

Brief Encounters from the Taos Institute

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Relational Leading - An Idea from the Field

By David Cooperrider

"One of the things we have discovered that is the most important route to leadership development is simply doing inquiries -- EVERY DAY. There are several published books of positive questions that have hundreds of appreciative questions in them. What we are doing in our work is encouraging leaders to take at least one question every day and find a meeting, a coaching opportunity, or an ad hoc interview in which to ask the positive question. We are asking leaders to choose a different question each day. The responses have been exciting; leaders are connecting with people in ways that open them to stories they might never have heard otherwise, and spontaneously it has shifted, for some, how they open every meeting.

Relationships are transformed.

One organizational president has gotten into the learning process by using positive questions so much that he in fact now starts every meeting with a new positive question.....So much of the fun of this work is also creating the questions. It is the best leadership strengthening tool I know.

Once when I was at an Images and Voices of Hope conference where AI was being used, I participated in the interview at the beginning, a lengthy interview guide. I got paired up with someone that I had a strong negative reaction to....I thought 'how did I get paired up with him?' I went into the interview with low energy. But the questions, prepared by Danielle Zandee, Marge Schiller and Judy Rodgers were powerful. Within a half hour I was learning new things that inspired me for weeks. I felt so privileged to have had the opportunity to enter into worlds of experience and wisdom that I never would have touched without those questions. The questions were the tool that drew me into new realities. This man's stories will stay with me forever. As will the relationship. I was humbled.

Imagine leadership development where we do this every day!!!! To me, this is the essence of leadership and it might well be a way to make Peter Drucker's comments come alive in practical ways when he says: 'Leadership is about creating an alignment of strengths making people's weaknesses irrelevant.' This, it seems, would require an appreciative eye --and there may be no better way of developing it than by trying the powerful, unconditionally positive question each and every day."

*Note: This excerpt was taken from David Cooperrider's posting on the AI Listserv in May of 2001. This is still so relevant today, almost 14 years later. David points to a new book by Warren Berger that features some of David's thinking. It's called **A More Beautiful Question** and David also recently wrote a "contemporary commentary on AI" for a recent book, the 4th in a series called **Advances in Appreciative Inquiry**. That contemporary commentary can be found on the website at Champlain College's new center-it's called the **David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry** at <http://www.champlain.edu/about-champlain/newsroom/cooperrider-center>*