

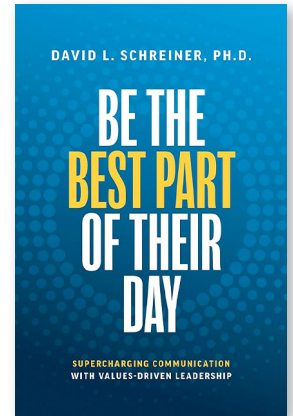


# Executive Book Summaries®

## Be the Best Part of Their Day

Supercharging Communication with Values-Driven Leadership

by **David L. Schreiner**



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### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Communication is the glue that holds an organization together. It builds a strong connection in the workplace that improves productivity and brings long-term success. But how exactly can you, as a leader, build Supercharged Communication systems? How can you build a genuine connection with your people?

The book *Be the Best Part of Their Day: Supercharging Communication with Values-Driven Leadership* reveals three vital elements of effective communication: engaging and connecting at a personal level, engaging with intent through various mediums, and being mission-focused through united leadership.

Author David L. Schreiner lays out research-based and actionable strategies to connect with others, embrace authentic leadership, build a culture of positivity, energize people, and drive long-term success that is deeply meaningful. By helping leaders cultivate a mindset of kindness, abundance, and appreciation, he helps them truly “become the best part of their day!”

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to build a solid framework for efficient communications.
- How to engage in the most impactful way possible.
- How to cultivate a mission-focused and values-based leadership.
- How to connect with people at personal and professional levels.

### Introduction

As the CEO of Katherine Shaw Bethea Hospital (KSB), a rural hospital in Dixon, Illinois, I run into the people our hospital serves in the course of my average day. Some of these encounters had been positive while some weren't. I began to wonder if there was some way to turn things around and be able to make every encounter a better experience. I wanted every employee or person in the hallways to feel that seeing me was the best part of their day. That's when I took up the leadership doctoral program at Benedictine University.

I ended up interviewing CEOs at five of the best-performing rural hospitals in America, and I spent many hours examining the data behind Supercharged Communications (through research I designed myself). I realized that the results of my research would change my life and those of the people working in and around the hospital. I also realized it had applications everywhere. We are all leaders. How can we move through the world making a difference? I think I've found the formula, and I am excited to share it with my readers.

This book is for you if you've wanted to discover the secret to making your communications transparent, honest, real, compassionate, inspiring-and Supercharged.

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### Chapter 1: The Best Part of Someone's Day

At its core, communication is really about how people feel when they spend time with you. I will give you an example. In the past, if someone came to me complaining that a bill was not itemized properly and that they were frustrated by red tape, I would have absorbed their criticism and called billing to try to sort it. I'd make some vague reassurances (which I meant).

But now it's different. As you'll learn in this book, I approach situations like this totally differently. I now use Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a proven, collaborative, strength-based approach to facilitating positive change and building capacity in organizations, groups, and communities.

So, using our example of the bill someone is unhappy about, I listen. I pause. And then I start asking questions like: If the bill looked EXACTLY as you want it to look, describe it to me in vivid detail. What would you like to see on it? This kind of communication style changes things in

an instant. First of all, rather than inviting a laundry list of what is wrong with the bill, it invites specificity of what is needed for it to be right. It switches our mindset from a deficit mentality to an abundance perspective. More importantly, it makes others feel "heard." You are listening – and for many people that is all they want.

Appreciative inquiry requires you to take your constituents into consideration. Your constituents are the people who matter most to you in your current position beyond just your stakeholders or department heads. The entire idea of Appreciative Inquiry is very much centered on that first word. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, when you appreciate someone, you "grasp their nature, worth, quality and significance." You "value or highly admire" them. You also "recognize them with gratitude."?

The "inquiry" part is based on asking questions with respect and listening, following through, and making sure that you truly understand the other person's concerns (not just "smile and nod"). Then, with that understanding, it's trying to see if there's a way that you can help them think through it or give them suggestions.

I would like to take us through, in order, each piece or step of this Supercharged Communications approach. You will see each part has a "D" word to represent it, as used by the Center for Appreciative Inquiry:

1. Definition. Before you approach a problem, you need to define it. Just because there is a problem does not mean it has to be viewed through a negative lens. The first step is to frame your question in a positive way. Instead of asking, "Why does our customer service department have longer call times than our competitors?" ask, "What are some of the positive aspects of our customer service department—when were we firing on all cylinders? What specifically makes our call center best in class?" This approach involves "flipping the script" to ask what your organization wants more of, as opposed to a focus on the problems you want to solve.

