Solution Focus in Organizations

Accelerate Change

Solution Focus (SF) is a smart, agile model for change, unique only in its simplicity. It has been around in various ways for some time. What makes it different and more effective is the framework in which it is practiced, namely:

- What already works?
- What we want once the problem goes away?
- What small steps might get us moving in that direction?

There are many change practices that are helpful to organizations and individuals. Positive Psychology, Appreciative Inquiry, etc., have built a base of powerful research to supporting the idea that, more often than not, we already have the resources to make change work for us.

While the origins of Solution Focus lie in therapeutic practices, it does not require lots of time exploring the problem/cause hoping that things will get better.

Instead, SF looks at what we want to be different from the problem. We create change through reframing issues and looking for purposeful elements and the solutions within. We willfully ignore the *cause* of what troubles us so that we can go forward.

> *"Instead of problem solving, we focus on solution-building. Which sounds like a play on words, but it's a profoundly different paradigm"*
>
> Insoo Kim Berg, Founder, Solution-Focused Therapy

Steve De Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg's partner, subsequently came up with the notion that SF was like a set of skeleton keys that opened the door to solutions. Based on what had worked in the past, participants were encouraged to do something differently to the problem and pay attention to the effect it had on them and others.

FRY THE MONKEYS CREATE A SOLUTION
ALAN KAY
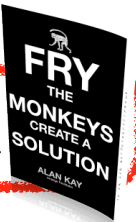
Today, SF is helping transform organizations. Few change models can be so easily adopted to fit the special needs of each situation.

By nature all organizations are problem-focused. Witness the SWOT analysis which laboriously weighs on the weaknesses and threats with scant attention to strengths and opportunities. That said, problem-focus is appropriate among scientists and engineers. If they didn't root around problems and have systems to fix them, many medical discoveries wouldn't happen and bridges would collapse.

So, if a problem-focus works for engineers, why is it less helpful among other people inside organizations? People problems can't be as easily fixed. We don't have systems for human problem-solving.

Discussing human problems and their causes greatly slow things down, obstruct productivity and under-utilize people resources. In Solution Focus we don't obsess about the problem, and certainly not its cause, so we can move more effectively and faster to solutions that work.

"Ah yes," you say, "but what if the solution is the wrong one?"

The answers to this frequently raised challenge are as follows…

a) In Solution Focus we find out what people want. Rather than being 'right', it's about making progress right away and learning something;

b) If, via the slower problem/cause mode, we do manage to get a solution it's almost always highly constrained;

c) Change happens all the time and the situation can resolve itself by osmosis, slowly and not the way we want.

So, why not try speeding up change with Solution Focus? Here's how.

Be counterintuitive. Stop problem obsessing for a fix. Instead…

The solution focus steps	Why?	So that we…
Talk *briefly* about the problem, the 'issue' – not the cause	To quickly define a) where to focus and b) what we want to be different	Begin somewhere
What worked in the past? What's working now?	Despite the problem, we've made it to today, so how did we do it? Something's working!	Affirm that we have strengths / resources that will allow us to see forward more purposefully
What we want to happen ideally in the future	If the problem were to disappear, what would we do instead?	Build on our resources to paint a detailed picture of progress and things done well with the problem gone
Small steps	With the resources and the better future in mind, what micro steps do we need to get going?	See ourselves making progress in order to take on more later

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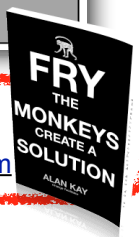
If at first Solution Focus does not resonate for you and it sounds a little like buttercups and butterflies, be careful not to dismiss it because it doesn't fit your known framework for change. Change happens all the time, with or without our influence. Solution Focus is simply a method to speed up change that works.

It can't be that simple, can it? Yes, if we learn to ask the right questions.

What really matters is how we practice Solution Focus. Us it as a 'toolbox' rather than a 'system.' The following tenets help make Solution Focus differences come to life.

- Ask, not tell
- Every case is different, unique
- The customer is the expert in the change they want, not you
- Customers do not need to have all the answers in order to make progress – work with what they have
- Find the resources and the small steps will appear
- Support your client by letting them own the ideas and support that notion
- Change as little as possible

Are you looking to become even better at facilitating change solutions?
This book shows you how to build a powerful tool for your work and make it the most useful approach in your facilitator's toolbox.
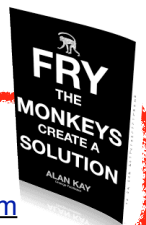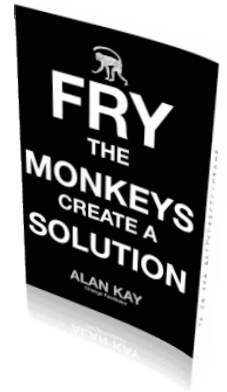
Understand how organizations benefit by moving from an ineffective problem-focus approach to creating highly efficient solutions that are visible, agile, tangible and sustainable

Learn the ingredients required to make Solution Focus work for you and the organization

Practice sensible Solution Focus recipes and see change happen right away

Download the first chapter