

# Working as a solution focused mentor

## - what we do and how we do

by Anne-Marie Wulf, Master in Educational Development

The Danish Solutionfocused Institute | 2018

### Introduction:

For years, I have been working as a social worker and family therapist with people suffering from mental problems. Taking a Solution Focused Approach, I have been hired by the local Jobcenter to mentor them and help them cope with challenges of being lonely and isolated, without education or work, and for some of them with no hope for the future.

The mentoring model as formulated by Solutionsbywulf, Denmark, have been developed and shaped during the last 4 years and it still growing and changing, being organic and dynamic. By 2016 the average mentee were between 20-29 years and diagnosed with either schizophrenic, depressive, anxiety, stress, isolation or a mix of all. Most of them lived in their own flat, although some were homeless. Half of them men and half of them women, and none of them were in employment, only few in education. The strength of our mentoring model is the flexibility in the activities and interventions, and a holistic perspective on the client, which brings back humanity in social work.

### A way of seeing mentoring

The concept of mentoring is originally from the Greeks, where Odysseus left his son back to mentor, while going to the Trojan War. In the meantime Mentor was suppose to "take the place of Odysseus" by guiding and supporting his son as a kind of a role model. The term *mentoring* can nevertheless nowadays be understood in many ways, depending of the context. This article is referring to a context regulated by the Danish laws of employment, which might provide a sense of clarification, and yet the concept contents a variation of different roles for the mentor with great

flexibility; for instant the mentor must act as a companion for meetings, as a coach in conversations, as an economic advisor or as a supporter for breaking social isolation, and this article claims that no matter the role, it's possible to work from a Solution Focused (SF) approach. To clarify the context further it might be helpful to know, that in order to receive welfare in Denmark the unemployed client is offering a mentor as a kind of activity among other activities, e.g. internship or courses about how to write a job application, but the minimum of activity would very often be mentoring. The social worker at the Jobcentre generally gives concession for mentorship for a period of three months, which can then be extended, and often are, thus I've had mentorships for more than three years, and the clients referred to us are normally suffering from mental problems like depression, anxiety, stress, PTSD, schizophrenia and social phobia. By using the Solution Focused mindset we've combined the concept of mentoring and it's origin ideas of *guiding and supporting* to the context of the Danish welfare system regulated by laws: thus I see mentoring as a (social) service on line with coaching, family therapy or other social services. The model Solutionsbywulf have developed, consists of four main elements: *Communication, Activities, Relationships* and *The Digital Diary*, which will be further explained and explored in this article, and it's all to be framed in our mantra: *we have many ways of doing, but only one way of thinking*.

## Communication

The way to communicate is based on the ideas, principles and assumptions of the SF approach and mindset. I assume these are well known by the reader, I therefore just want to make a short distinction between my lexical choices *approach* and *mindset*. The *mindset* I understand as a *philosophical stance* with ideas and thoughts from among others Wittgenstein, Milton Ericson and Gregory Bateson and Social Constructionism. The word *approach* is to be understood as a *method of practice* with guidelines on what to do, how to do, when to do e.g. in a therapy session, thus *the approach* contents "tools and technics" like the use of scales or the MQ. I use both

the terms of mindset and approach, and I consider Steve de Shazers contributions in both fields as huge and essential.

Mostly the mentorship starts with a three-part-meeting, - the client, the social worker and mentor, and together they co-construct the 'goals' of the mentoring. What do the social worker needs to see be different, what do the client wants to be different as a result of the mentoring and how do the mentor imagine she/he can be helpful in this process. In collaboration with the client we talk about the preferred future or his best hopes as a result of our work together, and explore small concrete specific detail to be small steps to take.

