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# The Power of Appreciative Inquiry

**A Practical Guide to Positive Change**

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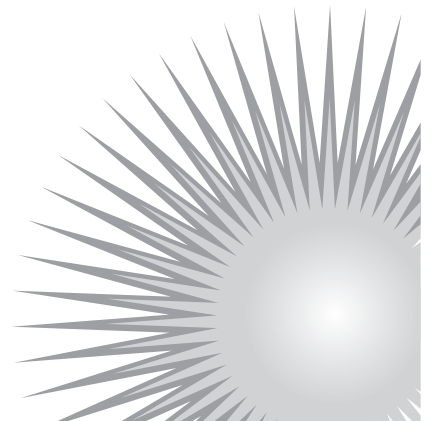
**Foreword by David Cooperrider**

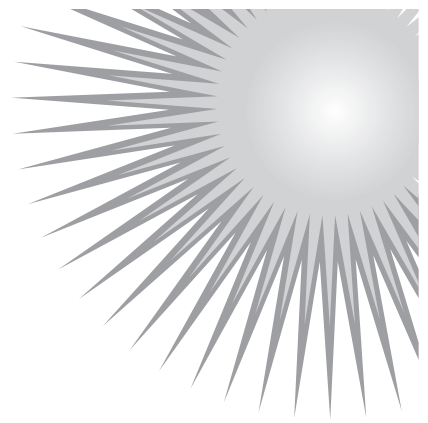
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## Why Appreciative Inquiry Works

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In a decade of using Appreciative Inquiry as a process for organizational change at Hunter Douglas and elsewhere, we have witnessed exciting transformations in the way people work together and in the results they achieve. And we have heard stories, over and over again, about the positive impact of Appreciative Inquiry on people's personal and professional lives. So we began to ask ourselves and those with whom we have worked: What's happening? Why do people get so excited and want to participate in Appreciative Inquiry? Why does participation so readily lead to innovation, productivity, employee satisfaction, and profitability? What is it that creates possibilities for personal transformation and for people to discover and be their best at work? What conditions foster cooperation throughout a whole system of highly diverse groups of people? In short, the central question of our reflection and the question addressed in this chapter is *Why Does Appreciative Inquiry Work?*

## An Inquiry into Appreciative Inquiry

In keeping with the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, we decided to carry out an inquiry. We created a set of questions and held focus groups with people throughout Hunter Douglas, top to bottom. And we conducted interviews—some formal and some informal—with people in other organizations who had used Appreciative Inquiry. We sought to discover what is it about Appreciative Inquiry that so engages people—and, ultimately, why it works. The interviews were energizing and informative. What we learned was enlightening and, we believe, a significant contribution to the evolving wisdom of Appreciative Inquiry.

Our key finding is that Appreciative Inquiry gives people the experience of personal and collective power. It gives them practice exercising power—and doing so responsibly, for the good of the whole. Once they experience this liberation of power and the effect it has on their lives and the world, people are permanently transformed.

We discovered that for some, Appreciative Inquiry enhanced self-esteem and self-expression. Renee Chavez, an inspector with Hunter Douglas, suggested that participation in Appreciative Inquiry helped her become more fully and powerfully herself:

I think this is a good job, but I made it that way. The only person who's going to get me what I want is me. Appreciative Inquiry helped me to express myself, and helped me learn to communicate in a better way. It helped me become more of who I've always been.

For others, Appreciative Inquiry permanently and positively affected their careers and career potentials. Tina LaGrange, a customer information representative, told this story:

Shortly after coming to Hunter Douglas, I applied for a position in the customer information center. I went through the interview process, and was turned down. So I applied again, and was turned down again.

In the past, I might have stopped after this. I might have felt too discouraged to keep trying. But Appreciative Inquiry told me that I was responsible for doing what I needed to do and getting what I needed to be successful. So I found out what I was missing (which turned out to be technical training), got the training, and reapplied one more time. This time, I got the job. I had persisted, because Appreciative Inquiry taught me that's how you get things done.

Another powerful story we heard about the transformational capacity of Appreciative Inquiry came from fabric printer Kathy Mayfield:

Appreciative Inquiry created a complete turnaround for me. I'm painfully shy. Before Appreciative Inquiry, I would go down the hall and wouldn't look at anyone. Now I march! I talk to everyone—even the “suits”! Since this change happened, I'm even getting a little better on the “outside” [i.e., outside of work]. Now I know I'm somebody.

