

Appreciative Leaders

In the Eye
of the Beholder

Edited by

Marjorie Schiller • Bea Mah Holland • Deanna Riley

The Taos Institute

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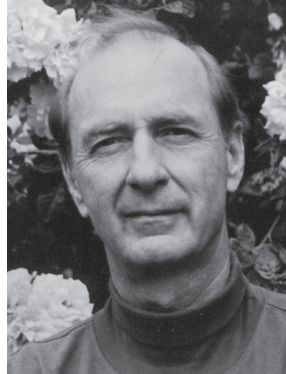
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Preface

Kenneth J. Gergen



I take great pleasure in introducing the work of Marge Schiller, Bea Mah Holland, Deanna Riley, and their colleagues as the flagship volume in the Taos Institute Focus Book series. The Taos Institute is a non-profit community of scholars and practitioners working to explore and extend the view that through human relationships we construct our realities. Our attempt is to design and promote creative, appreciative, and relational practices for broad use within society and around the world. Through publications, conferences, workshops, and educational programs, we hope to provide innovative conceptions and effective practices for transforming individuals and organizations.

The Focus Book series is intended to bring to a broad readership significant fruits of these efforts. The particular hope is to make available cutting edge ideas and practices as they are developing, and at an affordable cost. Our champagne glasses are now raised at the publication of *Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder!*

This present exploration of Appreciative Leadership is indeed cutting-edge work. The enthusiasm with which organizational practitioners have greeted Appreciative Inquiry is both exciting and gratifying. Practices of Appreciative Inquiry are now employed around the world, in organizations of every variety. However, practitioners are also increasingly aware that such practices harbor implications of far greater depth. The transformational processes set in motion by appreciative inquiry are not limited to these particular practices alone. The powerful processes of appreciation may thrive in all domains of organizational life. The domain of leadership is an optimal venue for unleashing these forces.

It is in this context that we owe a great debt of gratitude to Marge Schiller, Bea Mah Holland, and Deanna Riley. They have

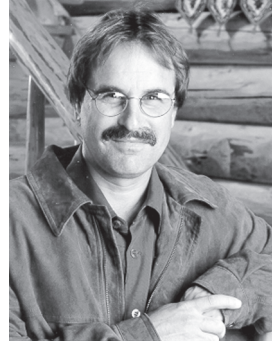
not only witnessed these powers at work, but have now taken the first significant steps in bringing them to light so that all may share. Their method is a simple one: To work with their colleagues to identify leaders who seem to embody practices of Appreciative Leadership, and explore with them what it is they do and how they understand their actions. The results are far from simple: Here we have an enormously rich body of material—a broad array of insights and ideas coupled with diverse forms of relevant practice. As they are shared with us, the readers, we are challenged to rethink the character of organizational life and are provided images to inspire our own future actions.

These resources come to us at a crucial time in the history of organizational life. In many sectors, the traditional organization—hierarchical, top down, and rigidly structured—is proving unserviceable. The demands of an increasingly complex and rapidly shifting environment bring about new demands for flexibility, coordination, and the sharing of opinion. Further, with increased sensitivity to the ways in which organizational viability depends on the values and voices of many different groups, concerns with the democratization of the workplace have become paramount. These changes call for new practices of leadership. In my view, it is just such practices that are represented in the pages of this book. We encounter here the contours of the future.

Kenneth Gergen
Director
The Taos Institute
July 2001

Foreword

David L. Cooperrider



In the decade since our book *Appreciative Management and Leadership* was written (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1991), I have become increasingly convinced that *appreciative modes of management may be to our newer, self-organizing systems what deficit or problem-oriented methods of management have been to command-and-control bureaucracy.*

Appreciative Leaders: Theoretical Background

Deficiency focus, root cause analysis, remedial action planning, closing gaps, intervening in broken down systems, machine metaphors—these were and still are among the most recognizable vocabularies of bureaucracy, and these are the vocabularies, when caricatured, that make us all shudder and laugh when reading one of the all time best selling management books, *Dilbert's Management Principles*. Robert Haas, chairman and CEO of Levi Strauss, observes that the deficit management approaches have reached the point of diminishing returns, and that the kind of radical innovation needed today requires whole new patterns: “There’s a whole range of behaviors that were highly functional in the old hierarchical organization that are dead wrong in the flatter, more responsive, empowered organization that we’re seeking to become” (Haas, in Bennis, 1992, p. xi).