### Structured Conversations

Or what I would like to call "ordinary" SF conversations take place all the time and contains well known parts as establishing a platform or common ground for the miracle question/the tomorrow-question by talking about the mentees preferred future, using micro perspective to unfold resources and strengths and descriptions of every day life, the MQ-scale and confident-scales among other, searching for exceptions or glimpses of the preferred future and maybe give feedback and even still sometimes an experiment. Exactly how the conversation unfolds depends on the mentor, thus our conversation practices move between SBFT 1.0 and 2.0<sup>1</sup>

Solutionsbyvulf have location in a near-by area from the mentees we're servicing and the Jobcenter and most of the mentees are visiting us there. There we have whiteboards and flip charts, which are much used in the structured conversations. Writing and drawing on the whiteboard gives the mentor an overview of the small important actions we discover, of the next steps to be taken or a list of what's been better. For some mentees this is very useful and by adding different colours, figures e.g. we amplify the visual expressing. By taking a picture of the whiteboard with a cell mentee gets an opportunity to transfer our conversation into every day live, thus

---

<sup>1</sup> McKergow, Marks: SFBT 2.0: The next generation of Solution Focused Brief Therapy has already arrived *Published (2016.) Journal of Solution Focused Brief Therapy vol 2 no 2 pp 1-17*

they can look back and recall the list of “what’s’ been better” or when standing in the supermarket with anxiety looking at the picture and recall the list of “How do I manage times with anxiety – what do I do, that works well”.

The potentials are huge, and I’m convinced that when talking in a collaborative and co-constructive process, and thereby activating the hearing sense, you can activate other senses as well, e.g. the sight, and thus reinforce the conversation. In any case, research within didactic shows that activating more than one sense, for example two or three, is more likely to be learned, and since I have no idea about how others learn, remember or understand, why not activate more than one sense.

## Unstructured Conversations

Basic and very important: unstructured conversations are also SF conversations, but in another set-up or environment. I name them unstructured because the conversations mix different parts, and do not follow the 'rules' from Steve de Shazer's Central Map, nor contain all the elements as specified on SFBT 1.0 or 2.0. These types of conversations are often improvised and take place in connection with activities or where mentor and mentee are "out of the house".

Some years ago I found inspiration in a thread on the SFLT-List hosted by Harry Korman where practitioners talked about “how to do solution focus in 5 minutes”. This discussion supplemented with several supervision sessions, helped me look at solution focus in new ways. I once supervised a group of practitioners at a treatment for drug abuse trained in SF and with a management stated they were supposed to work from this approach. But they were frustrated due to the fact, that they never had 40-45 minutes for a ‘hole’ SF conversation, but only 10 or 15 minutes, so what to do? At that time I realized, it’s all about the mindset, instead of thinking of solution focus as a method to be used in a very structured way. It *can be* used in a structured way as when I’m doing therapy, but also in short time situations, as

when a student leaves class, or when walking in the forest with mentee, when eating an soft ice on the beach, training at the gym and other activities.

Doing different kinds of activities and having an unstructured conversation with mentee involves some creativity. For the less experienced practitioner an improvisational unstructured context can be a challenge, but there are a variety of solution-focused questions that can be used in such situations. Anyone can ask questions like "How did you do that?", "What difference would that make?" and "What's been better?". These questions can lead to small talks about small topics and tiny differences or about small next steps. As the solution-focused approach focuses on the language, the conversations are also centred on a linguistic attention, and 5 or 10 minutes are time enough to pay attention to mentors use of words. Thus we listen, select and build, - listen and if appropriate shifting "if to when" and "'but to and".

## Activities

The aims are anchoring and increasing skills, building network and clarifying employment or education opportunities. There is a diversity of activities, and without doubt many more than those we have found meaningful. At Solutionsbywulf we have chosen activities that fits with the groups of mentees and ourselves, thus we don't offer an activity as bicycling, because none of us are cycling to work. However there are single activities from time to time, because it makes sense to do so.

### *Walter and Simon*

*Mentoring Walther it made sense to talk about diet, grocery shopping and cooking together, as one of his goals was to lose weight and regulate his diabetes. Another example is Simon, who hadn't had a friend for 10 years, and in the same period hadn't been able to sit in the cinema and watch a movie to the end. Twice he had tried, but anxiety forced him to leave before time. Part of the mentoring task became going to the*

*cinema together, where Simon learned to master “seeing a movie to the end” and thus gained knowledge of himself that he, like other youngsters, were able to go to the cinema, He had the needed competences, but didn’t know, and during the process we off course focus on the times he had been able to sit in the cinema for just 10 minute or the time he managed to sit there 30 minute.*

## **Intern Ship**

The main purpose for the Jobcenter is getting clients to employment, or clarifying their abilities, competences and resources. This can be done in many ways, and one of them is by establishing internship for mentee. Internship are regulated by laws, and are typical for a period of 13 weeks, maximum 26 w., and are just as diverse as mentees, from working 3 hours a week up to 30 hours, and in all kind of branches.

