

Appreciative Inquiry Is Made for Times Like Ours



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The world has seemingly tilted on its axis. First and foremost, we hope that wherever you are reading these words, you are safe and healthy, and that you are finding ways to stay socially connected with others, even while we must be physically distanced from each other.

Even before COVID shook our global community to its core, we often heard people ask: “Can we use Appreciative Inquiry in times of challenge?” This question has

seemingly only crescendoed in the wake recent events. Our heart-felt response to this question has always been, “Appreciative Inquiry is made to help us address challenges, not ignore them”, and we have never felt more strongly about that answer than in these past weeks. Appreciative Inquiry does not ask us to ignore what is going on, nor to wait until tomorrow gets “better” for us to use our appreciative and inquiring “muscles”. Rather, it invites us to apply them now, and in times just like ours that seem dark and in need of more light.

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In their own way, the underlying principles of Appreciative Inquiry provide us with a pathway forward together, inviting us to bring our best generative selves into the world at this very moment.

The Constructionist principle, with its simple reminder that words make worlds, invites us to intentionally choose the words we are using to not only reflect, but to actually create our realities. Are we talking about “social distancing”, or is it actually “physical distancing with a need for new ways to socially connect”?

The Poetic principle reminds us that we have a choice as to where we give our attention and what we actively seek out in the world around us. Are we looking for

moments of breakdown or breakthrough? Are we actively seeking out examples of transformative cooperation. Because the promise is that it is all there for us to find if we look for it.

The Simultaneity principle reminds us that with every question we ask of others, we are an active change maker because questions are interventions. Thus, are we asking questions about what we want to see more of? Questions like: “What self-care am I doing today?”, “When have we worked effectively in remote situations before?”, and “How can I use my privilege to help others?”

The Positive principle reminds us that positive affect and inquiry help generate positive change. As such, are we taking moments to cultivate laughter and joy even as we support each other through our collective grief or fear?

The Anticipatory principle daringly invites us to dream of new possibilities for the future, and ask questions such as “What do we want our post-COVID world to look like?” with the promise that our images today will inspire action toward those visions tomorrow.

The Wholeness principle reminds us that it is when we engage everyone in these questions and visions, we always come out better for it, so the question then becomes, “How might we ... together?”

Times like those that we now find ourselves in call upon us to truly embrace a stance of inquiry, as we must be open to new ideas, meanings and perspectives. In that inquiry, we appreciate or value sincerely all that emerges and all that we create anew together. How are you using applying these principles and Appreciative Inquiry to create the tomorrows you most want to see with others?

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