At the core of every distinctive form of social organization, proposes Barbara Marx Hubbard (1999), are “memetic codes” that are to social systems what genetic codes are to biological organisms—“the way genes build bodies, memes build cultures, societies, and the noosphere.” So when Thomas Kilman (1979), for example, equated deficit-based, problem-focused management as the memetic essence of what it means to be an executive, he was likely speaking about the modernist, bureaucratic form of industrial

organization. He wrote: “One might even define the essence of management as problem defining and problem solving, whether the problems are well-structured, ill-structured, technical, human, or environmental” (p. 214).

But this book describes something completely different. It’s about a new memetic code. It is about leadership as a life-centric process of reality construction and meaning-making, *not* leadership as machine repair. It is about the “spirit of inquiry” being even more powerful in leadership than final answers and intervention, and it is about the amazing energy that is available when we realize that organizations are centers of human relatedness, first and foremost, and relationships thrive where there is an appreciative eye and when people see the best in one another, when they share their dreams and ultimate concerns in affirming ways, and when they are connected in full voice to create not just new worlds but better worlds.

Appreciative Leadership in Practice

Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder, describes and tells *stories of positive revolutionaries*, of leaders who are transforming their industries and the world through appreciative modalities of knowing, interrelating, and the active social construction of reality. It tells the story of leaders who lead by valuing, not evaluating, and who create change by synthesizing or combining capacities (not breaking apart the problematic) and by imagining the new, the better, the possible in ways that compel, transcend, and uplift. Peter Drucker was perhaps the clearest and closest to what this volume is about when we asked him the question last summer: What will the core of leadership be in *tomorrow’s* organizations? His reply was immediate and unequivocal: “The task of leadership is *to create an alignment of strengths and make people’s weaknesses irrelevant.*”

Over the last couple of years, I have been having remarkable conversations with leaders who represent this emerging paradigm: President Jimmy Carter; Jim Staley, President of Roadway Express (featured in *Fast Company*); Dr. Bernard Lown, Founder of the Nobel Prize winning organization, International Physicians for

Prevention of Nuclear War; Anita Roddick, Founder of The Body Shop; Tom White, former GTE officer; Admiral Clark, Chief Naval Officer, Navy; Jane Pratt, CEO of the Mountain Institute and former officer at the World Bank; and Dee Hock, Founder and CEO Emeritus of Visa. What all of these human beings have in common, as far as I can discern, is an uncanny capacity to see, magnify, and connect all that is good and best in people and the world around them, and to summon all that is best in life as something that can only be described as a “power core” capable of mobilizing transformational conversation and cooperative action. Several themes appear again and again:

- *Everything the appreciative leader does conveys to others a genuine, respect-filled, positive intention to produce enduring change for world benefit. Reality, for the appreciative leader, is not a given: It is there for our active shaping in the direction of our higher purposes.* For example, when I asked Jimmy Carter to describe for me moments in his work when he feels most alive, effective, and fulfilled, he said: “ I know precisely the moment. It is when we have put the last nail in the structure for a new Habitat for Humanity home...the whole group stands together in front of the home in a circle, and we say a prayer, celebrate, and talk. We are together as equals, Black and White, across all racial boundaries and all class boundaries—and you see right in front of you the tangible image of our joint capacity to deal with poverty. At those moments, you feel miracles of benefit to people are possible...and the tears often well up in my eyes.” Today Habitat for Humanity is making more homes than any other corporate or nonprofit homebuilder in the world.
- *The appreciative leader enlarges everyone’s knowledge and vision of the appreciable world—all the strengths, capacities, and potentials—not by having solid answers, but expansive questions. It is precisely through inquiry itself that the appreciative leader realizes and unleashes,*

