Dominic Hofstetter:

Solution-Focused Selling

SOLUTION-FOCUSED MANAGEMENT SERIES, edited by Günter Lueger, Band 3
ISBN 978-86618-231-8, Rainer Hampp Verlag, München u. Mering. 2008, 128 S., € 19.80

This book introduces a new selling method that is based on the fundamentals of solution-focus, a counseling approach originally developed and applied in psychotherapy. It describes the challenges that salespeople and their marketing organizations face today and why their current selling methods no longer suffice. It continues to elaborate on how solution-focused attitudes, processes, and tools can be used to overcome these challenges, to increase advisory quality, and to eventually make higher sales.

This book is directed toward salespeople of all industries who want to gain a competitive advantage and increase their success in business. Its content also relates to therapists, coaches, and managers who want to gain a new perspective in solution-focused management.

Keywords: solution-focus, solution-focused selling, sales, marketing, scaling question, solution-focused management

Dominic Hofstetter currently works in the institutional distribution department of a Swiss bank, where he sells complex investment solutions to sophisticated clients. Before, he occupied several positions within the financial services industry in Zurich and New York and successfully ran his own business venture. Mr. Hofstetter holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from the University of Applied Sciences of Zurich, where he also wrote his Bachelor thesis titled “Client Coaching – A solution-focused sales approach”.

SOLUTION-FOCUSED MANAGEMENT SERIES

edited by Günter Lueger

Volume 3

Dominic Hofstetter

Solution-Focused Selling

Rainer Hampp Verlag München, Mering 2008

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

ISBN: 978-3-86618-231-8

Solution-Focused Management Series: ISSN 1862-9091
DOI 10.1688/9783866182318
First published 2008

Umschlagfotos: Dr. Klaus Schenck und Thomas Lenz

 Rainer Hampp Verlag München, Mering
Marktplatz 5 86415 Mering, Germany

www.Hampp-Verlag.de

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I love sweets. I always have. Not all sweets, but most. Not always, but often. Today, I can suppress the impulse to buy or eat sweets, mainly out of concern with regards to health and appearance. In the past, however, when I was a child, I was a killer of all sorts of candy and pastries. One day, my parents got anxious about my constant appetite for sweets and started to hide the candy supply in secret places. This mission was destined to fail, though, since no parent can ever come up with a place that is secret enough to protect contraband from a curious and determined child. Over the months, I played cat and mouse with my mother, and as soon as I found the hiding place, I began helping myself by taking away a few sweets every day. The supply decreased gradually, and of course, it was eventually depleted. When my mother discovered this, she dispraised me and threatened to stop buying sweets for good. Fortunately, she was too good a mom to really stick to her threats and soon provided replenishment—which she hid in another secret, yet soon unmasked place.

This game went on for some months, until my parents actually cut off the sweets supply entirely. I was left stranded, since I didn't have the money to buy it myself. Therefore, I had to come up with a new and effective combat technique that would empower me to regain supremacy in this fight. I thought about it for quite some days, but it wasn't until I came across a very interesting radio program that I found the solution. The voices on the radio where discussing a study in neuroscience, in which scientists allegedly had discovered a way to program a person's subconscious. The trick was to say a word *backwards.* By doing so, the letters would be memorized by the brain, which would then unconsciously manage to put them into correct order. The brain's owner would then have this word in mind without knowing why, yet—in the case of a product—it was supposed to be enough to stimulate purchase.

According to the people on the radio, this was the reason to prohibit supermarkets from exposing their customers to backwardly read advertisements and subliminal messages. This subtle technique seemed like the perfect weapon for me. I acted quickly and made my first move the very same day. For my first attempt, I chose one of my favorite cookies, which, read backwards, is LEGGRIT. I dropped the word carefully over the whole day since I knew that my mom was going shopping on the weekend. She didn't understand what I was up to and got suspicious. However, by the time she left, I was very confident and couldn't wait for her to return. When she finally got back and began unpacking the bags, I soon learned that my efforts were a complete failure: no sweets at all. Imagine my disappointment; I was devastated.

At night, I reflected on my plan and tried to figure out why I didn't succeed. What did I do wrong? Was all too obvious? Was Leggrit not the right term for my first mission (how could it not be)? Was my mom too smart? Did she know about my plan? Was it something superhuman, let’s say, not the season for Leggrits? Did she simply forget? Was it too expensive for her? Was the store out of Leggrits?

Retrospectively, I admit that it was quite a cheap technique to change somebody’s behavior. Today, my sales techniques are much more advanced and sophisticated than they were back then. However, the questions I ask myself when I lose a deal are pretty much the same. Was it the right product? Did we use the correct words? Did we highlight the benefits that were important to the client? Did we do this, did we do that, did we do anything wrong at all? I guess these are the kinds of questions that everybody in sales asks himself/herself once in a while. And all too often, the answer is, “I don’t know.”

A successful salesperson is constantly reviewing his/her selling skills, and so do I. For quite some time now, I’ve been searching for a holistic sales technique that is highly effective, suitable for a multitude of situations and easy to apply. I’ve been looking for the golden key. In fact, this search is on-going and seemingly never-ending. You, dear reader, will not find the golden key in this book, but you will read about a very interesting and truly unique approach: solution-focused selling.

The method is described in the next chapters, and I don’t want to go into too much detail at this point. However, it is worthwhile to spend some time thinking about the meaning of the term “solution-focused process-counseling” in order to prevent confusion and misinterpretation. During my research, I discovered that many people have something else in mind when they hear this term. When I spoke to salespeople about this method, some instantly replied that they were already selling with solution-focus. After asking a few questions, it quickly became clear that they simply had a different understanding of solution-focus; they either used the term “solution”—which sounds dynamic and client-friendly—as a mere substitution for “product”—which sounds static and dusty. Or, they referred to “solution” as a product that can be modified to an extent that will turn a “mass-produced product” into a “customized, individual product.” While both usages make valid points, they are not congruent with the meaning used in this book. In the original fields of application, psychotherapy and coaching, solution-focus refers not so much to a specific subject as to the timeframe (future) in which the client should think and the language that is used. In this book, “solution-focus” means, “not speaking about the problem, but strictly focusing on the future (state and behavior).” Similarly, in the context of sales it means, “not speaking about what you have and what goes wrong, but about what you want in the future and how this differs from today.” The same applies to process-counseling; many of my interview partners have claimed that they regard process-counseling as part of their service in advising their clients as to how to improve internal processes, e.g. for sourcing, production, or logistics. However, “process-counseling,” as used in this book, does not refer to business processes, but to the culture and content of the consultation. It means, “The counselor leads through questions and does not make personal contributions,” thus, fundamentally differing from its counterapproach, “specialist-counseling.” Please see the first chapter of this book for a more elaborate distinction. At this point, however, it is sufficient to understand what solution-focused process-counseling is not rather than what it is.

I claim that solution-focused selling is a new sales approach, that it is superior to any traditional method and that it goes beyond their fundamentals. However, please feel encouraged to challenge this view. Tell me your feelings and thoughts. Let me know if you believe I am wrong or right. Share with me your own personal experience and help improve this method.

In December 2007, a handful of salespeople and coaches, at Mag. Dr. Günter Lueger's invitation, gathered in an attic office in Vienna. There, they launched a task force to start a dialogue about solution-focus in sales and to research and develop this interesting approach. Join us and enter into this dialogue. Be a pioneer yourself. Log on to www.briefmanagement.at for further information.

In conclusion, I would like to say *Thank you* to the following people: Urs Blättler, the godfather of solution-focused selling, for his inspiration, humor, and cheekiness; Hansjörg Künzli, the guard of structure and eliminator of the redundant, for his critique and thoughtful input; Mag. Dr. Günter Lueger, the series sponsor, for the opportunity he provides me to publish this work; my parents, the incarnation of pride, for actually reading through this manuscript in the first place (I know, it was a pain); my brothers and other family members, including Strongs – for just being there; and finally, Sandra, my most important spur, who drives me to top performances – and yet, sometimes to madness.

And now go on, read, and spread the word!

Dominic Hofstetter

January 2008

PROLOGUE

Current Situation

The art of selling is as old as mankind. The origins of *trade* – the prototype of selling – reach back to the beginning of humanity. It is not surprising that selling has played an important role in the history of mankind. Still, today, it is much more than just a profession; several times per day, consciously or unconsciously, every person becomes a buyer or seller of goods, services, ideas, messages, feelings, relationships, ideologies, political standpoints, and much more. Salespeople have had some thousand years to develop their sales approaches and to make them superior to those of their competitors. With the evolution of the *consumer society,* these methods have been developed to perfection. Simultaneously, selling has ascended to one of the most important activities in the corporate value chain.

Today, literature on sales exists in abundance, and the practitioner can choose among plenty of methods, techniques, and instruments. There is only one hitch: Most of these approaches have assimilated over time and differ from one another only in the slightest of details. Although the recent past has brought major changes that have affected all levels of corporate activity, sales methods have not moved significantly. A salesperson directly feels the consequences of this fact; his/her sales methods have lost effectiveness. Therefore, marketing organizations are forced to contemplate their sales strategies and to critically review their approaches on all levels of the buyer-seller-interaction. The quest for a new, effective, and superior sales method is launched.

Challenges

Traditional selling usually is practiced in the form of *specialist counseling.* The economical environment, however, has changed in a way that makes this sales approach less effective. Therefore, it is essential to understand in what settings sales takes place today. Furthermore, a salesperson must be aware of the changes that have occurred in the last few years and that have affected his/her work environment. Thereafter, the following questions must be answered: How can sales competence be enhanced in order to meet the new market demands, and what considerations must a marketing organization take into account when introducing a new selling method?

Goals of this book

With *solution-focused selling,* this book introduces and discusses a new approach for face-to-face sales calls. It illustrates the reasons and necessities for a new sales method, elaborates on instruments and techniques for the practical application, shows implications on various corporate levels, and outlines first evidences of its effectiveness.

In the end, you will be able to answer five core questions:

– What is solution-focused selling?
– How can solution-focused sales make a salesperson more successful?
– How is solution-focus applied in selling?
– When can solution-focused selling be practiced?
– What must a salesperson and his/her marketing organizations consider when introducing and applying solution-focus in sales?

This book helps to build awareness for an alternative sales culture. It provides the chance for marketing organizations and sales specialists to critically review their personal sales methods and gain new perspectives on how sales can take place. This work should also be a window for feedback, questions, suggestions, and any other form of inspiration.

Organization

Part I (“Selling in a Changing Social Market Environment”) provides an overview of today’s marketing and sales environment. In chapter 1, you learn about the importance of personal selling and the manners in which counseling takes place. Furthermore, you are introduced to today’s most popular sales methods. Chapter 2 describes the most relevant changes of the recent past that have affected the salesperson’s work environment and draws some conclusions on the matter.

Part II (“Solution-Focused Selling“) outlines how solution-focus can be applied in sales calls. Chapter 3 sheds light on how solution-focus is already applied today and what practical experiences have been made so far. In Chapter 4, the solution-focus is introduced in its original context of psychotherapy. Chapter 5 shows the commonalities and differences between therapy and selling. Chapter 6 describes how solution-focus can be applied in sales calls, while chapter 7 deals with a few special situations. Part II concludes with chapter 8, which outlines the implications for practice.

Finally, chapter 9 in Part III (“Conclusions“) draws the most important conclusions.

GLOSSARY

Term	*Explanation*
Autopoiesis	A model of characterizing the nature of living systems; describes the process of self-creation and self-preservation of a system
Coaching	A form of counseling that incorporates the fundamentals of solution-focus; advocates that the coach refrains from giving advice
Complementary counseling	A type of counseling that combines specialist and process-counseling
Implementation gap	The discrepancy between the possible and real result of a new solution after implementation
Inbound-marketing	A new perspective on marketing that places the customer in the center of all activities along the corporate value chain
Incompetence Fallacy	The assumption that a client or customer does not possess the required resources to find a suitable solution to a problem
Lethology	The doctrine of ignorance; refers to the attitude of an advisor to refrain from making personal contributions to the content of a consultation
Lip service	An idiom used to describe the situation in which someone complies with a certain obligation to the minimum possible extent
Nescience	Synonym for ignorance
Outbound-marketing	The traditional perspective on marketing that promotes customer contact only in the sales stage of the corporate value chain
Process-counseling	A type of counseling where the advisor acts as change agent and supports the client to find a suitable solution without disposing technical knowledge
Radical constructivism	A perspective in philosophy that views all knowledge as constructed and assumes multiple realities

Resource-orientation	A special attitude in counseling that believes that the client has the ability to solve problems without external advice
Sales call	A seller-buyer interaction of any kind, especially face-to-face (meeting)
Solution-focused brief therapy	A type of talking therapy that focuses on goals, future, and solutions rather than on problems
Specialist-counseling	A type of counseling where the advisor acts as technical expert to create solutions based on specialist knowledge and experience
System theory	A scientific domain that studies structure and properties of systems in terms of relationships

PART I

SELLING IN A CHANGING SOCIAL MARKET ENVIRONMENT

CHAPTER I

SELLING TODAY

In order to understand how current sales methods suffice for today's market environment, it is valuable to consider how selling is embedded in marketing organizations and how it typically takes place in the 21st century.

In this section, you will learn about the importance of marketing management und personal selling for companies today. Furthermore, you will also be introduced to the two classical forms of counseling, in order to understand the origin of modern sales methods. The bulk of this chapter describes the most popular sales methods and their instruments and techniques.

Basics of marketing management and personal selling

Sales can be defined as the exchange of goods and services with monetary or non-financial allowances.[1]

In traditional business administration, selling represents one of the last stages in the corporate value chain and the ultimate connector between the company and its customers.[2] In their marketing communications mix, KOTLER ET AL. divide the entirety of sales activities into six fields: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, events and experiences, direct marketing, and personal selling.[3] The final term, which denotes the actual one-to-one sales call, is defined as "face-to-face interaction with one or more prospective purchasers for the purpose of making presentations, answering questions, and producing orders."[4]

Personal selling is primarily used for products or services that are complex, require explanation, or have high added value. The purpose of personal selling is to support the client at each stage of the buying process by maintaining direct contact and inducing a positive purchase action.[5] The seller's goal is to arouse the customer's interest in the product until he/she eventually makes a purchase.[6]

Due to high personnel costs, personal selling is the most expensive marketing activity. It is vital to properly recruit, constantly train, assess, and supervise sales staff. Other crucial factors that determine a sales force's success are structure, size, and compensation.[7]

A brief reflection on counseling

The definitions of counseling are as versatile as its ranges of application. Depending on the specific context, "counseling" has different meanings. Most of these meanings, however, share some common ground: Counseling denotes a form of communication that aims to solve problems or approach solutions.[8]

Despite these commonalities, differences exist when it comes to the manner in which counseling is practiced. In recent years, a distinction between specialist-counseling and process-counseling has developed.[9] This dichotomy stands for two contrasting approaches that rest on different grounds, use different techniques, and have different characteristics. As KÖNIGSWIESER ET AL. outline:

> "Specialist and process-counselors […] rely on different theoretical models, values and realities. They represent two contradictory schools of thought."[10]

Specialist-counseling

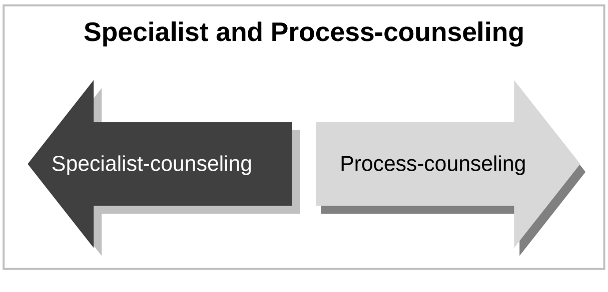
Specialist-counselors are experts who provide recommendations and proposals based on their personal, technical, economic, fiscal, judicial, therapeutic, or other competence. They place the content of a problem in the center of their activities and believe that there is a single objective reality that requires a single best solution.[11] They rely on data sets, analyze processes, and justify their measures with hard facts. Specialist-counselors are often employed due to their analytical objectivity, their knowledge of best practices, and their high efficiency.[12]

Process-counseling

Process-counselors view their clients, whether a company, a team, or an individual, as a complex system. They take into account the interconnectedness and interdependencies of the various elements and believe that any change in one element can cause a chain reaction. They also assume that there are multiple realities and usually many good solutions to a problem. They mainly act as change agents and go along with the client in all stages of the counseling process, including implementation.[13]

Process-counselors do not make recommendations or proposals regarding a technical problem. They believe that the client already disposes of the right resources and see their job as empowering the client to uncover and utilize these competences.

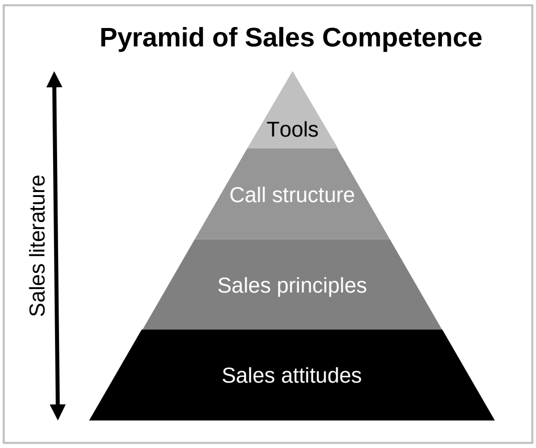
Fundamentals of contemporary sales



While most practitioners, authors, and instructors agree on the *tasks* of a sales force, there are countless opinions of the manner in which selling should be performed. It is generally accepted that the selection of a method depends on numerous factors such as industry, product range, size of sales force, customer groups, market saturation, competitors, availability of information, complexity of the matter, and cultural conditions.[14] Additionally, the relationship between seller and buyer also plays a vital role, as GÜTTINGER outlines:

> "Depending on the relationship—B2B (Business to Business), B2G (Business to Government), B2C (Business to Consumer) or C2C (Consumer to Consumer)—the sales process relies on different rules and norms and requires a different set of sales techniques and tools."[15]

Each sales relationship is unique. As a result, there is no fixed recipe for acting in sales calls, but a vast variety of different methods, instruments, approaches, attitudes, tools, and techniques.[16] This idea is supported by today's market for sales literature. The online shopping platform AMAZON lists an astonishing 35,579 books under the key word *Marketing and Sales*[17], and the Swiss online literature service GETABSTRACT offers 576 abstracts on the same topic, of which 173 focus on personal selling techniques.[18]



Of these 173 books, I researched 23 in detail for this book. I selected them randomly, although I paid attention that their titles did not resemble one another too much in order to ensure a broad variety of different emphasis.[19] The contents of these abstracts and their respective books provided the fundamentals for the upcoming analysis of today's most common sales practices. This book, however, cannot provide a comprehensive description of all valid and accepted practices, especially because the great variety would make this an impossible task. You will nevertheless get a sense for how selling usually takes place today.

The following points are organized according to the pyramid of sales competence, as illustrated.

The market for sales literature

The market for publications on sales can be divided into two groups. The first is dedicated to marketing and strategic selling, whereas the other group focuses on the field of personal selling and conversation competence. Although articles differ with regard to their content, the following common themes and claims can be identified:

Uniqueness: Many authors believe or allege that their contribution somehow reinvents the art of selling. They see their method as the almost-only valid manner of successful selling and typically claim that it is superior to others. This attitude is especially prevalent with American writers.[20]

Customer segmentation: Some articles contain clues for segmenting the clientele. They describe how customers think, to which stimuli they respond, and according to what patterns they act. On this basis, they recommend measures and activities that must be adopted by the salesperson in order to be successful. Sometimes, a profile of the "perfect" salesperson is provided.

Sales stages: Most books structure the sales call in distinctive stages. They argue that a client must pass each of these stages and offer aids and tools with which the seller can navigate through the process. The preparation stage and the closing stage are considered to be most important.

