

CANADIAN SFBT NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Winter Edition

Happy New Year. I'm writing this as the snow softly blankets the ground. By the time we leave our place today the snow will be past our knees and we'll have to go for a 20-minute walk as we pull our sled holding our belongings to our truck. O.....Canadian winters are so unpredictably wonderful. Such a metaphor for the work we do as SFBT therapists; seeing endless possibilities for change, witnessing miracles all around us and using our creativity to move through sessions.

We are so happy to be sharing this newsletter with you. First of all, we had a wonderful time in Halifax this fall. Thank you to everyone who made this conference an amazing experience. We had several highlights: hearing an amazing plenary by Harvey Radner, many excellent workshops, fantastic east coast hospitality and food and then

the opportunity for our own Dina Bednar speak about her thoughts on "growing of SFBT". I (GV) see Dina as the anchor of our team. She absolutely lives and breathes solution focused ideas. Her ability to see strengths and possibilities in everything not only speaks to her Greek heritage but also simply as to who she is. These elements make SFBT a natural fit for her. I am sure you will be delighted to hear what she had to say at the conference.

Since our last newsletter, we have also presented Single Session Therapy and SFBT in Barrie and Halifax. We are also going to be presenting this as a 4-day workshop in Brantford at the end of this month. Training is something we certainly enjoy doing.

We are also excited to share a book review "*How Do You Know When You Know*" by Ellen Quick. As always, Ellen

continues to inspire us with her SFBT ideas.

We look forward to an exciting 2017. We have partnered with the OISE's SFBT certificate program and continue to look

forward to connecting with the Canadian SFBT community.

May 2017 be filled with good health, adventure and amazing solutions!!!

PLENARY PANEL TALK GIVEN BY DINA BEDNAR

Closing Plenary Talk at SFBT Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia 2016.

“How do solution focused brief therapy practitioners both embrace change in their practice and adhere to the original ideas of Solution Focused Brief Therapy?”

I want to start off by saying that I consider myself a postmodern thinker, a social constructionist and a solution-focused therapist. This goes well together I think. I also, with your permission would like to take you on a journey. We will start off in Boston where I was last weekend. My husband and I went to the Boston Library where they had an exhibit on Shakespeare entitled Shakespeare Unauthorized. I think that Shakespeare was definitely a post-modernist, “Nothing is neither good or bad, but thinking doth make it so.” Did you know that the first edition of Hamlet had the famous quote “to be or not to be” followed with “I that is the point”. It was changed in the second copy to “that is the

question”. Maybe by Shakespeare, maybe not. At the exhibit, they highlighted that we have no idea what is really, originally Shakespeare. That Shakespeare collaborated with many other play-writers such as Marlowe, Greene, Webster and Middleton. Not only did they edit each others’ work and sometimes steal from each other, but directors, and actors would change the words according to the audience and who was in the audience on that particular day. What we have of Shakespeare comes from the first folio published 7 years after his death. We have no idea how much editing went on or what lines were altered. The plays and sonnets are

works of art, with maybe many people influencing the final product. They were always works in progress – much like SFBT.

Now I want to take you to one of my favourite cities in the world – New Orleans and I would like to quote Charlie Parker a jazz musician, who said: “If you don’t live it, it’s not going to come out of your horn.” What Steve DeShazer and company

called “guidelines for the approach, the major tenets of SFBT, I consider my foundations. For me the major tenets and assumptions are the foundation for my work. They

shape my stance, influence my philosophy and the questions I ask. I know that my clients have the resources and strengths they need, that the future is created and negotiable, that there are always exceptions, that small changes can lead to big changes, and that sometimes the solution is not necessarily related to the problem. I appreciate the

importance of languaging and how the language for solution development is different from that needed to describe a problem. Simply put – If it’s not broken don’t fix it, if it works keep doing it, and if it doesn’t work do something different. How do I live that, how do I adhere to these original key concepts? I want to take you to a city outside of Toronto called Hamilton, and to the children’s

mental– health clinic that I work at. This is my professional Shangra – la and, where I am living La Vida loca. – Along with my colleagues and dear friends Geri Van Engen, Mark

Fernandes, Tammy Dunn and Joanne Robinson we provide for each other an intensely fertile environment for our work. Four years ago, we created a solution–focused working group, we tape our sessions and watch them together, we do microanalysis, co–therapy, read and discuss SFBT articles and books and as AAMFT approved supervisors run a training program for graduate students

