



What can Appreciative Inquiry do for your business?

Nutrimental Foods Founder and CEO Rodrigo Loures had to act quickly to halt the downturn. Nutrimental was undercapitalized, deeply challenged and declining rapidly. In a bold move, he shut down the company for four days while he convened key customers, suppliers, and all 700 employees in an Appreciative Inquiry summit that focused on identifying past company successes and factors that led to those achievements. They also took a look at operational aspects that were working well to figure out what they could apply to other areas across the company to improve efficiency. The discussions generated viable ideas, enabled rapid decision-making, built new alliances, sparked widespread enthusiasm, and inspired a collective confidence in the company's future. The summit was a phenomenal success. Within six months, profitability has increased by 400%, and employee satisfaction was notably improved. A short time thereafter, sales were up by 66 percent, profitability had risen to 422 percent, productivity had increased by 42 percent, and employee satisfaction ratings were at 95 percent. Appreciative Inquiry had enabled Loures to rapidly mobilize stakeholders in important and strategic discussions, which ultimately revitalized his company.

What is Appreciative Inquiry? Appreciative Inquiry is "the study of what gives life to human systems when they are at their best. It is an approach to human and organizational change based on the assumption that inquiry into and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams is itself transformational," according to Dr. Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom in the *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*. Problems are not denied or ignored, but the idea is that focusing on strengths is a more effective path to finding solutions. We know that we move in the direction of what we study. So why not study what we want more of? For example, if a company

wants high performance, it makes sense to study the times when it is operating at exemplary levels and the quality is flawless, to learn what makes it so and to consider how to replicate and expand it. The premise is simple, yet profound. Instead of focusing on what's wrong, build on what works.

A strength-based focus encourages creative thinking, innovation and an openness to positive change. This contrasts with a problem-based focus, which often results in finger pointing, blame and resistance to change. "We don't need research to tell us that it's difficult to foster collaboration and creativity, and to achieve a successful outcome, when people are thinking defensively. Research reinforces what we know instinctively,"

says Whitney, internationally-recognized consultant and author. For example, psychologist Marcial Losada spent years studying the behavior and work patterns of high, mixed and low performing business teams in action. He found that high performing teams had a much higher ratio, 6 to 1, of positive to negative behavior versus a ratio below 1 to 1 of low performing teams. High performing teams were more open with each other, willing to ask questions and accept new ideas as a result. They were more resilient and didn't get stuck in critical, one-sided arguments.

Appreciative Inquiry is rooted in the meaning of its two words. "Appreciate" connotes valuing, gratitude and recognition. "Inquiry" has to do with exploration and discovery. The two words together suggest an open, positive focused approach to organizational change. The template for Appreciate Inquiry, designed to help participants create the roadmap for change, is what's called a 4-D Cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny." People engage in dialogue and inquiry to discover strengths (a "positive core"), share dreams for the future, design the ideal organization, and make decisions and commitments to

create the destiny.

It all began in the early 1980's, when Suresh Srivastva, David Cooperrider, and other graduate students in Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management innovatively modified their approach to organization development. Now practiced by thousands of organizations and communities around the globe, Appreciative Inquiry has become one of the most popular management tools put in practice today.

■ **Appreciative Inquiry** has been credited with stunning successes around the world in businesses, communities, universities, and nonprofit organizations. A few examples include:

■ **Award-winning corporate culture change:** GTE corporation (now Verizon) received the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) "Best Organization Change Award" for the vanguard work done over two years guided by Cooperrider and Whitney. Appreciative Inquiry has been used successfully by companies such as Hunter Douglas, Merck, British Airways, Roadway Express, and British Petroleum.

■ **Community development:** "Imagine Chicago" engaged Chicagoans in a comprehensive community visioning project to co-create a desirable future. Other communities have launched similar projects with great success including: Dallas, West Australia, Chile and in Longmont, Colorado.

■ **Educational opportunities:** Three international Appreciative Inquiry conferences have been held, the most recently in Nepal in 2009. Appreciative Inquiry has become mainstream in many doctoral programs, including Benedictine, Fielding, Saybrook, the Naval Post Graduate Institute, and the Taos Institute, as well as the AU/NTL program. In addition,, Case Western Reserve University

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Optimism, pride and talking are great, but now what?

In July 2009, 300 members of the community gathered for a Dream Summit to hear feedback from nearly two years of community conversations about the future of the region, namely what people hoped it could look like in the year 2020 which is not so far in the distance.

The very nature of this gathering was rooted in optimism and a sense of pride in having engaged over 3,000 citizens in productive dialogue. Too often we are told that not enough people care about the health and long term vitality of this region, and here we were faced with thousands of people who not only cared, but were upbeat for the most part about what we could accomplish together.

