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FOREWORD

By Luis Cauffman

Perhaps I shouldn't reveal it

You are reading the second edition of *Solution Talk* by Ben Furman and Tapani Ahola. This re-edition is good news on several levels: one, the book got published (which is not always the fate of manuscripts); two, the first edition was sold out (which indicates its success); three, the publisher assumes he will make money with a new edition (rightly so, since it's a wonderful read); four, you no longer have to borrow a copy of this extraordinary book from a friend or colleague (but buy your own and write whatever you like in it); five, at last I can once more lend my copy Ben's and Tapani's inspiring tales to my students (over the years, several copies of the book got lost that way because lending a book often means losing a book).

Frankly, this book needed to be republished. Why? Because it is interesting, funny, evocative of the creative power of our clients, friendly and respectful, offering wonderful case stories and, not least, because since the first edition much has happened in the world of solution-focused therapy that was "pre-flected" in the original.

In the late 'nineties, "solution talk" became an art with many many followers. This happened because Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, parents of the solution-focused model, tirelessly kept (and still keep) studying, teaching and refining

their insights. Their work inspires many fellow therapists who in turn inspire many trainees. And our solution-interested clients inspire us all.

The solution-focused model spreads like a benign virus all over the world. And the reason for this is simple: it works.

Solution talk is the practical translation of Steve and Insoo's "non-theory" that makes life as a psychotherapist a lot simpler. Solution talk is a perfect antidote to burnout.

Its Zen-like simplicity is not easy to master, however: you need the courage to let go of most of the "problem-oriented" (and therefore hampering) "knowledge" that took us, as clinicians, so much time to learn in the first place.

Solution talk has some very distinct features that all go back to this one (Ericksonian) conviction: the client knows best, although he or she is not always aware of this.

If you read Ben and Tapani's wonderful stories, you will be surprised by an experience that all psychotherapists have: reality is much more interesting than what one can invent from behind a desk.

The following characteristics of solution talk are scattered throughout the book:

- The only goals worth working towards are the goals of the clients. Therapists can unlearn the importance of their own goals for the therapy when they realise that this is getting them and their clients nowhere. So only the client's goals count.
- Focusing on what – despite the problems that drive them into therapy – (still) work well for clients. Life is more than the problems that bring clients to therapy. There is always a broad base of things that go well in the life of the client. To tap into these resources creates rapid, lasting and satisfying results for the client.
- There is not a single imaginable problem that is always there to the same degree (except death – and that is not a problem but a limitation). One can always find exceptions to the problem. Starting out with these exceptions provides the client with a short cut to his or

her own solutions.

These characteristics of solution talk can be translated by using solution-focused questions:

- “What should we talk about today so that this meeting is useful to you?”
- “What is so valuable in your life that you certainly want to see it continued?”
- “At the times when your problem does not occur, what do you do differently?”

Spice your solution talk with industrial amounts of compliments, use scaling questions, pop in the “miracle question” and you are all set for solution-focused therapy.

But there is more. As you will read, Ben and Tapani accepted – no, invited – non-therapists such as clients and other “workers-with-humans” to their training sessions. They point out that this solution-focused model is suitable for non-therapist cases. As a matter of fact, their book helps us to look beyond the clinical world. In it is hidden the concept of Ben’s wonderful “re-teaming” concept: how to use solution-focused principles when working with teams.

Working as a management consultant myself, I have used the solution-focused model for many years now. I am always amazed at how fast and eagerly profit-workers pick up these concepts and at how well solution talk fits the corporate world. I predict that this model will be a big hit there.

As you read the cases, you will learn that Ben and Tapani often offer different choices to their clients, who can decide what particular problem they want to work on, what explanation of their problems they prefer and what solution strategy they wish to follow. This multiple-choice strategy comes so naturally to them that one can hardly call it a strategy at all. It is more like a way of life for Ben and Tapani, and it certainly helps their clients to quickly enjoy looking at the brighter side of life again.

However, a warning is needed here: we suggest you do not

start reading this book in your office. It is such a page-turner that you will run the risk of forgetting to do your work. If you do choose to read this book in you office, offer your clients a copy and read it together!

OK, there's no time to lose. Let's go.

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FOREWORD

By Ben Furman and Tapani Ahola

Second Coming

In the early 'nineties we were so excited about the solution-focused way of working that we felt compelled to write this book. We wanted to tell the whole world what we thought to be the essential ingredients of solution-focused therapy as we had begun to practice it here in Finland.

We believed that what was essential in this way of working was not specific questions, nor particular strategies or flow-sheets, but rather certain conversational themes or topics that seemed to help create constructive discourses with people who had problems. We identified a number of such themes including “desirable future”, “progress already made”, “help and support received from other people”, “valuable things that clients themselves had already done”, “clients’ resources”, and so on. All of them were topics pertinent to what is known as solution-focused therapy.

Since writing this book we have had the privilege of expanding our work from the clinical to the preventative sphere. That means that these days we work more and more in the field of promoting psychological well-being in organisations – mainly workplaces and schools. We have found that the principles outlined in this book are almost directly applicable to preventative work in the wider community.

In the late 'nineties we developed a solution-oriented step-by-step model for organisational and personal development

that was based on the principles outlined in this book. We dubbed it “re-teaming” and began teaching it to others. Many of the people who participated in our re-teaming seminars have become fond of the model. At the time of writing there now number more than one hundred re-teaming coaches in 12 countries who are using this model, either in working with organisational development and team-building, or in personal development.

The work that we have done with organisations using the re-teaming concept has led to the development of a number of ideas about what it is that constitutes psychological well-being, not only in workplace environments but in any human system. We have organised our thinking into a model we call the “Twin Star”, and we have created a commercially available website for companies which outlines our thinking about psychological health in a highly practical manner.

In recent years we have extended the concept of re-teaming to the field of children’s problems. The principles remain the same, even if we have made quite a few modifications to fit their special needs. We have dubbed this approach “Kids’ Skills” as it is based on the solution-oriented notion that children have no problems but merely lack skills they have yet to learn.

And last but not least, we have also begun to do work in the field of preventing and stopping unacceptable, immoral and criminal behaviour in children and adolescents. For this purpose we have developed a concept we call “The Steps of Responsibility” which has been adopted by the Finnish Board of Education in our own country, and internationally the Connect Initiative of the European Union. We urge you to visit our website (www.reteaming.com) if you are interested in knowing more about these and other recent developments in our work.

All this is to say that the conceptualisation of solution-oriented psychology outlined in this book has been useful to us. It has been a platform, a stepping stone, that has helped us repackage solution-oriented psychology into a language that is accessible not only to professional helpers but to anyone

interested in finding constructive ways of solving problems and finding dignified approaches in managing human change.

Ben Furman and Tapani Ahola
Finland, June 2001