

# Collaboration in Action: A Solution Focused Leadership Approach

Brenda Zalter-Minden & Sarah McVanel ~ HRMA Conference 2015

## Solution-Focused Leadership Framework

*The SF approach is based on the work of Insoo Kim Berg and Steve De Shazer*

Tenet #1	Tenet #2	Tenet #3
If it isn't broken, Don't fix it	If it's working,  Keep doing it	If it's not working,  Do something else

### Establishing Rapport

- Listen
- Acknowledge
- Validate
- Compliment

### Determine Goals

- Desired change
- Clear Vision
- Small steps

### Building Solutions

- Miracles (Envision a Future that is ideal. Spend time imagining and creating it)
- Use Relationship questions to solidify the goals and desired changes
- Look for Opportunities for greatness and exceptions (When is the problem not happening?)
- Identify Goals and look for coping strategies (How are they managing?)
- Use Scaling questions to help determine the first small steps

### Summarize Strengths

- Provide affirming feedback
- Reiterate their strengths and greatness
- Review their self identified next steps

<b>Future Oriented Questions</b> help to select and process the important information relevant to what can be achieved and what needs to happen
<b>Relationship Focused Questions</b> help create solutions from an outsider's perspective
<b>Opportunity Seeking Questions</b> help to elicit what is already working and sparks creativity to inform the most resourceful outcome for the individual and situation.
<b>Greatness Goal Questions</b> help to make transparent the existing talents, passions, and virtues in order to leverage these experiences to encourage growth and first steps.
<b>Scaling Solutions Questions</b> help to gauge progress and determine next steps while emphasizing resiliency and coping strategies.

<b>E.A.R.S.</b>	<b>W.O.W.W.</b>	<b>F.R.O.G.™</b>	<b>Q-T.I.P.</b>
Elicit positive change Amplify through W5H Reinforce positive change Start over	<b>W</b> orking <b>O</b> n <b>W</b> hat <b>W</b> orks	<b>F</b> orever <b>R</b> ecognize <b>O</b> ther's <b>G</b> reatness	<b>Q</b> uit <b>T</b> aking <b>I</b> t <b>P</b> ersonally

**Solution Focused Leadership Principles:**

- Change is happening all the time. Our job is to identify and amplify useful change.
- There is no one “right” way of looking at things; different views may fit the facts equally well.
- Detailed understanding of the “problem” is usually of little help in arriving at the solution. The direct route to problem solving and solution building lies in identifying what is going on when the problem does not happen.
- The system creates its own benchmarks and monitors progress.
- Employees are engaged and involved in all steps along the way.

**The Essence of Solution Focused Leadership:**

- To work with the person rather than the problem
- To look for resources rather than deficits
- To explore possible and preferred futures
- To explore what is already contributing to those possible futures
- To treat staff as the experts in all parts of their lives

**Solution Focused Leadership Strategies:**

**1. Resource Gossiping**

One of the most toxic things in an organization that ruins morale is GOSSIP. Gossip is really just stories we tell ourselves and repeat to others adding our own spin. It becomes part of the culture because it forms an important “social glue” between people. When that glue is toxic, it toxifies the whole atmosphere. What would happen if that gossip could cleanse rather than infect the workplace?

Recognizing that gossiping is a part of all organizations imagine the power of taking this to a new and positive purpose. **Resource gossiping** is when we talk about other people only from the position of strengths and resources. Here’s how to practice it (and after that, it becomes as natural as negative gossip!)

**Step 1:** Form groups of 4 and decide who will be A. B. C. and D.

**Step 2:** A asks B the first question while B C and D listen to the answer

**Step 3:** B then asks C the same question (and so on) until everyone has had an opportunity to answer the first question.

**Step 4:** Repeat this process with the next 2 questions

**Step 5:** Once all questions have been answered in this way: A turns their back to the other 3 people while B C and D resource gossip (speak positively and with lots of compliments) about

A for 2 minutes

**Step 6:** Repeat this for the 3 other members of the group

**Step 7:** Debrief

**Step 8:** Brainstorm a number of strength –based questions similar to the ones that you have just answered that could be asked to your staff (see box next page of sample questions).

