

# VCU's Commitment

To a Culture of Appreciation

Amy J. Armstrong  
Conflict Resolution Day

# Civility

- 74% of 1005 US Adults believe civility has declined in the past few years.
  - (Civility in America, 2016).
- 70% say incivility has risen to crisis levels.
- Workplace stress costs the US economy \$300 billion/year
  - (APA)

# Impact of Incivility

- Work Reduction 48%
- Quality Reduction 38%
- Lost Work Time 68%
- Managers & Execs spent 13% of time (=7 weeks a year) mending employee relationships/dealing with the aftermath of incivility. Connelly, 1994
- 80% of customers who **have not** seen employees treat one another poorly would use products/services in future.
- Only 20% **who had** witnessed incivility said they would use services.
- 2/3 stated they would feel anxious dealing with **any** employee of that company.
- 1 in 8 employees leave. VCU= 2,861 potential employees

# Culture

- Vision
- Values
- Practices
- People
- Place
- Narrative
- Implicit Assumptions
- Conscious contracts & norms-rules & procedures
- Artifacts: building, mission, goals, how we recognize people.
- Explicit behaviors



# VCU Mission Statement

As the premier urban, public research university in the state, Virginia Commonwealth University's mission is to advance knowledge and student success through its commitments to:

- An engaged, learner-centered environment that fosters inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global setting
- Research that expands the boundaries of new knowledge and creative expression and promotes translational applications to improve human health
- Interdisciplinary collaborations that bring new perspectives to complex problems and mobilize creative energies that advance innovation and solve global challenges
- Health care that strives to preserve and restore health for all people, to seek the cause and cure of diseases through groundbreaking research and to educate those who serve humanity
- Diversity that provides a climate of inclusion, a dedication to addressing disparities wherever they exist and an opportunity to explore and create in an environment of trust
- Sustainable university-community partnerships that enhance the educational, economic and cultural vitality of the communities VCU serves in Virginia and around the world

# VCU Code of Conduct Ethical Standards



- **Respect**
  - We will respect individuals, diversity and the rights of others.
- **Honesty**
  - We will act and communicate honestly and candidly.
  - We will not mislead others.
- **Excellence**
  - We will strive for excellence in all that we do.
- **Responsibility & Accountability**
  - We will be responsible and accountable for our decisions and actions.
- **Stewardship**
  - We will be good stewards of the resources entrusted to the university.
- **Compliance**
  - We understand and comply with the codes, laws, regulations, policies and procedures that govern our university activities.

# VCU Strategic Plan 2025: Excellence & Access

- Local Impact and Social Embeddedness
- National Prominence
- Student Success
- Leveraging Diversity
- Culture of Appreciation

# VCU Strategic Plan 2025

## Leveraging Diversity

**Our aim:** VCU is committed to, reflects and pursues inclusive excellence in all that it is, does and aspires to be. To leverage diversity is to take full advantage of the unique character and quality of VCU to make the whole greater than the individual parts



# Leveraging Diversity

## We will make VCU distinctive by:

- Embracing difference – *valuing and respecting members of our community*
- Engaging difference – *members of the community can hear their own voice in the larger narrative of the university*
- Empowering difference – *members of the community can thrive*
- Ownership – *91% of climate survey respondents feel a responsibility to work towards an inclusive and diverse VCU*
- Becoming a role model for other universities - *There is optimism about who we are and can be as a model and beacon for other institutions.*

# Culture of Appreciation

## Our aim:

1. VCU strives to develop a university-wide culture of appreciation that is reflected in day-to-day behaviors, activities and campus life, which will be enhanced by formal and informal recognition and awards

## Three goals:

- All VCU administrative and academic units have an active appreciation environment reflected by identifiable behavior and efforts that foster ongoing appreciation
- All VCU administrative and academic units will have a formal recognition and awards system for exemplary behaviors
- All VCU administrative and academic units will have a leadership competency of exhibiting and fostering a culture of appreciation within the unit

# Culture of Appreciation

## Our aim:

2. VCU develops and maintains a climate that fosters a sense of belonging, where all students and employees see themselves as an integral and important part of the VCU community

## Two goals:

- All VCU administrative and academic units will include developing a sense of belonging in their overall unit strategic planning
- Part of the evaluation for VCU administrative and academic unit leadership will include criteria on sense of belonging and leaders fostering a sense of belonging

# Culture of Appreciation

## Our aim:

3. VCU nurtures a university environment where all people feel pride in what they do, have mutual trust with colleagues and are treated fairly and with respect

