

Preface

This monograph introduces a new approach to career development — one which applies the systems approach of Appreciative Inquiry to the process of finding one's life passion. It is a "Strength-Based Approach" to career development using the process of Appreciative inquiry that focuses on building upon strengths rather than on fixing or repairing deficits. It suggests that the questions we ask drive the direction and focus of our actions and behaviors. The Strength-Based Approach to career development is based on the simple assumptions that every individual has something that works well and that these strengths can be the starting point for creating positive change.

This approach focuses on discovering the best in people and in the relevant world around them. It is the art and practice of asking unconditionally positive questions that strengthen an individual's capacity to comprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. Instead of negation, criticism, and a spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, design, and destiny. In short, it is an approach that builds on strengths and manages around weaknesses.

The purpose of this process is to create a positive self-image along with the ability to envision even greater possibilities for the future based on individual strengths. The process connects work and life decisions to life partners and support networks. The end result is a better understanding of the "life-giving" forces that provide vitality and distinctive competence to life and work.

The primary technique used in this approach is an appreciative interview, from which the rest of the process unfolds. The appreciative interview uses stories to uncover information or data. It is a process that attempts to discover the best of "what is" for the individual.

The Strength-Based Approach to career development is not a new tool, nor is it a new theory of career development; it is an approach that can be integrated into many different theoretical perspectives.

As a career development professional, using the Strength-Based Approach to career development is refreshing — participants are eager, excited, and motivated to take action. The reframing of career development interventions using the Strength-Based Approach offers individuals an energizing way to assess, explore, and plan for a more positive work-life balance. If the goal is to create an action plan that honors an individual's strengths and articulates her or his hopes for the future, the Strength-Based Approach provides a process for reaching that goal.

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