You know, I'm luckier than some people. I don't have to work. But something happened here that changed the way I saw my work. I realized that I didn't have to be here—but that I wanted to be here.

To us, these and similar stories imply that power is like the proverbial genie in the bottle—once liberated, it won't be re-contained. It continues to seek ways of expressing itself. Brian Bassett, shipping coordinator, observed, “As people tried and got results, they gained confidence. That led to five times as much input and the desire to get more involved.” The liberation of power creates a self-perpetuating momentum for positive change. Appreciative Inquiry consistently and dramatically liberates people's sense of individual and collective power, adding great value to organizations and communities.

### What Is the Value of a Naturally and Comfortably Powerful Person?

Think with us for a moment about this question: What do organizations value about people beyond the inherent worth of every human

being? Organizations' answers vary widely. Today, for example, corporations around the globe value people at anything from a few cents per hour to millions of dollars per year, depending on their answers to such questions as Who are the people? What unique skills or background do they bring to the organization? How capable are they of making independent decisions? To what extent can they influence their work environment and the world around them? In essence, how powerful are they?

So let's restate the original question: What is the value of a naturally and comfortably powerful human being? A person who knows that the world is subject to human influence? Who knows that she personally has the power to change the world? Who chooses to exercise that power for the good of the whole? Who encourages and grooms the people around him to similarly exercise their power? Who invites others to cooperate in discovering, dreaming, and designing the future?

"Ah," we hear you say, "now that is a different question! That kind of person is valued much more highly in organizations today than the person who simply shows up and does what he's told." In other words, that kind of person is worth a great deal more in organizational and business terms.

When the members and stakeholders of an organization are naturally and comfortably powerful—when individual and collective power has been unleashed—organizations become more capable of innovation, learning, and contributing to the greater good. They become what we call life centered. A life-centered organization is one in which power—the capacity to create, innovate, and positively influence the future—is an unlimited relational resource. It is an organization in which people care about and work toward being the best they can possibly be, both personally and within the organization. It is an organization guided by spiritual ideals—peace, harmony, justice, love, joy, wisdom, and integrity. It is an organization in which people take responsibility for constructing the world they inhabit and making it good for generations to come.

Our research suggests that Appreciative Inquiry works by gen-

erating the conditions that liberate power—by creating life-centered organizations in which naturally and comfortably powerful people thrive.

### From Oppression to the Liberation of Power

The journey to liberation—from oppression to power—is one of social emergence. Paulo Freire’s work suggests that the “oppressed” are submerged in reality.<sup>78</sup> They are, in a sense, social realists who believe the world is the way it is and there is nothing they can do about it. They experience and describe themselves with neither the position nor the power to change anything. We have heard this organizational lament all too often: “This is how it has always been around here. It has been this way for the twenty years I have worked here. It is never going to change.” These are the voices of the organizationally oppressed.

In our experience, organizationally oppressed people live and work in all functions, at all levels, and in all sectors of organizations. No organizational group, level, or function is more receptive to organizational oppression than another. In some organizations, the marketing group doesn’t feel heard or able to influence decisions. In others, it is manufacturing. Elsewhere, those at the top express great frustration at being unable to influence the market or shareholders or to motivate employees. In still others, front-line employees experience themselves as invisible and unable to influence the way work—even their own work—gets done. Often, when one group in an organization feels undervalued and unable to influence, so do others.

The first step toward the liberation of power and life-centered organizing begins when people recognize that the world and their organization is open to social change as created by and through human interaction and creativity. At this stage, people often see and describe having a positive impact as an attribute of others: “She is such a great leader. Since she has been here, we have made major improvements.” This other-oriented power is a step toward

liberation that acknowledges the potential for social change, though still placing the capacity for influence and change with some “other.” Generally, the other has more authority or perhaps is more informed, more experienced, or is in some other way more powerful.

When people realize they can and do make a difference in relation to others, they experience true liberation. Theoretically, we call these people social constructionists—people who understand the socially crafted nature of our realities. Appreciative Inquiry, through the Six Freedoms, creates a context rich in relationships and narratives that becomes the path on which the journey to liberation takes place. Following is a more in-depth description of the Six Freedoms, illustrated with quotes and stories from people who have participated in some form of Appreciative Inquiry. These are voices of the organizationally liberated, describing the conditions that bring out their best.

