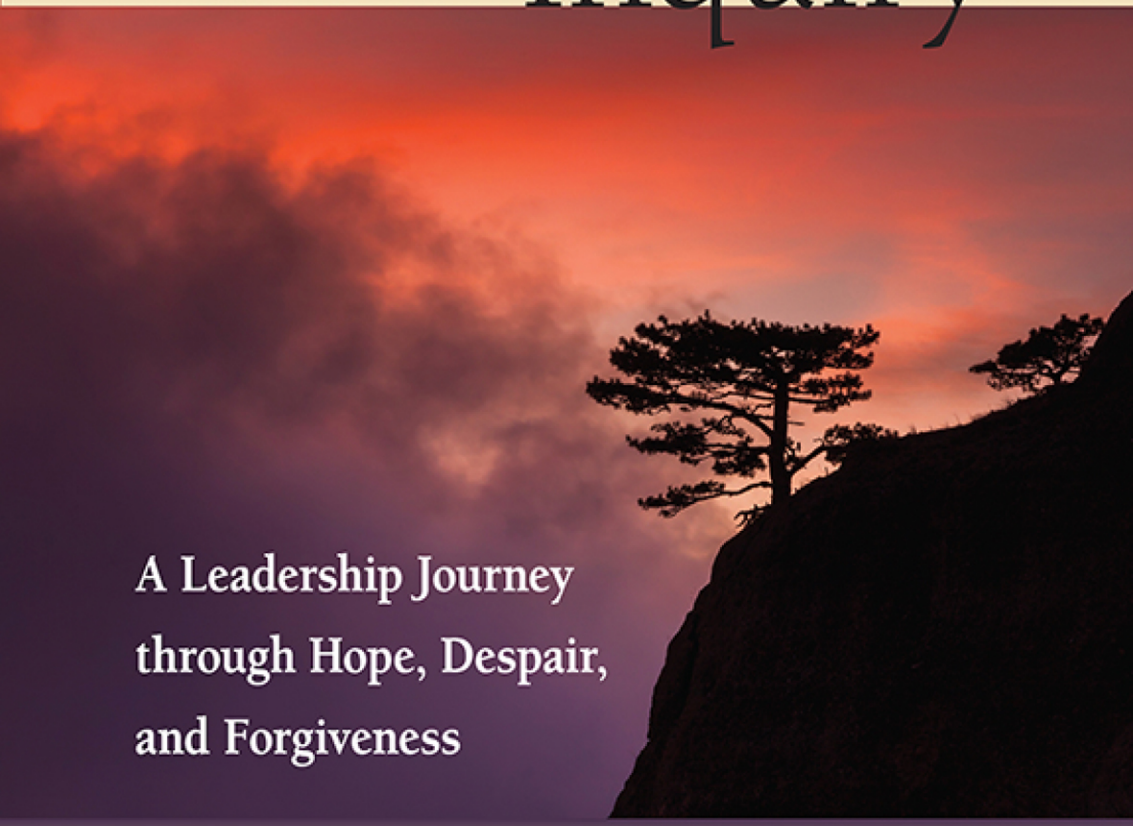
Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry



A Leadership Journey through Hope, Despair, and Forgiveness

Joan McArthur-Blair & Jeanie Cockell

Foreword by David Cooperrider

Distinguished University Professor, Case Western Reserve University & Honorary Chair, The David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry Champlain College

If you enjoy this excerpt…

consider becoming a member of the reader community on our website!

Click here for sign-up form. Members automatically get 10% off print, 30% off digital books.

Praise for *Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry*

"Resilience has become one of the most highly sought-after competencies for today's leaders—a capability that organizations struggle to define but seek to both hire and develop. *Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry* offers a model that captures and simplifies the elements of resilience along with practical and accessible approaches to developing and practicing resilience. Applicable across sectors, ages, and roles, this is a great go-to for organizations and individuals who seek to be prepared for change and leadership."

—Anna-Marie Stuart, FCPA, FCMA, FCMC, Managing Partner, Knightsbridge Robertson Surrette

"*Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry* is about making *being human* a sustainable endeavor in a world of complexity, adversity, and uncertainty. This book provides tools, practices, and reflective questions that will build your capacity to dance fluidly with hope, despair, and forgiveness. The result: resilience, an essential strength for leaders committed to evolving a more positive future. Jeanie and Joan are strikingly honest in sharing their own stories and the stories of other leaders. Anyone stuck in despair, at odds with forgiveness, or looking for hope should read this book. You will come out the other side stronger and more resilient than ever."

—Cheri Torres and Jackie Stavros, coauthors of *Conversations Worth Having* and *Dynamic Relationships*

"Jeanie and Joan model bravery throughout this book. They dive into the human condition of despair and apply Appreciative Inquiry practices to being resilient. With exercises and dramatic stories, they share this as a framework for facilitators, coaches, trainers, and leaders to 'fan the capacity to inquire into and fuel the bravery leaders hold in their hearts.'"

—Kathy Becker, President and CEO, Company of Experts, Inc., and CEO, Center for Appreciative Inquiry

"The perfect balance of theory and practice, grounded in courageous stories of hope, despair, and forgiveness. This book inspires leaders, facilitators, and individuals with a road map for their own leadership journey. The appreciative resilience model provides an accessible framework coupled with reflective questions to guide your practice and strengthen your leadership resilience. The practical tools and workshop agenda are excellent resources for facilitators and leaders to strengthen teams and foster an environment of appreciative resilience."

