

Appreciative Inquiry in Real Estate Industry

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Introduction

As defined by Rouse, M. [1]. Appreciative Inquiry is an approach used by management which says that focus defines what we do the best. If we put all our attention on problems, then we only end up dealing but if we focus on the strengths only then we will end up strengthening and building up on those. This paper is about Mr. Innovator who joined a failed real estate company but with his own positivity and his skills of positive psychology, appreciative inquiry and using people's strength, he brought huge success and triumph for himself, his team and his company.

Mr. Innovator

A man who dreams must be ready to work hard to achieve this dream. But **what happens if the whole system is against you? What if people in it totally refuse to listen or do and keep putting obstacles in the path of your success? How do you maintain the positivity and belief in the face of such odds, how do you persevere, despite the lack of co-operation of all?**

Here is a peek into the bubble of a dreamer, where everything was perfect and everything bad happening around him only increased his resolve so that he gave off positive vibes rather than the shadow of negativity; a bubble which made miraculous changes in the hopeless recruitment of the dreamer in his organization.

This is a journey to see how the magic of appreciation, repetitive working on an individual's strength, motivation, team work and positivity helped him to overcome astronomical odds, helped him make a niche for himself in the organisation and changed the mindset and negative attitude of others, creating and recreating co-operation and goodwill amongst all.

A Problematic Organizational Scenario

When Mr. Innovator joined his new company, a real estate venture; it was in a very bad condition. Already functioning at a loss the company had hardly any sales as the real estate market was not flourishing either.

When Mr. I joined the company, there was already an existing system of 'doing' and a complacency which refused to accept any efforts

towards change. The oldies in the company had already been there for about 8-10 years and were a close-knit lot. Although there was new recruitments, but none were welcomed into the existing system and finding cracks to slip in seemed impossible. Also Mr. Innovator's youth and enthusiasm seemed to rub everyone the wrong way. Their closed mindset and refusal to change had already defeated their boss, his new boss who had also just been recruited a few months back and who had been trying to bring change but had failed.

Mr. Boss lacked the power necessary to execute his ideas, despite trying his best; because those under him would try to work around his instructions, avoid whatever he asked them to do whenever they could or just bypass his authority and get Mr. Super boss to agree with them that the old way of working was more suited to their comfort levels. This happened so many times that he had begun to feel as if his recruitment was unnecessary and that he had been forced upon them against their will. When he joined this organisation; having sold almost nothing for a long time, it was not a recognised brand name and as a result, the old retainers were all trying to preserve their jobs by destroying the others. The cutthroat competition to survive in the system and the ineffectivity of Mr. Boss who was supposed to be a Vice President but was actually just a fake label without power, control or access to any means of redressal; was literally killing the company.

Having failed to justify his presence, Mr. Boss was almost ready to give up, when he came across **Mr. Innovator's** job application. He felt that Mr. I might be the answer to all his prayers as he was an old colleague whose reputation for 'moving mountains' with faith was legendary in their old company and now his application for a position in this one seemed like manna from heaven

With his 'Never say Die' attitude and the absence of words like impossible, difficult, problem, cannot do it, etc in his vocabulary; Mr. I refused to accept things as they were.

In bike riding training, bikers are taught to keep their eyes on the road and not on the obstacles that are used to train them to avoid crashing. They are told that they will hit whatever they keep their eyes upon, so hitting the road would be better. For Mr. I it was the road that was important, not the blocks.

It was not easy for him at first. Whenever he would try to sell a few flats to prove himself; his colleagues, the Gang of Oldies would block him, ensure that they discouraged his prospective clients or try to muscle in on his sales. Whenever he tried anything new, they would mock and discourage him, stop him from accessing any files or material information that might help. His malevolent co-workers guarded the system they were used to with all their being. They refused to leave their comfort zone and explore new avenues and tried to stop him also as they did not want to be dragged out of their comfort zone.

However, despite the deteriorating atmosphere, he did not give up. Refusing to quit he persevered and managed to convince one of them, a fellow who was not as well accepted as the others in the old gang; to help him organise one sale with an existing client, but the gang foiled those plans using foul play and snatched it away from under his nose. This was the last straw.

Bringing Appreciative Inquiry to the Organization

He now realised that he had to stop expecting people to live up to his own exacting standards of honour and ethics in the workplace. He decided to go around the gang and asked his boss' permission to set up a parallel network/ resource as the existing network and resource was tightly managed by the oldies.

