

Nourish to Flourish



Nourish to Flourish brings together practitioners' voices and creative practices, and appreciative reviews of resources that support strengths-based approaches to human interactions.

Voices from the Field



Keith Storace

Keith Storace is a Registered Psychologist with the Psychology Board of Australia (PsyBA) and Associate Fellow with the Australasian College of Health Service Management (ACHSM). He has designed and implemented health and wellbeing frameworks across the community, health and education sectors. Keith's current focus is developing his work on the Appreciative Dialogue (ApDi) therapy program designed to assist individuals in moving from self-doubt to inspired positive action.

There is, without question, an increasing desire for leaders throughout the world to encourage and support practices that enable individuals and teams to engage in decision making in a way that cultivate a sense of worth and dignity. In their ongoing series, "Our Principles in Action: Appreciative Inquiry for Justice & Belonging", Faith Addicott and Stacey Randle elaborate on the Appreciative Inquiry principle of Free Choice and how it "...might be the most powerful tool we have", especially as it is essential to expressing who we are. Having free choice opens the pathway of inquiry and in her article, "The Power of a Question in a Culture of Critique", Oona Shambhavi D'mello continues the theme of expressing who we are and shares ten steps that support everyday inquiry as we work our way through the complexity of life. It is my pleasure to introduce our voices from the field in this issue of *AI Practitioner*.

Our Principles in Action: Free Choice IS Inclusion

Faith Addicott | USA



Faith Addicott, MPA, MPOD is working to improve the intersection of work and life through innovative and human-centered process design. Her consulting work has centered on nonprofits and local government using Appreciative Inquiry and other strengths-based processes. She is a champion for inclusive workplace design.

Stacey Randle | USA



Stacey Randle, MPOD is a human resources professional passionate about creating workplaces focused on helping people grow and learn. She is also an advocate for ensuring equity and justice in every aspect of her private and professional life.

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Psychologist Rollo May says, “a man or a woman becomes fully human only by his or her choices and his or her commitment to them. People attain worth and dignity by the multitude of decisions they make from day to day.”¹ Our ability to choose is one of the things that makes us human, and opening freedom of choice to all people is inherent to inclusion and to democracy itself. The Appreciative Inquiry principle of Free Choice isn’t just about the fact that “people and organizations thrive when people are free to choose the nature and extent of their contribution”.² Free choice “is an essential aspect of being human”.³

Yet the experience of people who have been systematically marginalized and silenced, where oppression occurs daily as multitudes are excluded from decision making and representation in rooms where choices are made, belies the ethos of inclusion. Entrenched racism says “those aren’t really people” in its work to discredit and harm. This can be traced back to the history of people in the United States since its inception – indigenous people were brutalized as non-human and Black Americans were not human beings, but capital. Free Choice asks us to not only allow people to be a part of decisions that determine the course of change, but to acknowledge that failing to do so dehumanizes people and the organization (or world!) as a whole.

You may have heard the phrase, “nothing about us without us”. It is used to communicate the idea that no policy should be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy.⁴ It’s simple, catchy – and true. Imagine the power of having a system where people truly have free choice and the chance to be heard. Not just some people in the system, but *all* people in the system. What could that look like and how would that actually feel?

In our organizations, one of the most powerful and effective ways of centering diversity, equity and inclusion in our work is through building in choice. We can

¹ Rollo May, (1978). *The Courage to Create*, Bantam.

² <https://coachingleaders.co.uk/emergent-principles-appreciative-inquiry-free-choice-principle/>

³ Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, (2010). *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*, Berrett-Koehler.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_About_Us_Without_Us

We can let go of the idea that all institutional knowledge rests on leaders' shoulders.

let go of the idea that all institutional knowledge rests on leaders' shoulders, and instead consider diverse employees as co-creators in their own organizational experience. Perspectives from diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds enrich and improve our work when we allow for this co-creation, choosing inclusion over expertise.

Participation and the freedom to choose is essential to having people feel a sense of power. As we seek to weed out racism and exclusion in our world, leaning into the principle of Free Choice might be the most powerful tool we have. Free Choice asks long overdue questions about how we treat people – do we treat everyone as fully human, as inherently deserving of choice? If we start all Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts with a commitment to the human voice and choice of all people, we alter the fundamental lens of our work. We honor our shared humanity and unleash the power of shared dignity.

Power of a Question in a Culture of Critique

Oona Shambhavi D'Mello | India



Oona Shambhavi D'Mello is an artist, OD practitioner and agent of social impact. Oona's personal mission is to impact the lives of people, serving their personal and professional growth, the wellbeing of their ecosystems and the health of the planet, with appreciative language being a key facet to promote human and social sustainability. .

When I was a little girl one of my favorite possessions was my mother's moonstone ring. I would wear it and, given my small fingers, it would easily slip off and fall. There were times, wearing it in the backyard as I played on the rope swing, I would watch the ring slip off. There were spots in the sand pile where I would hide the ring and then busy myself in finding it. That moment of losing the ring, watching it slip off and looking in the sand pile was intriguing and stressful. I would feel the win when I found it, until one day I couldn't.

It is hard to make sense of why we do some of the things we do. If I were to sit with this story and decode it, the one thing that stands out was this sense of adventure with the moonstone ring. It is complex, and for many reasons, we humans seem to thrive in the dynamic of complexity. Personally, I am comfortable with such dimensions, in my own being and that of the world. When they are sometimes tough and call for investigation, I dive into the layers of the self and find my way in and out of complex systems.

When the moonstone disappeared, I would ask myself – “What do you love about this game”, “What does this game do for you?” “What is the emotion it creates” “Why do you enjoy it”?

