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## The Art of Questioning: Using Powerful Questions and Appreciative Inquiry Conversations to Understand Values and Needs

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# The Art of Questioning

Using Powerful Questions  
and Appreciative Inquiry  
Conversations to Understand  
Values and Needs

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# Learning Outcomes

- Be able articulate what Appreciative Inquiry is
- Understand the importance of asking powerful questions
- Be able to develop powerful questions
- Begin to support a group's process through powerful conversations
- Know how to facilitate for and listen actively to all voices

# A Video



# Appreciative Inquiry in A Nutshell





# Appreciative Inquiry ...

- Engages stakeholders in self-determined change
- Is a strengths-based, positive approach to leadership development and organizational change
- Seeks what is best and their organization



# Appreciative Inquiry Core Principles

1. *Constructionist* – Words create worlds
2. *Simultaneity* – Inquiry creates change, the first question is fateful...
3. *Poetic* – We can choose what we study
4. *Anticipatory* – Images inspire action, positive images of the future lead positive actions
5. *Positivity* – Positive questions lead to positive change



# Appreciative

Inquiry is not just  
about the positive

“A focus on the positive is useful for appreciative inquiry but it’s not the purpose. The purpose is to generate a new and better future.”

~ Gervase R. Bushe, Ph.D.





# Appreciative

Inquiry is not just  
about the positive

- Focus on growth
- Constructive approach
- Questioning as discovery
  - Generates reflections
  - Inspires innovation
  - Seeks understanding
- Acknowledges reality, yet seeks a better future

# Appreciative Inquiry vs Problem - Solving

1. What to grow
2. True, good, better, possible
3. Defines ideal first, coherent response
4. Expands vision of future
5. Assumes infinite capacity for imagination

1. What to fix
2. Problem, symptom, causes, solutions, plan
3. Breaks things into pieces, fragmenting response(s)
4. Responds to past
5. Assumes constellation of problems to overcome

# Appreciative Inquiry vs Problem - Solving

- 1.Holistic approach
- 2.Creates sense of unity
- 3.Expands possibilities
- 4.High energy – decision to make change happen
- 5.Inspires creativity
- 6.Assumes infinite capacity for imagination
- 7.May reduce other problems

- 1.Piecemeal solution
- 2.May seek to assign blame
- 3.Narrow scope of vision
- 4.Can lower energy - resistance to change
- 5.Can inspire crisis mentality
- 6.May not address the root issue



# Develop Powerful Questions Strategically





# Powerful Questions are Generative Questions

- Generates curiosity and encourages creativity
- Stimulates reflective conversation
- Surfaces underlying assumptions
- Explores with genuine curiosity
- Does not imply intent
- Uses neutral language and tone



# Powerful Questions...

- Set the tone for the conversation and set the change in motion
- Allow exploration beyond the immediate
- Move us beyond what is to what could be
- Framed within the concept of positive intent, challenge each other as partners not adversaries



# Attributes of Powerful Questions

- Generates reflection and creativity by:
  - Asking open-ended questions
  - Starting with “What if”, “why”, “how might we”
- Includes a clear scope and positive intent of inquiry to move forward
- Anchored in positive intent

# Building Generative Questions

- Ask about ultimate concerns
  - What do you value most?
- Use positive questions that build on positive assumptions
  - What about this library makes you especially glad you work here?



# Building Generative Questions

- Give a thought-provoking, appealing definition
  - “Constructive experiences of difference inspire new ways of thinking.”
- Present questions as an invitation using expansive, positive, feeling, experiential words.
  - What has inspired you to get engaged? What do you most hope to contribute?)

# Building Generative Questions

- Enhance the possibilities of storytelling by asking questions about trusted personal experience.
  - Thinking back on your year, please share a high point when...
- Phrase questions in a conversational, friendly tone (and listen eagerly as to a friend.)

# Building Generative Questions

- Ask open questions to which you do not know the answer and to learn something interesting and important.
  - Open ended questions cannot be answered “yes” or “no”
- Good questions invite thinking—they stretch the imagination and inspire new thoughts without evoking defensiveness or hostility.

