



SMALL STEPS TO
BIG
CHANGES

**CREATE THE CHANGE
YOU WANT NOW**

KENNETH KWAN

Here is a copy of your first chapter on
Small Steps To Big Changes.

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PRAISE FOR *SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES*

"*Small Steps To Big Changes* highlights what all organisations need—the ability to help their staff win small continually so that they can win big. It is honest, pragmatic and immediately applicable. "

Marshall Goldsmith

International best-selling author and editor
of 35 books including *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* and *Triggers*

"*Small Steps To Big Changes* cracks the code to overcoming complex problems with an easy-to-follow process everyone can apply. Now you can achieve higher levels of performance and delight in your organisation, and in your life. "

Ron Kaufman

Author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Uplifting Service*

"Leading people and change are challenging, but totally necessary. It matters in any organisation. We need leaders who can turn bold ideas into realities in order to take an organisation to greater heights. *Small Steps To Big Changes* will do that and shape your conversations to create useful outcomes for yourself, your team and your organisation. It is a sustainable process that will yield results. Try it—take the first small step. "

Benedict Tan

Group CIO, Singapore Health Services

"This book addresses a lot of important issues that people have—how to identify what they want out of situations and take active steps towards it. It outlines how you can move towards your goals and create quick wins. This reinforces the core concepts of *Small Steps To Big Changes* and has helped my team tremendously. "

Dr David Low

CEO of Advanced Remanufacturing and Technology Centre (ARTC),
Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR)

“Kenneth offers a practical and powerful solution which employs a goal-focused approach to help people do things differently and change organisation culture from the bottom up, rather than top-down. I like its approach and find it useful in raising employee engagement and productivity. ”

Sally Chew
Adviser, Temasek Polytechnic

“As a leader who believes wholeheartedly in people development, the principles shared in this book is what you need to create people engagement leading to organisational effectiveness. This book shares great insights for leaders who want to operate from a strengths-based culture to achieve an organisational breakthrough. *Small Steps To Big Changes* focuses on what really matters to achieve your key objectives. I would recommend you to read this book many times over if you believe that people are the core asset of your organisation. ”

Naresh Kapoor
Director of Training, India, Marriott International

“This programme teaches principles that I hold dear to in my professional and personal life. Even after seven years, I still remember and apply these principles that have shaped the way I lead and engage my team members. This programme has also created an impact on my team members. Our coaching conversations have become more optimistic and they are more open to feedback. One of my team members also reported overcoming a specific quality issue that he could not make progress in even after six months of working on it. Using the principles taught, he was able to overcome it quickly in a single discussion. Another Continuous Improvement Manager also saw a significant increase in contributions from his team members. Being in a manufacturing environment, I can see that *Small Steps To Big Changes* is extremely refreshing and results-oriented. It creates a sense of renewed excitement and a progressive mindset that things can be done. ”

Michael Mok
Senior Director, Greater Asia, Becton Dickinson

“Kenneth Kwan offers you a practical approach to overcoming all sorts of problems. By focusing on the desired outcome, it opens up a new perspective in finding solutions to problems. By changing our conversations, we change our outcomes. This book focuses on taking small consistent steps and changes will start to happen. This is a must-have book for every executive. ”

Isaac Chan
Vice President, Mediacorp

“Kenneth Kwan is an engaging and experienced speaker with years of consulting practice behind him. *Small Steps To Big Changes* provides a pragmatic, solutions-focused approach to solving issues encountered at the workplace or arriving at improvements to complex situations in the fastest way possible. This new book by Kenneth Kwan is a useful primer that motivates people to overcome their inertia or ineffectiveness and start focusing on small simple steps forward towards change. It draws on real-life work scenarios and dilemmas faced by many people and organisations, and uses the philosophy to tackle situations and create success. A riveting and essential read for any business person or individual. ”

Ang Kiam Meng
Chairman, Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCCI)

“I run the world’s largest conferences and find that Kenneth Kwan is exceptional in helping people move from problem thinking to solution thinking. A lot of people are stuck in what they don’t want in life; not many know what they want and move towards that direction. This book has valuable and workable ideas that focus on the steps that you need to take to start making changes in your life and work. If you want to get ahead in life, read this book now. ”