So, he went outside the office and associated with his own external team, selecting each 'channel partner' or agent carefully, so that there would be no procrastination. He made every agent aware of the organisation's goals and the product and motivated them to get him sales for the organisation. He used his charm to influence and convince them into offering their clients his product as it was the best. He offered them every support into their sale and assured them it would be a win-win situation for all if they continue to associated with him.

The old Gang kept trying to block him at every turn, restricting his access to resources, to the old customers whom the company had already acquired, trying to stop bills of his agents from being honoured, trying every means they could to make him look as ineffectual as they were.

Mr. I continued to work despite these adverse conditions He continued to address all raised concerns and would meet their clients, support site visits, encourage and support his channel partners. He would provide positive leadership, helping them through the rough patches and overcoming their doubts.

At the end of a year, his hard work paid off and with the help of his small team of agents, his company had sold 24 flats, out of which his number was 16, ie twice the no sold by the gang of oldies. The Numbers achieved were an eye opener for the company and a slap in the face for the complacent oldies who had not given him the time of day. It also helped consolidate his own as well as Mr Boss' position, who now gave him more freedom to experiment.

You see, the visible difference in numbers forced Mr. Superboss to reconsider his stand and he had to accept Mr. Boss' reviews on the work ethics of his second team who till now would surpass him Over time, Mr. I's work increased and his dynamic leadership was proving more effective than the working of the gang. They continued their dirty tactics but eventually were not able to stop his streak of

success. His numbers just kept increasing and in the third year, Mr. I had to request a subordinate or team member for himself from the company, to help him keep up with the increased workload.

Mr. Newbie was however a misfit. He was a manipulator and greedy to boot. Mr. I tried to offer guidance and made an effort to change him; made an effort to help Mr Newbie find his strengths; but despite continued efforts, Mr. I couldn't change Newbie's deceitful nature which was causing problems in and hindering the work. In the end, Newbie had to be fired within a few months.

Mr. I now demanded the authority as well as autonomy from the company processes to hire another worker as per his requirements and Mr. Boss, seeing the failure of Newbie; agreed. With this new recruitment Mr. I hit a new high of sales, almost double of the previous year's numbers. The pair worked marvellously well together, boosting their numbers beyond the expectations of all. Mr. I very well understood his strength and exploited it to reach greater heights for the company.

Having a team member with him Mr. I was able to reduce the pressure on him by off loading some of his work on the fellow worker. Mr. I thus decided not to work like a Ass but to figure out a strategy which would create a smooth process that would in turn quicken their success and help in the achievement of greater numbers in sales. He actually moved from just Sales to Market planning for the company. Thus he spread his wings making his department more powerful and ready to handle greater pressures.

The First and fore most agenda was Brand building. On a regular basis Mr I came up with newer, fresh ideas to experiment for brand awareness and Brand building. Not all his ideas were a big hit but he never would lose hope and would keep experimenting with much newer ideas. He was very well aware that the agents were very important part for his success thus collaboration with them was very important. He knew that everyone craves personal attention and guidance and so he tried to connect with them at a more personal level more often, rather than just keeping the relationship professional, formal and to the point.

He started organising events for this connection. The first in the pipeline was the football match where he invited his channel partners, residents on the campus and clients to come and play football with them every week. This was an intensely informal space to connect and build better relationships. He was very clear that the residents might become his future clients again and they could even become a secondary marketing team; by spread a word in favour of the company and the product. With the success of this event. Such experiments became commonly used by the team of Mr. I. They ventured into events like TT matches, Diwali festivals, Holi stalls, Food events and many more.

Mr. I used food which is our basic need to spread good will. Realising that the crazy rush of competitive work has made us compromise on this need and we often skip meals, he realised that if we are offered food on the run, during work hours and that too tasty food, it would go long way to bettering his personal relationships with people. After all, we all enjoy being taken care of and pampered. Added to it when we are just invited specially only to have food, it builds a personal relationship which goes beyond anything money can buy. Food has always bridged gaps between people and made

their bond extremely strong.

All these events needed a lot of flexibility, money and permission from the superiors; but being a star performer for more than 3 consecutive years, Mr I felt very little concern about demanding such liberties and the money for it. As for Mr. Boss and Mr. Super boss the numbers were more important, so such permissions were easily attained.

Mr. I started to move himself as well as move the company along and slowly and surely he sidelined the very people who had tried to mock and break him in the beginning. He hired more recruits and surpassed the numbers of the older teams who had gotten used to the older way of working. His team of 8 was motivated, enthusiastic and positive because he kept encouraging them to do better.

