

How to run an appreciative inquiry meeting

So what is an appreciative inquiry?

- a meeting focused on just the good, the awesome
- not for negative problems - shouldn't avoid these, but this meeting not place
- it's about understanding what is working - shine a light on it and keep doing it
- it's also about designing a brighter future
- as a meeting run with your team also a way to build trust and get people engaged in designing their own work

Step 1 - Invite the right people

Send an invite to only the people needed in the meeting. The more people you have, the harder the meeting as there are more voices, ideas and communication

Step 2 - Plan Ahead

Plan ahead and make sure you have the right kit. The stationery list is as follows:

- Basic sticky-notes
- large sticky pads
- whiteboard pens
- pens for writing on sticky notes - our recommendation

On the whiteboard you'll need four columns for Discovery. Dream. Design. Plan and a boxed area for *Offline* - where you're parking all of the negative comments, problems and challenges that people will inevitably bring up.

Step 3 - Create A Safe Place

At the start of the meeting I make sure I do something to create a safe place for people to share ideas. You'll have your own style but I tend to tell some jokes, play a silly game or do something to stimulate the creative juices.

Step 4 - Start with Discovery

Discovery is all about what's going well. What are the team doing that is awesome.

- What is working?
- What is excellent about your chosen area of discussion?
- What makes working there so awesome?

Step 5 - Dream

Next step is to dream. This is where I ask the people in the room to start listing how much better we could be. Here are some sample questions.

- What could we do to improve on what is already working?
- How can we get even better?
- If we had no limitations at all what would our future look like?
- What kind of future would mean we would be unstoppable?

Step 6 - Design the Future

Now it's time to start working through the ideas in the next stage - the design stage. The design stage is where we put in place steps to make the best ideas a reality.

- What would it take to deliver it?
- If we're doing this work what else has to drop?
- What would be the outcome of doing this work?
- Can we measure it?
- How will we know when we finish?
- Who benefits from this work?
- Do we have all the people we need to achieve this?
- Do we have the skills?
- Does this resonate with the business goals?

Dig deep enough to be able to visualize what would it takes to deliver it.

Step 7 - Plan

Now we need to put in place a plan. We're looking to put in place these things:

- Who is leading this work (and it should not be the manager, unless it is a management initiative).
- Who is on the team?
- Who is doing what?
- When is the next milestone? (Not too far out - a week at most)
- What reporting mechanisms are we using?

The deploy stage is all about putting things in to motion and building a team around it. Consider though, that there still won't be a huge amount of detail around the plan. So the next milestone is usually to flesh out the plan and report back to the wider team.

Step 8 - Ensure Clear Outcomes

Close the meeting and set the next steps. Reiterate back to the group what we're doing, why and by when. Fix the next meetings and make sure people are clear. Field any questions. Keep positive.

Step 9 - Follow Up

Follow up with good communications, regular meetings and iterative planning. Ensure your team are talking to each other and reporting back progress.

- Are they stuck with anything?
- How is the plan going?
- What actions are happening?

In my experience every time I run an appreciative inquiry the team are energized and focused.