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Six Questions that can Lift Your Leadership, Shape Your Strategy, and Transform Your Organization

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The starting point is to ask the right questions.

INTRODUCTION

"We used to be a wellspring of innovation," said the C-suite leader as he sat at the conference table in his glass-walled office. "But we've lost the habit. I've got to get that started again."

Over the last several years, the executive went on to explain, the team members at his manufacturing firm had focused on important tasks like opening new plants and transferring major parts of their operation from one location to a larger, better-equipped facility. They'd made these dramatic moves while maintaining the exceptional quality of their product and meeting their clients' increasing demands. But along the way, they'd been too busy to invest in the ongoing research and development needed to keep new ideas flowing. They'd lost their spirit of innovation, and he wanted to bring it back.

How does a leader create a culture of innovation? You cannot do so by simply asking your team members to be more innovative. This executive knew that fostering innovation would require shifting the mindset of his organization. And a slow shift wasn't going to work.

In Latin America, a pharmaceutical company came to the realization that the growth strategies that had worked in the past wouldn't work for the future: they needed new ideas, and more involvement from consumers and government officials.

Further north, a university in Florida dusted off the strategic plan for their college of nursing and realized it was five years out of date. The field of healthcare had changed dramatically in those years, and the college knew it needed to move aggressively to create and implement a new plan. They needed the college's faculty and staff, as well as the external health care providers with whom their students worked, on board immediately.

Elsewhere, the leaders of a heavy machinery manufacturing company found themselves staring at a problem: a workforce that had grown disillusioned and angry. Engagement was low, and genuine effort at solutions had proven elusive. The company's leadership and the union-led employees needed to find new, cooperative solutions for building a better future.

In Chicago, a young leader at a global organization was tasked with identifying worldwide best practices for the marketing of a specific product. Her colleagues on other teams were willing to talk but struggled to articulate what had made them successful. The ideas she collected were superficial, so she knew she needed to change her approach.

What do these stories have in common?

Despite different geographies, industries, and roles, these leaders found the strategies they needed to

"What people think of as the moment of discovery is really the discovery of the question."
- Jonas Salk

move forward because they asked six simple questions.

These questions aren't magic, but they are powerful. When adapted to meet the needs of your company or organization, they can point you in the right direction and align your team in a way that makes achieving your goals not just possible, but inevitable.

The questions help leaders find the starting place for meeting a company's challenges. But they reveal more than just a starting place, they can also mobilize the organization in a positive way to address these challenges.

So what are these paradigm-shifting questions? In short form, they are:

- What led me here?
- What is my high point?
- What do I value?
- What is changing?
- What's the best future I can imagine?
- What will it take to get us there?

Those questions may seem basic, but don't underestimate what their answers will tell you. Their genius is not in the words themselves, but in the attitude with which you ask them. When well-framed, and asked with the spirit of discovery, they open the door to moments of insight you could not have achieved otherwise. When teams work through the questions together, what emerges is a shared understanding that can fast-forward them into the future they want.

About this eBook

Throughout the rest of this book, we'll explore each of these questions and show ways you can adapt the questions to fit your organizational needs. We'll highlight how to analyze the answers you receive, and how to identify direction and set strategy based on the patterns you find.

These questions are based on Appreciative Inquiry, a positive approach to leadership development and organizational change. In the next sections, we'll explain the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry, that give these questions their transformative power.

We'll work through each question, offering variants and potential uses, and sharing stories drawn from our consulting work and the experiences of business leaders who have applied the questions with remarkable results. Finally, we'll discuss applications of Appreciative Inquiry; you'll find it to be a useful tool for both big picture thinking and daily leadership of your company.

Let's get started!

About the Authors

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What is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a positive approach to leadership and organization change that is used to help organizations of all sizes move strategically toward a shared vision for the future, whether that's creating a new strategic plan, growing in some area or capacity, or developing individuals and teams.

AI accomplishes this by engaging organizational stakeholders, everyone from the executive suite to the factory floor, without concern for how many years of seniority they have or how new they are to the team. In many circumstances, AI is also used to bring in external voices – clients, patients, vendors, community stakeholders – in a safe and engaging format that expands the organization's understanding.