not their own, but other people's genius. The art of leadership lies in the art of the positive question. One of the most exciting pieces of work I have ever done was a three year project with Dee Hock, the Founder and former CEO of Visa. When I asked Dee about the Visa story—it went up 10,000% in profits under his leadership—he pointed to the moment he brought a brilliant team of “ordinary bankers” together to reconceive, not just the old Bank Americard, but the very concept of organization itself. In his memoirs, Dee Hock (2000) writes: “I asked if they would be willing to take a week or more of their time, isolate themselves completely, set aside all thought of the problems of the system, and address a single question based on a simple assumption: *If anything imaginable were possible, if there were no constraints whatever, what would be the nature of an ideal organization to create the world's premier system for the exchange of value?* After a bit of head shaking and rolled eyes, they became intrigued...” (p. 132). The Visa system, soon thereafter to be born, became a benchmark of a new “chaordic” form of organization—and within a decade it had become the largest corporation in human history. The appreciative leadership lesson? *We live in worlds our questions create and, precisely because of this*, humility is a stronger quality of leadership than bravado, infectious curiosity more important than supervision, and a spirit of inquiry is more decisive than static strategy.

- *The appreciative leader lives with an awareness that organizations that are in “full voice” will be more creative, resilient, and knowledgeable than organizations that are in half voice and, because they hold positive assumptions about people, they, as leader-weavers, are continuously expanding the web of inclusion—realizing that the best in human beings comes out when people experience the wholeness of their system.* Jane Pratt, the CEO of the Mountain Institute and former officer at the

World Bank, taught all of us about this when she helped create a worldwide alliance of scientists, grass roots activists, UN Agencies, and non-profit environmental groups to deal with the environmental threats to mountains in all parts of the world. The web of inclusion she helped create was hailed in 1997 by the UN. What she set in motion was a worldwide movement that would make people as aware of our fragile mountain regions as we are of our precious tropical rainforests (Kaczmarek and Cooperrider, 1999). Rodrigo Loures, taking inspiration directly from Jane, said, “It is not just systems thinking we need; what we really need is *living* systems thinking— to put it into practice.” So what did he do? He closed down his whole Brazilian food plant and brought all 750 people of Nutritional Foods together for four days, to plan the future of the company. It was an extraordinary display of trust, but it paid off. A year later absenteeism rates were cut by 300 percent and profits were up 200 percent.

Similarly, Jim Staley, President of Roadway and just featured by *Fast Company* magazine (Hammonds, July 2001, p. 56), did the same thing. He brought truck drivers, dock workers, union leaders, customers, and people from every function of the company together to plan the future. His belief in dialogue, in relationships, and the human factor is total. “There is not a lot of technology that’s going to make us more efficient. So future opportunities are going to come from our people being engaged and involved in the business, and coming together as a whole helps us align, create, and empower in ways we have never experienced before.”

I was at that four-day meeting. And Jim Staley worked in a subgroup just like everyone else. He only stood up once, on the morning of the last day, and spoke spontaneously for seven minutes. After he spoke people cheered and gave him a standing ovation. He lifted up, in inspiring and grateful words, what was in the heart of

every person at Roadway. People sometimes talk about participative management as abdication of leadership. But this kind of radical participation—bringing a whole plant together—is not abdication, but just the opposite. Leadership is given life by relationship, by good conversation. The more relationship, the more leadership. This is what the web of inclusion is about.

These are the kinds of insights Marge Schiller, Bea Mah Holland, and Deanna Riley have brought together in this wonderful book. Listen to what they and their partners have to say. Appreciative leaders are maestros. They brilliantly work with relational capacities, strengths, invisible opportunities, values, elevated qualities, assets, generative words, patterns and currents of possibility, meaning systems, sacred traditions, stories that inspire—almost anything but machine-like breakdowns. Appreciative leaders bring the gift of new eyes, penetrating and positive. They hone in on capacities. They lift every voice. But most of all they are agents of knowing life—generating alternatives, lifting up options for better living, and creating webs of inclusion that serve to enlarge our world-making potential at its healthiest. There is a world where you are, where we are. It exists because of what we, collectively now and socially before us, have constructed. And it is made up of so much potential just waiting to be used to create, like a painter does before going to a canvas with paints of red, and blue, and yellow.