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doing their practicums. We are constantly consulting with each other with transparency and an eagerness to learn and share our work. In a clinic of 17, five of us see 70% of the clients. I like to think that we play our horns really well together and if I can clumsily continue to use the analogy to jazz – when you live it, and practice it a lot you naturally start to improvise. And now if we can go to Phoenix, Arizona, to meet the Wizard of the desert– Dr. Milton Erickson. Dr. Erickson said “You cannot imitate somebody else, but you have to do it your own way.” Steve deShazer became interested in therapy because of Milton Erickson, in an interview with Brian Cade, Steve said it was because of his interest in Milton Erickson that the SFBT approach was developed. Steve studied the great Erickson trying to figure out just what he was doing in therapy. It took Steve 10 years to figure out that simply put Erickson was listening to his patients. The greatest gift that Erickson gave SFBT I think is utilization –the idea of using everything the client brings, even what some may consider the weeds. {Our own way has developed in a greater

transparency more and more focus on naming abilities, character strengths and virtues.

How has my practice of SFBT developed?} I think the nature of SFBT, the developers’ intentions, utilization, and co–construction means that SFBT is different all the time – with every client. I also think that the danger to this approach would lie if of you don’t develop, change, rethink it. The danger would be going through the motion, robotically doing the techniques, manualizing it. When you and your clients are engaged in co–construction you are inevitably inventing a new model for every client. And the beauty of utilization in my opinion is that it involves using everything about you the therapist as well!

At our clinic, the five of us have developed and evolved overtime to more transparency and focusing on the languaging of strengths with great intentionality. some of our own ways, individually and collectively, we use Duncan and Miller’s Outcome sessions scale and Session Rating scales. We are really interested in what our clients say

about our work together – they make us better therapists to use the title of Duncan’s book –not only do we engage in lexical encoding by asking if the session was useful and what they are leaving with we give the scales in every session and we ask what we could have done better if it is necessary to do so. And we listen. When we take our thinking break we do our session notes in the form of a letter and give this to our clients, the other copy goes in their files so they always know what is in their file. And for the last three years we have been working on refining and

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redefining the Team behind the mirror. In the first year we researched what therapists liked and disliked about the team behind the mirror, and we went ahead and made the changes, making the team more transparent with no call ins, in the second year we discussed what therapists and the team liked about our changes, such as bringing the team into the consulting room, having the clients

overhear the discussion, and each member of the team giving the clients a copy of the notes they took during the session (all solution-focused notes, highlighting strengths, exceptions and compliments), and the third year we looked at what clients said was useful and what they liked about the redefined team.

The poly-ocular view, one of the original intentions of the team, was still the

predominant feature, with clients appreciating hearing it from the Team directly (original speakers). All this modification in a spirit of collaboration and

fun.

Another development in recent years has taken place because of the populations we work with – children, adolescents and their families. sometimes kids don’t have the language to even explain who they are– you got to name it to be it. We started to focus on the languaging of abilities, strengths, and virtues and

seeing them as skills of living, naming them together with our clients, looking for fit and giving them life. We go slow and slice it as thin as possible – words continue to be magic – they give shape to identity and to hope. But is this really a development or is this simply solution-focused work as it was intended??

For me it has been a both/and. Staying true and modifying and adapting. Working in community and collaboration with therapists I respect and who inspire me has kept me close to the tenets and ideals of this approach– my foundation. The Assumptions and tenets are timeless. It is a philosophy, a way of being, one that establishes my stance and attitude. I am passionate and true to the core principles.

I like to think that I live it. Working collaboratively and co-constructively with clients has taught me the importance of doing what works. And this post-modern approach inspired by Erickson, the MRI, Wittgenstein and Buddhist Philosophy tells me to continue to co-define what works and what needs to be different with every client. It is only fitting that Shakespeare has the last word –in the

spirit of utilization – “To thine own self be true!” This approach invites my creativity and ingenuity to be myself and not to simply imitate but to bring a fully engaged collaborator to the change process.



Book Review:

“How do you know when you know?”

By Ellen Quick

Review by Dina Bednar

How Do You
Know
When You
Know?



Ellen Quick, PhD, BC

Struggling with a decision, big or small? Let me recommend this book to you.

To all coaches, therapists and people who are deliberating, pondering or struggling with a decision Ellen Quick has written her first book for the non-therapist and it is excellent beyond that. *“How do you know when you know?”* is full of practical guidelines, relevant information, and examples written in an easy to read and engaging style. For those of us familiar with Ellen Quick this is no surprise. To

many developing and seasoned marriage and family therapists, and solution-focused therapists (me included), Ellen Quick is a well-respected and revered giant in the field. Her brilliance extends to psychotherapy, coaching, writing and training.