AI is distinct from traditional problem-solving approaches, which often begin with the idea that people and organizations are fundamentally "broken" and need to be "fixed." In traditional methods, the process usually involves very different questions:

- Identifying the key problems – what's wrong?

- Analyzing the root causes of failure – what caused the problem?

- Searching for possible solutions – what ideas do we have for fixing the problem?

- Developing an action plan – what are the next steps?

In contrast, the underlying assumption of Appreciative Inquiry is that people and organizations are always evolving, growing, and moving toward the future. AI focuses the whole organization on identifying its greatest assets, capacities, capabilities, resources, and strengths – to create new possibilities for change, action, and innovation. Instead of searching for problems, AI focuses on strengths and the future. This changes the questions, and of course it also changes the answers you get.

Don't leaders need to address problems?

Sometimes it is important to recognize and directly address problems. It is foolish to pretend problems don't exist. An AI process, however, helps organizations reframe problems so that they become an expression of a desired future. For example, imagine you work for a software company whose sales have tanked. Asking, "Why are sales so low?!?" is one way to address the problem. However, if you ask the questions below, you may find the answers point you much closer to actionable next steps to reach your sales goal.

- "When our sales have been at their best, what made it possible?"

- "What would it look like for us to be the world's best high-volume sales team in the future?"

Appreciative Inquiry invites you to create the future you want by building on the best of the past. In the process, problems are solved, challenges are met, risks are mitigated, and weaknesses are overcome by strengths. Not bad, huh?

Is Appreciative Inquiry legit?

We don't blame you for asking that question. In fact, it's natural to bring some skepticism to the process because your business school training, and your real world experience, has always taught you to start with a SWOT analysis, solve all the problems, and then think about the future. But research by the Center for Positive Organizations and our Return on Values Initiative at the CVDL shows that focusing on strengths is a more powerful approach to reaching your goals. Problem solving approaches can improve systems incrementally, but if we want to go beyond the ordinary, strengths-based approaches deliver superior levels of performance.

AI has been used globally by public and private organizations of all sizes, including to address sales growth at Merck; to improve customer service at British Airways; to pursue sustainable value creation with Wal-Mart; to develop leadership in the United States Navy; to redesign organizational divisions at World Vision; and to improve cost, quality and cycle time at John Deere. We've seen it in action in healthcare, manufacturing, service industries, education, nonprofits and governmental organizations, publicly-traded and privately-held companies, and teams of all sizes. It works.

AI was developed at Case Western Reserve University by Dr. David Cooperrider, Dr. Suresh Srivastva, Dr. Ron Fry, and others, in the 1980s; it's since been used by thousands of organizations, involving perhaps millions of stakeholders, making our six questions some of the most asked questions in the world.

If you want to explore AI more thoroughly, please see the recommended resources in the back of this eBook.

"The easiest way to predict the future is to create it."
— Abraham Lincoln

Why does AI work?

Appreciative Inquiry draws from the fields of psychology, leadership, and organizational behavior to create a methodology that is nimble and effective. We'll share some of the core principles of AI below, but first, let us illustrate with an example.

When Jim was completing his Ph.D. at Case Western Reserve University, he was called in to help the oil industry company BP with their service stations, called BP Pro Care, they ran throughout Ohio at the time. A year before, the leaders at BP Pro Care completed a customer satisfaction survey, and the results were positive: 79% of customers were satisfied or highly satisfied. Pretty good, considering customers often receive bad news from their mechanic!

But 79% wasn't enough, so BP Pro Care launched a study into the other 21%. They began to research customers who reported dissatisfaction with their service, and what they heard was predictable for anyone who has ever owned a car: the repairs took longer than expected, cost more than expected, didn't solve the real problem. They also heard that the coffee in their lounge was terrible, the chairs were uncomfortable, and the cars were sometimes returned with dirty interiors.

Armed with that information, BP Pro Care began to warn its mechanics of what

can go wrong. Months later, they conducted a second satisfaction survey to check their progress and found, to their surprise, that the bottom had dropped out of the satisfaction scores. Even more customers were dissatisfied with their service.

