

*Helping our clients to grow healthy & innovative organizations.*



**RETURN ON  
ENERGY**  
Management Consultants

## Appreciative Inquiry In a nutshell



**Appreciative Inquiry** is a collaborative search to identify and understand an organization's strengths, its potentials, its greatest opportunities, and people's hopes for the future. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a philosophy, a system, and a methodology developed by David Cooperrider, a professor of Organizational Behaviour at Case Western Reserve University. David designed the AI approach through his work at the Cleveland Clinic over 30 years ago to:

- *seek the best of 'what is'*
- *ignite the collective imagination of 'what could be', and*
- *generate new knowledge which expands the "realm of the possible."*

Most importantly AI is a unique invitation - an invitation to bring people together to create the future they care about by innovating on top of the very best of the past. AI is an effective process for any planning effort, which requires strategic vision and is an empowering methodology for innovation, development, and teambuilding.

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*"The problem-solving approach directs attention to "the worst of what is" constantly examining what is wrong with the organization. It is assumed that something is broken, fragmented, not whole, and that it needs to be fixed. It is erroneously believed that if the problems are fixed, the desired future will automatically unfold."*

~~David Cooperrider

At Return On Energy (ROE), we have used the AI approach in whole system change, strategic planning initiatives, teambuilding, community engagement, leadership development and with teams tackling sensitive and business operations issues.

An Appreciative Inquiry process restores trust, generates hope, invites vision, and opens up infinite vistas of possibility. No other methodology has the potential to be as effective in addressing challenging issues and effecting transformation, because the bottom-line objective is always **to discover what gives life** - to the individual - the team - the organization - the community? In this way AI sets itself apart from the pathology-based medical model that focuses on the familiar pattern of symptom - diagnosis - treatment, or the organizational problem solving practice of focusing on problem - solution - change intervention.

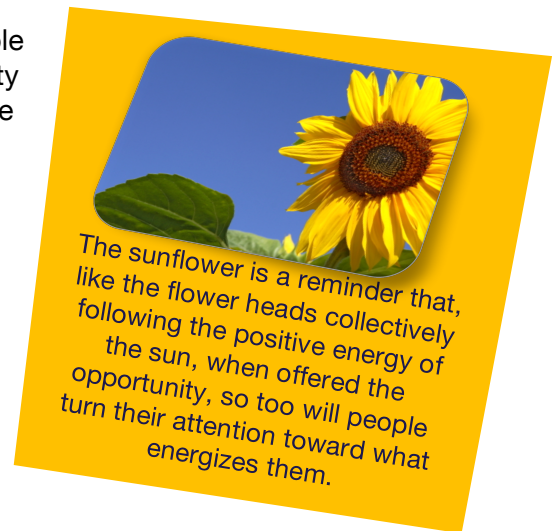
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*"We have reached the end of problem solving as a mode of inquiry capable of inspiring and sustaining human system change.*

*The future belongs to methods that affirm, compel, and accelerate learning while including the voices of all the people who will be affected by the change."*

~~David Cooperrider

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Appreciative Inquiry teaches that language creates reality and that the act of inquiry is not the prelude to an intervention, it **is** an intervention. Therefore, inquiry and change are a simultaneous occurrence.

The intention of the person conducting the inquiry and the nature of the question determines the answer; and the outcome lies in the asking, and the questions are as important as the answers. Through questions, you find what you look for and direct the flow of change. Positive, or negative, what you focus on grows and expands.

## Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

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 a group influences the group in some way.
5. People will have more confidence and comfort to journey into the future (unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (known).
6. If we carry forward parts of the past they should be the best parts.
7. The language we use creates our reality.

# The Appreciative Approach Goes Beyond Positivity

An appreciative approach is far more than just generating a positive outlook. It is a mindset that enables a person to proactively and intentionally generate human energy through the choices of what to focus attention on. It is a philosophy that, when cultivated, can be used as a tool for change.

Applying the appreciative approach is more than simply pasting a label of “good” on something that is not good or about unreasonably calling a negative situation positive. It goes beyond simply seeing the negative aspects of people or a situation. It does not mean complimenting or rewarding incompetence. The appreciative approach does not mean pretending that terrible things have not happened to people, erasing tragic events in history, or denying that reality exists. Instead it allows painful memories to be viewed as historical data rather than present reality, in order to focus on the opportunity to create a different action for a better future.

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*“Having a positive attitude isn’t like having a magic wand. It’s like having a canoe paddle. Going upstream you have to use it and work with it. Just having it isn’t good enough.”*

From ‘Appreciative Intelligence’ by Tojo Thatchenkery & Carol Metzker (2006)

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The appreciative approach is about the ability to reframe problems toward a great view of the future. By framing reality in a new and positive way, people open their minds to seeing new connections between ideas, people or situations. When they suddenly see connections that previously eluded them, they are said to have a flash of insight.



*“The purpose of AI is to transform challenges into powerful strategic questions . . . to quickly discover the strengths, best practices, and passions for improvement and innovation that already exist in your organization.”*

*~David Cooperrider*

# Igniting Positive Change

Appreciative Inquiry is three things – a **philosophy**, a **change system**, and a **methodology**. Appreciative Inquiry can be applied in many ways. Here are 3 Ways you can ignite change:

*“The rapid speed of change that we face today requires us to continually search for new and innovative solutions to the complex problems we encounter. Experience has shown us that the ability to reframe, to shift our mindset is a valuable skill for managers, leaders and individual contributors.”*

~~Frank Barrett, Author of 'Play with the Mess'

## Cultivate an Appreciative Mindset.

1

Taking steps to nurture an appreciative mindset is an essential first step to making change. If you only think of Appreciative Inquiry as a methodology, you are missing the greatest opportunity of all – to weave the philosophy into all of your actions. Cultivating an Appreciative mindset is a core leadership competency. Developing this competency will help you change how you interact every day, with every person you encounter. Your conversations will change, your view on challenges or problems will alter, and your confidence to make positive change with the people you engage with will increase. You will begin every situation by pausing and considering how you might positively reframe your perspective.

2

## Launch a collaborative, Appreciative Inquiry based change process.

Use Appreciative Inquiry methodology design-thinking process to address a change, tackle a pressing social or organizational challenge, develop a strategy with your internal and external stakeholders, or develop a new program. Essentially, Appreciative Inquiry can be applied with profound effect to any change that you need to make. It all begins by crafting generative and life giving questions.

3

## Boost your organization into an Appreciative Learning and Innovation system.

This means introducing the philosophy at a cultural level. Find the opportunities to grow health, innovation, and creativity by using a positive, appreciative-focused approach. By growing the capacity for appreciative inquiry within an organization, the consequence will be increased organizational energy. And human energy is the most important resource available to any organization.

**Maureen (Mo) McKenna**  
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**& Change Maker**

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