2. Discovery: Part 1. You have flipped the script. Your inquiry is down a positive rabbit hole — not a negative one. Now, you simply have to dig deeper into that positive. This involves interviews and collecting stories. Questions for this portion of Appreciative Inquiry might include: "When are we at our best as an organization?" "What are the stories that show that?" "What are the elements in place in those stories?" These stories can energize your constituents. By building on the positive, people can feel excitement or hopefulness – far more than stats, bar graphs, and a lot of internal "jargon-speak."

Frustration is often a sign of the need to dig deeper and do more exploration.

### 3. Life-Giving Forces: Discovery Part 2

Appreciative Inquiry uses a term called life-giving forces (LGFs). These are the “elements and experiences that represent the organization’s strengths when it is operating at its very best.”

As the name implies, LGFs are those elements that should be nurtured, developed, and grown.

### 4. Dream

The next part of Appreciative Inquiry is taking these positives and creating a dream or vision. In keeping with the earlier theme of connecting to stories, the dream should not be a list of KPI targets (not that those aren’t important). Instead, it should include visual images and word images

### 5. Design and Destiny

There are few things more frustrating than working feverishly on a problem or a vision, to channel real solutions, to come to a consensus with your peers and colleagues on the best course, and then to see those ideas aren’t acted upon. However, in Appreciative Inquiry, this is when the real work begins. Once everyone is on board, there should be energy within the organization for this new dream. How can innovation be inspired to make this a reality? What can be done to improvise and embrace the new future for your company, healthcare system, or nonprofit?

6. Identify your constituents. All of them. Remember that Appreciative Inquiry embraces true appreciation, compassion, and grace toward others. It also requires reframing your inquiries from negative to positive. Remember your D’s: Definition; Discovery; Dream; Design and Destiny. Words and visions, stories, will captivate and inspire more than a lot of data and graphs.

When instituting changes, culture can be stubborn to transform. Start with yourself and cascade it out from there.

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## Chapter 2: Values-Based Leadership

Appreciative Inquiry must be closely intertwined with

values-driven leadership. “Values-driven” leadership implies a conscious commitment by leaders at all levels to lead with their values and create a corporate culture that optimizes financial performance, ethical practice, social contribution, and environmental impact.

Some life-affirming values include honesty, integrity, excellence, courage, humility, trust, care for people, social responsibility, and environmental responsibility. Values must be lived and be a seamless part of how you operate as a leader. Bolster your values-driven leadership through the use of your Life Tree. Here are the elements that are important to define in this tree:

- Your definition of values-driven leadership. If you were picking the one thing that is most important to your leadership style when you were operating at the top of your game, what would it be?
- Leader as results driver. What results do you expect from your role as a leader?
- Leader as teacher and learner. If you were leading as a mentor, teacher, or colleague, what would that look like?
- Your leadership life perspective. How do you want to be as a person?
- Leader as a relationship builder. What do you want to bring to every encounter with you? The goal is to be the best part of someone’s day.
- Change leader. If you were looking at your organization’s key metrics and you were able to be in the outstanding category in every one of them, what would that look like? What would you have to do?
- Leader as an authentic self. This is where you describe your most authentic self.

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## Chapter 3: Arriving at Supercharged Principles of Communication

I wanted my readers to know that the Supercharged Communication Principles I distilled down from my research is, indeed, research-based. I set out to study CEOs

at top-performing rural hospitals to get at the secrets of engagement. What I discovered were principles and methods that could be utilized across all sectors of business. I shared the design and focus of the study, as well as who I interviewed, and my approach to those interviews. I focused on three types of leadership: Authentic, Servant, and Positively Energizing. Through this study, I discovered the Four P's of CEO engagement:

- Leadership “Presencing” (engaging in the moment). Leaders are “on stage” the moment they get out of their car at their workplace. The words they say are magnified and the actions they take are enriched and spread contagiously throughout the organization. The interactions experienced with team members greatly influence and shape organizational culture.
- Purposing (Communicating vision and values). In today’s uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times, many employees across all business sectors have an embedded level of anxiety about their organization’s sustainability. Communication of the system’s vision and values is imperative to build trust, which can help offset such anxiety.
- Patterning the Fabric (keeping the organization connected). Communication is enabled in a healthy, engaged way when leaders create trust and understanding. Team members need to see leaders in the hallways, cafeteria, and all departments and clinics. You can’t create a cohesive fabric as a leader if you are not one of the threads in that fabric.
- Promoting Positive Change. Observations of a hospital CEO include the fact that healthcare (or any other industry) is changing so quickly that if senior leaders are not out in front and doing the right things with their team and people, change efforts will fail.