That's when BP Pro Care called Jim and his colleagues. Using AI methodology, the consultants switched the questions and began to ask satisfied customers about the great service they received. Some of the answers were predictable – fast and affordable service, for example. Others were surprising: customers liked that the phone was answered quickly, that they could talk directly to their mechanic, and that the mechanic would call with an update, even if the work was not yet complete.

The leaders began to train on these customer service techniques. Mechanics became so quick to answer the phone that they were literally diving to pick up the receiver. They made more calls to customers; and they continued to provide fast and affordable service.

Within months, BP Pro Care's satisfaction ratings had not just recovered, they went through the roof. They had 95% fully-satisfied customers within 8 months.

Core Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

BP Pro Care found that when you ask the right questions, you get the results you want. But why did it work? To answer that, let's explore some of the underlying principles that make AI effective.

Words Create Worlds

AI is based on the principle that organizations are networks of people. When people begin to talk with one another, they co-construct the structures, strategies and processes they need to move forward.

David Cooperrider coined the phrase "**words create worlds**." Get people talking about a compelling shared future, and you begin creating new levels of understanding and the future in the process. When customers and mechanics were asked what was working well, the words they used created a service approach that fostered even more satisfaction

The fact of co-creation through conversation requires that AI is a **collaborative** process: you cannot do AI on your own. It works best when you involve all stakeholders, and, if possible, all members of the organization.

AI is a rich process because it intentionally engages diverse groups of people. The varied perspectives make conversation robust, spark fresh ideas, and stimulate creativity. In this way, AI builds whole-system awareness, learning, and capacity.

Inquiry Leads to Change

AI is focused on inquiry, question-asking. Perhaps the most important thing a great leader of change can do is ask good questions rather than always provide answers.

When we are too quick to offer a solution, we miss hearing the other – often better – ideas that are in the room. Executives who learn to ask questions and listen well have an advantage over answer-giving colleagues because they are better learners. Hotel magnate Bill Marriott said the four most important words in business are, "What do you think?"

Questions unleash learning, and learning is a catalyst to change. The moment we ask a question, people get talking, ideas begin to flow, and new strategies start to take shape.

Most importantly, "**we move in the direction of the questions we ask.**" If we repeatedly ask what's broken and who is at fault, we may or may not find out, but we will spend a lot of time talking about deficiencies and disappointments, and eventually they will define us. In contrast, if we consistently ask who we are when we're at our best, and what we want for the future, we'll talk at length about strengths and possibilities, and begin to move in new directions we previously couldn't see. In this sense, inquiry leads to change, that's why the next principle is so important.

Appreciation Adds Energy

As the leaders at BP found, stories of failure teach you what not to do, but they do not necessarily teach you how to succeed. Focusing on strengths and opportunities inspires creativity and innovation, like rocket fuel; it gets us where we want to go faster, better and stronger.

By flipping the question from focusing on dissatisfaction to satisfaction, BP Pro Care raised their scores to nearly unimaginable levels.

To appreciate is to recognize the best in someone or something and to add value for the future. It requires keeping a focus on what works and what is possible.

It is about "**positive image, positive action**." Holding a positive image in mind moves us toward positive action. This concept is used frequently in sports psychology, as visualization. Legendary golfer Jack Nicklaus wrote that "I never hit a shot even in practice without having a sharp in-focus picture of it in my head."

The Future is Now

The final principle of AI we want to introduce is that AI is designed to transform the present by focusing on the future. It enables organizations to co-create a positive, shared future, here and now, in real time.

But not just any future.

AI methodology helps organizations to flourish. It is designed to create an elevating purpose, collective confidence and practical strategies to advance the triple bottom line: people, planet, profit.

In the next section, we'll dig into the six simple questions, and show how to adapt them to construct a shared, positive future.

Consider This

Take a second and ask yourself the following question:

Am I feeling tired today?

Most people, if asked that question, answer yes. And then their thoughts turn toward the feeling of being tired; they become aware of any sense of tiredness they feel, even though moments ago it hadn't crossed their mind that they were tired.