Richard Tan
CEO, Success Resources Global

"All have dreams but many don't do anything towards achieving them because they procrastinate or are overwhelmed by the things they need to do. *Small Steps To Big Changes* will show you how you can work towards your dreams and create specific steps forward. I like the concepts of consistently taking small steps so that you can win big over time. "

Gurmit Singh
International Celebrity

"*Small Steps To Big Changes* contains extremely helpful principles that I have personally embraced. I have seen my team increase their levels of trust and open communication by 7% and 17% respectively. It has helped us to be positive when solving problems and this has reduced the escalation of problems. Now my sales leaders can focus on more important things. In addition, we are able to hit our goals consistently over this period of time.

Kenneth has been personally involved in supporting me through this journey. I am extremely happy to share that my team today is one of the strongest I have seen over the last five years, with a high level of trust, openness and positivity. "

Julian Neo
Head of Commercial, DHL Express (Singapore)

"*Small Steps To Big Changes* contains simple, practical and down-to-earth solutions for handling issues, making conversations and helping teams work. It emphasises the use of a positive mind, coupled with active solution-focused listening to achieve purposeful outcomes. I thoroughly enjoyed the read. "

Yvonne Chan
Director and Chief Financial Officer, Maritime Port Authority of Singapore

"In my 18 years of working with sales professionals, I have noticed that the most successful ones are those who do not just talk about their dreams but also focus on the steps to make them happen. Life is filled with ups and downs but the one who gets ahead always focuses on what can be done and needs to happen in order to move forward. This is a must-read book for anyone who wants to get ahead in life and create his or her own success. "

Gene Teo
Senior Director of Agencies, AIA

"Small Steps To Big Changes goes beyond theories to provide a powerful blueprint for deep changes. It is a useful guide in transforming lives and empowering people to achieve success. It will help people to focus on what they want and create action steps to get there. This book is a great tool for leaders who want to avoid pitfalls and create successful teams that will deliver sustainable results. If you act on what is taught in this book, you will build unstoppable teams. "

Dr Patrick Liew
Entrepreneur of the Year for Social Contribution

"As a leader in the public healthcare sector, I find myself revisiting the principles mentioned in this book over and over again when we have to constantly innovate to meet the huge expectations of the public. It will help you overcome procrastination and create progressive steps forward. Not everyone can take big steps to improve things but everyone can take small steps forward. This creates ownership and improves morale when people are winning at work. "

Dexter Chia
Director, Singapore Health Services

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To Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, your philosophy and work have changed my perspective and the way I lived my life. To this, I am grateful and humbled.

And finally to you, the reader of this book, you made a choice to create sustainable change. The road ahead is not always smooth and I salute you for your desire to want to make things better in this world.



INTRODUCTION

Everyone has dreams of being better. We want to be slimmer, healthier and wealthier. We want to go through life with a purpose and conviction. We want to create changes to be more successful in life but there are three challenges that we face:

1. The illusion of big goals
2. An excessive preoccupation with weakness and failures
3. The inability of taking sustained action

1. The illusion of big goals

In order to achieve your dreams, you are told to set goals. Set big goals so that you can achieve big in life. In fact, we were told that if the goal is not big enough, it does not challenge you to be the best you can be.

SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES

Despite its best intentions, there is compelling evidence that people and organisations frequently fall short of achieving their goals.

How motivated will you be if the goals seem too big to achieve? How will it affect your self-belief, if you are not able to achieve your goals? Because of these issues, can you understand why so many people have given up setting goals for their own lives?

Setting big goals in our personal lives and at work is just not effective. In fact, it could be a complete waste of time.

Research has shown that when individuals repeatedly fail to achieve their goals, performance drops. In addition, setting goals that are too big to achieve can also lead to unethical behaviours, short-term thinking, reckless risk-taking, preference of competition over cooperation, a decrease in intrinsic motivation and erosion of organisation culture.

In *Small Steps To Big Changes*, I will share with you how to make small achievable goals so that you can create a series of small wins. It may sound counter-intuitive but breaking bigger goals into smaller ones that produce results, will lead you to win big over time. I have discovered that when people are winning, they are self-motivated because they see the results of their actions.

