

Perhaps the highlight of the second day of the workshop was the Solution Focused Career Counseling presentation by Wendy Stubbs of the University of South Dakota, a counselor at the Career Development Center. The thrust of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) as applied to career and employment counseling, is to build solutions with the client, not resorting to a “whine and complain” mentality. SFBT beliefs include:

- 1) solution building as opposed to problem-solving approach
- 2) helps clients to discover their strengths and empowers them
- 3) allows the client to be the expert on his or her life
- 4) does not ask why
- 5) the empowering process allows the client to discover untapped resources
- 6) does not place blame
- 7) recognizes that the client has been a survivor, often under difficult circumstances.

The paradigm shift for counselors using the SFBT model is that they are not the “expert” solving clients’ problems. The counselor using the SFBT approach asks some key questions including scaling questions and the Miracle Question.

Useful questions include: How can I be useful? How can I help? What have you tried? What do you want to have different? What have you found helpful so far? (an indicator of coping)

The basic form of the scaling question is: On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means you are coping with your situation as well as you can imagine anyone could, and 0 means you are not coping well at all, how would you say you are coping right now? This scaling question can be used for a variety of situations such as: On a scale of 0 to 10, how prepared are you to conduct a job interview? Or, On a scale of 0 to 10, how important is it for you to have that GED?

The Miracle Question asks the client to focus on the future and how he or she can plan for it to happen. Develop as much detail as possible when they are responding to this question. Miracle Questions to ask might take this form: If you were to wake up tomorrow and all your problems would be solved, how would that make you feel? What would you be doing different in your life?

Related to the Miracle Question is the one about a class reunion. Here is the scenario:

Imagine it is 5-10 years down the road and you are meeting for a class reunion. You feel you are doing your life’s “calling.” Your career is well underway and you love your work. Your classmates notice how happy and content you are in your job.

- What is your “calling?” What kinds of tasks are you doing? Are you working with people, data, ideas, or things? What is a typical work day like for you?
- Give as much detail as possible explaining what your career involves. Imagine you are sharing this with one of your best school friends at the reunion.
- Following this exercise (which could be a homework assignment), the counselor and client focus on what the client needs to do, learn, research, etc., to get to that ‘reunion’ point. Help the client create a list of action steps and a timeline.

I suspect many career and employment counselors are already using some of these solution-focused brief techniques in various forms. Modified from [NECA Newsletter Summer 2002](#) on Workshops Presented in New Orleans