Our minds move in the direction of the questions we ask. Now, imagine instead that you asked:

What makes me feel energized today?

Pausing to answer this question can reset your energy level, and help you tune in to what you really appreciate and value. This little exercise is a good reminder that the questions we ask shape not just the answers we receive, but our attitudes as well.

Exploring the six questions of Appreciative Inquiry

We introduced the six simple questions earlier. In this section we'll work through each question, offering ways to adapt the question to address your end goal. But before we dive into the questions, we have to talk about a seventh question: the question that drives your process. We call that your "target topic" – the central question that prompts your AI work.

The Target Topic

Almost any organization could learn something from asking AI's six questions in their most general form. But to actually reach the results you want requires a clear focus. In the opening section of this book, we shared a few key examples of target topics:

- A manufacturing firm wanted to **improve innovation**

- A college of nursing needed a **strategic plan**

- A heavy machinery manufacturer needed new, **cooperative solutions for a disengaged workforce**

- A pharmaceutical company wanted a **new growth strategy**

- A global organization needed to find **best practices for a product's marketing**

- And of course, BP Pro Care wanted to **improve customer satisfaction ratings**

These target topics are diverse, as are their natural end-products. Establishing clarity around this central question, the target topic, is vitally important to creating a successful AI process.

What Makes a Good Target Topic?

It's tempting to rush past the selection of a target topic, but to do so would be a mistake. Without absolute clarity around your target topic, it is impossible to approach the questions in a way that will allow you to reach the outcomes your organization needs.

Target topics should be on-subject, inspiring, and appropriately provocative.

They should be on-subject in that the topic should shine a spotlight on the specific focus of your inquiry.

Target topics should be inspiring and provocative in that they should challenge stakeholders to dream bigger, beyond the edge of what they previously imagined.

Earlier we listed "improve innovation" or "new growth strategy" as target topics. That is a short-hand expression of the target topic; a fuller expression would ask participants to consider what it would look like to be a "world-class hub of innovation" or to develop a "record-setting new growth strategy." Language like this inspires us to dream of a rewarding future, and challenges us to think past the limitations that normally blind us.

In selecting your target topic, seek language that is clear and on-subject, and also excites. Appreciative Inquiry methodology encourages inspired thinking. Putting provocative, compelling language to the target topic is the first step.

Once you have clarity around your target topic, you can begin adapting the six questions to focus on your area of inquiry.

Question 1: What led me here?

This first question is designed in part to get people talking. It's kind of a warm-up pitch.

But there's more to this question than a "warm up." Reflecting on what brought you to a company or team or relationship helps you reconnect with the positive qualities that attracted you at the beginning. Most of the time, when you start work for a new organization, there's a powerful attractor that drew you there: you were excited for the mission, the new responsibilities, or even the convenience or benefits of the job. Each of those are important observations to make.

A fuller expression of the question might be something like:

Think back to when you first decided to join our company, what attracted you? What were your initial excitements and impressions?

We think of the AI questions as being "nimble" or "agile" – adaptable to your circumstances. Here are two brief examples:

For a team within a larger organization:

Think back to when you first joined this team, what about the opportunity attracted you to this team, among other opportunities in the organization? What were your initial excitements and impressions?

For volunteers with a nonprofit:

Think back to when you first became connected to our nonprofit. In what way did you connect? (As a volunteer, a donor, a client?) What attracted you to the organization? What compelled your interest? What were your initial excitements and impressions?

There are no wrong answers to this question. "What attracted you?" might be in-

come, or benefits, people, mission, values, industry, company reputation, potential for advancement or impact, or the nature of the work itself, but whatever it is, it's a reflection of what's best about the organization and what you want more of for the future.

Question 2: What is the high point of the past?

In questions 2-6, we focus more on our target topic. This question, which should be carefully adapted to fit the target topic, evokes "here's what's working" answers.