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2. An excessive preoccupation with weakness and failures

We seem to pay excessive attention to weakness and failure. At work, whenever something goes wrong, the impulse is to investigate it. We form committees to conduct an audit of what happened. We attempt to dig deeper into our problems, thinking that this would help us discover the root of it. We start asking diagnostic questions such as: "What happened? What went wrong? Who is at fault?"

We believe that by understanding the problem, we can solve it. However, knowing the cause of the problem does not always point you to the solution. It just tells you what NOT to do. In fact, asking too many diagnostic questions tends to lead people to be defensive, uptight and may make them less open to share more information with you.

In this book, I will share with you how to develop a solution-focused approach, instead of the problem-focused approach. It does not spend too much time in defining, building or expanding the problem. Instead, it spends more time in identifying what works and ways to solve problems. It is a direct path, producing optimistic conversations and better results at the same time. You will learn to ask progressive questions, nail the issues head-on and resolve the situation at hand.

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3. The inability of taking sustained action

Even if we have the right motivation to do something, it does not necessarily get done.

How many times have you heard of people with great intentions, such as wanting to lose weight, eat healthier, or exercise more, but end up procrastinating or giving up halfway?

How many times have you heard of colleagues or leaders talking about how things could be different for the organisation but no change is ever made?

Ideas and plans are great, but they are nothing without sustained execution. In this book, you will learn how to gain clarity and create small steps that you need to take. Why small steps? Because everyone can do them! When we succeed in each small step, we will want to take the next step (and the next, and so on). This develops self-belief and positive emotions.

What if you:

- ask yourself what you want in life, rather than focus on the things you do not want?
- focus on the small steps that lead you forward in a situation, rather than get overwhelmed by too many details?

INTRODUCTION

- ask your colleagues what they prefer for the future? Explore what they want to see in their team, company, or in their personal lives?
- ask family members what they have done well in and what they are proud of?

What do you think will happen?

These questions are solution-focused. They focus on a preferred future, goals and the necessary steps to move forward. *Small Steps To Big Changes* attempts to share with you the philosophy behind the solution-focused approach.

This approach has changed the way people and organisations conduct their businesses, plan for the future, overcome inertia, get unstuck from difficult situations, and adopt a progressive stance in matters of importance. It has also changed lives for the better. Some participants who adopted these principles have gone on to become better parents, lovers, leaders, and team members.

SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

Small Steps To Big Changes is for you if you are able to identify with the following situations:

1. You are in a complex situation and would like to get out of it quickly. This book will explore the practical steps you can take to make things better—quickly.
2. You are trying very hard to improve the results you want in your life. The principles outlined in this book will help you find ways to move forward with greater personal success.
3. You are trying to change mindsets or build up your team members with qualities such as resilience, self-belief and optimism. Those who have applied this approach have reportedly picked up what I call “possibility thinking” and other useful strategies that help them create options and alternatives, instead of saying, “It cannot be done.”
4. You want to build good habits and a winning culture. By focusing on taking small, easy and doable steps, you will find that over time, it will open up a path leading to big changes.

INTRODUCTION

5. You are looking for a powerful approach to lead and manage sustainable change in a fast-paced world. The approach outlined in this book will bring out the best in people, systems, processes and workplace culture. It does not require you to be in a management position to change things. In fact, you can even co-create changes from the bottom-up in an organisation.
6. You want ways to solve problems efficiently and effectively. *Small Steps To Big Changes* will help you do it fast. Say goodbye to the days of spending huge amounts of time and energy getting nowhere. You can now use your energy productively in creating forward momentum and overcoming massive obstacles.
7. You want to be more productive. You will start focusing on what needs to be done to make things better, overcoming inertia and indecision.

Sounds amazing? I invite you to read on.



Chapter 1

WHAT IS *SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES*?

In *Small Steps To Big Changes*, you use the solution-focused approach to start making changes.

It is a robust approach with over 30 years of research and application in therapy and business.