May this daring book open new options in your leadership. And may it help all of us expand our constructive capacity, our life-centric capacity, for bringing our *appreciable worlds* into closer and closer alignment with our language, our accounts, and our conversations of our *appreciated worlds*. For in the end, appreciation is as much a language as it is a quality of relational living—it is, as Bill Moyers once put it, “a language of life.”

David L. Cooperrider
Weatherhead School of Management
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio
July 2001

Chapter One

The Road to Appreciative Leadership

Marjorie Schiller

Something is happening with leaders. They are changing. As our views of how organizations' work changes, the models of effective leadership also change. Gone is the notion that organizations are like machines: You plug them in, you turn them on, you replace broken parts, and productivity results. There is an emerging picture of how organizations *actually* work. As we move from the mechanistic metaphor to a more subtle and complex understanding of organizations, we see the need for leaders who care about context, wholeness, and interconnectivity. We are moving from solving problems to embracing the iterative mystery of solutions. We have learned that what we ask determines what we find and what we appreciate matters. It appears that information and interrelationship are the building blocks of new organizations and the motivators for the appreciative leaders who are the topic of this book.

The Elements of Appreciation

Appreciation has three core elements. First, as the dictionary suggests, an act of appreciation acknowledges what is outstanding or special. Second, appreciation recognizes the mundane or ordinary. This suggests appreciation of the expected; taking joy in the unexceptional like the sky, a child's continual questions, and the day-to-day beauty of life. Third, there is appreciation of those situations that are painful and difficult; appreciation of the improbable and important lessons that are embedded in some of life's awful experiences. The Webster's Collegiate Dictionary offers "value," "prize" and "esteem" as synonyms for appreciate. Appreciative is also defined as "capable of showing appreciation." A leader is "a person who leads others along the way, a guide." Appreciation can also be defined in financial terms as in to appreciate or grow in value. You will see these definitions brought to life in this book.

The Purpose of the Book

This book was written for appreciative leaders to recognize their own style and to bring to the attention of learners and practitioners a more articulate and transparent model of appreciative leading. The demographics of the new work force suggest more people will have more choices about where to work and how to work. Job satisfaction and appreciation are vital to attract and retain the highest quality employees in the new economy. Therefore, leadership skills and attributes must shift from giving orders to providing direction and support.

Appreciative Leadership, as indicated in the following chapters, is highly values based. Leaders see it and recognize it as their own personal style of leading—“that’s just what I do.” Yet, Appreciative Leadership is more than an individual style. It is a method and practice that is gaining respect in the international business community. This book aims both to connect appreciative leaders, so they may know and recognize each other, and to encourage new leaders to see the benefits of bringing Appreciative Leadership into their workplace practice. The book also attempts to codify what was originally seen as stylistic or idiosyncratic and to reinforce and give language to models of success in appreciative leading. We want to demonstrate that Appreciative Leadership works. The appreciative leader is one who is as Miracle Grow® plant food is to a garden; that leader can jump start growth and, when it really works, can produce change at the speed of collective imagination.

Two Assumptions

There are two underlying assumptions to this book: 1. Everyone is a leader. We all lead in different domains; therefore, everyone can learn from this book. 2. Leadership is in the “eye of the beholder.” The relational (what happens between people) co-construction (mutual development) of meaning (interpretation) is the foundation of what we experience as real.

This book has been written as an invitation to leaders to recognize themselves in the stories of others. Appreciative leaders want theory and examples that validate and communicate what they

are already doing. This book is also written for people who are in the process of finding their own leadership style. We want emerging leaders to see some applicable alternatives to command and control methods. As organizations become more like self-organizing systems, and as the rate of change increases, we propose that there is a benefit to celebrating the existence of appreciative leaders as examples of doing leadership better and doing leadership right.