Remember the BP Pro Care story? To find out how to improve customer satisfaction, they need to look at the best of what they were already doing. Their second question was something like:

For employees

During your time working with BP Pro Care, I'm sure you've had some ups and downs, some peaks and valleys, some high points and low points. I'd like you to reflect for a moment on a high point experience when you delivered really great customer service, a time when you felt most alive, most engaged, most proud of your involvement. Tell the story. What happened? What were the forces and factors that made the experience possible?

What was it about you that made it a great service experience?

Who were significant others and what was it about them that made it a high point?

What was it about BP Pro Care as an organization that made it a customer service high point for you?

If you want to interview customers, the

question would have to be slightly adapted. Likewise, questions can be adapted for new employees who may not yet have a great customer service story of their own. In that case, you could ask them to think of a time outside their current role when they delivered great customer service, and share that story.

The important guideline is to adapt the question so that it fits both the target topic and the person who is answering it. Here is another example of adapting the second question to fit a different target topic:

For focusing on innovation:

In your role at our company, you have exposure to customer needs, supplier needs, employee needs, and the needs of other firm stakeholders, like the communities in which we operate. In this capacity, I'm sure you have had some ups and downs, high points and low points, some peaks and valleys. I'd like you to reflect for a moment on a high point experience in your career with the company, as it relates to exceptional innovation, a time when you felt most alive, most engaged, proudest of your involvement… tell the story. What happened? What were the forces and factors that made the experience possible?

Did you notice that in both the examples, the question acknowledges the person may have experienced some low points? Again, AI does not ask people to ignore problems, nor does it minimize negative experiences. Instead, during the time of an AI project, participants are asked to share the positive experiences as a way to stay "focused on forward."

The question also asks people to tell stories. This is important; we coach participants to interview each other, and draw stories out of each other. To ask for more detail. To look for the descriptive words that explain the high point experience. *Words create worlds*: these stories are important. That's where the real learning takes place.

Question 3: What do I value?

The next question continues collecting information about the organization when it is at its best, this time by focusing on the characteristics, values, and behaviors that are considered most important.

Here is the fuller version of question three:

For exploring innovation

Next, I want you to think about some things you value deeply.

First, what do you value most about yourself? If we were to have a conversation with the three people that know you best, what would they say are the greatest strengths you bring to our company?

Second, when it's at its best, what do you value most about your work?

Finally, what do you value most about our organization? No matter what else changes, what are the things you want to preserve as we move into the future?

When we walk participants through this question, we often ask them to respond without being bashful or shy. They know best the personal qualities that make them good at their work, and we want those clearly identified through this question so they can be affirmed and amplified going forward.

Getting clear on what is valued helps identify an organization's "positive core" – the powerful, cultural forces that make work meaningful, drive engagement and high-performance, and deliver value to employees and customers. This is the essential difference between AI and other approaches to leadership development and organization change. Rather than exploring the root causes of failure, AI begins by inquiring deeply into the root causes of success - all the forces and factors, resources and relationships, strategies

and systems, that enable the organization to sustain peak performance around the target topic.

Studying root causes of success builds confidence and positive energy, strengthens relationships among people, promotes fine-grained learning about how to do things right, and provides a tsunami of ideas, insights, connections, and possibilities for the future.

As with all the questions, this question can be adapted to fit the circumstance. In work with a college of nursing, for example, the faculty members were asked to think about question three in relationship to their work with students, patients, and community members. Adapting the language to fit the organization and target topic sparks more thoughtful responses from participants.

Question 4: What is changing?

This question grounds the topic in the realities of the current situation. It gives participants an opportunity to notice industry-wide trends and other marketplace factors that are influencing your work.

Adapting question 4 to fit a customer service target topic might look something like:

We know we exist in a dynamic and changing environment. What do customers expect from customer service now, that they didn't expect a few years ago? What trends do you see emerging over the next five years that will have the greatest influence on us becoming an exceptional customer service organization -- things like competition, customer needs, leadership, technology, collaboration, communication, etc.?

A health care firm might ask about how insurance and legislation are changing expectations. A manufacturing firm that wanted to improve leadership and union relationships might ask about what families need now that is different than the past, and how the current political climate influences expectations.