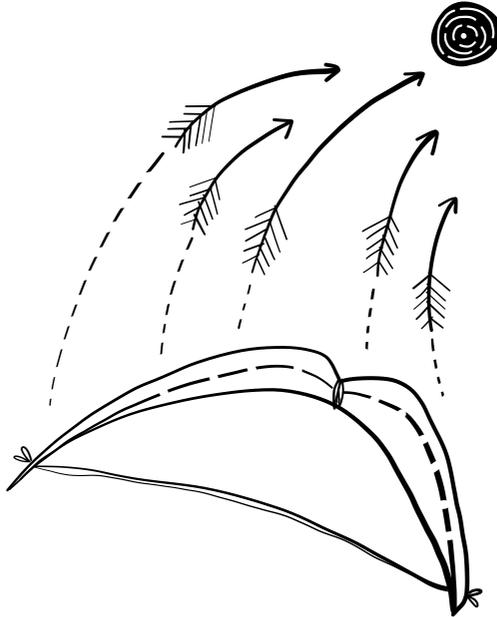
The solution-focused approach has been applied in workplaces that require quick adaptation of responses to solve issues in an ever-changing business environment.

As the name suggests, the spotlight is on solutions. Unlike conventional approaches to problem-solving, the focus is NOT on problems but on desired outcomes and creating the steps to reach them.

This approach is an extremely practical, proven and useful to create forward momentum in people and organisations. You will no longer get trapped in the “analysis paralysis” of what is not working.

SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES

It is future-focused, goal-directed, and solution-oriented. This means you will think about what is your desired future, things that should happen in it and what you need to do to move towards that.



AIM FOR WHAT MATTERS.

This book helps you to zoom in on what is important.

- 1. Focus on your strengths and what has worked well for you.**

Stop doing what does not work. Seek new and better ways to get to your desired destination.

WHAT IS *SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES?*

2. Focus on the desired future, not present problems.

Avoid getting distracted in the deep and complex analysis of a problem. Instead, redirect your mind to focus on the desired future. Ask yourself, "Suppose things were better and no problems existed, what would be different?" Channel your energy to work out plans and move towards them.

3. Focus on simplicity in processes and communication.

Look for simple and immediate actions that you can take to address issues. Avoid complicated processes, jargons or trying to effect too many big changes at a time. Simple actions and easily understood words are more likely to be acted upon.

4. Focus on identifying the causes to solutions, not problems.

Most people pay attention to what did not work but we look at what were the things that worked—that can bring you closer to a solution. Pay attention to habits, attitudes, resources and skills that can be useful. Orientate your thinking and actions towards them.

5. Focus on repeating past successes rather than revisiting past failures.

Thinking about your past achievements increases your confidence and awareness of what it takes to replicate or even surpass your success. You do not become more

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successful by examining where and why you have failed. You become more successful by focusing on what you have done well. Repeating what you have previously done to succeed is also easier to do since you have done it before.

By the end of *Small Steps To Big Changes*, you will be able to do all of the above.

This book is not conventionally classified as a motivational tool but from my personal experience, it has the ability to motivate people to make positive changes.

Your organisation, team members and yourself will feel empowered, unhindered and be able to tackle even the most difficult situations.

WORDS MATTER

What you say makes a huge difference to the people who listen to you. This applies to yourself as well.

In most societies, people are trained in asking diagnostic questions (Why, What, When, Where, Who and How).

However, if you were to keep asking diagnostic questions when things fail (e.g., "What happened?", "Why did you do it that way?", "Who else did it?") to get a deeper understanding of the problem, the person who answers these questions will

WHAT IS *SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES?*

start to show signs of discomfort. He might even become trapped in what he did. It might get worse and become a blame game or a hunt for who did wrong.

If you constantly ask yourself these questions, you may become unhappy or frustrated. If this line of questioning continues, it may even lower your self-esteem.

These questions do not offer any hope of making things better. They focus on what has already happened.

In fact, even if you were to find out all the reasons why things failed, it does not bring you closer to solving it. It just tells you what NOT to do. It does not tell you what to do.