## Four goals:

- Feel pride in what they do
- Mutual trust with colleagues
- Treated fairly
- Treated with respect

# Culture of Appreciation

- An organization that values and facilitates a Culture of Appreciation (CoA) is grounded in **sustainable appreciative practices** designed to **enhance employee engagement** and **organizational performance**.
- Framework: Evidence based practices associated with Positive Psychology, Appreciative Inquiry & Leadership, and Positive Organizational Development.
- Extends beyond a culture of recognition and seeks to establish a pervasive climate that is **relational, generative and aspirational**.
- A CoA will have a sustainable impact upon personnel recruitment, retention, performance, customer satisfaction and wellbeing.

Armstrong

# Engaged Employees

- Significantly higher performance outcomes compared to those that are disengaged.
    - 10% increase in customer satisfaction;
    - 21% increase in productivity;
    - 22% increase in profitability;
- And...*
- 37% lower absenteeism;
  - 25% to 45% lower turn-over;
  - 41% fewer quality defects.

Gallup



# All roads leading to Cultural Change at VCU

- Mission/Ethical Standards
- Strategic Plan
- HR Redesign
- Leadership Development...Faculty and Staff
- Director of Learning, Organizational Development & Culture
- Faculty and Staff Trainings
- Recognition Ceremonies & Routines



***Key to pervasive and lasting change... Us.***

# Appreciative Inquiry

- ***Study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best.***
    - Positive strengths-based approach to change.
    - Relational, Generative, Aspirational
- Cooperrider, Whitney, Trosten-Bloom

# Appreciative Intelligence

- ***Being able to see the generative potential in any given situation.***
    - Seeing the mighty oak in the acorn.
- Thatchenkery & Metzger

# Appreciative Living

- ***The simple act of applying Appreciative Inquiry to everyday life.***
    - Naturally seeing the positive aspects & potential in what is happening, & creating something even better.
    - Learning to find what is right.
    - Strengths, Gifts, Positive Possibilities
- Kelm

# Appreciative Leadership

- ***Relational capacity to mobilize creative potential to make a difference in the world.***
  - Positive Psychology
  - Strengths Movement
  - Appreciative Inquiry

Whitney, Trosten-Bloom & Rader



# Power of Appreciation

*Seeing the best in others without being blind to their weaknesses, and...perceiving the greatest possible good in all situations while being alert to what will and won't work for you.*

- (Nelson & Calaba)



# The Power of Appreciation

## 3 Facts About Human Beings

1. **Exceptionality**...we are all exceptional to the rule. Unique.
2. **Essentiality**...not seen as central but as essential. Not a resource, but a source. The Sun, Energy, Creativity.
3. **Equality of voice**...all have a full voice.

Cooperrider



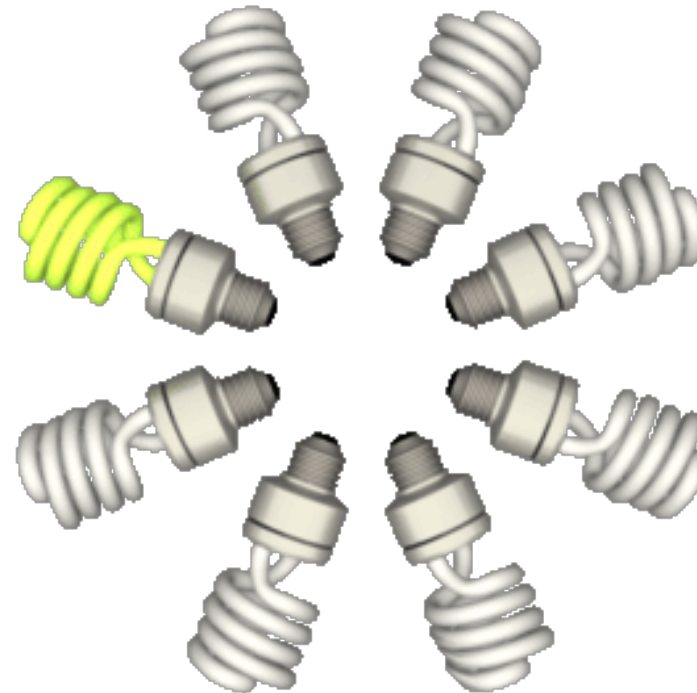
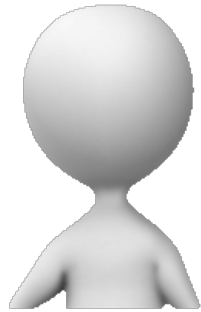
Change creates emotion... The hard stuff's the easy stuff. The soft stuff's the hard stuff. Organizational change is 90% a people deal.

