

- Clear Leadership: How outstanding Leaders Make Themselves Understood, Cut through the Mush and Help Everyone Get Real at Work.

- Gervase R. Bush

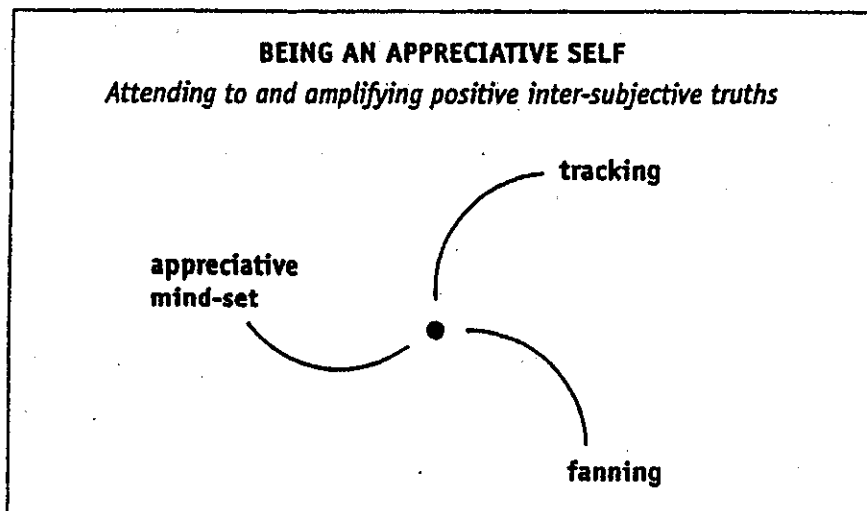
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## The Appreciative Self Inspiring the Best in People

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Interpersonal clarity is the prerequisite for effective cooperative action. It improves communication, problem-solving, decision-making, conflict management, and teamwork. As I hope I have convinced you by now, without interpersonal clarity no group of people working together can come close to achieving their potential.

But there is one other thing I see exceptional leaders in empowered organizations doing that seems to be an important ingredient to their magic. Put simply, they focus more on what's working and what they want more of, and less on problems and what they want less of. Taking a cue from Dave Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, I've come to call what they do an appreciative stance toward management and change.<sup>1</sup>



In traditional organizations many managers see themselves as "problem-solvers." Authority to act on problems rests in the hands of the few, while the many are there to gather information, make suggestions, and execute the solutions arrived at by the few. The best problem-solvers are promoted up the hierarchy and in many organizations "management" is synonymous with "problem-solving." Management schools have been, I think, justly criticized for training MBAs mainly in how to apply problem-solving formulas. There are a number of deficiencies with the "manager as problem-solver" model that is contributing to the demise of bureaucratic organizing. One is that such organizations make suboptimal use of their biggest operating expense, their payroll. Instead of using the minds of everyone to achieve and sustain competitive performance, most people are used as the hands and feet of the organization while only a comparative few are used for their brains. This separation of problem-solvers from solution implementers creates a number of other problems. One is increased resistance to implementation from those who have had no say in the "solutions." "Those who plan the battle don't battle the plan," as the saying goes. Another is that the "problem-solvers" tend to be a few steps removed from the actual problems they are solving. Research has shown that solutions tend to be more efficient and more effective the more "variance is controlled at source"—that is, the more people close to problems are the ones solving the problems. Finally, the separation of those who report problems and then execute solutions from those who actually solve the problems considerably slows down processes of adaptation and innovation. In today's rapidly changing business environment this traditional form of leadership takes too long to find the right solutions and get them implemented.

These are some of the very reasons that new, "empowered" organizations are being created. These organizations "flatten the hierarchy" precisely so that those solving problems and making decisions are close to where the problems are. In theory, everyone is a problem-solver and local adaptations to local problems occur rapidly. In practice, however, these new organizational designs are still often managed with traditional leadership styles, so the results are far below those that are produced when people use clear leadership.

The clear leaders do a lot less problem-solving than traditional leaders. They rely on the people doing the work to solve problems. Instead of focusing on problems, they focus on solutions. They are continually looking for instances where things are going right: where quality is increasing, where customers are being satisfied, where internal

processes are being managed seamlessly, and where wealth is being created. They get clear about where things are working well and they work to amplify it. They focus on increasing what is already working well. Instead of trying to compensate for weakness, they build on strength. Instead of criticizing and punishing people for their failures, they praise and reward people for their successes. Instead of worrying about what to do with the processes or people that aren't working well, taking what is working well (and the bulk of the workforce) for granted, they wonder about what to do with the processes and people that are working well. By managing people through appreciative processes, they use less energy to have a much greater, positive impact on people's motivation and organizational performance.

I call this set of behaviors being an Appreciative Self. There are two skills that underlie appreciative processes: tracking and fanning.<sup>2</sup> Using them requires an attitude toward life I call an appreciative mind-set. In addition to differentiation, it is the platform upon which the skills of clear leadership rest.

### Appreciative Mind-Set

The first step in being an Appreciative Self is developing an appreciative mind-set. As it turns out this is not that easy for many people. We are all heirs to a deficit mind-set that may have increased in Western culture in the past century.<sup>3</sup> Our society trains us to see the glass half empty, to notice what is broken, lacking, needs fixing, and isn't good enough. In organizations a lot of the drama of management is taken up by the identification and quantification of the gap between what is and what should be, the actual and the ideal, the goal and current performance. We are fixated on problem-solving. As soon as current performance gets close to the goal, we more than likely move the goal line. As a result much of the time in organizations people live in "gap land," that place of "not good enough." Some try to put a positive spin on it with words like "challenge" and "opportunities," but most people see that the ground their managers stand on when they use those "inspirational" words is gap land. So they feel the gap, not inspiration.

