

# Valencia Students Into Random Acts of Listening

I was happy to be invited, for a second time, as sometime-professor at the University of Valencia to work with students in the Erasmus program “European Master in Work, Organizational and Personnel Psychology (WOP-P) 2024” for the course Intervention in Organizations, Organizational Change and Development (see photo). My three-day lecture is about contemporary methods of organizational change and development: Appreciative Inquiry interventions.



This [LinkedIn post](#) by Bishal Sala gives an impression of how it went. AI, of course, is the perfect practice for a process of “learning by doing”. We designed our own AI-summit on the self-chosen – and essential – topic of Work-Life-Balance.

Fast forward to the individual assignment I created, inspired by Nick Heap and Random Acts of Listening initiative, which turned out to be a great success, highly rewarding for both teacher and students.

Cees Hoogendijk

[www.ceeshoogendijk.com](http://www.ceeshoogendijk.com)

[mail@ceeshoogendijk.nl](mailto:mail@ceeshoogendijk.nl)

## Appreciative Inquiry Reflection with a Stranger

Faith Sonia Wanyoike

The theme I decided to explore for the Appreciative Inquiry interview was ‘passions’. This is a topic that I think about. I feel as if I have already discovered what I am truly passionate about, but when faced with obstacles towards achieving this passion, I often feel like it is not truly what I want to do but what I think I should be doing. I hoped that the conversation I would have with a stranger would also help me reflect on how I really feel about my personal passions and it could also help open up this conversation in the mind of someone else.

Because of poor weather, I decided to go to my favourite café. A girl was ordering her drink in accented Spanish, but she spoke English fluently, helpful as I don’t speak Spanish well enough to interview someone. She was German, on an ERASMUS semester studying Literature and Linguistics and spoke four languages. After I explained the purpose of the interview and Appreciative Inquiry, she agreed to be my interviewee.

## Interview questions

I designed the questions based on the content delivered during the classes and content from the book, attempting to. Because I had selected a complete stranger I tried to open up with energizing/exciting questions first, following the 5D approach.

### Energizing

1. What activities or interests make you feel most energized and fulfilled? 2. When did you last feel completely absorbed in something you love doing? What made it so exciting? 3. Who or what inspires you to pursue your passions? Do you feel like their actions impact you in some way?

### Discovery questions

1. Can you share a time when you were able to express your passion fully? What strengths did you use? 2. What do you consider your biggest accomplishment related to this passion? What helped you achieve it?

### Dream questions

1. Imagine being able to live out your passion without limitations. What would that look like? 2. How would you like your passion to shape your future? What difference would it make in your life?

### Design questions

1. What steps would you need to take to integrate your passion more fully into your daily life? 2. Do you think people in your life could support you pursuing this passion more actively? In what way could they?

### Delivery Questions

1. What's one small action you could take this week to move closer to living your passion? 2. What resources, habits, or support systems would help you stay committed to this passion long-term?

## Preparation considerations

- Because I was aiming to talk to a stranger, I thought about ways I could engage in someone naturally before opening into a conversation. I was hoping to find an English speaker, so I went to a café near the university. I prepared an explanation of what the interview was for and how it might help them reflect on their personal lives. I also wanted to reassure them that they should feel comfortable sharing as much or as little information as they wanted.
- I also felt very nervous and uncomfortable with the situation so I practised questions with my roommates to get a feel for how long the conversation could go on for.

## What worked

- The opening appreciative compliment worked well and allowed us to begin interacting. She seemed interested in what AI was and found the topic of passions interesting. We found a common theme in competitive rhythmic gymnastics, which she had competed in and which I used to enjoy watching in the Olympics. She became excited when explaining the pride she felt watching the Olympics this year, as a German gymnast had won the gold medal.

- Asking more specific follow-up questions helped open up the conversation as well, as she was initially a little bit reluctant to be sharing so much with me as a stranger.

### What surprised me

- I was surprised by how much she had already reflected on this topic; her answers felt confident and well thought-out. At the end of the interview, I asked her what influenced her approach to passions. She explained that in Germany you select your life path from an early age, and she already knew that art and sports were key for her to feel fulfilled in her life. This was a bit of a cultural shock to me: in Kenya there is a greater focus on picking a stable career, rather than picking something that you are passionate about.
- She also surprised me with how strongly she identified with her passion, in her words it is something “part of yourself” and something you simply do. She mentioned that perseverance to pursue your passion is more impactful than merely talent, a concept I also struggle with accepting and implementing in my own life. I found it surprising that someone similar to me in age had already grappled with these ideas and determined what their beliefs were.
- As someone who also has a passion for the arts, I was really surprised by her effort to include that in her everyday life. She was also clear that it is her responsibility to push her passions forward even if there was no time or motivation to do it. I am still reflecting on how to push away my doubts and fears, and have this approach instead.

### General experience and learnings

- I found this experience a little uncomfortable at first, but after the conversation ended I felt like I had a new perspective on what a passion is. Once we discovered we shared similarities, the conversation felt more natural. The AI approach helped both of us reflect on how we can appreciate, build and maintain these passions in our everyday life. I also felt like I learned a lot about myself during the conversation.
- This experience reminded me that I should not neglect my passions, particularly when I can still create time for what I love to do.
- I appreciated the challenge of having to talk about this topic with someone I didn't know. It was difficult, but afterwards it felt like an accomplishment that I had approached a stranger and completed the interview.
- At the end of the conversation my interview shared something I will try and incorporate more in my life regarding my passions: “If you love it, you will never give up.”