

Appreciative Inquiry

By Kevin Obermuller

Appreciative Inquiry, as the name suggests, is a strategic process that focuses on intentional change through the identification of the best of “what is” and the pursuit of the opportunities and possibilities of “what could be”. Through acknowledging and collecting the wisdom, knowledge, strategies, skills, behaviours and capabilities of an organisation or community, leaders and their teams are able to capture the “best” of the organisation whether it comes from the remembered past, the present way of doing things, or from the vision of its desired future.

This approach turns traditional problem solving on its head and, when used he Corporate Transformation Tools, creates a new way of thinking and acting for the people involved. For example, with traditional Problem Solving, people are motivated to identify a “problem” (the word in itself is capable of dragging thinking in to a state of low energy or opportunity.) They must then analyse the causes and possible solutions and follow this with action planning (which normally leads to a conversation like, “You need to do this, I need to do that, on top of everything else!!!”) The effect is, for many people, less than inspirational.

Appreciative Inquiry on the other hand gets people searching for and valuing the best of “what is” occurring or has occurred, envisioning “what might be”, dialoguing “what should be” and then innovating “what will be.” This is a much more dynamic and inspiring journey. For example, when working to enhance engagement in behaviourally based safety leadership within a company, the *Appreciative Inquiry* process has resulted in significant emotional and behavioural “buy in.” This has resulted in sustained improved safety awareness and behaviour across the organisation.

For those of you who like reading small books with big messages, we can recommend Ken Blanchard’s book “**Whale Done**” which reflects on many of the messages from his “**One Minute Manager**” books, this time concentrating on the power of positive relationships. For leaders and managers or supervisors wanting to review how they are doing in creating a positive culture, it is a fast read that allows for informed reflection and opportunity to move through all four stages of the *Appreciative Inquiry* process for themselves.