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Opening Appreciative Space

Guest was John Steinbach

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[John Steinbach](#) has combined the approaches of Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space into his dynamic and positive Opening Appreciative Space process. This process starts with Appreciative Inquiry; a positive approach to change that can be used by individuals, teams, organizations, and communities. Through an interview process that focuses on strengths and high-point experiences, Appreciative Inquiry helps participants discover and create a desired future. This dynamic and uplifting process has been used by Fortune 500 companies, educational institutions, not-for-profit organizations, youth groups, world leaders, and communities.

John Steinbach has worked to Open Appreciative Space in a wide variety of organizations including GTE, Verizon, Hughes Electronics, Nationwide Insurance, Boeing, Raytheon, GE, Cardinal Health Systems, United Way, American Red Cross, Purdue Extensions services and dozens of non-profits, churches and youth-serving organizations.

John can be found at <http://www.jpconsultantsinc.com>.

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Transcription of Podcast

Joe Dager: Welcome, everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business 901 podcast. With me today is John Steinbach. John has done training, design, and organizational development work with a variety of organizations for over 25 years. After using several approaches to change, John now focuses almost exclusively on a process he calls Opening Appreciative Space, which combines Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space. His variety of client bases include GTE, Verizon, Hughes Electronics, Raytheon, GE and many, many more. He has also worked in the area of youth leadership and was a founding member of Community Partnerships with Youth, which was funded primarily through the Lily Endowment. John is the founder of JP Consultants and more information about him and his work can be found at www.JPConsultantsInc.com.

John, I'd like to welcome you and tell me a little about Opening Appreciative Space.

John Steinbach: Well, thanks a lot, Joe. It's going to be fun to talk about it. I'll start as if the listeners don't really have any background in either Appreciative Inquiry or Open Space. What I like to do is kind of give the founding stories of those two things, because that's what this Opening Appreciative Space is about is combining those approaches. Where Appreciative Inquiry comes from is the person primarily accredited with starting the approach is David Cooperrider, who was a graduate student at Case Western Reserve. And David is a very accomplished guy who studied many fields, and one of the things he had studied was kind of personal psychology, performance psychology, and he came up with something he calls the positive image/positive action connection.

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The Olympics are going on now, so we see that all the time, that athletes can have tremendous physical ability, but really, the thing that can distinguish a good performance from a great one or a poor one is the image they carry of themselves as they go out to perform.

We've seen great athletes just flounder in the Olympics, because the pressure creates an image where they're stressed and they don't see success. So we know that from lots of things; salespeople, performers of all types, their image kind of controls their level of action. Make sense?

Joe: I think Olympics are great example right now, because when that moment of doubt surfaces in them before a performance, at that level it's always telling.

John: We've seen it with some of the best. Michelle Kwan was one that she skated for years and should've definitely been a gold medalist. She was just a wonderful Olympian and was close to it often, but it was something, she was just a little tight, and somebody else would go out there, and they would just be very loose and very confident. There's this whole approach with performance psychology where people work with these athletes, work with salespeople, whoever it is, to get their image to the point where they can maximize their ability. Cooperrider has studied that quite a bit and now he's studying organizational change, organizational development. This is where the story really caught me because this is what I was doing.

He was given an assignment. The assignment was --just listen to these words, they're just really amazing and telling - to go to the Cleveland clinic and find out what's wrong with the human side of this organization. Now, the reason for that question is we have this

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assumption that to make something better, like a human interaction in an organization; we've got to find out what's wrong and fix it.

Cooperrider started thinking of that in light of what he knew about performance psychology, and that's positive image, positive actions, and so he thought, "This is just crazy. If I go into this organization and dig into what's wrong, ask them what's wrong, create a report about what's wrong, it will really highlight that image in their head of everything that's wrong with this organization."

As he looked at the Cleveland Clinic, it's a premiere medical institution, one of tops in the world, and he saw amazing people doing just incredible professional work and great teamwork - all the hallmarks of a really high functioning organization. He thought, "Why would I go in and ask them what's wrong?"

Instead, he kind of just stumbled into this approach where he created questions, and structures, and interview formats that explored the best of who they were - the high points in their experience of working together, the hopes they had for the future. He was looking at the top level of achievement, the top of the past, and then projecting that onto the future of how good they could be.

When he did this, the people at the Cleveland Clinic were just amazed because they had worked with consultants before, and they were used to feeling awful when the consultant leaves because usually the consultant's job is to uncover everything that's wrong.