Author Peter Block, who was in town earlier this year as a part of the Pikes Peak Library District's All Pikes Peak Reads program, wrote in his book *Community: The Structure of Belonging* that "conversations of possibility gone public are not all that restores, but without them, personal and private conversations of possibility have no political currency and therefore no communal power."

And therein lies the primary challenge — how to translate conversations of pos-

sibility into communal power.

That is the work that continues to fuel the Dream City Vision 2020 process. We believe that the very act of sitting down with people who are different from you and finding commonalities can, over time, powerfully shape a community one person at a time.

There is no doubt that even after two year's of conversation, we are still facing some of the most difficult times in our region's history and compromise can sometimes be a foreign concept.

However, it is imperative that we create an environment where important issues can be discussed in a civil manner that respects all parties involved. When this is possible, over time we will start to see the progress we seek.

As Block writes, "speed and scale are the arguments against what individual and communal transformation require."

So, while Dream City, and other community engagement efforts that have taken place before it (such as Food for Thought) and others, are longer-term projects that seek to create systemic change over time, there are many other valuable efforts being rolled out in the community that create a platform for more immediate action

and participation. Colorado's Future, Operation 6035, the Southern Colorado Innovation Strategy and more are all working to create a unity of purpose that our community can rally around. Together, these projects have gathered much data that can inform each other and enhance outcomes.

The 100 volunteers that facilitated over 300 Dream City dialogues gathered feedback that was synthesized into vision statements in ten different categories that align with quality of life indicators in an attempt to track progress in those areas. These statements represent the voice of thousands of citizens and what they want to support.

The Dream City coordinating partners have identified likely champions that are already working in these areas to create positive change, and we will be scheduling board and organizational presentations to share the feedback we've gathered so it can be put to good use informing their work. We cannot begin to predict the positive things that will come out of these outreach efforts, but history shows us that big things can happen when you have the will of the people behind your work.

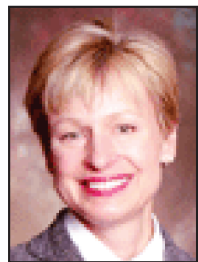
Just one example of this is the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region (COPPER) is using the data from Dream City dia-

logues on art and culture to inform their new cultural plan for the region. Thanks to the work done through Dream City, COPPER's plan will reflect the needs and wants of the citizens who will ultimately be asked to support any new initiatives that come out of their cultural plan.

We will also continue to reach out to other community-building efforts to share what we've learned from the initial stages of the Dream City process, and it's our hope that this will help break down some of the silos that can be created by well-meaning groups eager to create the change they want to see.

The primary take-away from the last two years of Dream City is that our community doesn't suffer from a lack of people who care. The challenge we are faced with now is how to educate and engage the passionate citizens who want to take ownership of the future they will help create through their actions, for good or bad. The role we can play is to reach out and provide a platform for respectful dialogue so that more people will be armed with the knowledge of what's at stake.

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INQUIRY

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has a Masters in Positive Organization Development, and several organizations — including Corporation for Positive Change — offer Certificate Programs in the practice of positive change.

What has changed over the years? Appreciative Inquiry has matured. More people know about it and believe it can serve their purposes. Dozens of books have been written on the subject, applying Appreciative Inquiry to culture change, strategic planning, congregational growth, team building, families, coaching and more. Around the globe, organizations and communities are doing revolutionary work with award-winning results, just as the City of Longmont and Boulder County, CO have done with the support of Corporation for Positive Change consultants Amanda Trosten-Bloom and Barbara Lewis. The list goes on and on.

And now, a philosophy and practice called Appreciative Leadership builds on the wisdom of Appreciative Inquiry to bring out the best of people and ad-

dress the unique challenges of leadership today. Based on years of research, including focus groups conducted in Colorado Springs, Appreciative Leadership is described at depth in a new book by the same name (Appreciative Leadership, McGraw Hill, August 2010). Co-authored by Whitney, Trosten-Bloom and myself, it offers clear concepts and practical tools to “Drive Winning Performance and Create Thriving Organizations.”

Do you want to consider further what Appreciative Inquiry or Appreciative Leadership could do for your organization or business? Go to www.positivechange.org, or www.appreciativeleadershipnow.com for more information, books, workshops, research, and links to other resources. Or look for the second edition of The Power of Appreciative Inquiry (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom), available on bookshelves this month.

Kae Rader is President of Rader Consulting, LLC and a Consulting Partner with Corporation for Positive Change. She has more than 30 years of managerial and consulting experience and is facilitator and speaker. She can be reached at Kae@raderconsult.com or 685-0434.



Colorado Springs Leadership Institute

Colorado Springs Leadership Institute Class of 2010

The CSLI is a diverse group of more than 180 proven leaders with a passion for the Springs. It encourages leadership, dialogue and interaction about the future of the community.

