

ASKING THE PROPER QUESTION! Part 3

This blog is the third in a series of five that explores the art of asking the proper question. In the last blog I looked at closed and open questions. In this blog, I will focus more specifically on asking solution-focused questions.

Solution-focused questions

Open questions that help us keep up moving forward in the direction of our goals are sometimes referred to as solution-focused questions. A study by Grant and O'Connor (2010) examined the effects of solution-focused and problem-focused coaching questions using an exploratory pilot study. The study found both problem-focused and solution-focused questions helped participants make progress towards a desired outcome. However, this was more so for participants who were asked solution-focused questions. In addition, solution-focused questions were found to have a greater impact on increasing positive emotions and self-efficacy, and helped participants to have a better understanding of the nature of the problem.

Solution-focused questions can be used in a number of ways. They can help us to:

- Explore our uncertainty or ambivalence about making a change
- Articulate our thoughts and feelings about a given situation
- Raise awareness about our strengths, successes and achievements
- Rethink our current way of thinking from another perspective
- Imagine (or reimagine) a desired or best possible future
- Gain clarity about a goal or goals
- Build confidence, generate hope, and create a more positive mindset
- Identify a range of options, strategies and action steps to achieve a goal
- Evaluate progress towards our goals.

So what are some examples of these better, powerful, 'magic', solution-focused questions? To begin with, there is no ultimate list, although Bannink (2006) did come up with 1,001 of them! The best solution-focused questions need to be considered in the context of the current situation, the people involved in the conversation, the issues at hand, and the desired outcome.

References

Bannink, F. (2006). *1001 Solution-focused Questions*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Grant, A. M. & O'Connor, S. A. (2010). The differential effects of solution-focused and problem-focused coaching questions: a pilot study with implications for practice. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 41(2), 102-111.