

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry is the study and exploration of what gives life to people, teams, and organizations when they function at their best. And then to use what is learned to create a better, more positive future.

“Guided by the belief that good is the opposite of bad, people have for centuries pursued a fixation with fault and failing. Doctors have studied disease in order to learn about health. Psychologists have investigated sadness in order to learn about joy. Therapists have looked into causes of divorce in order to learn about happy marriages. And in schools and workplaces around the world, each one has been encouraged to identify, analyze, and correct our weaknesses in order to become strong.”

“This advice is well intended but misguided. Faults and failings deserve study, but they reveal little about strengths. Strengths have their own patterns.”



Buckingham and Clifton (2001). *Now, Discover Your Strengths*

Depreciative Mindset	Appreciative Mindset
What needs to be fixed?	What is working?
Organizations are problems	Organizations are possibilities
Glass is half empty	Glass is half full
See it and you'll believe it	Believe it and you'll see it
Ask questions that blame or doubt	Ask questions that create energy and hope
Deficit vocabulary	Learner vocabulary
Devaluation of personal anecdotes	Storytelling as central to understanding
Attempts to change people	Invite people to collectively build the future
Small groups of decision-makers	Large group of decision-makers
Emotionally draining	Spiritually uplifting

The Process for an Appreciative Inquiry

The core practice of an appreciative mindset is changing the focus of inquiry. The focus is shifted from understanding problems to understanding solutions. Here are the typical four parts to an appreciative inquiry if you want to identify, amplify, and grow what is working already.

- **DEFINE:** Reframe your problem into an affirmative question.
- **DISCOVER:** Share personal stories *in some detail* about (whatever topic you are studying) when you felt most alive, engaged, uplifted, and proud. Identify what factors made those experiences possible, What did you contribute to making it happen? Other people? Your organization?
- **DREAM:** Use the best of the past to dream about a better future.
- **DESIGN:** Use the insights from your storytelling and dreaming to create a better, workable, more positive future.

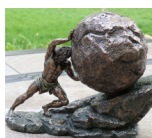
Five Tools to Nurture Community



Questions are fateful. Chose questions that open possibilities.



Study success: See what is working and ask how you can do more of it.



Words shape worlds: Use a learner, not a blaming, mindset.



Treasure maps: Create a treasure map for where you want to go.



Feedback: Be generous with positive feedback to encourage others' development.

Recommended Reading

