

Growing Towards the Light

Rolene Pryor | Canada



Rolene Pryor is a facilitator, planner, trainer and management consultant who loves supporting her clients to get beyond baseline. Rolene uses her background in facilitation and planning to understand client context, needs, goals and strengths, and applies that learning to co-create compelling visions for the future. Rolene holds a master's degree in Applied Social Psychology and is energized by people and teams.

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'Everything begins with an idea.'

Earl Nightingale

My AI story starts with a big idea from a cherished colleague and friend, Dr Kelly Josephson.

In 2010, Kelly and I were working together in the Institutional Research and Planning team at a higher education institution in the Middle East. Our institution was a satellite campus of an established Canadian organization and had never been asked to create a strategic plan that was specific to the needs of our campus.

When the call for a strategic plan came, a team was assembled to get the job done. The challenge was that this team didn't have a lot of experience with strategic planning. Plus, the timeline was short. And the needs were complex.

Enter Kelly. One of her most beautiful strengths is her love of new ideas and models. Kelly had been reading about Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and its potential to bring large groups together to align on vision. She was intrigued by the potential to use AI in our work and suggested that we get trained in AI so that we explore further.

'Viva, Las Vegas!'

Elvis Presley

The training was in Las Vegas, USA; I was sold! So, we made the long journey from Qatar to Nevada to take our four-day Appreciative Inquiry Facilitator Training (AIFT) with Company of Experts. In those four days, we were continually inspired and energized with all the ideas that were coming up for us, and the ways we could see the potential to meaningfully use AI in our work. Before our trip, I was excited to see Las Vegas. After our trip, I was excited about what we were about to try.

Kelly and I returned to the Middle East with enthusiasm and energy, and pitched our idea to the strategic planning team. Given the timelines and the other pressures, they agreed to let us run the process with what we had just learned in our time away.

'You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.'

Martin Luther King, Jr

And we were off! Through our planning process, we did a lot of great stuff. We engaged more than 400 key partners through the planning process in both English and Arabic, we built a culturally appropriate space to hold our events (a majlis), we heard inspiring and energizing stories of institutional excellence, we co-created directions for the future, and we created a compelling multi-year strategic plan.

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But the best part of it all was the bonds that were created, the relationships that were deepened, and the shared understanding that was built that cut through the challenges being faced at the institution. Kelly and I saw, firsthand, the power of Appreciative Inquiry. We left our planning sessions each day with tired feet and electrifyingly energized minds – I will always remember that feeling. Together, we had unlocked real magic.

More than a decade later, I look back on our AI-for-strategic-planning process as a peak career experience and something that forever changed how I move through the world, both at work and at home.

'Unlimited. Together we're unlimited.'– Stephen Schwartz

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I left that institution in 2012 to start a career back in Canada as a management consultant. As I began to work with clients in different industries who were all presenting with unique challenges and needs, it became clear that, despite their uniqueness, AI could have a positive impact for all of them – just as it had for our campus in the Middle East back in 2010.

As I used AI more and more with my clients, I started to realize that the power of focusing on strengths, finding ways to create more of those strengths, and creating an expansive view of the future was allowing my clients to get well beyond where they were now and where they thought they could be in the future. My clients were getting beyond the baseline that they had set for themselves; instead, they were realizing that their future was truly unlimited.

I took what I had learned from years of facilitation, research and planning, combined that with the power of the principles and process of AI, and created an agile planning process called [Beyond Baseline™](#). This approach meets people, teams and organizations where they are, seeking to understand their context, pain points, fears, and concerns. That, combined with additional research, becomes the starting point for future-state visioning, action planning and implementation. Each client engagement is different, and the specifics of the

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approach are highly customized and flexible for each clients' needs, goals and preferred outcomes. One thing remains the same – the process is grounded in finding, appreciating and amplifying the strengths present in every team and organization.

Insomuch as this Beyond Baseline™ model is agile for my clients, it's agile for me too. As I learn more, try more and explore more, I add to and adjust the model. I recently completed the Appreciative Resilience Facilitator Training (ARFT) course offered by the Center for Appreciative Inquiry and I have folded learnings and insights from that experience into my Discovery phase flow with my clients, recognizing that hope, despair and forgiveness are normal and fluid in everyone's lives, at work and at home.

'If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself'
Henry Ford

I am very thankful to work for an organization that embraces the ideas (like Beyond Baseline™!) that passionate practitioners bring to the table – and I am passionate about the power of AI in consulting.

In addition to using Beyond Baseline™ for clients, I've had the support from our team to turn the lens inward for our organization Our Barrington Consulting team has used Beyond Baseline™, and its grounding in strengths, to build our own corporate multiyear strategy and to understand and celebrate our corporate culture.

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Just like that first strategic planning experience in 2010, our Barrington team has worked together to create powerful and compelling visions of the future which were excellent. But the most powerful outcome of the process was the way that relationships were formed, deepened and solidified. Our team understands the power of AI because they've experienced it. We are all excited to bring more clients through the Beyond Baseline™ flow because it's so uplifting and poignant while also being incredibly effective and powerful.

'Ask for what you want and be prepared to get it'
Maya Angelou

I feel the power of AI in my own life, every day. Being able to reframe an issue or a gap into a request for what it is that I actually want, framed in the affirmative, has been transformational. As an AI trainer, I often hear the question – “aren't we ignoring the problems when we reframe?” I strongly believe that the answer to that is no, we aren't ignoring the problems that exist.

Instead, we are asking for what it is that we want, what we want to create, what success looks like, and/or what we want more of.

I believe that *more* is a small word with incredible power. In my life, more has opened many doors for me – doors to hard conversations, doors to increased clarity in relationships, doors to shared understanding, and doors to vulnerability. These are all doors that, when we walk through them, build more and more authenticity within ourselves and our relationships with others.

My goal is to continue to grow AI in everything I do, in every breath I take, and every interaction I have.

'Wherever there is air and light and open space, things grow.'

Helen Oyeyemi

So, what does the future hold for me and Appreciative Inquiry? It's more!

I am excited to build more and more AI into my consulting work. Beyond Baseline™ is growing and I am excited to continue to evolve this method as I have more opportunities to serve current and new clients. I continue to be inspired when I see how widely applicable a strengths focus is across so many specific needs, realities and sectors. I've had the chance to use these techniques and principles on dozens of different client engagements over the years – each one has worked and each one has been transformational in its own way. I trust the process because it works.

I am excited to breathe in the power of more in my daily life. As AI practitioners, we often talk about the difference between being AI and doing AI. Doing AI is about the process – following steps that work to create a vision based on a specific topic or opportunity. Being AI is about how you move through the world, finding the joy in small things, fanning the flames in others, seeing what is possible.

My goal is to continue to grow AI in everything I do, in every breath I take, and every interaction I have. I'm a work in progress and I'm excited to continue to grow towards the light.