

Walking the Talk: The Principles of AI in Daily Living

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In this article, Jackie Kelm presents a simple model she created to help apply Appreciative Inquiry in daily living. The model is based on the underlying principles of AI as they apply at the individual level.

What does it mean to “live” Appreciative Inquiry? What does it really mean to “walk the talk?” I have spent the last several years exploring this topic at a deep level and my life has transformed in ways beyond description. I believe the possibilities for personal change and growth with Appreciative Inquiry are equal to – even greater than – those in organizations. This article presents a simple three-step model I created to help apply AI in everyday situations.

The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry

*Be like the bird that,
passing on her flight awhile on boughs too slight,
feels them give way beneath her,
and yet sings,
knowing that she hath wings.
~ Victor Hugo*

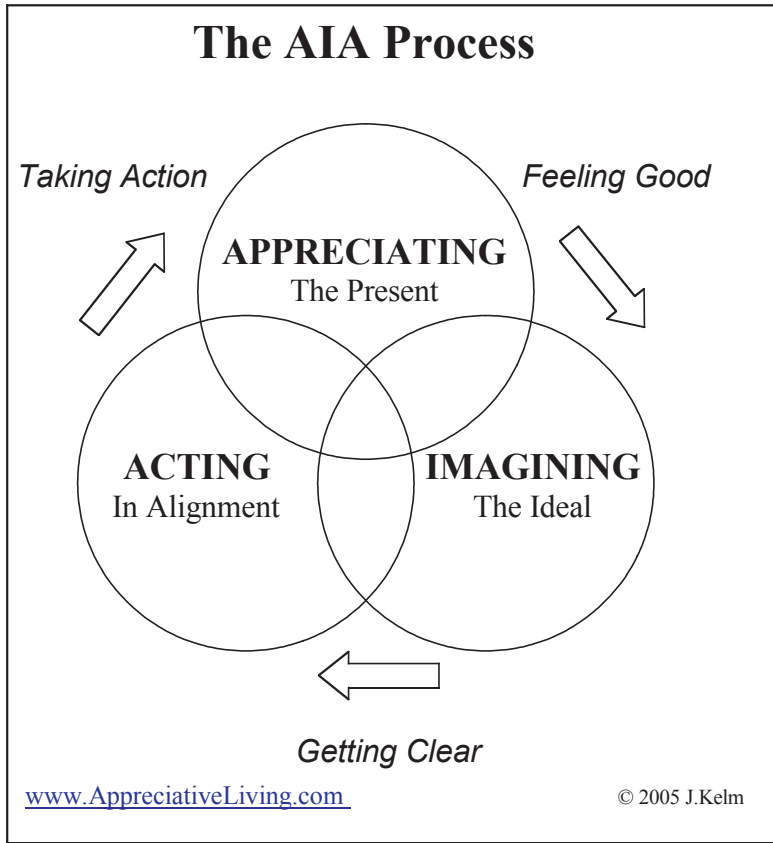
My exploration into applying AI at the individual level began with an intense study of the five original principles created by Cooperrider under the guidance of Srivastva (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999), and five emergent ones recently proposed by AI practitioners. I researched each principle and summarized the essence of it as it applies in personal life:

The Five Original Principles	Applied at the Individual Level
The Constructionist Principle	Reality and identity are co-created
The Poetic Principle	Whatever we focus on grows
The Simultaneity Principle	We live in the world our questions create
The Anticipatory Principle	Our images of the future become our future
The Positive Principle	Focusing on the good and feeling good leads to more good

The Five Emergent Principles	Applied at the Individual Level
The Enactment Principle (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003, pp. 72-74)	Be the change you wish to see
The Free Choice Principle (<i>ibid</i> , pp. 75-79)	True freedom comes from inner clarity
The Wholeness Principle (<i>ibid</i> , pp. 69-71)	We are all inter-connected and part of a bigger whole
The Awareness Principle (Stavros & Torres, 2005, pp. 79-83)	We need to reflect on and be aware of underlying assumptions
The Narrative Principle (Barrett & Fry, 2005)	We create stories about our lives and live into them

These ten principles create a broad and deep paradigm from which to live. When I considered the ideas together as a whole, three basic practices emerged and the AIA Process was born.

The Appreciating-Imagining-Acting (AIA) Process



The Appreciating-Imagining-Acting (AIA) Process is a simple way to think about integrating the principles of AI in our personal lives as shown in the following diagram (Kelm, 2005, pp. 145-155):

Appreciating the Present

The first practice in the AIA process is appreciating the present. It suggests that we learn to see the good, the available learning and the positive possibilities of whatever is showing up in our present experience. When difficulties arise this step can be easier said than done.