Most times we cooperate with the workplace and participate in meetings focusing on what’s working or what needs to be different, and talk with the manager on how mentee master the work. The SF-questions are obvious to use at those meetings, and questions from third perspective are relevant and useful, e.g. to ask the manager: How do you notice, that mentee are being satisfied with his tasks? What did mentee do, that told you, that he enjoyed the contact with the customers? What did your manager do, that told you, and he was pleased with your work? What did you manager, see you do, that made him think, “I might hire that guy”? These types of questions create reflections and curiosity at both sides, and thus the mentor acts like facilitator in the relationship between mentee in internship and the workplace manager.

## **Attractions**

For people with social phobia or anxiety they sometimes prefer to stay in their flat, therefore lots of hours are spend by them selves alone. Being alone and loneliness are two very different things, sometimes it can be very nice and uplifting to spend time in your own company, but feeling lonely can be tuff. As a part of a mentees preferred future there can be “not feeling lonely”, and by exploring in terms of “What would like to feel instead?” “What would be a smallest signs that told you,

you were not lonely?” or “what would you be doing, when you’re not lonely?” we get descriptions of small actions for the mentee to take.

By attending a café together we support the desired action (as part of the preferred future) and can in the specific situation talk about, how it has become possible? What difference does it make to be sitting here? And sitting at the cafe tells about mentees resources and competencies and how those strengths can be used in other contexts or for a next café visit with another, and who, else would you like to go to a café with? And sitting here maybe in two weeks time with your friend Sandra, what would she be seeing you doing, that tells her, that you master or even enjoy being at the café with her? Socializing e.g. by going to a café, also means, that mentee have courage to facing her fears (strength to be high-lighted), how did she do that?

And as an equally important part, going to a cafe, drinking coffee makes you very ordinary too. When you are capable of doing things that ordinary people do, you become empowered, and not only working towards the preferred future, however actually living it in small actions, visualizing it, strengthens you to move on and support hope. Socializing together gives an opportunity to discover skills, competences and resources, but also inadequate skills, or challenges that need to be taken in consideration.

### *Camilla*

*Years ago I was visiting the museum of Karen Blixen, a well-known Danish poet together with Camilla. Walking around in the museum, looking at photos from Karen Blixen’s time in Africa and her early childhood, I was noticing Camilla was moving quickly from one photo to another. I realize it was difficult for Camilla to read the text beneath the pictures. I asked her, what she fancied the most from this museum, and she replied; all the photos, I’m not into all this words and texts, I’m not the academic type, but more into using my hands. This was important information for me, and guided me in the process of finding an internship for her, and later on an adequate education program.*

## Sports, Fitness and Walk n' talk

We all know the benefits of having an active lifestyle, daily walks with fresh air helps us to sleep better and a healthy and varied diet gives the body the necessary nutrition. We support mentees in being active and/or doing sports. The people we are mentoring usually have a low budget economy without money for holidays or excursions, and a trip to the beach gives new experiences. Lots of unstructured conversations take place walking around the local lake, in the forest or by the beach. We drive many places if it makes sense for mentee, assuming mentee has good reasons for wanting to go there. We drive, we talk - and we go to the fitness centre. Sometimes mentee needs support, a kind of helping hand for even going to the fitness centre, which is why we participate in a yoga class together. Mentee discovers, how she mastered the situation and we talk about managing others watching her, or scaling how confident she is in going to yoga again.