### The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle and the Six Freedoms

So what’s the relationship between the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle and the liberation of power and the establishment of life-centered organizations? Personal and organizational power is unleashed when certain essential conditions are present for people within organizations. Our research suggests that there are at least six of these conditions, which we call the Six Freedoms:

1. Freedom to be known in relationship.
2. Freedom to be heard.
3. Freedom to dream in community.
4. Freedom to choose to contribute.
5. Freedom to act with support.
6. Freedom to be positive.

Any one of these Six Freedoms can significantly alter people’s

perception of their power within an organizational context. Because individuals learn and are motivated differently, we believe initiatives that provide the opportunity for people to experience multiple freedoms have the potential to make the greatest impact on the largest number of people—and ultimately on the organization as a whole.

The power of Appreciative Inquiry comes, in part, from the way it unleashes all of the Six Freedoms over the course of just one complete 4-D Cycle. Because of this breadth of impact, it has a greater capacity for transforming personal and collective realities than many other organizational change processes.

#### *Freedom to Be Known in Relationship*

In work settings, people are often known in roles rather than in relationship. They are vice presidents and operators, doctors and nurses, employees and customers—in short, they are perceived as what they do rather than who they are. However, human identity forms and evolves in relationship. In the words of Sheila McNamee and Kenneth Gergen, “Persons represent the intersection of multiple relationships.”<sup>79</sup> The sense of self is a relational identity that thrives in communication with others. According to psychologist Alan Fogel, “Communicative connections to other people are fundamental to the workings of the human mind and self, and to the culture that enriches and sustains our spirits and achievements.”<sup>80</sup>

Just as we know and become ourselves in relationship, so also do we contribute to our organizations in relationship. For many people, the quality of their relationships at work is the quality of their work life. Appreciative Inquiry allows us to know one another in relationship rather than in roles. It calls us to know one another not just as unique individuals but also as a part of the web of relationships through which “I” exist.

The more fully we are known in relationship, the more fully we can come to work and contribute. John Cade, a printer with the Window Fashions Division, reflects on the fundamental human need to be known in this way. “I want to be known, and to ‘belong,’”



says Cade. “The animal takes care of survival, but the heart—the soul—wants to belong.”

Being known in relationship includes knowing one another as relational beings—as parents, coaches, artists, bowlers, and so on. The more fully I am known in my world of relationships, the more fully I can come to work and contribute.

Appreciative Inquiry breaks the cycle of depersonalization that masks people’s sense of being and belonging. The appreciative interview, which is the core technology of Appreciative Inquiry, is powerfully rooted in the creation of personal relationships. It seeks and explores in depth people’s personal peak experiences—times when they were most engaged, most alive, and proudest of themselves, their organizations, and their work. Appreciative interviews ask them to recall those moments in vivid detail and to share their experiences with people they have previously known only in roles—or not at all. The process affirms people in relation to others, enables new relationships to be formed, and enhances respect among people who work together daily. People gain the freedom to understand that to know themselves and others is fundamental to high performance.

Appreciative Inquiry doesn’t just build relationships. It also levels the playing field and builds bridges across boundaries of power and authority. As Renee Chavez says, “I did my interviews with people who weren’t like me. That helped me meet and get to know people who are very different from me: different jobs, different backgrounds, different races.” Mark Maier, a machinist, says it even more succinctly: “Appreciative Inquiry blew the communication gap wide open.”

Similarly, John Cade comments on the ways in which Appreciative Inquiry in general—and the interviews in particular—help to make other people and their ideas more accessible: “Appreciative Inquiry gives us opportunities to be known across the boundaries.” The contagious spirit of the interviews results in a sense of connection to others: “As our Appreciative Inquiry effort got fully under way, other people became excited, just like me. I didn’t feel alone. For the first time, it was ‘me with the world.’”

In today’s business world, relationships—teams, alliances, part-

nerships, colleagues—are essential: work gets done through relationships. Management consultant Kevin Kelly claims, “The central economic imperative of the network economy is to amplify relationships.”<sup>81</sup> Through Appreciative Inquiry, the freedom to know and be known in relationship liberates people’s energy, ideas, and personal and organizational power.