# Examples of Generative Questions

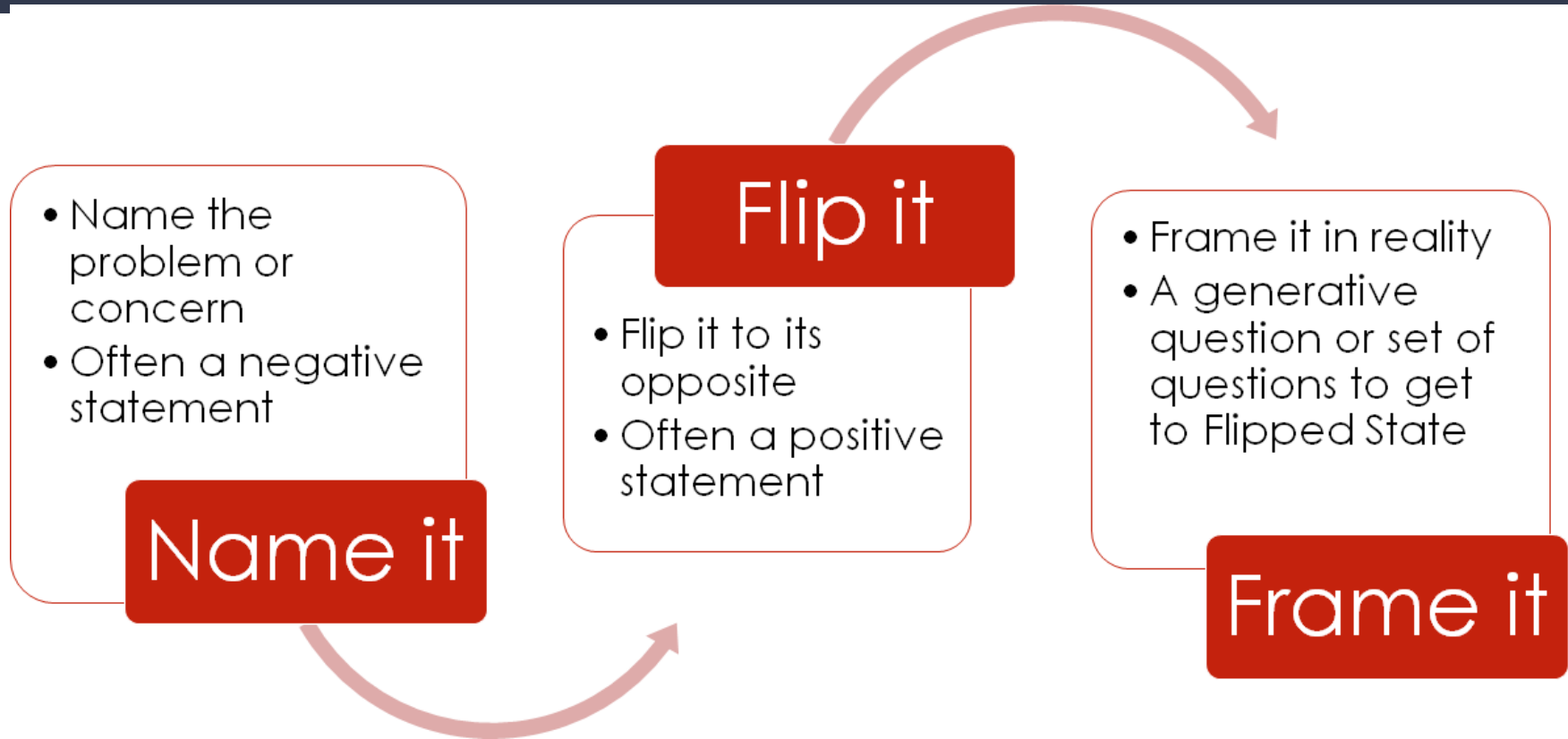
- What are all the possibilities for collaboration between our departments?
- What challenges might come our way and how might we meet them?
- What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than we do say about our decision?

