



School Provision #103 – Follow your Passion in Education

Today's email newsletter, the monthly "Provision" sent out by the [Center for School Transformation](#), presents the inspiring story of Kathleen, one of our faculty members, who discovered our work at a conference when she attended a day-long workshop on Appreciative Inquiry (AI) that Megan and I were conducting. She had not heard about the Center or of our work before that time; she simply saw the term "Appreciative Inquiry" listed as one of the workshop topics in the conference program and, because it resonated with her at a heart level, she decided to attend. Afterwards, she immediately contacted us to learn more about the Center and the work we were doing. It wasn't long before she had learned the ropes sufficiently to become not only a faculty member of the [Evocative Coaching Training Program](#) but also an integral part of our consulting and development work. Although everyone has pitched in to help carry the load over the course of my illness, it is hard to imagine that the Center could have survived without Kathleen. She has become that much of an invaluable resource and stalwart member of the team.

At the time of the conference, Kathleen was the coordinator for staff development in a large urban school district. In that role, she was constantly on the lookout for new ways to get better results. One thing was clear: the old approach of identifying and trying to fix problems was just not working very well. The more people focused on problems the more overwhelmed they became not only by their magnitude but also by the challenge of ever turning things around. So the notion of identifying and building upon strengths sounded like an intriguing approach. Learning how to do that, and how to do that well, became one of Kathleen's commitments and passions. Joining the faculty of the Center's coach-training program was soon to follow. Let's hear from Kathleen, then, as to how this has worked out for her and where this may be leading.

Bob: So you met Megan and me at a conference and learned about Appreciative Inquiry. Why do you think that resonated with you so strongly?

Kathleen: I think it was the combination of the message itself and of how the two of you were working together and presenting that message. It was truly inspiring. I became enamored with the notion of building on strengths rather than solving problems. That was a huge shift that I was ready to make. In fact, I was more than ready. I was impatient to find something, anything, which would be more effective than what I had been doing all along. Appreciative Inquiry sounded like it might be the approach I was looking for. You two made that come alive for me.

Bob: So how did you go from learning about AI at a conference to becoming a faculty member of the [Evocative Coaching Training Program](#)?

Kathleen: Well one thing just kind of led to another. At the AI workshop I learned about the other hat you wear, with [LifeTrek Coaching International](#), and I learned about your weekly email newsletter, LifeTrek Provisions. So while I was still at the conference I went to your LifeTrek Coaching website – www.LifeTrekCoaching.com – and I signed up to receive the newsletter. They started coming, every Sunday, and I really enjoyed reading them. Then, a while later, I read the

announcement in Provisions about the pilot round for the [Evocative Coaching Training Program](#). Since I'm the kind of person who jumps on bandwagons and since this was not only intriguing to me but also so obviously important in the context of schools, I said to myself, "Why not? Let's see what this is all about. Let's give it a try. And it has proved to be quite transformational."

Bob: Of yourself personally or of the schools you have worked in and with?

Kathleen: It has been certainly transformational of me personally. It has been harder to get this framework into the schools so as to work the transformation there. Some of that had to do with my position – I wasn't exactly at the top of the org chart – but more of that had to do with the orientation in schools of trying to fill gaps and fix what's wrong. We do that with students as well as with colleagues and subordinates. To some of my supervisors, building on and learning from strengths just seemed like a waste of time. Others just could not understand how to make that work.

Bob: I'm guessing that none of your supervisors took the training program themselves?

Kathleen: No. As much as I encouraged and prodded them to do so, they were always too busy or just did not have any interest. They saw that as my job, not theirs. I just could not sell them on taking the program themselves or on paying to have others in the school system to take the program as well. I really did this on my own, for my own benefit.

Bob: That's sad, because our training program not only equips people to do one-on-one coaching; it also equips them with a skillset that can be used much more broadly, as a tool for Organizational Development or OD.

Kathleen: Absolutely. It's very sad. I really wish I could have sold more of the right people on AI as a tool for OD so as to make this approach more of a system-wide orientation and approach.

Bob: So let's get back to coaching. What have you liked best about the [Evocative Coaching Training Program](#) or about the model itself?

Kathleen: Well, it depends upon the day. I've already talked about my attraction to its strengths-based approach using AI. But the notion of coaching presence as well as the other parts of the model – Story Listening, Expressing Empathy, and Design Thinking – are equally attractive and powerful. I like how the Training Program puts this all together, helps people to see the big picture, and empowers people to use the model as often as possible in their work.

Bob: Can you give our readers an example, growing out of your personal experience?

Kathleen: That's easy. It was one of the first times I had to do a coaching demo in class, as a faculty member. I was quite nervous because I knew it was going to be recorded and this was going to be the example that people were going to follow. I didn't want to leave them with a bad example and I knew I was going to have one chance with someone I did not know in a context with which I was not familiar. If that's not a formula for anxiety, then I don't know what is!

And the person volunteered to do the demo and we did it and I thought it went very well. The person that I was using as the coachee was quite candid. And I remember quite a bit of energy and we were laughing and the demo seemed to be going very well. And I felt good about that.

