

Alan's Gift

BY DAVID NELSON

It was a gift I did not notice until years later. In fact, at the time I had very little appreciation for it. Alan was a classmate of mine in kindergarten and first grade. Whenever we had show-and-tell and it was Alan's turn, the class heard amazing stories of adventure. He told about his two-story tree house, his hideout by the local stream, his spying on strange people in a nearby neighborhood, and many other exciting tales of exotic happenings in the life of a five-year-old.

I became envious of the classmates who were invited over to Alan's home to partake in his childhood adventures. After hearing the stories for months, my time finally came. I was so excited. That afternoon we went to Alan's home and did what most kids do. His mother provided us with a light treat. We played outside with his toys. We climbed onto a small platform a few feet above the ground in a small tree. When my Dad picked me up, I thanked Alan and his Mom for a wonderful day and went home very disappointed because I had hoped for something more.

My real surprise came the next week when Alan got up for show-and-tell. I had low expectations and was prepared to be embarrassed because our adventure was meager compared to the great ones he'd had with the others. My little jaw dropped as he told of walking along the stream and catching fish. Alan told how I had spotted some animals from the second story of his tree house. At the time I thought he was a big liar. Alan had no hesitation telling about things that never happened and spinning a yarn to make the future look exciting. His imagination was amazing.

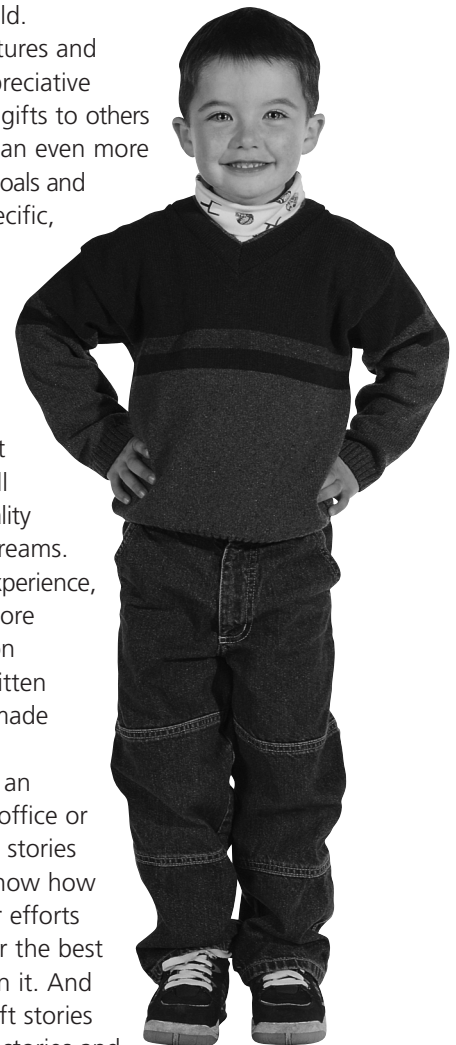
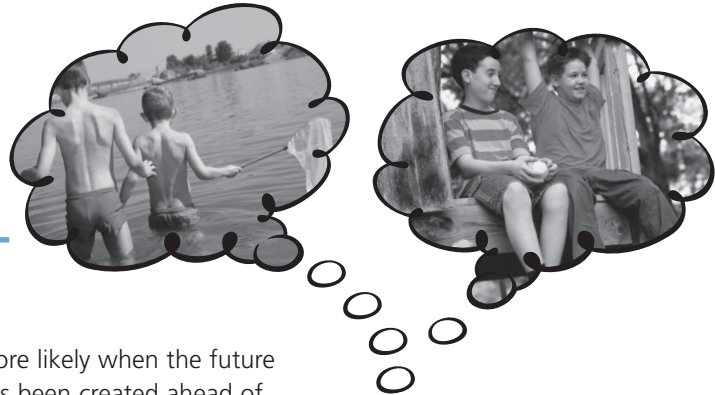
I am no longer that six-year-old, but I remember that story as a gift. Alan taught me about the power of imagination and how a story can create expectations. I hope he has learned to be a bit more honest with himself and others; after all he too must be about sixty-five now. But I also hope he can still spin a story and create positive expectations. The power of a story to describe and create the future is amazing.

I am told great athletes and rock stars live their games or concerts in their heads before they step into the arena. They create in their minds every play, every song, and every note... and place themselves in a state of expectation that prepares them for the event about to happen. The entire event unfolds in their mind before the opening of the event. Success, they tell me, is

more likely when the future has been created ahead of time in the story that is told.

We can create our futures and live our stories. As an Appreciative Inquiry Coach, one of my gifts to others is to assist them in creating an even more positive future by setting goals and making SMART plans. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timed) The desired future will be far more likely when a vision has been identified and planning has taken place. There is no guarantee that everything we imagine will occur; in fact rarely will reality be a carbon copy of our dreams. However, in my own life experience, I have discovered much more satisfaction when my vision is strong, my goals are written down, and my plans are made and shared.

Show-and-tell can be an important activity in your office or your organization. Tell the stories of success. Let the staff know how much you appreciate their efforts and excellence. Remember the best from the past and build on it. And look to the future and craft stories of success. We create our stories and our stories create us. We can live into the future of positive patient relationships, happy employees, and a positive personal life.



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“Language creates reality” is the eighth assumption of Appreciative Inquiry. I know in my own experience I often get what I expect. When I expect a struggle and uncomfortable communications, more often that is what I get. When I dread the next step in my journey, often the next step is difficult. But when I create a story about courage, joy, and satisfaction, those are created more often than not.

Years ago a friend told me he always prepares for every meeting. He brings his own agenda whether or not the leader has one. I have adopted that intention. If a meeting is important enough to attend, it is important enough to prepare for. A personal adventure or a family vacation is more likely to be a success when planning and dreaming have taken place beforehand. We can live into our stories.

As I mentioned, I have lost touch with Alan. I hope he is happy and living a good life. I do appreciate his gift to me and to others. He taught me that dreaming of a better office, organization, or world is not a big lie, but a big possibility.

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