## Anders

*For years Anders was living in isolation alone with his cat. Once a day his stepfather would come and woke him up, brought him some food, a packet of cigarettes and Coca Cola. Then they would walk to some green area around the block to feed a group of homeless cats. Later the stepfather would pick him up, they would have dinner together at the stepfathers place, and he would drive Anders back home. This went on for years while Anders was trying to change his life, trying to reverse daily rhythm, trying to get the strength to see the doctor and so on. Once a week I picked him up, and we went for a walk in a forest nearby. We did that for more than three years, and Anders discovered, how seasons would change, how the leaves shifted colours, birds sang in trees and daylight changed. Anders was pleased with our walks, sometimes he had energy and we went a longer route, and he talked about hope, dating a girl on the Internet, his computer skills as a host on an Internet server, his fascination for old Nordic gods and good times in a Swedish cottage with family. At those moments I discovered skills and resources, and I saw a man longing for relationships. Our walks and talks helped him to maintain a daily life until last summer, when his stepfather passed away, died by cancer.*



*Anders had to do things himself, shopping, wash clothes, pay bills, cook and much more. We started to take small steps, go to the supermarket, pick and find the goods, stand in line in front of the cashier and walk back together. By doing things step by step Anders succeeded in coping with the situation of his new life. After four years of mentoring the Jobcenter in collaboration with Anders decided to set him up for a Resource Course where he, for a five-year period, has the opportunity to focus on treatment for social phobia, anxiety, depression and newly diagnosed diabetes. He now has some hope for the future.*

## **Companionship**

Working with mentees with trauma, stress, depression, mental illness, addictions and others also means working with mentees with needs of treatment. As part of the Danish welfare system, there are many different treatment options, different centres with group or individual therapy. Sometimes one of the tasks given from the Jobcentre is to accompany mentee to treatment, make sure he gets up in the morning, maybe even drive him there, depending on what he has previously mastered, and now needs support for. Sometimes I collaborate with the treatment centre by having common meetings, setting goals or next small steps to be taking, and all parts benefits from development of a common understanding and holistic view of mentee.

This is solution-focused social work, and all along the SF questions works, and helps me maintaining a professional stance in the collaboration. Joining different meetings means having different roles and functions, and most times mentee defines mentors role. In order for me to be helpful for you, when you see the doctor, how would you like me to act? Take notes? Help you make an agenda for the meeting? Support you by asking questions to the doctor? The primary aim of joining and following mentee to a meeting, are to be helpful and to support mentee in working in direction of the preferred future. Therefore it's also mentee, who defines how mentor can be helpful, thus we can act like secretary, extra ears, memory or mental support with agreed signals if mentee needs a break, - whatever makes sense (and is ethical okay).

## Practical stuff

Well, we don't do the laundry or wash the dishes, but we do help mentee in second hand shopping or make a budget. One of the most envious reasons is, because we're asked to. Part of a preferred future can include, having a place to live, or a nice home, both can be difficult to achieve with low money, so we assist mentee by driving to the second hand store to look for furniture, kitchen stuff or cloth. Another reason for supporting this is, because we're aware, that not having an overview or control over your finances, or the lack of it, increases stress. Living in fear a collector suddenly knocks on your door have never been any ones "preferred future". So we create setting for mentee to call creditors, prepare the calls together by talking about: What different will it make when you have talked to the creditor? And what different will it make for your overview of the finances? And what would be possible for you with that overview? How will your mother notice your having an overview of the finances? Lots of SF questions goes along with supporting mentee in getting in charge of the finances, and I haven't yet met any mentee, who didn't care about their finances or want to improve their financial status.

## Sofie

*I have known Sofie for years and during her time at Solutionsbywulf she has had three mentors, for the sole reason it was more suitable for the company. I met Sofie four years ago while she was living a difficult life; trying to get a suitable treatment offer and trying to get hold on life. Lots of confusing things in her life, so together we decided to first examine her finances, mails, letters, for example. One of the first times we met, she brought a plastic bag and poured all the contents on the table. Unopened letters from the state tax department, creditors, telephone companies and other small businesses. We started to open letters and tried to create a system of who should she calls and which letters should be thrown out, because there was a recent letter. Together we managed to set up arrangement with creditors about repayments of debts and for a long period we checked her e-mails and mailbox on a weekly basis, and made sure once a month, that she paid her bills. We made an overview of her debts, which helped her to see, how she was coping with her finances and by doing that, she realized, what a responsible person she was.*