Most people understand the critical role of self-esteem in the lives of people who accomplish and succeed. Without self-esteem even the most talented fail. We know that if we constantly criticize a child, telling her she isn't good enough, setting standards she cannot meet, and never lavishing our praise upon her, she will develop an inferiority

complex. What happens to a team or organization that gets the same message? What happens to people when most or all of their organizational life is lived in gap land? I've come to believe that organizations also develop inferiority complexes, and when that happens there is no chance of outstanding performance. One large company I consulted with had been very successful in the past but had spent the last 10 years continuously missing the standards and goals its executives set. This company was going through a major transformation in its industry. They had lost market share and wealth but had made numerous positive changes that no one was focusing on. Instead there was a pervasive sense of inferiority. People were even embarrassed to tell their neighbors what company they worked for. In meeting after meeting in this company I encountered a phenomenon I came to call "pulling the rug out from underneath ourselves." For the most part meetings were full of cynicism and doubt that the company could do anything right. Every now and then a group would start to get excited by an idea of something positive they could do, and then someone would voice the collective doubt that they really could pull it off and the energy would instantly deflate. It was a very difficult atmosphere in which to get any positive momentum going.

When all we do in our organizational life is go from one crisis to the next, one problem to another, work becomes drudgery, or worse, paralyzing. The only time action is mobilized is when you have a serious problem. You can't create a climate of continuous learning and improvement in a problem-oriented culture. Such cultures develop a "don't fix it unless it's broken" map, for good reason: they have so many already broken things to fix.

One CEO of a large telecommunications company put it like this:

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*[Appreciative processes] can get you much better results than seeking out and solving problems. That's an interesting concept for me—and I imagine most of you—because telephone companies are among the best problem-solvers in the world. We troubleshoot everything. We concentrate enormous resources on correcting problems that have relatively minor impact on our overall service and performance. . . . [W]hen used continually and over a long period of time, this approach can lead to a negative culture. If you combine a negative culture with all the challenges we face today, it could be easy to convince ourselves that we have too many problems to overcome—to slip into a paralyzing sense of hopelessness. . . . Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating mindless*

*happy talk. . . . We can't ignore problems—we just need to approach them from the other side.*"<sup>4</sup>

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What happens when we let go of a deficit mind-set and develop an appreciative mind-set? The most general thing is that we start to see our organizations primarily as people and human relationships with limitless capacity and potential to achieve whatever the human imagination can yearn for. Social systems are not like natural systems; they don't follow natural laws. In modern society we are trained to think of social systems as natural systems, as complicated sequences of cause and effect. If you do A, B, and C then D will follow. In business, economists and financial experts, in particular, like to think this way. But most of us intuitively know it's not true. Post-modern philosophers have been pointing out the differences for most of this century. Although scientists have been trying to discover laws of human nature since the 19th century, about the best they've come up with is "a behavior rewarded tends to be repeated."<sup>5</sup> And notice it is only "tends," because sometimes rewarded behavior isn't repeated. Organizations are not based on objective truths but on inter-subjective truths—they exist the way they do because of the web of agreements among the people inside and outside them. Are we good or bad? Are we successful or unsuccessful? Are we in conflict? The answers to these and a thousand other questions are inter-subjective truths. We can collect objective data to try and help us figure out what is true—but the results of our research only become true in an inter-subjective sense once the people they affect believe they are true.

This is one of the reasons why spectacularly successful managerial innovations in one company that are simply copied in another place almost never yield the same results. There are no simple or complicated ABC formulas that always work because we each create our own experience, and people co-create the social systems they live in. What gives social systems their reality are people's shared maps. The only limit to what is possible is our collective imagination. When our collective imagination changes, the world changes. Here's an example you may already know about.

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*When the ecology movement started it was seen as anti-business. Business-people thought "ecology nuts," and in particular "ecological warriors," who pulled off daring and dangerous stunts to stop environmental*

*damage, wanted us all to return to living in peasant agrarian societies. Ecologists, on the other hand, tended to see business people as greedy, short-sighted lunatics who were relentlessly damaging the support systems of "spaceship earth." There was almost no meeting ground. These people had nothing to discuss; they were enemies. One VP of future planning for a major wood products company was overheard saying, as late as 1987, "This ecology thing will just blow over."*

*Something happened that changed all that. It happened in 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development published its report Our Common Future, better known as the Brundtland Report. The report set out a concept, with a new phrase that became a new map that almost instantly changed the relationship between business and ecologists. The new idea that expressed the yearning of the human imagination was "sustainable development." Within a year of the commission's report the social system that had existed was so dramatically changed that one very well-known organization of eco-warriors went into a crisis. For decades they had been screaming "Listen to us, listen to us," and now business and government, under the banner of sustainable development, was suddenly turning and saying, "Yes, we want to listen to you, what should we do?" This organization went through more than a year of internal conflict and soul-searching trying to figure out what its new role should be in such a radically changed set of social and organizational relationships. In the end it decided that it must continue outside the mainstream in a critical advocacy role, and left others to join the boards of companies and government planning commissions that followed this dramatic change in Western culture.*

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At the beginning of the 21st century when telecommunications, media, and transportation have shrunk our world and we are continuously confronted with the enormous variety in human cultures, the average person has some recognition of the arbitrary nature of social systems. Most of our great-grandparents never traveled farther than 30 miles from where they were born. They didn't have TV to beam images of different cultures and ways of thinking into their living rooms. Almost everyone they met in their lives grew up believing the same things they did. No wonder they thought there was a "divine order" or "natural law" to human relationships. But the clear leader knows differently. She knows that people "see it when they believe it,"

that what people think about and the way people think about things makes all the difference in organizations. How we think has a direct influence on our sense-making, our experience, and ultimately our actions.