These 16 will add their energy to the CSLI effort:

Clarrisa Arrelano, Pikes Peak Association of Realtors

Brian Binn, Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs

Richard Blair, Southern Colorado AIDS Project

Scott Bryan, Bryan Construction, Inc.

Dan Dandapani, UCCS School of Engineering

Mike Esch, Jean Sebben Associates

Jeff Greene, El Paso County Administrator

George Guerrero, El Pomar Foundation

Hay Den, Kane Law Firm, P.C.

Katie Lally, Center for Creative Leadership

Judith Mackey, Benefit Services Group

Jes Raintree, Community Activist

Paul Martinez, Dynamic Solutions, LLC

Scott McGuire, Colorado Technical University

Steve Self, BBVA Compass Bank

Bettina Swigger, COPPER

Good luck class of 2010, study hard during your week in April 19 to 23 at the Center for Creative Leadership. The test at the end is a doozy.

More information is available at www.CSLIonline.org.

Community Leadership Development Options in the Pikes Peak Region

The Colorado Springs Leadership Institute

The Colorado Springs Leadership Institute (CSLI) begins with an intensive five-day training session that applies the leadership skills development approach of the renowned Center for Creative Leadership, within the specific context of challenges facing the Colorado Springs Community. Colorado Springs Leadership Institute recruits established leaders that represent all segments of the community (business, government, education, nonprofit sector). After completing the course, classes participate in networking events, ongoing communication and informative programs.

For information contact **Katie Lally** at 329-7864 or www.CSLIonline.org.

The Center for Creative Leadership's Community Leadership Program

The Center for Creative Leadership's Community Leadership Program provides emerging leaders with an intensive leadership development training and self assessment program. The program provided by the Center for Creative Leadership's world class faculty is three-and-a-half days long. Applications are due March 1.

For information contact **Suzanne Ernster** at 633.3891 or ernsters@leaders.ccl.org

Leadership Pikes Peak's Signature Program

Leadership Pikes Peak's Signature Program is a community leadership development program with the mission to develop to cultivate vital and diverse community trustees. Leadership Pikes Peak has offered this interactive 10-month Signature Program annually since 1980. The curriculum includes monthly experiential full-day sessions covering topics such as business and economy, education, human services, state and local government, criminal justice, arts and culture. In addition, each class meets and networks with regional leaders and implements a project that benefits the community. The selection process focuses on people with demonstrated leadership or management and community service experience, and each class is selected to reflect the diversity of our community. Applications are due June 18, 2010 for the program which will start in September. Applications may be obtained at www.leadershippikespeak.org.

For more information call 632-2618, or email lpp@leadershippikespeak.org.

The Women's Community Leadership Initiative

The Women's Community Leadership Initiative (WCLI), a program of Leadership Pikes Peak, seeks to empower women of modest means with the knowledge and tools to make a positive change, not only for the women, but for our community. Through the six-month, 12-evening sessions program, participants learn about the community, and gain and practice leadership and networking skills. Graduates become involved in their own communities, confident that they have something to contribute, willing to have a voice and become an active participant. WCLI just started its eighth class, which will graduate in June. Applications will be accepted this fall for a January 2011 start date.

For information call 632-2618, or email lpp@leadershippikespeak.org.

Leadership NOW!

Leadership NOW! is Leadership Pikes Peak's newest program. This program targets young professionals (ages 22-32) working and living in the Pikes Peak Region. Leadership NOW! integrates the best in current leadership thinking and application with the intention that participants graduate well equipped to lead. During the course, participants will network, learn core leadership concepts and practice applying these concepts to current issues. In addition, participants will have the opportunity to meet with and learn from a host of seasoned local leaders about relevant community concerns. This is an opportunity to combine leadership practices, personal/professional motivation and civic-mindedness toward the ultimate goal of individual and collective impact. The program begins in the fall and sessions are held every two weeks. Applications are due June 18th for the 2010 program, which will start at the end of August. Applications may be obtained at www.leadershippikespeak.org.

For more information call 632-2618, or email lpp@leadershippikespeak.org.

El Pomar Foundation's Emerging Leadership Development Program

El Pomar Foundation's Emerging Leadership Development Program (ELD) identifies and encourages current and emerging ethnic minority leaders to embrace broad-based community involvement, civic engagement and service on boards and commissions. The program is a collaborative effort among El Pomar Foundation, leadership development programs and ethnic minority-focused community organizations in Colorado Springs and Pueblo. El Pomar Foundation also provides scholarships to civic-minded ELD participants that are selected to take part in community leadership development programs.

Information can be obtained at www.elpomar.org/emergingleaders or by contacting **Theophilus Gregory** at 577-7081 or tgregory@elpomar.org.