—Anita Ferriss, Organizational and People Development Specialist, Camosun College

"Jeanie Cockell and Joan McArthur-Blair have written a wholly unique, original, and poetic book that explores one of the most important qualities leaders must cultivate in themselves and nurture in others: resilience. The authors' approach to fostering resilience is as powerful as it is unexpected. We do not become more resilient, they write, by 'toughening up' or 'doing more, better, and faster.' Instead, we fully realize the capacity to sustain ourselves and others in challenging experiences by journeying through hope, despair, and forgiveness in a process of Appreciative Inquiry. Refreshing and beautifully written, *Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry* is rich with engaging stories, reflective questions, and practical applications that will better enable you to thrive in your work, life, and leadership. Read this book and flourish."

—Jim Kouzes, coauthor of the bestselling *The Leadership Challenge* and Dean's Executive Fellow of Leadership, Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University

"While there is no clear road map through the new and unprecedented challenges that today's leaders face in our ever-increasingly complex world, in *Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry*, Jeanie and Joan provide a compass to help any leader—formal or otherwise—navigate the often bumpy journey with compassion and resilience. Like a lighthouse beacon on a stormy night, their ALIVE model offers a pragmatic framework for leaders to traverse even the darkest shoals they may face on their journey to help guide others. If you have ever sought to turn leadership breakdowns into breakthroughs, or realize that you need to put your oxygen mask on before helping others, this book is for you."

—Lindsey N. Godwin, PhD, Director, David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry, and Professor of Management, Robert P. Stiller School of Business, Champlain College

"Jeanie Cockell and Joan McArthur-Blair have produced a remarkable work based on their scholar-practitioner journey where they demonstrate how to leverage the power of human emotions without judgment and with unconditional acceptance. Building on their decades of work on Appreciative Inquiry, they share what's next for building organizations for ecological sustainability and social justice. Jeanie and Joan make a critical link between positive approaches in organizations and resilience and demonstrate how the latter can support leadership development and transformation at the individual, group, organization, and societal levels. Written in the most reader-friendly manner with plenty of practical tools, this book will be especially useful for social change agents, OD practitioners, coaches, consultants, and individuals interested in their own personal growth."

—Tojo Thatchenkery, PhD, coauthor of *Appreciative Intelligence* and Professor and Director, Organization Development and Knowledge Management Program, George Mason University

Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry

Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry

A Leadership Journey through Hope, Despair, and Forgiveness

Joan McArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell

FOREWORD BY
DAVID COOPERRIDER

BK®

Berrett–Koehler Publishers, Inc.
a BK Business book

Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry

Copyright © 2018 by Joan McArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.

Appreciative Intelligence® is a registered trademark of Tojo J. Thatchenkery

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
1333 Broadway, Suite 1000
Oakland, CA 94612-1921
Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278
www.bkconnection.com

Ordering information for print editions
Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the Berrett-Koehler address above.
Individual sales. Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; www.bkconnection.com
Orders for college textbook/course adoption use. Please contact Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626.
Distributed to the U.S. trade and internationally by Penguin Random House Publisher Services.

Berrett-Koehler and the BK logo are registered trademarks of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

First Edition
Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-5230-8255-1
PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-8256-8
IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-8257-5

2018-1

Project manager: Susan Geraghty

Text designer: Paula Goldstein

Cover designer: Leslie Waltzer, Crowfoot Design

Compositor: Andrea Reider

Copyeditor: Michele Jones

Proofreader: Sophia Ho

Indexer: Sylvia Coates

For Mar, who uplifts our lives
and
For all the people who have uplifted our leadership journeys

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

Foreword by David Cooperrider xi

Prologue: The Journey of an Evolving Idea xxiii

1 Appreciative Resilience 1

2 Leveraging the Force of Appreciative Inquiry 17

3 Hope: A Generative Force 47

4 Despair: Devastation or Glancing Blow 73

5 Forgiveness: Rising Again 99

6 Resilience Practice: The Day to Day of Being a Resilient Leader 123

7 Appreciative Resilience Workshop 141

Epilogue: An Invitation to Practice Appreciative Resilience 173

Appendix 1: Interview Questions, Story Prompts, and Contributions 179

Appendix 2: Appreciative Resilience Workshop Agenda 185

References 193

Acknowledgments 197

Index 205

The Authors 211

Cockell McArthur-Blair Consulting 215

Other Appreciative Inquiry Books by Berrett-Koehler 217

This page intentionally left blank

FOREWORD

David L. Cooperrider

This page intentionally left blank

If you could choose only one powerful and resource-filled book on resilience for leaders, what do you suppose it would be? For me the answer is right here. *Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry* is something that should be read by every leader in our turbulent and *extreme* world of leadership, and read by anyone involved in the helping professions—and that's everyone!