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That's why I related to this so much. I was, at that time, a consultant who was helping people find out what was wrong with their organization, their department, and their team, whatever it was, "What's wrong here, so we can fix it?"

Cooperrider takes this very different approach. The people at the Cleveland Clinic are amazed. His advisers at Case are just kind of floored by this new approach. He writes a paper about it. He says, "If I were to name this something, I would call it Appreciative Inquiry." That's where the name comes from and the approach, which is developed and been used in thousands of organizations and communities all over the world.

That's kind of the founding piece of it. I think to understand it, you really need to look at the two words and the appreciative part of it kind of has two meanings. One is, as in art appreciation, where you look at something, and you learn to appreciate that art by developing a better sensitivity of what makes the art great, the same with music appreciation or anything with the Olympics.

I mean, there are some people watching the gymnast who can see every little thing they do well because they understand that sport. Other people, it's just like, "Oh, that was nice." So part of it is that sense of appreciation and refining our vision of what's great about an organization, community, or whatever.

The other part of that is to appreciate in value as in appreciating a home in value, which can happen over time, or because we put care into it, put attention into it. Or, at least when I talk to groups now, I say, "It used to happen;" and "Remember when houses appreciated in value?" It's kind of a touchy subject.

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What he found is if you have these inquiries, the second part of Appreciative Inquiry, the name, if you have questions that allow people to have conversations that one, help them appreciate what is good, and strong, and the best, and the talents, and all those things about the organization, about the community or whatever -- those inquiries, those questions will help them appreciate those things and they will appreciate in value. That's the first part of this Opening Appreciative Space, is Appreciative Inquiry. So like I do with the group, when I explain that far, and I tell that story, I usually just pause and say, "What do you think? Does that ring any bells for you? Had you experienced consultants who were practicing like me, John Steinbach, before Appreciative Inquiry, who came in and dug up all the dirt, might have made moral worse, might have made the situation worse?"

I tell groups, that the amazing thing was they always paid me. I never had somebody say, "You almost destroyed our organization; we're not paying you." But I felt like I almost destroyed their organization. Then, I saw this other approach, and I said, "Well, this makes absolute sense as a better way to approach making things better."

Joe: Well, I think that's good. We have all the good touchy-feely stuff, but let's say from a process methodology point of view, how do you fix anything?

John: Well, it's interesting that when the mentality starts with, "We're going to fix something. We're focusing on what we're going to fix," When the mentality is more we're going to find what's really good and strong about this organization and move toward that -- two things happen with fixing things that I find. One is they fall away and they're not noticed anymore. One of the examples I've seen a lot is pettiness within a group. They'll be like, "Oh, the office politics, the talking about people; all that is just terrible."

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They think that that's what we're going to go into, but instead when we go over here and talk about when that organization is at its best, when that department's at its best, and they change the conversation, that thing that had been plaguing them for so long tends to fall away, or at least diminish so much in importance and energy, that it's not so much of a problem anymore.

The other piece of it is that when we look at those things that are the high point experience, the story of the organization changes. It becomes a story of how good we are in our capabilities versus how bad we are.

Now, with that said, there's definitely a time for problem solving. And that's around technical problems. That's around process things, as you said, perhaps, where it's a fairly technical thing. Appreciative Inquiry is more for human interactions, team building, morale, things like that, that really grow out of the interactions people have and the image they have of the organization and of the human dynamics, what they call it.

Joe: I think that's a good point, well made, John, is that separation from process to people. Could you tell me a bit about Open Space?

John: Well, Open Space is something that Harrison Owen - just like David Cooperrider's the name associated with Appreciative Inquiry - Harrison Owen is the guy who got Open Space rolling. Open Space was a discovery he had of being somebody that would organize conferences and very typical type of meetings that we've all been to, where you might have keynote speakers in concurrent sessions and an agenda that's been hammered out. Everything's going to run precisely. We're to-the-minute planning these things out. And you know, "If the food's three minutes late -- oh, my gosh! Everything's thrown off." He

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did a conference like that once, and as he was looking at the evaluations, he kept noticing that people would say the best part of the conference was the coffee breaks. His initial reaction was, "How can they say that? I put all this time into this; all the other organizers put time into making it this well-run machine, and they like the coffee breaks." Again, like I do with a group, I'll just ask you, "What's so great about a coffee break at a conference?"