### *Freedom to Be Heard*

When we feel we are not heard, we feel less real, less able to affect our environment. This is the experience of the oppressed. But when another person hears us—when they witness and repeat our ideas and stories—we become tangible, real, significant, somebody who can make a difference. To be heard is to have a recognized and credible voice, to be known as a source of creativity, innovation, and influence. The Reverend Canon Charles Gibbs, executive director of the United Religions Initiative, stated it this way:

I have seen over and over again—all around the world—what happens when people who are not used to being valued feel heard. The experience of being heard allows them to be present and to offer the best of themselves in a way that could not happen otherwise.

Much has been written on the act of listening, but surprisingly little has been written about the experience of being heard. A person can listen without truly hearing or understanding the person who is speaking. To feel heard, the speaker must recognize that the person listening is attentive, is listening with sincere curiosity, empathy, and a willingness to learn. It requires the listener to hear a person’s story and words. In other words, the experience of being heard requires a relationship between speaker and listener. Appreciative interviews encourage this kind of relational hearing. They ask speaker and listener alike to reach beyond the mundane, the theoretical, into personal experience and values. They invite an act of hearing that draws out the best of another person—that encourages the cooperative creation of meaning and identity.

During Appreciative Inquiry, people experience themselves as being heard and as hearing others in powerful, fulfilling, and energizing new ways. Through this act of mutual hearing, employees who are traditionally disenfranchised—the organizationally oppressed—begin to show up, think, and imagine in bold and provocative new ways.

One-on-one appreciative interviews open channels of communication and nurture people's experience of being heard. They do this by unleashing a wealth of stories which, in later phases of the process, spread and multiply throughout the organization. People experience being heard as the ideas and stories they offered during interviews are presented, discussed, and put into action throughout the organization.

When Hunter Douglas first implemented Appreciative Inquiry as a culture change process, Mark Maier was supervising a group that performed technical maintenance on the company's production machinery. He and his staff felt undervalued, not heard, and often ignored—even when it came to their particular area of expertise. Mark decided to put Appreciative Inquiry to the test. He initiated an inquiry among all of the team's internal customers—engineers, technical support staff, and so on. He and his staff collected stories of exceptional support that people had experienced both within Hunter Douglas and at other companies. He invited people to dream about the service they had always wanted and to describe it in detail. What was the result? People felt recognized. They built relationships across functions, in particular between engineering and technical support. Being heard brought the group to life.

Appreciative Inquiry affords people the opportunity to be heard. By setting the stage for the freedom to be heard, it opens doors for people who had felt ignored, without a voice to offer information, ideas, and innovations. It creates a rich context for knowledge creation and exchange, for personal respect, and for employee satisfaction and development.

*Freedom to Dream in Community*

Visionary leaders have long been recognized as assets to their organizations. Their capacity to propose an image, a dream, a sense of possibility that others can rally around has been regarded highly among the traits of transformational leaders. But what of the dreams of the people? In today's highly diverse world, neither leadership vision nor shared vision alone is enough. We need leaders who invite everyone to dream and to realize their dreams. We need organizations to be safe places where people dream and share dreams in dialogue with one another. We need the freedom to dream in community.

One-on-one interviews and story-based synthesis open people's individual dreams to the whole organization. This capability can change people's work and lives, as it did for Brenda Luebben, a ten-year employee of Hunter Douglas:

At the end of my interview, I was asked to imagine one thing that would help me do my job even better. I said, "It would be going to Mexico." You see, my sample books, the products which I produce, go to one of our fabricators down in Mexico. Can you believe it? They ended up sending me to Mexico! The trip made me feel like I really knew my job, like my job was really important to the company. Just seeing who they were and what they needed gave me better ways to communicate with those folks.

In cultures that believe in personal revelation, the act of sharing visions and dreams is sacred, in part because of the belief that Spirit speaks through dreams. Through the act of sharing dreams, one person's connection to Spirit can enlighten the whole group. For example, Black Elk—a recognized holy man among the Lakota Sioux—had visions of seven sacred rites.<sup>82</sup> As he shared his visions publicly, the community embraced his dreams as collective guidance and tribal wisdom. Today these seven sacred rites are recognized and carried out by the Lakota Sioux as their seven sacred ceremonies.