I first became interested in resilience when I started my PhD research on leadership and organization development at Case Western Reserve University. I was young and had very little sense of the intense, often lonely, and unnerving pressures of leadership. When in the midst of some thirty interviews—where every single leader spoke not only of success moments but also of times that nearly broke them, as in what one leader spoke about as "that dark night of the soul"—I woke up one day to a newspaper headline that sent a chill through my body. I've never forgotten the moment I opened the pages to the story ("AROUND THE NATION . . ." 1985):

> *CLEVELAND, Jan. 28—Frederick Holliday, superintendent of schools in Cleveland, shot himself to death in a school over the weekend, and left a note saying his suicide was a result of the school system's "petty politics," the authorities said today.*

> *Mr. Holliday's body was found by a student in a stairwell at Cleveland Aviation High School this morning. His death was ruled a suicide by the Cuyahoga County coroner's office. Mr. Holliday, 58 years old, was the 76,000-student district's first black superintendent. . . . A school board member, Joseph Tegreene, said the superintendent feared his contract would not be renewed.*

The story ripped through our city like the bullet that pierced through Frederick Holliday's heart. His suicide was a jarring ending to a promising start as a superintendent, which, on the surface, seemed to many as the most successful in years. Few knew of his despair and loss of hope; the resentment he felt toward the crumbling schools, the systemic racism, and the relentless public school budget cuts; and the ire he felt toward a tiny group on the board ostensibly out to block his leadership. Few knew how down on himself he was. Despair somehow visits and envelops us when we can't cope with it and when we have a big dream that falls apart. Getting back up is the hardest part, especially when feeling alone. Although leadership despair and setback ARE not dealt with much in our business schools or leadership research, the call for cultivating real resilience is pervasive anywhere people truly lead and take risks. While the example of Fredrick Holiday might appear as an outlier, some version of what Holiday experienced happens to virtually everyone. Even the greatest, legendary leaders such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Elon Musk, Coretta Scott King, and John F. Kennedy—every single one—have written about moments when ice-cold despair and hopelessness have saturated their every waking moment.

If nothing else, the story of Frederick Holliday sensitized me to the inner life of leadership. And it made me more

empathic toward every leader, friend, relative, and colleague taking on much-needed change agendas that are often bigger than life. Yet it is true: there may be nothing more important not only to leadership survival but leadership thriving than resilience—and the remarkable practices that give it tensile strength. Terms like *bounce-back capacity* trivialize what's meant by the work of resilience.

And that's why this book is so special.

This small volume—written so genuinely, compassionately, and powerfully in terms of its intimate stories and solid evidence base—is a gem. Joan McArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell have written a book that could not have arrived at a better time for our world and for the rapidly growing discipline of appreciative inquiry (AI). Everyone needs resilience, not as an end state, but as an ever-growing collaborative and capacity-building practice. Yet to date the self-help books on resilience, in my view, treat the subject far too superficially, as in "It's all about the way you think about adversity." This book is far different. For one thing, it embraces the richness of life-giving relationship—compassionate colleagueship, skillful mentorship, friendship, evocative coaching, cocounseling, coinquiring—as the requisite medium for the broadening and building of resilience. (It's not something you do just alone.) In addition, whereas most books on resilience focus on prescriptions, as in "Here is how you should change your thinking style," this compelling volume focuses on the relational practices and first principles of AI and its many strengths-empowering modes of discovery, design thinking, and action learning. Moreover, this is the first book I know of where we are encouraged to think of resilience not as a noun, as a thing, but as a verb form, something more active and forged; let's call it the practice of resiliencing. To be sure, the nuanced commentaries, practices, and perspectives offered in

this book can help you transform your life as well as the resilience capacity of many others, but not superficially or in some disingenuous way. It's not a motivational speech. It's about a lifelong art and practice. It's about making resilient lives happen: your own and that of everyone you care about, work with, and want to support.

This book emerges from the theory and practice of AI (Cooperrider 1986)—something that's been hailed as "a positive revolution in change." Today, AI's approach to strengths-inspired change (rather than problematizing change) is being practiced everywhere. The corporate world; the worlds of public service, economics, education, faith, philanthropy; and the fields of positive psychology and design thinking—all have been affected by AI principles. Indeed, Kenneth Gergen, one of the greatest scholars ever to come out of Harvard, once said: "The growth and application of Appreciative Inquiry over the past two decades has been nothing short of phenomenal. It is arguably the most powerful process of positive organizational change ever devised" (Cooperrider 2017, 82). AI is a discovery process—it is premised on the principle that human systems grow in the direction of what they most rigorously, frequently, and creatively ask questions about—and it searches for everything that "gives life" to persons, organizations, communities, and larger systems when they are most alive, resilient, and healthy in their interconnected ecology of relationships. To appreciate, quite simply, means to value and to recognize that which has value; it is a way of knowing and valuing the life-giving dynamic in any living entity. And one of the major achievements of this book is that it brings the power of AI not just to joyful extraordinary moments but to some of the harshest, most demanding, and seemingly impossible experiences in life.

In contrast to the positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship movements that define their work around the concept of "positive deviance"—that is, studying and focusing their field on "the extraordinary" and thereby often dichotomizing or creating an unhealthy split of positive from negative human experience—AI transcends this polarity. It's not about positive or negative human experience, says AI: the task is the quest for what gives life and generative potential—even in the midst of the tragic. One of the great frontiers of AI that this volume opens up is how to bring the "the gift of new eyes" to successively more demanding arenas for the duet of appreciation and inquiry. Imagine a Maslow-like triangle or pyramid with three levels.