In the end, I found three primary Supercharged Engagement Principles. Each then had five elements – practical, doable methods that actually work and that you and your team could start implementing right now:

- Engage and connect at a personal level
- Engage with intent through various mediums
- Be mission-focused through united leadership.

In each of the next chapters, we will focus on one of these areas, along with the five actionable engagement methods.

## Chapter 4: Supercharged Principle One – Engage and Connect at a Personal Level

The principle of Engage and Connect on a Personal Level includes five key parts:

### 1. Ask Great Questions and Generate Positivity.

Asking great questions of your team often includes having people think about when they were performing at their best. It’s about reminding people of their worth and reminding a team of the times when everything went right – and then chasing those results. Asking great questions involves one very important trait: cultivating your curiosity.

### 2. Develop Outstanding Listening Skills and Practice Them Regularly

More than anything, I think asking great questions has another piece: compassionate listening and active listening. You don’t jump in and try to “fix it” right away. Allow the other person to speak fully. Be patient. If you don’t have an answer, it is perfectly fine to say, “Let me get back to you on that after I look into it.” (But then make sure you, indeed, follow up. That is an essential key to developing trust.) Active listening involves paying attention. Your eye contact and body language should reflect that you are interested in what the other person is saying.

Be active in your unspoken cues. Nod your head. Occasionally add a filler like, “Go on,” or some short, encouraging phrase showing you would like the speaker to continue. Provide feedback. You can use the technique of mirroring in order to ensure you have “heard” the intended message. “What I am hearing you say is...” and repeating back, in your own words, what you thought the other person said. Ask open-ended follow-up questions if needed. Respond appropriately. Demonstrate empathy, understanding, and compassion, and withhold judgment.

### 3. Be Accessible and Show an Interest in Member Concerns.

This step involves thinking about your accessibility and being proactive to improve it. A few ways to become more accessible to your people include having an open-door policy, responding to emails instantly, giving people time when they need to have a word with you urgently, sharing your number so people can reach out to you after work hours, and more.

### 4. Find Ways to Express Gratitude

Emotional authority is very nuanced, and all types with this authority need to get to an emotional neutral before concluding.

Studies suggest that nine out of ten people would accept earning less money if their work was meaningful to them. However, regardless of the reasons someone works, we all like to be recognized for our efforts. But gratitude goes even beyond that. Gratitude is a mindset. Obviously, bonuses and raises demonstrate appreciation. However, here are some other ideas for employee appreciation that you might implement:

- When your people achieve a goal or demonstrate good conduct, you can show appreciation in the form of extra days off, modest gifts, or simply recognizing them gracefully.
- Take your people on lunches.
- Celebrate milestones using small gestures like a cake, a bouquet, or gift card.
- Offer wellness offerings such as a yoga class.

#### 5. Find Ways to Interact Through Rounding

Rounding is exactly what it sounds like – making rounds. You might walk the factory floor or through various departments. In a large company, you would obviously break it up, perhaps trying to get to each department once or twice a year, or once a quarter. But it's important to be seen – this is about connecting. No more hiding in the office.

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## Chapter 5: Supercharged Principle Two: Engage with Intent Through Various Mediums

In this chapter, we're going to talk about engaging with intent and doing so through various mediums. Our second Supercharged Communication Principle has five elements:

1. Find a rhythm of regular communication with key constituents. Look at all your communication and examine the effectiveness of each medium as well as its frequency. In my case, most of my videos and communications are now weekly. And some I play by ear.
2. Be transparent with high frequency. Only through trans-

parency can you impact people's lives positively, set clear expectations, shield your people against workplace anxieties, and keep unnecessary gossip at bay.

3. Use multiple channels to communicate your message. Meeting people where they are, including in their attitudes toward tech and communications means utilizing a mix of channels and messaging. The seven main channels of communication include:

- Face-to-face
- TV radio, broadcast communications
- Mobile communications, including texts
- Phone messages, voicemails
- Slack and other instant messaging channels
- Email
- Social media

4. Look for ways to overcome engagement challenges. Engaged employees demonstrate enthusiasm. There are more productive and willing to go that extra mile. But engagement is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Some barriers to successful engagement include the lack of a clear mission, information overload, and inconsistent communications. No two workplaces can whip up the same engagement magic but finding ways to overcome these barriers is a great first step to boosting your engagement.