### Powerful Sample Questions other Groups Generated

- *What good news do you have to bring to this meeting from this week?*
- *What was the best compliment you received recently?*
- *What made it great?*
- *What made it believable?*
- *When would be a good time to remember this compliment again?*
  - *Describe an accomplishment that you have made in your professional life (over the past week) that you are proud of.*
- *How did you do it?*
- *Did this happen step by step or all at once?*
- *When did you know that this was something that you wanted?*
- *What does it tell you about yourself that you were able to do this?*
  - *Talk about a “SPARKLING MOMENT” with a staff from work....a moment that gave you hope that you can be the leader you wish to be.*
- *What was it that made it a memorable moment?*
- *How did you do it?*
- *Did this happen step by step or all at once?*
- *When did you know that this was something that you wanted?*
- *What does it tell you about yourself that you were able to do this?*
  - *Describe the best client outcome you had this week. What was your role in this? How did you know this was a good idea to do?*
  - *When you are feeling your best with your work/life balance, what are you doing to create this balance?*
  - *What is one trick you have learned so far, since you have returned from ...(mat leave, sick leave) that has helped you transition?*
  - *What is one thing that none of us here know about you?*
  - *What is one thing we don't know by just looking at you?*
  - *What else? What else? What else?*

### Tips for Sustainability of Resource Gossiping:

### A) Individual Application

**Step 1:** Prior to meeting with your staff identify a question or two that elicits strengths and resources (similar to the ones listed in the above boxes)

**Step 2:** Start each individual meeting with one of these questions, followed by genuine compliments.

**Step 3:** Encourage staff to write down key components of these compliments. They can put them in a special tin or jar for their review on a rainy day.

### B) Group Application

*Note: Prior to engaging in this application staff would brainstorm a number of questions that can be placed in a question jar that will be available at every meeting*

**Step 1:** At the beginning or ending of each staff meeting break into groups of 4: A asks B the first question while B C and D listen to the answer

**Step 3:** B then asks C the same question (and so on) until everyone has had an opportunity to answer the first question.

**Step 4:** Repeat this process with the next 2 questions

**Step 5:** Once all questions have been answered in this way: A turns their back to the other 3 people while B C and D resource gossip (speak positively and with lots of compliments) about A for 2 minutes

**Step 6:** Repeat this for the 3 other members of the group

**Step 7:** Staff write down key components of these compliments. They can put them in a special tin or jar for their review on a rainy day.

## 2. Getting to “Yes” and Staying There

Consider yourself in the employee’s situation. This will help you to listen differently. Incorporate the following suggestions into a solution-building interviewing strategy.

**Step 1:** Start by noticing something positive about the employee and genuinely compliment them.

**Step 2:** Use the employee’s language, pick up his/her words and weave them into your next questions.

**Step 3:** Assume the employee is cooperative until proven otherwise.

**Step 4:** Affirm what the employee wants as valid and reasonable.

**Step 5:** If conflicting stories confuse you, ask the employee to help you understand.

**Step 6:** If there are unrealistic expectations ask:

- *“How do you know/he/you can do this?”*
- *“How would that be helpful to you?”*
- *“What difference would that make for...?”*
- *Have the humility to say, “Gee, I don’t know. What do you think?”*
- *“What tells you that...?”*
- *“What have you thought about doing?”*

### **3. The Ten- Minute Solution Focused Conversation**

1. *What are your best hopes for this conversation?*
2. *Suppose that you... (achieve those best hopes). What will be different?*
  - *What else?*
3. *Who will be first to notice? Who else?*
4. *On a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 standing for ... (finish scaling question about person’s goals)*
  - *Where are you now on the scale?*
  - *Where do you want to be?*
  - *What will be different when you are one step higher on the scale?*
5. *What are you already doing that is on track?*
  - *What else are you doing that is on track?*
6. *What is the next small step?*
  - *Anything else?*
7. *[End with a....] Compliment*

## **References**

Burns, K. (2008). Ten minute talk: Using a Solution-focused approach in Supervision. *Solution News*, 3(3), 8-10.

De Jong, P. & Kim Berg, I. (2012). *Interviewing for Solutions* (4th Edn.). New York, NY: Senge Learning. Cengage Learning.

Fisher, R. & Ury, W. (1987). *Getting to Yes: How To Negotiate Agreement Without Giving In*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Fiske, H. (2010). A 10-Minute Solution-Focused Interview Training Exercise” in *Doing Something Different: Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Practices*. Edited by: Thorana S. Nelson. New York, NY: Routledge.

Jackson, P. & McKergow, M. (2006). *The Solutions Focus: Making Coaching and Change SIMPLE* (2nd Edn.) New York, NY: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.