

This book is designed to open the doorway into the *appreciative paradigm* in daily living. It describes how living with the intent to create positive, expansive ways of relating and knowing actually increases the sustainability of positive change in and beyond previous applications of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to organizational life. *Dynamic Relationships* invites you to unleash the power of AI in your life, influencing the generation of communities that construct positive meaning. It will also influence your way of being in the world.

This book is about living Appreciative Inquiry. It is about seeing yourself in relation to and integrated with whole communities. We use this venue to offer the practice of the principles of AI as the foundation for being in relationships. Living AI requires enhancing awareness through cycles of reflection and action:

- *Reflection* calls us to ask questions such as:
 - Q. How are we responding or reacting to one another?
 - Q. What are we aware of (assumptions, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, etc.)?
 - Q. What are we working to create and how are we creating meaning together?

The hope is that this might lead to further reflections like:

- Q. How did I come to understand things the way I do when it seems so different from you?
- Q. How can we come to understand one another and create shared meaning?
- Q. What meaning will my actions have for others?
- Q. How are my actions influencing the relationship?

- *Action* calls for [or includes] consideration for the options I choose. Such consideration addresses the impact my choices have on the environment and others; the way my action changes the relationship or community; and the impact of my actions on my relationships, my organization, or family.

When we recognize and understand the dynamics of relationships, we discover new ways of knowing or understanding, new ways to be in relationship with the world and everyone in our life. We have the opportunity to generate more joy and abundance in our lives by relating in appreciative ways. This book is about entertaining the possibility that our lives and the world in which we find ourselves cannot be held apart from our reflections or actions. Ken Gergen suggests that by “reflecting critically on our taken-for-granted worlds, and the way in which our lives are affected by these constructions, we may be freed to consider alternatives.”¹ *Dynamic Relationships* is about considering and choosing to work with the appreciative paradigm. It is about entertaining the idea that we are inseparably related to one another and that by relating with positive intent, we can create more effective and joyful communities.

The *appreciative paradigm* is a perspective that invites us to attend to the positive dynamics in our relationships and communities:

- Q. What is working?
- Q. What gives life to the relationship?
- Q. What is right?
- Q. How are we successful because of our dynamics?
- Q. How can we achieve our greatest dreams together and discover our positive core?

This paradigm calls us to recognize that we are relational beings: we do not act alone in the world, and every action has a relational impact. This book is a personal call to become aware that *you are integrally related with others*—including us, the authors, as you read this book—and that you are a part of creating meaning in the world through your actions and interactions with others. Further, it is a call for you to have a positive impact in all of your various communities of choice—with significant others, family, friends, communities, organizations, and beyond.

Who Should Read This Book?

We invite anyone interested in creating and sustaining positive change in the world to join us. We intend the term ‘community’ to be understood in the broadest sense of the word. We understand community to include the intimacy of your relationship with your partner, the small community of your family, the larger community of friends and neighbors, your community of faith, your communities of learning and education, your work community, as well as any other group with whom you share an interest and a relationship. In the smallest sense of community, we include your relationship with yourself; in the grandest sense of the word, we include the world. Your immediate communities; however, are those with which you relate on a daily basis. It is in these relational communities that positive change in the world is potentially constructed and sustained.

We have written this book for those who have experienced AI or some type of strength-based approach to change and want to sustain it at work by seeing the impact of it in daily living. Yet it is relevant for anyone who wants to *consciously* have positive dynamic relationships in their life. For those new to AI, we invite you to read more about its origin and use in organizational life. The reference list at the end of this book includes a wealth of resources, though reading these is not necessary to gain value from *Dynamic Relationships*. For everyone it encourages you to embrace life by recognizing your connections and the inherent relevance and value of your actions.

What this book calls for may require a significant shift in your perspective. It requires leaving a paradigm that may be familiar and comfortable, one that may have proven highly successful for you. The current dominant western worldview, which espouses rugged individualism, autonomy, independence, and progress through problem-solving, has delivered wealth to many (you may be one) and incredible technological advances for the world (which have benefited many). We have been influenced by this cultural paradigm as well as participated in continuing to reinforce it by the

way we live. This individualized paradigm is part of the way we frame our world, how we understand, and how we make decisions. This book is about re-framing how you see and experience your relationship to your communities and the world.

