



LifeSolutions

# The Successful Supervisor

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## Appreciative inquiry

It is often challenging for leaders to facilitate positive workplace growth and change with their employees. This edition of the *Successful Supervisor* introduces the concept of appreciative inquiry. The following information was adapted from *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (2003) by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom.

This appreciative inquiry approach was developed in the mid-1980s at the Department of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University by David Cooperider and Survesh Srivastva. It differs from traditional problem-solving approaches by focusing on what is working rather than on what is broken. We all know that positivity can breathe fresh life into a struggling workplace. If you're facing low morale, reorganization, staff turnover, or other challenges, approaching the issues with this framework in mind may help you and your employees get unstuck. As the name suggests, inquiry (or questioning) is at the heart of the concept. The process for generating the power of appreciative inquiry is referred to as the 4-D Cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. As a successful supervisor, you can guide and prompt people to look at their work and performance in these terms.

### Discovery

Look for the best of "what is and what has been." Share best practices and search for examples of extraordinary actions, when you've pushed yourself above and beyond what is expected.

Here are some questions you can ask people in this phase:

- In what context have you (or has the department) thrived?
- What is the most exciting part of your job now?
- What engages you or gives you a sense of fulfillment?
- When have you really made a positive impact at work?

### Dream

Explore "what might be." What hopes do you have for your work, your working relationships, and the organization as a whole?

Here are some questions you can ask people in this phase:

- What do you see as the strengths you possess that can help you meet your goals? What strengths do you see in your team members?
- What would things look like if your goals were realized?
- How would you like to see yourself (or the team) do things differently to get you and the team or organization to the next level?

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### Design

Describe the ideal organization (i.e., “what should be”). Craft provocative statements that list the qualities you most desire.

Here are some questions you can ask people in this phase:

- What affirmative statements would describe you (or this team) taking our success to the next level? (For example, We will communicate openly and frequently. I will identify ways to streamline our processes.)
- How would you describe your ideal role in making this team or department the best it can be? (For example, I will be a mentor to our new staff members so they can learn from my experience.)

### Destiny

Support ongoing innovation, or “what will be.” Examine your own and the organization’s commitment to new processes and practices.

Here are some questions you can ask people in this phase:

- What specific steps are you/we taking to make this transformation happen?
- What obstacles do you think we might encounter?
- What steps will we take to overcome those obstacles?
- Whose support will we need to succeed at this?

Leading your team through this cycle can help you and them to focus on possibilities, rather than getting stuck solely on the problems and obstacles to growth and positive change. Scheduling a series of ongoing group meetings or dedicating a portion of individual supervision to appreciative inquiry questioning could both be valuable applications. If this approach appeals to you, there are numerous resources on the topic for you to explore. Keep in mind that *LifeSolutions* is available for consultation concerning any workplace or employee issues. You can call 1-800-647-3327 for confidential support. You can also find resources on our website at [www.lifesolutionsforyou.com](http://www.lifesolutionsforyou.com).

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