Instruments: The instruments described and recommended are usually introduced in the context of their application. Questions are often described with a reference to their outstanding relevance. Other tools usually concern the fields of handling objections, arguing, closing, and emotionally selling.

Do's and Don'ts: Frequently, the do's and don'ts in selling are discussed at length.

Role model: Most sales methods are based on the role models of the expert and the layman. Many authors perceive the salesperson as a convincer and motivator, and to the client they assign the role of a person who wants to be informed. Very little attention is drawn to the customer's resources and maturity, and if so, this is usually done by European writers.[21]

Basic attitudes of traditional selling

Traditional salespeople tend to perceive themselves as technical experts. They often assign their clients to the role of the layman, who seldom possesses the relevant resources to fix a problem and therefore mostly depends on external help. This leads to a hierarchical role definition, where the seller sees himself/herself in the superior and leading position. From this position of superiority, the seller usually tries to lead throughout the sales call and to convince the client that there is a single best solution.

This so-called "expert attitude" builds on the advisor's competence and implies that there is a single right way for the customer to go. Furthermore, the client is implicitly asked to remain passive and to only *receive* information about the product or service. It is only in the final sales stage where the client can engage actively by commenting on the solution and deciding on the next steps.

Many authors, however, emphasize that this superiority must not be conveyed to the client, since dismissive and arrogant mannerisms will not be rewarded by the customer and can be counter-productive. Nevertheless, this does not change the salesperson's inner attitude, which tends to be based on this role definition.

In the past, the traditional customer usually accepted this role definition happily, because it matched his/her experience and complied with common sense: *The salesperson wants to sell something, so let him/her talk!* Moreover, this willingness was supported by a beneficial side effect: The client could behave like a passive consumer and did not have to play an active part, thus saving energy. Furthermore, the client did not have to take responsibility for designing the content of the conversation or its process.

General sales principles

In the expert attitude described beforehand, the traditional salesperson makes decisions on how to design the sales process and what techniques and instruments to apply. He/she bases his/her actions on a set of generally accepted principles that are described as:

> **Motive theory:** Customers act when they have a motive. It is the seller's task to arouse interest for the matter and evoke a positive expectation for success. After this is accomplished, the seller can initiate the customer's purchasing action with suitable incentives. As GEYER writes:
>
> > "Salespeople want to convince their clients and motivate them to close the deal."[22]
>
> This statement gives paramount importance to motivating and persuading. For the traditional salesperson, it is crucial to create motives that are relevant to the client in order to persuade him/her to buy.
>
> **Cognitive dissonance:** Customers are subject to cognitive dissonance. Internal conflicts can arise when new information does not comport with previous thoughts, opinions, views, desires, or intentions. People then try to eliminate these contradictions by adapting either the new or the old information. This leads to phenomena such as selective attention, selective distortion, or selective retention.[23] Thus, people tend to maintain prior decisions. All new information that undermines these decisions is automatically devalued. A person only acts if the dissonance is great enough to cross a certain threshold of tolerance. The seller aims at creating enough contradiction to make the customer act.
>
> **Generally accepted communication principles:** Most sellers act according to a set of well known communication principles, such as the "anatomy of a message" discussed by SCHULZ VON THUN[24] or the four communication axioms by WATZLAWICK[25]. Additionally, most salespeople are also aware of the practical implications of transaction analysis.[26]

With the awareness of the findings regarding communication processes, most salespeople have developed a sense for social interactions and derived a set of personal measures for sales calls, which are listed hereafter as do's and don'ts.

> **Do's:** The most important behaviors in sales include: using empathy, evoking feelings, analyzing the customer's needs, noticing body language and applying it consciously, listening carefully, prioritizing the client's wishes, paraphrasing, summarizing, inquiring, maintaining dialogues rather than monologues, giving concentrated information, using the client's language, creating a positive atmosphere, and using a pictographic language.

Don'ts: The most frequently committed mistakes are: acting snotty, judging, comforting, asking exaggerated or inappropriate questions, showing irony, commanding, menacing, giving unwanted advice, being vague, holding back information, and engaging in gamesmanship.[27] VERWEYEN names among the main reasons for sales processes failing: unclear goals, lack of information about the client, lack of competence, scruffy appearance, lacking presentation material, weak arguments, arrogance, know-it-all attitude, catechizing, extensive monologues, aggression, allegations, unstructured negotiation, killer phrases, and ignorance of the client's real needs.[28]

Structuring the sales call

On the grounds of the expert attitude and the generally accepted sales principles, practitioners have developed a series of techniques that have become very popular, some of which are introduced here.

Micro models of consumer responses: KOTLER ET AL. describe four classical models of consumer behavior: the AIDA Model, the Hierarchy-of-Effects Model, the Innovation-Adoption Model, and the Communications Model. All of these models are based on the assumptions that the buyer passes through a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral stage in the sales process, as the following table illustrates:[29]

Stages/Models	AIDA Model	Hierarchy-of-Effects Model	Innovation-Adoption Model	Communications Model
Cognitive Stage	Attention	Awareness Knowledge	Awareness	Exposure Reception Cognitive Response
Affective Stage	Interest Desire	Liking Preference Conviction	Interest Evaluation	Attitude Intention
Behavioral Stage	Action	Purchase	Trial Adoption	Behavior

These four models provide orientation guides for the salesperson. By means of these thought patterns and decision processes, the seller can design his/her marketing activities on a strategic (marketing management) and operating level (personal selling). The instruments and aids that the seller uses in order to achieve his/her goal depend on where the client stands in the buying process.

Concepts to structure the sales call: Practitioners have developed the findings of the micro models into concrete concepts that structure the sales call at different stages. As opposed to the micro models of consumer responses, in which the sales process is viewed from the client's perspective, these sales call concepts indicate how the seller can actively structure his/her interaction with the customer.

Some models that have gained popularity include BEDAZA, DIBABA, KOALA, FABV, and VERKAUFSPLAN.[30] Other concepts are offered by VERWEYEN[31] and GEYER.[32] All of these models follow a very similar structure:[33]

> (preparation) → opening → analysis of needs → presentation of products → handling objections → close → (post-sales actions)

The success of each structure depends on various factors. In the end, the seller decides which method he/she finds most suitable. While the importance of structuring a negotiation is undoubted, WITT criticizes such models by claiming that they emerged from practical experience and thus lack scientific evidence of their effectiveness. Furthermore, they also have little psychological profundity.[34]

Basic techniques

Instruments and techniques for each stage of the sales process exist in abundance. They can be classified as question techniques, handling-objections techniques, argumentation techniques, and closing techniques.

Question techniques: Many books and articles make recommendations about how various question types can be used most effectively. Besides the classical segmentation between open-ended and closed-ended questions, one can also distinguish between information questions, alternative questions, leading questions, counter questions, etc. Generally, the importance of open-ended questions is emphasized, and many examples are provided of each type of question.[35]

Handling objections and subterfuge: The customer usually raises an objection or subterfuge when the salesperson tries to convince the client of the benefits of the products. With a subterfuge, the customer dismisses a statement made by the seller with a flat, unqualified, and mostly emotionally colored rejection. Objections imply that the customer has a real interest but still has qualified concerns about the appropriateness of the proposed solution.[36]

Handling objections and subterfuge is of high importance in today's selling literature. Hardly any publication fails to discuss this subject at length or dedicate several pages about how to deal with such reactions. While these techniques do differ in small details from one another, one principle can be found everywhere: Objections and subterfuge are *reactions of resistance* and must be overcome.[37]

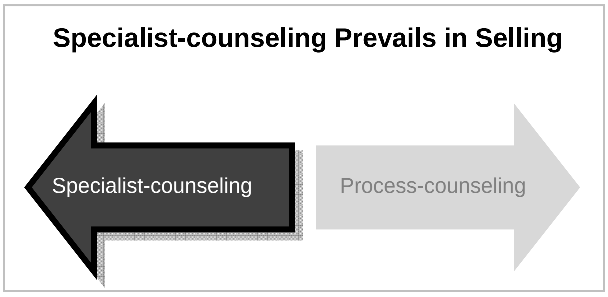
Argumentation techniques: Argumentation techniques are strongly associated with instruments to handle objection and subterfuge. The goal of argumentation is to convince the client of the product's benefits. The quality of the arguments shall increase with the endurance of the sales talk, and the seller should favorably highlight those aspects that are of particular importance to the customer.

Closing techniques: The closing stage is particularly relevant for a sales call, because that is when the success or failure of the sales activity will be determined. Accordingly, the variety of techniques to close a deal is great. TRACY, for instance, offers three methods: the invitational close, the assumptive close, and the direct close.[38] Another famous closing technique is the Socratic Method.[39]

Trends

Every year, countless books and articles are published on the subject of sales. Although there is often little in the way of innovation, some trends might develop into novel methods in the coming years. It is striking that more and more authors demand that companies actually place the customer at the center of their activities. Along with that, they claim to take the customer's remarks more seriously, to accept his/her objections more openly, and to involve him/her in the solution creation more honestly. The concept of inbound marketing[40] is a symbol of this development. In addition, more and more authors focus on the interpersonal aspects of the sales relationship and advocate emotional selling. In this approach, selling does not happen through the product or the service but through feelings and emotions such as security, freedom, prestige, and satisfaction.[41] Similarly, some authors encourage salespeople to sell solutions instead of products or services.[42] They claim that the future lies in comprehensive, integrated systems and not in single, isolated building blocks. More and more attention is paid to sustainable selling. Instead of short-term deals, the sales force should aim to establish long-term relationships that are based on mutual trust. This has become particularly important in industries with complex and sophisticated market offerings. Finally, RACKHAM ET AL. go in a new direction by redefining the role of the sales force.[43] Instead of being a mere value communicator, the salesperson should become an additional-value creator. In other words, the sales department should add value to the product of service, something they usually do not.

Conclusion



Today, salespeople have access to countless publications on all stages of the sales-competence pyramid. While each book and article differs in its details, they allow for the conclusion that today’s sales methods represent typical specialist-counseling. Apparently, specialist-counseling was the right way of selling in the past. As the homogeneity of the recently published literature implies, selling has not developed much in the last few years, as BELZ confirms:

> “For me, one of the great challenges is that many companies say that everything has progressed, but sales methods in their very essence have not.”[44]

This leaves the question open as to the effects that this stasis causes and whether these methods are still appropriate in today’s buyer market. In order to provide a comprehensive answer, it is necessary to consider the recent changes in the salesperson’s environment and their implications for practice.

CHAPTER II

CHALLENGES FOR MARKETING ORGANIZATIONS

Our society has undergone drastic cultural and social change in the last few years. When the state of the economy is considered to be a reflection of our society, one can conclude that the economy and its participants have also changed, regardless of industry, region, or company characteristics. As a consequence, marketing departments, as the salesperson's organization, are forced to conform to new circumstances in order to maintain sales effectiveness.

In the following sections, you will learn about the most relevant recent changes and how they affect marketing organizations. At the end of the chapter, you will learn how today's sales methods, as described in Chapter 1, respond to current challenges.

The terms buyer, client, customer, consumer and seller, salesperson, and vendor are used interchangeably.

Current challenges posed by the buyer

On the buyer's side, a series of major changes can be held responsible for the change from the traditional consumer to the new consumer, including the information revolution, increased corporate-governance requirements, self-service platforms, and changes in cultural values.

The role of the information revolution

The overwhelming victories of the internet and the daily free press stand as exemplars of the development of the information society. Among others, these factors have had a tremendous impact on people's relationship with information and communication. Today, information is better accessible than a decade ago, news is published faster and with shorter time lags, the need for information and for the feeling of being informed has risen, and people in our culture have developed autonomy to inform themselves. The results of this evolution for marketing organizations are manifold, two of which are of crucial relevance: First, clients are better informed, and second, they have greater confidence in their own expertise. ZECH writes:

> "[…] the modern customer is more critical. In general, he/she is better informed and more suspicious about the seller's advertorial promises than the traditional buyer."[45]

RACKHAM ET AL. argue:

> "Today, there is a wealth of information available to consumers. They appear much more willing to do their homework and research their

> intended purchases. They are much better armed with hard factors and less vulnerable to softer, less tangible elements like reputation or image."[46]

From these findings, two crucial conclusions can be drawn:[47]

> **1) The customers' need for involvement has risen.** Because clients are better informed, they bring more expertise and greater confidence to the sales call. They therefore want to participate more actively in the sales process. They are no longer willing to accept being treated as laymen or worse, as uninformed people in need of instruction. This *emancipation of the layman* can also be found in other professions. Students are more critical, parishioners question religious beliefs, and patients want to be involved in the search for a solution to their ailment. Nowadays, teachers, priests, and doctors serve in a different work environment than just a few years ago and have had to reflect on their natural behaviors towards their clients; that is, saying how something is and giving advice about what to do.[48] In the case of sales, this implies that all activities that contain fragments of teaching, preaching, or prescribing bear the risk of being rejected by the customer.

> **2) The requirements of a salesperson's technical expertise have risen.** Because customers are better informed than in the past, they bring more personal expertise into the sales call. They want to have discussions on a higher and more sophisticated level. They want to talk to specialists that still know more than them.[49] Again, this trend can be seen in other fields: More and more, employers tend to engage technical experts, doctors specialize in a certain field, and scientists' research has become more specialized. Similarly, the customer has developed a demand for specialization.

This evolution makes great demands on the product development and distribution departments of marketing organizations. On the one hand, suppliers constantly face a tradeoff between customization and batch production. On the other hand, the abstraction and complexity of some products and services (e.g. in the financial industry) challenge customers if they want to understand them in their entirety.

Corporate Governance

Corporate governance denotes the collectivity of all principles and rules that guide the structure and behavior of a company's top management.[50] Corporate governance has increased in importance over the last few years. This development was partly triggered by the scandals of multinational corporations like ENRON, WORLDCOM, and PARMALAT. In such situations, the public usually questions the accountability of managers: Under what circumstances can company leaders be held accountable for their duties?

The increased awareness of these issues has affected the decision process within companies. Managers are less willing to pay a consultant for adjusting a standardized solution to the specific situation and simply hope that it will turn out as successfully as it has in similar cases in the past. Moreover, the possibility of outsourcing the responsibility for a major decision along with an executive task has almost vanished, displaced by the belief that solutions must be completely individualized to be successful. Furthermore, there is a clear need for knowing and understanding a solution in its details, since managers must take responsibility for their decisions again.[51]

Self-service platforms

In the ongoing attempt to rationalize processes and to save resources, numerous forms of self-service platforms have occurred. On such platforms, the customer answers a set of questions (input), while every answer triggers the next question so long as a suitable solution (output) is provided. Consequently, the communication interaction shifts from man-man to man-machine.

Self-service platforms are operated by both producers and retailers, which leads to a considerable variety of distribution channels such as online shops and sales gates. There are also the so-called comparison services, which offer the possibility of comparing goods and services in order to evaluate different suppliers. As a result, the comparability of goods and services improves, and buyers can inform themselves more quickly and conveniently.[52]

Rudiments of self-service platforms can also be found in sales talks. In the financial industry, for instance, it is still common to ask a set of questions in order to categorize customers into specific groups of investors. The bank representative will then promote the services that were specifically created for this type of investor, regardless of other factors that might influence the suitability of the solution.[53]

Self-service platforms especially qualify for standardized decision-making processes and predictable, non-customizable offers. The quality of the output, however, relies heavily on the quality of the input, which basically is determined by the set of questions that were asked. Thus, the concision and relevance of the questions play a vital role as well as the manner in which answers can be given.

The popularity of self-service distribution channels is a direct result of technological progress and the increased demand of the clientele to shop quickly, conveniently, and independently from time and place. In certain industries, this type of marketing has almost substituted for the sales talk between two people, but it also contributed to building awareness among customers for the different kinds of seller-buyer interactions. For sales, this implies that some markets explicitly have a demand for self-service platforms, while others need personal counseling and individual, tailor-made solutions.[54]

Changes in cultural values – The new consumer

The changes described beforehand have generated a new type of consumer who considers time, attention and trust as the new commodities:

> "While the purchasing habits of the traditional consumer are/were driven by supply shortages, the *new* buyer is usually short of time and, as a result, of potential attention. Therefore, the new buyer is glad to pay more if he/she can save in one or the other direction."[55]

The new consumers act individualistically, proactively, with emotional independence and more information. They also strive for authenticity of goods and services:

> "Goods and services that are perceived as authentic are worth their money because they excel through quality and reliability and represent a long-term, potentially increasing value [...]. The affection of authenticity, however, lies deeper, in the psyche of all human beings: Self-fulfillment is the buzz-word. In their quest for the genuine and the authentic [product], the New Consumers actually search themselves."[56]

To summarize, the new clients are better informed, more autonomous, critical, active, and emancipated than before. They want to shape their goods in questions of design and production, contribute to the solution-finding process, and broaden their technical knowledge. The new consumers strive for authentic and individualized solutions and want to choose from different options. They want to be respected, to be taken seriously, and to talk on a high technical level that matches their personal expertise.

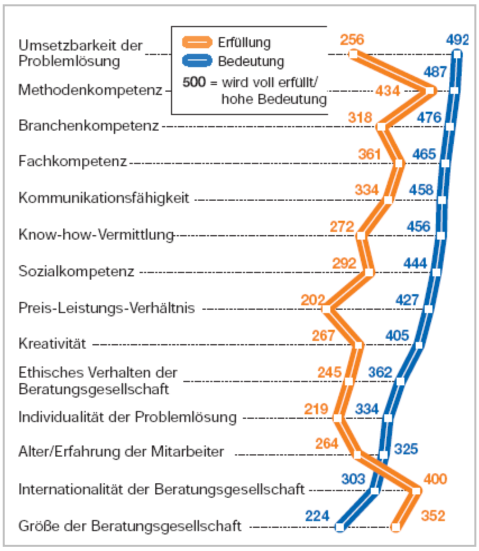
Current challenges posed by the seller

On the seller side, the major challenges are posed by implementation gap, lip service, changing trend awareness, complexity of sales, and globalization and competition.

The Implementation Gap[57]

FINK, a German professor of Economics, conducted a survey among 224 German business executives about the image and competence of 10 German business advisors. A portion of the survey was devoted to the importance and fulfillment of 14 criteria that are often used in choosing a business advisor. The survey participants could award between 100 and 500 points for each criterion, 500 meaning the criterion was met to a high standard. The aim of the survey was to show discrepancies between the importance and the fulfillment of the criteria, as shown in the diagram. A summary of the results was published in MANAGERMAGAZIN.[58]

"Practicability of the solution" was by far the most important rational criterion in the selection of a business advisor, with 492 points. However, with just 256 points in the fulfillment, this criterion also showed the greatest discrepancy. This leaves the question of the reasons behind the so-called *implementation gap*. Why were the advisors of the survey participants unable to reach a higher level of customer satisfaction in the implementation? SUTRICH ET AL. offer a possible reason, suggesting that in many places, models are used that have been proven successful in other businesses. In doing so, the specific differences of the new organization are not considered. Standard solutions may or may not be suitable in certain situations; as KÖNIGSWIESER ET AL. point out,



"Something can be right in one company and wrong in another."[59]

For the business-advisor industry, these findings suggest that one must not simply set standardized solutions but evaluate each case individually and provide a solution that is tailored to the particular situation. However, past experiences and the learning effect of previous cases should not be totally ignored. In fact, changing the basic attitude, a general rethinking and the adaptation of the advisory culture would probably be enough to reduce the implementation gap considerably.

The same conclusion applies to traditional selling. Everywhere, where not only products are sold but demanding and complex solutions are sought, the role of the advisor becomes more important. In such situations, a salesperson is a business advisor confronted with the challenge of keeping the gap between the importance and the fulfillment of the solution as small as possible.