Quick is the author of three professional books that are essential reading for therapists: *Doing What Works in Brief Therapy*; *Solution-Focused Anxiety Management*; and *Core Competencies in the Solution-*

Focused and Strategic Therapies. Into her first book for a general audience ‘*How do you know when you know?*’ Quick has poured in her considerable experience, knowledge and wisdom providing the reader with an abundance of tools, suggestions and material to reflect on that will make “knowing” easier in decision-making.

In the first chapter Quick provides the reader with a description of the background and concepts of the Solution-Focused Approach and the set of attitudes and methods that define this strength-based therapy, and sets the

tone for the rest of the book. In chapter 2 Quick references many ideas, books, websites and blogs on decision-making providing the reader with many perspectives from the stages of change to behavioral economics, positive psychology and a slew of other resources. If knowledge is power, then the reader is the recipient of a plethora of opportunities to explore and learn from.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 share stories from interviews of decision-making. These stories illuminate, normalize, validate, entertain and inspire! Chapter 6 reviews examples of decision-making (struggles and all) in movies and memoirs. I have already watched the trailer on one of the movies Ellen Quick mentions. In Chapter 7 the author provides examples of everyday decisions and an interesting example of using Gabriele Oettingen’s WOOP app. I appreciated Wayne Dyer’s quote in the chapter that “Our lives are a sum total of the choices we have made.” This chapter reminded me of the many, many decisions I make every day already – and I like to think reasonably well!

In Chapter 8 '*The Many Ways We Know When We Know*' Quick ties in all the threads that run through decisions described in the book, from gut reaction, to learning from mistakes, event-driven decisions and more... Ellen Quick provides a range of languaging on how we make decisions that is intentional and very useful! As a solution-focused therapist I also appreciated the emphasis on the importance of the "unique combination of an individual's strengths, style, and experiences" in decision-making (p. 111).

In the final chapter Ellen offers guidelines for Solution-Focused decision-making in pragmatic, and mindful steps that honour the reader's strengths, abilities and what the individual "really wants". The guidelines are small capsules of wisdom and common sense providing the reader many ways of knowing - and most of them referencing previous chapters, making it easier to flip back and review.

In this highly useful book Ellen Quick has taken the subject of decision-making and she has sliced it as thinly as possible,

deconstructing it for the reader in many different ways, with stories, information and different ways of approaching the process of making a decision. I am walking away with the nugget proposed by Ruth Chang, 'when you choose A over B, make yourself the kind of person for whom A is absolutely the right fit.' (p. 123) I also appreciate how Quick both introduces to the reader and remains consistently faithful to the assumptions and tenets of the Solution-Focused Approach. I will be recommending this book to my clients, colleagues and students.



Upcoming Events not to be missed:

Mark Fernandes and Geri Van Engen will be presenting a 4-day workshop on SFBT in Brantford, ON on January 30, 31, 2017 and February 2, 3, 2017. This training is sponsored by St, Leonard's Counselling Centre

SFBT Certificate Program at OISE, University of Toronto, Upcoming Workshops:

- **Foundations, Assumptions, Theory and Skills:** January 20 & 21st, 2017
- **Mindfulness and solution-focused therapy: An integrated Approach to coping:** Feb. 24 & 24, 2017
- **Child, Adolescent and Family:** March 24 & 25, 2017 (Facilitated by Dina Bednar and Geri Van Engen)
- **Promoting Post Traumatic**
- **Growth:** April 21 & 22, 2017
- **SFBT Practicum (Single Session Therapy):** May 5 & 13th, 2017 (Facilitated by Dina Bednar, Mark Fernandes and Geri VanEngen)

SIMCOE County District School Board – Dina Bednar and Geri Van Engen will be presenting a second installment of the SST/SFBT Workshop for School Social Workers, Administrators and Staff in April 20 & 21, 2017. We thank the school board for welcoming us back!

Thunder Bay – Dina Bednar and Mark Fernandes will be in Thunder Bay on March 28th & 29th, 2017 delivering a

workshop on advanced skills in SFBT. This event is co-sponsored between the Thunder Bay Counselling Centre and the Children's Centre Thunder Bay.

Changes! Change happens all the time!

Big news, happy new! We are happy to announce that the Solution-Focused Counselling Certificate at the University of Toronto has changed locations and name! We are now at OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), University of Toronto. Our new name is The Solution-Focused Brief Therapy Certificate. For more information please go to <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/cpl/Community/SFBT/index.html> or contact Janice Spencer at Janice.spencer@utoronto.ca