This question plays an important role in transitioning the questions from being focused on the past, to a focus on a positive, successful future. Without this question, participants might be tempted to put a new spin on old ideas in the next question. But, because question four prompts thoughts about industry trends and shifting marketplaces, participants are inspired to think about how these factors necessitate new ideas and intentional change.

Question 5: What's the best future I can imagine?

Inspired by the past, and aware of the shifting present, this question pushes participants to dream of the best possible future for the organization and its people.

This question is intentionally framed in a playful way that stimulates imagination and removes the normal roadblocks that prevent us from seeing possibilities. Here's an example from a health care company, whose target topic was exceptional in-patient services:

Imagine that tonight you fall into a deep relaxing sleep, and you don't wake up until 18 months from today. When you awake, you see that a miracle has occurred. Major changes have taken place, and the in-patient services program has become everything you ever hoped it could be. You can truly say, without reservation, that this is the organization of your dreams. What do you see? What does it look like? What's go-

ing on around you? What's happening that's new and different? What do you see in terms of values, people, quality, efficiency, growth, retention, profitability, etc.?

Here is another example, from a college of nursing focused on creating a five-year strategic plan:

Imagine that tonight you fall into a deep relaxing sleep, and you don't wake up until the year 2020. When you awake, you see that a miracle has occurred. Major changes have taken place, and college of nursing is recognized globally as the world's premier nursing school, truly equipping students to serve with skill and compassion. The college and its program have become everything you ever hoped they could be. You can truly say, without reservation, that this is the nursing school of your dreams.
What do you see? What does it look like? What's going on around you? What's happening that's new and different? What do you see in terms of purpose, values, systems, people, partnerships, patient response, ways of working, rankings, others?

Both questions begin with imagining you fall into a deep sleep for an extended period of time. The length of time varies depending on the target topic: an organization that wants to see change happen fast will choose a shorter period of time than an organization that is creating a "slow-but-steady" five-year plan. Regardless, the "wake up" moment happens when the organization has reached a mountain top that exceeds expectations.

As with other questions, question 5 asks people to elaborate, sharing as much detail as possible. Essentially, we ask participants to build an imaginary world, and tell us all about it. The structures that make that world work are essential to understanding how this dream can become a

reality, which leads us to question six.

Question 6: What will it take to get us there?

The final question takes a step toward actionable strategies. An elaborated version of the question might be something like:

If you could develop or transform the organization in any way, to help us reach our target topic, what three wishes, in order of priority, would you make?

Here is another version, focused on innovation, that gives more specific timelines:

Think about the vision you just described – your vision for our company as a center of world-class innovation in 2020. What are the 3-5 most important actionable strategies we must implement over the next 3 years to launch us toward your vision?

We sometimes ask participants to "imagine they have a magic wand that can grant three wishes." As in the last question, this imaginary thinking helps remove perceived obstacles. As you move toward actionable strategies, it's easy to begin thinking about all the ways these new ideas are impossible. Focusing instead on what it would take to make them possible can help find real strategies that will actually get you there over time.

Now what?

Now that you have a good understanding of the Appreciative Inquiry questions, you may be wondering how exactly to use them. We'll cover that in the next chapter, as well as providing some brief examples of how they could be put into practice in your company.

Putting AI into Practice

We've referred to the AI questions as "nimble" and "agile." Once you grow comfortable with them, you will be agile as well, finding countless new ways to integrate them into your professional and personal life.

In their book *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*, Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom identify seven "change agendas" for which AI is well-suited:

Organizational change, including culture transformation, strategic planning, and business development issues like innovation, growth or customer satisfaction

Inter-organizational capacity building, including merger integration, alliance building, and resource sharing

Community development, including participatory planning, economic development, asset mapping, and reform

Global transformation, including global organizing, multi-local planning, and awareness raising

Small group development, including meeting management, instructional design, and team building

Inter-group change, including conflict resolution, process improvement

Personal/relational transformation, including leadership development, performance appraisal, career planning, and relationship enrichment

Using Appreciative Inquiry for Performance Appraisal

Annual performance reviews can often feel backward-looking and punitive, especially if the manager focuses on failures and what should have been done differently. While managers may need to address areas of improvement, an AI performance review can feel less threatening, and more focused on opportunities for positive growth. Here, in abbreviated form, are the six questions adapted for a performance appraisal.