Tom Malone

***What is your commitment to fostering a CoA?***

# A CoA is Relational

...we energize one another creating  
a ripple effect.



Describe a time in which you personally felt appreciated or a time you appreciated a friend, family member or colleague.

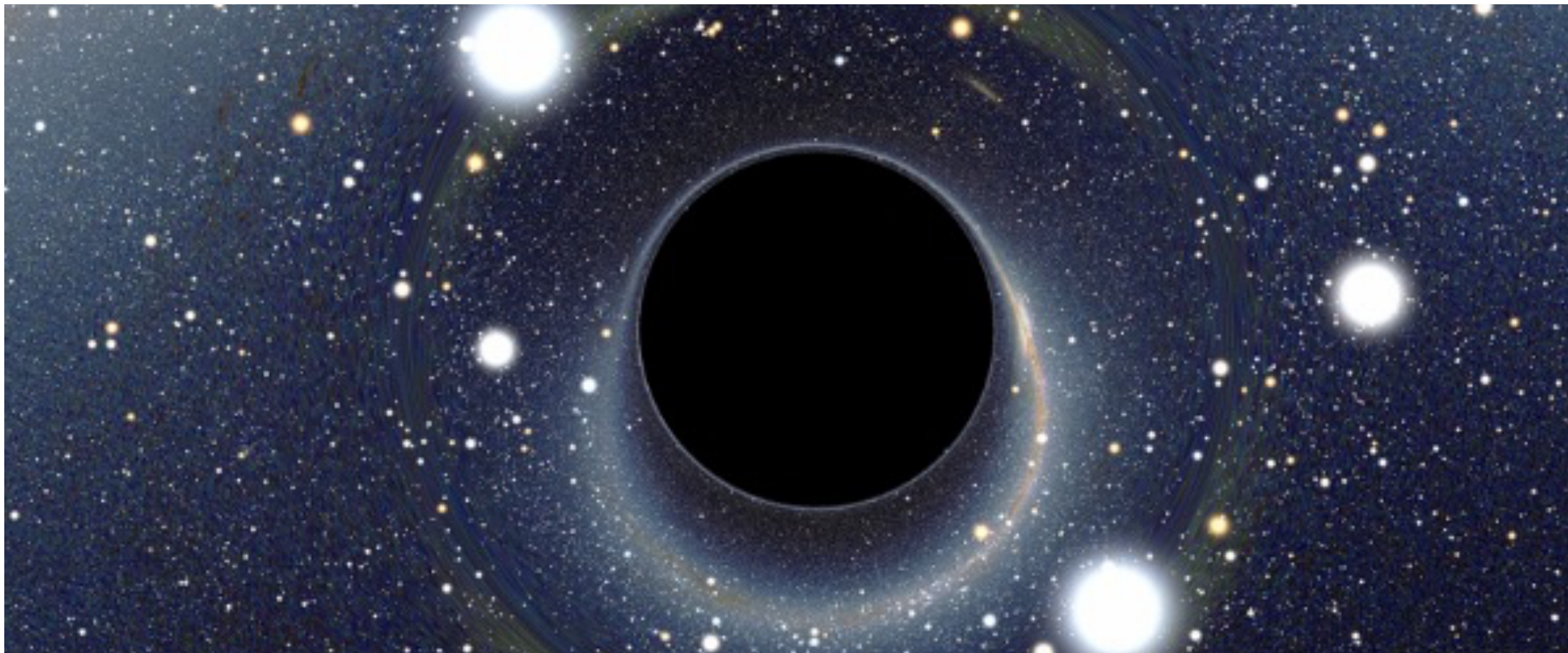
- What did it feel like?
- What did it look like?
- What happened so that you recognized this as an appreciative moment?
- How did it impact the interaction?
- What contribution did it make to your life and/or the workplace?

What are the features/elements/components of an ideal relationship (in work and in life)?

What is your ability to develop high quality connections? ...Mutuality, Respect, Trust.



# What is Your Relational Energy?



# A CoA is Generative...

...positivity broadens our  
thinking toward creativity.





# The causes of our conflict ...

...Often have nothing to do with the issues we are fighting over, and can be corrected through learning and dialogue...