Joe: I think the great point is you get to talk to your peers about similar subject matters.

John: Mm-hmm, yeah. And who determines what you're talking about?

Joe: Oh, we do. I do. They do.

John: Right. Unlike the conference, where it's a group of people deciding what -- out of these 100 or 5,000 people or however many are going to gather -- do they want to hear about, do they want to talk about. They're selecting the agenda. So what Harrison went to develop and started thinking about was, "How could you create something with the energy of a coffee break, the dynamic of a coffee break, but with a little intentionality and structure?"

You need enough intentionality and structure to give form to it, but not so much that it stifles those things that are in a coffee break. So this one is, I think, really hard to understand and visualize until you've seen it in action, but I'll try to do this with just this herbal thing we've got going with the podcast.

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The group shows up, and they're sitting in a big circle. It's a big circle of chairs with no tables in front of them. The reason you've got a circle is there's no top, there's no bottom, there's no hierarchy. Everybody's in a big circle.

In the middle of the circle is a table with flip-chart paper. On the wall, there's a matrix, and the matrix is to show time and space. Imagine, if you will, a matrix where we have, down the left side of it, say, one through five, and across the top, A through E. One through five would be five different sections in time we're going to have, and A through E would be the places where people will meet during those times. So we've got whatever that comes up to, 25, 30 - I don't know what the math would be on that one - different sessions, but it's a blank matrix.

We bring the group together and there's a convening question. The question might be something like how to give the most phenomenal customer service possible in our organization. The topics to be posted are the things that people want to talk about to move towards that particular goal of this great customer service.

There's a little bit of introduction. The introduction is for one thing saying there's two pieces that really run this, passion and responsibility. If you have a passion for something, you're going to write it on a piece of flipchart paper and say, "I want to have a meeting about this." If you have a passion for something, you are going to take responsibility for getting it on that piece of paper and getting it up there.

If you don't, well, you have the opportunity to do it because the agenda is open within the topic we're convening on. There's an introduction to it, there're a few guidelines and then the space is open. What that means is, "OK, everybody, there're some flip chart paper and

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markers. Come out here, write your topics. Announce them to the group, so they can ask any questions they've got, hear a little explanation, and you post it at the time and space where you want to have this meeting."

It's really interesting to do. I've done this with communities, with hundreds of people in communities. I've done it with very hierarchical organizations; very technical organizations -- Boeing, Raytheon, organizations like that where it's all engineers. I've done it with faculties at universities, and sometimes people just sit there for a bit. Nothing happens.

In that case, I'll just say, "You know, there's no alternative plan." I'll sit there again and eventually somebody will get up; they'll post the first topic, and then it just flows out of that. Other times, as soon as I say the space is open there's five people lined up, and they're ready to go. But I've never seen it when that agenda does not get filled up and almost always we have to create more times or spaces to accommodate all the things that people want to talk about.

That's the way open spaces structured and looks. For listeners, you can go and search Open Space. You can go to Open Space World, which has a ton of information about it and some diagrams and outlines with what the guidelines are and so forth, but that's the structure of it.

Joe: Could you kind of outline how you would use this in business?

John: There have been lots of different applications in business. One of them I mentioned with Raytheon and Boeing. They were working a particular project where one of them was

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the main contractor and the other a subcontractor. It was, "How are we going to work together to get this particular project to flow the best way possible, to be able to communicate the best way possible, to get our specs right so we know that we're doing the right work?" This was addressing not the process type of things that we might be able to fix a little bit with very technical things, but "How are we going to interact as a team? How are we going to work the best possibilities?" They came up with those topics and figured out the way they wanted to work.

There's kind of a natural selection of that, that if somebody is really passionate about making that thing happen, and you, Joe Dager, posted it or I, John Steinbach, or whoever, posted it, and we want to make sure it happens - you, or I, or whoever; we have a responsibility to push that thing forward.

The hierarchy in the organization has a responsibility for making space, after the Open Space event, to allow those things to happen. That is one of the things I really am fascinated about with Open Space, is working with organizations so that after all the energy of that meeting, which are tremendously energetic, the organization has a capacity to absorb the creativity that comes out of the session.

Another example of using it in business is one that I really liked; it was an accounting firm called - and I still get the calls. The calls that I usually get are not, "Hi John. Could you come do Appreciate Inquiry and focus on our strengths?" It's, "Hi John. We have problems. Could you come fix them?" In this case, their problem was twofold - low morale and high turnover.

