



Notes From Under the Prairie Sky

Issue #3

April 2011



I do hope winter is finally on it's way out.

It has been a long cold one for many of us and even though I got away for a few weeks of warm weather we came back to a blizzard and more below frigid temperatures. It is now a mess of snow and mud around here. Our puppy Skidoodle is growing fast and will be huge. She is tracking mud everywhere through the house.

Well back on track. I have learned this past month that my mind goes on vacation along with the rest of me. I am now home and beginning to think again.

This is my third e-zine and I am beginning to get the sense of how to do this so that it might be useful and interesting.



Skidoodle - my new puppy

In my first two e-zines I spoke about the four types of listening: (Downloading; Factual; Empathic and Generative). I also spoke about the importance of intention as we enter any situation and how we pay attention as leaders. In this edition I am moving on to Appreciative Inquiry and Appreciative Intelligence which I hope fit for you with the earlier messages in providing you with tools to lead your organization and perhaps your life.

A number of years ago I began learning about Appreciative Inquiry as away to create change in an organization but also as a way to find out information in a manner that is supportive rather than negative.

What is Coaching?

The ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

Getting coached by Prairie Sky Executive Coaching you won't need to leave your office or pay for travel as all your coaching will be done over the telephone.

Would you like some support as you lead your organization through difficult times.

I will listen, listen some more and together we will co-create pathways to solutions and new opportunities.

If you are unsure if Coaching is right for you or your organization, you can contact Gail

at

gail@prairieskyexecutivecoaching.com



There are a number of assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry (references at bottom).

1. In every society or organization or group something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple moments.
4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past.
6. If we carry forward parts of the past they should be the best of the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

It is interesting to me that when these concepts were first introduced they seemed quite esoteric but now make perfect common sense.

The traditional models of improving focus on what we are not doing well and implementing a problem solving model. The focus of Appreciative Inquiry is always on what we do well and how to do more of it.

Do the people in your organization hold the assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry to be true or would some still focus on using a problem solving model in order to improve the situation? Do we believe that when we ask a question of a group that the group stays the same or is the group changed by our interaction? If we ask a question that leads to looking for what is wrong what are we going to find? How are people changed when someone begins asking what is wrong with how we do things? How are people changed if we begin by exploring all of the things that we do right?

If we believe that what we focus on becomes our reality as assumed in Appreciative Inquiry can you see that when we begin looking for what is wrong we find one, two, and then many more problems so that we are creating more anxiety and defensiveness and end up overwhelmed by all the work that needs to be done trying to undo or do less of the things that are wrong. If on the other hand we begin with what is right in our organization (or our life) we also find more things that we do well and the change begins to happen from a place of strength as we build on the characteristics found in the things we do well.

Appreciative Inquiry draws on brain research that most of us have known intuitively for a long time. Our brains do not compute the word no, or don't. If someone says don't think about elephants what do we think of? Of course we think of elephants. If someone says don't hit that bump on the road what happens. If my diet says don't have pie what do I want. If we accept this it

makes sense to take the negative right out of our conversation. Have you ever said to a staff member or your child "don't be late again". How long did it take until it happened again? Their brains computed be late again.

I know that much of this is not new to you however, thinking about the assumptions that live within your organization or family and how they affect your ability to create positive change could be an important beginning to strategic planning or to a life plan. Recognition that group assumptions play a huge role in determining whether an organization (or home) will change successfully creates the need to start there.

"If something we focus on is magnified by our attention we want to be sure that we are magnifying something worthy"

If you want to begin the appreciative inquiry process you want to start out choosing the right topic as it will be magnified by the process. Create questions that explore the topic. Following are some sample questions that have proved useful to a group looking to work together as a team.

Describe a time when you feel the team/group performed really well. What were the circumstances during that time? Describe a time when you were proud to be a member of this group. Why were you proud? What do you value most about being a member of this group/team? Why?

In putting together this e-zine I used The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry by Sue Annis Hammond and on line resources about David Cooper Rider and the development of Appreciative Inquiry. I find the Thin Book a good tool with lots of examples. It is available from Amazon for about \$7.00.

I am now rereading "Appreciative Intelligence" by Thatchenkery and Metkzer which details characteristics of and skills leaders use to spread Appreciative Intelligence throughout their organizations.

I hope to pass on more ideas and tools that may be useful to you.

*Choosing joy for each of you on
your path,*

Gail