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Thinking Skills for Opportunity Search,
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 Appreciative Inquiry

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Using *Appreciative Inquiry* to Improve Your Organization

presented by

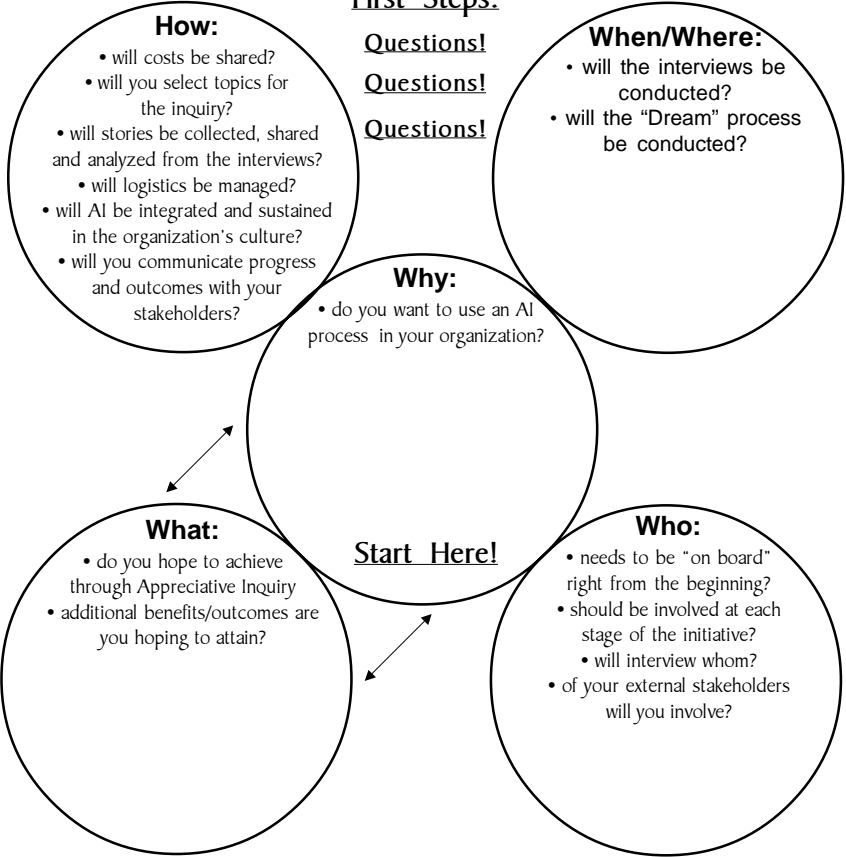
James E. (Jim) Taylor



Ph./Fax: 403 343-7388
 Email: rolyatcorp@shaw.ca
 Mail: 3421 - 39th St.
 Red Deer, AB T4N 5T7

Five Factors Critical for Success

1. A clearly defined and important purpose.
2. An relentless focus on the positive.
3. A willingness to commit the time and resources needed to do what is necessary.
4. Inclusiveness: all key stakeholders should be involved.
5. Trust in, and commitment to the 4D (or similar) process.



A Process for Launching an Appreciative Inquiry in an Organization

1. Senior management decides to adopt the AI process: may set *general* area for the inquiry, e.g. customer satisfaction, improved quality of work life, team building, partnership building.

2. A “steering group” is selected: should be a diagonal cross section of the organization, with representation from all levels of the organizational chart. Working with the AI consultant, this group then:

- is trained in AI concepts and engaged in the AI process; members practice “appreciative interviewing” on each other
- identifies the specific topics of focus of the inquiry; there are usually 3-5 for an inquiry
- frames the “architecture” of the inquiry: who will be interviewed and by whom - within or across functional groups
- frames the “appreciative protocol” (the actual interview questionnaire) This process achieves clarity about the purposes of the inquiry and determines the questions to be asked
- tests the appreciative protocol on itself and, based on the results, revises if necessary

3. “Storytelling” - the appreciative interviews are conducted - (Discover):

- these are usually one-on-one interviews lasting one to two hours; ideally, everyone in the organization is

interviewed; failing this, a representative sample is interviewed; often includes stakeholders outside the organization

- involves active listening & eye contact on the part of the interviewer; if necessary, the interviewer may “reframe” negative comments into positive ones which still address the underlying issues
- interviewer makes brief but precise notes during interview; makes more extensive notes immediately after interview is completed
- the “data” is analyzed, themes are identified, organizational circumstances and conditions that give rise to “peak experiences” and “best practices” are defined

4. Imagining a “preferred” future - (Dream): based upon the best of what has already been, a future is imagined where the best is achieved more often; “images” are created - may incorporate art, sculpture, drama, music; “provocative propositions” are written that will guide movement towards the imagined “preferred” future.