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Not only did they have a problem; they had a solution. The solution they had was a mentoring program. So I said, "Let's not just focus on a solution to a problem, but let's look at that thing you brought, which is low morale and high turnover. First, let's do Appreciate Inquiry, and we're going to ask, not, 'Why is morale so low, and why is turnover so high?' But, 'When morale is at its best,' because there are times it's higher than other times, '...what's going on that makes morale high?'"

"In other organizations that you've been in, what makes morale high? When you look around and say, 'We could do this, and it would raise morale,' what kind of things do you envision? When you think of high turnover, let's not ask, 'Why is there high turnover?' Let's ask, 'What makes people stay as long as they do, and what will make them stay even longer?'" We have a conversation that's all about creating the vision, the image, for high morale and increased retention.

Joe: What do you do with the negative comments? There has to be, because that's how we're used to thinking.

John: You don't fight it. I try to get that across in my presentation that part of what you're doing - if I sit down, and I'm doing an appreciative inquiry interview with somebody, and they're just really negative - we did a big effort in the zip code I live in, and it's a wonderful place to live, and also, it has a lot of foreclosures, people will talk about crime, we've lost businesses, whatever. Some of the people just want to talk about that. That's what they want to talk about. You don't fight it, but what you can do is, you take it, and this is a really, I think, a concept that people find so valuable if they start to use it, is any

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negative that a person has. If you think of a coin, the opposite side of that coin is a positive image that's frustrated.

So they're saying, "This part of town, the housing is just deteriorating, and we're seeing more crime," and whatever it is, and you say, "It sounds like you're really concerned about that. What is it that you want to see this neighborhood look like and feel like? Let's talk about that. Have you seen some steps, either here or other places that help move toward that?"

You're acknowledging, "Yeah, I understand that you don't like this. Now, the opposite side of what you don't like is what you want to see. Let's talk about that." I think every group I've ever worked with; they can see how much more effective that is, because they've been involved in so many efforts that focus entirely on the negatives and the problems.

We're not saying, "Deny the problems," we're not saying, "Don't allow them to surface," just asking people to try to skillfully flip it when they do surface, to say, "OK, I get that. Now what is it you want to see, and have you seen some of it, and how can we move to more of it?" "Your organization with low morale, we could've talked about why there was low morale until the cows came home. Instead..."

I acknowledge that up front from when we started the effort. I said, "I got called in to examine low morale. We're not going to do that. The reason is, I think if we examine low morale, we're going to have lower morale when we're done. We're going to examine what there is that makes morale as high as it is, how to take it higher, and get those ideas flowing."

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It's a tricky thing. If you fight the negatives, they just gain energy, but if you accept them, and then help people look for what they want, in almost all cases they will cooperate with that.

Joe: The Open Space part of this, "We're looking at the appreciative side, and we're doing that, and we're putting these things up on the board," and everything, but then the Open Space, does everybody get in a circle and hold hands, and chant? What do we do?

John: You can hold hands if you want. It depends on who's next to you, if you want to, but it's... They get in a circle... See, this where this opening Appreciative Space is different than Appreciative Inquiry, and different than Open Space. I honor both of those, I acknowledge those, but what I do is... I gave the reference for Open Space world, there's something called the AI Commons, so if somebody searches for AI Commons, or Appreciative Inquiry, you'll find tons of information, and you'll find that there's something called the 5-D Model. What that means is you define what you're going to inquire into, it could be morale. You go ahead and have that interview process, which is called the discover part of the process.

So you talk and have these interviews, and then you go to the dream phase, and that's really articulating the vision. After the interview is where I part from Appreciative Inquiry. The rest of it, in my experience, was very much wordsmithing. It is where you're coming up with these things that are called provocative propositions. They're very language-heavy. They're like affirmations and goals, but often nothing happened, other than coming up with that language.

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So we define what we want to talk about. We do the interviews, which are a one-on-one process to surface things like, "How can morale be even higher? Why is it as high as it is? Where can we go in the future?"

Then, after they've had those individual conversations and got the ideas flowing, got the juices flowing, you get into that circle, and you say, "No doubt, you've got lots of things to talk about from these interviews, and you've got some wonderful things to explore. Now, we're going into this thing called Open Space where you have the opportunity to do that."