One of the most inspiring stories about the freedom to dream in community comes from American Baptist International Minis-

tries. On the heels of several months of interviews with over twelve hundred stakeholders worldwide, two hundred fifty people gathered in an AI Summit to hear people's hopes and dreams for the organization. They gathered to imagine an organization that could deliver on those hopes and dreams to create new ways in which they might serve people in need around the world. They imagined a new kind of service—one that would move from predominantly sending people out to “do good” in the world, to a model of linking people and organizations of similar intent around the globe. This vision was so compelling—and its momentum so great—that by the first anniversary of the summit, close to thirty new initiatives were launched using this “sister organization” model as a template. Then, in the two years that followed, close to two hundred new initiatives unfolded. Consultant Jim Ludema described the power of the community's dream as “unleashing energy that was already there. It was a positive explosion waiting to happen.”

Time after time, Appreciative Inquiry invites people at all levels of the organization into the dreaming process. It creates an impetus for doing things better—for realizing dreams, whether they are big or small, personal or organizational. It puts attention on the visionaries rather than the squeaky wheels—on the path ahead rather than the problems of the past. And it enables images of hope, potential, and being the best to rise to the surface of organizational life.

#### *Freedom to Choose to Contribute*

Work can separate us from what matters most to us, or it can serve as the vehicle through which we enact and realize our deepest calling. In more patriarchal organizations, some “other” is said to know what is best for us. A manager, supervisor, or employment advisor determines the scope of a job and whether we are suited to it. People are matched to work based on the needs of the organization.

Not so in life-centered organizations, where the freedom to choose one's work and learning opportunities is recognized as essen-

tial to creativity, cooperation, and well-being. When people are free to volunteer based on their interests and passions, their capacities to learn and contribute are significantly enhanced. The scope, success, and satisfaction of contributing are directly related to the freedom to choose the nature and extent of the contributions.

In an Appreciative Inquiry process, people can and do join only when they become curious, stimulated, or inspired by a task, activity, or dream. Many people choose only to participate in the interviews—yet even that minimal level of engagement has a liberating effect on those who are involved. Others, like Kathy Mayfield, come on board later in the process. A printer with several years' tenure, she initially refused even to be interviewed. But eight months into the process, someone recruited her into an Action Group—formed at the first AI Summit—that was working on a task that piqued her curiosity and profound interest. Soon she had become one of the strongest supporters of Appreciative Inquiry in the entire organization.

John Cade believes this capacity to choose the nature and extent of one's contribution has a built-in mentoring and developmental quality: "Since some people are more comfortable following than leading," he suggests. "The Appreciative Inquiry process—which is grassroots and designed to engage people in their own time and way—gives them a hand to hold and helps train people to take responsibility for their own lives."

Freedom to choose to contribute leads to commitment, the liberation of power, and learning. When people choose to do a project and commit to others to do it, they become very creative and determined about it. They will do whatever it takes and learn whatever is needed to get the job done. For example, a front-line employee who had volunteered to lead an innovation team went to her personnel department and asked for coaching. She declared that she needed to learn to facilitate meetings and help her team make decisions in order for them to succeed. Her determination paid off for the team, the organization, and herself. The team's project was finished in record time and led to significant process improvements in the

company. She was promoted to a supervisory position, and her new team is thriving with her leadership.

In any organizational change process, some people are more committed to, enthusiastic about, and engaged than others. These people become the informal leaders of the change effort. Because Appreciative Inquiry works to locate and channel people's interests and passions, that kind of involvement is nurtured and supported rather than contained. Brian Bassett describes the relationship between this kind of engagement and the liberation of power:

Because our initial efforts flowed from people's passions, people had energy to do the work. People had success with the work that really mattered to them: work that was so important to them that they were willing to change their old habits and *play*. Once they'd had that experience, they wanted to act elsewhere . . . and continue acting. That's why people at Hunter Douglas kept moving from one Action Group to another. It wasn't because they had to. It was because it felt so good that they didn't want to stop!

Not surprisingly, our research suggests that the more engaged people are in an AI initiative, the greater their experience of personal transformation will be. Joe Sherwood, a manufacturing and fabrication process coordinator, observes:

I've seen a huge difference in the people who have really embraced Appreciative Inquiry. Those who were more involved, and more willing to become part of the leadership of the process, seemed to grow the most.

