



Value Added People: The Power of the Story

By Dee Dee Raap

Value added means something added to products and service to enhance their worth. Something extra, like free shipping, exceptional service, or free support after purchase are designed to enhance value, creating greater merit to increase sales and reinforce relationships with customers.

We don't get very far in business without people selling the products and providing the service. Even in cyber sales, people—not robots—inform, offer, persuade, and assist customers. Getting greater value from people isn't a mechanical feat, but an endeavor of the heart, enhanced significantly when we add value to employees with new skills and new experiences that help them grow.

But there's another vital way of adding value to people, a simple, timeless process that honors, builds and reinforces: helping them understand the power of their story.

Each of us has a story, as did those who came before us, and those who will follow us. Stories are shared verbally, in books, on the internet, in the news, in meetings. Stories connect us to what matters because they identify and share our values. There are countless ways we share our stories.

Stories are how we identify and share values (what matters, and what matters is our values). Sometimes what's most important gets informally shared verbally with a cup of coffee sitting at a kitchen table. Sometimes the stories aren't shared—as many Baby Boomers whose parents fought in WWII know.

My Dad's WWII stories were known by one person in my family, and that was my mother. The night after we buried my mother, my dad sat in the kitchen with me and my mother's brother. He started to tell stories of WWII, when my uncle said, "Orville, I've known you all my life and I've never heard these stories," my dad said only Betty knew, then he looked at me, and said, now someone else needs to know.

What followed were stories of fighting, sharp shooting, survival of invasions, and how he got the purple heart and bronze stars.

The power of that story? Healing and understanding. I finally understood my dad.

One Thanksgiving Day I was at my husband's family dinner, looking at a plat map of Day County where I grew up. I discovered my great grandmother's name on the land I grew up on, which meant she was a homesteader, but I'd never heard that story. I only knew she was a widow from Wisconsin with two small children when she came to SD. When I asked my dad later that day if Great Grandma Aase was a homesteader, in his Norwegian voice, dad said, "Yah."

The power of that story? I knew that less than 17% of SD was homesteaded by women, and most of them were married. Aase was single, with two small children. I felt much stronger about myself when I realized I was related to such a tough woman.

The point is we each have a story. Stories add value to us. Stories aren't about bragging, boasting, which is why most people won't share. Stories allow us to share what really matters—the values that shape us, the characteristics that matter. Stories add value to us by sharing strength, courage, empathy, love, knowledge, wisdom, and as we hear, we grow, we evolve, we appreciate.

Appreciative inquiry is the technical name for this process. When applied to businesses and non-profit organizations to help develop leaders and staff. Appreciative inquiry looks back, finds the good, share its and the lessons received, and applies it to the future.

I have facilitated sessions where people using AI found new, incredible value in things they'd always taken for granted or though were not big deals.

Our stories are big deals, because they are OUR deals. Telling the positive focuses energy on the positive—and we get more of what we focus on. Organizations and people grow, develop teams, strategic plans and solve problems, all through appreciative inquiry.

And we do the same in our lives. Dear Mom was like one big personal appreciative inquiry for me. I didn't recognize it at the time, of course. I just wrote letters, cried, laughed, wrote some more. And every time I re-read them, I grew, healed some more, valued my mom and all moms more for their gifts and lessons, and as I mined my memories, I gained a clear appreciation for values I grew up and still have and hope to pass on to my grandchildren.

The power of the story. It's pretty amazing what a simple pen and piece of paper can give you, if you let it.

What's your story? What are your values? Our kids and grandkids need to hear from us—Baby Boomers—it's time for us to think about our legacy—what are you going to leave behind I think look for the good, the lessons, the values—is the perfect thing for the Baby Boom Generation to leave behind. After all, we always wanted to change the world, didn't we?

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About Dee Dee Raap:

Dee Dee Raap is a service expert, national speaker and consultant who loves to help people make their journey great. Dee Dee believes we all serve, and how we serve, lead and live is guided by the authentic, timeless values inspired by our moms and other key people. Putting those values to practice every day not only makes service great, but helps organizations grow and retain employees, a result Dee Dee's clients and audiences know well.

For information on authentic inspiration to make service, leadership and life great, go to www.DeDeeRaap.com.

Congratulations on making your journey great!