Lip service

Few businesses today would not claim the client is the center of their efforts. The extent to which client centricity is internalized, however, differs from company to company and even within the different stages of the value chain of one and the same institution. The financial industry offers a useful example. Being a service industry with demanding clientele, service providers always strive to provide the customer with a feeling of appreciation. At the same time, however, they operate their marketing activities under the principles of outbound marketing.[60] In doing so, services are mainly developed without the active involvement of the client, and it is left to the sales force to create a need if it does not exist yet. ZECH points out:

> "A survey among 3,000 marketing directors of leading British companies has shown that client orientation is still rather a lip service than systematic practice; a client specific relationship management and a customization of products and services are still considered to be unimportant aspects of client retention programs."[61]

This statement is backed by BLÄTTLER:

> "The meaning of client orientation is generally accepted, yet hardly anyone is acting so."[62]

Lip service can progress to an internal or external problem. On the one hand, customers might lose faith in the company when they realize that they do not stand in the center of the relationship despite the sales representative's claims that they do. On the other hand, salespeople can face a moral conflict when they want to advise in terms of the customer's needs but simultaneously have to meet contradictory sales objectives. The situation worsens when a single company or an entire industry is discredited and faced with reduced credibility. Again, the banking industry offers an interesting example: Due to the industry's above-average compensation policies and opaque fee structures, it faces harsh criticism. A representative survey conducted by the SWISS BANKING ORGANIZATION on a yearly basis since 2001 shows that only 51% (on average) of the Swiss population have a positive or very positive opinion of the banking industry.[63] Fortunately for the banks, this has not persuaded the customers to act, since banking clients have proven to be rather inert.[64]

Changing trend awareness

Fashions and trends are especially relevant for the textile industry, but they are also marketed by service providers with great success. Once more, banks excel at marketing fads: Thanks to skillful marketing activities, they wrote a mere success story by complementing traditional (and low-margin) asset management with lucrative alternative investments (e.g. hedge funds, private equity, commodities, etc.) and even more profitable structured products. Although it is disputed whether these trends originated from a market demand or were merely pushed by the media, it is undisputed that the sales force is highly motivated to market these high-margin solutions, even more so when they are financially rewarded.

Increased competition and shrinking margins in crowded markets have led to a multitude of product variations and have increased the degree of complexity of goods and services, not just in the financial industry. As soon as this development leads to a state were the customer is overburdened, the demand for familiar, seasoned, and reliable solutions will rise again.[65]

FINK identifies a rethinking on the customer's side and writes with regard to the consulting industry:

> "The trends that have magnified the business of many consultants no longer prevail. Clients want to get basic services, nothing more."[66]

This appraisal refers to a general trend and has not been factually proven by FINK. Nevertheless, it represents a great challenge for companies, as many salespeople must rethink their strategies as a result of this development. FINK concludes:

> "It will be tough to adjust to this progress, since many consultants have internalized to market trends. Companies with high methodological competence will benefit from this development."[67]

Complexity of sales

Increased competition and declining profits have driven the necessity of higher effectiveness in sales. The phenomenon that marketing organizations face a multitude of different tasks that they can barely manage, is referred to as complexity of sales by BELZ ET AL.[68]

BLEICHER defines complexity as the trait of systems to adopt a multitude of different states within a given time span.[69] The complexity of marketing systems has increased dramatically in the last years. BELZ ET AL. state:

> "The diversity of rules and tasks that sales people face manifests in many distinct goals, broad product lines, a high number of customers to care of as well as extensive internal requests from IT, reporting, internal surveys, order flow, feedback, projects, meetings, workshops, seminars, etc. Usually, these measures are flanked by programs for productivity increase and cost cutting, which in turn decreases the resources relative to the tasks."[70]

BELZ ET AL. also define a set of complexity drivers, including customers and markets, performance, regions, distribution channels, support-systems, planning, and leadership.[71] The consequences of overburdening complexity in sales can be seen as fatal, since companies more and more deal with self-made problems.[72]

> "Complexity in sales results in an overload of the sales staff and in the loss of business, since the sales staff can only care about a small fraction of the targeted tasks."[73]

Moreover, BELZ ET AL. assume that the sales force does not even suffer consciously under this complexity, but that they master the difficulties quite competently—but only for themselves, because they take measures of defense such as short-term alignment of the sales activities, emphasis on the safe business and suppression of innovations and new products, concealment of knowledge gaps (both internally and externally), retreat to familiar market penetration rituals, neglect of duties, individual simplification of tasks, separation, and struggle against internal guidelines.[74]

The consequences of overburdening complexity in sales are by no means desirable. Fortunately, the company's management can avoid, reduce, or control certain complexity drivers. Exposure to complexity can therefore amount to a competitive advantage, since the company has the ability to differentiate itself from its competitors.[75] Consequently, it is essential to manage complexity actively and not to accept it as a matter of fact.

Globalization and competition

Not least due to ongoing globalization, competition has risen significantly in developed markets. New organizations push into saturated markets and regions and try to get a hold of a piece of the cake by applying all kinds of different strategies. As a result, innovations and novelties are copied quickly, niches are difficult to defend, and product lines assimilate more and more.[76] All of this has made it harder for companies to differentiate themselves from their competitors through product specifications. The requirements for all processes of the corporate value chain, including marketing and sales, have risen.

How current sales methods respond to these challenges

The world has changed, and these changes have directly affected the environments that marketing organizations and their sales forces face. More and more, traditional sales methods are approaching their limits. Due to their homogeneity, the tools and techniques lose their effectiveness, because clientele become accustomed to and less receptive of recurrent approaches. Furthermore, selling usually takes place as specialist-counseling and therefore does less to satisfy the customers' need for involvement, self-determination, maturity, freedom of choice, equality, authenticity, transparency, and independence. Moreover, the modern customers are more critical, confident, and competent. They want to actively participate in the sales process and engage in a discussion that matches their level of technical expertise. Modern customers no longer accept implementation gaps, since they are forced to take full responsibility for their decision. As a result, they need to understand a solution in detail and can no longer accept a seller's proposal without critical and independent reflection.

The above criteria call for stronger process-counseling in the sales process. Marketing organizations in general and their salespeople in particular must review their own sales methods and assess how much process competence they already possess. If they determine that process skills are lacking, they must consider closing this gap. This leaves the question of how to enhance process competence in order to better meet today's sales requirements. One possibility is to apply solution-focus, as outlined in Part II.

PART II

SOLUTION-FOCUS IN SELLING

CHAPTER III

SOLUTION-FOCUS IN SELLING: STATUS QUO

Introducing solution-focus

Solution-focus is the convergence of attitude, mindset, and conviction. It is based on the premise that solutions do not necessarily have to be associated with the problem and that consulters generally possess the resources to autogenously create the solutions for their self-made problems.

The solution-focused counseling approach has its origins in the work of the American psychotherapists STEVE DE SHAZER and INSOO KIM BERG and was developed in the early 1980's as a method for psychotherapy at the BRIEF FAMILY THERAPY CENTER in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is inspired by the life works of MILTON H. ERICKSON and GREGORY BATESON and basically arose with attentive observation of real cases.[77]

The solution-focus approach represents a counter-approach to traditional counseling, in which the client and the counselor spend a great deal of time and energy on problem analysis. By contrast, in solution-focused brief therapy, the problem is the core of the discussion only until both the client und the therapist understand the problem or concern on a broad level. Thereafter, the discussion focuses solely on the future and on the solution-finding process.

Solution-focus has become very popular over the last few years, especially with the new economy, and has made its way out of the therapy room and into the offices of innovative and modern companies where it is better known as “coaching.” As a result, the consultancy industry has been split into two divisions: On one side, there are traditional expert advisors who practice specialist-counseling, in which they make suggestions and give advice to their clients based on their experience and expertise. On the other side are the process-counselors who consider themselves change agents and define as their core task the enabling of the client to obtain access to his/her own resources. Further fields of application can be found in schools, prisons, nursing homes, and employment agencies.

Solution-focused counseling, as it is applied in therapy and in coaching, provides a foundation for the sales method that will be introduced at a later stage. Chapter 4 will describe this method and its origins in greater detail.

Before delving into the details of solution-focus, it is essential to know how and where solution-focused elements are currently applied and to outline what results its practitioners have achieved. The results from research on these occurrences are discussed below and are followed by a review of the effectiveness of the method.

Research

The Economic & Business Information Center (EBIC) is the center of competence for information sourcing and processing of a large Swiss bank. EBIC's eleven employees conduct research for all of the bank's internal departments and maintain a library for publications on economics and banking. Furthermore, they provide a daily press review and offer assistance for all information-related matters.

In fall of 2006, EBIC's specialists produced research on the topic of solution-focus in sales. They searched according to the following grid:

Key Words (Languages used: English, German)		Connectors
Lösungsorientierung	process-counselling	Verkauf
Lösungsorientiert	Ressourcenorientierung	Verkaufsgespräch
lösungsorientiertes	ressourcenorientiert	Verkaufssituation
Solution-focus	ressourcenorientiertes	Verhandlung
solution-focused	resource-oriented	Verhandlungsgespräch
solution-centered	esource-centered	Verhandlungssituation
Systemisch	Coaching	Sales
systemic	Client coaching	face-to-face selling
Kurztherapie	Konstruktivismus	selling situation
Komplementärberatung	Moderation	
Prozessberatung		

Key word searches were performed in the following databases:

- Factiva (specialized on press; worldwide, all languages)
- GBI Genios (trade magazines, press; German)
- WIWI Solution (trade magazines)
- Ebsco (trade magazines, financial press; English)
- Lexis Nexis (press, trade magazines; worldwide)
- Google (internet search engine; worldwide)

The lead researcher commented on the results:

> "Unfortunately, you are right with the assumption that there are not many […] publications that treat selling in connection with coaching or solution-focus."[78]

EBIC found only a few articles that mentioned coaching and solution-focus in connection with training and supervision of the sales force. No publications were discovered where solution-focus was described in the context of a buyer-seller-interaction. I complemented EBIC's research by searching with the same keywords in the following databases in January 2007:

- Cinahl 82+
- EconLIT 69+
- FRANCIS 1984+

- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences 51+
- Philosopher's Index 40+
- PsycCRITIQUES
- PsycInfo
- Psyndex Plus (including Testfinder)
- Wiso
- Google

The results of this research confirm EBIC's findings. Although there are many articles on how to use solution-focus in connection with the sales force, very few published records refer to using the method in client interactions. There were three rudimentary instances in which this did occur.

> **Case 1:** In 2003, RADATZ gave an interview to the trade magazine DIREKT MARKETING, where she proposed to coach the customer in the sales process.
>
> > "If a client wants to buy a car, systemic questions will make him/her contemplate and decide what product could be most suitable."[79]
>
> RADATZ understands coaching of clients as an approach to consulting and sales where the product is not the sole focus of the sales talk. Instead, the seller wants to find a tailor-made solution, regardless as to whether this solution can be provided or not. In this respect, coaching also serves as an innovation driver.[80]
>
> With respect to the benefits of coaching in sales, she states:
>
> > "The cognitive dissonance is mitigated strongly, since this approach also serves for removing doubts. Only then one can say which product or whether any product at all should be considered with regard to the client's criteria. The client himself/herself finds what he/she needs. This means that systemic sales-coaching shifts the focus from the seller to the buyer."
>
> RADATZ and her team at the INSTITUTE FOR SYSTEMIC COACHING AND TRAINING in Vienna developed their understanding of coaching in sales six years ago, but did not publish on this topic. At the time, they found that, because the mindset of the industry was still based on very traditional views, the time was not ripe for this sales method and that it was too early to market it. She still claims that this approach is both unknown and unpracticed today. However, she sees a changing trend and is confident that the topic will increase in popularity.[81]
>
> **Case 2:** In 2006, LUEGER ET AL. published a series of articles written by independent authors on solution-focused management.[82] Therein, SPROSON

describes how he used solution-focused tools to train a team of business-development advisors whose task was to sell the services of a British university to industry.

The initial training consisted of a workshop in which SPROSON used some solution-focused methods to train the sales force in effective selling, including scaling questions and miracle questions. In subsequent review meetings, the trainees reported how successful they were in selling the services. In one of these gatherings, SPROSON introduced them to the theory of solution-focus. The salespeople than began to brainstorm about how to use these instruments in their interactions with the clients.

> "It appears that one difficulty the Development Team often faced was in overcoming a company's apparent inability to recognize the need to innovate. Some quite plainly had little concern for product life cycle, blaming market downturn for a drop in sales. The advisers immediately saw the benefits of using the 'miracle question' as part of their scenario in helping customers articulate a future vision and utilize scaling to help them appreciate how that vision might be achieved. Another suggestion was to use the 'what else' question, when identifying personal reasons for making decisions."[83]

Case 3: In 2007, FREUDENTHALER published the article "Verkaufserfolg nachhaltig sichern" in LERNENDE ORGANISATION, a magazine dedicated to systemic coaching in management and organizations.[84] Therein, she raises the idea of applying the systemic-constructivist view not only to salespeople but also to clients. She compared the two mindsets in sales (specialist and process-counseling) as follows:

Traditional mindset in sales	Systemic-constructivist mindset in sales
Sellers want to motivate for purchase	People do not like to be directed
The seller possesses the competence – he/she demonstrates the product's benefits to the client. All benefits are given and the same for every customer.	The buyer possesses the competence – he/she is the expert for his/her concerns and defines the suitable solution as well as the benefits
The seller is responsible for the solution	The seller is responsible for the process of finding a solution
Customers are categorized to certain types	Customers are no machines; they possibly behave differently in each system
There is *one* correct sales method	There are multiple sales methods, according to the salesperson's character
The customer is king	The customer is an equal partner

FREUDENTHALER, however, dedicated the article to the use of systemic coaching in training and supervising the sales force. No further comments were made about using these instruments in client interactions.

Practical experience to evidence effectiveness

As SPROSON experienced, the use of solution-focused tools in sales coaching can prove to be very effective, especially in situations where traditional sales methods may struggle. His conclusion is backed by a series of practical experiences that were made by sales representatives and relationship managers of a Swiss bank. The employees met with existing clients or prospects for review meetings or sales pitches, respectively. The tools that were applied are described in detail in Chapter 6. The results of these applications are outlined below.

Case 1: "Change of perspectives" in use[85]

Background: In June 2006, BLÄTTLER visited a mid-size Swiss pension fund. The fund had no prior business relationship with the bank, but a preliminary meeting had taken place before the one in June. In this first meeting, the client expressed his general interest in an asset-liability-analysis, and they reconvened to discuss this issue in detail. The goal of the meeting was that the client would purchase the service.

Experience: After BLÄTTLER had briefed the client on the topic, he wanted to learn more about the client's opinion. To do this, he asked the client to assess the service from various perspectives:

– *How would you, as the fund's director, benefit from this analysis?*
– *How would the fund's investment committee benefit from it?*
– *And what would be the advantages for your recipients?*

To these questions, the client replied with the same keywords that were typically used by BLÄTTLER to convince the client of the service's benefits.

Conclusion: Due to the systemic questions, the client was motivated to contemplate. The change of perspectives also stimulated the client to value the service from the standpoint of other stakeholders. By using positive language, the client literally sold the service to himself. There was no further negotiation needed, and the client did not raise any objections or pretences. The deal was closed.

Case 2: "The scaling question" in use (1)[86]

Background: In the summer of 2006, FEHR held a review meeting with a mid-size manufacturer of medical equipment. The client had handled its pension services through the bank for many years and always claimed to be very satisfied with both the services and the care. FEHR's task was to present the investment's performance of the last year to a committee of several people.

Experience: After FEHR had completed the information session, he wanted to learn about the customer's satisfaction regarding the quality of advice by asking:

- *On a scale from 1 to 10 – where 1 means "not at all" and 10 means "couldn't be better" – how satisfied are you with the quality of advice that you receive from me?*

After the chairman had indicated *8 to 9,* FEHR asked about the reasons for this high score. The chairman added that he appreciates the performance of the investment, the transparency of the reports, and the competence of the advisor. Afterwards, FEHR asked what it would need to score a 10. The client replied that he would like to meet the bank representative twice a year instead of only once.

Conclusion: Due to the uncommonness of the scaling question, FEHR was able to intimate that the client actually thought about things that could be improved. The client took the time and made efforts to seriously think about what the bank could do to further improve her satisfaction. With this, FEHR had a good chance to strengthen the client relationship and to decrease the risk of a client loss. He is convinced that he would not have gotten this information with the use of common open questions such as, "How satisfied are you?" or, "What could I do to make you even happier?" He completely assigns the success of this interview to the scaling question.

Case 3: "The scaling question" in use (2)[87]

Background: In November 2005, BLÄTTLER visited the Swiss branch of a large international retailer. Although the domestic company already maintained a business relationship with the bank, BLÄTTLER hoped to sell additional services to the headquarters of the group. He was accompanied by the relationship manager of the client, who first reviewed the investment's performance of the previous six months.

It was determined quickly that the contact person did not have the authority to make decisions on the group's assets. It therefore became a mere relationship-management discussion, and BLÄTTLER used the opportunity to scale the client's satisfaction.

Experience: BLÄTTLER asked the client how he would score his satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10. The client rated the service as an 8, and noted that he appreciated the care and support of the bank's relationship manager. BLÄTTLER then asked what it would take to score one point higher. The client specified that the score would increase with the length of the business relationship, since long-term collaboration was vital in the eyes of the client. After BLÄTTLER asked *what else* it would need, the client had no additional criterion. BLÄTTLER, however, repeated the "what else" question, and thanks to his persistence, the client replied that he would appreciate being contacted and updated by the bank more frequently.

Conclusion: Due to the scaling question, the bank representatives discovered how they can best satisfy their client's needs. The persistence that was applied by using "what else" questions forced the client to really think about concrete measures that the bank could undertake to increase customer satisfaction and was a crucial part of this interview.

Case 4: "Focusing on the client" in use[88]

Background: In late 2006, BLÄTTLER was invited to present the bank's services to the investment committee of a mid-sized company in the printer industry. All presenters had been informed of the relevant topics in advance and were asked to submit a written proposal prior to the date of presentation. In this so-called "beauty contest", BLÄTTLER and his companion wanted to convince the committee of the bank's outstanding service quality.

Experience: Before beginning the presentation, BLÄTTLER took some 20 minutes to ask the committee members a set of questions concerning preferences, interests, relevant topics, priorities, preparation, previous knowledge, expectations, etc. Although the task was actually clear and although he could have used these 20 minutes—which represented a third of the total time allocated for the presentation—to position his company and services, BLÄTTLER started with a moderation to determine what deliverables were needed to win over the audience.

Conclusion: From the beginning, BLÄTTLER perceived the client as a system and was aware that there were relationships and interdependencies among the system's elements. By respecting each member of the group, he gained valuable information about the preferences of the committee and about how he might best use the additional 40 minutes to tailor the presentation to the client's needs. Although the contract was awarded to a competitor (primarily for political reasons), BLÄTTLER received phenomenal feedback for the manner in which he designed the presentation.

Case 5: "Focusing on the future" in use[89]

Background: In the summer of 2006, BLÄTTLER had a meeting with the investment officer of a congregation. Since the church was not yet a client, BLÄTTLER wanted to become a partner by selling some financial services. At the beginning of the meeting, the prospect suddenly became aware that the church already did business with one of the bank‘s subsidiaries and did not want to expand this business relationship. The meeting was over before it had started.

BLÄTTLER, however, opened by asking a series of questions to determine how satisfied the customer was in his current situation. The client always replied that he was very satisfied and that there was not a single need. The prospect also stated that this very positive rating was mostly attributable to one man on the investment committee who brought a lot of knowledge to the committee.

Experience: BLÄTTLER persisted in asking how the client sees his situation developing in the near future. At this point, the prospect dropped his resistance, admitting that this specialist was preparing to retire by the end of the year and that the future was still very uncertain. He also admitted that he would appreciate any input about how they could organize themselves after the person's departure and what other issues they had to consider.