People embarking on this process usually have the most questions about

this practice. It is easy to see how you can appreciate a beautiful sunset, but how do you appreciate a hurricane? How can you begin to feel good about a sudden job loss? When we are conditioned to see the “bad” in these situations, it is quite a task to shift our automatic thinking to see the good. Finding what’s right with others and whatever shows up in our lives is a thinking habit that can be learned through experience, but it must be deliberately learned and practiced.

There are a variety of ways we can modify our thinking to shift our experience. One way is to modify our underlying beliefs. If we don't like what we are experiencing, we can look for alternative ways to make sense of it by choosing to focus on aspects we do like. Another thing we can do is shift our underlying questions. Rather than asking what is wrong in the situation, we can ask what is right, or what we want more of. We can also shift our mental models by viewing the situation through the eyes of an admirer and advocate rather than those of a judge and executioner.

It is important in this practice to respect negative feelings and not try to bury or ignore them. This is often a misunderstood aspect within AI. It is not the negative feelings themselves that we attempt to change in thinking appreciatively, it is the way we make sense of them and attach to them. Negative feelings tell us we are not focused on what we want, and that a change in thinking is in order. They sometimes let us know we are in danger. We learn to find and appreciate the inherent learning and guidance they provide, and move on.

Positive feelings let us know we are focused on what we want and are in an appreciative space. It can be overwhelming at first to begin thinking this way when we have a lifetime of critical, problem-focused habits. For now, start small. Just set an intention to find the good or to appreciate whatever you can in people or situations. One way to begin is by creating a gratitude list in which you write 3-5 things each day for which you are grateful. Over time you will begin to notice the good more naturally.

Imagining the Ideal

The next practice in the AIA process is imagining the ideal. The essence of this practice is to get clear about what you want. On a grand scale, you may create provocative images of your ideal future dreams using the 4-D cycle. On a small scale, you can create a mental picture of what you want most in the moment. In either case, the stronger your feelings are about your images and the clearer your pictures are, the more likely they are to manifest.

I have found imagining the ideal to be a very powerful and practical daily practice. Each morning I take a quick look at the activities for that day and note what I want most for each one. This simple exercise helps me get clear about what is really important to me, and it has been one of the most powerful tools in helping me create a more satisfying and effective day. If I have something especially important going on, I try to spend a few minutes visualizing the ideal outcome.

Acting In Alignment

The last practice is acting in alignment, which means taking a small step forward to think or behave in ways that are consistent with your greatest future images. The change can (and should) be something small, and does not have to be a physical action. It can be a change of focus, questions or ways of perceiving.

Questions are an excellent way to begin making change, since we ask and answer questions all day long. We can become aware of the underlying questions we ask and shift to ones that bring us more of what we want (Kelm, 2005, p. 55). For example, your decision about what to eat for breakfast came from an internal question that might have been, "What can I eat quickly for breakfast today?" Consider what would happen if you asked one

different question in the morning such as, “What would be the healthiest thing I could eat this morning that would leave me feeling good about myself and give me the greatest energy to start the day?” Even if you made the same breakfast choice, it would be done with a different mindset. If you continued to ask this same new question each morning, at some point you would begin to change your actions by virtue of your attention.

The key to making this practice work is *small change*. Small changes give our belief systems and support structures a chance to grow with us, which makes the change sustainable. I have also found that change is most effective when I work it from both thinking and action perspectives. For example, when I wanted to improve the relationship I had with my young son, I wrote one page a day on all the things I loved about him to shift my thinking. I also began spending more time with him doing activities that he enjoyed, which was an action. In less than three days we were closer than ever.

Questions

Here are some questions to consider in any situation to help you move into a more appreciative space (Kelm, 2005, p. 147):

1. **Appreciating:** Do I feel appreciative or good about this situation or person? If not, I know I am not focusing on the good. How can I shift to see more of what I desire?
2. **Imagining:** Am I clear about what I want and am I giving this my attention? What images am I holding? My feelings again provide helpful information, because if I’m not feeling good, I’m not focusing on or visualizing what I want, and I’m impeding its creation.
3. **Acting:** Do my current actions and thinking align with what I want? Is what I’m saying, asking and doing consistent with what I desire? If not, what small change can I make that would help move me just a bit closer to my ideal.

I hope these practices will help you begin a journey towards more joy in your life than you ever thought possible. For more information on Appreciative Living, or to purchase the book, please visit www.AppreciativeLiving.com. Best wishes to all of us in finding the wisdom and courage within to create the life of our dreams!

References:

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