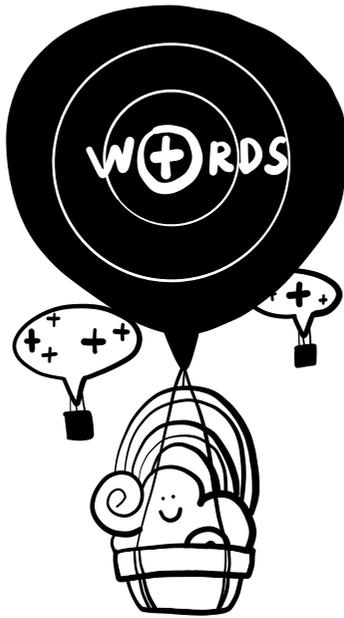
However, if you were to focus on what the person wanted, on how he could make a difference and what went well previously, you will start to see how things can be better.

You begin with the present and help a person focus on progressive actions that will help him move closer to what he wants. Not everyone knows what is best. However, everyone knows what can be better.

Words matter. They will determine whether a person gets stuck in his current situation or finds ways to be progressive. What you say to yourself and others is important.

Researchers Jeffrey Hausdorff and Becca Levy in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* noted that words affect the physical and mental condition of the elderly.¹

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POSITIVE INTERACTIONS LEAD TO POSITIVE FEELINGS AND USEFUL CONVERSATIONS.

Elderly folk in the experiment played a computer game which exposed them briefly to words like “wise”, “astute” and “accomplished”. The results increased their walking speed by nine per cent.

Those who received negative words on ageing like “senile”, “dependent”, and “diseased”, maintained the same walking speed.

**NOT EVERYONE
KNOWS WHAT IS BEST.
HOWEVER, EVERYONE
KNOWS WHAT CAN BE
BETTER.**

Words carry a lot of implications and affect us all. Better questions result in better answers and will lead you closer to solving problems or improving situations.

WHAT IS *SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES*?

Finding this hard to believe? Here's a simple question to prove my point.

Ask yourself: "What would happen if the problem didn't exist?" or "Suppose I could get what I wanted... what would be different?" I am sure you will be discussing something more positive and progressive. This is the power of asking solution-focused questions.

**BETTER QUESTIONS
RESULT IN BETTER
ANSWERS AND WILL
LEAD YOU CLOSER TO
SOLVING PROBLEMS OR
IMPROVING SITUATIONS**

QUESTIONS THAT MATTER: CREATING PROGRESSION USING PRESUPPOSITIONS

We use presuppositional words in our daily conversations and they produce a specific kind of outcome. The problem-focused questions could lead you to more problem talk, while the solution-focused questions could move you closer to solutions.

In *Small Steps To Big Changes*, we are very mindful of this. We use presuppositions in a manner that will help create progression on what can be better.

Consider the use of problem-focused questions:

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PROBLEM-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

"WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?"	Implies that there is a problem when there could be none.
"WHAT CAUSED THE PROBLEM?"	Implies there is something wrong with the way the person did things, which resulted in the problem. This brings about defensiveness.
"WHY DID YOU DO THAT?"	Implies that the person caused the failure.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

"WHAT'S BEEN BETTER?"	Presupposes that the person's current situation is better compared to the past.
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WHAT IS *SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES?*

"HOW DID YOU DO THAT?"	Suggests that the person had an influence on the positive outcome.
"WHAT MAKES YOU CONFIDENT THAT THIS CHANGE WOULD CONTINUE?"	Beckons possibility and hope.
"WHAT MIGHT YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?"	Hints at the availability of choices.
"WHAT ELSE?"	Invites the person to consider what has not been considered.

Using presuppositions that identify a person's strengths and successes help him to find new ways of dealing with situations.

It also conveys possibilities or expectations for a positive outcome. This applies to yourself and working with others, and from creating organisational change to making personal improvements in your life.

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USE SOLUTION-FOCUSED PRESUPPOSITIONS
TO HELP YOU MOVE FORWARD.

Most organisations recognise that change is important. However, in many instances, junior staff do not think that change is possible at their level since it is usually driven by their leaders. This creates a problem since leaders are often busy and may not have time to constantly drive change.

However, in *Small Steps To Big Changes*, presuppositions are used to help individuals know they can create a positive outcome even if they are not the leaders.

My team and I, work with our clients to identify all the small steps they can take to make a change.

WHAT IS *SMALL STEPS TO BIG CHANGES?*

Taking small steps is easy since it requires little energy and motivation. The most important part is that it can generate sustainable change.