*Almost a month ago Sofie and I met again for a conversation. Since our last mentor-period, she have had first Henrik, second Solveig as mentors, but with Solveigs resignation, Sofie had to change mentor again and I was the one to be. We then talked about her financial status, and she showed me the overview, that she along with Henrik and Solveig had maintained. I was surprised and impressed to realize, how she reduced her debt and kept her agreements. She still had a bill, that should have been paid two months ago, but she grabbed the mobile phone, rang the creditors, explained the delay and promised to pay it immediately. Afterwards, we talked about how she managed her finances, fulfilled her obligations and acted responsible. What difference did it make? She told it had become important for her, not to make new debts, and that she was now less stressed and more calm. She had decided her addiction of hash had to stop, because it was an expensive addiction, and she wanted to use the money in another way, she wanted another life and to be able to take care of herself.*

Sometimes I see myself as a therapist, sometimes as a pedagogue, and yet other times as a social worker. Social constructionism has put its fingerprints on me when I say; we differentiate ourselves differently in different contexts and with different people, and therefore use different skills in different contexts, with those people. Some of the practical things I as social worker also do, is helping mentee to apply, for example going to the dentist, a new refrigerator, moving expenses or applying for legends especially at Christmas time. The application system and requirements for documentation in the Danish welfare system are very complex, and it often becomes too troublesome for mentee to apply. The system's rules and regulations are difficult and hinder the system's intention, which is a paradox.

Practical stuff can be many things, and doing practical stuff mentor and mentee together becomes another opportunity to have unstructured solution focused conversations about what's related to mentees preferred future, miracle day, tomorrow or skills to achieve.

## The Digital Diary

I've been talking about how to integrate digital medias in solution-focused conversation for some years. The reason is quite simple; digital communication and thus digital conversations are here to stay. The children of today are what we call 'digital natives'; they haven't lived without computers, mobile phones or Internet. They don't remember sitting next to the router trying to get connecting to the Internet, because it has been available always. Nowadays, many of us are taking the Internet for granted, and have forgotten the first text-message was sent in 1992. These new opportunities have had impact on my practice by using photos, text dialogues and e-mails on digital medias as phones and computers. The Digital Diary is bridging SF conversations into daily life, and gives mentee an opportunity to keep focusing on the preferred future outside our meetings.

### Text messages

The aim of integrating text-messages into our practice was originally to apply the potential from working on mobile phones with mentees. Like others, mentees and we texted a message about cancelling an appointment, or being too late, but sometimes I got messages about emotions, and feelings. Mentee were writing maybe late in the evening about how depressed he was, or how anxious she felt, and I was convinced, that if I were to stay helpful, I had to answer these text-messages adequately. The question was, how to do that, and the use of microanalysis became the answer into that.

By time the mentees responded on the use of text-messages by saying, that it also became a way of remembering: when mentee came to mind something he would like to talk about, he could send a text message and it was in my phone, thus texting also created headspace because the mentee could shift focus to other areas of life. Thus integrating text-messages as a dialogic tool it also lead to, mentee over time experienced him or herself as more confidant, and skill full because of coping with life in a better way.

Working with text-dialogues you can be online without being present, which gives some benefits. One of them is you can quickly send a message and get a quick response, but you can also afford time to answer, reflect and discuss with others to qualify your response. Waiting to respond also gives mentee an opportunity to construct some solutions, or to be curious about, how mentee have handled the waiting time. And yet other times you can respond quickly with a typical SF question, and thus create reflection at mentee.

## Microanalysis

For me it all began with Harry Korman introducing to microanalyses and the work he has been doing with Janet Bavelas and others. I was impressed by the impact this research showed on conversations.