Conclusion: Only by shifting the focus from the past or present to the future did Blättler gain access to the client and have the chance to engage in a constructive conversation. This case illustrates how solution-based discussions and a future orientation can positively influence a client's openness and willingness to critically review his/her situation.

Conclusion

Research shows that there is very little literature that actually mentions solution-focus in connection with sales interactions. In cases where this was done, there were only rudiments of this, and no author has either published on the topic or conducted empirical research of any sort. Anecdotal experience with the use of solution-focus in sales has already been made. Although they do not represent empirical evidence, they do highlight the potential of this approach.

CHAPTER IV

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF SOLUTION-FOCUS

The following sections elaborate the theoretical and practical basics of the solution-focused counseling model. Abundance literature on the application of the solution-focus in therapy and coaching already exists.[90] Therefore, the following remarks focus on those aspects that are relevant for the next chapters.

The terms advisor, coach, counselor, and therapist; and client, consulter, patient, and coachee are used interchangeably and denote the two parties involved in the counseling relationship.

Theory fundamentals and practical observations

The solution-focused approach was developed inductively through observations of psychotherapeutic life cases. Two of the most important findings are that the solution to a problem does not necessarily require a deep understanding of the problem and that the client always has the capacity to solve a problem himself. These observations are supported by a number of theories, whose most relevant representatives include radical constructivism, autopoiesis, and general system theory.

The following remarks cover the practical findings that affected the instruments and sequences of solution-focused consultancy. They also describe the basic theory underpinning the mindset and conviction of a solution-focused counselor.

The solution is not linked to the problem

DE SHAZER has discovered that the Western world has always assumed that the constitution of a problem determines its solution. As a result, the belief has persisted that a deep understanding of the problem must be the first step toward a better future. By observing therapy sessions, DE SHAZER discovered that certain interventions also caused positive and desirable changes, even if the therapist did not know every detail of the problem.[91]

Solution-focused advisors are convinced that a problem does not necessarily predict the solution and that a full understanding of the issue is not needed to find a suitable solution.[92] The analogy of chess can help here: The current disposition of the chess pieces contains all of the information about the actual state, but for the solution of the game it is irrelevant how this disposition was accomplished.

WATZLAWICK ET AL. share this opinion by adding:

> "While […] the insight into the genesis of the current difficulty might indeed allow for a very plausible and intellectually satisfactory explanation, it hardly ever contributes to a solution."[93]

Both DE SHAZER and WATZLAWICK ET AL. admit that the past can have a causal effect on present behavior. Since the past cannot be altered, however, there is no need for it to be comprehensively analyzed. They claim that the impact of the past on the present is solely determined by the interpretation of it. A change in this interpretation might already be a step toward a future solution.[94]

Brief-therapists do generally not look for a cause, which differentiates their job fundamentally from those of traditional therapists. Whatever the cause of a problem, its continuation is linked to the context in which it appears and to the expectation that it will persist.[95] All questions about the past aim not at discovering causes, but at finding successful or unsuccessful patterns that could be vital for future behavior.[96]

Radical constructivism

Radical constructivism is the concept that every human being as a sensory creature does not objectively perceive reality but rather invents or constructs it itself. When three different people describe the same situation, they will tell three different stories. In doing so, there is no right and no wrong. Each observer reports the story in his/her own manner and according to the individual perception at the time of the happening. Therefore, there is no such thing as an objective reality:

> “Reality is created in the eye of the observer.“[97]

Whenever a person describes or judges a thing or a situation, he/she tends to apply his/her own views that seem to be somewhat *real*. Consequently, there will never be two people who experience the same thing at the same time in the same manner. Every perception first goes through the personal filter of the observer and is then influenced by a multitude of factors that will exert a distractive influence: emotional state, experiences, expectations, beliefs, moral, mindset, etc. Hence, human descriptions can never be *objective* but always are *subjective*.

WATZLAWICK claims that reality is simply the result of communication, and that the belief that there is only one true reality is a dangerous self-delusion.[98] Therefore, countless perceptions of reality exist, each of which can conflict and all of which are solely the result of communication. DE JONG ET AL. affirm this concept with regard to traditional counseling practices:

> “The awareness of the facts that the clients’ perceptions and definitions change and that there are multiple definitions of realities among clients contributes to the skepticism regarding the appropriateness of a scientifically justified, problem-solving approach. If problems and solutions are mainly a matter of definition, and if those definitions can change over time and in cooperative interaction with others, how can these problems and solutions be ‘real’ in an objective, universal and scientifically ascertainable sense?”[99]

Thus, radical constructivism teaches that an advisor can never be sure that his/her understanding of what clients say is congruent with what these clients really mean.

As a result, any solution developed and proposed by the advisor can never fully fit into the clients' frameworks, since the solution was created in the reality and reference framework of the advisor.

Resource-orientation

In the same manner that people create their own realities, they also create their own problems. They are therefore also capable of creating the solutions to their problems. This proposal constitutes the concept of *resource-orientation*, which represents the conviction that every client already has the skills, knowledge, and experience to create solutions. Since the client can usually not access these solutions, the task of the solution-focused counselor is to make these resources accessible and utilizable so that the client is able to create solutions autogenously. With this approach, all solutions fit perfectly into the client's reference framework and reality, and they therefore enjoy great acceptance. DE SHAZER applies the resource-orientation consequently in his work:

> "The whole […] therapy is based on the thesis that the client develops his/her own solution on the grounds of his/her own resources and successes."[100]

Resource-orientation is a key element of the solution-focus and is at the same time the single most important difference with traditional advisory.

Autopoiesis

The term autopoiesis goes back to MATURANA[101] and denominates the process of self-creation and self-preservation of a system. LUHMANN has applied MATURANA's concept for the examination of social structures. According to his beliefs, people only perceive those things from their environment that fit into their frameworks and can be connected to the previous senses of communication.[102] This means that people, provided that they can influence their behavior, always do what makes the most sense at a specific moment. As a result, most people take no stock in advice, since the advisor cannot understand their limited scope of perception or the reason why these people act in a particular manner. Moreover, the advisor never knows what he/she will initiate in the clients and what impact this will have on the counseling process. In the end, people must find sense in executing a given action.[103]

Systemic thinking

According to DE SHAZER, a human system does not only consist of the sum of its components (elements) but also of the relationships among these components.[104] Practitioners of brief-therapy put the emphasis of their work on the systemic concept of the entirety, whereby a change in one element of a system or in one of the existing relationships may also cause other elements and relationships to change.

DE SHAZER confirms:

> "The general system theory has for long relied on the principle that a difference or a change in one part of the system results in feedback (and transformation) in other parts of the system. This simple thought constitutes the fundamentals of brief-therapy […]."[105]

For the brief-therapist, behavior, emotions, thoughts, and perceptions and their specific context are all part of the same system. A difference in behaving, feeling, thinking, or perceiving will necessarily affect the basic pattern.[106] To think systemically means to replace cause-and-effect sequences with circular, multifactor approaches. Systemic circular thinking pays tribute to interdependencies among the behavior of all system elements. However, it never looks for causes or culprits. Instead, it tries to discover the impact of certain communication patterns and relationships on the behavior of the client. In the end, it wants to find those factors that proved to be successful in the past to continue them in the future.[107]

Instruments of solution-focus

Solution-focused counseling uses a set of specific instruments to uncover the client's resources and empower him/her to create solutions. These instruments are also called interventions and they usually suffice to initiate the client's solution-finding process so that the advisor can abandon an advisory role.[108]

The following sections describe the classical instruments used in therapy and coaching. Some of them are unique to solution-focused counseling, while others are also applied in other fields of social interaction. The effectiveness of these instruments is determined by the user; the manner and timing in which the interventions are performed are crucial. This chapter discusses the basics of these classical instruments, while Chapter 6 describes in detail how these interventions can be applied to sales situations.

Basic behaviors

An advisory call is an interactive process between the client and the advisor in which both persons constantly communicate with each other, whether verbally or nonverbally. Every behavior of the advisor therefore represents an intervention. DE JONG ET AL. summarize the sum of all behaviors and instruments under the rubric "attitude of nescience" and describe the basic mindset that a solution-focused counselor should possess. It is a lifelong process to learn and fully understand what this approach implies, and it requires great effort and much experience to master it.[109]

The basic instruments of this methodology include focusing on the solution and concentrating on the client.

> **Focusing on the solution instead of the problem:** Classical therapy, since its inception, has given a privileged position to the problem. The problem has always stood at the center of therapeutic discourse and has always been analyzed based on its structure and etiology.[110] Since solution-focused

counselors assume that the solution is not associated with the problem, they focus on the future. By simply describing a future in which the problem has already been solved, the expectation is created that the problem will actually *be* solved.[111] Once this expectation is created, it can be helpful for the client to change his/her thinking and behavior in a way that enables this expectation to occur, as in WATZLAWICK's idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy.[112]

The vision of a time during which the desired state is present separates the solution-finding process from the problem itself, which will make the client more hopeful and confident. The focus on the favored end state also promotes the *undulation effect*, which might allow the client to adopt change independently and at his/her own discretion.[113]

In the field of verbal communication, advisors can choose between solution-talk and problem-talk. Solution-talk is hopeful and future-oriented, and it suggests the volatility of problems. In the solution-language, the patient talks about his/her successes and about everything he/she has achieved, which creates a comfortable and animated atmosphere for both the therapist and the patient. In contrast to solution-talk, problem-talk is mostly past-oriented and negative, analyzing the origins of the problem, which suggests permanency.[114]

Although solution-focus and solution-talk focus on solutions, the problem is not ignored during the session.[115] The problem will only be the core topic for as long as it needs to commission the therapist.

Concentrating on the client:[116] When clients assign a problem to a third party, they enter an arena that is outside of their own scope of influence. Therefore, it is important that the advisor tries to refocus the clients' attentions back onto themselves, so that the clients can find out what they might do in order to improve the situation. This is also an important part of the transition from problem-talk to solution-talk.

Characteristics of systemic questions

Questions are a very powerful instrument when communicating with the client. Through the use of systemic questions, the advisor can initiate a process of reflection. The goal of every question is therefore to free the client of thoughts that are limited, thus allowing new and different perspectives.[117]

Although there are many different types of questions, systemic questions have certain characteristics in common: They are open-ended questions, they create thought-provoking impulses (reflection), they are future-oriented, they focus on specific actions and behavior, they maintain a solution-focus, and they exclude leading questions.[118]

RADATZ classifies systemic questions into nine subgroups according to their type.[119] All of these types of questions can be used at different points in time within a consultation. It is one of the main tasks of the solution-focused advisor to pose the correct follow-up question upon a given reply.

Special question types

During their work with patients, practitioners of the solution-focus have developed a series of questions that are almost uniquely applied in solution-focused consultations, including miracle question, scaling questions, and coping questions.[120] These questions are introduced in chapter 6 in more detail and in the context of sales interactions.

Content-oriented instruments

In some classic interventions of solution-focused counseling, the advisor relies on content-oriented language. These instruments can be divided into several groups, including feedback, emotional stimuli, and reframing.

> **Feedback:**[121] Clients use language to describe their relationships and experiences. Although language can convey hope for them, it is easy for language to be formulated vaguely. One possibility for eliminating ambiguity is to repeat key words. Key words are terms through which clients try to describe their experiences and the meanings that they assign to these experiences.[122] Other important variations of feedback tools include summarizing and paraphrasing.
>
> **Emotional stimuli:**[123] Solution-focused counseling builds on the positive aspects of a situation, concentrating on what already works well. The client's strengths and past successes are important resources on the path to creating a solution. When such positive traits are reinforced through compliments, the client's confidence is boosted and he/she will want to discover more about those strengths and successes.[124]
>
> **Reframing:** The denotation of a situation as problem is only one of several possibilities for labeling and understanding events. The framework used for such valuations represents the context of the clients' construction of reality. Since clients build this frame themselves, and therefore also create the interpretation of the terms themselves, they can also conduct a reinterpretation (reframing). The counselor helps clients assign new meanings to specific problems.[125]
>
> The advisor accepts the client's interpretation only to the point at which it evokes problematic behaviors, thoughts, emotions, and perceptions.[126] Once these negative interpretations are manifested, the advisor's task is to empower the client to reframe the situation. In order to achieve this, the advisor can deconstruct the client's framework of perception and then initiate a reconstruction framed from a positive aspect. Another possibility is to instill

certain doubts regarding the framework and behavior to provoke the start of a constructive reflection process.[127]

Passive, non-verbal interventions

Most instruments introduced so far either represent attitudes or require the advisor's active involvement. Among the classical instruments of solution-focus are also those that relate to passive, nonverbal behavior of the advisor. These include active listening, a careful use of personal nonverbal behavior (e.g., mirroring), a careful observation of the client's nonverbal behavior (e.g., incongruence between verbal and nonverbal communication), as well as the use of natural empathy and silence.[128]

Homework

At the end of each session, the advisor has the chance to assign homework to the client. This intersession work is often given as a behavior instruction or an observation mandate. Such homework serves as preparation for the next appointment, where the emphasis will be on analyzing the impact of a new behavior or on describing the observations made. This tactic aims at determining which measures have caused a change in the desired direction and which have not.

DE SHAZER's elementary first session task requires clients to observe, in the time between sessions, all of those processes in the environment of their problem that they desire to be continued. The purpose of this task is to deflect the clients' focus from the past to present and future events in order to promote positive expectations of change.[129] Other possible interventions include making a rule out of the exception, changing the place of the complaint, changing the order of the steps involved, adding a new element to the complaint structure, prolonging the duration of the pattern, starting or stopping randomly, and increasing the frequency of the behavior.[130] The basic logic behind this can be described as *doing something different.*

Procedures in solution-focused consultations

Although solution-focused consultations always dwell on specific cases, the following procedure is standardized to a certain extent. The most important stages of this procedure are described in the following sections in the chronological order in which they can appear. Depending on the context in which the counseling takes place, some of these elements can appear at different stages, be substituted by others, or omitted completely. It is one of the advisor's primary tasks to lead the conversation through these sections and to decide on where to put the emphasis and when to move onto the next stage.

Introduction

The first moments of contact between two people are crucial, since this is when the fundamental elements of the future relationship are developed. In advisory settings, the client must gain faith in the counselor in order to develop a constructive relationship. Without trust, it is unlikely that the client will accept the advisor's services or advice. Whenever the advisor interviews two or more people, as in family and group therapy, it is vital that he/she strives for an interaction that is balanced among all of the participants. This shows respect for the attendants and conveys how important it is that everybody actively participates in the conversation.[131]

Consultations typically are begun with small talk. It is important to break the ice as early as possible in order to create a comfortable and productive atmosphere. In the next step, the advisor briefs the client about the methods and informs about the upcoming procedure. The advisor does this with the intent to mentally prepare the client for the collaboration and to explicitly gain his/her commitment to this procedure.

Problem definition

The problem-definition stage serves to uncover the client's reasons for the consultation and simultaneously defines the advisor's mandate. If there is no problem or concern, there is nothing to be solved either. With regard to problem construction, DE SHAZER states:

> "Whether an event is a 'problem' that requires therapy or not depends on how the participants interpret their experience."[132]

The advisor invites the client to describe the problems that he/she wants to solve and define which concern he/she wants to address first. The advisor accepts this mandate without commenting on the meaning or the severity of the problem or influencing the client. The advisor fully respects the client's remarks and consequently abstains from personal contributions.

After the client has prioritized his/her concerns, he/she is asked by the advisor to describe all solutions that he/she has thus far tried. This request transmits the sense that the client is competent and facilitates learning about behaviors that have worked in the past. The attention that the advisor directs to determining what worked previously serves two purposes: to learn about solutions that are not worth repeating and to define what is most important to the client.[133]

The most important part of the problem-definition stage is the search for exceptions. Exceptions can be defined as those behaviors, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings that represent a contrast to the concern and that could possibly lead to a solution when they are enforced or applied more frequently in the sense of "more of the same."[134] All problems have exceptions in the sense that situations exist in which the problem could have appeared but did not. Consideration of these exceptions can lead to findings of how the patient can repeat his/her behavior in order to prevent the problem from appearing. By directing the focus to these exceptions instead of the problems, the obviously *secondary* (the exception) becomes the *primary* and causes a hierarchy inversion.[135]

Goal setting

The goal of the consultation is the end state that the client wants to achieve by changing his/her behavior. Goals have the character of a map, since they show the direction toward which all participants should work. Goals are defined together with the client and in his/her specific frame of reference. In solution-focused counseling, the advisor does not make proposals about what the clients need or what they should strive for. The advisor asks the clients to formulate their minimal goals for the consultation in concrete words. Furthermore, he/she invites them to describe how an outside observer might notice that the goal has been achieved and who will do what once the problem is solved. Without a concise approach to setting goals, the coaching or therapy can continue indefinitely.[136] DE SHAZER indicates:

> "Without goals, neither the therapist nor the client can know when the therapy is successful or fails […]. The therapist must know what must not be done, and the best example for what must not be done is usually what the client had been doing so far."[137]

The biggest advantage of having clearly defined goals is that they inspire the expectation of a different, satisfying future. These thoughts promote a change of behavior in the present and contribute to achieving those goals. DE JONG ET AL. regard *well defined* goals as those that are relevant to the client, defined in small steps, described precisely and realistically, and couched in positive language.[138]

A solution-focused advisor can use various instruments to support his/her clients in defining their goals. Especially worth mentioning is the miracle question, which encourages clients to broaden their viewpoint and to contemplate their desired state in a visionary way.

Create solutions

After the goals have been developed, assessed for quality by the advisor, and prioritized by the client, the conversation turns to the formulation of a solution. At this stage, the emphasis lays on the fundamentals of focusing and building on what already works well. Thereby, the advisor fosters the client's cooperation and creates a constructive atmosphere in which the client feels empowered.[139]

The rudiments of potential solutions are derived from the exceptions that were formulated in the problem-definition stage. These exceptions are evidence for behavior that worked in the past (the existing positive) and thus can serve as potential starting points for solutions of the present. DE SHAZER writes concisely:

> "As soon as we know what works, we continue with it."[140]

Among the frequently used instruments at this stage are coping and scaling questions. Both types of question aim to uncover the client's resources. It is typical in solution-focused counseling that the advisor refrains from making personal contributions with regard to the content of the conversation. Solutions are built using the client's resources in order to ensure that they perfectly fit into his/her construction of reality.[141]

Giving feedback

In brief-therapy (that is, in clinical work with patients), the therapist takes a short break after the phase of creating solutions in order to reflect on the content of the conversation. After that, he/she formulates a feedback for the patient. If there were observers inside or outside the room, the advisor will briefly discuss his/her findings with them in order to ensure a consistent and appropriate message.

The feedback begins with compliments for the client to show respect for attempts previously made and to direct the focus on the existing positive. After some bridge statements, the feedback usually closes with a task that the client is to complete before the next session.

Second session and any further meetings

The purpose of the second session and any further meetings is to discuss any changes that happened since the last conversation. The advisor wants to learn about the effects of the new behavior in order to obtain a basis for solution enhancements.[142] At this stage, the advisor can make use of all solution-focused instruments that contribute to the assessment of changes. Especially suitable are scaling questions, since they evaluate the client’s progress and confidence.

Requirements for practical application

Solution-focused counseling succeeds or fails with the advisor, regardless whether this is a therapist or a coach. Solution-focus is not so much technique as attitude, mindset, and conviction. In order to apply this attitude effectively in practice, several requirements must be met.[143]

On the one hand, advisors must possess a lethological talent. Lethology is defined as the doctrine of nescience.[144] It implies that advisors perceive themselves as naive and accept that their knowledge and thought patterns cannot match scope of the experience that the client brings. As a consequence, they accept fully the client’s personal opinions toward problem definition, goal setting, and action planning.