At the lowest rung—and perhaps the easiest domain in which to practice AI—is the appreciative inquiry into the extraordinary, the best in human experience, those times of positive deviance that jump out. At the second and sequentially more difficult rung is the capacity to do AI during times of the ordinary—at those times that are so taken for granted that we often fail to apprehend, appreciate, or even attempt to search for everything that is giving life. Here we are talking about the capacity for seeing the best in the seemingly ordinary and insignificant events, where there are no starbursts, no mountaintop experiences. Thank goodness, then, for the example of our gifted artists and the many layers of meaning they help us see and appreciate: think of how a Vincent van Gogh teaches us to see the extraordinary in a coffeepot or a pair of worn-out shoes, a pipe, or a pouch. William Wordsworth, as another example of the second level of appreciative maturity, encourages the cultivation of appreciative intelligence in the midst of the ordinary. He writes: "While with an eye made quiet by the power / of harmony, and deep power of joy / we see into

the life of things." And then there is a third developmental level for the practice of AI—the least understood. It's the kind of AI sensitivity, skill, or literacy as evidenced by someone like Victor Frankl, in his enduring classic, *Man's Search for Meaning.* So, this, the third level of elevated AI capacity, is not appreciative inquiry into moments of excellence or into experiences of the life-giving in the ordinary, but AI in the midst of tragedy. Victor Frankl, as we all know, was in a concentration camp where everything was taken from him and others, yet he saw resources, relationships, and regenerative possibilities that gave life to many, and built a whole new edifice and field of transformational capacity in psychology. There is example after example of Frankl's idea of finding the life-promoting meaning in the midst of extreme suffering; they are threaded throughout his accounts of the harsh conditions of the Nazi concentration camps. In his 1959 book, *Saying Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp,* he said, "What is to give light must endure burning" (Frankl 1959).

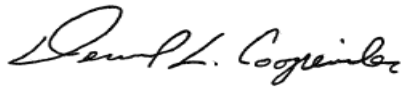
This is the great achievement of this book. The authors not only tell us but show us the "how" of it all. Drawing on Frankl and others, they demonstrate that we can see only half of anything; the other half is the meaning we give to what we appreciate. For Joan and Jeanie, the AI methodology is relevant everywhere, from the extraordinary to the tragic, not just in moments of success and exceptional deeds.

What AI does, then, in terms of a theory of change, is embrace one of the most difficult and meanest paradoxes of change. It argues that we change best when we are strongest: as human beings, we change best and in the most capacity-filled way when we experience the resonating power of every relevant resource, even the tiniest seed of hope, available to us across the entire spectrum of systemic strengths, outside and

inside any given system, including social and cultural assets; technical and economic assets; psychological and spiritual strengths; ecological strengths of nature; and the strengths of moral models, positive deviations, and collaborative creativity. And if we change best when we are strongest or have access to everything needed for resilience (encircling the change domain in a kind of "surround sound of strengths" and meanings), then the reverse is also true. For there is a mean paradox inherent in situations where change, resilience, and renewal are needed most—for example, when persons are in a dark depression or there are the imminent threats of a company facing bankruptcy or traumatic market shifts. At precisely those moments when we feel the weakest, we are being asked to change? This mean paradox should be reversed, shouldn't it?

Well, that's exactly what this book can help you do. The book is a treasure trove of stories that echo our lives. It is a conceptual resource that helps us work with the key triad for building resilience, which the authors identify as *hope, despair, and forgiveness.* Within a week after my first thrilling reading, I leveraged this book's poetic questions about hope, despair, and forgiveness, the generous workshop tools, and the resilience-building practices with a sixty-two-year-old close relative and loved one and then with one of the most challenged executive teams (in the auto industry) I've ever worked with. Appreciative inquiry, in times of trauma or tragedy, is indeed a crucial next stage of development for many in the field of positive change, and it is not an oxymoron. As I said, after reading this book, I experienced its transformative power with leaders in business, and with loved ones, as if Joan and Jeanie were right there, gently guiding the initiative. When was the last time a book came to life for you just at the right time and instantly? Of course, that's no simple achievement.

That's how special and important this book is.



Distinguished University Professor,
Case Western Reserve University
Honorary Chair, The David L.
Cooperrider Center for Appreciative
Inquiry, Champlain College, Stiller
School of Business

This page intentionally left blank

We didn't set out
on this journey,
to travel the path
of resilience,
but
resilience howled to us,
its voice hoarse
against the wild wind
of life

JMCB 2017

PROLOGUE

The Journey of an Evolving Idea

This page intentionally left blank

Something interesting happened in our journeys as leaders and as explorers of leadership. More and more as the years passed, we found ourselves being drawn to the notion of resilience. At the same time, our clients were asking us to help them journey through situations requiring resilience. All leaders seek to be resilient in their work and their lives, to withstand what organizations and life can throw at them, and to rise again from despair. We have also sought resilience for ourselves in our work and life as educators, consultants, entrepreneurs, and leaders. We have struggled to stand again in difficult times, and to claim our own agency, even if that agency was merely a whisper.

This book is a commentary on our exploration of building resilience with appreciative inquiry for ourselves, other leaders, and organizations. We call this book a commentary for three reasons. First, the book deeply reflects the thinking, reading, and work we have been doing with appreciative inquiry and resilience for many years. Second, we recognize that this book is just one viewpoint on resilience. It represents our perspective, not the only perspective, on resilience. Our ideas about resilience are, at times, confluent with those of others; and, at times, they enter into new territory based solely on our work and reflection as leaders. Third, we are white lesbians living in Canada. The privilege that being white accords us and

the discrimination we have experienced as lesbians influence this commentary deeply. We experience freedoms that many around the world do not have, yet both of us are old enough to have lived through a time when we dared not tell people who we really were. We recognize the influence that whiteness and living in a stable country has had on our view of leadership resilience. We also know as lesbians what it means to be excluded and discriminated against. We understand that we are influenced by our positions, privilege, and power as well as by our experience of difference. Consequently, we have created a commentary, a place where ideas are put forward with a generous spirit for leaders to take what resonates, use what is powerful, and expand on the ideas in this book for themselves.