He was not a 'by the book' worker and of course no one understood how he managed to get such success. Let me tell you the secret of his happy, positive, succeeding team. As the market trend changes, the core sales team is only about numbers and each person is given separate targets and consistently kept under pressure to achieve those targets. This creates unnecessary stress, competition and insecurity in the team.

Mr I changed his modus operandi. He split the achievement of sale numbers into a process. For sales, new leads are to be generated, old leads to be reviewed. So you have to be in constant touch with, meet new people, motivating them, luring them, giving them information, negotiating the original sales, offer post-sale support. For the post sale support there were other departments which were to work in association with them but he realised for this too he had to split his team based on their strengths and give them their work profile based on these strengths.

Thus he sat with every member of his team and worked to understand their personality- strengths and weakness. Then designated them specific tasks based on their strengths. He motivated them to bring new innovative ideas and every time they came to him he kept praising and encouraging. He would give them credit rather than taking all the credit himself as he could so easily have and would take responsibility for their failures. Every good innovative idea was awarded with more flexibility and freedom in their working but without any compromise in the work. He was fine if they came late but on the other hand expected them to continue working till extremely late hours if the work demanded it. As he trusted his team and treated them as his battalion of warriors, they proved their worth and brought a lot more success and triumph along.

He had to enforce discipline among them, but it was understood by all that the discipline was only to protect them and to help their growth as individuals and also as a part of the team. He assured that the seniors or anybody else had no right or access to them and he would not allow any harm to come to them or anyone to restrict them or disciple them. Instead he was the one who was completely incharge and kept protecting them from any external force.

He handled their arguments fairly and with understanding. In case of any dispute he jumped in for intervention and encouraged them to come and talk to him. He used this opportunity to hear out their concerns and understand their needs. But ultimately he would resolve any issue by helping them see the pluses of the other member and

thus how s/he is an asset to the team. He suggested them to look for the strengths that other individual has, that they should not look at the problem and he tried to figure out with them how they could work around the weaknesses of the others and collaborate using only the strength of the individual. For this intervention he kept the complaints completely confidential with him and didn't betray the other party, as he knew that by conveying the complaints, it might lead to forming cracks in the mirror which would not be repairable.

He made himself accessible and helpful to his team and would allow them to speak out their thoughts and offer suggestions. He made it possible for them to even reach his Boss in case of any emergency. He would organise parties for his team, even allow them to keep flexible hours, but with the clear understanding that the work should not suffer. He made everyone feel important and actually helped build their personality and profiles which gave every one an edge over the other thus could recognise their own importance in the team.

He would protect his team from inter departmental politics and higher managerial pressure he was a reflector and protecting ozone layer which reflected every heat or harmful ray coming on them.

There were even market fluctuations which could affect his bigger goals but he planned things and sailed victorious out of it.

Demonitisation was a huge hit to the market but giving leeway for the payment. Accepting delayed payments helped them manage their way through the demonitisation phase. The drop in sales were renegotiated and the management was confronted to reduce targets for a very short span assuring them that the sales over the year would meet the required targets.

And indeed the GST was exploited as an added marketing tool. Before the launch of GST the people were made aware of the tax benefits if cheques reached them before the dead line.

The Pradan Mantri Awas Yojna forced every company to lunch affordable homes and this project was not picking up as till now the team and the partners were used to only selling high end projects. This needed a change in strategy and planning. Due to the failure of its sale by the other teams he was temporarily posted there to create magic there also.

He came up with an idea of food for all. All were personally invited regularly to have food. In the beginning every one including Mr.I's own team kept saying it was a waste of money. Yes to begin with it looked like a waste of money but Mr I gave a deaf ear to all till clients started pouring in and sales started coming. A project which they had planned to sell in 3 years was sold in one and a half years and the total cost of sale per person was negligible. On top of it the total company sales went high by 30% and the brand become popular which even lead to the company getting foreign collaboration. Indeed because of the success of this project the team was even taken for a foreign trip for the first time.

As the company started selling the product extremely quickly, like hot cakes, the work load of other teams also increased as they were forced to show competitive results or be forgotten. No one in the other team was happy or prepared to handle the kind of workload they were being forced to take on. Those who had never had to get off their chairs or exercise their brain cells, who had been languishing

in ease; now forced to MOVE. Plus inter-departmental politics was in its prime. Mr. I needed a variety of things to be done, in time; sometimes many at the same time and any delay would have affected his market, his customers and thus the numbers that had so impressed his superiors. Like slides even they were used to the slugging way of being so they also blocked, undercut, avoided, ignored, denigrated and disrespected him at every step. The departments like accounts, CRM, etc despised paperwork, hated to work and did not want to be shaken out of their stupor.

