

Marilyn Manning and The Consulting Team's Leadership Tips



NOTE FROM THE CONSULTING TEAM

The New Year is a time of hope for the future when we decide what is next, how to reach that important goal, and our perennial favorite, to lose that holiday weight gain. Many of you begin each year by listing personal resolutions and professional plans for improvement. Here is an idea for you.

For the last few years The Consulting Team has integrated Appreciative Inquiry (AI) into strategic planning, team building, and improvement efforts. At its basis, Appreciative Inquiry builds organizations that people want to work in. One of its fundamental questions is "what's working now?" This approach has been invaluable for organizations that have to meet continued challenges with fewer resources.

In this issue of Leadership Tips we share the basic concepts of this positive and affirmative tool. The Consulting Team applies these ideas to the work we do and the training and coaching we provide. We describe how you can use AI's fundamentals to create a more positive and motivating work climate and develop new approaches for your 2012 plans.

Our warm regards,
Marilyn Manning, Ph.D.
(650) 965-3663

What's Working Now?

Improving with Appreciative Inquiry

"You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and latch on to the affirmative. Don't mess with Mister In-Between."

~Lyrics by Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer

Despite its unusual name, **Appreciative Inquiry** is simply a technique to find ideas and ways to do work and to help organizations become better. Its main method to identify possible innovations is to encourage people to tell stories about what has worked best for them in the past.



These stories may be about the best team experiences or employees may tell about why they loved a particular leader. An anecdote may relate what produced the best group results last month or last year. Once these are collected, the storytellers discuss their findings in order to generate clear ideas of what works and how to make work or leadership or teamwork even better. This makes Appreciative Inquiry a potent change methodology that can build on the strengths of your organization.

Something else always happens during this story collection and discussion, It is generally impossible for people to talk about their positive experiences without reliving the joy and enthusiasm they felt. In the very process of Appreciative Inquiry, participants develop their own momentum toward creating a more positive organization.

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to organizational change based on strengths rather than weaknesses, on a vision of what is possible rather than an analysis of what is not.

*~David Cooperrider, Case Western Reserve University,
AI Pioneer*

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Since we all use problem-solving processes to improve how we function, a lot is usually accomplished by clearly defining problems and finding ways to correct them. However, this process is limited. When groups of people problem solve, they usually concentrate on what is wrong and try to “fix” the situation. They may not consider what is right and how to build on it. They may not focus on what more they might create.

Appreciative Inquiry expands these improvement efforts by offering another approach, based on different assumptions. It’s easier to foster change by increasing positive qualities rather than by finding fault and fixing it. Another AI assumption is that people who investigate the best of their work will create their own momentum for producing even more positive results.

The Consulting Team sees the proof of these assumptions when we facilitate groups through AI processes. The energy level in the room, the smiles on participants’ faces, and the quality of their exercises all show us the power of accentuating the positive.

Appreciative Inquiry is a planning process with four dimensions we call the 4 Ds. (See *Tools of the Trade: The 4 “Ds”*):

Discovery: Remembering and appreciating your current and prior bests

Dream: Imagining what might be and its positive results

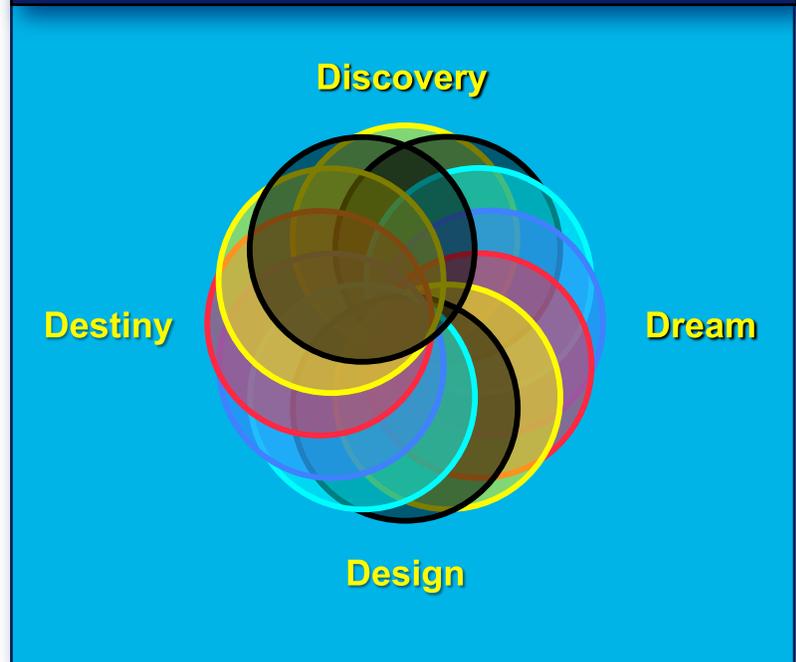
Design: Constructing the future state as a group, based on what’s working

Destiny: Changing or adapting to the future state, then solidifying and sustaining

This method for discovering the power of the positive can be applied to most business scenarios. The Consulting Team uses a simple exercise of “Sharing Prouds,” influenced by the Discovery stage of the 4 Ds. We witness it building teamwork and recognizing and appreciating each individual’s efforts as well as the group’s as a whole.