#### *Freedom to Act with Support*

Much organizational support is limited. To be supported by one part of an organization—one supervisor or one manager—leaves room for doubt, mistrust, and hesitation. It breeds fragmentation. By contrast, when people know that the whole organization is aware of their project and willing to cooperate, they feel safe to experiment, innovate, and learn. In other words, whole-system support



stimulates people to take on challenges and draws them into acts of cooperation that bring forth their best.

To act with support is the quintessential act of positive interdependence. In an Appreciative Inquiry, people are invited to act on behalf of the things that passionately inspire them—the things that they know will make a difference in their organization and in the world. They are called to act in the service of the organization, with support from others at all levels of the organization.

The freedom to act with support leads to unprecedented action, and it also raises people's confidence in and hope for the organization. John Deere Harvester Works' highly creative approach to unleashing the freedom to act with support broke through years' worth of apathy and distrust when facilitators designed a five-day summit, the last two days of which were focused exclusively on what they called "tactical implementation." They knew that being able to implement changes right there, while everyone was together, would prove unequivocally to participants that the organization was serious about supporting change.

People dreamed, created an opportunity map, brainstormed projects through which they could accomplish their dream, and selected the ten projects that they believed were most critically important. Then, to their surprise, they were invited to work with one another right there in the summit to plan, line up resources, and initiate the projects! As consultant Jim Ludema says, "This immediate, concrete support reversed over twenty years of history by showing that management was serious about involving the whole system in the changes. In response, employees invested huge amounts of knowledge and creativity into finding innovative solutions." As a result, the plant reduced its new product cycle time from five to three years and gained millions of dollars in new market share.

Hunter Douglas's Appreciative Inquiry was similarly organized to provide both leadership and organizational support—though in a very different form. Business unit managers supported the Action Groups by consistently offering participants access to information, time, resources, skills training, and professional facilitation.



In addition, they served as champions for the Action Groups, and they served on the Appreciative Inquiry Advisory Team.

At the same time, the Advisory Team initiated and maintained a communication network through which the Action Groups' activities and successes were broadcast to the entire organization. This promoted organization-wide support for the work of the Action Groups. When asked to describe what they had done and what they had learned about leading an appreciative change effort, the Advisory Team commented:

We didn't have to do much, as leaders. Mainly, we provided guidance and the green light for people. We helped build confidence that people's ideas and plans made sense.

Of the initial fourteen Action Groups, eleven either met or exceeded their original goals in ways already described in detail. But what of the three Action Groups that failed to achieve their goals? Surprisingly, our research shows that this freedom to act with support liberated individual and organizational power—even when the actions “failed.” Tina LaGrange's story powerfully testifies to that effect:

I came away from the summit clear that cross-training was very, very important. I just knew that it would solve our mandatory overtime problems and provide people with a career path. But everybody I talked to said, “Sure we need it, but it won't go through. They'll never support it or let it happen.”

Still, I joined an Action Group and worked hard. We designed a great program, proposed it to the Advisory Team, and got the go-ahead to test it. Then . . . *nobody signed up!!!*

Once we got over trying to “drive” it through, we stepped back and saw that there was a loud, clear message trying to be heard. “They” weren't the problem—it was the people in the organization. Nobody had much energy for cross-training.

When our program died, I was disappointed—but OK. In the end, the only thing I really accomplished was getting an answer; but that was a big thing. It meant that I had the power to get an answer.

With Appreciative Inquiry, people sense support from one another, from the organization's management, and from the whole system. To take initiative is an adventure and a risk for many. To do so with full knowledge and support of colleagues throughout the organization creates a pathway for self-confidence, learning, and innovation.

### *Freedom to Be Positive*

People and organizations grow and thrive with recognition and appreciation. And yet many organizations today are overrun with deficit discourse. They are habitually prone to problem analysis and hence to fear, blame, and criticism. Their inner dialogue is full of tales of woe and who has done what to whom. In many organizations it even seems chic to be cynical, to be the first to critique new ideas, and to seek to understand and describe causes of failure.