Dynamic Relationships is a call to change the way we live and work together. It is an invitation to develop a new set of beliefs for how you perceive and make sense of the world. It is also intended as a guide for a new way for all of us to make meaning together. Many corporations, communities, and families are doing just this as they flatten their structures. They are seeing themselves as dynamic systems and calling for leadership at every level because of the value of engaging the full potential of every person.

The idea of systems thinking has been around for more than 50 years in the engineering and scientific world. Jay Forrester is responsible for introducing the concept of systems thinking to organizational change in the 1960s. He suggested that an organization was a complex whole of interrelating and interdependent parts, stressing *relationship* as the process that created the context of the organization. Peter Senge is responsible for bringing this concept into the public forum with *The Fifth Discipline*. Steven Covey's *The 8th Habit* calls for the awareness of *real* relationships as the critical factor for the power of an organization. Organizations are networks of relationships between people. This power is the connection between the people, the quality of relationships.

The shift is spreading to communities that are calling for their members to have a voice, to recognize their relationships are dynamic, and to take an active role in creating their community of choice. Families share decision making in family meetings where children can be heard. This book is about sustaining such positive change by supporting your ability to recognize the dynamics of your relationships and to act with appreciative intent.

What's in This For *You*?

Imagine a life of opportunity, one full of possibility and potential. Imagine a life where you have a sense of wholeness and connectedness with others. This kind of connection is fluid, positive, enriching, and dynamic. It is a life where anything that can be imagined has the potential to be developed and brought into being. Imagine celebrating conflict as a catalyst for discovering diversity in knowledge and opinion as well as differences in underlying assumptions. Ponder the value of such collaboration in the generation of new knowledge and innovative thought. Consider the resulting value to your organization and to the world. Imagine families relating in ways that make them strong, whole, and mutually supportive, acknowledging strengths in differences and celebrating individual gifts that make the whole so much more than each person alone. Imagine feeling alive, vibrant, curious, empowered, safe, valued, and joyful—the sense of life that a young child has, but recaptured with the kind of awareness that only an adult can develop.

Does this sound too good to be true? Our experiences of taking appreciative action in our communities affirm that such a world is possible, and there are people who are moving toward it already. You may even know some of them or know *of* them. You may have said, “They’re so lucky” or “I wish I were more like them,” never imagining that it is possible for your life to be different. There is nothing stopping you from moving towards this imagined world except you and your way of making sense of the world. As soon as you can see and accept that you have options in creating a meaningful life, that you can perceive, interpret, and act differently from the way you are right now, you have the option of moving toward the world you imagined.

Moving toward your imagined world is a gradual process, simply because it calls for changing old habits of being in relationships. We cannot predict how long it will take you to step into this promising world. We, ourselves, are still moving toward it—but

we can predict that you will experience moments of what you imagined as you practice the exercises and complete the journal assignments that you find throughout the book.

Positive dynamic relationships are based on six core principles explained in Chapter 1. The more dedicated you are to practicing these six principles, the more you will experience relationships that uplift and elevate. Be encouraged that it is a continual process of moving toward the appreciative paradigm where your actions are governed by positive intent. With every step—no matter how small—you will be moving in that direction. But don't take our word for it, try it yourself. If you do, as David Cooperrider suggested in the *Foreword*, you will not be disappointed. In fact, we predict you will be delighted.

This book is about discovering your current habits of thought and action and—with awareness—learning to be in relationships with appreciative intent. You will find exercises, activities, journal reflection questions, and other ideas to support your ability to live into this new paradigm. Your ability and dedication to living in the appreciative paradigm will be determined by your willingness to try the activities, practice new ways of thinking and acting, and apply each principle in daily living. The principles are²:

1. The Constructionist Principle—the way we know affects our actions.
2. The Principle of Simultaneity—change happens the moment you ask the question.
3. The Poetic Principle—life is an open book.
4. The Anticipatory Principle—we move in the direction of the images we hold.
5. The Positive Principle—the more positive the image or question, the more positive the action.
6. The Principle of Awareness—self-reflective awareness is needed to apply the principles in your life.

