, Volume 32, 2000.

This article is an excerpt from the book, *Put Your Spirituality to Work: Spiritual-Based Leaders*. To download the full book of articles, as well as additional book chapters, articles, workbooks, and research on the subject of “spirituality and human values for leadership and work”, visit our website: www.globaldharma.org