As two long-term educators, we didn't start out to explore resilience. In our work as educators and as educational and organizational consultants, we have used appreciative inquiry approaches to foster positive innovation inside education, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations. Appreciative inquiry approaches focus on what is working well with individuals, organizations, teams, and systems in order to build positive futures. Through the years of using applications of appreciative inquiry, we have been continually struck by the power of appreciative inquiry to help people through the most challenging of experiences as well as through other organizational life journeys—planning, collaboration, and working well together. We wrote our book *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A Transformative Force* (2012) in the context of our work with higher education institutions and included other educational perspectives—schools, community development, and training—where learning was taking place. These applications included many kinds of outcomes, all of which can be summarized as a desire to create positive futures. In our journey of working with people in these organizational settings inside

and outside education, we witnessed rich experiences of leaders seeking to be resilient. Life experiences and professional issues had created challenging times for them.

We became curious about how people seem to be able to make it through challenging times, carry on, and be resilient in their lives. We began to wonder how leaders in organizations dealt with hope, despair, and forgiveness in their daily leadership lives, and started to write about the link between these elements and resilience (McArthur-Blair and Cockell 2014). We wondered how leaders were resilient themselves and how they helped create resilient organizations. This intense curiosity led us through several stages of examining and reflecting on resilience.

We knew that appreciative inquiry, with its focus on exploring what is working well, grounded people in hope, no matter what their issues were. Appreciative inquiry helped people see challenges as opportunities and reframe problems as possibilities. We also began to focus on the power of appreciative questions as tools for reflection during challenging times. The experiences of despair are often the catalyst for inspiration. Although we had been using appreciative inquiry to work with leaders through challenging times, it was a deeply personal experience that inspired us to develop a new appreciative inquiry model. Jeanie was in a serious car accident, and living through that very challenging time led us to develop the ALIVE model. We reflected deeply on the experiences we and other leaders were having in challenging times and developed a model to capture how appreciative inquiry could be used to foster resilience. ALIVE is an acronym for a practice in which we **a**ppreciate, **l**ove, and **i**nquire, in order to **v**enture and **e**volve. The daily practice of appreciative inquiry with the addition of a focus on love rounded out the first part of the model. The second part builds on the first: to venture and evolve, in order

to be resilient. We also developed critical appreciative inquiry, which focuses on the use of appreciative inquiry with social justice and large systemic issues. Both of these models contributed to our early thinking about appreciative resilience, both systemic and personal (Cockell and McArthur-Blair 2012).

This early work led us to melding the notions of hope, despair, and forgiveness with appreciative inquiry because we saw the power of bringing these ideas together. We were seeing the ability of appreciative inquiry to open dialogue about these leadership states in uplifting ways. From this, the idea of appreciative resilience, working with appreciative inquiry through journeys of hope, despair, and forgiveness, began to take form. Appreciative inquiry's focus on strengths and on what is possible reinforces a hopeful view. Appreciative inquiry helps people in times of despair to focus on using their capabilities in these times and to move forward or reside in the state of despair. When engaging people in appreciative inquiry processes, we are struck by the power of appreciative inquiry to open people up to seeing one another's strengths, perspectives, and worldviews, as well as their own. This opening up can help shift how they view the situation they are in. Through this shift, people can forgive, and the journey toward a hopeful view can begin anew.

This book is a view of resilience created by two women who for a lifetime have led in many situations both formal and informal; we have experienced successes and suffered despair. We are intensely and unstoppably curious about the experience of leaders as they undertake their roles. Our goal in this book is to offer a commentary that can open the door to leaders' exploring and reflecting on how they foster resilience for themselves and others. The notion of practicing resilience arises over and over in the book. Practice is something that one begins anew each day, adding to one's skills and capacity to be

resilient. Undertaking this practice matters; we believe leaders can polish their resilience skills. This practice can't safeguard against all the complexities of leadership, but it can hone capabilities and strengths.

We hope that leaders, formal and informal, leave this book with a deep understanding of their strengths in times of success and challenge; leave knowing how appreciative inquiry approaches can be used to foster resilience; and leave uplifted by this commentary and the stories of other leaders included here.

Joan McArthur-Blair and Jeanie Cockell
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
February 2018

I can be strong
and still bend
I can be flexible
and made of steel
I can fall
and rise again
I can lead you
and follow you
Be with me . . .
JMCB 2017

CHAPTER 1

Appreciative Resilience

This page intentionally left blank

Leadership resilience is a state toward which one is always journeying. Leaders, whether formal or informal, don't get to arrive and reside in resilience forever. Leadership is complex with its multiple demands, constant change, and ups and downs. Leaders cannot predict what challenges, issues, and random events they will be called on to face, and they need tools and practices to advance resilience. There is always something more to learn and to practice on the journey toward resilience. This book is a commentary on that journey and that practice. It is about how leaders can build what we call appreciative resilience by using appreciative inquiry as they journey through the constantly evolving landscape of hope, despair, and forgiveness.