Organizations can augment their current strategic plans by using the Discovery and Dream

Tools of the Trade: The 4 “Ds”



stages to build a more innovative common vision. By doing this they rediscover their past successes, which may form the basis for imagining a better future. When planning strategically, you can use Appreciative Inquiry to engage your stakeholders with a positive outlook. You may then experience less resistance to strategic change from employees.

On the verge of a bright new year, consider asking your team, “What’s working?” and “What are you most proud of accomplishing last year?”

“When The Consulting Team facilitated the San Rafael City Council’s Priority-Setting Retreat, we reviewed City budgetary constraints. They then suggested we share what we were proud of accomplishing in the past year, despite resource restraints. As Department Directors and City Council members shared their achievements, we enjoyed all the successes we garnered for or with our community. This increased our feeling of teamwork, as it became clear these accomplishments were completed by partnerships or team efforts.”

~Nancy Mackle, City Manager, City of San Rafael

The Consulting Team's Planning Resources

The Consulting Team provides many workshops that integrate Appreciative Inquiry ideas and processes to increase skills and motivation. Here are a few of our current offerings:

Appreciative Inquiry: This workshop provides a different approach to improving results. It assists groups to succeed by finding what's working vs. what's wrong. AI offers powerful techniques to both managers and staff with its fresh, positive process to improvement. Learn to apply this process to support effective change, open communication, and positive morale, even in a challenging environment. It is available as a half-day basics class or a full-day applications workshop.

Value-Based Customer Service: What can move your customers' perception of your service from lukewarm to red hot? What will help motivate your teams to take a fresh, effective approach to satisfying customers' expectations? This full-day workshop builds on the best of your service practices to develop a value-based, highly skilled customer-facing workforce.

Strategic Planning: Strategic thinking and planning can align your organization or team for purposeful and effective change. Clear direction, roles, responsibilities, and values resolve conflicting priorities and ineffectual initiatives. Developed with your organization's input and collaboration, strategic planning creates greater teamwork, focus, and productivity. The process includes assessment,

facilitation, and documentation. We provide this process through meeting facilitation or a workshop format.

Building Better Teams: Do you have a diverse group who must work together to achieve common goals? Are you challenged by building trust and keeping members motivated? As a half- or full-day session, this workshop is designed to help you build better teams using practical tools, communication tips, and a restructuring model. It encourages diverse individuals to work together cohesively and productively.

Meeting Facilitation: We can apply elements of Appreciative Inquiry to facilitating meetings that build teams, increase energy and commitment, and accomplish goals.

About Leadership Tips:

Leadership Tips is a periodic newsletter to help deal with the difficult issues in today's busy and hectic work environment. To see past **Leadership Tips** go to www.theconsultingteam.com and select Newsletters

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For more information on this new lineup, please contact m@theconsultingteam.com or claine@theconsultingteam.com.

Communication Quirks: Buzz Words

Effective communications is one area of The Consulting Team's work. If you want to improve customer service, teamwork, or implement plans or policy, good communications is a must. A humorous side of this work is yearly published lists that point out words and phrases that have passed their usefulness. Our favorite is the **Lake Superior State University Banished Words List of 2012** (<http://www.lssu.edu/banished/current.php>).

Here are a few recent picks you may want to avoid:

- **Amazing** got the most votes, seeming to replace "awesome" on lists of yesteryear and selected for its overuse and inaccuracies. Almost everything just can't be amazing.
- **Shared Sacrifice** was picked in this election year because it is "usually used by a politician who wants other people to share in the sacrifice so he/she doesn't have to."
- **The New Normal** is often applied to the economy and "used to justify bad trends in society and convince people they are powerless to slow or to reverse those trends."
- **Thank you in advance**, a condescending, challenging way to say, "Since I already thanked you, you have to do this."



Elaine
Schmitz, M.A.
Leadership Tips
Editor



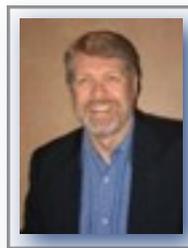
**Marilyn
Manning,**
Ph.D.
CEO



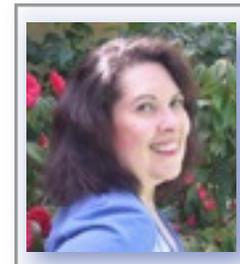
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