Methodology

One hundred and ten people were approached and invited to interview and write about an appreciative leader. We intentionally did not provide a definition, but used the “you know one when you see one” approach. More than half of those invited identified a leader they wanted to interview. Then more than half of those who expressed interest submitted a manuscript. What you will read in the next five chapters is a selection from the submissions. The interview demographics are explained in Chapter Six; it is noteworthy that 43% of the submitted interviews were with women appreciative leaders, and 11% were with international appreciative leaders from Europe, New Zealand and Latin America. To get the big picture and expand your knowledge of appreciative leaders, read more interviews at the Taos Institute Web site <www.taosinstitute.org> or the November 2001 edition of the Appreciative Inquiry newsletter <www.aradford.co.uk>.

The leaders who are profiled are varied and diverse. The aim is to show Appreciative Leadership in action. This is not an academic book, although it is expected it will be useful to teachers and students. It is a series of snapshots, sketches, and drawings of leaders whose behaviors and philosophies of leadership are congruent with the principles and practices of appreciative inquiry.

The authors have provided insight into how these leaders make meaning of their jobs and lives. Efforts have been made to give the reader descriptions of what the leaders actually do in order to make Appreciative Leadership tangible and visible. The choice to use first names, last names, titles, and combinations in describing these leaders was deliberate. The nuances and language of personal or relationship titles is a complex business. Words create worlds,

and it is important to show the diversity and changing nature of relationships.

- Chapter Two describes the Appreciative Leadership stories and experiences of seven leaders who are taking care of business in profitable companies.
- Chapter Three brings together leaders in the health care field who focus on medical service delivery, wholeness, and healing.
- Chapter Four highlights the experiences of several community leaders and their contributions in police work and school systems.
- Chapter Five shares the reflections of three people, each with a lifetime of honorable leadership.
- Chapter Six presents the editors' findings and insights along with an Appreciative Leadership model derived from the interviews that were conducted.

The title of the book, *Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder*, underscores our individualized definitions of “appreciative.” This is why interviewees were asked to select appreciative leaders based on their own perceptions and knowledge of Appreciative Inquiry—a concept of finding the best in organizations and promoting positive change through inquiry into the finest of what was, what is, and what might be. Conversational exchanges and relationships clearly define the qualities of appreciation. Appreciative Leadership can look very different in different settings: an appreciative leader in the U.S. Department of the Army may sound different than the appreciative leader in direct sales or telecommunications.

While the title of the book deals with the potential multiple interpretations of an individual's story (“what is appreciative to me, might not be appreciative to you”), it is through the reading of many stories that one can begin to piece together the overarching characteristics that define an appreciative leader. The editors could have approached this book as market researchers and held focus groups with leaders, or as academic researchers and surveyed the

catalogue of leadership literature to find the salient qualitative data. Instead, a more anthropological approach—going in search of leadership ethnographies—was selected. Each author—or would-be anthropologist—was supplied with identical question protocols. Assuming what is asked predetermines what is found, we asked appreciative questions. What we heard were stories and answers that reflected the appreciative leadership of successful women and men. The authors expanded the protocol questions with their own follow-up and/or augmenting inquiry. This protocol is included in the Appendix. Each author questioned, listened to, and observed their leader and, much like Margaret Mead or Jane Goodall, documented the individual nuances of style and culture. It is in the intersection of these personal accounts that we found the universal. In the last chapter the editors describe the fourteen characteristics that identify, personify, reinforce, and drive appreciative leaders. We identify the themes that emerged from our study and present a model of Appreciative Leadership.

We want future and emerging leaders to see the pragmatism and the promise of Appreciative Leadership. Leaders, and those who study and work with them, have been having a lot of conversation about moving beyond command and control to a new style of leadership that we believe is called for in organizational life now and in the future. The hope is that readers will see Appreciative Leadership as the template for leadership in this century.

Conclusion

We invite you to read and learn from these stories of successful women and men who enable others to expand their own definitions and design their own philosophy of leadership. These leaders are not confined to any industry or culture. The stories can remind us of the leaders we want to be and give us *aspirational* clues of how much further we can grow. Here are practical strategies to appreciate, and models to use as we travel the road to being appreciative leaders.

We have learned a great deal and we hope you will too.