On the other hand, advisors must let go of their personal goals and hypotheses, and both parties must be able to build on mutual trust. Other crucial factors include the voluntary nature of the consultation and the mental dissociation of the advisor.[145]

Solution-focus vs. traditional expert counseling

The solution-focused approach differs in a number of ways from traditional forms of specialist-counseling. The most relevant differences between these two models are described below.

Differences in attitude

The starting point of both advisory models is always a problem or concern of the client, who became stuck when using his/her own problem-solving competencies and therefore seeks help from an advisor. Expert counselors take the role of the technical experts, who first analyze the situation in detail in order to then make reasonable suggestions based on their own experience. Generally, the main difference is that process-counselors take a non-directive attitude, while specialist-counselors act in a directive manner. ROGERS defines these attitudes as follows:

> "The non-directive standpoint emphasizes the right of each individual to remain mentally independent and to preserve mental integrity. The directive standpoint emphasizes social conformity and the right of the able to direct the unable."[146]

In this sense, the basic differences in attitude and mindset can be examined on various levels, as the following table summarizes:

Criterion	Specialist-counseling	Process-counseling
Responsibility for solution	Advisor	Client
Client Involvement	Low	High
Resource-orientation	Advisor	Client
Conversation focus	Problem	Solution
Connection between problem and solution	High	Low
Roles and relationship	Expert/Layman	Equal partners
Conversation media	Monologue	Questions/Answers
Content	Technical advice	Questions
Language	Problem-talk	Solution-talk

Differences in the consultation procedures

Besides differences in attitudes, which are the major factors in distinguishing between solution-focused and expert counseling, there are also differences in the procedures used with the two types of consultation.

Stage 1: Problem definition
Both consultancy models open with the description of the problem, but the solution-focused approach designates less time and effort to this stage and does not ask for details or for the reasons of the problem.

Stage 2: Assessment of the problem versus goal setting
In Stage 2, the traditional expert counselor assesses the problem by valuing the nature and severity of the issue. By contrast, the solution-focused advisor invites the client to develop well defined goals and leaves the valuation of the problems to the client.

Stage 3: Intervention planning versus search for exceptions
While expert advisors plan interventions based on their experience, a coach starts searching for exceptions in order to find rudiments for possible solutions.

Stage 4: Intervention versus feedback
At the end of the conversation, the expert advisor intervenes by making suggestions or giving advice, while the client in a solution-focused consultation receives feedback.

Incompetence Fallacy

One of the most important differences between the two models can be found in the understanding of resources. Even if expert counselors apply certain solution-focused instruments, they are still convinced they know more than the client and perceive him/her as the technical layman. They believe that they can create better solutions than the client and make contributions in the form of suggestions and advice.

In contrast to the above, solution-focused advisors refrain from making contributions to the content and rely on the problem-solving competence of their clients. They do this when defining the problem, the desired goals, and the available resources.[147] They withhold advice even when the goals or solutions defined by the client are unsuitable in their opinion. The expert attitude can also be denoted “incompetence fallacy.”[148] The question of resources is the crucial interface and probably the most important difference between specialist-counseling and process-counseling.

Weaknesses of solution-focused counseling

When the solution-focused approach began to establish itself as an independent form of consultancy, it represented a contrast to the previously anchored traditional fundamentals in therapy and consulting. Even today, the consulting industry is split into different camps, which can be attributed to the fact that solution-focus has also not proven to be a panacea. While there are many advantages to the solution-focus, there are also drawbacks that practitioners must consider.

First, solution-focus requires a high level of method competence in order to be applied successfully. Even with intensive instruction, these skills can only be acquired through experience. The advisor must develop a sense of timely application of the instruments, a sense that relies on his/her intuition and experience. Furthermore, inexperienced practitioners sometimes strive for all-too-quick solutions, putting pressuring for change on both advisor and client.[149]

Second, solution-focused conversations always run the risk of paying too little attention to the problem and overlooking or omitting crucial viewpoints. Extensive discussion of the problem can make the client see aspects that have been hidden, which might have a significant impact on any future solution.

Another weakness is the missing external perspective. Solution-focused counseling completely counts on the client's resources and ignores the viewpoint of others. When the client's resources are overestimated or when objectively unsuitable solutions are proposed, the advisor can only correct this by making an expert-oriented intervention. In doing so, however, he/she violates the central attitude of the solution-focused approach. Furthermore, the advisor must overcome the limitations of the method that are set by the client. Especially in coaching situations, these limits can include the demand for quick solutions, for a shift of responsibility, for radical external ideas, and for legitimization of personal decisions against third parties.[150] As a result, the coach always risks not meeting the client's needs.

Finally, SCHMIDT describes a number of discrepancies in cultural values that also have an influence on the success of solution-focused counseling. He especially points out the varieties between German and American patients of brief-therapies:

> "By comparing the mindsets of American patients to those of German patients, there seem to be important differences between them, at least by tendency […]. In our [German] culture the need for historicity, meaning, and search for cause seem to be even higher."[151]

As a result, a German patient might lack confidence that a change can be initiated after a few sessions, especially when the problem has long-term characteristics. Moreover, people also fear that the severity of the problem or suffering is not sufficiently dignified.

SCHMIDT also sees a challenge in the different health systems of the two countries, which makes it especially delicate for German therapists to maintain the pathological character of the consultation for health insurance reasons and still maintain the resource-orientation with the client.[152] SCHMIDT summarizes his conclusions regarding cultural differences as follow:

> "Many therapists and patients have adopted the idea that psychotherapy can only be successful if many sessions take place over a long time. Many patients assume that they are entitled to a certain number of session hours. Moreover, they believe that fewer hours are not favorable but an expression of discrimination and punishment for recovery. Such situations are not likely to occur in the American system. There, patients are often relieved if brief-therapy is prospective, since this usually means less personal contribution to the costs."[153]

Summary

The past is over, and previous behavior cannot be changed. There is no point in discussing a problem at length, since problem-talk does not contribute to the development of solutions. Moreover, it creates a negative atmosphere because it is backward-oriented and problem-focused. Discussing the past, however, can certainly be beneficial, as long as it discovers previous attempts and uncovers resources.

Solution-focused counseling offers a different approach. With its attitudes, instruments, and procedures, it consequently strives for achieving goals and developing solutions. It uses the client's resources and thus ensures high practicability and identification.

Today, solution-focus is mainly applied in psychotherapy (brief-therapy) as well as in single and group coaching and management development. PICHOT ET AL. summarize the principles of applying solution-focus as follows:

- If it's not broken, don't fix it.
- If something is working, do more of it.
- If it is not working, do something different.
- Small steps can lead to large changes.
- The solution is not necessarily directly related to the problem.
- The language requirements for solution development are different from those needed to describe the problem.
- The future is both created and negotiable.[154]

The solution-focus was developed in psychotherapy and relies on a series of specific basic conditions. Most of these conditions can also be found in sales calls, which is why solution-focus ideally suits being applied to sales processes. The next chapter builds a bridge between counseling (therapy and coaching) and selling.

CHAPTER V

COUNSELING VERSUS SELLING

In order to better understand solution-focus in the context of sales, it is essential to build a bridge between therapeutic counseling and selling. Despite various commonalities in these activities, there are also a number of differences that are worth being analyzed.

Common grounds of consulting and selling

Like therapy and coaching, selling can be considered a type of counseling. Moreover, clinical brief-therapy has already been referred to as a type of negotiation: That is, an interaction between two equal partners where certain topics are negotiated.[155] There is therefore a set of shared grounds between counseling and selling, as outlined hereafter:

Advisory nature: A sales relationship has an advisory nature, as do therapy and coaching, since it also is about dealing with unsuitable or undesired situations. The seller takes the role of the advisor, who assists the client in overcoming difficulties. The manner in which the advisor does that heavily depends on the chosen form of consultation. As Chapter 1 showed, the expert attitude (specialist-counseling) represents the predominant sales manner.

Focus: In all three formats—sales, brief-therapy, and coaching—the client stands at the center of the advisor's activities. The primary goal is the same for each setting: to increase the client's satisfaction by removing a problem with a tailor-made solution. However, the inducement to engage as advisor differs, as is shown further below.

Theory fundamentals: The theoretical fundamentals for human thinking and social interaction rely on the same framework for all three models. This includes the findings of radical constructivism, autopoiesis, system theory, and other disciplines that discuss direct or indirect influence on human behavior.

Instruments in use: Language is a fundamental tool in each form of counseling, although practitioners have the liberty of using language according to the needs of the situation. The classical dichotomy in nonverbal (analog) and verbal (digital) communication[156] provides segmentation of language tools that can be applied.

Differences between counseling and selling

Besides these commonalities, there are also a number of differences between consultations and sales calls, the most relevant of which include:

Voluntary nature of the relationship: Therapeutic consultation and coaching generally happen on the patient's or the coachee's initiative. Occasionally, the client is sent or taken by third parties such as probation officer, spouse, supervisor, or jurisdiction. Consulters should desire a consultation because they find sense in it.

Sales calls, too, usually take place voluntarily and willingly on the part of the customer. The degree to which customers participate voluntarily, however, varies greatly, depending partly on the market situation: The more saturated a market and the more competitors who operate actively and flood the clientele with information, the less openly will a client receive foreign salespeople. In such market environments, the salesperson succeeds simply by obtaining an appointment. Consequently, the seller is often confronted with the delicate task of promoting the openness of the client and gaining his/her commitment to actively participate in the sales process.

The absence of the problem: Since clients usually initiate therapy and coaching, they are often aware of their problems or at least of the symptoms. The presence of a concern constitutes the mission for the advisor, and solving the problem is the actual goal. In sales situations, a need replaces the problem. The awareness of a need varies depending on the specific situation. If there is a relationship of trust between buyer and seller, the customer might address his/her needs proactively. Such settings typically take place when the initiative for the sales meeting came from the customer, although this happens only very rarely in saturated markets.

In saturated markets with high supplier activity, customers usually have access to all relevant information. They are convinced that they possess the ideal solution and have no unmet wants, since they would have acted if there was need to do so (autopoiesis). In such settings, the salesperson should focus on *need creation* instead of problem analysis. In the initial stages, it is not the client's problem that stands as the focus of the sales call, but rather the seller's motivation to provide solutions to the customer's latent needs.

Customer expectation: Consulters and patients usually attend consultations with the expectation that their current problems can be solved in one way or another, and they perceive the advisor as a supportive helper. Customers as participants in sales calls have different expectations, depending on their experience and problem awareness and on how the sales meeting came about. If the customer is convinced that everything is in good order, the salesperson has to take measures to increase the customer's interest. The salesperson can do so by generating a phase of need creation and development. Therefore, the customer's expectation of the relationship with the salesperson changes along with the awareness of the problem or need.

Experience from previous advisory sessions: Clients in coaching situations and therapy usually have an idea of how the consultation will take place. These ideas are influenced by personal experience and reports of others. In almost the same manner, customers create their expectations toward the sales call: If they are used to a traditional procedure, they might be surprised by the solution-focused approach. In such situations, it is essential that a salesperson prepares his/her customers for the unfamiliar procedures and that he/she gains their commitments.

Session length: In both brief-therapy and coaching, the ideal number of sessions depends on the specific case. Practical experience shows that brief-therapy requires between five and seven sessions,[157] whereas coaching goals are often achieved with only one meeting[158].

While it is the client who decides on the total length of therapies and coachings, the duration of a sales process also relies on the seller. Depending on the situation, as well as the seller's persistence and the customer's progress in the buying process, the salesperson may or may not encourage more meetings. In either case, he/she will never neglect the opportunity costs that are involved in each meeting and only invest time and energy when there is a chance of some return.

A similar approach applies to the duration of single sessions. Consultations in coaching and therapy require 90 minutes on average.[159] In sales calls, it is usually the customer who allocates the time budget and the seller often has to adapt himself/herself to rather brief appointments. Experience shows that customers usually are willing to spend up to 60 minutes per session when they have not met the salesperson before.[160]

Varying goals: Although the primary goal, satisfying the client's need, is the same for all counseling formats, there are discrepancies between the inducements of the advisors. The primary goal of every salesperson is to sell goods or services for his/her employer. In contrast, therapy and coaching aim to solve a problem, and when this is achieved, the advisory relationship ends. In sales calls, the seller is confronted with the pressure of closing a deal. Coaches and therapists also have a pressure to be successful, but not to the same extent and severance. The seller must be aware of possible goal conflicts and adapt his/her activities regardless of the chosen consulting style.

The following table reviews the major discrepancies between therapy/coaching and selling, respectively. Nevertheless, the criteria mentioned represent tendencies and can hardly be found pure in practice.

Criterion	Therapy & Coaching	Selling
Initiative	Buyer	Seller
Awareness of the problem/need	High	Low
Expectations towards content	Clear and coherent	Clear, incoherent
Length of consultation	Open-ended, no restriction by the seller	Open-ended, restricted by both the buyer and the seller
Goals of negotiation	Lay solely with the buyer	Also lay with the seller

The meaning of solution-focus in sales

Solutions-focused selling adopts attitude, mindset, assumption, and conviction from the solution-focused fundamentals. Solution-focused salespeople take advantage of its tools and procedures to sell more effectively and with a greater client orientation. By applying solution-focus in sales, a salesperson can make up for a potential lack of process competence.

The next chapter extracts solution-focus from its therapeutic context and adapts it to the sales environment.

CHAPTER VI

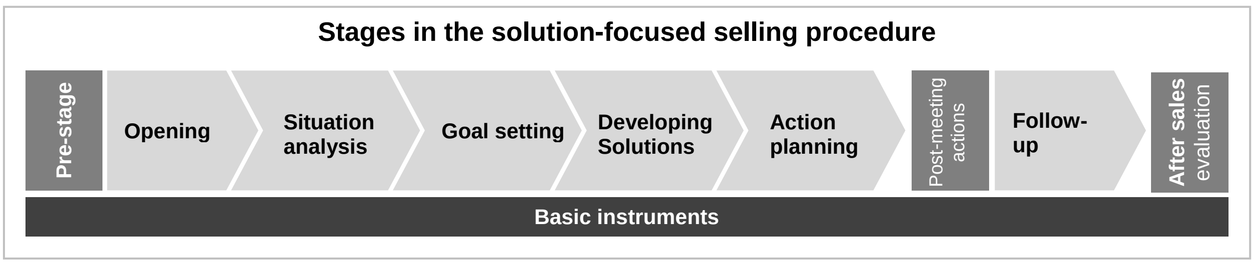
APPLYING SOLUTION-FOCUS IN SALES

A solution-focused salesperson can choose among a set of specific tools; these tools are described in this chapter. Some of these instruments build on the classical tools of brief-therapy, while others are inspired by innovative coaching tools that have proven effective in practice. It remains to be considered that not all instruments of coaching and therapy qualify for the use in sales calls, but many of them still serve as a rich source of inspiration.

The tools will be introduced along with the various sequences of a solution-focused sales call. Depending on the specific situation, some of these steps might be placed in a different order, treated with varying depth, or omitted at all. Thus, the proposed procedure represents only one possible structuring for a sales conversation. Additionally, most tools might qualify for an application in multiple stages. In order to avoid duplication, these tools will be introduced in the stage at which they are most likely to occur with the greatest effect and to be used most frequently.

At the beginning of each of the following sections, some statements are made about the importance and the goals of the specific stage. This is followed by an introduction to the most frequently used tools for this stage. For each tool, there is a general description as well as remarks about its goals, advantages, drawbacks, and supporting aids. Where appropriate, you will find additional tips for your use in practice. Each introduction concludes with model dialogues or a choice of specific questions or communication excerpts. Those examples are deliberately kept neutral to show that the use of the instruments is versatile and applicable in numerous situations.

The following items are not intended to be an exhaustive list of solution-focused instruments and their application in sales. Rather, they should be considered as a type of inspiration, allowing you to discover your personal possibilities of application in your private and professional environments. Individual adjustment by practitioners is not only necessary but also desirable.



BASIC INSTRUMENTS

Solution-focused selling is based on a number of fundamental attitudes and skills that must be incorporated by the seller regardless of the sales stage. This includes the attitude of nescience and systemic questions.

Attitude of nescience

The first step toward a successful application of the solution-focus in sales requires adopting an attitude of nescience. Solution-focused sellers must abandon the traditional expert mindset and act in the conviction that the customer already has at his/her disposal all of the necessary resources to create a suitable solution. Sellers must be ready to move away from a resource-orientation and internalize that expert counseling and advising are no longer among their core tasks. Furthermore, they must also be aware of the fundamental implications from constructivism, autopoiesis, and system theory. As a result, they know that there is neither a single reality nor a single suitable solution and that various perspectives are allowed.

This attitude becomes manifest in a series of basic behaviors which are valid independent of the specific sales situation or starting point or sales stage. These instruments include focusing on the solution, which goes along with the use of solution-talk and systemic questions, as well as concentrating on the client. Additionally, the solution-focused vendor can always utilize emotion incitements (complimenting and normalizing), feedback (paraphrasing and summarizing), and other nonverbal interventions (active listening, nonverbal signals, observation, empathy, and silence). These interventions belong to the standard toolbox of the solution-focused salesperson.

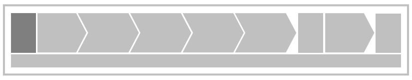
Systemic questions

A solution-focused sales call is nourished by the questions of the salesperson. These questions are the heart of the sales process and of great importance, making high demands on the seller's competence in asking questions. The different question types will be introduced in specific sales situations below.

Independent from the question type, it is necessary to pose questions as follow-ups to the client's previous answers. This principle is important for two reasons: First, it conveys the message that questions lead to answers, possibilities, and solutions. Solutions are best created when questions are formulated according to this guideline. Moreover, the client would rather engage in a question-and-answer game when he/she sees the connection between the questions and the answers. Second, it enables the seller to work from the client's frame of reference, because the seller always learns more about what the client just said.[161]

A major element of this interrogative technique is inquiring for details. Customers often express themselves vaguely and with the use of generalizations in order to describe circumstances. In such cases, it is up to the seller to question these remarks critically and to search for discrepancies.

PRE-STAGE



It is in the pre-stage where salespeople usually have initial contacts with the client and when they prepare themselves for the actual face-to-face meeting. Sellers also have the opportunity to extend the preparations to the customer. This can be very helpful, especially when the two parties meet for the first time and when the customer has not yet been exposed to the solution-focused approach. The pre-stage is also important because it is when the salespeople decide how much time and effort they want to allocate to this case. The typical sequence involves scheduling, personal preparations, and preparing the customer.

Scheduling

Although scheduling can be done in various manners, it usually happens by means of a phone call. If the salesperson and the customer are acquainted through previous contacts or an existing business relationship, the salesperson might capitalize on a possibly existing mutual trust. Otherwise, if the two parties do not know each other, such a telephone contact is also referred to as *cold call.* This distinction is central, since the quality of the existing mutual trust is a key determinant for choosing appropriate tools.

Abundant literature already exists on the art of scheduling—especially on cold calling—and many different techniques about how to best schedule appointments are described. Characteristic of the solution-focus is a concept called *socializing first-person language.* The following remarks can be seen as a supplement to traditional and proven techniques.

⚒ THE SOCIALIZING FIRST-PERSON LANGUAGE[162]

General description: The socializing first-person language starts with *me* (seller) as subject of the communicative relationship, who wants to connect with *you* (customer) in order to create a joint *we.* The key to this combination can be found in a joint interest, whereas this interest, as opposed to the traditional expert attitude, does not lay unilaterally with the seller. Since *we* are placed between the two other subjects, both *me* and *you* must set out for it. The seller can achieve this with a special culture of language, which gives the customer the feeling of being a competent and respected person.

