

From SMART-goals to LEAD©(-ing your life)

Over the last 40 years working with SMART-goals¹ have been a part of a goal-oriented management style and shortly repeated; it's about setting goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant (former Realistic) and Time-limited.

SMART-goals

SMART-goals were originally a discipline for managers and executives to navigate in organizational units. Business cooperation's and departments have been managed through setting goals that often were defined by different categories as sales-related, process-oriented or internal. In the public sector and with new IT-systems, SMART goals in Denmark have been integrated into many different programs, projects and models as a way to ensure results were achieved. Many practitioner in the Danish welfare system will know what I'm talking about, because we've all at sometime been encouraged to formulate SMART goals, e.g. in the field of child protection.

Among my colleges there has been a tendency to integrate SMART goals within the solution focused (SF) approach, which - in a sense also can be seen as a goal-oriented working process, but not exclusively. However, integrating SMART-goals into the solution focused mind-set and approach easily because troubles, because when you're working from a solution focused stance in an organization, one does not focus on measuring and controlling the organisation, but the changes needed, the preferred future of the organisation. SF is conversations about changes based on a particular understanding and assumption of humans, for example, that they are experts in their own lives. Therefore, in collaboration with Karin Pharès, I have developed another way of working with goals, which in our opinion fits better with the solution focused mind-set.

Goals in Solution Focus

Originally, Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg were focusing on, how the client wants life to be, when the problem was no longer existing and Harry Kormann have talked about creating a "common project"² as a starting point for the miracle question. BRIEF talks about knowing the "destination" in order to ask "the tomorrow question",

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria

² <http://www.sikt.nu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-common-project-small-revisions-2017.pdf>

some how more simple, but fundamentally with the same presumptions.

The purpose of getting descriptions of "the preferred future" was originally to discover moments, where the preferred future was seen in glimps and/or looking for exceptions to the problem. Solution Focused Therapy Treatment Manual for Working with Individuals 2nd Version © published by SFBTA, July 1, 2013, says on p. 9:

The setting of specific, concrete, and realistic goals is an important component of SFBT. Goals are formulated and amplified through SF conversation about what clients want different in the future. Goals in SFBT are desired emotions, cognitions, behaviours and interactions in different contexts (areas of the clients life).

Making a shift

Whether you're having solution focused conversations as therapy, coaching or as "chats about changes", the focus must be on the client's hope and desire for changes. The session needs to create a sense of meaning and our questions need to create reflections for the client. That is our best hope. And the questions we're asking are not random, they are based on the SF assumptions, the process of listen, select and build, thus we construct the next question. The clients answers to those questions, clarifies the clients "goals", and the more concrete and detailed descriptions the clients formulate, the clearer the preferred future becomes. I have put the word goal in quotation marks, as I for the moment can't quite agree with it. I prefer to think in the term of "destination" because it is less strict and holds the potential of new possibilities. Using the BRIEF taxi-driver metaphor³ one can change the destination during the ride, e.g. if you receive a phonecall or you can stop before planned, if you sees a friend along the street. It's that kind of flexibility I'm referring to.

The focus is on describing the next small steps and steps already taken and paying attention to the outcome of the process rather than the process itself.

In our teaching at the Danish Solution Focused Institute these reflections and thoughts has led Karin and I to make a shift from SMART-goals into creating a LEAD, - which can be understood as a clue for the client in his life and as a solid direction of what one wants different in life. When you're creating a LEAD, you're asking questions and paying attention to the descriptions of the clients preferred future.

³ <https://www.brief.org.uk/blog/2016/07/11/where-to-guv/>

The LEAD[®]

Living, and not the absence of anything, or something "a dead man" can do ☺ If a teacher wants a student to stop bullying another student, one have to explore what positive attractive actions the student could do instead of bullying. One have to look for the negation of a 'passive' action by asking yourself; is it possible for "a dead man" to do that...yes – so what can the student do instead – read in a book, write an essay, say hello, shake hand, walk in another direction.... Using the aspect of "Living" the descriptions needs to be attractive, positive and future oriented actions

To **Embrace** a specific change is needed in order for the client to work towards the preferred future. What does the mother want and what does the child wants? Sometimes there are different perspectives on, what kind of changes needs to happen and as a solution focused practitioner you'll then work with more than one preferred future. By embracing a specific change you create ownership, which is essential for the client in order to make changes. "Owning the preferred future" supports the development of micro descriptions of future actions and makes the preferred future attractive, because something is at stake.



Acceptance of the clients preferred future and the concrete changes he's working towards meaning it's not okay to want to beat up your little brother or kill your husband! Sometimes you have to ask for more details using the micro perspective in order to get the clients good intentions described or in order to find the acceptable in "not wanting to live anymore". Having an acceptable 'goal' or destination can also be seen in a contextual context; in which way, if any, would my 'goal' be acceptable from the working context I am in.

Detailed and **divisible**, small steps with a micro-perspective. The fact that the student has to learn to "behave properly in school" can be further elaborated,

defragmented to more precise actions by asking questions like: “Would that be all over the school, that the student needs to behave properly?” What does it mean to behave properly? What actions would the school like to see? Will the English- and Gymnastic teacher want to see the same actions? Questions are our tool for this clarification, and as you get small concrete detailed descriptions, it gets easier for the client to imagine and first small steps emerges and can be taken.

When you’re creating a LEAD, you collaborate and co-construct with the client in a way that place the client as ”master in his own life”. This will guide the client towards the preferred future - and that's basically what solution focus is about, - with clients to co-construct conversations from which they can go make the changes, they want.

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Ratner, H., George, E., & Iveson, C. (2012). Solution focused brief therapy: 100 key points and techniques. Routledge.

Shazer, Steve de (1988): “Clues – investigating Solutions in Brief Therapy”

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