What led me here? What attracted you to this work and this role?

What is the best of the past? I know this past year has had some high points, and you've probably had a few low points as well. Think of a time when you felt particularly great about your contribution. What happened? What was it about you that made things so great? Who else was involved and what was it about them that made things so great?

What do I value? If I were to ask your three closest teammates what they appreciate most about you, what would they tell me are your greatest strengths? What do you value most about your work, personally and professionally? And what do you value about our organization?

What is changing? Considering all that's happened in the last year, and all that's changing in our industry, what shifts do you see? How is your role changing? What internal or external trends are shaping the way we do our work?

What's the best future you can imagine? Imagine it's next year this time, and you've received a 5-star review. Your accomplishments are undeniable. What would that look like? Describe in detail the initiatives we've created and led, the results we've seen, the relationships that have formed, the products and services we now offer. (Note – if you need to address a performance concern, such as low sales numbers, you might include that here as well: "our sales numbers are off the charts.")

What will it take to get us there? Now, imagine you have three wishes you can grant. What would they be, in order of priority, to make this vision become a reality?

Once you've worked through these questions together, you can move from the interview script into an open discussion on next steps, timelines, and accountability processes.

In addition to knowing when you might use AI, it's important to understand how to use it. Here are the most common methods:

Free-standing, 1:1 interview: Use the AI questions individually for performance feedback or other individualized applications. See sidebar for an example.

Small group work: With a team or sub-team, AI can be used in an abbreviated format as part of a team meeting, or in a fuller format as part of a retreat of extended planning session. In this case, after participants interview one another, a facilitator leads a process to explore the results. The team works together to co-create next steps and strategies.

Mobilized inquiry: Train a team to interview a broad section of your organization, customers, or community. A project team must then gather the results and analyze it for the best ideas and patterns. Depending on the size of the inquiry, help from a trained AI practitioner may be needed for the analysis.

AI Summits: A summit brings together a whole organization, or a representative sample, in a multi-day format. After completing interviews, small group work helps identify overall themes and ideas. The par-ticipants are then reorganized into working groups that can develop prototypes and shape clear strategies and timelines for implementation. Summits can be conducted with hundreds, and even thousands of participants, but professional facilitation is required. They are an exceptional tool for winning wide-spread support when large-scale change or strategy shifts are needed. They are also faster, better, and cheaper than traditional approaches to large-scale change.

Mixed methods: Many organizations employ all four of the AI methods listed above. For example, they might use a handful of 1:1 interviews to narrow in on a target topic. Then a small group might flesh out the idea further, working for clarity on the topic. Mobilized inquiry might be used to bring in customer or vendor insights, or draw in perspectives from employees who live globally. Finally, an AI summit with a representative sample of the organization could be used to design the strategies, systems, and processes needed to implement the new shared vision of the future. The organization might do follow-up 1:1 or small group interviews six months later, to evaluate progress and adapt.

Expanding Your Appreciative Capacity

This eBook has only covered the tip of what makes Appreciative Inquiry a powerful tool for developing leaders and shaping change at your organization.

If you'd like to continue in your study of AI, we recommend the following books:

The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change, by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom

The Appreciative Inquiry Summit:
A Practitioner's Guide for Leading Large-Group Change, by James Ludema, Diana Whitney, Bernard Mohr, and Thomas Griffin.