Seeing communication as an interactive co-operative process psycholinguist H.H. Clark development the "collaborative model" together with his colleagues. The model argues that meaning becomes united in a three-step process between talking and listening: 1) A presents information, 2) B shows that he has understood 3) A confirms that B has understood. Any such completed sequence represents a collaborative meaning-creating entity. Clark denounced these devices for "grounding circles" and considered dialogues as a co-operating complex process in which understanding and meanings are constantly co-constructed with the other.

Based on Clark's ideas about collaborative processes Janet B. Bavelas experimented in collaborative co-constructive processes in face-2-face dialogues, leading to the development of Microanalysis as a research tool. Video recordings of mainly therapeutic conversations are analysed with the ELAN software program, which plays micro sequences of maybe 10-20 seconds duration to investigate, how therapist and client co-construct the dialogue. Throughout her research, Bavelas has identified at least three significant steps the therapist contributes and uses in this process of co-operation; questions, formulations and lexical choices.

The result of microanalysis is, that formulations are an active therapeutic tool that can be linked to the therapist's approach. De Jong et. al. (2013) propose, that "all formulations are influential choices rather than passive evidence of understanding" (pg. 26), and present three distinctions in which formulations can contribute to a rewording of the client's words. Thus, the therapist's formulations will always:

1. Exclude some of the client's words.
2. Exactly preserve some of the client's words
3. Keep in a changed form some of the client's words. The changed form is affected by it

lexical choice, and may thus be a summary or an offer of another understanding rooted in the theoretical reference framework of the therapist, that is, adding new words.

The idea of conversations being co-constructed between client and therapist by the use of language, made me think if it was also applicable to other types of conversations e.g. text-message dialogues. And by looking at text-message dialogues as a co-constructive process, one could also do microanalysis on text-message.

This perspective led to my Master thesis from 2017, where I did microanalysis of 12 text-dialogues with the purpose of looking into how do mentor formulate his text-messages to mentee? And what kinds of linguistic grips are used? Which kind of responses does that provide for mentee? And what difference may they have? The micro analytic grips I researched was:

- ✓ Questions
- ✓ Linguistic choices
- ✓ Formulations
  - ✓ Text-responses preserving words from mentee in exactly form
  - ✓ Text-responses omitting words from mentee
  - ✓ Text-responses transforming words from mentee in a positive direction.
  - ✓ Text-responses assuming solution focused assumptions

## Line - Questions

Tuesday d. 22.03.2016 kl. 08:43	Mentor	<i>It isn't good, that you're feeling so bad, Line, because it's probably very hard to get a faster appointment. I'm thinking, what do you do of good things to keep up the spirit despite pain and discomfort? - Maybe we can take some time to talk about it after tomorrow's meeting. Have you also informed Lone that I'm participating?</i>
---------------------------------------	--------	--

From the example above one can see mentors assumptions regarding Line:

- She's able in taking actions: *I'm thinking, what do you do...*,
- She's able to target her actions in a certain direction: *...do of good things*
- The actions are targeting a specific effect: *..good things to keep up the spirit...*
- She's competent and full of resources: *keep up the spirit despite pain and discomfort*

## Line - Transform in a positive direction

Friday d. 16.12.16 Kl. 09:57	Mentee	<i>You have to try it too. It tastes delicious too! I was very happy to get up and bath and wash my hair and get a few baked bread (smiley with happy smile)</i>
Kl. 10:09	Mentor	<i>Lovely Line. I sit here and smile broadly over your recovery and maybe mostly your will and strength (strong arms emoji) May I disturb you with a request from Hanne-Vibeke? So can I call?</i>
Kl. 10:10	Mentee	<i>Yes ☺</i>

## Photos

Finally, as mentioned earlier, I use photos in the mentoring process. Photos can be used in many ways, e.g. by taken a picture of the white-board with all our notes or the long list of “what's been better”, or photos are useful as a tool for showing glimps of the preferred future, moments where mentee felt more calm (instead of

anxiety), or sending a photo of a painting were newly discovered skills were activated. There are lots of other areas for photos to be used, and the main thing for me is, that the visual image can support the process of learning or developing new skills and competences. Today almost everybody has a mobile phone with integrated camera, which makes it easy to take pictures, to save them in different folders or to share them with others.

