

Appreciative Inquiry: A New Kind of Performance Review...  
What's Love Got to Do with It?

Just as human beings endeavor to understand and harness the power of the wind, the atom, and gravity, they might also endeavor to understand and facilitate the energies of unlimited love.  
~Case Western Reserve University, Institute for Research on Unlimited Love

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Dear Friends and Colleagues ~

Wait a minute. What's "unlimited love" got to do with it? This touchy-feely language usually gets checked at the front door in most organizations. But before you question our relevancy, what might the "energies of unlimited love" look like, for something as entrenched as, say, performance reviews?

Love, much less "unlimited" love, is not a descriptor that comes readily to mind when most of us think of performance reviews. "Devastating" might be a better word, which is how Dr. W. Edwards Deming captured it.

And Deming, whose world wide consulting helped transform businesses, stated as one of his key principles: "Remove barriers that rob people in management and in engineering of their right to pride of workmanship. This means . . . the abolishment of the annual merit rating and of management by objective."

Abolish merit rating! But what about accountability? And how does Appreciative Inquiry figure into this?

#### A NEW KIND OF PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Let's suppose an organization jettisoned the standard format of performance reviews and instead, the supervisor begins the interview with this:

"Pat, I want to take a look at your work this month. We all have peaks and valleys in our performance. I would like to look at one of your peaks, the Sherman project. You did a terrific, maybe even outstanding job. You obviously loved this project."

The supervisor, with an appreciative ear, leans towards Pat and continues: "Let's talk about what we can learn from it . . .

\*Without being humble, what did you bring to that project?

\*Who was involved and how did they contribute?

\*What policies and procedures here supported this peak experience?

\*And, by the way, I want to know all the "juicy" details . . ."

A different approach? You bet it is! One that we propose Deming would approve of.

#### INQUIRY AND INTERVENTION

And the added bonus is that inquiry and intervention are not two separate moments but instead one simultaneous event.

From the first questions we ask we are making change in a human system. So instead of being chewed out for standard or sub-standard performance, the supervisor asks for a story about work that was exceptionally well done. Instead of gaining knowledge of what shouldn't be done, the employee gains:

\*a sense of efficacy (“This job can be done.”)

\*agency (“I can do this job.”)

\*an increased repertoire of positive behaviors which leads to high performance (“I wonder what else I could try that would improve my performance and gain more praise from the boss?”)

There was something about the project, the people who were involved, and the way they worked together that Pat loved, that was engaging on a higher level and produced a positive result. The wise supervisor wants to know what that was so it can be integrated into the organization's structure. Pat also needs to know how he or she can continue to play a role in creating more of it.

In this scenario, we've “endeavored to understand and facilitate the energies [of Pat's] “unlimited love.” Touchy- feely? Maybe AND it's a rigorous investigation into what's working for one employee.

Imagine what might happen if this kind of performance review was established for all employees . . . “you obviously loved this project...tell me about it...”

#### WHITE SPACE METAPHOR AND KNUCKLE BALLS

Because our enthusiasm for sharing these ideas shows no sign of abating, we decided to add the rest of this piece as an attachment titled “White Space Metaphor and Knuckle Balls” or you may find this entire mailing at <http://www.characterethics.com/appreciativeinquirylearningspace/> .

#### AI FOUNDATIONS CLASS

Consider joining a community of optimistic, like-minded individuals who will learn first hand the nuts and bolts of Appreciative Inquiry – and how it can work for them. Hope to see you at our Appreciative Inquiry Foundations Class, September 20 – 23, 2005, Charleston, WV.

Visit <http://www.characterethics.com/learningopportunities/> for the details and registration.

Enjoy! And let us hear from you. ~ Trish, Chet, and Skip

If at any time you wish to be removed from this “learning space”, please hit reply and say, "Please remove" in the body of the email. Thanks!