



Exercise: Using Appreciative Inquiry

When a worker is distressed, managers can be tempted to ask a lot of questions to ensure they have all the information needed to know how to respond. Although asking questions is often necessary to encourage a worker to speak, and to obtain relevant information, it is important to take a balanced approach. Asking too many questions can make workers feel overwhelmed or bombarded.

There is an art to approaching distressed workers in a spirit of **appreciative inquiry**. This involves asking questions that recognize workers' positive strengths by affirming their past and present achievements, abilities and potentials.

Try asking workers the following types of questions, when opportunities arise:

- *“What do you enjoy most about your job?”*
- *“What do you feel are your greatest job skills?”*
- *“What tips and strategies have you learned over time for doing your job well?”*
- *“How did you get that job/task done so well/quickly/efficiently?”*

When a worker is distressed, try some of the following questions:

- *“Can you help me understand what works best for you when you are feeling upset/distressed/overwhelmed?”*
- *“What can I do to help you do what you need to do to take care of yourself?”*
- *“When you have experienced these work issues in the past, what helped you?”*
- *“Are there ways I could help you to best make use of your strengths and skills in this situation?”*

These types of open-ended, strengths-oriented questions can convey to workers that you value and respect their experience. Appreciative inquiries like these may elicit valuable information that can help you determine how to better manage a distressed worker. Notice the differences in the types of information you receive when you ask questions like these.