The concept of *Dynamic Relationships* is based in large part on the groundbreaking work of David Cooperrider and his colleagues into what has come to be known as Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Therefore, Chapter 2 of this book introduces the five core principles of AI and the new Principle of Awareness. We explore the ways that these principles enhance relationships and sustain positive change in families, organizations, and communities. Deciding you want to engage consciously in dynamic relationships is easy; transforming the way you relate and living the six principles requires change. It calls you to question assumptions, change old habits, beliefs and values, and entertain new perspectives. This is the challenge we address in Chapter 3, where you will learn a technique to develop self-reflective awareness regarding the dynamics of your relationships and expand the possibilities for what can be created in those relationships. In this chapter we bring in the concept of the *collective person*, as developed by Jane Seiling. In Chapter 4, we share a useful framework for bringing the power of AI into your life through the practice of appreciative intent. Chapter 5 provides key illustrations and exercises to help you sustain positive change in daily living. Chapter 6 is our closing invitation for you to join us in seeing the world from the appreciative paradigm in hopes of changing our world—through dynamic relationships!

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

There are a couple of ways to read this book. One way is the standard approach, where you start at the beginning and read straight through to the end. This approach will give you the big picture, after which you can go back and begin to practice the exercises and ponder the questions. The second technique is to read a chapter or section of a chapter and then experience what you have read by answering the questions or doing the activities sequentially as laid out in the book.

To get the most out of any book you must act—and, in this case, maintain an ongoing determination that doesn't wax and

wane. Thus, we offer the following suggestions for nurturing that determination:

- ***Work with a partner or collaborative learning group:*** Find another person or group and form a Dynamic Relationships collaborative group (a DR partner or group). DR partners or groups should be others who are interested in positive dynamic relationships, systems thinking, and discovering new ways of making meaning in life, specifically using a strength focused, appreciative approach. You can even develop an on-line dialogue with a cohort of people who are collaborating to bring about a new way of relating in their department or organization. If you prefer to work on your own, we encourage you to use a journal as your DR partner. It is important to allow other voices to surface in your journal assignments by imagining how your colleagues, friends, and family might respond to a given question. Listen to these voices and reflect deeply on your experiences. It is valuable to do your work in relationship, even if it is in relationship with yourself and the many perspectives you can imagine.
- ***Practice and live the six principles:*** Applying these will change your relationships and your world as you know it.
- ***Act:*** Do at least one activity a week, preferably one every few days.
- ***Reflect:*** Pay attention to your thoughts and actions—reflect, and be aware of how the world reflects back on your actions. Be aware of the options that arise when reflecting on your thoughts and actions. Be aware of the possibilities that you and others have, and when possible explore these options together.
- ***Be curious*** about the dynamics of relationships and how it is that people bring about the best in each other in any situation.

If you follow these five suggestions, your world will change, most of your relationships will improve, and you will discover a whole new sense of freedom.

You may find that friendships deepen and expand, and you may also lose friendships. There is much to be gained by sharing experiences, discovering each other's stories, and having support for a change process. We would never have discovered and learned all that we have if we had not been in dialogue with one another, as well as with all those who have given valuable feedback and insight on this book. If you join us in this dialogue, together we will discover and learn even more about positive dynamic relationships. We invite you to work with us in discovering all the positive possibilities we can create together in coming to know what it means to live in dynamic relationships with appreciative intent.

Co-authoring this book has been challenging, enlightening, exciting, energizing, and rewarding. Though we began our conversation about writing together in 2003, we did not understand fully what we would create together until its completion. It has truly been an experience of collaborative learning and emergent knowledge, sharing our hopes, insights, and assumptions. What we have experienced through the process is what happens when Appreciative Inquiry is unleashed in dynamic relationships. This book truly is a living testimonial of what is contained in its pages.

Asking each other to explain and clarify helped us move beyond our assumptions and tacit understandings. Defining concepts and ideas coherently enough to write them could only have happened in collaboration with one another and others. It meant discovering the dynamics in our relationship and learning how to maximize our strengths in our work together. Those who reviewed our early manuscripts asked questions that challenged our views and pushed us to go deeper in our understanding. In doing so, our way of knowing and speaking about what it means to live in the appreciative paradigm were transformed. This book is by no means the final product on this paradigm; it is the beginning of an exciting new adventure.

Finally, as authors and learners, we invite your comments on this *Focus Book*. We invite you to join us on this collaborative journey by sharing your stories and giving us feedback. Your comments on what you read and how you are applying it in your life will contribute to the emerging knowledge pool associated with dynamic relationships and appreciative action. With your insight, experience, and input into the process everyone learns more. Please contact either of us at jstavros@comcast.net or cheri@mobileteamchallenge.com or www.dynamic-relationships.com.

Jackie and Cheri