This dynamic interweaving of appreciative inquiry processes and philosophy with a deep exploration of hope, despair, and forgiveness opens new ways of reflecting on and practicing being a resilient leader. Appreciative resilience aims to sustain leaders as hope blooms, as despair visits, and as forgiveness opens their hearts. In our work, we have come to believe that practicing appreciative resilience in each of these states—hope, despair, and forgiveness—generates leadership resilience over time. This book is a commentary on that belief and an invitation for you to journey with us. In journeying through this

commentary, you will find reflective and practical processes to build your own appreciative resilience.

We fully recognize that this commentary presents one idea of how to view and foster resilience. This book is not designed to be the definitive answer to leadership resilience. Rather, it is designed to tell stories that provide insight; offer a useful model for building resilience with appreciative inquiry in times of hope, despair, and forgiveness; engage you in reflection on your own resilience; and offer thoughts on organizational and team resilience. We recognize that leadership resilience is refined in the crucible of leading in the everyday and that leaders forge their own thinking; this is ours.

Over the course of the book, we explore this thinking in depth. We unpack and repack the component parts and related concepts of the appreciative resilience model in order for leaders to apply these ideas to their own work and reflect on how to be appreciatively resilient. To begin that process, we offer a quick primer on some of the key ideas and definitions, introduce the appreciative resilience model, and provide some notes on reading this book.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is an approach for positive change in individuals, groups, and organizations. Its assumption is simple: every human system (individual, group, organization, community) "has something that works right—things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways" (Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros 2003, xvii). AI focuses on what is working well (appreciate) by engaging people in asking questions and telling stories (inquire) (Watkins and Mohr 2001). To appreciate means to value, to increase in value, and to be fully aware. In being fully aware, one does not ignore issues and problems; rather one seeks to deeply see what is and find within that the fertile nuggets that can be made to grow. To

inquire is to ask questions; to inquire into what might be, what can be; and to dream a new and possible future. All AI processes are built from these two fundamental concepts of appreciating and inquiring. Appreciative inquiry is narrative; it is about telling and listening to stories in order to build a positive future together. Finding those things that are working "right" and working well allows people to build the future together in a highly engaged and participatory way.

Appreciative inquiry was developed by David Cooperrider and others in the 1980s. AI prompted a catalytic shift from a problem focus to a possibility focus in how organizations, systems, teams, leaders, and individuals approached the future they were trying to build. Appreciative inquiry is used in many contexts around the world: for strategic and other kinds of planning, team development, coaching, organization development, research, and in every other way imaginable. Appreciative inquiry includes tools and processes for positive change and is also a way of being in the world. In the works cited throughout this book, you can find models, processes, and principles for applying appreciative inquiry to a wide range of situations.

Appreciative inquiry is at the core of appreciative resilience work. Over the course of the next chapters, you will find many of the principles and models of appreciative inquiry applied to the ideas, processes, and practices of resilience.

Leadership can be a catalytic force for positive futures in the world. In this resilience work, we are writing for leaders who undertake this kind of leadership. These leaders care about creating something that serves to uplift, to enhance, and to foster. We seek to help these leaders be resilient for themselves and to create resilience in their teams and organizations. We recognize that leaders are not always good and that not every leader seeks to build positive futures. However, in our work,

we are interested in helping leaders who do. Consequently, for the purposes of this exploration of appreciative resilience, we define leadership as leading for and with others for the purpose of creating positive change in the world. That change can be in the neighborhood block, in the executive suite, in profit or nonprofit organizations, in youth and senior organizations, in communities, in global organizations—everywhere where leaders, formal or informal, undertake leadership. Leadership is about leaders attending to how they are being in the world as they are doing their leadership work. This book offers insights for leaders about how to foster their resilience as they undertake the leadership of positive change.

Resilience is the ability to sustain or persevere in the most complex of leadership and life experiences. Leadership demands a great deal from people. The need for leaders to be resilient arises for many reasons. To be resilient is to have the ability to adapt, grow, and change in the face of adversity. This adversity can be large and life changing—for example, losing a loved one, experiencing a tragedy, or losing a job. The adversity can also be small, such as the failure of a plan or idea—what we call a glancing blow. Large or small, these events have an impact on leaders. When leaders pick themselves up, they are being resilient. We believe that resilience can be learned and practiced. This book is about just that—learning and practicing resilience by using appreciative inquiry. We haven't found in our conversations with leaders or in our own leadership life a perfect formula for being resilient, nor is there a vaccination against despair. Rather, being resilient is about finding an individually created path forward and having the strength to withstand the current circumstances.

Appreciative resilience is an area of leadership resilience that is built from the practice of appreciative inquiry. It approaches resilience from the place of assisting leaders in developing their

own understanding and personal call to resilience by using appreciative inquiry principles and practices. Leaders often think of resilience as a response to weathering despair, but in appreciative resilience work, resilience is fostered from a place of maximizing the use of appreciative exploration through the leadership states of hope, despair, and forgiveness.