But the next day I got an email from her and she said that after the demo, she just kept thinking about the questions that I had asked her. And she'd had a breakthrough that night and had to let me know that something that she had been grappling with for months was finally clear. She saw the light at the end of the tunnel and was so excited about moving forward.

Bob: That is powerful.

Kathleen: It was, yes, it brought home to me how well this all works.

Bob: Well, you did not just learn how well it all works; you also learned that you can facilitate the process yourself. And that's even more important. That's self-efficacy, which, as you know, is a part of what we try and achieve through our training program. We want people to feel empowered to do more coaching, as well as better coaching, in their work. We want them to achieve both increased confidence and better results.

Kathleen: Learning that I could use this model did not make it any easier, of course. But it did make me more willing to try creative, experimental approaches with the people I was coaching. I was no longer just following a script; I was processing in the present as an Evocative Coach, and that was quite encouraging as well as exciting. I am so pleased to have learned how to make this come alive with the people I have the opportunity to coach.

Bob: So where has this taken you?

Kathleen: On place this has taken me is to the ASCD Conference. As a part of that Conference, I had the opportunity to coach some people in public, to demonstrate the model. At first I was terrorized by the thought of other people watching or of doing it wrong. But after I got over my stage fright, I ended up doing three coaching sessions with three different people and all three walked away with huge smiles on their faces. It was very gratifying, especially since we were able to demonstrate all four elements of the model – Story, Empathy, Inquiry, Design – in just 20 minutes. I think the people who watched, even for brief periods of time, got much more interested in the learning and using the Evocative Coaching model.

Bob: Is there anything else you would like to say about the model itself?

Kathleen: Just that it takes a very human perspective. I don't quite know how to say it, but when I compare Evocative Coaching to some of the other coaching models that are used in schools, this one is so much more respectful, encouraging, and empowering. It is person-centered in the best of all senses. Instructional coaches so often focus on what someone is doing wrong, in order to "fix" the "problem". By focusing on what someone is doing right, in order to expand and develop that further, it really moves people forward. They become very excited about trying new approaches to see what works and to develop that further in their work.

Bob: Wonderful. That is our philosophy, approach, and perspective. Could you say just a bit more about Evocative Coaching being "person-centered"? What does that actually mean, as far as you see things?

Kathleen: It means that I set my own ego and agenda aside in order to listen and focus on them, what they think is best for them, and how they think they can grow into a better teacher or school administrator. Then we work with them to develop an action plan. We do that in our classes, classes in which people can participate by calling in on the phone or using Skype. But the Conference experience was much more powerful because it was face-to-face. People could see the expressions and reactions of the coachees as we went through the process, just how it would be done in schools, so they came away with a better understanding of what this is all about.

Bob: Now I understand why you kept coming back to Appreciative Inquiry at the beginning of our conversation. If coaching is not inquiry based and focused on strengths, if it is more didactic and instructional, then the people we are coaching are made to feel wrong, even if that is not our intention. That just doesn't happen in Evocative Coaching.

Bob: So is there anything else you'd like our readers to know?

Kathleen: Perhaps that Evocative Coaching has as much relevance to our personal lives as to our work in schools. This stuff is not just a "model". It is a way of looking at and going through life. It is a philosophy and an orientation. It is really big stuff that anyone and everyone would benefit from learning. But it is particularly relevant as we get into the testing season. Evocative Coaching helps people to relax and to have fun again. It leads to greater effectiveness without all the work and pain of "figuring out what's wrong" and "solving problems". As I have already said, I love the strength-based orientation. It is more effective and it works better than the problem-solving orientation. But people have to learn how to do that, and how to do that effectively; it doesn't come naturally. That's why the [Evocative Coaching Training Program](#) is so important. A person has to learn the concepts as well as the practices. The [Training Program](#) does that.

Bob: And how has that come into your personal life?

Kathleen: It's hard to find the right words. It has infiltrated my life in so many ways. I am more person-centered in every context. And when people criticize or correct me I am not as defensive. My ego is no longer the focus. The work and the person I am with are the focus. I am just a facilitator of the learning orientation. Through my coaching, I hope to inspire people to see things that way themselves, to share that orientation, and, as a result, to get their work done with more success and happiness.

Bob: And you don't "instruct" them in how to do that. You turn that into a collaborative learning project with the help of Evocative Coaching.

Kathleen: Exactly. And one more thing: I really hope the Evocative Coaching model becomes much more widely known and utilized in schools That would really make such positive difference. Every time I have used the model with teachers, and I am thinking of three in particular, they have all said, "Wow! I would have never thought I could get here from there. You have really helped me to see things and to get things done in new ways." And I knew that was true when the supervisor of one of the people I was coaching came to me and said, "What did you do here? It's like this person is an entirely different person! Thanks so much for making that happen."

Bob: What an amazing testimony to the power of this model. I hope more and more of our readers will want to go through the Training Program to have experiences just like yours. I, too, know what a positive difference it can make. Thanks so much for sharing.