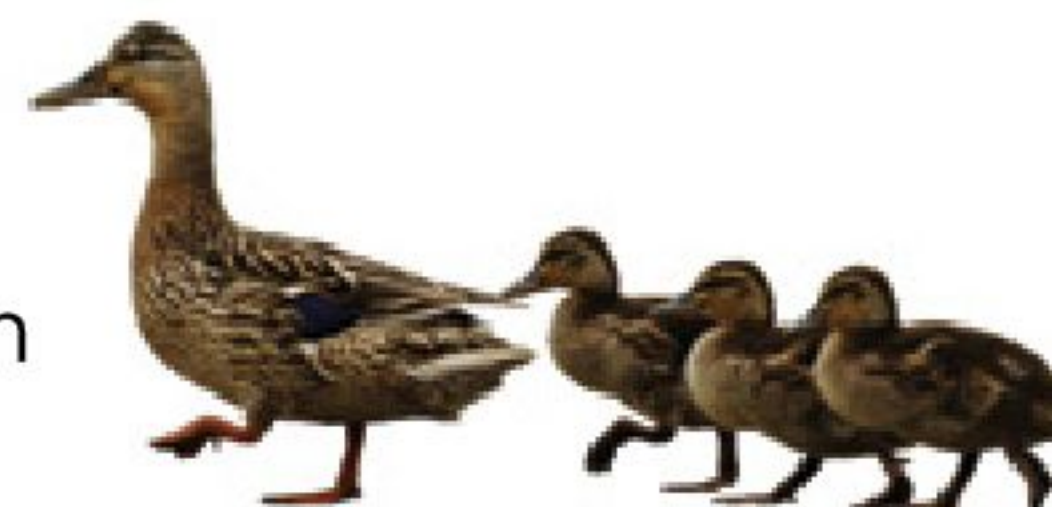


Leaders Worthy of Appreciation

New leaders learn important soft skills through an appreciative inquiry development approach.



This story was told by Jen Hetzel Silbert and Bob Laliberte, partners at Innovation Partners International (IPI), a consulting firm specializing in building strengths-based organizations using appreciative inquiry.

CLIENT>>

A community of long-term healthcare facilities

PROBLEM>>

The organization was grooming up-and-coming leaders and hired IPI to conduct leadership training.

CAUSE>>

The employees needed to acquire leadership competencies beyond traditional hard skills. IPI used appreciative inquiry—a strengths-based, holistic approach to change—as a training and development method.

METHODS>>

During a progressive, in-house, three-hour workshop that took place every two weeks for two-and-a-half months, IPI taught employees how to sustain lasting cooperative leadership capacities. First, participants completed

a visioning exercise to identify positive leadership experiences from their pasts and examples from history and current events. Then the students created personal visions and learning goals based on these real-life examples.

Through appreciative inquiry, they asked questions about qualities they valued from respected leaders. They realized they already had many leadership strengths, and identified stretch goals to work on.

Participants took the IPI-developed “Appreciative Capacities Inventory (ACI)” to determine how they rated themselves within each of the following five cooperative capacities:

- Collaborative: The ability to positively invite, engage, and involve many in a conversation about important topics.
- Reframing: The ability to seek out and study a new frame or view of the world; to be open to new concepts, ideas, viewpoints and possibilities.
- Potential: The ability to see the positive possibilities for oneself, others, an organization, or community.
- Emergent: The capacity to see beyond what is known to oneself or visible; to be able to improvise

and hold space for new possibilities to emerge.

- Affirmative: The habit of seeing the world with an appreciative eye; to notice and articulate what is healthy, constructive, and life-giving.

Participants learned how to apply the capacities daily at work. For example, they used reframing to ask (instead of blame) and to facilitate understanding (instead of conflict). They learned to deliberately change conversations so they could get where they wanted to be quicker, without unnecessary conflict or staff turnover.

RESULTS>>

The leaders noticed marked improvements in one another and held each other accountable to their development goals. IPI recalled how one nurse manager’s tone and closed physical presence at the beginning of the workshop negatively affected how she was perceived as a leader. They worked with her to adopt more affirmative body and verbal language. After several weeks, the nurse reported that her CNAs said she appeared more open and confident; they were impressed by how calmly she was handling difficult situations.



LESSON LEARNED:

Leadership development is about taking the time to become aware of your words, emotions, and physical presence—particularly as they affect those in your workplace. It’s also about using intentional words and actions to quickly get you and your team where you want to be.