# Flipping the Script: Problem - Statements and Closed Questions to Generative Questions



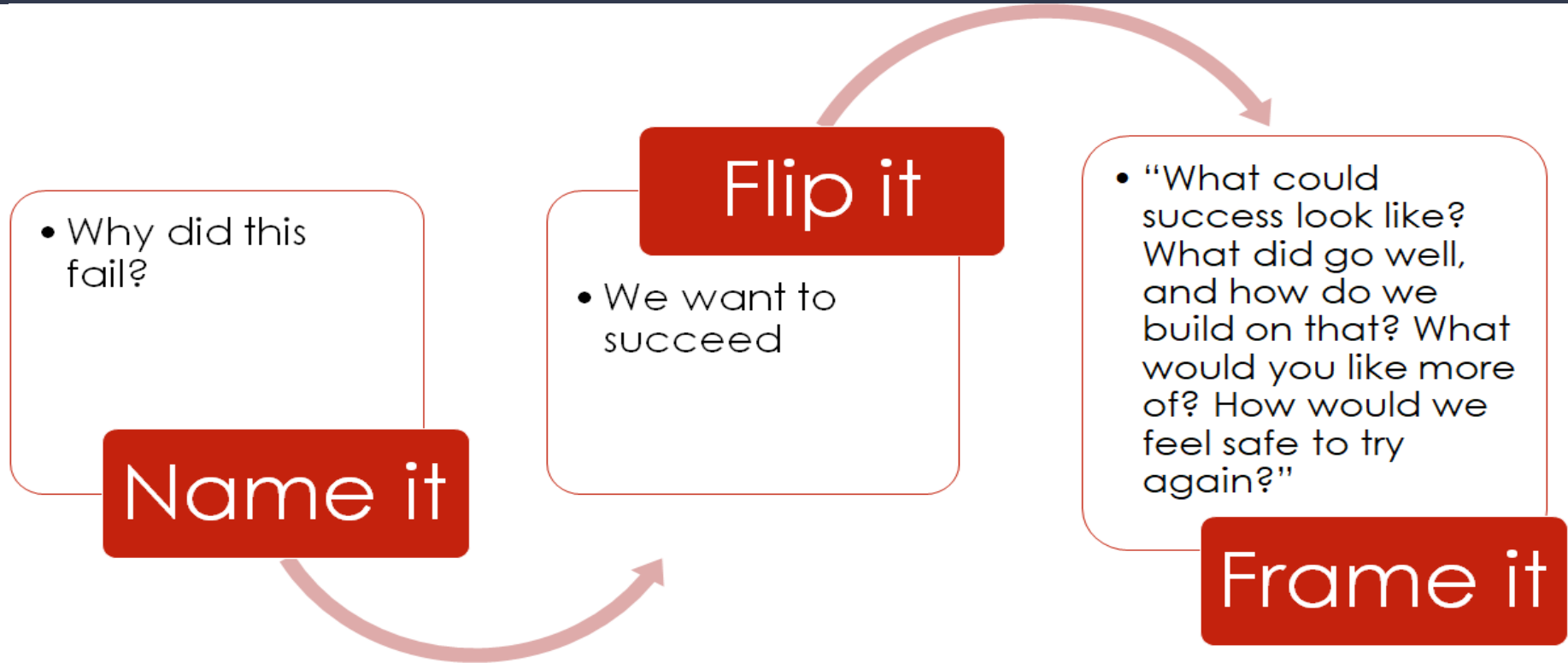


# Flip the Narrative



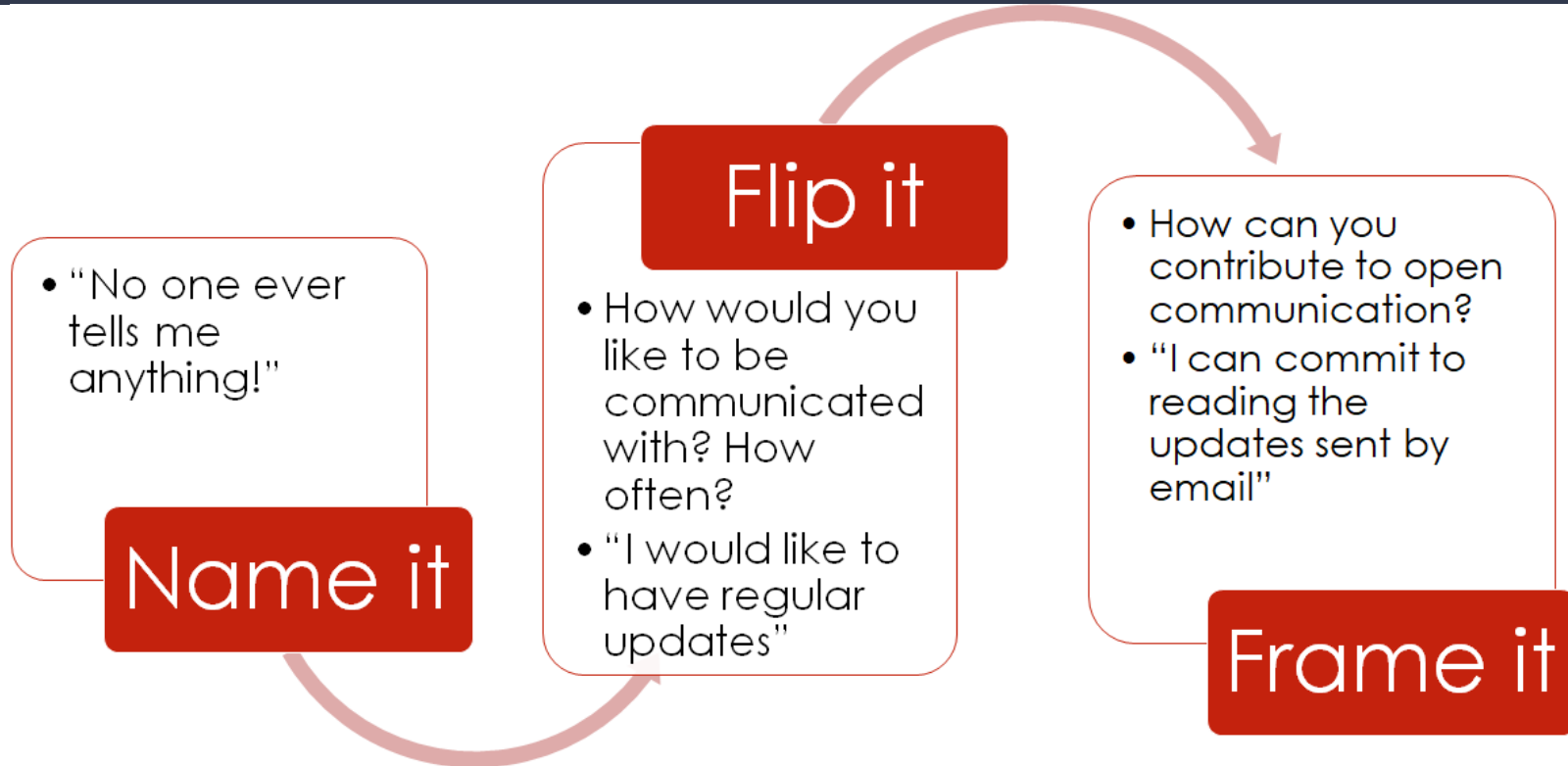


# Flip the Narrative



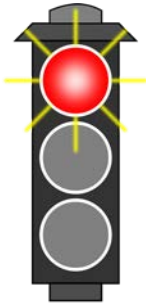


# Flip the Narrative

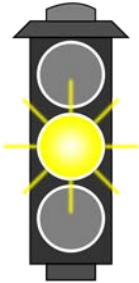




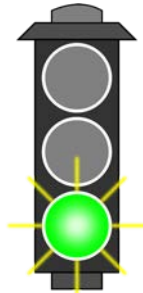
# Evolving Questions: Closed → Open → Generative



Closed: Do you have experience?



Open: What experience do you have?



Generative: How might your experience impact the initiative's success?

# Facilitating Conversations Through Collective Engagement





# Developing Collective Engagement Agreements to get to Brave Space

Understand how we want to be with each other

- Groups generate them
- Establish communication norms
- What is in and out of bounds
- Creates shared understanding
- Are referenced often to center the group

# Collective Engagement Agreement Example

- Past patterns need not define future patterns.
- We are empowered in our process.
- We are working toward the formation of shared understandings.
- Each take care of comfort needs

# Collective Engagement Agreement Example

Participating today:

- Everyone has wisdom,
- Everyone's wisdom for the wisest result,
- There are no wrong answers,
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts,
- Each will use voice and allow others to use voice,
- Each will avoid assumptions, ask questions,
- Each will reach minimally, act maximally, and
- Each person will hear others and be heard.

## Facilitation ...

- Requires ability to let go of our personal control
- Is a pattern and process
- Values people as people

*“The power of conversation cannot be underestimated.”*

Lewis, Passmore, Cantore, page  
94



