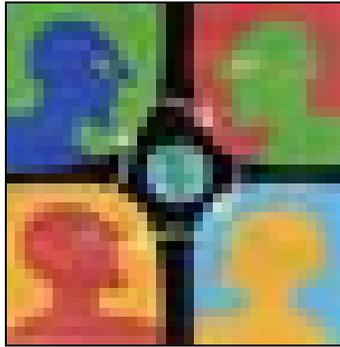


Words Create Worlds, May 2006



"The possible's slow fuse is lit, by the imagination."
-Emily Dickinson

Four resources for you

~ For those of you who wish to repeat an AIFT for only \$300, three AIFTs are coming up: Corning, NY; Longview, Washington; and Palm Springs, California

~ If you need a partner to help you in your Appreciative Inquiry work, Company of Experts.net has lots of AI Facilitators who can help

~ For those of you in education, StrengthsQuest is a revolutionary program from The Gallup Organization that focuses students on strengths rather than weaknesses. Check it out at <http://www.strengthsquest.com/>

~ Dr. Martin Seligman is founder of Positive Psychology, a new branch of psychology which focuses on the empirical study of such things as positive emotions, strengths-based character, and healthy institutions. His research has demonstrated that it is possible to be happier · to feel more satisfied, to be more engaged with life, find more meaning, have higher hopes, and probably even laugh and smile more, regardless of one's circumstances. To take free questionnaires, go to <http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/>

Two more AI Facilitators certified

~ Congratulations to **Steven Youngblood** <youngblood@psusd.us> who participated in the AIFT© Palm Springs. He has completed a practicum and is now a certified AI Facilitator. **Steven**, Director of Secondary Education, worked with directors and coordinators in the Education Services Department of the Palm Springs Unified School District at their quarterly strategic planning meeting. A Core Group, a sub-set of the larger Inquiry group, identified the positive topic of Inquiry as "Visions of a Better World," with assistance from the Whitney, Cooperrider, Trosten-Bloom and Kaplin's *Encyclopedia of Positive Questions*. Here's the inspiring Interview Guide they developed:

Introduction

World-class organizations exist to serve a vision of a better world. Their purpose, principles, and people are aligned with the vision. Products and services are created to realize the vision. People within such organizations are energized and inspired by possibilities for a better world.

1. When have you most felt like your work was part of a positive force in the world, when you felt an alignment among your principles, purpose, and practices? Tell a story about what you were doing.
2. What do you see today (not future possibilities, but beginning to happen right now) that gives you hope for the future? This could be something on a global scale, or a personal experience. It could have to do with social or political events, or it could have to do with what you've experienced in this organization or your community.
3. If a genie appeared right now in front of you, and offered to grant you three wishes (without worrying how they would be fulfilled) to heighten vitality and effectiveness in this organization, what would these three wishes be? What do you wish for the organization and the people involved?

Using face to face paired interviews, the group shared stories and identified a number of life-giving forces from their stories:

- ~ Helping teachers to grow and develop into a quality professional
- ~ Helping people know that they can teach even the most difficult, challenging group of students because of the support provided to them
- ~ Helping people to learn what friends in the workplace really are
- ~ Enabling members of the organization to organize into small teams for self-governance
- ~ Hiring employees that shape and direct the district's focus on what is best for kids first and what is best for the organization second.

As a whole group, they developed a Provocative Proposition: *"At the heart of everything we do is the belief that what we are doing is what is best for every single child."*

As a whole group, they also developed the Bold Idea of using the principles of AI in all the work they do. Each person also developed a number of Individual Commitments, Offers and Requests.

Members of the Education Services Department agreed to post the Provocative Proposition in their offices and report on their efforts to implement AI principles in their work at the first tactical meeting of each month. Two members of the group agreed to facilitate an Appreciative Inquiry with K - 12 principals at their summer retreat. As a member of the Education Services Department, **Steven** will check to ensure members of the department have posted the Provocative Proposition in their individual offices. **Steven**, along with Unified School District's Director of Elementary Education, **Frank Tinney**--also a certified AI Facilitator--will strive to help their supervisor, peers and subordinates, to continually focus on the inherent principles of AI in its work together. **Steven** will review the schools' needs

on a daily basis and follow-up with members of the department to ensure schoolsq staffs, students, and parents are being served and that %what is best for every individual student+is continually its focus.

Steven's %personal best+experience was the %econnection to our training experience (i.e., the AIFT) as I worked to plan and facilitate the process with our department. In addition, I think this experience helped members of our department to feel safe to express their feelings about our work together as a department.+

~ Congratulations also to **Kate Tucker** <kate.tucker@syngenta.com>, a participant in AIFT© Cape Town and Human Resources Officer for Syngenta South Africa (Pty) Ltd. She completed her Practicum and is now certified as an AI Facilitator. So far, **Kate** has facilitated two Inquiries with two different teams within Syngenta, a world-leading agribusiness committed to sustainable agriculture through innovative research and technology.