Since it is through our actions that we co-create the world, it turns out that our biases have a much more profound impact than merely clouding our perceptions. It is not just that someone who wears rose-colored glasses sees a rose-colored world. Research in many areas of human existence consistently shows that self-fulfilling prophecies happen, that what we believe will happen is more likely to happen because of our beliefs.<sup>6</sup> One of the most striking examples is the research initiated by Robert Rosenthal, whose studies have produced what came to be known as the "Pygmalion effect." In hundreds of studies conducted by dozens of researchers with children and adults, the same effect has been found. If you tell a teacher that a randomly selected group of people are the best at something in the course, by the end of the course they are the best! It doesn't matter whether you are teaching reading to children or marksmanship to army recruits, the results are the same. The teacher expects randomly chosen student A to be the best, and by the end of the course, on objective tests of achievement, he is. How does this happen? Potential explanations have been put forward but none proven.

This phenomenon also occurs in healing. The "placebo effect" refers to the fact that if you give any group of sick people fake medicine, about 30 percent will get better simply because they believe they will. The reality of self-fulfilling prophecies (literally, faith healing) is so accepted in medicine that tests of new drugs must contain placebos (fake drugs that look real) and be administered by people who don't know which is fake and which is real. Significantly more of the people getting the new drug than the fake drug must be cured for the drug to be considered effective. How about that! A significant number of people will get better if they think they are going to get better! Medicine is only now studying how that happens.

My point is that a leader's beliefs about the people, teams, and organizations he works in probably come true. If he is biased toward seeing the best in people, that's what he gets. If he is attending to the worst in people, he gets more of that. But taking an appreciative mind-set is not about having a Pollyanna view of people. It comes from having a map that acknowledges the power of maps for creating the relationships people have.

## Your Thoughts and Feelings Do Affect Other People's Behavior

The people I have had the most negative emotional reactions to in my work life have been the people who have taught me some of the most important lessons about myself. The most important lesson of all, however, has been that when I own the part of me (the split-off projection) that I am reacting to in the other person, he or she miraculously changes and becomes much easier to deal with. For example, there was one person I worked with who used to "make me" very angry. I often found myself at the other end of arguments with him over what our organization should do and how we should do it. It got so bad I found myself avoiding him and having daydreams where I would roundly defeat him. I finally applied my own medicine to myself and thought about what unfavorable words I would use to categorize him. Then I took those words and searched for a part of myself that is rigid, tradition-bound, and elitist, and it didn't take me long to find it. When I owned the part of me that I had been trying to deny, took back the projection, all my fusion with him went away. We stopped arguing and I discovered that we actually agreed on a lot of things.

Part of this kind of change, of course, is due to my change in awareness; my map changes, so my experience does as well. But part of this is also that the other person's behavior changes—and others notice it as well. It is as though my negative thoughts are part of the system that keeps their negative behavior in place, and when my thoughts change, the system changes and so does their behavior. Let me give you the example of the first time I put this idea into practice.

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*My partner and I were working with a group of 35 engineering managers and their direct reports at a five-day workshop that was the beginning of a long-term change effort. After the first three days I was totally frustrated and becoming hostile toward the people we were working with. My partner agreed that they were reluctant, resistant, always questioning our motives, argumentative, narrow-minded, and closed to our ideas and suggestions; but he was less emotionally affected by it than I was. He had worked with this client system longer and seemed to be taking it in stride. I, however, was fused and getting emotionally hooked by their behavior. Toward the end of the third day I found myself starting to sarcastically attack some of them. I realized that if I continued to do this*

*I would lose any chance of being effective with them, so I decided to try out some ideas I had been developing about how I could alter my experience. The next morning I got up an hour earlier than usual and put myself into a quiet, meditative mood. Then, one by one, I visualized what each of the 35 people looked like when they were five years old. As I got a clear visual picture, I imagined myself putting them in my heart and felt the loving feelings I can have for any sweet five-year-old. When I felt the loving feeling I went on to the next person until I had done this with each of them.*

*An hour later when the fourth day of the workshop started, the atmosphere in the room was completely different than it had been for the previous three days. Right from the start the group enthusiastically participated in the activities I suggested. They were open, interested, and completely receptive to our ideas. The day was a huge success and a turning point in our work with them. My partner and I were stunned by the change in their behavior. We had a hard time believing it was just from my morning exercise, but we could not discover any other reason for their change. Interestingly, the participants we talked to about this later either had not noticed a difference or agreed there had been a difference but could not name what it was.*

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Can I explain the change in this social system by conventional notions of cause and effect? No. So this and a variety of other experiences has led me to question our commonly held assumptions about cause and effect, at least as they apply to people, and to come to the conclusion that we somehow affect each other with our unspoken thoughts and feelings. There are a number of simple experiments I have since learned that demonstrate this. One of the simplest involves a group of people and two volunteers. I usually ask a strong man and a petite woman. The strong man sits with his back to the group so that he cannot see what I or the group is doing. He holds out one of his arms, parallel to the floor, and resists while the petite woman tries to force his arm down. Usually she can't. Then the group is asked to focus an emotion at the man, and on a board or flipchart where he can't see I write the word "hate." After five or ten seconds the woman is asked to try to push his arm down again. She can do it easily. The group's negative emotion, directed at him, weakens his bioenergy system. I then ask the group to direct another feeling toward the man and write "love" on the board. After five or ten seconds she once more tries to push his arm, which is now rock solid. I have done this with

dozens of groups and it never fails. In fact, some men claim they can sense the change in emotions being directed at them. If you try this yourself it's important to make sure that you and the others have enough time to really feel the emotion you are directing at the subject. And be sure to end with love, as you don't want the poor person walking around with other people's hate in them.

