Appreciative Inquiry 101: Finding "The Flip" to a More Positive Outcome

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> *Positive thinking is more than just a tagline.*
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> *It changes the way we behave.*
>
> *And I firmly believe that when I am positive, it not only makes me better,*
>
> *but it also makes those around me better.*
> *-Harvey Mackay*

A fundamental practice of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is to focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. Doing so enables us open up our thinking to explore our successes and opportunities rather than obsess about our shortcomings or failures. **This practice does NOT mean that we sugar-coat or overlook reality.** It simply means that we build on our immediate and local assets rather than focusing on what is not there or not desirable.

We all tend to find evidence to support our assumptions and values, no matter what they are. As public servants, we can use this inclination to our advantage in our interactions with both citizens and colleagues. This practice, based on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry, is called finding "the flip."

This is not the same thing as putting a more palatable spin on a negative topic. **Instead, it enables our capacity to recognize any positive assets or attributes that are contained within the hard situation.** That's the positive nugget, the gold. We want more of that.

Consider one simple example. You are leading a staff meeting following a week in which your community experienced conflict or, perhaps, a natural disaster. People are depleted and disappointed, AND there is a lot of work to do. Assume our society and we as individuals share the responsibility in varying degrees for the bad things that happened. **Ignoring the weight or reach**

of the negative experience is not appropriate, and ignoring the work that has to be done today is not an option, either.

Try opening the meeting by going around the table to allow responses to one of the following questions:

- Share one simple action you saw or experienced in the last week that gave you hope for our capacity to act with integrity and compassion, even in challenging situations.
- Our systems were overwhelmed dealing with difficult circumstances last week. Share one small example of a successful interaction with the public that gave you pride in our organization.
- The stressful events of the last week indicate we need to strengthen arenas of both prevention and response. As we begin work to do that, share one practice or asset we have that strengthens our public interactions and should be retained into the future.

By naming that good stuff together first, we can unleash the potential of that positivity and design the way forward together -- a future that includes more of what we desire.

To learn more about using AI in your work in the public sector, join us in [Winston-Salem on November 4, 2016, for a one-day workshop on Positive Problem Solving.](#)