

Achieving Team Goals with Appreciative Inquiry

Too often we focus on problem areas of our business and use diagnostic thinking to pull apart issues and understand why. Or we take a pro sand-cons approach and stagnate in a decisionless torpor. Interestingly at the organizational, team and the individual level a strengths-based approach has been found to support the fastest trajectory towards goal realisation. Appreciative Enquiry is a strengths-based framework that gives you 5 easy steps to individual, team and organizational transformation.

Appreciative Inquiry is about the search for the best in people, their organisations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives 'life' to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms.

Appreciative Inquiry involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive and instead of negation, criticism, and spiralling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, design, deliver and delight.

5 steps to achieving your goals

The following 5 steps are based on the Appreciative Enquiry theoretical framework.

1. **Discover** – this is where you get real about what the current situation is. It is like a fitness assessment or health check for your goal area. In this phase you need to closely attend to and collect accurate data on what is going on right now. The challenge is to avoid trying to change things immediately, and to avoid glossing over reality. You may need courage to look reality in the eye. Try documenting what you observe, spread sheeting, journaling, using a dictaphone or collecting a file of evidence. There is enormous power in 'just watching'. If you are focusing on a personal transformation a week or two of this stage should be sufficient. For organizational transformation include as many as possible in the observation phase.
2. **Dream** – this is your chance to get crystal clear on the vision so you know exactly where you are headed with your goals. You will need to know exactly when you have achieved your goals and what key indicators mark this achievement. The challenge is to avoid being vague (so we can let ourselves off the hook if we don't make it). When creating the vision with your staff your role is to ensure they step up and challenge themselves whilst staying realistic. Try documenting the vision, sharing it with your personal cheer squad and creating daily visual reminders to keep you attending to the end game. Try: www.mindmovies.com or Vision Board on your iPhone or ask your graphics people to create a poster for organizational change.

3. **Design** – this stage gives you the chance to do research and experiment with options before committing to your course of action. The challenge is to hold back from diving straight into the first alternative we think up. The design stage ensures when we take action it is well thought through and has the highest likelihood of leading to our goals. Try internet searches, interviewing experts or brainstorming with a team of trusted advisers. Try on some ideas for size knowing that you are not committing to action merely exploring to see if this is the avenue you will choose.
4. **Deliver** – Just Do it! Choose your course of action and get started. Set milestones and track them. Recalibrate as you go. The challenge with this stage is to view all early successes and setbacks as equally valuable feedback. Without feedback you cannot recalibrate as you go. Try noting when it's working and then do more of it. When it's not, stop and think about what you can learn and how you can polish your approach. You'll see staff opening up about errors rather than hiding them when you take a 'what can we learn here?' approach.
5. **Delight!** – this stage is about celebrating your achievements and reviewing lessons learned. The challenge is to avoid skipping this stage altogether and moving on to your next transformation project! Celebration for you, your team and the key stakeholders who assisted along the way is vital for recharging batteries and preparing people and organizations the next transformation project. Try using celebrations to turn life from a marathon into a series of sprints. You will note greater energy for future projects and increased ability to learn key lessons from this one. You'll also see better discretionary effort and reduced sick leave from staff.