I suggest that a person's thoughts and feelings have an effect on other people and that, like the Pygmalion effect, the thoughts and feelings of those in authority have an even bigger impact on people who work for them. If you are a manager, you are probably having an effect on people who work for you simply by the way you think about them. Wait a minute, you may say. Doesn't this totally contradict what you were saying earlier about boundaries and keeping you and me separate? What about the "I'm responsible for the impact you have on me" stuff? From my point of view it is paradoxical but not contradictory. Both things are true: We each create our own experience *and* others' unspoken thoughts and feelings affect us. From the point of view of differentiation and learning the most useful map to use is that each person creates the impact that others have on him. From the point of view of leadership and positive influence the most useful map is that the mind-set leaders have affects their followers. These are just two maps; they are not "the truth"—which none of us knows. They are paradoxical, but that doesn't make them any less useful.

### **We Get More of Whatever We Pay Attention To**

There is an ancient piece of wisdom that whatever we pay attention to grows. It's as though simply paying attention to something invests it with more energy. The appreciative mind-set chooses to pay attention to things it can value, care about, be happy with, and want more of. It recognizes that inquiry into inter-subjective truth can either be a looking at the past, where we try to uncover the agreements we've had, or a looking to the future, where we try to uncover the agreements we want to have. The appreciative mind-set is more interested in the latter kind of truth.

This means, first of all, being clear about what you want more of. Sometimes that is easy and sometimes it isn't. People often begin by knowing what they want less of, especially from other people. "I want her to stop gossiping," "I want him to stop interrupting me when I talk," "I want them to stop filing nuisance grievances." OK, but what

do you want *more of*? You cannot use the skills of the Appreciative Self to stop something, not directly. Appreciative processes are used to amplify things—to create inter-subjective reality by increasing the amount or frequency of something you want more of.

Second, for it to be a truly appreciative mind-set, you need to be calling to something that touches people's imagination, their aspirations and spirit. You may want one more widget produced, but that, in itself, isn't going to touch the hearts and minds of anyone. Opportunities to excel, make a difference, grow and develop, achieve our potential, be the best, live in community, make a better world, fulfill our dreams, gain new hope, surpass expectations, be a winner, enable the children, ennoble our spirit, be a part of a dynamic and caring team, be in real partnership with others, make a valued contribution—these are the kinds of things that an Appreciative Self pays attention to.

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*Jerry, a manager who was trying to develop his Appreciative Self, found himself stumped over a "problem person" who worked for him. Bernice had been in her job before he arrived and was protected by the union she belonged to. Jerry found her obnoxious and intimidating, with a minimal work ethic, and believed that she poisoned the whole atmosphere in the office. His attempts to give Bernice corrective feedback had met with sullen silence and no change in her attitude. He found himself stumped over what he wanted more of from Bernice. He tried out different ideas with me: "I want her to be nicer." "What's nicer?" I asked. He described what she would stop doing if she were nicer. "I want her to just do her job." "Does she do her job now?" I asked. Well, yes. "Actually she really knows her job but just doesn't care. That's it, I want her to care more." "What would it look like if she cared more?" But all he could come up with were things she would stop doing if she cared more. "You're going to have to work harder at figuring out what it is you want to see in her," I said.*

*Jerry was still trying to figure this out when, a few days later, he was in a meeting with his regional manager and his staff, including Bernice. His manager was describing a new service that they would begin to offer customers and his belief that they needed to transfer someone from another office with expertise to provide the service. Jerry said, "We don't need someone else. Bernice knows more about that than anyone we could transfer. Don't you, Bernice?" Bernice did not change her sullen expression but nodded her head, and the regional manager said, "OK,*

*we'll start out with Bernice, but if you feel you need more support on this let me know," and the meeting concluded.*

*An hour later Bernice came back into Jerry's office with a list of ideas for how to launch the new service. Jerry was stunned; she had never taken initiative on anything before. He realized that an appreciative process had been set in motion. He now started to see the part of Bernice that wanted to be recognized as the best, as making a valued contribution, and he began tracking and fanning that part of her at every opportunity. Two weeks later when I saw Jerry he was buoyant at the change in Bernice. "She still uses coarse language and makes fun of me, but I have to say that she has really turned around in terms of her work. She actually stayed late at the office last week, and other people are noticing it too." Jerry hadn't realized what he was doing when he praised Bernice in front of his boss and her peers, but he had the wherewithal to quickly capitalize on it because he was working on developing an appreciative mind-set.*

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Developing an appreciative mind-set is not something most of us can do overnight. I have met a few people who seem to be naturals at it. For most of us, however, it is a lifelong task to focus less on what's not right and focus, instead, on what is right. I'll offer you some techniques for developing your appreciative mind-set at the end of the chapter.

### Tracking

Once you know what you want more of, then you start "tracking" it. The image here is of a hunter tracking game in the jungle. It takes constant attention, a light step, and seeing the clues hidden in the surrounding foliage. It is, most profoundly, the ability to see what you want more of as already being there. After 10 years of teaching managers (and myself) the skills of the Appreciative Self I've concluded that this is the toughest part: developing your ability to see what you want more of as already there in the people and systems you work in. Sometimes you just have to start with a leap of faith.

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*A team from Healthy World, a non-governmental organization, had entered the small, war-torn African country to get permission from the current ruler to allow them to begin inoculating children against diarrhea,*

*one of the major causes of infant mortality. There were reports that government forces were killing women and children in outlying villages, and just before the audience with the ruler someone had put a videotape into Jack's hands, showing a recent massacre. The irony of inoculating children who might then be gunned down was not lost on Jack, the team leader, and he decided to try and do something about it.*

*When he was given an audience with the ruler he explained their desire to inoculate the children and asked for permission to do so, which he was given. He then also asked the ruler if he would help to open the first clinic to begin "saving the children of your country." The ruler agreed to do that. Then, in a risky move, Jack asked for a videotape machine and played the tape of the ruler's troops massacring women and children. Nothing more was said except to thank the ruler for having given his permission to "save the children of your country."*

*A few days later when the outdoor clinic was set up and mothers were lined up with children to get the inoculations, the Healthy World staff put the syringe in the ruler's hands and invited him to give the injections. As the long line of thankful mothers, joyful over the blessing they were receiving at the hand of their ruler, moved past, the Healthy World staff kept saying to him, "You are saving the children of your country. Now you really are the father of your nation." The ruler so enjoyed himself he decided to cancel all his engagements and spent the next few weeks traveling with the clinic throughout the country, personally inoculating children and being reminded over and over that "now you really are the father of your nation." The massacres stopped.*

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In this case, Jack and his staff looked for and found the part of this warlord that cared about the people he ruled. It wasn't something that people would have instantly seen in this man. In a sense, they had to take a leap of faith and look hard for every sign of compassion in him with the appreciative mind-set that there was a part of him that wanted to be and could be amplified into "the father of his nation."