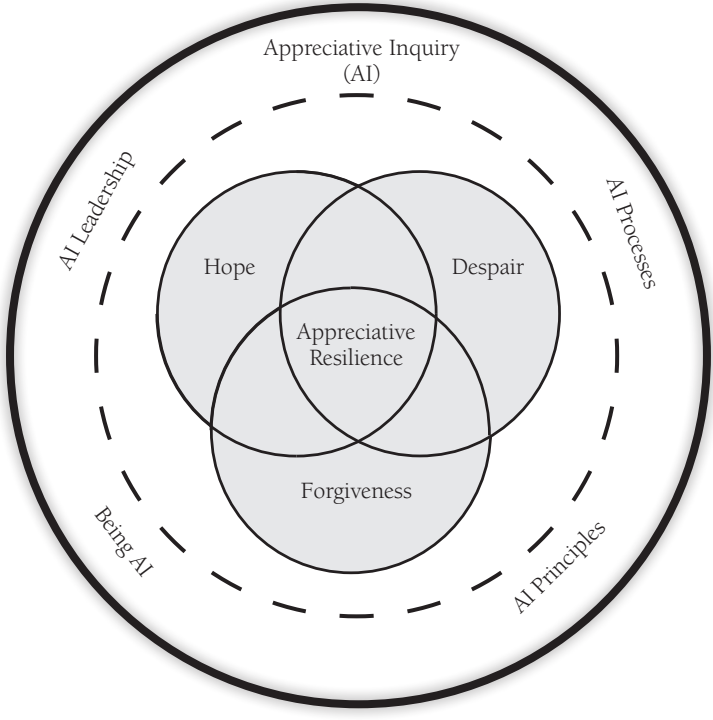
Hope, despair, and forgiveness. We think that the interplay between these three elements and taking an appreciative inquiry approach to them are at the core of resilience. Each one of these elements has a powerful impact on leaders because it influences leaders' ability to respond to the fray of a leadership life. These elements have captivated philosophers and existentialists throughout the centuries. We could spend our time here just in creating and re-creating the definitions of these states. We are not going to do that. We offer definitions that we have been working with that have some power to generate deep reflection and conversation. We understand that these are not the only definitions of hope, despair, and forgiveness.

Hope is needed for leaders to move forward. We are not referring to the kind of hope that envisions personal gain or power over others, but rather to the kind of hope that creates space for power with others to generate better futures. This does not mean that there will be no conflict or that people will not fail themselves and others. Hope is about believing that no matter what the state is at this moment, the future will open to other possibilities. Hope is generative; it looks at what is and what might be and then begins to gather the force required to move toward that future. Hope is not a simple concept. It is not about being joyful or optimistic all the time. In using appreciative inquiry to explore how one fosters hope and a hopeful view, leaders can begin the journey of finding their resilient selves and begin to use a hopeful view as an element of resilient leadership.

Despair, in a leadership context, is that "dark night of the soul" (Moore 2004) where leaders do not see a clear path forward, where outcomes cannot be seen, where doubts arise about whether anything matters or is possible. Almost all leaders over a lifetime will find themselves in states of despair at times; for some it might be only momentary, and for others it might be life defining. Critical to being resilient is the ability for leaders to reflect on and tap into their capabilities to sustain themselves as they reside in and move through states of despair. The experience of despair can, paradoxically, show leaders what they truly believe in, what makes them strong, and how they can use their power most generatively. Who we are in times of despair is at the core of our resilient selves. This appreciative resilience work draws leaders to focus on their capabilities in times of despair and, through a series of processes, assists leaders in amplifying and growing those capabilities in order to become more resilient.

Forgiveness is an essential part of resilience because it can be the animating energy that makes forward movement and leadership agency possible. In forgiving, leaders can shift and move by choosing to give up resentment, anger, and fear and by stepping toward accepting things as they are. Forgiveness is a means of moving back to hope from despair or residing in despair with grace. It creates space for dialogue to begin and for change to take place. As a practice, forgiveness is challenging to cultivate because it is a conscious act undertaken with powerful will and determination. It requires one to look into one's leadership and deeply forgive the failures—others' and one's own. It is only in this place of forgiveness that we literally have our minds changed and can see the possibilities before us. Forgiveness has an element of letting go and looking forward in expectation of positive change, of being in the moment, and of seeing the strengths and possibilities in the midst of challenges.

The ***appreciative resilience model*** helps leaders build resilience by using appreciative inquiry to reflect on and explore the leadership states of hope, despair, and forgiveness. The outer ring includes appreciative inquiry (AI), AI processes, AI principles, being AI, and AI leadership. The inner core is the interplay of the states or elements of hope, despair, and forgiveness. These three states or elements of leadership are interlocked. They ebb and flow through a leader's experience. At times, the circle of hope will almost eclipse the circles of despair and forgiveness. At other times, the circles of despair and forgiveness will be the predominant elements at play in a leader's life. The model and its related exercises are designed to help individual leaders, teams, and organizational groups reflect on and build their resilience.



A leader we interviewed for this book wrote a wonderful story of how the ebb and flow of hope, despair, and forgiveness played out for him:

An Hour That Changed My Life

Our founding president of eighteen years announced that he would be retiring within the year. I had served the organization for seventeen years in a number of progressively more senior roles. I had addressed a number of challenges, including stakeholder issues and the formal unionization of our staff. I supported the founding president in all ways. During those seventeen years, I had also completed my doctoral work at an Ivy League institution, focusing specifically on leadership and community development. The combination of these experiences instilled in me a belief not only that was I qualified to be our next president but also that the range of experiences over the previous seventeen years had uniquely prepared me for the position.

The board conducted a national search, and I was the only internal applicant. I was excited about the prospect that I could lead in the years ahead, addressing our challenges at that time. The interview process allowed me to articulate an organizational vision nurtured by belief in my abilities and my potential to lead our organization to a compelling future.