## Relationships

Taken the stance, that dialogues are being co-construct in a collaborative process between mentor and mentees, this would also count for relationships. Being in relation to something or someone over time creates relationships, which undoubtedly applies to the mentor as well. We develop relationships with mentees on the sole grounds that we often see them weekly for maybe more than one year, some mentees are enrolled between two to three years. The main questions are, what kind of relationship does we have, and what are the purpose of the relationship. By having status meetings with the social worker at the Jobcenter every three month, we get the opportunity to recontracting the aims and goals of mentoring, thus we also review the relationship for mentee regarding meaningfulness. Are we still on “the right track” and working towards mentees preferred future? Are our meetings and activities still meaningful for mentee? What would he/she like to be different? This kind of evaluation keep us reminded, that the relationship mentee-mentor are build on a collaborative process, which changes over time as mentee reach his goals / discover himself in moments living in the preferred future. Sometimes the goals are achieved and new ones appear, and become the subject of future work between mentee-mentor, and other times achieved goals are the perfect time for ending the relationship.

Several practitioners including BRIEF have referred to Insoo Kim Berg saying, that the therapist was “not to leave any footprint” in the clients life, meaning to intervene as little as possible and as briefly as possible (BRIEF 2012:4). On one hand, I think,



it's not at all possible, because "no footprint" would almost mean being "invisible" and not being present. Through the years as family therapist, I've often referred to the impossibility of not communicating (Watzlawick, Bavelas & Jackson 1967:29), all actions are signs of communication, - *one cannot not behave*. Looking at communication through a social constructivist lens, dialogues are a collaborative co-constructive process and in that process it is impossible not to influence the other person and thus one do set footprint. However, I find it more interesting to focusing on the footprints I leave behind, and the impact they may have, leading to reflections on the role of the mentor, and how to position your self in the context. Sometimes I'm not the therapist, and 'just' another human being. Mentee and I can drink coffee together, we can go for a walk and – I'm just another human being talking about what kind of bird is sitting in the tree, or why I don't like lemon curd on my bread. It is essential to get humanity back in social work, and to be "quite ordinary", as most mentee longs for – to be like everyone else. I leave my footprints and try to make them very special, meaningful and helpful footsteps for mentees.

#### *Samantha - Ending a relationship*

*A year ago I ended mentoring Samantha from South America living in Denmark for a decade. Seeing her for the first time two and a half year ago, limited by her anxiety for being in public, taking busses, talking to others and being in a classroom, many things have changed. I said bye to a woman, whom gave birth 4 weeks before to her second child, - the older child were in kindergarten. We had a short chat about, how she's now focusing on her daily life instead of having all her energy bound the buss-distance to the kindergarten, and she told me; - how she four days after giving birth went to school planning to graduate with her classmates, - how she cooperated with the classmates, - how she joined in on family treats and so on. Getting closer to good-bye I asked her: "If you in a short sentence should say, what I did that helped you accomplice all those things, what would you say?"*

*"You", she said, "you helped me see things, so I could do things, that I didn't knew, I could, and am now just doing".*

## Spending time together build dilemmas

I've been perturbing this arising dilemma shortly in my writing on having a weekly contact with mentee, sometimes even twice a week, and over a long period. We spend much time together, and I get to know mentee well, and – in some ways reverse. I pay attention to the distinction between being personal, but not private, and yet I'm listening to very private stuff, but spending time together also create dilemmas - one easily gets projects on behalf of mentee. Because we assume the client to be expert in own life, getting projects for mentee isn't very solution-focused, and isn't very helpful. Mentor becomes less helpful and less creative in constructing questions, it affect the collaboration and the co-constructive process. So, how do we deal with that? We try to handle it by....

- Renegotiate the 'goals' every third month, - what to focus on for the next period.
- Being very explicit in our dialogues with mentee and colleagues.
- Shift mentor know and then and invite colleagues to meetings.
- Have multi views on our writings to the social worker or other partners involved.
- Establishes special activities for more, such as summer trips or training groups.