Additionally, the Center for Values-Driven Leadership offers regular workshops that can be taken individually, along with opportunities to earn a certificate in Appreciative Inquiry. Learn more about these courses on the following page.
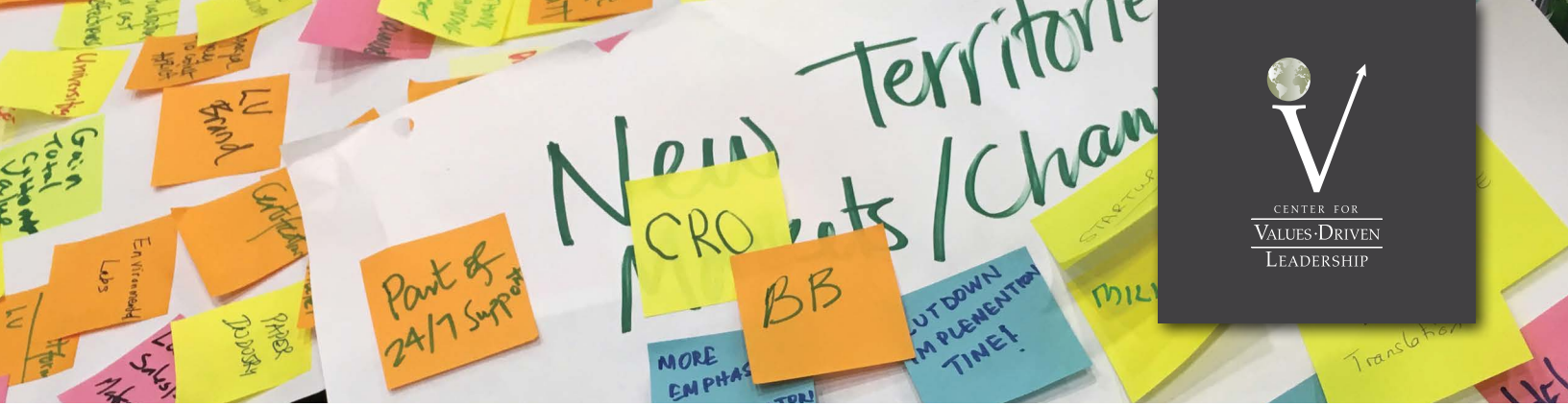
Appreciative Inquiry:
Executive Education Workshops

In our workshops and executive education training sessions, you learn the tools of Appreciative Inquiry in a premier, hands-on learning environment. Walk away equipped to develop yourself and others as exceptional leaders, build high-engagement organizations, and drive performance by providing clear, strategic leadership. Our programs are built on our evidence-based research into excellence in leadership, culture, and change combined with the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a positive approach to leadership development and organizational change used by companies worldwide.

Take the courses individually, then apply what you've learned to earn your certificate.

Find full descriptions along with the next scheduled dates at **cvdl.ben.edu/ai**.

Intro to Appreciative Inquiry

Change the way you think and you'll change your results. Reframe your leadership through Appreciative Inquiry in this introductory session.

Appreciative Inquiry for Coaching & Feedback

Help others reach their full potential by learning to use the Appreciative Inquiry method for coaching and giving feedback.

Leading Collaborative Change with Certificate Option

Master the art of leading collaborative change and help your organization become more agile in this hands-on workshop for individuals and teams, with an option to earn your Certificate in Appreciative Inquiry.

Find complete program descriptions: cvdl.ben.edu/ai

Benedictine University

Kathy Hopinkah Hannan, Ph.D.
KPMG's National Managing Partner for Diversity, Inclusion, and Responsibility (retired); National Board Chair, Girl Scouts USA

Think Deeper. Lead Stronger.

Ph.D./D.B.A. Program in Values-Driven Leadership *for Senior Executives*

Benedictine University's **Doctoral Program in Values-Driven Leadership** is the first of its kind, uniquely designed for senior leaders who want to **connect values with strategy** to drive results.

Integrated Fields of Study
- Leadership
- Strategic Change
- Corporate Sustainability

Rigor & Relevance

- Designed to fit your demanding schedule.

- World-class core faculty and distinguished visiting scholars.

- Evidence-based research with immediate application.

- For leaders who make a transformative impact on business and society.

Lead at Four Levels

The curriculum is designed to expand an executive's ability to lead at four levels: personally, interpersonally, organizationally, and globally.

Student-Centric Focus

Our core faculty's student-centric focus enables completion of the program in three years: two years of once-a-month weekend classes, and an annual eight-day intensive, plus a third year of dissertation work.

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Learn more: download our program booklet at
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