In organizations today, it is simply not the norm to have fun, to be happy, or to be positive. Despite the pain it causes, people allow themselves to be swept away in collective currents of negativity. A long-term employee of an organization mired in deficit discourse shared with dismay: "I have ulcers because of this negative thinking and talking. Every day I come to work and hear nothing but complaints and criticism and blaming. I hate coming to work."

In contrast, Appreciative Inquiry is a bold invitation to be positive. To be positive is more than a freedom—it is a prescription implicit in the process of Appreciative Inquiry. You simply can't participate in an Appreciative Inquiry without focusing on what is positive, what gives life, and what constitutes the positive core. Over and over, people have told us that Appreciative Inquiry works in part because it gives people the freedom to be positive. In the words of someone who first learned about the practice, "The power of Appreciative Inquiry comes, in part, from the permission it gives employees to feel positive and be proud of their working experiences."

People whose dispositions are basically upbeat are the first to celebrate the freedom to be positive. Renee Chavez, for example,

deeply valued the opportunity afforded by AI to indulge her natural optimism:

I don't know if it's me or if it's Appreciative Inquiry—but *I like to be positive*. I liked doing the interviews, because I heard more positive things. Because of my involvement with Appreciative Inquiry, I got people thinking more positively. I think that a lot of the improved morale, the communication, the sense of community with the other departments came from Appreciative Inquiry and its positive approach.

The effect of Appreciative Inquiry is so strong that it can even transform deficit discourse and negative thinking. In the words of one employee:

I am a very positive thinker, so this suits me very well. But I believe this process is powerful enough to influence all of the staff—not just those of us who are already this way.

What happens to an organization when the freedom to be positive is unleashed? “You know the old adage ‘Garbage in / garbage out?’” asks Joe Sherwood. “Well, Appreciative Inquiry replaces the ‘garbage in’ with positive feelings and positive experiences. It creates instead a cycle of ‘energy in / energy out.’ It jump-starts organizational change.”

The freedom to be positive affected the home life as well as the work life of many Hunter Douglas employees. One employee described what happened when she felt free to be positive and share Appreciative Inquiry with her children: “It worked at home with my kids. It helped get them thinking positively, thinking things through for themselves, and getting what they want.” And Rinda Becker, an executive secretary, told us that her use of Appreciative Inquiry on the occasion of her thirtieth wedding anniversary led to “one of the most insightful and meaningful conversations my husband and I have ever had.”

How odd to think that people need permission to be positive. And yet so it is today in organization after organization. In its fully

affirmative stance, Appreciative Inquiry is a radical departure—a true revolution in positive change.

### In Conclusion: An Invitation to Positive Change

One measure of success for an Appreciative Inquiry initiative is whether an organization has enhanced its capacity for positive change. Has the organization's inner dialogue transformed from problem-oriented, deficit discourse to strength-oriented, affirmative discourse? Has knowledge of the organization's positive core expanded? Have members and stakeholders of the organization learned how to learn? Have the level of curiosity and the tendency to inquire increased? Has the organization's mind become an inquiring mind? Have the patterns of conversation, interaction, and relationships become more life centered? On the heels of a successful Appreciative Inquiry, the answer will most often be a resounding yes.

By liberating people's power, Appreciative Inquiry enhances an organization's capacity for positive change. This book is filled with stories that illustrate the power of Appreciative Inquiry, how it works, and why it works. Hunter Douglas's success story is the norm, not the exception, when it comes to getting results with Appreciative Inquiry.

Still, in the midst of growing applications and continued successes, there is much more to be done. Imagine schools around the world where children and teachers discover and learn together—where teachers, parents, and administrators are committed to bringing out the best of every child. Imagine hospitals where doctors ask people to describe their images of health and positive aging and where nurses, doctors, patients, and families gather to cooperatively design the health-care practices for their community. Imagine businesses that are dedicated agents of world benefit—where all stakeholders value the triple bottom line: balancing financial, social, and environmental needs. Imagine a community in which you are known for your unique gifts and strengths—where you choose to

work and are supported in areas that interest you. Imagine positive change in your organization.

And so we invite you to join the revolution for positive change. We invite you to experiment with Appreciative Inquiry in new ways and different places and thus to add to the growing body of knowledge about the liberation of power, life-centered organizations, and positive change. In short, we invite you to make our world a better place, one organization at a time.