5. Finding innovative ways to create the preferred future (Design and Destiny): structures and strategies are devised to take action on short-term, and longer-term goals; action plans are prioritized and implemented; change strategies are made sustainable through adjustment and improvisation and the creation of a “appreciative learning organization”. Ideally, the Design/Destiny phase will involve “recycling” the process through new 4D cycles.

Writing an Appreciative Inquiry Interview Guide

AI interview guides ask three sets of questions: Introductory questions, Topic questions, and Concluding questions.

Introductory questions deal with a person’s first contact with and attraction to the organization, and with high point experiences he/she has had since then. (See Questions 1-4 in the *XYZ Church* example.) Introductory questions are designed to build rapport between the interviewer and interviewee and initiate a positive and meaningful conversation. They help the interviewee connect with positive memories and experiences, and ease into a “storytelling” mode.

Topic questions address the focal points of the inquiry. An Appreciative Inquiry usually has 3-5 topics and each one is introduced with a positive “lead-in” to direct the interviewee’s attention to positive thoughts. (See the examples provided.)

Concluding questions direct the interviewee’s attention to the future, and to what the organization is being “called” to become. They connect with the interviewee’s imagination and

vision of the future. At the same time, they ask about the “positive core” of the organization that should be preserved into the future. Here are some examples of concluding questions.

Tonight when you go to sleep, you have a very deep sleep, and wake up 4 years later. It is 2010. When you arrive at work, you begin to notice that XYZ is as you always imagined it could be — the way you believe it ought to be. Describe what you see happening. How is it different? Describe what is going on in 2010 that exemplifies the ideal XYZ you have always imagined.

If you could change or transform XYZ in any way, what three things would you do to heighten the overall health and vitality of the organization? What single small change could we make that would have the biggest impact in improving XYZ right now? What bold change could we make that would have a big impact in improving XYZ ?

Great organizations know how to “preserve the positive core” of what they do best, and are able to let go of things that are no longer needed. As XYZ grows and expands, what are three things - core strengths, values, qualities, that you want to see preserved and leveraged as we move into the future?

Sample Questions from Several AI Interview Guides

XYZ Church *The following comes from interview guides I developed for two churches I have worked with.*

1. To start I'd like to learn about your beginnings at XYZ Church. When did you first come to the church and what attracted you to it? What keeps you coming back? What sets our church apart and causes you to choose us as your spiritual home?
2. Since you have been coming to our church, some days and services have likely been better than others. For a moment I would like you to think about a time that stands out to you as a high point, a time when you felt energized and passionate about our church and knew that you were coming to the right place. Please describe in detail the situation, the people involved and what made it a high point experience for you.
3. Let's talk about some things you value most — specifically about yourself and about our church. Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself— as a human being? What are the most important qualities or strengths you could contribute to XYZ Church if you had the time?
4. What is it about your involvement with XYZ Church that you value the most? What is most interesting or meaningful to you? What is the greatest contribution our church has made to you and your life?
5. What would you like to see more of at XYZ Church? How can we serve you better?

The Church as a Positive, Healing Force in the Community

Many churches and spiritual individuals want, as a major part of their organizational or personal mission, to make a positive, practical difference in the daily lives of the people in their community. Mother Theresa is perhaps the best known role model of this desire. Other examples include the many programs that aid the poor and homeless offered by the Salvation Army, and our own participation in *Inn from the Cold*. Tell me about a time when you felt the most enthusiastic about our church's helpful, healing role in the community, when you knew we were making a significant positive difference in people's lives.

What was going on? How were we making a difference? Who was being helped? Who was doing the helping? Without being modest, what was your role in making things better? What did it feel like to be part of these constructive activities? What good came out of the collec-

tive effort to be of service to the community? What was its most positive legacy?

What two or three things could we do to maximize both our positive impact on the community and our own sense of the meaningfulness and purposefulness of our church life?

Personal Commitment

Sometimes, organizations or causes are so appealing and meaningful to people, that they are willing to go above and beyond the call of duty in their support of it. Think about a time when you were really committed to a church, or some other organization or a cause, when you were not only willing, but eager to give it your time and financial support. What did you find so attractive and so deserving of your commitment? Please describe the situation in detail.

What would XYZ Church need to do to earn the kind of enthusiastic commitment from you that you described in answer to the previous question?

