

MOTIVATING PEOPLE TO CHANGE

“Appreciative inquiry” is a way of assisting change. It is a process that begins with the assumption that discovering the best of what is motivates us to imagine something new. Organizations and people can be thought of as problems to be solved or miracles to be appreciated. (Cooperrider and Srivastva) One can use appreciative inquiry for whole organizations, departments or teams, and between persons.

On the organizational level, consider the example of a company that is divided into factions. When I toured the factory, I noticed that department heads didn't even greet each other. Yet what a wonderful product they are producing, and for steady customers. What approach would help managers to restore communication? Considering that they were avoiding each other, would they be able to express their differences? Or would they find ways to change once they started to talk about core values, successes and potential? Appreciative inquiry asks, “what is going right here?”

In a workshop I was teaching on managing conflict, appreciative inquiry gave a fresh approach to a department's dilemma. Managers in this department were puzzled by contradictory behavior of their employees. Groups pulled together well when other parts of the large organization asked for their services, yet bickering between individuals was chronic. The inconsistency made no sense to the managers, who had tried without success to talk employees out of fighting.

Concentrating on the problem behavior failed. As an alternative, what if the managers were to encourage employees to reflect on what is happening when they work together well? Invite their co-workers to tell some stories about coming through a crisis or serving the larger organization well, and then identify what contributed to these successes. At such times, what beliefs about each other do they act upon? Why have they trusted and depended upon each other? What do they realize they have in common? What have they accomplished together?

By focusing on successful patterns of communication, employees would realize that they have a reservoir of experience they could draw on to reconstruct their ways of relating. By affirming the best of what *is*, the managers could discover and teach their employees *that it is*. (Weick, 1982)

Here is appreciative inquiry on an interpersonal level: Two division heads came to loggerheads when they needed to be working together on a project. How could senior management break the jam? Both wonderful managers needed to hear about their own and each other's value. Then the two unhappy division heads needed focused discussions—even guided or mediated—in which they acknowledged each other's points of view, areas of expertise and contributions. They needed to appreciate the best of what is. Then they would have more ways and more reasons to hear each other. More patience, maybe. More appreciation.

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Quotable

“We may have different images of organizations... problems to be solved [or] miracles to be appreciated.”

*Tojo J. Thatchenkery
OD Practitioner*

Myers Briggs Type Indicator

- helps you understand how people think, act and choose.
- gives groups a common framework for discussing work issues.
- emphasizes the positive in self and others.

Have you thought of using MBTI to:

- improve teamwork?
- communicate across difference?
- understand sources of conflict?

Since passing the MBTI qualifying exam in 1997, Merryn has taken follow up workshops to enhance her skill in applying MBTI in organizations.

A client writes...

“Merryn is a wonderful resource. In a gentle but persistent manner...she helped us to...challenge our views and pointed out a different path...”

Vermont Equity (teacher professional development) Project participant