5. In times of crisis be intentional about communicating differently. Every day, corporations face crisis events such as financial crises, organizational crises, personnel crises, natural disasters, and tech crises. In these situations, immediacy is essential. When your employees and stakeholders are not informed, it creates an information vacuum. When there is a vacuum, gossip, false information, rumors, and even outright hostility can take its place.

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## Chapter 6: Supercharged Principle Three: Be Mission-Focused and Present United Leadership

Your mission is your true north. When leadership has a clear-eyed focus on the bigger mission, the trust within the organization deepens. Let's discuss the five essential parts that makes a leadership mission-focused.

### 1. Keep the Focus On Your Mission and Know Your Audience – Be Prepared.

Every corporation or organization has its own unique mission. Companies need to sell products and services, they must answer to their shareholders, or their stakeholders, or the people whom they serve. But aside from that, most companies also have a bigger mission, one that often reflects a commitment to environmental, social, and governance, commonly referred to as ESG. Missions are usually also straightforward-the better to remember it. For example, TED's mission is "Spread ideas." LinkedIn's is "To connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful."

### 2. Vocally Support Team Members and Encourage Healthy Debate.

When you don't hesitate to vocally support team members and encourage healthy debate, you are also building a place of trust. When you have trust in your leadership and your teammates, disagreements come from a place of "How can we all do this better," not accusations or resentments.

### 3. Ensure Team Members Feel Informed and Included.

Earlier, leadership was usually autocratic. It was a hierarchy, fairly linear, and top down. Now, leadership is more people oriented and collaborative. I may be the CEO, but I am part of a leadership team. We now expect leaders to be inclusive. Instead of barking orders or commands, we inform and use our soft skills, like Supercharged Communication, to pull people together into a cohesive team.

### 4. Build a Structure to Support Key Leaders.

Provide your leaders with the structures and methodology needed to elevate communications and ensure they have your full support when it's time to implement something new. This not only helps avoid silos but also leads to a more collaborative space.

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## Chapter 7: AI and AI

Appreciative Inquiry and Artificial Intelligence both seem to take a prominent place on the horizon of communications. But are the two "AI's" compatible?

Some concerns surrounding artificial intelligence include lack of creativity, biased algorithms, data privacy concerns, lack of human touch, potential for communication misunderstanding, lack of personalization, and resistance when introducing new tools into the workplace. But this tool also comes with powerful advantages such as customized communications, potential for quick content creation, measurement and analysis capabilities, increased efficiencies, and elimination of human errors.

The conclusion? It's important to remember that ultimately artificial intelligence is an "and" tool, not an "or" one. With the right apps, tools, and approach, it can enhance your communications, streamline them, create efficiencies, and enable personalization with a few keystrokes. But you as human must still put the thought into your approach.

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## Chapter 8: Putting It All Together

So, how do you apply Supercharged Communications principles, as well as Appreciative Inquiry, in your organization and life?

Begin with the Life Tree and use it to crystalize what you want for your yourself – as well as your family, your organization, your bigger community, and even the world. Take the time to create the picture of your values and life and what is truly important to you. Remember though, trees are living and breathing organisms. Our trees will change as we evolve in our leadership.

Analyze where you are personally by revisiting your Supercharged Principles and the approaches beneath them that bring them to life. Use the same step to analyze where your organization is. Look at the scores and consider where there is misalignment and the potential reasons for that. Look at your strengths and think about how you can build on them. But if you have lost sight of your mission and purpose, you need to figure out how to bridge that.

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## Conclusion: How Can I Help?

Most of the people I know go into healthcare because they want to help people. I know I did. We may think of "helper" professions as those in, for example, healthcare, teaching, or social work. But regardless of your profession, there is the adage in business that you are not selling a product but a solution. You are helping people – whether you are providing a service, leading a rural hospital, or have a B2B product that helps your customers solve a business problem.

I invite you to spend the next month typing into your phone, or scribbling into a little journal, anything that touches your heart and soul over the next four weeks. Write down your experiences. See how those little moments relate to your Life Tree. At the end of these four weeks, update your tree. Continue working on these reflections as you evolve into someone who becomes “the best part of their day!”



**David L. Schreiner, Ph.D.**, is a values-driven leader who lives in the moment, has an unquenchable thirst for continual learning, challenges existing practices, produces positive results, innovates to improve the lives of others, and loves unconditionally. He aims to be a missionary for excellent health and vibrant communities. His research has focused on the area of excellence in communications and authentic leadership.

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