

A Story of Empowerment through Appreciative Inquiry

This article is written by Ada Gonzalez, Ph.D., LMFT

I was meeting with a group of 20 executives from management teams around USA. A few years ago several smaller companies were acquired by a major global organization. Almost 4 years later (now) this was the first time the leaders from the 5 smaller USA companies were finally getting together as part of the bigger company.

They had asked me to facilitate a 1 1/2 day process to help them come together, find common goals for the USA group (800 employees among them) and see how much they could advance on getting to know and trust each other.

On the first day we did several exercises open space, cafe, and dialogue style. We had an excellent visual recorder to enhance the process. By the end of that first day several things were very obvious:

1. The leadership was confused about their identity (were still using the new name of the acquiring company together with their old names).
2. They felt disempowered in relation to what "them" (higher leadership in the company, from europe) wanted and the USA leaders felt did not fit USA needs.
3. They seemed to be "waiting" for someone to fix the issue. . .

At the beginning of the second day I decided they needed to be more conscious of their strengths and the power they had as a united group.

We started the morning by me calling for 2 minutes of silence during which I wanted them to look deep inside and find the personal strengths they were willing to bring into the room and into their organization. Then I asked them to stand, circulate, and share at least 3 strengths with others. After a few minutes of this, I called them back into the circle and ask each one to share strengths they had heard around the room. This are the strengths that were brought to light:



- They all had similar values and strengths that they wanted to bring into the bigger organization.
- What they wrote was aligned with the values that the new organization was trying to promote. (just maybe different words or emphasis)



At the end of the meetings, they had accomplished a lot. More importantly, they felt they were aligned to one purpose, and were working as a USA team. Here are their comments:



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I truly believe in the power of dialogue and appreciative inquiry. It never fails to bring hope, optimism, positive energy, and empowerment.

Dr Ada has worked as a communication specialist for more than 25 years, [helping organizations deal with the process of change](#). You can check out [Ada's blog](#). It's packed with ideas and practical advice, to help you improve your leadership thinking and communication skills.