

Coaching Skills 2023 Solutions Focus Follow-up Notes:

1. It can seem counterintuitive not to attempt to identify causes. When we go to the doctor with stomach pain, determining the cause is important because it will dictate the effective treatment. An appendicitis, an ulcer, or stomach cancer might have a few overlapping symptoms, but the treatments will be very different. While this works for the relatively "closed systems" such as medicine or fixing your car's engine, it is less appropriate for complex "open systems" such as human relationships. How important is it to identify the cause of conflict between two working parents and their teenage daughter? Is it hormones? Is it natural psychological separation that is typical to that stage of development? Is the teen reacting to the parent's attention to work? Was there an actual event that precipitated the interpersonal conflict? Maybe all, maybe none, maybe some, or other choices not listed here. It can be far more efficient to identify the desired goal - a good relationship - and take steps to have that. Here's the trick: if you are designing a preferred future, you don't need to look at causes because you are not looking at a problem with a supposed cause.

2. What is the English word that is the opposite of "mistake"? Related to the radical solution-focused mindset is the idea of "learning from mistakes." In the world of coaching, it is common to hear platitudes such as "There is no such thing as a mistake; only opportunities to learn" or "I failed my way to success." These mindsets encourage us to focus even more intensely on problems because of their supposed utility. Here is a TEDx talk that challenges these notions. The quality is low on this video, but I think it is worth viewing because of how it challenges these notions. Among the important insights are: A) many of the things we call 'mistakes' are not mistakes, B) we learn more from success than failure, and C) our psychological need to explain through a story is implicated in our love affair with mistakes. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_o5beLKS5M4

3. Solutions focus isn't very deep, or is it? One criticism people levy at SF is that it is too "nuts and bolts." It just wants people to identify resources, marshal them, and plan baby steps. This leaves many people scratching their heads and wondering where all the deep self-growth, personal awareness, and processing are. In some ways, this is a holdover from early insight-oriented approaches to psychology, such as Freudian therapies. This raises a profound question—and one I offer no answer to—regarding the path to growth: to what extent are we engineering a better self by carving away that bad stuff versus by building up good stuff?