This is a better strategy to improve situations and increase fulfilment, as others will be aware they have a part to play in their own success and not simply shift the responsibility to their leaders. This eventually leads to ownership of the issue and dispels the idea that they are not empowered to change anything.

When people start winning small, they want to win more. People who are constantly winning do not need to be motivated. Winning itself is motivational.

NEW MANAGERS PRACTISING PERFORMANCE-COACHING SESSIONS

A training programme for the managers of a life insurance company was conducted for newly-appointed managers to increase the sales performance levels of their team members. They previously had no practice in such conversations.

The participants of this training session had to practise their coaching skills in two scenarios. In the first scenario, a team member was unable to meet his target. He fell short of the agreed-upon weekly target. In the second scenario, a team member exceeded his weekly target by a healthy margin.

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Just minutes before the coaching conversations began, the trainer told the participants not to allow the conversation to be diagnostic in nature. The managers were told not to focus

WHEN PEOPLE START WINNING SMALL, THEY WANT TO WIN MORE. PEOPLE WHO ARE CONSTANTLY WINNING DO NOT NEED TO BE MOTIVATED. WINNING ITSELF IS MOTIVATIONAL.

on the past and why their team members failed. He explained that understanding more about the problem does not bring them closer to a solution. They had to focus on asking what their participants could do differently to hit their sales targets. In addition, the managers had to ask what they could do to support their team members' success.

At the end of the conversation, the participants reported that their managers did a great job in supporting and enabling them to move forward. The language that was used was so progressive that they all felt happy and encouraged.

In the second scenario, the managers had to celebrate their colleagues' success and to identify what they did that led to their success. They needed to look out for 'evidence' of what created this success.

Once the second conversation was over, all the participants shared that they were impressed by what their managers did. They reported that they felt good about sharing what went

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well for them and the strategies that worked to achieve the sales levels they wanted. This created an awareness of what created success and a mental picture of what was needed to replicate it.

When the training session was completed, the training director mentioned that he was really impressed that his newly-appointed managers had done so well in this coaching conversation with practically no prior experience.

EMPLOYING SOLUTION-FOCUSED LISTENING

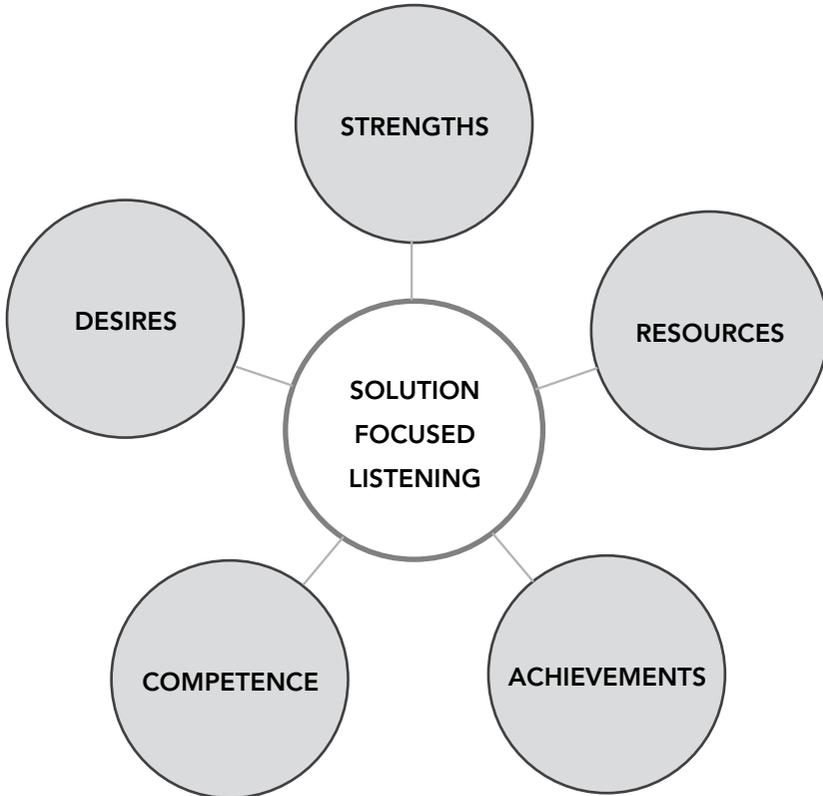
Active listening is a skill widely taught in most communication courses.