That's where I move from Appreciative Inquiry to the Open Space. Open Space people would say, "Well, just forget the Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space will do it all for you." I somewhat agree, but what I've found is by starting with the Appreciative Inquiry, it brings people into that Open Space with a reference point that says, "We're going to talk about how to move forward, how to make things better, how to build on what is good, versus we're going to talk about how terrible things are, how bad they were in the past, and how hopeless it all is." It really sets the tone for the whole Open Space session.

Joe: Can you do this in a larger group setting? Can this be an entire conference in itself?

John: There's been lots of conferences that are done like this. The last large organization I worked with was some work with Nationwide Insurance, and a woman came up to me and said, "At my professional conference," and I forget what her professional conference is, I think it was something fairly technical, she said, "...we did the last conference with Open Space." I was kind of holding my breath and thinking, "Now, is she going to say, 'it was just terrible'?" I said, "What did you think?" She said, "It was the most wonderful

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thing. I thought, 'Why did we ever do it differently?'" That has always been what I hear from people.

A friend of mine - and she was a client before she was a friend of mine - was the executive director of the YWCA in Fort Wayne. The YWCA, years ago, really went to examine its mission and figure out who they were. They had the people that were the directors, the board members, from YWCAs from all around the country. I think it was 5,000 people or something, this huge group. That's what they did. They used Open Space to reinvent who they were, and by the end of it, they had reinvented who they were, and I guess it was drastically different from what they started with.

Not only can it be used with large groups, it can be used with very contentious issues. One of Harrison Owen's examples that he cites is one of the first times he used it in a big setting was with environmentalist and forest industry people in the west. The convening issue was something like, "How do we protect the environment and at the same time maximize the economic benefits of forestry?" These are people that hate each other.

Joe: That's what I was going to say. You can get opposing groups that have this wall between them?

John: Well, think about what you're walking into, though, because usually, what would happen in a conference like that is some group would have set the agenda, and they would have said, "We're going to talk about this from 9:00 to 9:15, this from 9:20 to..." And right away; people would be going, "Who decided that was the most important thing? This is biased towards the environmental people. This is biased towards the..." Instead, you're saying, "OK, we come from very different perspectives; we're sitting around this room

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now; everybody has access to that agenda that has nothing on it other than the convening topic. That's all we know. We're going to talk about this topic. You post what you believe in the most."

And then, a very important part of that is people go where they have a passion. So if there're five concurrent meetings going on, and there is tremendous passion around one of those meetings, and let's say we've got 100 people and 90 of them go to one meeting, that's fine. If they all go and balance 20 at each one or whatever, that's fine, too.

But there's no segmenting the group to say, "We need another person here, another person here." You go where you are passionate to talk about something. If it's the wrong place, once you get there, or if you just learned all you can, there's one law, and it's called the law of two feet. The law of two feet says, if you're not learning or contributing where you are, move.

Imagine this group. We've got six concurrent sessions going on. You go to a session; you get what you wanted out of it, you find out it's not what you thought it would be, whatever the reason; you simply move. No reason to apologize. It's just the way the process works.

Joe: Isn't that how Congress is supposed to work?

John: I don't know how Congress is supposed to work. I would love to do an Open Space session with Congress if there was some promise that it would never be in the media and there was absolute secrecy. Because I think that part of it, it gets to, I think, the really good intentions of people by saying, "You know, there're no restrictions here. If you care about something bring it up." And you are not forced to go to anything you don't want to

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talk about. However, you articulate your topic the way that you think it's most productive, and then you see who comes. And one of the really interesting experiences with that is sometimes, you know; somebody will post a topic, and they go, and they're sitting there waiting and nobody comes.

This is one of the few kinds of interventions. I'll do once the process starts. I'll walk over to that person and just say, "Hmm, what do you make of this?" And they're like, "I don't know." I answer, "Well, what could you make of it?" And they'll say, "Well, nobody's interested." I'll say, "You know, maybe you're so far ahead of your time they just haven't caught on yet."

We just talk and say, "OK, you've got a choice. You can sit here and be a group of one, and you can think through this and put notes together and do all those things, but it's up to you what you do." So if we take Congress and we unleash them from being democrats and republicans, conservative and liberal, Fox News and MSNBC, or whatever it is, and could get past that, you know, maybe I'm naïve, but I believe underneath that there's an intelligence that would work on these things. I think with the structure the way it is now, it's almost impossible to get to.