Most arise from:

- simple miscommunications;
  - simple misunderstandings;
  - seemingly irrelevant differences,
  - poor choices of language,
  - ineffective management styles,
  - unclear roles and responsibilities;
  - and false expectations.
- [AI Commons Website](#)

# Reframe “conflict” as an opportunity for creating an ideal working/living relationship.

## **Examine the *Positive* Factors in the Relationship:**

- What is working in the relationship?
- What are the benefits of the relationship?
- Tell me about a time when you successfully worked together?
- What do we agree on?
- What are our individual/team strengths?

## **Give More:**

- Find the positive core,
- Share resources,
- Practice humility and share credit with those who contributed,
- Pay attention how you give feedback & understand others emotions,
- Provide people with a sense of meaningfulness...how is their work positively affecting others.
- Liberate other's creative potential.

# Positive Things that Come Out of Conflict?

- Increased motivation and energy available to apply to required tasks.
- Increased innovativeness of individuals and the system -because of greater diversity of viewpoints and a heightened sense of necessity.
- Development of an increased understanding of individuals' own position - because the conflict forces them to articulate their views and to bring forth supporting agreements.
- Each party may achieve greater awareness of their own identity.
- Participants learn methods to manage their own internal conflicts.

# Reflect on What you Are Already Doing to Uplift the Resilience of Others?

1. How are you currently uplifting what others are best at? What more might you do?
2. How are you building generative relationships in your life and work? What more might you do?
  - Using appreciative questions (Ask to Tell ratio); Curiosity?
  - Building others up? Focusing on Strengths?
  - Assuming Positive Intent?
    - McArthur-Blair & Cockell

# A CoA is Aspirational

...a bias toward intentional action.

What we do now will build it.



***Grant me the serenity to accept  
the people I cannot change, the  
courage to change the one I can,  
and the wisdom to know it is me.***



- The resolution of conflict and the discovery of a better way of being, working and living in the world occur simultaneously.
- Face the dark side of our own participation in conflict...to recognize:
  - Its extraordinary capacity to transform our lives by shifting the way we act and understand ourselves, how we experience others and conduct our relationships, and how we learn and grow.

# Being AI

- The daily practice of an Appreciative Inquiry mindset—ways of seeing the world, being and doing. This practice includes:
    - Reframing problems into possibilities & threats into opportunities.
    - Seeing the strengths and successes of individuals, groups, and organizations.
    - Being AI is key to Appreciative Resilience...daily practice.
1. Appreciating What Is.
  2. Imagining the Ideal.
  3. Acting in Alignment.

- McArthur-Blair & Cockell; Kelm



# Appreciative Intelligence

Qualities:

1. **Persistence**: of thought until a goal is achieved.
2. Conviction that **one's actions matter**... can achieve a goal or perform a task.
3. **Tolerance for uncertainty**: use the chaos of ambiguous ideas to spark innovation & creativity.
4. **Irrepressible resilience**: channel energy with focus and determination to accomplish goals in the face of challenges.

Thatchenkery & Metzger

# Reframing Conflict

- Empathy: identify and understand the emotions of the person.
- Let go of your ego.
- Appreciation: Recognize and appreciate that the other person is coming from a perspective of good intentions.
- Search for solutions: Think of alternative positions that may represent a compromise.
- Explore: ways to have productive discussion.
- See the opportunities for growth.

# What does a CoA look like?

- A focus on **STRENGTHS**.
  - A focus on **ABUNDANCE** (what works well when we are at our best).
  - Opportunities/support for **GROWTH** and **LEARNING** (personal & professional).
  - Opportunities/support to be **CREATIVE** and **INNOVATIVE**.
  - **LEADERSHIP** Development & Training.
  - Fostering **WELLBEING** of employees.
  - **INTERDISCIPLINARY** collaborations.
  - Connecting **WORK TO MEANING/PURPOSE**...a shared vision/mission.
    - Community Engagement
    - Connecting work to customers.
    - Shared planning and implementation of actionable goals.
  - Developing **HIGH QUALITY CONNECTIONS** (positive energy & communication; empathy, compassion).
  - **CIVILITY & RESPECT**
  - **RECOGNIZING, CELEBRATING, SHARING** successes.
    - Fostering positive identities & relationships.
- Armstrong, based on AI, PP, & POD

*How do you foster a climate/culture of inclusion, positivity & appreciation?*

What **3** things can you do when you leave this meeting to foster a Culture of Appreciation?



***My mission in life is not to merely survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style.***

Maya Angelou