It's easy to track something when it already exists in abundance. One senior manager I know personally tours his far-flung operations twice a year. He spends one or two days at each location while managers and employees make presentations on the best improvements they've made in one of three areas: increased operating efficiency, customer satisfaction, and product improvement. His expectation is that the people who were personally involved in the improvements

will make the presentations. If he believes there's more potential in an idea or a group of people, he will give them more resources to keep doing whatever they are doing. In a sense, he has trained his managers to do his tracking for him, and his personal attention and methods of amplification ensure a steady stream of improvements for him to fan.

But it can be difficult to track something when we don't see it there in the first place. This is the tough part of tracking and is what makes the appreciative process more than just positive reinforcement. The Appreciative Self begins with the assumption that whatever we want more of already exists, if only in tiny quantities. We begin by believing in the best in people and organizations. We have to get over the belief that our experience is "the truth" and assume we can have a different experience by changing our map. Numerous managers I've taught this technique to have discovered that when they start to look for something they didn't think was there, they start to see it. The more attention they pay to it (fanning), the more of it they get. Let me tell you one more dramatic story.

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*Tim, the consultant, flew in for his usual monthly two-day plant visit and as usual was met at the airport by Fred, the operations manager. Tim had been working at the plant for six months and was credited with having helped create a lot of positive change in work relationships, which was paying off in productivity and quality improvements. Fred, however, met Tim at the airport with a tale of doom and gloom. Two weeks ago the replacement for the regional vice-president, who was physically based at this plant, took up his new position. The new RVP, Eric, had a reputation throughout the company as ruthless, demanding, aggressive, manipulative, and very hard to work for. But as a plant manager in another region he had gotten results in more than one operation, and that had led to this promotion. Tim's clear leadership style seemed the complete opposite of Eric's style, and Fred thought that Eric would quickly pull the plug on Tim's consultancy. As they drove back to the plant Fred regaled Tim with stories of Eric's abusive behavior since his arrival. Things sounded very bad indeed. Tim decided to try to keep an open mind.*

*Once Tim arrived at the plant a number of people came up to him to talk about their despair over the changes since Eric had arrived. At 10 that morning the usual management meeting took place, but the atmosphere was even worse than it had been when Tim first started working there. Sure enough, Eric was bossy, sarcastic, and demeaning. People*

*were completely closed down and no truth-telling was going on. Tim decided that he would not be able to do anything for them if he got caught up in their sense of helplessness and doom. Instead, he began tracking the part of Eric that wanted to be a wise, compassionate, and loved leader. He looked and looked, and noticed at one point in the meeting that Eric offered some good ideas about how to deal with a personnel problem. At a break Tim mentioned how wise and compassionate that idea was. Over the next two days Tim was in the presence of Eric six more times, and each time he ignored everything else about Eric and just paid attention to the part of him that wanted to be loved as a leader. Whenever he saw Eric do something that had the slightest wisdom or compassion he said something about it.*

*During lunch of the second day Eric sent a message to Tim that he wanted to see him before he left for the day. Everyone, including Tim, assumed that Tim was going to be given the pink slip and that would be the end of that. When Tim went to see Eric, however, something quite different happened. Eric almost broke down as he described to Tim his realization that he had gotten where he was by being ruthless, demanding, and aggressive, but that he was at a management level now where those characteristics would not be effective and that he was scared and didn't know what to do. He asked Tim to help him, and the work went on from there.*

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It seems obvious to me, and I'm sure it is to you, that if Tim had paid attention to what he didn't like in Eric's behavior he would have quickly been shown the door. Using an appreciative mind-set and tracking the best parts of Eric allowed that part of Eric to recognize an ally—someone who saw what others weren't seeing—and created enough trust in him to confide his doubts and fears to Tim. Let's face it, who are you going to go to for help and advice? Someone who sees the worst in you or someone who sees the best in you? The Appreciative Self creates followership by tracking the best in people and fanning it when he sees it.

Someone who is good at tracking is constantly looking for what she wants more of, without presuppositions of where she'll find it. A friend and I went to a conference where the leaders of two dozen hand-picked, successful NGOs had been invited to talk with academics about processes of change across political and economic boundaries. We were excited about our expectation that we would be able to witness some of the world's best trackers in action over the coming

week. We ended up a little disappointed, however, at how little tracking we saw. But one image has always stayed with me and it says a lot about the difference between the trackers and the rest. Everyone would come into a large conference room between sessions for major speeches or to discuss what was being learned at the conference. Most people would walk in, find a seat, and sit down. But the really good trackers did not sit down. They stood up along the walls on the sides of the room. They were constantly wandering about talking to anyone and everyone. You might call this "good networking," and it is, except the trackers weren't just collecting contacts; they had larger game they were stalking. There was something each of them was looking for more of. I have since learned that I can often tell who the good trackers are just by noticing how much each person moves around in a crowd. Good tracking takes constant motion, looking for more and more of the thing being tracked, never assuming you know where you'll find it.

