

## The Experience of Wholeness



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What is it about the experience of "Wholeness" that brings out the best in people, teams and organizations?

This question has been with us since the inception of The Appreciative Inquiry Summit as we have watched over and over again, tension turn to enthusiasm, cynicism to collaboration and apathy to inspired action. We began wondering and asking people what happens when the whole system is in the room? When posed to clients, workshop participants and colleagues the answers typically include:

It evokes trust. When everyone is there you don't have to feel suspicious about what the others will do - there are no others.

It lets people see and experience a purpose greater than their own or their department's. You get the sense that you are connected to a goodness that comes from the power of the whole. You realize you really need one another. It satisfies the human need to be part of a larger community. It taps into our tribal consciousness. You feel like you belong. It establishes credibility in the outcomes. When everyone is part of the decision you know it will stick. Public commitments engender responsibility. New norms form quickly. You start to value relationships and getting the "whole story."

People transcend the "I" and become a "We." What's common becomes apparent. It eliminates false assumptions about other people and other groups. When you get to know someone you realize they aren't exactly what you imagined them to be. You develop compassion for different people instead of judgments.

According to our colleague Jim Ludema, "having the whole system in the room also brings an ecological perspective: all the pieces of the puzzle come together in one place and everyone can gain an appreciation for the whole. The unique perspective of each person, when combined with the perspectives of others, creates new possibilities for action, possibilities that previously lay dormant or undiscovered."

For people in large organizations, the experience of "wholeness" is akin to John Glenn's spiritual experience as he looked upon the whole planet earth from outer space. When the "consciousness of the whole" is evoked in us, we human beings want to organize our life and our work to serve the highest good of humanity. In large scale meetings, like the Appreciative Inquiry Summit getting the whole system in the room brings out the best in people, its facilitates the "whole story" coming together and it inspires highly committed actions on behalf of the whole.