# Facilitators...

- Are alert to questions that are beginning to be voiced
- Stay sensitive to questions that may not be voiced but are present
- Hold conversational spaces where questions may surface
- Make space for quieter voices to be heard by getting everyone involved
- Know it's ok to interrupt when it's appropriate



# How to facilitate a Conversation

## Create a structure for conversations

- Giving structure to activities
- Stating purpose
- Identify supporting benefits
- Managing perceived risks
- Identifying outcomes and stakeholders
- Articulating questions and prompts





# How to facilitate a conversation

*Carefully frame the initial question*

- *It provides the foundation*
- *It sets the tone*
- *It signals the direction*



# Facilitating Powerful Conversations

- Listen carefully and actively because we are genuinely curious and care about the speaker and what they are saying
- Shift from being focused on ourselves to concentrate fully on others
- Be present, attentive, curious, and caring
- Listen to yourself and use your internal voice to stimulate curiosity
- Listen for shared meaning by developing an ear that is attuned to interrelationships, perceptions, insights occurring in the room

# Conversations that Matter

- Generate curiosity and invite creativity
- Focus inquiry and stimulate reflective conversation
- Are thought-provoking and surface underlying assumptions
- Touch a deeper meaning and stay with participants
- Travel well, spreading around the organization
- Explore with genuine curiosity without implying intent

# Questions?

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Slides will be available at  
[scholarworks@gvsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gvsu.edu) soon

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