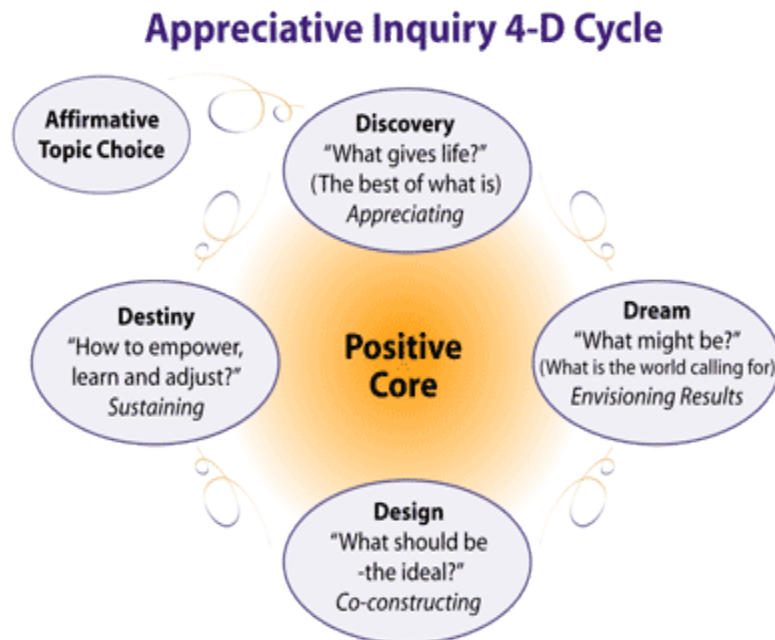


## Coaching and the Power of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) by Terence Mauri

*What is appreciative inquiry? Why is it powerful? How can you harness its power for breakthrough coaching? Terence Mauri, Director of Leaders First reveals its secrets.*

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is arguably one of today's most effective yet unrecognised change methods and has been used around the world to transform organisations from McDonald's to BA. Its assumption is simple and begins by identifying what is positive about an organisation – things that give it life and enable it to be successful. AI can inspire positive change by doing more of what works and less of what doesn't. Co-developed by Professors David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western University, AI can offer a useful and innovative organisational tool for coaching as well.

So how does it work? Imagine you are with a client and you ask the question - What is a high point experience in your work - a time when you were most alive and engaged? From the very first question you ask, change begins. You ask what works, rather than what are the problems to be fixed. Appreciative Inquiry begins by identifying what is positive and connects these affirmative qualities in ways that heighten energy and vision for personal change. For AI to work effectively, the coach will take the client through an appreciative dialogue known as the 4-D Cycle. Remember this process is flexible and adaptable to suit the needs of the coaching session.



The 4-D Cycle begins with the following:

**Affirmative Topic Choice:** Human systems move in the direction of what they study therefore the topic choice is critical. E.g. Inspirational Leadership or Ultimate Teamwork

Topics should be positive, desirable and stimulate conversations about desired futures.

**Discovery:** This stage is a cooperative search to appreciating the 'best of what is'. For example, what's going well?

**Dream:** An energizing exploration of 'what might be'. This phase is an opportunity for people to envision possibilities that are big, bold and beyond the boundaries of what has been in the past.

**Design:** Time devoted to dialoging 'what should be'. Priorities on where one should invest time to accrue the best results.

**Destiny:** A series of inspired actions that support ongoing momentum. This phase focused specifically on personal commitments and paths forward.

But – what about problems?

This is one of the most frequently asked questions about AI. The response is simply that if you want to transform a situation or an organisation, a strengths based positive approach will be more effective than a deficit-based approach.

Ground-breaking work by Professor Barbara Frederickson has now provided an explanation for the role of positive emotion. Her work is known as 'the build and broaden theory of positive emotion'. Frederickson's thesis is that positive emotion does not simply signal well-being and the absence of negative emotions but has the capacity to encourage well-being and flourishing. Frederickson argues that while negative emotions narrow people's perspective and keep them focused on the specific problem in hand (e.g. flight or fight), positive emotions 'broaden' people's likely thoughts and actions as well as their behaviour. In other words, when we are experiencing positive emotions we have more 'behavioural flexibility' and this allows us to build 'intellectual and psychological resources' – a hallmark of effective coaching. So if we are feeling positive we are more likely to be curious, to learn, to explore and be creative than if we are negative.

According to new research by Leaders First, organisations have used a 'deficit-based' approach to problem solving since the 1930s. Many companies today are overrun with deficit discourse and are habitually prone to problem analysis and hence fear, blame and critique. Their inner dialogue is negative. Isn't it time for a positive revolution in how organisations and individuals approach change? A strengths-based approach to coaching and change.

***Terence Mauri is a business speaker and expert on management and leadership issues.***