Mr. I went to his Boss, but was unable to get help. So he thought of developing better personal relationships with people of other departments. He started sitting with people from these departments; sharing his meals with them, talking to them, listening to their everyday problems and developing better friendships with them. He would often treat his colleagues to food, showing more consideration for them than anyone had ever bothered to show.

Slowly and slowly the people started to accept him and listen to what he wanted. His team started getting prioritised more than others. His work was the first to be done or given exact reason for the delay which was helpful to get quick and appropriate resolution.

This healthy, secure and productive work environment made everyone work to the best of their abilities, despite all the pressure they faces because in sales it was inevitable; but their results outstripped every other team in the history of the company by a huge margin, baffling the gang as well as everyone else. All those who had treated him with disdain had to now accept Mr. I as an unstoppable force in the company.

From one helpless employee, Mr. I had gone to treating the whole company as his family. The superbosses started relying upon his judgement and giving him carte blanche to do as he wanted. They even told him that when he organised an event, if he invested his own funds; he would be reimbursed later and that, no matter what the events were not to be stopped because of funding glitches in the system.

He had won their trust and their faith and never had his enthusiasm waned. He would just invite people for parties and without any pressure would end up selling whole projects. He would organise football matches and other such events. Never would the company feel encumbered with too many expenses despite the extensive events he planned and organised, pitching in himself, not just making others do the work.

He was hailed as a miracle worker and the 'golden boy' of the company because of the amazing turnabout he had affected in the position of the company as well as the attitude of the people inside. His bubble of positivity had grown bigger, affecting and including others; getting stronger with each new addition; strengthening the company further.

The Bubble was pricked

One of the most junior recruits joining the team of Mr I belonged to a dysfunctional family. Her father having left her mother and sisters in penury; instead of blossoming under the guidance of Mr. I, she became a destructive virago. Insecure and greedy, she wanted all the money, success and power of the team only for herself. She

used every means to manipulate everyone around her. She started spreading rumours in the team. Not ready to give up Mr. I started working closely with her and assured her that if she worked hard, she would get her just reward. However she was set out to undermine his position and tried to blackball him to control the team and use them to attain favour and comfort.

She tried to destroy all that he had worked for and the gang of oldies who were jealous of his roaring success, exploited her against him, trying to take revenge for their humiliation at his hands. This gave prick to the bubble but Mr I still didn't give up and still kept performing with his team. He ultimately got her to a point where she resigned and left.

Mr I took the responsibility of the fiasco she had caused and left the company hoping to reevaluate what had led to this blunder. Thus he had to quit the company.

Appreciative Inquire was the only Success Mantra

After Mr I resigned he took some time out for reevaluation of his complete journey through the organisation. He realised where he could have done some things better and what had actually worked for him.

He realised that all people want a safety net and job security while working. To sit and laze about is not really something that they prefer, however the lack of attention shown by seniors, their ineffective guidance and then the disproportionate allocation of blame if something goes wrong and the seniors sell out the juniors; this can sour a person.

He realised that by providing a secure working environment and protecting his team from the repercussions of the jealousy of others, he had won their loyalty. Also by knowing their strengths and learning about them as people, he had made the most effective usage of the human resource that had been made available to him and his constant guidance, praise and encouragement had helped each individual surpass his goals. This brought a sense of fulfilment and achievement which could in no way be quelled and which made them try harder until they carried the company beyond all limits and aims

After that Mr. I restarted his journey in another organisation. But as he came back to his work the last team started requesting Mr. I recruit them in the new company. Despite meeting his last boss and senior colleagues, Mr I couldn't motivate his team to stay in his old company despite hikes in pay packets and increased flexibility. Having won their loyalty and having formed a special bond with them, Mr I had to accept them. They all wanted to recreate the magic and the triumph which they had done earlier.

Conclusion

We achieve what we keep our eye on. Organization will grow in the direction that people in the organization focus their attention on. The paper beautifully presents the story of Mr. Innovator who joined a failed real estate company with negative working environment, in-secured and self-centred colleagues, rejection to change by the complete system, non-supportive directors, and lack of any access to resources for any break through. But Mr Innovator focused his attention on the strengths of people, used a lot of positivity. He took help of appreciative enquiry and revamped the system in the

company bringing huge triumph and new life for the company [2,3].

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