



Birgit Billen / Lilo Schmitz (DE)

Solution Focused Leadership Training

We will present concept and experiences of our open leadership training workshops. In our 2-3-days' workshops (basic level and advanced level) our participants are executives of different organizations and branches, who want to improve their management skills.. Subject of the workshops is, how philosophy and practise of the solution focused model can help in everyday leadership tasks.

According to the interests of the participants of the workshop we will

- give the opportunity to try out elements of the training or/and
- exchange and discuss other models of leadership trainings the participants have developed.

Birgit Billen is partner in a consultancy and training center in Bonn, Germany. Social scientist and Gestalt therapist, she combines elements of classical organization development and coaching with the philosophy and practise of the solution focused approach.

Lilo Schmitz, social anthropologist and social worker, is professor for methods of social work and consulting methods at the University of Applied Sciences, Düsseldorf, Germany. She is head of the research & development center for professional self-management and burnout prevention at this University. She is engaged in organizational development.

Both, **Birgit Billen and Lilo Schmitz** have developed a 18 months training in solution focused counseling and the solution focused leadership training. Their new books about 'Solution Focused Talk with Employees' and 'Motivation and Empowerment for Employees' are due in autumn.

Solution-focused leadership (our view)

Some of the characteristics of solutions-focused leaders:

1. They are relaxed. They regard world as complex, turbulent and unpredictable. They do what they can and leave the rest to good luck.
2. They trust in their employees.
3. They ensure good and fair working conditions.
4. They appreciate a variety of styles and opinions.
5. They devote their attention and time to success. They don't waste their time with mistakes. Mistakes are normal.
6. They identify and support first steps.
7. They see, enforce and amplify the talents and resources of their business.
8. They are no „super-experts“.
9. They don't work more than their employees and have enough free time.

Besides the philosophy and attitude solution-focused leadership can use some of the techniques and tools of the Solution-focused model in everyday management and executive tasks.

However, from an ethical point of view there have to be some limitations to use solution-focused **techniques and tools** in everyday communication with your employees.

There are important differences between counseling and communication at work:

Counseling, Coaching and Therapy	Communication with Employees
Counseling, coaching and therapy are mostly voluntary activities of the client.	The communication with his/her superior is part of the duties of an employee.
A client usually can choose his or her therapist, coach and consultant.	An employee usually can not choose his superior at work.
A therapist, coach and counselor works exclusively for the goals of his or her client.	An executive usually works for a lot of different goals: his own goals, goals of the customers, goals of the company.

In counseling and therapy the therapist has the permission to ask private and personal things.	In a working place the private life and sphere of an employee has to be respected. Communication is usually restricted to work topics.
A therapist and counselor is bound to observe confidentiality.	An executive should be confidential, but will have to pass certain informations to his own superiors and has decision-making powers.

**For our solution-focused leadership training this means:
The two big tools we regard as useful, ethical and fair in everyday communication at work are**

- **Sincere compliments and**
- **Solution-focused questions.**

A. Some characteristics of solution-focused „compliments“:

1. Positive feed back has always to be sincere. If you don't find anything to praise, don't give any „compliments“ at all.
2. Don't give compliments for tiny little things, that looks as if you do not wait for more from this employee („How wonderful that you wrote this letter for me“).
3. Be concise. In a short compliment every word has it's weight.
4. Don't give long explanations.
5. Leave out all negative wordings, they diminsh the compliment.

B. Some characteristics of solution-focused questions

1. Ask open questions.
2. Ask questions that assume competence, ideas, first steps and successes.
3. Ask questions that assume „good reasons“ and „good intentions“ of your employees.
4. Use the power of scale questions.
5. Use the creative potential of the miracle question.

Structure and participants of our solution-focused leadership workshops:

1. Our workshops are open to all executives and only to executives.
2. Our participants come from entirely different companies. Some are leaders for 5 people, some for 500.
3. We have a 3 days' basic training which every executive has to attend. In this training we introduce the theory and basic tools of the solution-focused model.
4. Subsequently we have different 3 days' advanced trainings with special topics, which are organized als moduls: The participants choose which of the trainings they attend when.
5. The principles of our trainings correspond with solution focused principles:

Learning by doing:

- (a) We make little theory input.
- (b) We spend much time in training solution focused tools in small groups.
- (c) We do not use artificial situations.
- (d) We work on real questions of the participants' real work situation.

Every participant is an expert for leadership:

- (a) We appreciate and utilize the knowledge and experience of all participants.
 - (b) So we find a variety of possible solutions without judging right or wrong.
 - (c) So the training broadens the range of possibilities for the participants.
6. What feedback do we get from our participants? Usually our participants are content and happy with the things they loose and with the things they gain in our trainings.

Some of the things they gain:

- practical tools for a communication that can motivate and empower their employees and can make them more and more successful
- new friends in other companies
- a lot of sincere compliments
- empowerment through a new knowledge about their own abilities and potentials
- a trust in their instinct for opportunities and a faith in their good luck
- a love for the variety of their working environment

Some of the things they loose:

- the interest in problems
- the idea that a good leader has to be a super-expert
- the idea that good leadership means extremely hard work, a lot of logical planning and controlling and...
- the idea that good leadership means coming home late at night.

The Miracle at Work

Work with a partner. Ask your partner the questions 1-7.

1. „Suppose when this conference is finished and Sunday evening you do your usual things, go to sleep and over night a miracle happens: At your working place everything has become wonderful, just the way you always wanted it.

What will be different on Monday (or the next working day) at work after the miracle has happened?“

2. „What else will be different?“

3. „How will you be different at this miracle day?“

4. „Now have a look at this scale. If 10 stands for the miracle at work and 0 (Zero) for the extreme opposite, the worst day you ever had at work. Where between 0 and 10 are you now?

0 _____ 10
worst day at work the miracle

5. „Now tell me a person (except yourself) that helped you to be now at (x of the scale) and not at 0=Zero.“

6. „Now tell me a favorable condition of your work that helped you to be now at (x of the scale) and not at 0=Zero.“

7. „Now tell me an activity of your own that helped you to be now at (x of the scale) and not at 0=Zero.“

Say thank you to your partner, think about what you have learned and then give 1 or 2 sincere „compliments“ to your partner about something you liked or admired in his/her way at work.

Change sides!