### Fanning

Fanning means to metaphorically blow air on a small fire to turn it into a roaring blaze. You are fanning when you look for ways to increase what you want more of. You could call it positive reinforcement, though fanning strategies can be more inventive than that. But simply paying attention to what you want in itself tends to amplify it. There is some evidence that any kind of attention, even negative attention, tends to amplify whatever is being attended to. In many situations attention is a kind of reinforcement.

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*In a company-sponsored leadership training course where I talked about appreciative processes as one of a set of change-management options, a woman approached me at the break to tell me she finally understood what she was doing. Right out of high school she had begun as a clerk at a customer service center of this large company and after many years became the store's supervisor. The store, located in a major city, consistently ranked high on productivity and customer satisfaction (though she never understood why they got better ratings than others), and six months ago she had been promoted to regional manager of a small non-urban region with a dozen centers. The very next day she had an appointment with the president of the company to tell him how she had been able to propel the region from an 83 percent customer satisfaction*

*rating to 92 percent, something unheard of in the company. She said, "Thank God I took this course because I did not know what I was going to say to the man. But now I see it. I just pay attention to what they are doing well and ignore what I don't like. It's what I've always done."*

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In my early years as a researcher and consultant, when I did lots of interviews and gave managers anonymous feedback, I found a number of common complaints, no matter what organization I was in. One of the most common was the reaction to the question "What do people get rewarded for around here?" Workers and lower-level managers would almost invariably laugh or shake their heads and say something like "Rewards?! You don't get rewarded for anything around here. The only time you ever hear anything is when something's wrong. If you do a great job well, that's what you're supposed to do and no one pays any attention. But as soon as there's a problem you sure hear about that!" No wonder that, in such environments, the simple act of noticing the great job people do daily can lead to leaps of improvement in quality and productivity.

### **Praise**

In addition to just paying attention to what you want more of, you can fan through praise, blessing, and asking for more. *Praise* refers to appreciating something that has already happened. When we are praising we are calling attention to something that has already been done and appreciating it. For any fanning process to be effective, it has to be sincere. Many companies have "employee of the month" kinds of programs, which are intended to use praise as a positive motivator. Such programs, however, will just get chewed up in the interpersonal mush if the person or committee doing the praising is not really operating from an appreciative mind-set. If the praise is just the result of some impersonal mechanism (e.g., most widgets sold) it can act as an incentive for some people, but it is not an appreciative process. Poorly thought-through praising programs can sometimes have the opposite effect from that intended. I know of one company that tried to influence its managers to improve their employee relations by having employees vote for the best supervisor of the month. What happened was that the supervisor widely seen as the most lax and ineffective won the first vote and then there was a race to the bottom as some other supervisors tried to win votes by coddling the employees. This created friction between those supervisors who were

willing to do that and those who believed they were trying to do their best for the company. The latter became more and more disenchanted and upset with employees who saw their fellows getting more and more coddled, and employee relations got worse instead of better.

Any sincere praise can have a fanning effect when it provides positive reinforcement, but praise can have a deeper significance. The great psychologist Heinz Kohut has shown that praise from someone we look up to is an indispensable way in which we develop a strong Self.<sup>7</sup> We continue to deepen and strengthen our Self all our lives, and I believe this kind of praise is just as necessary to adults as it is to children. For praise to have this kind of impact on adults, however, it must come from someone seen as a good authority. To describe what I mean by "good authority," we need to step back for a moment and understand the notion of psychological archetype.

Carl Jung, another great psychologist, coined the term *archetype* to describe bundles of image, affect, and intention that transcend time and culture. They are like templates that are hard-wired into the human mind. Jung's theory is that we are all influenced by a collection of ancient urges, desires, and inclinations. At most times in the history of humankind these have been talked about through myths and stories. These urges and desires tend to have a coherence: the urge to overpower, for instance, goes with the urge to protect. When we see a person who tends to overpower we may also notice a willingness to protect others. These bundles of qualities get personified into the characters who populate our myths and stories. In this case Jungians would talk about a *warrior archetype*—a template with common characteristics that appears as a soldier or hunter or knight in the stories and myths of all human cultures.

What makes Jung's and his followers' arguments so compelling is that the same images and stories reappear time and again, in all economic levels of society and in all cultures. They can be seen in all human art, poetry, scientific discoveries, and religion, and in our patterns of thought and feeling. It is as though the human race projects these deep structures onto things that we create. The stories and images that tap this structure most clearly are the ones a society retains and tells itself over and over. Some stories seem to be closer to the source, and as such they offer advice and wisdom on what it means to be human and how to lead a life worth living.<sup>8</sup>

Robert Moore, a Jungian scholar, theologian, and psychotherapist who has studied myths and legends, has identified a deep part of the unconscious mind that has needs, feelings, and potentials, which he has

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<i>Bad Authority</i>	<i>Good Authority</i>
<i>Seeks adoration and being the center of attention</i>	<i>Adores others and makes them the center of attention</i>
<i>Self-serving</i>	<i>Serves the people</i>
<i>Has a vision of own greatness</i>	<i>Has a vision of the great society, culture, organization</i>
<i>Blames others</i>	<i>Takes responsibility</i>
<i>Holds on to power</i>	<i>Steps aside when it is appropriate to do so</i>

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come to call the "King archetype."<sup>9</sup> The King archetype is very instructive for learning about leadership. It is as though our beliefs and feelings about the difference between "good authority" and "bad authority" are hard-wired into us as human beings. I have found the study of "ritual kingship" the best map for understanding the kind of leadership people want to follow and the kind they do not. Listed above are some of the key differences in the stories of the "good king" (good authority) and the "shadow king" (bad authority) that seem to exist in all cultures through the ages.

I believe there is a yearning today in Western culture for the good king and queen, for leaders we can trust to put the needs of the whole ahead of their personal interests, who are more interested in their vision of the great team, organization, or society than in their own personal grandiosity. There seem to be so few of them in business and government that when one comes along her power to elicit followership appears truly astounding.

