

## Words Create Worlds, February 2007



**Book of the Month:** I highly recommend a relatively new book that I discovered at the AI Conference in Vancouver, BC. Called Appreciative Intelligence, the authors (\*Tojo Thatachenkery & Carol Metzker) help us understand how important it is for leaders to re-frame situations and events to see hidden %possibilities+instead of %problems+and to see the strengths in the people around them. Some rare and incredibly successful people seem to be born with the %unconscious competence+to do this; most of us have to practice quite a bit in order to reach %conscious competence.+

**February 28 – March 3** . AIFT©, Houston will be rescheduled to other dates.

**March 14-16** - For Academic Leaders, Department Chair Institute in Elgin, Illinois.  
<http://DepartmentChairInstitute.net/>

**September 16-19** . Third International Appreciative Inquiry Conference, Orlando, FL

**November 8-10** . SAVE THESE DATES! Something special to be announced at a later date ☺

Congratulations to **Natalie Kimbrough**, Ph.D. <[nkimbrough@ccbcmd.edu](mailto:nkimbrough@ccbcmd.edu)>, Assistant Professor, History Department, The Community College of Baltimore County, Maryland- the newest certified AI Facilitator. **Natalie** participated in AIFT Baltimore. She co-facilitated a one-day retreat using Appreciative Inquiry for the Essex Campus Career Services Department (CACS) in October 2006. Her co-facilitator was **Judy Snyder**, also at the College.

The director of CACS wanted to hold a retreat because, in his perception, members of the department had low morale, and there was a lack of teamwork and communication. **Natalie** and **Judy** started the retreat by playing a video on %virtual awareness+followed by+The Power of Words+(a short video used in the AIFT©). After a brief overview of AI, **Natalie** and **Judy** co-facilitated the five generic processes of AI.

Here is **Natalie's** experience of the retreat and the Inquiry process: %The sharing of images, provocative propositions, and the ideas really hit home with the group. The commitment and final part of the retreat was very stimulating as clear commitments

were made and requests to be reminded of them by the person committing to a specific action. The conditions that existed when the department was at its best were: congeniality, opportunity for growth, autonomy, and passion. The groups then created Provocative Propositions around these four themes or conditions, followed by Bold Ideas for the department and Inspired Actions for individuals within the department.

According to **Natalie**, the retreat seems to have impacted the majority of those who were present immediately. Some were understandably hesitant but all participated. It was interesting to see that some participants had hoped to use this retreat more as an airing out of issues (some of the participants mentioned this directly to me. They mentioned initial hopes of getting to the real issues by attacking them directly, which included things such as "this person always does..."). However, with some further explanation and guidance during the Shared Image phase, these participants realized the power of addressing the issues without focusing on the negative. That was very rewarding to see as it developed right in front of me with me only providing a little more guidance on the image phase.

I was able to witness the initial hesitancy slowly give way to enthusiasm and belief in the **possibility** of making a positive change within the majority of participations during the retreat. I have also been assured that the Internal Suggestion Box has become a part of the department's daily life.

Personally facilitating this retreat was really groundbreaking. Since our training, I had tried to use AI in my direct environment, my department, but with mixed success. This mixed success was partially based on the crazy schedules that everyone has and partially on the fact that I did not make it an obvious AI piece. Instead I was trying to implement AI by using what colleagues had told me they wanted more of. However, the commitment was lacking due to the scheduling issues. Therefore, seeing how this retreat did immediately impact the group of participants and the immediate effect it seemed to have been (was) very enlightening and rewarding to me. It also reminded me of the various aspects and ways in which AI can touch us on a daily basis. I mentioned before how impressed I was with seeing participants turn away from the blame game and using their energy to illustrate the positives that they wish to have more of.

The inquiry (topics are) a recurring theme it seems to me in many places: low morale due to lack of communication, feelings of not enough trust, and so forth. It is truly amazing to see that **at the core most of us are looking for the same things and are driven by passion for what we do**, while these characteristics seem to get lost along the way so often. Helping someone, a group, reclaim that and broaden that is truly rewarding.

My best experience was being able to refocus the negative energy into creating a positive image and helping the mindset of some of the participants to switch from the blame game approach towards the AI approach, which happened right in front of me after I had been asked why we are not addressing the real issues head-on. The other experience was to see the commitment in the majority of participants at the end. Some

of the participants made commitments and asked for help from the rest of the group to enable them to keep that commitment. That was team-spirit and trust in action!+

## **Shift the Energy: From Problems to Possibilities**

Who knows? You might know a group of people experiencing low morale, a lack of teamwork or communication! If so, offer them a day of healing and action planning to help them shift their energy from problems to possibilities!

Best wishes,



Nancy Stetson

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