As the presidential search process reached its final stages, I became one of three finalists, and then one of two finalists. I had the credentials; I knew the organization; I knew the community; I loved this place and had given it my all for my entire career. Trying hard not to be overconfident, I nevertheless felt like the board's choice should be obvious.

On an overcast, rainy, early spring morning, the chair of the board visited my office to let me know that the board had selected the other candidate to be the next president, and he had just let her know that he intended to accept the position. The board was "grateful for my service but, at this time, they felt they needed new blood."

I was devastated. After she left my office, I closed the door and cried. I felt I had bled for this organization. I had given my all for seventeen years, and yet my "blood" wasn't good enough. The pain of rejection, the grief of having lost an opportunity that I felt I deserved, that I felt was inevitable, was palpable. Why didn't I deserve the opportunity to lead?

Within the hour, I received a telephone call from the man who had just accepted the position as our next president. He couldn't have been more gracious, and he informed me that he understood how I felt. He, at one time in his career, had been in the same position of having been rejected as an internal candidate for a leadership role. He told me that he had learned a lot about me during the interview process and that he wanted me on his team as he assumed the presidency. I was grateful for this reassuring call; however, I was still reeling from the hurt, pain, grief, and anger at the board for their decision.

My hour of learning about the board's rejection and hearing the next president's desire to have me on his team is an hour that ultimately changed my life. In looking back, it was probably the best thing that could have happened to me. Lessons in humility are always good for aspiring leaders. In supporting our new

> *president, I gained valuable new experiences by serving as a senior leader for eight years. I was the right person at the wrong time. However, these opportunities to mature as a leader made me, eight years later, the right person at the right time as I assumed the presidency of the organization.*

In this story, the hope, despair, and forgiveness are represented so clearly. This leader had hope that he was the right person to lead the organization and clearly suffered despair in not achieving what he set out to do. The most powerful part of this story is his decision to reside in forgiveness and work with the candidate who had bested him, before he actualized his dream of becoming president. In leadership, there are many things large and small that foster hope, and many things, from a glancing blow to a devastating event, that can cause despair; forgiveness is a powerful, willful choice that leads to venturing and evolving.

When reading this book, imagine holding the appreciative resilience model in your hands as a three-dimensional object that can be taken apart, deeply examined, and then carefully put back together. In the next chapters, this is what we will do. Each chapter addresses specific practices of resilience that you can apply and adapt to your own work.

Woven into these chapters are the voices of other leaders. Some wrote short vignettes, and others we interviewed (see appendix 1 for story prompts and interview questions). We have kept their names, positions, and locations anonymous to respect their confidentiality. They come from various walks

of life; work in education, social work, the private sector, and government; and hold various positions, from CEO to informal leaders to business owners. These people offer insights into leadership, being resilient, and working with hope, despair, and forgiveness. In their interview responses and stories, their words reflect the complexity of resilience.

The appreciative resilience model and this book are not linear journeys. You needn't read the chapters in order, nor work with the model beginning with hope. We encourage you to begin where you need to. We described our journey to developing the appreciative resilience model in the prologue. This chapter provides context and an introduction to the appreciative resilience model. Depending on where you are in your leadership journey, you may be drawn to the conversation on how appreciative inquiry and appreciative resilience are linked and work together—chapter 2. Hope and a hopeful view in leadership can uplift, and you may be drawn to begin with the possibilities that hope provides—chapter 3. Despair and how you might stand within a leadership storm by uplifting strengths might be more important at this moment in your leadership life—chapter 4. The intersection of power, privilege, and difference and their impact on organizational despair are also captured in chapter 4. Deeply residing in the possibility of forgiveness and what that can offer to your leadership life could be compelling to you at this moment—chapter 5. Chapters 6 and 7 move into appreciative resilience practice. They draw together the processes of building resilience with appreciative inquiry while journeying through hope, despair, and forgiveness. In chapter 6, we focus on resilience practices in the everyday of leadership work. After having reflected on the ideas in the book, you may want to have a practical way to share these ideas with others. In chapter 7, we have provided a

workshop with facilitation commentary for that purpose. Also in chapter 7, there are many appreciative questions that can be drawn out of the workshop and used as individual reflection prompts. In appendix 2, there is a version of the workshop without the facilitation commentary. At the ends of chapters 1 through 6, you will find appreciative questions to prompt personal leadership reflection and build on the practice of resilience. In the epilogue is a series of invitations for you as a leader to continue your evolution in becoming more and more resilient. We have learned for ourselves that being resilient is a constant state of evolution as we are forever and irrevocably changed by leadership experiences and there is always an invitation to grow and learn.

Reflection

Think for a few minutes about the journey of your leadership life.

1. Pick a few words that describe you in that journey. (For example: *trustworthy, loyal, collaborative*)
2. What do those words mean for you?
3. Why are they important?
4. In what positive ways have these influenced your leadership over time?

There are times
You are called to new knowing
And you are compelled to answer
There is no point in
Hiding under the covers
Pulling them tight around your ears
Hoping ignorance will reign
When the call comes
It is like a pry bar
Tearing away what you understood
Dissolving what you thought you knew
You may crave the not knowing
But that time has passed
you by.

JMCB 2017

CHAPTER 2

Leveraging the Force of Appreciative Inquiry

This page intentionally left blank

If you enjoy this excerpt…

consider becoming a member of the reader community on our website!

Click here for sign-up form. Members automatically get 10% off print, 30% off digital books.