In a project called %Learning to SOAR,+**Kate** worked first with the Vegetables Sales and Marketing Team, a seven-person team that reports in a matrix to both the local legal entity and into the Vegetables Sales and Marketing Team in Enkhuizen, in The Netherlands. The Market Manager, Vegetables, Syngenta Seeds, has been working hard with the team over the past 18 months, and is committed to a growth scenario for the team. Based on this, he agreed to the Inquiry.

Given the size of the Vegetables Sales and Marketing Team, **Kate** did not need a Core Group. All seven people participated in an off-site, all-day Inquiry.

Teamwork emerged as the most important theme for the Vegetables Sales and Marketing Team. Team members first created a visual image, followed by a word image or Provocative Proposition. **Kate** then used the Goose Egg Framework to help the team members develop action plans. This generated a huge amount of material and four action plans were developed with time lines and Champions. All the plans were rooted in intense teamwork, which was recognised at many stages in the Inquiry as being truly the *positive core* of the business unit. This was a significant learning, as team members are widely distributed geographically and rarely interact face-to-face.

According to **Kate**, %The aim, agreed to by the team at the end of the Learning to SOARqsession, is for each individual team member to take full ownership of the current and future action plans, and incorporate them into their everyday business. This will be a process of interaction, conversation, coaching and mentorship, as well as reiterating the success stories and adding new ones on a regular basis. We plan to have annual sessions but, in between, to use every opportunity to share, discuss and work on the small things that make the big differences.+

Kate facilitated a second Inquiry with the Formulation and Packaging Plant, Brits. Situated in the Northwest Province, approximately 60 kilometres from the Johannesburg Head Office, it consists of approximately 40 permanent employees, and numerous seasonal contract workers, who also report in a matrix structure. Local leadership is provided by the South African Leadership Team (SALT).

All employees were invited to an all-day session; only two were unable to attend. **Kate** identified a Core Group, a microcosm of the Inquiry group, and used the Generic Interview Guide to define the Affirmative Topic for the large-group Inquiry. The topic was %Good2GR8 Fundamentals.+

Kate said, %Significantly, the day before the session the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) called for a one-day national stay-away from work. After negotiating with the unionised employees, we obtained their buy-in to participate in the workshop and not to honour the call . a huge achievement and a celebration of the commitment of the group to the process.+

After the groups had developed their Provocative Propositions, **Kate** used the Syngenta Backbone and Leadership model (well known to the group) and asked each individual to write one idea on a Post It Pad and stick it on the appropriate part of the backbone. Using the Backbone and the Leadership Model made the action plans personal and helped create a feeling of ownership and engagement with the plans, as well as helping employees understand the role of strategy in their everyday lives.

The Core Group will integrate the plans and start clustering and prioritising them. Its first task will be to look for the quick wins, and then plan for longer-term ideas. **Kate** will provide the Core Group with coaching to empower them to improve their non-technical skills while still ensuring that action plans are implemented.

The Core Group at Brits has made a commitment to drive the actions and the process forwards. Specific supporting structures and mechanisms are:

Coffee sessions every month to share important information and success stories

Good2GR8 Meetings every quarter. These are %safe spaces+where people can share freely and discuss any non-operational issues freely, irrespective of rank. The meetings are contextualised in the Jim CollinsqGood2GR8 philosophy, with information sharing focussed on what they need to do to take them from good to great, and sharing successes already achieved

Clustering the action plans on the Backbone and Leadership model has already provided a user-friendly framework for implementation

Prioritising the action plans to identify quick wins and longer term plans will take place shortly

Coaching of First Level Leaders and the Core Team

Kate included two quotes that are outstanding examples of the climate for the day, and a testimony to the safe space that **Kate** managed to create to enable each voice to be heard.

The Odd Couple

%One of our recent employees (started work on 2 January 2006, as an Operator on one of our production lines) is a young black woman (unusual in our male-dominated environment). In the interview process she was paired with the Head of Engineering, a mature, white male. In her feedback, she commented about what an odd couple they made, and that if one just looked at stereotypes, the interview should have been very difficult. However, the interview was perceived by both as a great success and a good exercise in relationship-building across cultures.+

The Shop Steward

Another powerful example originated with an employee who was paired with the Shop Steward. His feedback was that he had not expected his interview with the Shop Steward to be easy; in fact he had expected the interview to be destructive. Instead, he found that being interviewed by, and then interviewing, the Shop Steward was a very positive experience. This was confirmed by the Shop Steward.+

A nice way to end...

Appreciative Inquiry, a poem by **Andrea Klein** <aklein@mhasp.org>, AIFT Houston
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It's a mindset, a philosophy, a shift in how you view
the world in every aspect and everything you do
When you ask that very first question,
things will start to open up
like a glass that's holding liquid
half empty or half filled cup?
The nature of the question
carries the direction you need to go
ask the question, listen deeply,
The conversation will ebb and flow
Describe life experiences and stories of hopes and dreams
Though grounded in reality the vision becomes more than it seems
Feel the energy, excitement
when this process starts to fuel
you are doing Appreciative Inquiry using it as a tool
From the positive experiences,
what works well just tends to surface
make commitments, collaborate together
to create more becomes the purpose

Andrea is Project Coordinator for the Delaware County Family Satisfaction Team in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania.

Thanks, Andrea!

Best Wishes,



Nancy Stetson

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