

# THE APPRECIATIVE APPROACH TO GENERATING POSITIVE CHANGE

Most of us have change of some sort on our agenda. We want to get more business, work smarter, feel less stressed, get on better with our kids, lose weight, etc. So what is the most effective way to generate positive change? Focusing on our problems or pursuing possibilities?

David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva asked themselves this question in the 1980's and subsequently developed the theory of Appreciative Inquiry (often known as AI).

AI is based on the premise that we change in the direction in which we inquire. So a person who inquires into or focuses on problems will keep finding problems but a person who attempts to appreciate what is best in themselves, from the past and in the present, will discover more and more that is good and create a capacity to generate the positive changes they desire. (If this sounds familiar, think Pollyanna's Glad Game!)

Originally developed for organizations, the approach has fantastic application for considering personal change but can be difficult to live into each and every day. Many of us by nature see the glass half empty. For others, our formal education has trained us to focus on what's wrong and fix it. However, when we feel stuck or dead-ended, it can be an incredibly effective paradigm shift to move you into positive action.

## **Coaching Exercise - Where are you stuck?**

Think of a new project you want to get started (or a problem you don't seem to be able to solve, or a change you want to see happen in your life.). You're stuck in inaction, or procrastinating about writing the To Do list.

### Phase 1 - Discover to appreciate what is

Ask yourself, "What's working well right now? What is there to appreciate about this?"

Write a "Ta da!" list. Think back to the past year and write down all the things that you were really proud of. Write down the times that you were inspired and productive. Now inquire. Ask yourself, "How did I achieve that? Who was I being at that time?" and add all the personal strengths and attributes that enabled you to achieve those wonderful results.

Ask yourself, "What do I know to be true about myself that will help me achieve this thing that I want now? Where have I been successful in the past? How can I leverage my strengths?"

### Phase 2 - Dream - To imagine what might be

Create a powerful vision of what you desire. Imagine the most positive result for your challenge that you can. Dream big. Stretch yourself. Think out of the box, out of the boundaries of the past.

### Phase 3 -Design - To determine what should be

Refine your vision. Get clear on what you want and write it down in the present tense.

### Phase 4 - Destiny/Deliver - To create what will be

Think what you could do to begin to make that happen. Create your plans and strategies and to do lists, focusing on your strengths and things that you enjoy doing, things that have worked for you in the past. Move into action.