A salesperson in the expert attitude would rather try to manipulate the customer by using phrases such as “We have to…” or “Don’t we have a lot of common grounds?”. The specialist-counselor calls upon *you* without asking and without addressing *you* directly. With socializing first-person language, the customer is invited to deal with a common topic, to search for solutions, and to find consensus in an open space of encounter. This procedure allows for mutual positions and promotes the development of the trust that is necessary to establish a sustainable relationship.

The first-person language incorporates the following structure:

> I have… → You and I should… → Then we have… → I benefit… → You benefit…

Examples

– *I have an idea. You and I should meet and talk about it. Then we can consider together how this idea helps us in our work. I get the assurance that it is worth pursuing, and you could bring your own view in at a very early stage.*

– *I have interesting information that makes it worth meeting and talking. We then both have the possibility of finding out how it can be useful for us. By doing so, I would get clues about what adjustments are needed and you would see quickly how you can capitalize on the advantages.*

Timing

- When the seller, his/her company, or his/her industry have the reputation of pursuing one-sided interests
- When the customer appears particularly critical
- In phone calls to schedule appointments

Solution-focused concepts

Equal partnership, focusing on the client, resource-orientation

Personal preparation

Once the seller has scheduled the appointment, he/she starts preparing for the sales call. Just as in traditional sales, proper preparation is a vital part of the sales process. The salesperson first takes into consideration the customer and the specific case, but primarily focuses on the most important facts. A comprehensive analysis of the situation or the problem, the standard practice in traditional sales, bears the risk of a loss of impartiality, since the seller might already think about potential solutions. This would not be consistent with the nature of the solution-focused model. Nevertheless, it cannot harm to brush up on previous contacts or possible transactions that were made in the past. This allows the seller to prepare for predictable customer reactions. Of great importance is information that refers to the quality of trust as well as to the customer’s opinion about the seller or his company. This can lead to illuminating findings about how to approach future contacts.

Another difference from traditional sales is that the solution-focused salesperson does not allocate any energy to speculating about topics (in the sense of goods and services) that the customer might be interested in. As a result, the labor-intensive creation of presentation material about the company or the product can be eliminated. By doing so, however, the seller loses an important aid that usually serves as an anchor or guideline in which the seller finds footing and orientation.

Preparing the customer

Similar to how sellers prepare themselves for the sales call, they can also prepare their customer for the appointment.

🛠 PRE-CONTACTS / PRE-CALLS[163]

General description: Pre-contacts are especially useful for clarifying the buyer's expectations toward the seller and toward the actual sales call. The customer gains the possibility to address his/her preferences in advance, and the sellers obtain the chance to prepare themselves for their role and the contents of the conversation. Furthermore, these pre-contacts also serve for collecting information.

Pre-calls can also be used to calibrate the client for the unique sales procedures and culture of the solution-focused method. Observations in practice show that customers base their expectations on personal experience. When they encounter a solution-focused seller for the first time, they might be astonished, puzzled or, in the worst case, reject the method altogether.[164] Pre-contacts offer a good opportunity to mentally prepare the customer for the upcoming meeting.

Examples

- To clarify expectations: *What expectations do you have for the conversation? What expectations and preferences do you have towards me? What must happen to make this meeting worth your while? What must explicitly not happen?*
- To mentally calibrate: *If you agree, I would like to deviate partly from the traditional manner in which most meetings are held. Instead of giving a presentation about our company or products, I would like to enter in a dialogue with you in*

Tips for practitioners

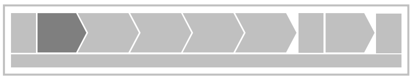
- At the end of your request, obtain the customer's commitment by asking a closed-ended question.
- Repeat all statements and agreements that were made in pre-calls at the beginning of the actual meeting.
- Use the customer's answers to the expectation questions to discover possible goals.
- When the sales call represents the first meeting or when you had to overcome considerable resistance when scheduling the appointment, postpone clarifying expectations to a separate phone call or even to the meeting itself. By doing so, you do not risk that the client suddenly pulls back and drops the meeting.

order to find out what already works in your company and where I could offer support. What do you think of that?

Timing
- Prior to the first meeting
- When the customer is conservative or reserved
- When the customer has a clear vision of the procedure

Solution-focused concepts
Focusing on the client, resource-orientation

OPENING THE SALES CALL



In this stage, seller and buyer meet for the first time in the sales process. The main goal in this stage is to establish the necessary conditions to proceed with the solution-focused approach and to apply it successfully.

The opening of the sales call usually begins with introductions and small talk. Here, the seller tries to build rapport and adapt to the client’s nonverbal behavior. In the next step, the seller asks about the customer’s expectations and uses the opportunity to prepare him/her (again) for the culture and procedures of the solution-focused sales approach.

🛠 ESTABLISHING RAPPORT[165]

General description: In NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING (NLP), the term *rapport* denominates a relationship of mutual trust and understanding with others. When two people are in rapport with each other, the communication between them seems to flow and the body language seems to match. The seller can best build rapport by making eye contact and by mirroring the client in terms of posture, gesture, breathing, and tonality. When no rapport can be built and when there is a mismatch, the seller will find it difficult to create a positive and harmonic atmosphere, which is vital for closing a deal.

At the beginning of each sales call, it is essential to gain the buyer’s trust in order to build a sustainable fundament. Especially in initial meetings, this is of great importance, since it is very unlikely that any business will be made without mutual trust. SPROSON argues:

> “Don’t even consider starting to sell without being in rapport with your client.”[166]

Even when the customer and the salesperson already know each other from prior contacts, it can be favorable to reassess the relationship and to allocate enough time to reestablish a positive emotional connection. If the client is represented by two or more people, the seller can hardly mirror all participants. It is often enough to adjust to the informal leader, since all other participants are likely to mirror the dominant person as well.

Timing
– At the beginning of a sales call
– When disharmony arises during the sales call
– When buyer and seller do not know each other or have not met for a long time

Signals
– When the seller can sense unrest
– When bustle arises
– When the customer shows uncommon and irrational opposition

Tips for practitioners

- During phone calls, the best way of establishing rapport is to adjust your own voice and rhythm to the client's volume and tonality.
- When the client is represented by two or more people, build rapport with the informal leader, but also try to interact with all other participants. This shows how you respect everybody and implies how important it is that everybody actively contributes to the conversation.

Solution-focused concepts
Equal partnership, focusing on the client

After the seller has built rapport and created a basis of mutual trust, he/she leads into clarifying the customer's expectations.

🛠 CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS

General description: In this stage, the seller wants to discover the customer's expectations toward the salesperson, the company, and the conversation. The salesperson also wants to learn about the conversation model and contents that the client expects in order to react to possibly unsuitable elements. This is also a good moment to make the customer familiar with the solution-focused method and to obtain his/her commitment to this approach.

Furthermore, this stage also allows the evaluation of the client's readiness and willingness to apply change. Conclusions can be drawn as to the client's motivation and effort. It is essential that the seller discovers potential incongruities between the customer's verbal and nonverbal signals and to address these directly. When a client claims to act according to a certain set of criteria, this does not mean that he/she actually does so. For instance, when the client has personal contacts (friends, relatives, etc.) with a current business partner, he/she is likely to not openly communicate this fact. In such situations, the seller could undertake every possible effort and still not close the deal.

Occasionally, it may happen that the client answers the expectation questions by describing goals or demands for certain goods and services. In such cases, the seller can gain interesting clues that might prove useful at later stages.

Timing
– At the beginning of the sales call

– When the client is not familiar with the solution-focused approach
– When the client's motives are unclear and when the seller has to expect that the client has no honest or real interest in a change

Examples

– Expectation questions: *What expectations do you have of the next 60 minutes that we spend together? What expectations do you have of me? How will you determine that this time was invested profitably?*
– Motivation questions: *When choosing a service provider, what is especially important to you? According to what criteria do you decide? What would a company have to provide so that you would consider switching?*

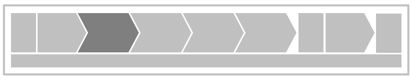
> **Tips for practitioners**
>
> ▪ When your customer reports how important personal relationships in business (friends, relatives, etc.) are, invite him/her to make a change of perspectives. Ask your client to assess the importance of these contacts for other stakeholders in order to negate this argument.

Solution-focused concepts

Equal partnership, focusing on the client, constructivism, resource-orientation

As soon as the salesperson understands the client's expectations, he/she leads over to those parts of the conversation that focus on content, beginning with situation analysis.

ANALYZING THE SITUATION



At this stage of the sales process, the seller wants to determine what already works well with the client's situation and where the client is not yet fully satisfied. Using systemic questions, visualizations, searching for the existing positive, and exploring exceptions, the seller can generate transparency and gain vital clues for designing the sales call.

🛠 SYSTEMIC QUESTIONS FOR SITUATION ANALYSIS

General description: Systemic questions are especially useful for collecting information about the customer. These questions can be posed directly to the client, and the salesperson concentrates especially on the answer in order to pose a suitable follow-up question.

The following questions help determine which aspect of the situation the customer wants to address first. For the first and only time in the solution-focused sales call, both seller and buyer remain in problem-talk.

Timing

– At the beginning of the situation analysis

Examples

- *What issues are you concerned about? What brought you here? What do we want to talk about today?*
- *How do you recognize the problem? What are the problem's basic features? How do you feel that the problem arises again? What do you usually do or what do others usually do when the problem appears? What are you doing then that you wouldn't usually be doing?*
- *What could you do to make it even more severe? What could others do to make it more severe? What would have to happen in order to make the situation worse?*
- *Who benefits when the problem is kept alive? What could make it desirable to maintain the problem?*
- *What do the problem situations have in common? What actions are recurrent when the problem arises?*
- *How would an outside observer describe your problem?*

Solution-focused concepts

System theory, resource-orientation

Visualizing the situation

Visualizations serve as guidelines toward which the seller and buyer can orient themselves during the conversation and beyond. Visuals can display a production flow (e.g. in engineering), a product line (e.g. in information technology), or an investment process (e.g. in banking). They allow utilization of the advantages of a dissociated, meta-level position of observation: The field of view is enlarged and new behaviors come to the forefront, fostering the development of new perspectives. They also encourage the client to think about the current situation and to discover interdependencies that are of great importance for the entire system.

In traditional specialist-counseling, visualizations are already used in some instances. Those visualizations, however, are usually created by the salesperson and bear the risk that the client does not identify with them.[167] If customers draw pictures themselves, the seller gains insights into the organization regarding its functionality and decision-making process. Moreover, the seller has the chance to adapt the conversation to the clients' realities, symbolized by the image. Since customers will automatically provide the appropriate emphasis by describing some elements in more detail than others, the seller also gains clues about the clients' most relevant and important concerns.

Depending on the situation and on the personal preferences of the customers, the salesperson can choose among different variants of visualizations. Three of them—situation picture, situation matrix, and metaphoric imagery—are outlined below.

🛠 VISUALIZING THE SITUATION

General description: Situation picture.
The customer is asked to visualize his/her situation (internal organization, production process, investment structure, etc.) on a piece of paper. The customer sketches all relevant sequences and elements and should in particular include distant effects and interdependencies. The goal is to depict the current situation in as vivid, practical, and condensed manner as possible.

Tips for practitioners

- Try to prevent the customer becoming stuck in details. The images do not have to be perfect.
- Let the customer explain the picture after completion in order to ensure a correct interpretation. Pay attention to key words that the client uses and note them for later use.
- Alternatively, draw a picture of what you already know about the client and take this to the sales call. Then, ask the client to complete your picture by adding missing elements. By doing so, the client will engage in this process and become part of the picture.

If the customer draws an incomplete or otherwise useless picture, the seller can encourage its enhancement or completion by asking a series of systemic questions. When this is unsuccessful or when the customer resists, it would be counterproductive to insist on the picture's completion. However, when the client has already completed parts of the picture, it is essential to work with it in order to maintain the trustful relationship and to complete the visualization during the conversation. Alternatively, the seller can use the tools situation matrix or metaphorical imagery.

General description: Situation matrix.
The seller first draws a table-style matrix on a blank piece of paper. The seller then asks the client to fill in the fields by writing down important parts of his/her situation. The client can determine the order and positions of the different elements himself/herself.

Tips for practitioners

- Offer enough fields to animate the customer to fill in as many as possible. This promotes detailing.
- Pay attention to the positions of the different elements, the order in which they are filled in, as well as to all observable nonverbal signs. This leads to central insights into the client's priorities.

Again, the customer is required to deal with his/her situation and to critically assess each element. As opposed to the situation picture, however, he/she can do so in a more structured manner and with less creativity. Matrices are also suitable when the client is represented by several people, since it is easier to unite the views of all participants on one piece of paper.

General description: Metaphoric imagery.[168]
The use of metaphoric imagery is a creative process in which the client

Tips for practitioners

- The selection of the imagery can provide clues about actions and thought patterns of the customer. However, they might also be misleading. Beware of rash conclusions and vague interpretations.

makes a complex solution pictorial and conceivable by using language. The seller asks the customer to describe a situation by means of self-chosen imagery (e.g. derived from art, sports, nature, etc.). The seller can then refer to individual elements of the imagery, because they can be remembered easily. This results in a vivid and pictorial conversation.

Aids (applying to all variants)
- A blank piece of white paper of suitable size
- Paint equipment (markers, colored crayons, etc.)

Timing
- Generally: In complex and abstract situations with distant effects and interdependencies
- Situation picture: When the customer is innovative, open, and likes to try new things
- Situation matrix: When the customer is conservative or lacks creativity or when there is more than one participant
- Metaphoric imagery: When the customer uses picturesque language

Examples
- To instruct the customer: *In order to spend our shared time in as beneficial a manner as possible, it would be very helpful for me to get a complete understanding of your situation. This will help us at a later stage to filter out the topics relevant to you. Therefore, I would like you to visualize your current situation on this piece of paper. With the image that you create, we get a terrific guideline that will help us orient within the conversation and during future meetings.*
- To promote completion: *Many thanks for your openness to take part in this exercise. These elements already help me to better understand your situation. Do I interpret this correctly, that the production line ends at this stage? What other steps follow? What happens to the products then? What factors exert an influence on this sequence? Where are the critical interfaces? What would your employees add?*
- To overcome resistance: *I am well aware that this is a very unusual thing that I ask of you. Such visualizations, however, would help me better understand your situation. Furthermore, it will serve as guideline during the conversation and ensure that we can use your valuable time as efficiently as possible. What do you think of concentrating on the very basic elements first? Would you rather prefer to work with a situation matrix? What if I start with what I already know and you continue?*
- To proceed: *Where would you like to start? Which elements are of special importance to you? Where do things already work very well? Where would you like to see improvements? About which elements would you like to talk today? Where can I support you? What parts do you worry about most?*

Solution-focused concepts
Constructivism, system theory

Exploring what works well

A central task of the salesperson during the situation analysis is to determine what already works well enough that it can be maintained. A solution that builds on these resources will meet with much greater acceptance. The search for these resources is best initiated through a series of systemic questions, with the scaling question being especially useful.

🛠 **SYSTEMIC QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE WHAT WORKS WELL**

Examples

- *What does already work well? What would you absolutely want to keep?*
- *Imagine your current solution in ten years: Which characteristics that exist today will still be there?*
- *What do you particularly appreciate in the collaboration with your current partner? What would a provider have to offer so that you would consider switching?*
- *Why is it that you haven't changed the situation so far? Which elements can you not break up?*
- *If there is anything that you like with the current situation, what is it? What is not half as bad? How can others benefit from the situation?*
- *What argues against the current solution? What should be kept?*

Solution-focused concepts
System theory, solution-talk, focusing on the solution, resource-orientation

🛠 **SCALING QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE WHAT WORKS WELL**

General description: The scaling question is one of the most important tools in solution-focused counseling. It invites the client to describe a situation or circumstance by using numbers on a scale. The range of the scale and the meaning of the extreme values are given by the advisor.

Scaling questions are multifunctional and provide various advantages. First, they allow the expression of abstract, imprecisely describable situations using a number. Second, the advisor learns about the self-perception of the client and is able to collect information about previous achievements (represented by the difference between zero and the value indicated). Third, the advisor can ask about the required steps to increase the score (improve the situation).[169]

SZABO differentiates between four core functions of scaling questions:[170]

- Evoke self-confidence for the previous achievements
- Discover shades of grey, in contrast to black or white

– Focus on small next steps
– Track differences in goal setting

The single elements of scaling questions can be applied in different stages of the consultation. The advisor has the chance to suspend the scaling process and to return to it at a later stage.

The first part of the question aims at finding out what already works well. The solution should build on these answers.

Examples

A model dialogue for the part of the scaling question that focuses on the existing positive is:

Tips for practitioners

- Encourage the client to name all his/her reasons for the current score by asking, "What else?".
- Avoid discussing numbers. It is the *difference* between zero and the score that counts, no matter what the score is.

Salesperson: *On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 represents "not at all" and 10 means "very", how satisfied are you with the current situation?*

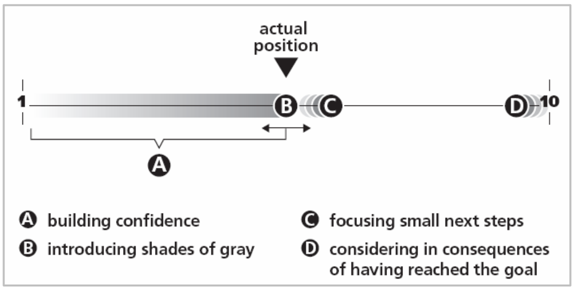
Customer: *Six.*

Salesperson: *Wonderful. What is it that makes you assign this value?*

Customer: *Our processes are well rehearsed and there are hardly any open loops. The reporting to the executive board works smoothly and the costs are always under control.*

Aids

Scaling questions can be visualized easily and effectively by drawing the scale in the form of a vertical line or a circle (similar to a pie chart) onto a piece of paper. A sketch has the advantage that the customer *sees* that he/she can build on something existing. The target value and the small steps can also be pictured. Moreover, sellers have the possibility of making the sketch disappear if they want to divert the conversation into another direction and to go back to it when they want to proceed with the scaling process.[171]



The coaching-group SOLUTION SURFERS has developed the so-called SKALEBOARD.[172] This is a metal board with five neutral scales and a series of colored magnets, with which the customer can set his/her scores for the current and the target value. Magnets have the advantage that they appear three-dimensional and that they can be moved anytime. Nevertheless, the use of such aids should be considered carefully: It destroys the value of ad hoc pencil-selling, and the customer might be alienated by the extent of such preparation. Another possibility to visualize is presented by the *topic wheel*[173], which allows for scaling multiple elements of a specific situation. The spokes should be elaborated together with the client.

Solution-focused concepts
Focusing on the solution, focusing on the existing positive, resource-orientation

Inquire exceptions

Focusing on the existing positive goes along with the search for exceptions. In a consultation, the advisor makes the client describe situations in which the concern has not arisen and tries to find out which behavior leads to this result. The search for exceptions focuses on behaviors and situations that lay within the client's control.

The solution-focused salesperson can initiate the search for exceptions by asking about the previous attempts and their effects. Additionally, he/she has the possibility of inquiring about the specific characteristics of the current solution in such exceptions. Both approaches facilitate insights into the desired traits of a future solution.

🛠 **SYSTEMIC QUESTIONS FOR THE SEARCH FOR EXCEPTIONS**

Timing
- In order to find out about the existing positive
- When the customer uses undifferentiated arguments
- When the customer makes statements like *always…*, *every time…*, *never…*

Examples
- *In what situations does the problem not appear?*
- *When does the current solution show its strengths? When do the negative aspects not appear or appear less intensively?*
- *In connection with what circumstances does the unfavorable state not appear? What people / things / circumstances participate in creating the problem? Which ones contribute to mitigation?*
- *When, during the last weeks, was the situation better for you, even if for a short time? What was different in this situation? How have other people behaved?*
- *Which characteristics that you assessed as unfavorable have proven in the past? In those exceptions, what was different compared to the normal state? How have those characteristics proven? Would you like to keep this positive effect for similar situations in the future?*
- *Which of these generally negative aspects do also have positive traits? Do you wish to maintain these effects for the future?*

Solution-focused concepts
Focusing on the existing positive, solution-talk

🛠 COPING QUESTIONS

General description: Coping questions try to find out about the customer's solutions and behaviors that have already worked in the past. They strengthen the customer's self-efficacy and promote confidence that he/she can also cope with the current situation. They uncover existing resources and deliver important rudiments for future solutions.