There is off course not ending of the list, - we might even in a supervision session make a list of have many ways to handle this dilemma, - how to stay brief in our mentoring work. I look into the projects I might have, the ideas about what to do or not to do, and asks myself solution-focused question. Suppose, I woke up tomorrow and didn't have any ideas about what Sofie should do to get her life back on track, or how Anders should handle his social phobia, what difference would that make? And by having that kind of conversations with myself, I put not only focus on the dilemma, but also on my role, position and actions in the dilemma. One can say that I contextualize the mentor function by reflecting and perspectiveing both the frame and the content, i.e. being in relationship creates opportunities for changes to emerge independent of contexts.

## When the model is working

Whatever the relationships are, and with whom they are constructed, we try to *let the solution-focused model work* by creating a setting, where the clients can shift mentor. By this I mean by viewing communication and relationship in an interactional constructionist optic it becomes possible to focusing on the co-construction and the collaboration. Mentee gets to know our way of constructing solution-focused questions, our way of working and by having a team, where everybody works from the same reference, anyone in our team can ask those questions, which makes it possible for us to substitute each other. We not only create flexibility for the staff regarding holidays and illness, but more than that, we maintain the flexibility in the relationship to mentee by letting the solution-focused mindset works, which strengthens the client furthermore.

It becomes an “easy-way-of-working”, when you know, you are replaceable, and share the tasks and responsibility with others. Solutionsbywulf builds upon five values related to solution-focused mindset: professionalism, innovation, transparency, orderliness and joy, and the same solution-focused mindset supports us in working in many ways from only one way of thinking. By considering the solution-focused approach as also a mind-set, there are almost unlimited practices. This is also the case for our mentoring service; we centre on doing what makes sense for mentees and is not afraid of using our skills in an alternative way. My best hope for my colleagues are, that this way of working provides energy into work life, and some of that energy can be channelled into doing more of what works.

## References:

- Bavelas, J. B., De Jong, P., Kormann, H. (2013). An introduction to using Microanalysis to Observe co-construction in Psychotherapy. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, Vol 32 (3), s. 17-30.
- Bavelas, J.B., De Jong, P., Jordan, S.S., Kormann, H. (2013): Microanalysis of Formulations in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and... *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2013, pp. 31–45
- Bavelas, J.B., De Jong, P., Jordan, S.S., Kormann, H. (2014): The theoretical and research basis of co-constructing meaning in dialogue. *Journal of Solution Focused Brief Therapy*, Vol. 1, No 2, 2014, pp. 1-24.
- Baym, N.K. (2015). Personal connections in the digital age: *Digital media and society series* (2nd edition). Cambridge: Polity Press
- Duncan, B., Miller, S., Wampold, B., Barry, L. (1999). *The heart and soul of change; what works in therapy*. (1. udgave). Washington: American Psychological Association, p. 57-79.
- Hoem, J. (2006). Openness in communication. *www.firstmonday.org*, Vol. 11 (7).
- Jordan, Sara Smock; Bavelas, Janet Beavin. (2013). Introduction to SFBT contributions to practice-oriented research. Part 1: Microanalysis of communication. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, Vol. 32, (3), s 13-16.
- Korman. H. (2004/2017). The Common Project. <http://www.sikt.nu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-common-project-small-revisions-2017.pdf>
- McKergow, Marks: SFBT 2.0: The next generation of Solution Focused Brief Therapy has already arrived *Published (2016.) Journal of Solution Focused Brief Therapy vol 2 no 2 pp 1-17*
- Ratner, Harvey; George, Evan; Iveson, Chris. (2012). *Solution Focused Brief Therapy. 100 keypoints and techniques*. East Sussex: Routledge.
- Shazer, S. de. (1988). *Clues: Investigating Solutions in Brief Therapy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Shazer, S. de (1991). *Putting Difference to Work*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Shazer, S. de. (1994). *Words Were Originally Magic*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company

Shazer, S. de, Dolan, Y., Kormann, H., Trepper, T., McCollum, E., Berg, I.K. (2012). *More than Miracles: the State of the Art of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy*. Great Britain: Routledge.

Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J. B., Jackson, D. D. (1967). *Pragmatics of Human Communication*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company