

*Helping our clients 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 research at the Cleveland Clinic 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 an 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.

*"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 use 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.

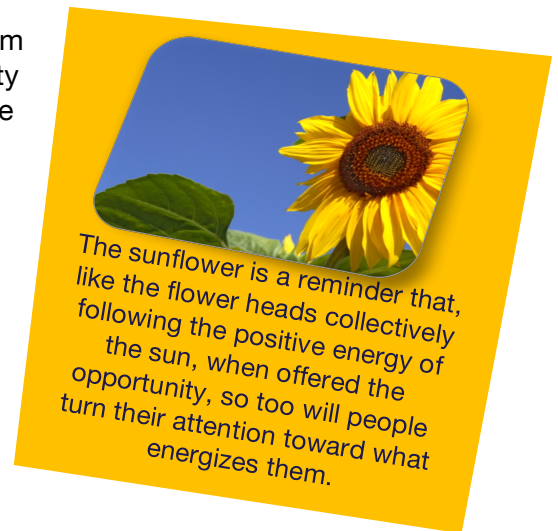
*"We have reached the end of problem solving as a mode of inquiry capable of inspiring and sustaining human system change.*

*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

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. In AI, the questions are as important as the answers. Generative questions are the gateway to discovering the outcome you seek and the compass to direct your desired change. Positive or negative, what you focus on grows and expands.



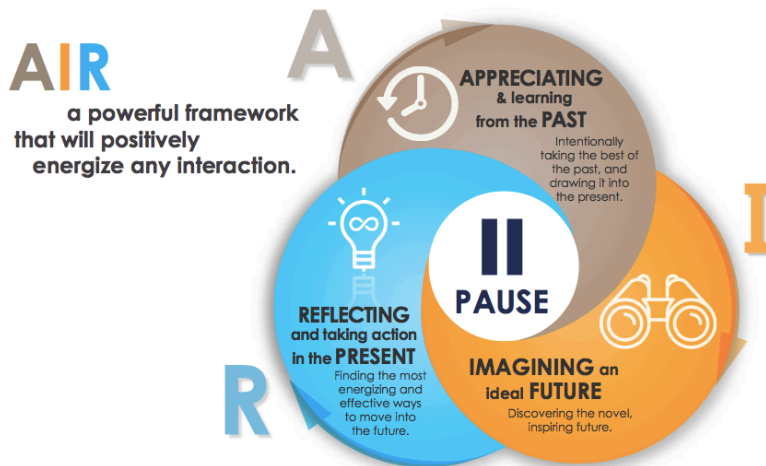
## Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry

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.
8. It is important to value differences.

Source: The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry by Sue Annis Hammond

# AIR Framework

## Preparing for a Conversation



**Pause**, take a breath, and be aware of my emotions. Set a positive intention for the conversation. Consider how I can be fully present, open-minded, and curious throughout the conversation.

**Appreciate** What can I appreciate or learn about this person and/or situation?

**Imagine** the conversation is really successful. What will we accomplish? How will I contribute to this success?

**Reflect** on my responses. What generative questions might I ask during the conversation?

### Using the AIR framework can be *child's play*

An executive from a financial institution on Wall Street was introduced to AIR during an appreciative coaching session and was asked to practice the process that night. He came in the next day very excited about a conversation he had with his three-year old son. He set the context by sharing that he and his wife both worked outside of the home and during the week, they spent only a couple of hours with their son. Every night they would have a challenge getting their son to go to bed and it would leave them exhausted and feeling like failures as parents.

#### **PAUSE** and set a positive intention

Father decides to use the **AIR** framework to guide bedtime conversation with his son.

#### **Appreciating & Learning from the PAST**

##### **Father**

*"How was daycare today?"*

*"What did you do?"*

##### **Son**

*"It was fun!"*

*"I played on the swings in the playground."*

#### **Imagining an Ideal FUTURE**

*"What are you going to do tomorrow?"*

*"That sounds really exciting."*

*"We are going to the zoo to see lions and tigers!"*

#### **Reflecting and Taking Action in the PRESENT**

*"What can you do to get ready for tomorrow?"*

*"I've got to brush my teeth and go to bed!"*

After the little boy was in bed, the father and mother shared a bottle of wine to celebrate their extraordinary parenting skills!

**Full disclosure:** Not sure what happened the next night!

**Consider using AIR framework the next time you are designing a meeting.**



# Igniting Positive Change

Appreciative Inquiry is a **philosophy**, a **change system**, and a **methodology**. When you choose to harness the power of AI, expect to inspire energizing change. These three ideas will help you develop the ability to use AI in many different situations.

*"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

## Cultivate an Appreciative Mindset.

1

Taking steps to nurture an appreciative mindset is an essential first step to inspiring 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.

Harness the power of Appreciative Inquiry's design-thinking methodology to address 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. 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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