In active listening, a person makes a conscious effort to hear what is being said and tries to understand the complete message, spoken and unspoken. Active listening also involves listening attentively without getting distracted and paraphrasing the message to check for understanding.

In solution-focused listening, the goal is greater. The listener tunes in to the speaker's desires (even if they are complaining), identifies a goal and helps that person establish steps necessary to move forward. He, therefore, seeks to achieve more than gaining an understanding of the message or conversation.

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Solution-focused listening does not shut out problems or complaints. Not talking about the problem is denial. Not listening to complaints is apathy. When you practise solution-focused listening, you listen for five things:



1. Strengths

Everyone has talents, strengths and abilities. These can be leveraged on to get better results. It is much easier to do things within your strengths, than to constantly focus on your weaknesses.

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It also takes a lot less effort and you are more likely to succeed. Unfortunately, most people think that they must be very good at demonstrating it, for it to be useful.

2. Resources

Everyone has resources to make progressive steps. Recognise them and believe that they are useful. You need to listen for the resources in others and draw these to their attention.

3. Achievements

Everyone has achieved something in his or her personal life or at work. For example, you might have successfully run a kids' camp, planned lovely birthday parties or even completed a marathon. Achievements demonstrate that you possess good planning and execution abilities (or have a high threshold for pain). The leadership ability or the perseverance that you have demonstrated can also be transferred to other areas of your life.

4. Competence

Competence in certain areas is advantageous. Knowing something useful or demonstrating a certain level of competence can help you move closer to what you want.

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Just like achievements, what you are competent in could also be transferred to another area. For example, if you are competent in selling, you would have picked up people skills and persuasion tactics that you could use in doing other things.

5. Desires

Listen to the person's desires and surface these to his attention. A lot of people know what they do not want. Some just dwell on it and continue to be unhappy. When a person focuses on what he wants and starts identifying steps to make that happen, the complaint will disappear.

Steve de Shazer, the pioneer of the solution-focused approach, famously mentioned:

“Anything that prompts the client to say that ‘things are better’ needs to be identified as verification of change, and anything that is new or different or more effective that the client reports, needs to be encouraged or amplified.”²

According to him, when a person mentions that “things are better”, you should pay attention to what was done to create this positive change. You focus on *anything* that can and will bring about positive change. You might be surprised. It can sometimes come in ways or forms that you do not recognise.

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FOCUS ON WHAT YOU WANT, NOT ON WHAT YOU DO NOT WANT

In order to be future-focused, you must constantly focus on what you want. Too often, we focus on what we don't want.

Some people live in the past. They allow their past to affect their ability to live in the present. There are many things that they want in life. Their past experiences are holding them back because they tried something before and it did not work. Then there are others who are upset over the things that they do not want in life but do not focus on what they want instead.

People often tell me what they are unhappy about. Whenever I ask them: "What do you want in life?" Most of the time, I get an awkward silence. They know what they don't want. Few know what they want. I can't help you if you only know what you don't want. I can only help you if you tell me what you do want.

When someone is angry, rather than focusing on talking about why they are unhappy, try asking what they want instead. I recall a man who was angry with his colleagues. I told him: "I know you're not happy and are visibly upset. Tell me what you really want so that I can help you. If not, I don't know how to help you."

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Listen to what you say to yourself: Are you usually speaking about things that you don't want in life or about what you want?

So, what do you really want in your life?

What do you want to see happen in your relationships?

What do you want to see happen in your work?

People who are successful don't leave things to chance. They design their lives intentionally.

A PROJECT MANAGER'S DILEMMA

A client requested to meet with me. He was a project manager in charge of building a shipping vessel and sending it to Africa as part of a huge oil and gas project. This project had many phases. His progress (or lack of it) would affect the rest of the phases. He had a small team of 24 people working for him. Half of the team were offshore experts from all over the world; the other half consisted of locals.

When I met with the project manager, he was rather despondent. There were a lot of issues within the team. He was constantly frustrated with them. Many of these were cultural issues because his team was made up of people from different countries.