One of Moore's important insights is that a core function of the King and Queen archetype is to give others praise and blessing. The bad King (or Queen) demands that he be the center of attention, that he be seen as the smartest, the strongest, the quickest, the best. From the shadow king's point of view his employees are there to admire and adore him, to praise and bless him. Such leaders, however, create deep and suffocating interpersonal mush around them, stifling the potential of the people they have power over and leaving a toxic work environment in their wake.

The good Queen (or King), however, makes others the center of attention. In her presence others feel bigger, smarter, stronger, more able. The Queen's job is to admire and adore her employees, to praise them and, in doing so, help them become more than they thought they could be. Anyone who has ever had a good King or Queen in his life (as a parent, coach, teacher, boss, or other authority) knows exactly what I am talking about—that merely being in her presence leaves you feeling more capable and motivated than you felt before. It literally strengthens your Self.

Praise serves to fan most when it comes from a leader in whom we see some of the good King or Queen. A leader with an appreciative mind-set has some of that going for her already. When praise comes sincerely from a leader who embodies the Appreciative Self, it is amplified. The same is true of *blessing*. While praise is about the past, blessing is about the future. When we bless something or someone we are giving them license to continue being what they are. Again, getting a "blessing" from a manager who just attended a course and is following his three-blessings-a-day program doesn't have much kick. But a blessing from a leader who sincerely appreciates what you are doing has an impact. And when blessing comes wrapped in tangibles, like money or resources to increase what you are doing, amplification is assured.

One of the first acts of blessing I witnessed early in my career had a big impact on my understanding of the power of appreciative process.

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*A regional manager who had come to the plant was shown what two skilled tradesmen had devised in their spare time. Using some discarded circuit boards and electronic parts they had gotten the maintenance superintendent to buy for them, they had been able to get two different machines on the production line to "talk to each other." They had, in fact, invented the basics for a crude programmable controller, now a mainstay of any modern manufacturing plant. At the time, however, these did not exist. The general manager said, "I've just spent the last week being told by our engineering staff that what you two have done is impossible!" He then, on the spot, gave them half a million dollars to spend however they saw fit to extend their work. You want to talk about two incredibly motivated, pumped-up guys! It affected not only them. Everyone in the plant took pride in their accomplishment and the blessing they received, and that helped to amplify their efforts in numerous ways as everyone pitched in to make them more successful.*

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## Meta Fanning

Anything that amplifies what you want more of is fanning. A lot of things fall into the categories of attention, praise, and blessing, and these seem to be the mainstay of fanning. But people can be ingenious in the ways they come up with to amplify what they are tracking. Meta fanning is what I call their strategies for getting someone else to do their fanning for them. I've seen people use the local newspapers for giving attention, and apply for company or industry reward programs for generating praise and blessing for others. Getting a respected authority to give out the attention and praise can have a powerful impact.

Meta fanning is also about finding positive ways to deal with what appear to be obstacles to getting more of what you want. One of my favorite meta-fanning stories comes from the first clear leader I ever saw in action.

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*Janice, a young quality supervisor who had shown an interest in Japanese quality methods, had been placed on special assignment to help implement Quality Circles. At the time, Quality Circles, where employees meet in groups on company time to identify and solve problems in their areas, were a very new idea. Being a natural clear leader, she decided to work from strength, and targeted the skilled trades area as a place to start. Employees there were used to taking initiative and solving problems. She found a couple of supervisors who supported the idea and began two Quality Circles using company-sponsored materials.*

*After about a month she got wind from the supervisors that their general supervisor was not at all supportive of the Quality Circles. Rob, the general supervisor, did not think it was a good idea to have employees meeting on company time doing the work of supervisors. He figured the workers would just goof off or come up with demands that management would not be able to meet. He was worried that other employees would demand the same "hour off work" and his efficiencies would go down. Janice's attempts to persuade him otherwise had no effect. He hadn't done anything yet because his supervisors were committed, but it looked like it was just a matter of time before he would pull the plug.*

*Janice thought that Jim, the plant superintendent, who was Rob's boss's boss, would be quite excited by the issues the Quality Circles were talking about. She put together the minutes from previous meetings of the circles and showed them to Jim. As she expected, Jim was excited by what he saw. The skilled tradesmen were discussing issues that were*

*always causing the department problems, and any solutions they came up with would really make a difference. Janice said, "What I'd really like you to do is go see Rob and tell him how much you like what the circles are doing and ask him to keep up the good work—and it might be better if you didn't mention you heard about it from me." That's just what Jim did. And Rob became a supporter of Quality Circles.*

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Notice how different this is from more traditional power plays and the use of authority to deal with issues. Janice reported to the plant manager who supported Quality Circles and could have asked him to "get Rob in line." But that would only have created a more resentful adversary out of Rob and could have created problems in her work with other supervisors. As a change strategy, appreciative process doesn't create the negative repercussions that "push" methods and "burning platforms" do. Appreciative processes are more likely to create the strong social bonds, good feelings, and sense of camaraderie that sustained organizational change requires.

Meta-fanning strategies depend on the circumstances and situation and are only as limited as your imagination. One of my favorite examples comes from the Peter Mayle book *A Year in Provence*, in which he is trying to get a host of different tradesmen to finish the renovations to his house. Anyone who has suffered through a major renovation, with contractors and subcontractors who are always disappearing before anything is finished, can relate to that. Work has now dragged on for close to a year with no end in sight when Peter's wife comes up with a brilliant meta-fan. She gets the contractors to agree that the work could be finished before the end of the year (of course, I could finish my part if those other people would finish theirs) and then invites them and their wives to a Christmas party at their home. This will give the wives an opportunity to see the husbands' handiwork. What happens next is that no husband, of course, is willing to be the source of his wife's loss of face in front of any of the other wives by not having his part of the renovations complete. The pace of repairs speeds up and everything is done in time for the party.