Timing
Coping questions are particularly suitable when the seller wants to learn how the customer achieved accomplishments in the past. Moreover, they are very effective when the customer shows signs of desperation or frustration. In such situations, coping questions help redirect the client's focus from the *impossible* to the *possible.*

Examples
- *What solutions have you already tried out? What was the result?*
- *Which measures have you taken in the past? How satisfied were you? Why?*
- *Which adjustments have you already made? How did this work?*
- *How did you cope with that back then? How difficult was it for you? What has helped you accomplish?*
- *When did you do this for the last time? What difference did it make?*
- *Have you ever been in such a situation? What did you do there to make it work? What was most helpful?*

Solution-focused concepts
Focusing on the existing positive, resource-orientation, focusing on the client

Analyzing previous attempts and searching for exceptions both are techniques aimed at collecting information about possible future solutions. The two methods have in common that they focus on what already works well and therefore foster a positive atmosphere as well as the client's confidence in his/her personal competence.

Inquire fields for improvement

At the end of the situation analysis stage, it is essential to disengage from the review of the past and to draw attention to the future. In order that clients can define their goals in the next stage, they must decide which problems or concerns they want to address first. The seller supports this decision process by means of a few goal-oriented questions.

🛠 INQUIRE FIELDS FOR IMPROVEMENT

General description: The salesperson invites the customer to name the issues on which he/she wants to focus and work first. The goal is to design the following sequences of the conversation according to the customer's needs and to ensure that only those issues are discussed that actually are relevant to the customer.

Examples

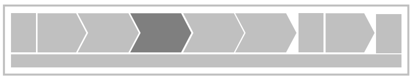
- *Where would you like to start? Which elements would you like to discuss first? What has the highest priority for you?*
- *Which characteristic is least desired? In which fields would adjustments have the biggest effects? Which fields would your employees change first if they could choose? What is most important for other stakeholders?*

Solution-focused concepts

Focusing on the client, resource-orientation, small steps

In this final part of the situation analysis, it is essential that the seller accepts and respects the client’s wishes, even though the seller's product line may be weak for these particular cases. In such situations, the temptation is strong to manipulate the customer or to force him/her to focus on topics where the seller is more competitive. This, however, would clearly violate the fundamental principles of resource-orientation.

SETTING OBJECTIVES



After the situation analysis has been completed, the seller initiates the next stage, that of setting objectives. The goal of this stage is that the customer describes the desired end state so that he/she can set concrete measures. Setting the objectives completes the mandate for the seller and provides a starting point for the actual search for solutions. From traditional sales literature, this stage is also known as *developing a need*. By using specific tools, the seller tries to evoke a need for change that can be developed in an impulse of action at a later stage. In solution-focused sales, this happens with the definition of the final objectives from which the customer will derive suitable actions himself.

In this stage, the solution-focused salesperson can choose among a series of systemic questions. Additionally, he/she can also make use of additional four instruments that are most frequently applied to setting objectives: scaling questions, miracle questions, change of perspectives, and suitability check.

🛠 SYSTEMIC QUESTIONS FOR SETTING OBJECTIVES

Examples

- *What should the future solution look like? What characteristics does it have to contain? What do you absolutely want to benefit from?*

- *What are your objectives? How would you know when the objectives are reached? When you achieve this goal, what does the situation look like? What circumstances will be present? What will you be doing?*
- *How do your employees and supervisors know that this solution fits? Who else would notice it and due to what? Who else?*
- *What is your goal in this case? What objectives do you set for this situation? Where would you want to go if you had the chance to do so? What does this solution look like?*
- *What would substitute the problem after it has vanished?*
- *What must happen here and now to make this conversation worth your while? What should be the results of this meeting? What can I do to make this conversation a success for you?*

To break the solution into smaller pieces:

- *How might you break down this large goal? What fragments is this goal composed of? When comparing this goal with the Tour de France: What legs of the race do you see?*

Solution-focused concepts
Focusing on the solution, resource-orientation, well defined goals, small steps

🛠 SCALING QUESTION FOR SETTING OBJECTIVES

General description: The second part of the scaling question is dedicated to setting objectives. The seller asks the customer about the score that he/she wants to reach on the scale. This can lead to some interesting conclusions about the customer's willingness to change. Afterwards, the salesperson inquires the differences between the current score and the desired end value. The customer will reply with those characteristics that are to be found in the end value and therefore starts creating the elements of future solutions.

The scaling question excels because it forces the customer to think about the end state and therefore envision what his/her solution will look like. At this point, however, the customer does not have to think about *how to get there* or how to overcome possible obstacles.

Example
A model dialogue for the part of the scaling question that focuses on setting objectives could be:

> **Tips for practitioners**
>
> - Bear in mind that not all customers strive for the maximum of 10 points. Some are happy if they score 8 or 9.

Salesperson: *(after the customer has indicated his/her current score) What score on this scale do you want to achieve?*

Customer: *9.5*

Salesperson: *OK. What is different at 9.5? What do the basic elements of your solution look like there?*

Customer: *Our processes run fully automatically and error-free. The throughput time has been cut in half and the assembly line requires 20% less space.*

Solution-focused concepts
Focusing on the solution, resource-orientation, well defined goals, solution-talk

🛠 THE MIRACLE QUESTION

General description: The miracle question is one of the classical instruments of brief-therapy and is ideal for setting goals. It invites clients to envision a clear picture of the desired end state while bypassing structural and causal assumptions. This is possible even if the problem is still nebulous, vague, or described incompletely.[174] Typically at this stage, the customer only has to think about the effect (the goal) and can fully omit the cause (the action). The customers' reply to this question provides important clues for their goals and needs and can be used by the salesperson at later stages of the sales process.

Timing (1)
The miracle question serves for setting objectives and is suitable for most sales calls in which the clients' motives and goals are unclear at the beginning. It is particularly suitable when customers are willing to change something but are still unaware of their desired end state or when their goals are indistinct or obscure. Additionally, it is applicable when customers are blocked by their expectations towards the practicality of a change, since the miracle questions omits these factors completely.

Furthermore, the miracle question is also very effective when clients claim that everything is in good shape and that no changes are needed. In such situations, it allows for assessing the situation in its entirety and independently from a practical or realistic context. Indeed, sometimes customers confine themselves by defining their goals by a rigid “That’s impossible”-attitude.

Timing (2)
When the customer says:
- *I know what I want, but this is impossible.*
- *We are dissatisfied with the entire situation but we don’t know what could help.*
- *Everything’s fine. I don’t know where we can improve.*

Examples

– *Assume that there was a miracle one night that solved your problem while you were asleep. When you wake up the next morning, you don't know that the miracle happened. How would you realize that the problem had been solved? What would be different? How would you behave?*
– *Imagine that you found a magic lamp and freed the genie inside. For your services, the genie offers you an unlimited number of wishes, all of which must be used for improving your current situation. What wishes would you make?*

Tips for practitioners

- Before posing the miracle question, make an introduction and point out that there is an uncommon and unique question to follow.
- Pose the question with a soft and mild voice.
- Pause between the passages in order to allow your customer time to imagine.

The actual miracle question is completed by a set of connecting questions that build on the customer's answer:

– *How would your employees and supervisors know that the miracle happened? Who would notice first? Who later? Who won't notice it at all? Why?*
– *How do other people react to that? What do they do differently?*

Solution-focused concepts

Focusing on the solution, resource-orientation, well defined goals, solution-talk

🛠 Change of Perspectives for setting Goals[175]

General description: Using this tool, the seller asks the clients to describe their situations from different people's perspectives, e.g. supervisors, employees, shareholders, etc. Through this change of perspective, the customers reveal their assumptions about the perceptions of others. This implies that there is no objective assessment of situations but that each appraisal is a matter of opinion. The buyers put themselves into the world of others and learn new ways of looking at things. They thus gain new information about their concerns, about their personal behaviors, and about their relationships to others. This enables clients to develop new, creative solutions. Furthermore, the salesperson obtains information about the clients, their systems, and about other deciders and influencers. RADATZ offers two variations for changing perspectives:[176]

> **Involvement of virtual experts:** Often, a seller can expand the scope of a client by inviting a virtual expert to the conversation. This tool is particularly suitable when the customer's own ideas reach their limits and when he/she has

no further rudiments of a solution. Sometimes, the client has the impression that people from his/her environment would easily cope with the problem. This change of perspective can therefore have a relieving effect on the client's thinking.

Involvement of virtual bystanders: Similar to the virtual expert, again, a virtual person is invited to the conversation. This time, it is somebody who has absolutely nothing to do with the situation and therefore brings in an unaffected perspective in order to enhance the customer's scope. This tool is very effective when the client is particularly associated with the situation. The perspective of a bystander can promote dissociation and facilitate the opening of new horizons.

Another popular method of changing perspectives is the DISNEY MODEL, named after the cartoonist WALT DISNEY. In this model, the customer acts in the positions of a dreamer, a realist, and a critic in order to assess a situation from all three standpoints.[177] This tool can be applied to single clients, where one person acts out each of the three roles himself/herself, and to groups, where people split up into three subgroups to represent one of the characters.

Aids

If there is a situation picture available that shows all people involved and their relationship to each other, it can be consulted to visualize the different perspectives. Coaches often work with different chairs to symbolize each character. Such aids, however, usually go beyond the average time budget of sales calls and would also require strong mutual trust between seller and buyer. Often, it is enough that the client performs the change of perspectives in his/her head.

Timing

These instruments serve to assess objectives for their suitability. This helps identify possible hurdles that might affect the implementation of the solution early enough to take measures. It also pays tribute to the implications of system theory.

Changes of perspectives are especially suitable when deciders act on doubtful motives. They do this by considering aspects that are usually not in the interests of other stakeholders such as shareholders, employees, suppliers, etc. A change of perspectives uncovers these false motives and still allows the client to save face.

Examples

– *What do your employees think of these goals? How would they assess them?*
– *What criteria would your shareholder apply by defining the objectives for the future?*

– *What is important for your employees? What is important for your supervisors?*

Solution-focused concepts
System theory, reframing

🛠 SUITABILITY CHECK[178]

General description: Using the suitability check, the seller tries to determine whether the goals set by the customer are well defined and in accordance with the client's intrinsic motivation. In particular, this is about scrutinizing whether the verbally stated goals are congruent with the client's own conviction. The seller can determine if these objectives are merely lip service and aim at appeasing the salesperson in order to get rid of him/her or if there is an actual desire for change. For the salesperson, a suitability check will minimize the risk of allocating time and energy to cases where the chances of closing a deal are low.

In order to assess the congruency and genuineness of objectives, the simplest measure is typically the best. If sellers are in doubt, they should address their concerns directly.

Timing
– The customer hesitates
– The customer claims interest, but the salesperson doubts his/her honesty
– Facial expressions, gestures, breathing, or other nonverbal signs do not comply with verbal statements
– The relationship between seller and buyer is stable enough to bear a direct confrontation

Examples
– *I got the impression that you are not quite sure yet. Am I correct in this appraisal?*
– *I believe to feel that you are not sure yet. What would your hesitation make disappear?*

> **Tips for practitioners**
>
> - Never assume a feeling that the customer does not agree with. Always accept when the client insists that his/her motives are real, even if your instincts say otherwise.

Solution-focused concepts
Well defined goals, equal partnership

After the objectives have been set and checked on their suitability, the sales process is ready to advance to the next stage, that of developing solutions.

DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

After the customer has clearly set his/her objectives, the seller can initiate the core part of the sales process: developing solutions. In traditional sales, the expert would now make suggestions based on his/her experience and technical knowledge. He/she would try to tailor the solution to the customer's problem and objectives. The solutions-focused salesperson, however, assigns this solution finding process to the client so that the solution is based on the client's resources.

This stage can be divided into two parts: developing solutions; and verifying solutions as to their suitability. The salesperson can make use of systemic questions and supplement these with reframing, a change of perspectives, scaling and coping questions, intervision, and changing of roles.

Developing solutions

🛠 SYSTEMIC QUESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

Examples

– *How would you know that you have found a solution? What behavior of yours would tell you that? What behavior of your employees would indicate that? What situation would you encounter in your organization when the solution is in place?*
– *What are the criteria of a good solution for you? What makes a solution good? How do you recognize a good solution? Which criteria must a solution incorporate that you say "This one is right!"?*
– *Assuming you had found five possible solutions. What characteristics do they all have in common? What else?*
– *What must a solution not contain? What must not be missing?*
– *What would Mr. X say that you have to do in order to improve the situation?*

Solution-focused concepts
Resource-orientation, change of perspectives, solution-talk

🛠 SCALING QUESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

General description: The third and final part of the scaling question focuses directly on developing solutions. The seller asks the client what would be different if the client already was one point higher as the initial score. This encourages the client to describe first small changes and thus provides clues for the upcoming action planning.

It is essential that the seller adheres to the concept of small steps. He/she does not ask for the differences between the current and the desired score (as is done in the goal-setting stage) but focuses on the *next higher* achievable score. Depending on the answer given, the seller can decide how to begin the next stage.

The concept of small steps in solution development has proven especially useful with complex, holistic systems, because it builds on what already works. If the entire system was to be replaced at once, the risk would arise that the existing positive aspects would not have the same positive characteristics in the new setting. The step-by-step implementation of a new solution allows for meaningful control of the process and can be better digested by the people within the organization.

Tips for practitioners

- Make sure that the customer describes small steps. If the proposed measures are too big, break them down into smaller pieces of action.

Examples

A model dialogue for the last part of the scaling question could be:

Salesperson: (After the customer has indicated his/her current and desired scores) *What would you have to do to improve from a six, your current position, to a seven? What is different at seven?*

Customer: *I first would have to enter the new processes into the user's manual. Afterwards, all employees must undergo a proper training. Then, I guess, I would be one step further.*

Solution-focused concepts

Resource-orientation, small steps

🛠 REFRAMING[179]

General description: Expert counseling usually assumes a linear reality with clear and prescribed rules. Solution-focused selling is particularly effective when it is used in environments where these general rules do not apply. In such environments, the seller can motivate the customer to accept different interpretations of circumstances. Through reframing, a situation can develop a different meaning and sense. To engage in reframing, the customer is asked to assess the situation in a different context or frame. Thereby, the client gains access to new ways of interpretation— ways that might have been hidden thus far and that might lead to a different appraisal of the situation.

Timing

Reframing is always suitable when the client has a rather static opinion of things ("That's just the way it is.") and when he/she tends to reject other perspectives. It can also be applied when the customer no longer agrees with certain aspects of an existing business relationship and when he/she threatens to switch to a competitor.

Examples

- *What else could this mean? How could this situation also be seen? What other opinions would be possible?*
- *How would other people evaluate this solution?*
- *What are the positive aspects of the solution?*

Solution-focused concepts
Reframing, change of perspectives, focusing on the existing positive

Verifying solutions

Generally, solutions are best verified by using forms of perspective change. The seller wants to find out how other stakeholders would assess the chosen solution. Two other ways to do this are represented by change of roles and by intervision.

🛠 CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVES FOR VERIFYING SOLUTIONS

General description: Changes of perspectives encourage clients to put themselves into other people's positions. This respects a system's relationships and interdependencies.

Examples

- *Which solution would Mr. X suggest? If Mrs. Y was in your position, what would she do?*
- *Which solution would be preferred by your employees? What would they vote for?*

Solution-focused concepts
Change of perspectives, system theory

🛠 CHANGE OF ROLES

General description: Change of roles is a special variant of the perspective change and also serves to confirm the suitability of a solution. Here, the seller and buyer change their roles: The customer now tries to pitch a solution to the salesperson.

The client is forced to reflect on the proposed solution and to assess its characteristics. Thanks to independent paraphrasing of the product's advantages, this information is anchored much better than if the client were to just hear it. By listening carefully, the seller obtains vital clues about the client's decision-making criteria. The seller recognizes them by their relative weight against other aspects during the staged pitch. Additionally, the seller will quickly realize if the client can identify with the solution or not.

Such a change of roles requires strong mutual trust between the client and the salesperson. If both parties have not known each other for some time and cannot build on this trust, this game can also be played in a slightly different variant, one in which the client imagines that he/she had to present this solution to the executive board of his/her company. By doing so, the client can take a more dissociated position and also utilize a meta-language by relating how he/she would do this.

Aids
If the salesperson has prepared a product presentation, he/she can put this at the client's disposal.

Timing
This instrument can be applied as soon as the customer has created a solution but is still not fully convinced of its advantages and suitability.

Examples
- *If you agree, I suggest switching roles for a few minutes. You take my part and try to pitch this solution to me.*
- *What do you think about changing roles for once? Imagine you are to present this solution to your executive board by the end of the week. How would you do that?*

Solution-focused concepts
Change of perspectives, system theory

🛠 INTERVISION[180]

General description: Intervision is a form of counseling where a group of equal individuals perform cooperative advising for a concrete problem of the case presenter. Intervision meetings typically proceed according to the following structure:[181]

1. The case presenter describes a case that includes an undesired situation (problem) for which a solution is needed. The advisors listen carefully and take notes, but do not interrupt.
2. The advisors now ask comprehensive questions, which are answered by the case presenter shortly and precisely.
3. The advisors then express their observations, assumptions, and feelings, but do not make proposals yet. The case presenter listens carefully and does not interrupt.
4. The case presenter comments on the advisors' statements and indicates which observations were correct and which ones can be ignored for the next steps. Again, the advisors just listen without interrupting.
5. The advisors then discuss possible solutions and agree on a few concrete, feasible options.
6. Afterwards, the case presenter analyzes and comments on the proposals,

chooses the ones that are suitable, and decides on the next steps.

At the core of an intervision is the change of perspective that occurs due to the impartiality and dissociation of the advisory group. The case presenter benefits from a neutral assessment of his/her situation through outsiders and can enhance his/her personal scope of perception and action.

The single best advantage of the intervision is the multiplicity with which solutions are created. By using brainstorming techniques, the power of all members of the advisory group is combined to the benefit of the case presenter. In sales calls, the basic elements of intervisions can be used to critically reflect possible solutions. One possible procedure may be designed as follows:

1. The seller takes over the role of the case presenter and offers the topics in the form of product proposals.
2. The customer poses comprehension questions, which are answered by the seller.
3. Afterwards, the client starts to discuss the various proposals aloud, either with his/her business partners or for himself, but does not yet make any decisions. The seller listens carefully and takes notes, because the client reveals much insightful information about his/her decision criteria at this stage.
4. The seller may interrupt the discussion and correct false assumptions about the solutions discussed, but only if this is absolutely vital. By doing so, the seller avoids the discussion being based on incorrect facts. It is essential, however, that the seller only comments on hard facts that are objectively assessable and that he/she leaves interpretations and evaluations (soft facts) entirely to the client.
5. If interrupted, the customer proceeds with the discussion until the most important aspects of each solution have been touched on or until the sequence loses momentum.
6. The seller then interrupts again and asks the client to make a choice. The seller supports the customer by asking a series of systemic questions. However, the salesperson refrains from making own contributions and lets the client find his/her own way.

When there are multiple participants on the customer’s side, the biggest advantage of the intervision is that the solution is discussed among the deciders in the presence of the salesperson. Usually, these opinion-building processes take place behind closed doors. Hence, the seller gains access to vital information about the customer’s decision-making criteria and can immediately correct false assumptions in order to avoid the decision being made on improper grounds. Moreover, the salesperson obtains insights into the action patterns and hierarchy structures of the client's organization which might prove very useful.

