

Sand Lake Ambulance

Appreciative Inquiry Case Study

Presenting Issues:

High turnover, low number of volunteers, disputes between staff and volunteers, difficulties with communication between Leadership and Members/Staff, unsustainable leadership structure, gossip and cliques.

Desired Outcome:

To create a thriving, magnetic environment where people want to contribute and be a part of a cohesive winning team.

Intervention Description:

An Appreciative Inquiry workshop was held in October 2010. Prior to the workshop attendees were asked to complete an Appreciative Interview¹ and then conduct Appreciative Interviews with a minimum of two other members of the organization. They were asked to come to the workshop prepared to share what they discovered.

At the workshop in October 2010, the “Positive Core²” of the organization was discovered:

Positive Core (Themes from “highpoint” stories)

- Camaraderie
- Respect
- Coming together/common cause
- Caring
- Acceptance/welcoming
- Pride
- Making a difference/know you matter

Next, the participants of the AI workshop began imagining a new future for the organization.

Dream/wishes

- Community awareness: community committed to organization and proud of it
- Enough volunteers: coverage filled, enabling shorter hours
- Modern facility, building to take pride in
 - Well-equipped kitchen
 - Room for classes, etc.
 - Hall for large groups
- Organization is “like a center” for members and their families
- Comfortable, relaxed environment

¹ *Appreciative Interviews are one-on-one conversations focusing on successes and “highpoint” experiences of the individual being interviewed. This process reveals the positive core of the community, illuminates best practices, enhances systems knowledge and ignites positive change.*

² *The Positive Core is a term of art in Appreciative Inquiry. The Positive Core refers to the elements that are present when the system is operating at its best.*

- Work with other agencies, cross training, synergistic relationship
- Organizational “spirit”
 - Camaraderie
 - Members want to come and look forward to it
- Office is working well, organized, new furniture and equipment
- Paid staff enthusiastic and all part of one team with volunteers
- Regular on-going training
- New equipment
- Abundance of funding
 - Innovative fund raising opportunities
- Regular rotation of leadership
- More community training/add value to community/ public health resource to community.

In February 2011 a subsequent AI workshop was held and the following future (dream statement) was created:

The Sand Lake Ambulance is an example throughout the northeast of a progressive community ambulance service, which provides state of the art, cutting edge, high quality Emergency Medical Services.

The Sand Lake Ambulance leadership team is committed to the mentoring and professional development of our community minded volunteers. We utilize each person’s talents and strengths to develop a sustainable progressive public health and public safety organization.

Once this future was created, the work of designing the organization to fulfill on the vision began.

The following Design Elements were chosen as areas to focus on to bring the dream into the reality:

- Communication
- Community Relations
- Resource Development (Fund Raising)
- Leadership Development
- Membership (Recruitment, Retention, Member Engagement)
- Administration



Several initiatives in each of these areas were begun to create new results consistent with the Dream Statement.

For example, a new structure for “on-boarding” new recruits was implemented which included a checklist and a structure for following the progress of each new recruit and supporting them through the probationary period.

Results:

- In 2010, went from 9,505 on call hours being volunteered to over 19,000 hours being volunteered in 2013
- Grew from 2 members volunteering over 500 hours in a year to 26 members volunteering over 500 hours per year
- Marked improvement in the relationships between paid staff and volunteers. For example the volunteers hosted a baby shower for one of the paid staff and paid staff now actively participate in crew training

*Written by Lisa Giruzzi, of Transformational Conversation and the EMS Leadership Academy
www.EMSLeadershipAcademy.com*

- Operating principles (see below) were adopted by the leadership and the members which lead to the elimination of gossip and complaining

Sand Lake Ambulance Our Vision...

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Developed February, 2011 by the Sand Lake Ambulance Leadership team with the assistance of communications expert Lisa Giruzzi.

Organizational Philosophy

We agree to:

- ❖ Be kind to each other for everyone is fighting a hard battle.
- ❖ Stop complaining unless it is to someone who has the authority to resolve the complaint.
- ❖ Respect differences as valid ways of seeing the world.
- ❖ Be mindful of my impact on others.
- ❖ Praise publicly and correct privately
- ❖ Apologize when I have made a mistake and accept the apologies of others when they have
- ❖ Not gossip under any circumstances (*gossiping is when you speak about another person when they are not present and it diminishes the person in some way*).
- ❖ Remember it is easy to be great when things are great; who am I going to be when things are not great?
- ❖ Be open to the support and feedback of others keeping in mind they have my best interests at heart.
- ❖ Remember: We are all committed Sand Lake Ambulance being the best it can be.
- ❖ Act in accordance with the Vision statement we created

Signed, 2011 Officers of the Sand Lake Ambulance