Not knowing that this was a subconscious technique, I do remember that the questions in themselves felt explorative, open ended and created expansion as I unpeeled my own psyche for answers. Never did I feel blame for losing that ring. There was safety, no judgement and certainly no criticism of a little girl's game.

As human beings navigating complex life situations, we are all undeniably seeking answers to everyday stuff, just as we are to the existential question of “who am I?”. Our social conditioning is also deeply connected to what I call the science of separation – the strange idea that we have been educated in: that our sameness triumphs diversity, leading to criticism of all things different – people, behaviors, cultures, styles and the rest of it. In addition, there is the play of power that provides greater privilege to the majority, leading to the enshrinement of the status of a critic. This shows up in schools as much at the workplace, leading to an interpretation that the more faults we find the smarter we are. My own experience of constructive criticism in art school and in the study of literature was not pleasant, and one that spoke to creating alignment rather than exploration. I see this being mimicked in corporations – maybe because the source of this malady is the same.

Can we ask questions that evoke attention to the good?

What if we changed this rhythm?

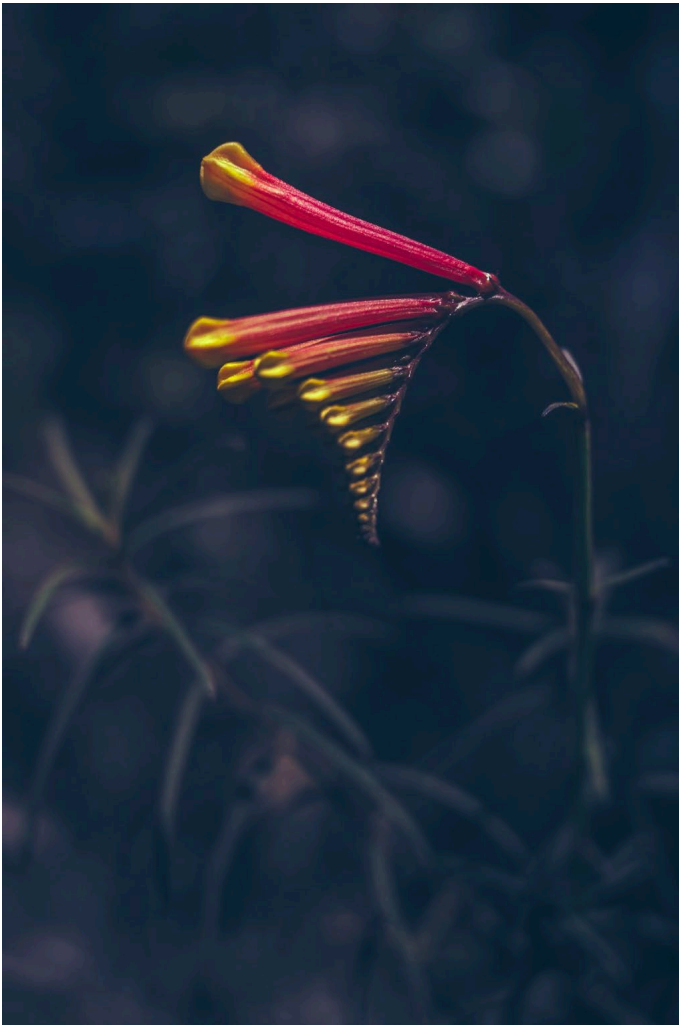
The question that I ask thus is, what if we changed this rhythm and paused – what if we responded by asking questions rather than reacting with critique? We might be misled in the modern world to treat criticism – appreciative, constructive or otherwise to facilitate learning. We might not always do right or know the way, often when the only way out is in. Can we soak in and ask the questions that evoke attention to the good, to what is working and to possibilities?

As an artist, let me talk about my experience as I peer into the canvas. I have a desire, a need to express that, more often than not, is unclear – what is evident is that I wish to explore. Sometimes this desire feels compelling and urgent and evokes a certain discomfort because I am not sure of where to start. These canvas ruminations are the same as our workplace dynamics. If only we would explore and ask, rather than exert expertise via our critique, we would be more humanistic and innovative.

The magic role of inquiry

The role of inquiry is magic. It has the power to completely alter the way we see the world. The role and power of a question supersedes its context and opens doors to possibilities. We forget to flourish when we focus on being less, not enough and not right. In my experience, inquiry is one such tool for our tool belt, allowing curious conversation, connection, positive thinking and belongingness.

How do we make this shift from reaction to response, from knowing to exploration, from certainty to emergence? I follow 10 steps that support my everyday inquiry:



1. *Attend*: to give oneself and others what is needed to exhibit and experience self-care and self-love.
2. *Pause and breathe*: to create a gap, build distance from the issue at hand and become an observer to the moment at hand.
3. *Meet yourself where you are*: psychological safety supports exploration. Take yourself where you need to be, rather than where you “should” be.
4. *Listen to your body*: pay respect to the greatest tool you have that speaks to you, if you pause and listen.
5. *Drop the agenda*: to be present so as to live fully.
6. *See the good*: acknowledge the positivity! Disallow matter to take over your mind.
7. *Allow for the new*: welcome change and hold it with wisdom so that you can experience the hidden messages.
8. *Engage with the flow*: learn to flow like water and not fight the current of the stream.
9. *Accept*: relinquish doubt and embrace the reality.
10. *Shift*: embody the lessons and shift your internal narrative for sustainable results.

A positively oriented, gratitude eliciting question can bring to life an abundant approach to development, learning and the subject of change. We can conquer and nurture ourselves by asking – “What am I doing right”?

I know that the more I engage, the more possibilities emerge. My work is to inspire and reignite that child-like simplicity & eldership that allows asking more and telling less.

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