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He said, "They sit together but they don't talk to each other. Instead, they email each other. Why can't they just reach out to the person next to them and talk face to face?"

**IF SOMEONE
CONSTANTLY FOCUSES
ON WHAT IS NOT
WORKING, OR
HAS A HARD TIME
GETTING OUT OF HIS
COMPLAINING MODE,
ASK: "WHAT NEEDS TO
BE DIFFERENT?"**

Even during meetings, no one wants to talk. But, when the meeting has ended, everyone starts to murmur outside the meeting room. That's not all. Person A and B dislike each other and don't talk."

It was clear that he wanted something different.

That's when I interrupted him: "So, Project Manager (names are withheld to protect the identity of individuals), what you are trying to tell me is that at the end of the day, what you really want is to finish building the vessel on time and on target. You really need a high-performance team in order to do this."

He stopped complaining. All of a sudden, his entire demeanour changed. He became happier. It was as if he had been released from a huge weight. "Well, Kenneth, you seem to know what I want. Tell me what to do?"

I asked him: "What are your best hopes for your team? What do you prefer instead of what is currently happening?"

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He began talking about what his vision of an ideal team was. He started painting a clear picture of the behaviours he required to succeed at work while bearing in mind the project deadlines.

When he was sharing, I noticed that his demeanour had shifted from that of despair to hope and possibility. He started to smile and focused on the things he needed to do to move forward.

MOVING FROM FRUSTRATION TO PRODUCTIVE ACTIONS

A talent manager shares a conversation she had with a colleague:

"Small Steps To Big Changes has taught me not to focus on the problems but instead to search for the wish behind the complaint. A colleague had issues with her supervisor. She was unhappy about how decisions had already been made at the management level and the fact that she had not been consulted. Employees have to live with the decisions that are made and decide how to move from there."

"So, I focused on asking what she really wanted at the end of the day. She wanted a lot of things. As she talked, I noticed that there were a few key considerations—she wanted recognition for her work and more attention from her leaders apart from her supervisor."

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“I helped her focus on her wish by asking her what she would need to do right now to be able to strengthen her current relationship with her supervisor so that he could understand her work better and acknowledge her for it.”

“The rest of the conversation was productive. She found answers that she needed. I directed her to what she wanted and also reminded her that she had the power to do it. The good thing about using this approach is that she did not get fixated on the problem. Instead, she spent a lot more time into focusing on what could be done.”

A MOTHER IN DISTRESS

A stay-at-home mother decided to see a counsellor. Caring for her three young, pre-school daughters was draining her physically and emotionally.

The girls resisted her efforts to feed, dress and teach them to read. They would scream, refuse to eat or take their own time to do so, playing with their food and throwing it all over the floor. One day, the mother realised that she could not handle it anymore and needed to talk to someone who could help.

Instead of asking her to describe what went wrong in her house and getting diagnostic in the process, the counsellor, a solution-focused practitioner, simply said: “What you are trying to tell me is that at the end of the day, you really want to be a good mother!”

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After hearing these words, the mother cried. She felt that someone finally understood what she wanted. She was frustrated because she felt that she was not a good mother.

The counsellor continued: "Let's focus on what you want. Let's think of ways of how you can be a better mother to your children." After that, she started to focus on what she wanted and needed to do to be better. As you can see, this counsellor understood that, in order to move forward and not wallow in the current state of affairs, we have to listen to the wish behind the complaint.



ACTION STEPS YOU CAN TAKE:

1. Don't spend too much time on identifying a problem and what caused it. It is better to spend more time in identifying what you want and creating solutions.
2. In all situations, focus on a desired future, not present problems.
3. Avoid big words that complicate things. Seek for simplicity in processes and communication.
4. Use solution-focused presuppositions to help others get closer to what they want.
5. Pay close attention when someone says "things were better". Look out for what created that difference. It needs to be encouraged and amplified.
6. Listen to the wish behind a complaint.

To purchase this book, please go to:
www.smallstepstobigchanges.com/shopping-cart/

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3. Identifying useful ideas and forward-moving action steps.
4. Overcoming procrastination and resistance.
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