Joe: Well, the reason I bring that up is because there's real definitive lines, and in organizations. There's a defined hierarchy culture that's there, these things exist. The government is the exaggeration of trying to make it work, but organizations are not that much different sometimes. When I say, "How does it work?" I mean, can we really make it work?

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John: By "make it work," I wouldn't say that it's perfect, and it creates paradise or anything like that, or that it gets around all the organizational hierarchy. That is still a mess. The best clients I have are ones that will take the time with me before we do this Appreciative Inquiry Open Space, this Open and Appreciative Space, and I say, "Here's what's going to happen." And this is a department head, the president of the university, CEO, whatever level I'm working with, "You are going to unleash a whole lot of creativity and passion. Now, if you can accommodate that, this is a wonderful thing. If you can't or don't want to accommodate that, I recommend we don't do this, because you're creating some real expectations."

And I've had clients that really hear that and say, "OK, how can we address this, and they make it clear that they're trying to work around, through, past, whatever it is those organization hierarchies, the rats and everything else that are there.

At the same time, those things have to be respected, because that department head is the person who is ultimately responsible for that budget that year, either being on budget, over budget or whatever. So they might say, "Yeah, we can pursue some of these ideas."

I've had organizations that say, "There's \$500 per idea that, if you give the time to do it, you go spend that money," or it's \$1,000, or whatever. "I'm saying you can use your time on the clock to do these things," and they find a way to work with that, but that's really a challenge because most organizations don't know how potent these things are.

A couple of examples, I think, will come up, but there's one that comes to mind right away. I was working with a small college, and the president of the college had brought me in. It was morale and communication, all the usual stuff, and from talking to a couple of people,

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I said, "Usually, I want everybody in the Open Space, but I'm going to ask you this time not to be there." "Why?"

I said, "Well, from what I hear, your presence might stifle the conversation." "Oh, no, no, no. Not at all." I said, "No, I think so, and we're going to work with you of how to hear the ideas that come out of this, too." So we worked through all this, we're doing the Open Space, there's all this energy in the room, and suddenly, it's like some scene from a movie where this silence just goes from one end of the room to the other in a weird way.

I see this going on, and I look, and I see everybody's eyes pointing toward this door, and the president of the university has walked in, and it just shut down. He went, "Oh, hi. I just wanted to say, 'Hi.' See you later," and backed out. When we talked about it later, he said, "John, I had no idea, but I saw what happened."

There are times where you have to work with that organizational hierarchy and the dynamics of maybe removing a person for a little bit of time. There are times I coached the leaders to say, "You know; I know that you really want to have a mentoring program with an example of a high morale. I really recommend none of the partners in this accounting firm post that. Let one of your junior accountants post it if they want it."

Sure enough, one of the junior accountants, one of the first things they posted was, "We want a mentoring program." The dynamic was so different with them posting it and pursuing it, versus the leaders posting it, and saying, "This is a good idea for you guys."

Joe: It reminds me a little bit of Jack Welch's workout program. Is there any similarity, or am I off the wall?

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John: No. I think Jack Welch's workout program was a lot like that. It was trying to integrate something like that in a structural way ongoing into the organization. The best of those programs are ones where there are no sacred cows. That's part of what he was trying to do. You go after what you want to go after. I worked with GE during that time and did some work. I didn't work specifically with the workout program. So I'm not speaking as somebody that was involved in it. But what I know of it, it is very similar.

It is a different dynamic with Open Space though. What something like Workout is trying to do, and this is what most fascinates me now, is I see how Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space can work and how they can work in this combined Opening Appreciative Space approach that I use.

But then, it's the next challenge of, how do you create an organization that runs more and more by this model? And a lot of it just happens naturally. People will tell me. Clients will say, after that we started doing this, this, and this, that integrated those particular things from Appreciative Inquiry and the Open Space. But I think something like Workout is an attempt to drive those things into the organization. There was a tremendous success with that program.

Joe: From an organizational standpoint and a business standpoint, that's something a lot of people relate to. What are your plans for this venture? How do you get involved in an approach like this? How do organizations get involved?

John: So far, my experiences with organizations being involved are they come with the traditional thing to somebody like me and say, "We've got a problem. Can you help us fix it?" It's kind of like going to a doctor and saying, "I've got a heart problem." And the

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doctor says, "OK. We're going to get you on an exercise regime. We're going to get your diet in shape. We're going to do all the positive things, rather than just go in there and start working on that heart."

