

Opportunity for Guidance: Building a Leaderful Organization
March 2015

Appreciative Inquiry

Discuss the following:

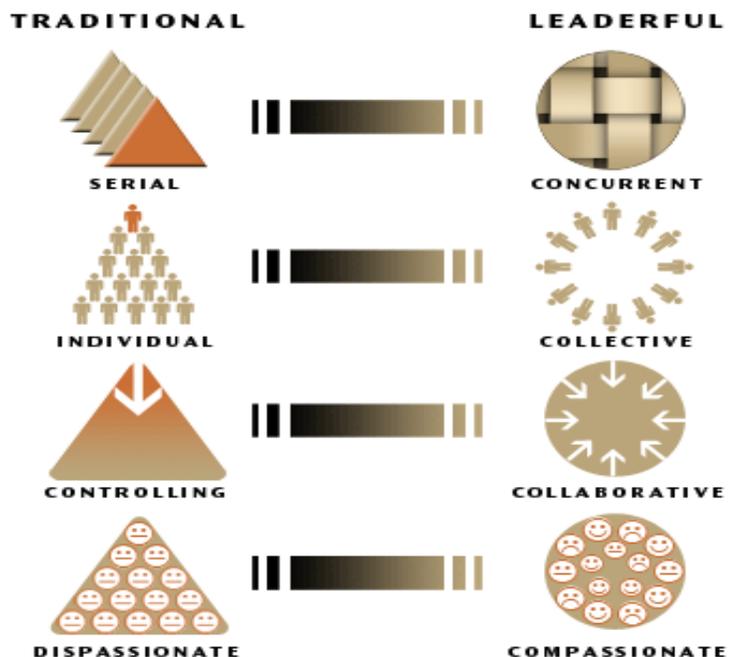
- Think of a time when you were part of a successful team (outside of League). What made that team successful? How did you feel being part of the team? How effective were you as a group? How effective were you personally?
- Think about something that your League did of which you were exceptionally proud. Why was it successful? What made it different from other League events/programs? Why does it stand out for you?

Guidance

Northeastern University professor Joseph Raelin asserts in his research that leadership styles and organizational leadership needs are changing. He writes, “Our knowledge-based organizations will require that everyone share the experience of serving as a leader, not sequentially, but concurrently and collectively. In other words, leaders will serve at the same time and all together.” Why? We’re in an age of doing more with less. Leaders feel overwhelmed by technology, we take on assignments that are challenging to accomplish in a specified time, and in some cases, we have less understanding of the problem at hand (i.e., it’s new to us). In short, according to Raelin, we desperately need to share leadership. Or, if we look at this in terms of our Appreciative Leadership framework, we are releasing individuals to contribute where their interests and natural leadership abilities are around any given situation.

Raelin refers to this concept as “leaderful practice” and he asserts that there are four components that set it apart from traditional leadership models.

1. **It is concurrent.** There can and should be more than one leader at any given time.
2. **Leadership is collective.** Decisions are made as a group and/or by whomever is in the relevant position of responsibility.
3. **It is collaborative.** Individuals can voice their opinions about what is good for the larger community. Feelings are considered and all viewpoints are valid.
4. **Leadership is compassionate.** Each member of the group or leadership team is to be valued.



How does this fit with League? What does this mean in practical terms? We present this concept here (as we did at LWVUS convention in Dallas) because we hope it will generate a conversation about how and what leadership means. We hear from Leagues almost daily about

how thin their leadership ranks are, about how “worn out” long-time leaders are becoming, and about the struggles to identify the next generation of leaders. At the same time we also see more and new people engaging with the League online and see younger leaders being fostered by Leagues that are open to their experience and those using [Building the League of Tomorrow](#) toolkit created by the LWV Young People Advisors.

By introducing this concept (much like the concept of the leadership ladder), we hope to put some intentional focus on how leaders can be developed and about the possible need for changing how things “have always been done.” A leaderful organization is one in which every capable and willing member/volunteer/partner assumes leadership in the moment, in their relationships with peers, team members, stakeholders and organizational partners. This makes it easier for new members to have an impact and learn on the job. In short, it helps to move them from “me” to “we” very quickly.

So, how do we shift away from positional power (i.e., traditional leadership) to shared authority and influence? Raelin suggests that the place to start is with some self-reflection. He suggests that current leaders ask some of the following questions:

- What do I want to achieve?
- What impact am I hoping to have on the people around me, my community, or my society?
- Am I willing to share control with others?
- Do I believe in the capabilities of my associates?
- Am I prepared to learn from my mistakes and examine my assumptions?
- Am I willing to experiment in new and different ways?

With some common understanding and framework, Leagues can start to move forward in adopting this leaderful approach. As with all change, there are things to be mindful of, including:

- An expectation that things can be “fixed” like a broken machine or object. With leaders, we are dealing with people, who are complicated and have feelings.
- An expectation that everyone is ready to change or that change can just be decreed.
- An expectation that this can happen quickly. Change takes time and buy in.

TRYING IT OUT:

At your next board meeting, take a problem or challenge that needs attention. Brainstorm concurrent or collaborative strategies that might address that challenge. Use these rules:

1. Everyone participates and offers a solution before anyone speaks for a second time.
2. Do not assess or debate the proposed changes.
3. Allow for some discussions to have a creative, divergent thinking stage and then a critical, solution-integration stage.
4. Strategies must be specific.

See if this style of discussion leads to a different outcome or feeling. Imagine how this might be adopted on a wider scale. Check in with the newest members of your board for their input and feedback.

RESOURCES:

- Training materials from the [LWVUS Convention presentation](#) (under Membership & Organizational Development)
- *Appreciative Leadership: Focus on What Works to Drive Winning Performance and Build a Thriving Organization* by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom
- Joseph Raelin’s website: <http://www.leaderful.org/index.html>