

Strengths-Based Communication – The Key to Building Positive Relationships

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Resources

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Inviting Possibilities for Teams

“When teachers are filled with a sense of their own strengths, vitalities, and aspirations, and when they are invited to imagine the possibilities that would make their life and work more wonderful, they get fully engaged in self-directed learning. Their energy goes up and their resistance goes down.”

Questions that Invite Possibility

What are the best things that could happen in our classroom in the near future?
What changes would we like to experiment with in our teaching?
What do you think are the best possible outcomes for our work together?
What do we believe is possible?
How might our teaching be different in a few months?
What could we pay more attention to in the classroom?
What variables do you think matter most?
What possibilities do you see for the teaching team in the next few months?
What changes do you think your students would really appreciate?
What commitments have you made to the team?
What things can we imagine doing differently?
What would we like to see more of in your classroom?
How could our needs and the needs of your students be more fully met?
What kind of environment would we like to create for you students?
What changes would excite us and make us feel great?
What has worked for us in other settings that we can draw on in this situation?
What are the best things that could happen in our classroom in the near future?
What changes would we like to experiment with in our teaching?
What do you think are the best possible outcomes for our work together?

Adapted from *Evocative Coaching* pages 159 – 160

After Action Reviews (AAR) for Teams

For teams to be successful they need to continually assess their performance and be willing to learn from their success and challenges. First used by the Army on combat missions, the AAR protocol is a structured approach for reflecting upon the teams work and learning what worked well and what pitfalls you can avoid in the future.

AAR - After Action Review

1. What were our intended results?
2. What were our actual results?
3. What caused our results?
4. What will we do the same next time?
5. What will we do differently?

Some Guidelines:

- Participants need to be open and honest
- Everyone on the team must participate
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Discussions focused on the results of a project or event
- Identification of ways to continue what was done well
- Recommendations for overcoming challenges that were faced
- Be creative in proposing solutions to barriers

A Variation:

BAR – Before Action Review

1. What are our intended results?
2. What challenges can we anticipate?
3. What have we or others learned from similar situations?
4. What will make us successful this time?

Adapted from: *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups* by Daniel Coyle

Questions for Teams to Reframe Difficult Situations

- 1. In what ways will our work together be better after having worked through this?**
- 2. What are the strengths of this situation, and what is good about it?**
- 3. What do we stand to learn or gain from this?**
- 4. Who do we know who deals well with these types of situations, and what can we learn from him or her? What questions do we want to ask this person?**
- 5. When was a time in the past when we dealt successfully with a similar situation, and what can we apply from that?**
- 6. What are our greatest strengths, and how can we use them to help us in this situation?**
- 7. What are two good things that could possibly come out of this?**
- 8. How will the learning from this situation spill over into other areas of our work?**

Adapted from: *The Joy of Appreciative Living* by Jacqueline Kelm

QUESTIONS FOR ALL SEASONS

Here is a series of generative questions that we and other colleagues have found useful to stimulate new knowledge and creative thinking in a wide variety of situations around the world. Look at these questions to stimulate your own thinking about questions related to your own specific situation. Play. Use your imagination.

Questions for Focusing Collective Attention on Your Situation

- What question, if answered, could make the most difference to the future of (your specific situation)?
- What's important to you about (your specific situation) and why do you care?
- What's our intention here? What's the deeper purpose (the big "why") that is really worthy of our best effort?
- What opportunities can you see in (your specific situation)?
- What do we know so far/still need to learn about (your specific situation)?
- What assumptions do we need to test or challenge here in thinking about (your specific situation)?

Questions for Connecting Ideas and Finding Deeper Insight

- What's taking shape? What are you hearing underneath the variety of opinions being expressed? What's in the center of the table?
- What's emerging here for you? What new connections are you making?
- What had real meaning for you from what you've heard? What surprised you? What challenged you?
- What's missing from this picture so far? What is it we're not seeing? What do we need more clarity about?
- What's been your/our major learning, insight, or discover so far?
- If there was one thing that hasn't yet been said in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/ clarity, what would that be?

Questions That Create Forward Movement

- What would it take to create change on this issue?
- What could happen that would enable you/us to feel fully engaged and energized about (your specific situation)?
- What's possible here and who cares? (rather than "What's wrong here and who's responsible?")
- What needs our immediate attention going forward? ■ If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?
- How can we support each other in taking the next steps? What unique contribution can we each make?
- What challenges might come our way and how might we meet them?
- What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that created new possibilities for the future of (your situation)?
- What seed might we plant together today that could make the most difference to the future of your situation)?

From: *THE ART OF POWERFUL QUESTIONS*, page 12

Team Discussion Planning Form

Name _____

Professional challenge (with a colleague, classroom dynamic, child, parent..):

Key goals for team discussion:

Key questions to gain a broader perspective on the challenge:

Key questions to define the issue(s) that needs to be addressed:

Key questions to define action steps:

Plan for follow-up:

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Assessing Your Work as a Team

Directions: Circle the number that best reflects how true each of the stated descriptions is for your team

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	5
1. We engage in open and honest communication.	1	2	3	4	5	5
2. Everyone has a chance to participate in decision making.	1	2	3	4	5	5
3. We all feel comfortable expressing our thoughts and ideas during team meetings.	1	2	3	4	5	5
4. We listen actively to one another and try not to interrupt.	1	2	3	4	5	5
5. We cooperate to get things done.	1	2	3	4	5	5
6. We all follow through on the commitments we make.	1	2	3	4	5	5
7. We continually clarify everyone's team responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5	5
8. Conflicts are dealt with constructively, respecting differing points of view.	1	2	3	4	5	5
9. We seek and give feedback to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	5
10. We regularly reflect on and evaluate the progress we are making towards achieving our goals for children and families	1	2	3	4	5	5

Source: *Adapted from Leading Adult Learning: Supporting Adult Development in Our Schools* by Eleanor Drago-Severson. p. 98