The following comes from AI interview guide used by Green Mountain Coffee Roasters. One of the focal points of their Inquiry was "phenomenal sustainable growth"

Question 2: Understanding Our Strengths as Growth Disciplines

As we focus in on the subject of phenomenal, sustainable growth for GMCR, it is helpful to think about the particular ways in which growth happens. In a recent book called *Double Digit Growth*, author Michael Treacy advises readers to consider several "growth disciplines:"

1. "Keep the growth you have already earned" (Market Retention)
2. "Take business from your competitors"
3. "Show up where growth is going to happen" (Targeting high growth sectors of the market)
4. "Invade adjacent markets"

Think about a time when you were involved in a growth initiative at GMCR that led to increased business. What was the growth initiative? Which of the above "growth disciplines" does it fit most closely? What was your part in that initiative? What were the results? What do you believe were some important contributors to the success of that growth initiative?

The following comes from AI interview guide used by Canadian Tire. It demonstrates that considerable creativity and playfulness can be shown in writing interview guides.

V. Thriving Enterprise

One of the four major points of Canadian Tire's leadership model is commitment to the enterprise at large. The Starship "Enterprise" on the famous 1960s series "Star Trek" provides us with an interesting and playful way to think about Canadian Tire's visionary goal of developing leadership on all levels for the good of the enterprise overall. The Starship "Enterprise" was led by extraordinary leaders whose decisions were guided by the ultimate necessity of doing good for both the home ship and the larger universe. Many episodes provided lessons on the importance of forming relationships across boundaries of culture, communication, or personal style in order to benefit the larger whole. Finally, the leaders of the Starship "Enterprise" were actually ambassadors for their own home and culture charged with the goal of proactively making connections to serve the universal good.

With this metaphorical model in mind, I'd like you to share a favorite "episode" in your career at Canadian Tire that demonstrates the value of "enterprise" leadership. Who was your Captain Kirk—your leader and role model? How did you know she or he was leading for the good of the enterprise overall? How did your team within the enterprise benefit from and support such leadership?

If you think about Canadian Tire as a thriving "universe" in the future, what kind of leader is most likely to carry the "ship" into its most prosperous future?

What is the smallest thing that would make the biggest difference in supporting that leader? (For further probing: what is an ambitious change that could set in motion a change of events that would lead to significant, lasting, positive change?)

The following comes from AI interview guide used by Roadway Express. One of the great achievements of their Appreciative Inquiry, is that it successfully engaged truckers in a unionized company in initiatives to reduce costs and increase productivity.

Question 3: Roadway will achieve a sustainable competitive advantage when everyone is fully engaged in the success of the Company and committed to the success of each other. This engagement allows true partnerships to emerge, which are characterized by a spirit of trust and common commitment. Describe one time when you felt a sense of engagement and trust be-

tween management and labor within this organization: a time when you felt a true "partnership" emerging.

How did it come to pass? What was your role? What would have made it more powerful or memorable?

Question 4:

A truly outstanding organization is one where each person is given the opportunity to display financial responsibility. Understanding how what I do impacts the bottom line, doing things right the first time, and being aware of the costs of doing business are all components of finan-

cial responsibility. Describe a time when you felt you exhibited a clear sense of financial responsibility.

What was it about the situation that enabled you to do this? What 3 things could be done to strengthen everyone's sense of financial responsibility?

The *Encyclopedia of Positive Questions Volume 1*, (ISBN 1-893435-33-4) is an excellent resource for getting started in writing AI interview guides. In addition, the book has chapters on ways of using positive questions, spreading appreciative stories within an organization, and choosing affirmative topics. The book has forty sample questions, on the topics shown below.

1. Best-in-class
2. Career Development
3. Can-do Coaching
4. Compelling Communication
5. Community/Service
6. No Limits to Cooperation
7. Culture as Strategic Advantage
8. Customer Loyalty

9. Participatory Decision-Making
10. Strength in Diversity
11. Environmental Friendliness
12. Financial Responsibility
13. Fun at Work
14. One Big Hope
15. Integrity in Action
16. Joy in a Job Well-done
17. Let's Do It
18. Inspirational Leadership
19. Irresistible Leadership
20. Continuous Learning
21. Organization Design
22. Ownership
23. Exceptional Partnership
24. Union/Management Partnership

25. Creating and Sustaining Positive Energy
26. Praise is the Fuel of High Performance
27. Quality Moments
28. Recognition
29. Respect for People
30. Role Clarity
31. Root Cause of Success
32. Seamless Service
33. Strategic Advantage
34. Strategic Opportunities
35. Winning Teamwork
36. Technology That Serves
37. Visions of a Better World
38. Shared Vision
39. Work/Family Balance
40. Men and Women Working Together

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Jim has demonstrated considerable skill in designing and managing group processes that help everyone to stay civil when strong feelings are in play. He has helped several groups engaged in conflict to identify and build upon areas of common interest.