## **Exercises to Develop Your Appreciative Self**

### **Appreciative Mind-Set**

Sometimes it's hard to have an appreciative mind-set, just because life ain't that good. With all the stress and problems we face we can lose

any sense of appreciation. Depression, too, can make it very difficult to pay much attention to the best in ourselves and others. I have found one thing that has worked for me and others that makes a big difference in my ability to have an appreciative mind-set (and get over non-chemically based depression). I call it "the gratitudes." It is simply spending a few minutes, twice a day, thinking about what I am grateful for. I invented this at a time when nothing in life seemed good to me. At first I would exhaust my list of gratitudes in about 15 seconds! But I would try to sit out the five minutes I allotted to the exercise trying to think of other things, and feeling almost guilty that I had so little I was grateful for. One effect of this was that I started to notice people who had it worse than me. I could at least be grateful that my life was better than theirs. Slowly I began to notice that I really did have a lot to be grateful for, and this spiraled into more and more gratitude until one day, a few months after I had started doing the gratitudes, I noticed that I was walking down the street with a smile on my face for no apparent reason at all. I was easily able to fill up five minutes with things I was grateful for, and realized that I didn't need to be doing the gratitudes anymore. Every now and then, however, when something is making it hard for me to be appreciative at work or at home, I do the gratitudes for a few weeks and it always makes it easier to track what I want more of in others.

You can do the gratitudes out loud with your partner or just silently to yourself.

### Tracking and Fanning

1. Tracking and fanning go together, so although they are two separate skills, you really practice them together. To practice tracking and fanning, think of some behavior you'd like more of from someone at home or at work. Remember, it can't be something you want less of disguised as something you want more of. With your partner identify what, exactly, you'll see if and when you see more of it. Pick someone that is low-risk; if this blows up in your face it'll pass with minimal damage.

Then simply be on the lookout for it. When you see it, notice it, praise it, bless it, and ask for more. If it is a behavior you don't think you'll ever see without some prompting, tell the person what you want more of and then fan like heck as soon as you see it. For example, one of my students wanted his mother to get along better with her sons-in-law and daughters-in-law and

decided that she needed to talk less and listen more at family dinners. He began by talking with her about her relationships with her in-laws, using the appreciative mind-set that she wanted good relationships, and discovered that indeed she did, but she didn't know how to get them. So he asked for what he wanted. He asked her, at the next family dinner, to talk less and listen more, to be curious about others and to ask questions. At the next dinner she did, and he fanned, and the rest is history.

Review with your partner, at regular intervals, how you are doing. Together, think up some meta-fanning strategies.

2. If it's an attribute or attitude you want more of, tracking is trickier. Then you have to see it yourself, behind the person's behavior. Remember the stories of the "father of his nation" and Eric, the leader who wanted to be wise and compassionate. Here is where tracking is the hardest. You need to assume that the attribute you want more of is indeed behind the actions you see.

If you find tracking an attribute difficult, start by choosing one attribute you want to see more of in people in general, something like generosity or thoughtfulness. Then, at work, in every interaction you have, assume that attribute exists in everyone you deal with, even if just in little ways. Work at noticing when it might be present in their behavior. Don't worry about fanning it, just pay attention to it. You'll notice that you forget to track, sometimes rather quickly. Just start tracking again. See how long you can keep tracking for that attribute before forgetting. Each day, try to increase the amount of time you spend tracking it until you can go for hours without losing track. When you start being able to see the attribute you are looking for in most people, review with your partner any differences you are noticing in your interactions with people.

### Summary

Clear leaders are not averse to problem-solving, it's just that they recognize that their effort and impact are greater if they leave the problem-solving to the people doing the work and use their attention differently.

By focusing on what is working well, on solutions that already exist, on the qualities of teams and people they want more of, they improve organizations through amplification. Instead of using their time and energy to shore up weakness, they build on strength. Clear leaders get clear about what they want more of and search for more of that.

Being an Appreciative Self requires developing an appreciative mind-set and the skills of tracking and fanning. An appreciative mind-set requires a map that says that your beliefs have an impact on the world you inhabit and that you get more of whatever you pay attention to. The Appreciative Self is about attending to and noticing those things that call out the best in us as people—the kinds of things most of us value, hope for, and want in our work lives. An appreciative mind-set is focused not on identifying and fixing what we want less of, but on tracking and fanning what we want more of.

One of the really neat things about appreciative process as a method of leadership is that it can be used by anyone regardless of his level of authority. You may have noticed that in a number of the examples in this chapter the person using appreciative process didn't have authority over the person he was tracking and fanning. Anyone can use appreciative process to influence others but, like anything else, power amplifies the effect. Using appreciative process, a supervisor can influence a few people (including people with more authority). A CEO, however, can influence a whole organization.

Tracking involves seeing what you want more of as already there. You can't fan something you can't see. Sometimes it requires a leap of faith to believe that the positive qualities or attributes you want more of are already there. Sometimes tracking requires seeing the subtle clues and tiny instances that give you a place to start fanning. Tracking is about seeing the good intentions people have in even their weirdest behavior. Most of all, tracking requires not taking all the positive effort, skills, imagination, and motivation people bring to the job every day for granted.

Fanning is about turning the little flame of positive potential into a roaring fire. By simply paying attention to something you tend to get more of it, but praise, blessing, and asking for more can go a long way in amplifying your efforts. Praise and blessing have to be sincere, and the more they come from someone (or some organization) that people have respect for, the more impact they have. When they come from someone we see as a "good King or Queen," praise and blessing

are a potent kind of psychological food that strengthens our Self. That, in turn, helps to strengthen and increase our ability and motivation to do more of whatever we are being praised for. The consummate Appreciative Self uses meta fanning, leveraging her fanning efforts and removing obstacles through appreciative processes.