They come with the heart disease, and we end up saying, "Let's look at the lifestyle of this organization and look at it with these very dynamic approaches." Quite often they come in that way. They also come often after the other approaches fail.

I've worked with community involvement efforts like that many times where they start a community improvement effort with listing all the terrible things about the community. It creates tremendous alienation, and it decreases morale. Nobody wants to be involved.

Then it's like, "How can we do this a different way?" They come across something like Appreciative Inquiry. I think it's - in a lot of ways - it's once they get exposed to it, it's "Take the dive. Jump in there and see how it works for your organization."

As far as getting trained on it or something like that, I did most of my training through NTL, National Training Labs. I still believe they have a strong Appreciative Inquiry program. There's something called the Taos Institute, which has also got a good program.

One of the things I'm looking at is starting to try to do some work in a more virtual way with people. Because when I have done training to bring people together for three days or something, it can be expensive with travel time and all those things. Then they go back and they are like, "That sounded so great, but now I've got to apply it." And they feel lost.

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Many people need coaching or support all the way through the process. I'm investigating Skype or other types of virtual settings to help this spread because I think it is very powerful. How do we get it into more organizations, more communities, more schools, lots of places?

Joe: Is there something you'd like to add that maybe I didn't ask?

John: I don't know if it's so much that you didn't ask, but there's a couple of other examples I think I want to give that can give a sense of, especially the Appreciative Inquiry part of it. One of my favorite things I've done is I've had some opportunity to work with young people and what we'll call the elders. The young people were quite often from what we call challenged backgrounds or something. The term used to be at-risk youth, which I always hated, but those were the programs I'd work with. So there were times where I would bring in elders, and they would be volunteers in the community or something and people in their 60s, 70s, 80s.

We would pair them up, and these teenagers would have exactly the same questions to ask the elders as the elders would ask the teenagers. The questions were things like, "What are some high points in your life that really stand out? What's a time you were really proud of yourself? What's your greatest contribution you've made to your community, however you define community? What are your hopes for the future?"

Now, the important thing with that is the young person is asking exactly the same questions of the elder as the elder is asking of the young person. We've put them on the same footing. And the relationships that would come out of that were just amazing.

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Quite often it would be relationships with some kids who look really rough around the edges and some very sweet-looking, bingo playing, old ladies who came in, and you'd look and go, "Oh, how will these two get along?" With that guideline of that conversation, they got along wonderfully.

Another example that just is always very touching to me is I did work with an organization that serves the adult developmentally disabled. In a situation like that, they'll be in interview format and like the board members; the staff will go out and interview clients and parents of clients and community members to find out about the organization.

When we processed what they found out, one of the board members said - the first thing anybody said was this board member who said, "I found out how important our bus drivers are." I said, "Well, what do you mean by that?" "Well, I talked to this parent of this adult client of ours, and she said, 'Your bus drivers are just so important in his life. When that bus pulls up, and that door opens, his face and his world is transformed.'"

I would venture to say that most organizations like that do not know the value of their bus drivers. You get the same thing with the value of the person who works the front desk at the hotel, the janitor, all these different people that emerge through these stories that people hear on Appreciative Inquiry, where there's a tremendous value that wasn't placed there - placed on what they do and who they are. I just want to get that piece of it across.

The other thing I'd say is, if somebody listens to this, and they say, "Yeah, sure, but it wouldn't work in my organization," really think about things like the environmentalist and the forest and the timber people. Think about the engineers at Boeing and Raytheon. I've worked with. I've worked in very tense situations in communities.

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I haven't found the place, the population, where this doesn't work. What I found over and over is people get it right away because they're so tired of trying to make things better by looking at how bad things are. They're tired of going to meetings where somebody else has structured the agenda that the combined energy of this appreciative approach, and the open space is just so refreshing to people.

Joe: What's the best way for someone to get a hold of you?

John: Well, you mentioned my website earlier, www.jpconsultantsinc.com. My email is john@jpconsultantsinc.com.

Joe: Thank you very much, John. I appreciate it. This podcast will be available on the Business901 blog site and Business901 iTunes store. So thanks again.

John: Thank you very much, Joe. It's been a pleasure.

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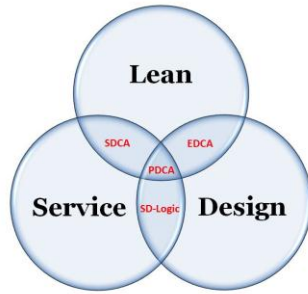
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