Timing
Intervision is particularly suitable when the client is represented by two or more people. It can also be applied with only one person. Either way, this tool requires a strong bond between buyer and seller since it is a rather uncommon method to be applied in sales.

Solution-focused concepts
Change of perspectives, system theory, focusing on the solution

HEADWIND[182]

General description: The "headwind" technique aims to verify that solutions are suitable. A salesperson confronts his/her customers with counterarguments to a specific product and invites them to defend the proposal. The customers are encouraged to reflect on all aspects of the solution and the seller can find out how much energy the customers are willing to allocate to the business relationship.

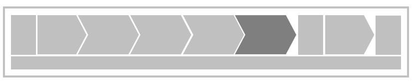
Timing
The headwind technique is especially useful when the client is unsure if a certain solution is appropriate. Furthermore, it is particularly effective when the seller gets the impression that the client is feigning interest in the solutions being discussed.

Examples
- Introduction: *If you had to make a decision for a solution here and now, which one would you choose?*
- Headwind questions: *Why this one? What makes you that certain? What if somebody else claims that this is much too expensive? How would you rate the price/performance ratio? How would you rate reliability, throughput time, ease of use, design, look, etc.?*

Solution-focused concepts
Change of perspectives, system theory, constructivism

After the customer has developed and verified the solutions, the seller can launch the stage of planning actions.

ACTION PLANNING



After the customer has considered the possible solutions and made a choice, he/she plans the next steps together with the seller. This can include an offer, a purchase agreement, an additional informational meeting, or any other action that is typical in sales processes. The simplest and usually most goal-oriented instrument that the salesperson can use in this stage is a series of open-ended questions.

🛠 SYSTEMIC QUESTIONS FOR ACTION PLANNING

Examples

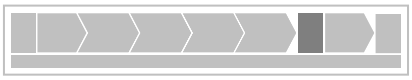
– *How would you like to proceed? What would you like to do now?*
– *What steps would you like to take next? What do you want to tackle now? How can I support you in this stage?*
– *What do you want me to do?*
– *What will you do now and by when? What are you going to do first? What should I be doing? What will you do differently tomorrow? What are your next steps? What measures do you take?*

Solution-focused concepts

Resource-orientation, autopoiesis, small steps

Beyond these questions, the seller can also make proposals on how to proceed and support the customer in planning actions. This, however, should only take place if the sales process has advanced to a point where action planning only has an administrative character. If the process is still in a state that can define the solution, the seller should continue with the resource-oriented approach.

POST-MEETING ACTIONS



Post-meeting actions primarily focus on the commonly defined next steps. If the client has not yet accepted an offer, the seller can continue the solution-focused process with a notation or, if stipulated, with a specially designed offer.

🛠 NOTATION[183]

General description: A notation is as a written review of the sales call and primarily serves to help develop connecting questions. The seller resumes the most important elements of all conversation sequences and pays attention to use the client's language and key words. The use of graphics, for instance the situation picture, increases individuality.

Notations should never contain interpretations or any other form of content-oriented contributions made by the seller. Notations are particularly effective when generating questions that continue the clients' reflection process and take them one step further toward their ultimate solution.

As a result of the notation, the seller as a person and the results of the sales call persist in the customer's memory. Furthermore, the notation offers the possibility of recalling the actions that both parties have agreed on. By providing a notation, the customer will better remember the seller and appreciate the time they spent together.

Timing
Notations suit the aftermath of all sales calls in which no agreement has been reached or for which the seller sees chances of exploiting potential. This tool can also be applied when the client's initial position is rather complex and when the client's reflection process should be stimulated.

Tips for practitioners

- Make sure you send the notation soon after the meeting so that the conversation is fresh in the client's memory.

Solution-focused concepts
Focusing on the client, resource-orientation

SOLUTION-FOCUSED OFFERS

General description: Often, the customer asks the seller to prepare a written offer for the goods and services discussed. Here again, the seller has the chance to continue with the solution-focused process.

Usually, written offers include information about the company and about the features, advantages, and prices of the product. However, such offers usually are standard documents and are rarely customized to the specific situation or the client's needs.[184] They hence bear the risk of minimizing their effectiveness. In contrast, solution-focused offers

- center those aspects of the solution that were developed by the customer;
- concentrate on those parts of the offer that were discussed and only contain additional information if demanded explicitly by the client;
- put an emphasis on those advantages and benefits that the customer particularly appreciated;
- are written in a suitable language and make use of the client's key words;
- contain a series of systemic question to carry on the reflection process;
- feature a high degree of individuality,
- and support the seller in meeting his/her objectives.

Timing
Solution-focused offers should connect to the next steps that both parties agreed upon. The specific design depends on the current stage within the sales process.

Solution-focused concepts
Focusing on the client, solution-talk, constructivism

FOLLOW-UP CALLS

Depending on complexity of the product, market penetration, competition, and other factors, a sales process can continue for several additional meetings. In every follow-up call, new topics can be brought up or issues that were already discussed can be further explored. Moreover, additional participants can take part in the sales process.

The position within the sales process provides important clues for identifying the most helpful solution-focused instruments. At any rate, the salesperson can capitalize on all sorts of systemic questions, especially on those that explore differences, exceptions, and anything that already works well. Furthermore, the seller can reuse visualizations (sketches, scales, etc.) and notations from previous calls.

If additional people attend

When the decisions at hand are far-reaching, it is likely that several people will be involved in the decision-making process. If additional decision makers join the sales process for the first time, it might make sense for the salesperson to walk these people through certain stages of the solution-focused procedure, even if the initial contact person has already advanced to a further stage. It is favorable to involve all elements of the *client system.*

If actions were taken after the last meeting

Solution-focused selling follows the principle of small steps. If product and industry characteristics allow, the step-by-step implementation of a new solution can make much sense to the client. In such situations, follow-up calls primarily serve one purpose: to find out how the executed actions (first steps) worked. Both buyer and seller can discover important things about the manner in which solutions must be conditioned to achieve the desired results. The customer can than derive concrete actions from these conclusions.

The stage of action planning can again show traits of a sales situation where the seller has to reposition his/her products anew. It will be much easier to be successful in doing so if the first steps worked well and the client already built confidence.

AFTER-SALES EVALUATION

Sales processes traditionally end with the client's positive or negative buying intention. In the event of a success, that is when the purchase actually happens and the prospect becomes a client, the stages of relationship management and exploitation of further potential will follow. When the seller, however, was unsuccessful and the client rejects making business, the process reverts to its initial position and the seller must make a new attempt.

In the event of failure, the seller usually wants to explore reasons. A short exchange with the prospect about his/her decision criteria will usually shed some light on the crucial aspects of the product, company, salesperson, or sales process. Today, some people already do this occasionally, but the emphasis is mostly on hard facts like product features or price.

In solution-focused selling, quality control is vital, since it allows for continuous development of the product line and promotes useful findings about the effects of the salesperson and sales method applied. Additionally, quality checks also increase the company's credibility.[185]

As opposed to traditional quality control, the solution-focused salesperson focuses on the sales method and its processes. He/she wants to know how the client assesses the sales process as a whole and some specific elements in particular. This empowers the seller to improve his/her personal techniques and instruments. Such evaluations are particularly useful for marketing organizations that do not have long-term experience with solution-focus in sales.

🛠 QUALITY CONTROL

General description: Quality control is an evaluation tool that is used by the seller to self-reflect his/her personal sales competence in order to discover fields for improvement. It includes a series of questions that can be posed in the written form of a questionnaire or verbally by means of an interview. These questions mainly refer to the design of the sales process and aim at finding out how the various communication elements worked. The secondary benefit from such interviews is that the customer is confronted once more with the differences between traditional and solution-focused sales. This can have a positive effect on the client and might be beneficial for future sales initiatives.

Timing

Quality controls should be applied in the aftermath of a sales call, independently of the outcome. They are especially effective when they are conducted by companies that have not been using solution-focus for long.

Examples

– *On a scale of 0% to 100%, what percentage have you reached in your opinion? According to what criteria do you assess this*

Tips for practitioners

- Foster the customer's openness and honesty by delegating the quality control to a neutral, uninvolved person or organization.
- If you do it yourself, give the customer your personal feedback at the beginning of the conversation. Express your gratitude and praise for his/her openness, trust and for all other behaviors that you have appreciated.

achievement? What is missing for 100%?

- *Would you collaborate with the salesperson again? Why?*
- *How do you think has the sales process been designed? What did you like? What not?*
- *Where do you see the differences between the method applied by our Mr. X and traditional approaches? Which one do you prefer? Why?*
- *What part of the achievement was due to the sales culture? In your opinion, where would you stand today if the traditional expert attitude was applied?*
- *Which instruments have proven helpful? Which ones haven't? Why? Which questions did you find useful?*
- *What was difficult for you, and what was simple? What has particularly contributed to your solution? What has not?*
- *In your opinion, what was the turning point in the process?*
- *Where can we improve? What should we have done?*

Conclusion

The solution-focused salesperson can utilize a number of specific instruments whose characteristics and application differ in unique ways from traditional sales methods and techniques. Nevertheless, it is the salesperson's own duty to attain experience with the use of these instruments and to adapt them to his/her specific professional environment. Most successful creations emerge when dedication meets and unites with experience.

This chapter outlined how the solution-focused approach can be applied to sales processes. It built on the assumption that the sales call runs in a model-like manner that allows for using the tools in their original context. In practice, a salesperson will be likely to encounter a number of special situations that he/she has to deal with. These incidents can be partly managed by the use of solution-focused tools. Nevertheless, some require leaving process-counseling and inserting sequences of specialist-counseling. The next chapter describes the three most relevant special situations that a solution-focused salesperson can encounter and shows how they can be overcome.

CHAPTER VII

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

The previous chapter showed how solution-focus can be applied in sales calls. These descriptions assume that the customer fully accepts the new method and participates actively in the role that is assigned to him/her by the solution-focused approach. A salesperson, however, will rarely see this ideal situation occur in practice. Usually, special occasions occur that make it necessary to work harder for progress in the sales process. Sometimes, these situations can be handled by using solution-focused instruments and techniques. Nevertheless, some occasions simply require the salesperson to temporarily abandon a strict solution-focus in favor of better consulting quality.

The next sections will describe three special occasions that a solution-focused salesperson must handle. Two of them can be handled with the basic solution-focused method, while one requires specialist-counseling.

Hidden motives

Brief-therapists and coaches have discovered that clients engage in consultations with different motives. These motives can be classified into one of three client types: customer, visitor, and complainer.[186]

> **The Customer:** Customers are actual clients. They have realized that they have a problem and that they require external support to solve it. At the same time, they know that they are part of the problem and that they can achieve a solution by a change of behavior. They are therefore willing to make great efforts to attain a solution.
>
> **The Complainer:** Complainers are aware of an existing problem; however, they do not see themselves as part of the solution. They believe that the solution can only be achieved by changing the behavior of others and they see no point in changing themselves. Whenever the advisor tries to work toward a solution, the complainers bring forward a new problem or devalue the solution with nebulous arguments.
>
> BERNE describes this behavior as a game called *Why not? – Yes, but…*.[187] There, the client or customer consequently rejects every proposal of the advisor without running the risk of being considered ignorant, since he/she *actually meets* with different advisors. Such games are played by people who often look for legitimation of their personal decisions by external experts.
>
> **The Visitor:** Visitors either do not see a problem or assign it to third parties. From their perspective, there is no point in changing the situation, and they

usually do not see the necessity of a consultation. Visitors are often sent by superior entities (supervisors, authorities, etc.) and sometimes they use the consultancy to legitimate personal decisions. KÖNIGSWIESER ET AL. write:

> "In many cases, the motive of having a renowned consultant legitimating for the expenses or for unpopular actions prevails."[188]

Similarly, prospects can participate in sales calls with varying motivation. The common sales literature offers examples of segmenting client types. However, they usually provide classifications according to decision patterns instead of behaviors.[189] The traditional segmentation of therapy and coaching can also be applied to sales calls.

The Customer: Real customers are truly interested in reviewing their current solution with the seller. They are open to the salesperson's products and services and can imagine doing business with him/her under certain conditions. They mainly base their decisions on pragmatic criteria and give the seller a fair chance to close the deal.

The Complainer: Complainers know that their current solution has potential to be improved, but they do not see a potential problem solver in the salesperson. They complain about their situation, about the deficiencies of their current provider, or about the inherent problems of the industry. They pretend to be open to alternatives but actually strive for maintaining the current state. Each of the salesperson's attempts to work towards a solution does not in any part match the client's needs, which makes it very difficult to close a deal.

The Visitor: Visitors to sales calls usually do not see any necessity for change. In general, they claim that everything runs perfectly and doubt that a conversation with the seller can by any means be beneficial. Visitors have no interest in alternative solutions, but nevertheless, unlike complainers, they openly admit this.

A prospect can take different roles during the sales calls, and the salesperson can control that to a certain extent by taking appropriate action. For instance, when the sales call had been fixed upon a cold call where the salesperson had to overcome some resistance, the client often takes the role of the visitor. In such occasions, it is the salesperson's task to increase the prospect's interest until he/she behaves like a real customer. One possibility of doing this is to start with analyzing and developing a need.

It is not easy, however, to recognize the client's motives at the beginning of a sales call. It is essential that the salesperson detects them in the course of the conversation in order to react quickly and to save himself/herself of obsolete efforts. Possible instruments that uncover those hidden motives include observation (e.g. if there is congruence between verbal and non-verbal communication), asking for possible fields of improvement and for the buyers expectations, change of perspectives, suitability check, reframing, change of roles, and headwind.

Customer Resistance

The resistance that a customer can offer during the sales call is closely linked to his/her motives. Such resistance can mostly be detected by segmenting the prospect's roles into customer, complainer, and visitor, and it usually manifests in the forms of objections and subterfuge. The traditional sales literature discusses the skills of how to handle resistance at length and with great importance. In the opinion of many authors, resistance is something negative. By classifying behavior as *cooperative* (without resistance) or *resistant*, however, the expert attitude appears, since the salesperson behaves like he/she would know what is best for the client.[190] Resistance is a natural part of each life system and a reaction to changing emotional processes. LIPPIT ET AL. write:

> "Resistance is a predictable and necessary part of change and learning processes. It is also a part of dealing with difficult issues."[191]

The solution-focused approach assumes that clients possess the competence to determine what they want and that they know how to proceed to achieve their goals.[192] Resistance is not to be seen as the customer's real position, but rather as the advisor's standpoint.[193] DE JONG ET AL. remark:

> "What we used to perceive as 'resistance of the client' can be better described as 'resistance of the practitioner'."[194]

Resistance can be described as the customer's unique way of cooperating.[195] In this sense, the goal of solution-focus is not to *break resistance* but rather to *increase motivation*, as the client's objectives generally signal interest.[196] In order to do so, the solution-focused salesperson can rely on a series of classical solution-focused instruments, including compliments, coping questions, change of perspectives, and the miracle question.

> **Compliments:** First, the salesperson should dignify the state that the customer has created. By doing so, the seller shows respect for the client's success and establishes the foundation for necessary mutual trust. As soon as the client feels emotionally nourished, he/she will be willing to discuss more openly. (Visitor becomes customer.)

> **Coping questions:** Subsequent to compliments, coping questions are ideally suited for encouraging clients to talk about their personal contributions to this positive state. Hardly anyone can resist talking about good deeds. Once the clients have praised themselves extensively, they will probably also show signs of self-criticism or talk about what is lacking, which the seller can address afterwards. (Visitor becomes customer.)

Change of perspectives: The change of perspectives aims to assess a situation from a different position, e.g. from the perspective of the chief financial officer or employee. This instrument encourages clients to critically review their own opinion, which might make them change their mind. (Complainer/visitor becomes customer.)

Miracle question: Another method of inviting clients to solution-talk is posing the miracle question. Clients usually assess their situation in a context where certain rules apply. These rules are set by their specific situation and apply today, which does not necessarily mean that they also apply in the future. The miracle question turns off these rules and forces the clients to describe their situation in a world where they could create the rules themselves. Such a starting point might cause clients to rethink their position in a different manner. (Complainer/visitor becomes customer.)

Provocation: When dealing with resistance, the salesperson can also utilize the tools of provocative therapy by FARRELLY.[197] The salesperson tries to initiate a reflection process by strikingly exaggerating the client's statements of resistance. It is essential that the seller maintains a respectful attitude and that he/she applies a sense of humor when making any provocation. Such interventions are especially suitable when the client engages in strong generalizations, e.g. "All you bankers are crooks!" (complainer). Especially when confining communication takes place which only allows a small scope of reaction, the provocative method offers a good solution to deal with the situation.[198] The provocation mirrors the clients' position in a humorous and respectful way and might make them reconsider their viewpoint. Provocations can also be used to deliberately evoke resistance in order to assess a solution for its suitability (comparable to the headwind approach).[199]

It is essential to understand that the provocative method requires a lot of methodic competence and experience. Provocations must only be used when seller and buyer have a strong rapport and when their relationship builds on mutual trust. Moreover, provocations must be stated with humor and convey the seller's respect and appreciation for the client's situation. When these points are neglected, a provocation can quickly become counterproductive.

Change of logical level: WATZLAWICK ET AL. suggest taking the client to a higher logical level by addressing the resistance in an open and direct manner:

Why should you change?

This question particularly suits clients of the type complainer, because it is usually not part of their approach to discuss about things on a meta-level.[200]

To summarize, resistance is a kind of behavior that the salesperson should address. The solution-focused method, however, sees resistance as something positive that highlights the importance of the matter. All of the tools that a solution-focused salesperson might use have in common that they convey the respect for the client's concern and do not try to convince or manipulate.

Resource Deficiencies

The core of process-counseling, and the most important difference with specialist-counseling, is its resource-orientation. The clients decide independently what it is that they desire (goals) and how they want to achieve it (actions). Solution-focused salespeople respect this opinion and refrain from making personal contributions. They even do so when they are convinced that different goals or measures would be more appropriate for the clients. Nevertheless, customers can only dispose of their own observation and selection criteria. Thus, it can happen that they define goals or actions that are objectively wrong or obviously not in their interest. Most of the time, this will be the case when clients lack technical competence. Although, in general, customers have more technical expertise than in the past, their knowledge is unlikely to go beyond the salesperson's expertise. MEIER says with respect to a sales process in banking:

> "The customer might be able to describe his/her situation accurately, but this does not mean that he/she also knows the bank's products."[201]

On such occasions, it is the salesperson's duty to empower the customers to make decisions on solid grounds of knowledge. As an external assessor, he/she brings in a different perspective that can be considered an additional resource. This resource can help detect blind spots[202] and it also represents a need of many clients, as MEIER affirms:

> "The customer would not feel satisfactorily advised if the salesperson retained information that would be helpful for developing the solution."[203]

The salesperson can choose between two possibilities to address resource deficiencies. On the one hand, he/she can apply classic tools from solution-focus. On the other hand, he/she can insert sequences of specialist counseling. These alternatives are described below.

Handling resource deficiencies with classic solution-focused tools

The salesperson can make use of original solution-focused methods to address the client's resource deficiencies. These instruments are especially suitable when the client either makes an obviously harmful decision on goals or actions or when he/she has no answers to the seller's questions. In the first case, the solution-focused salesperson can act out of the attitude of nescience, by assuming that the client still possesses all relevant resources. He/she can ask the customer to comment on his/her position:[204]

- *What tells you that this goal/solution is good for you?*

- *What other possibilities would you have? Why did you decide in favor of this one? What would argue for model b or c? What else?*
- *How would your employees assess this solution? What would they particularly appreciate? Which aspects of the other models would they like?*

The purpose of these questions is for the client to critically reflect on his/her position.

In the second case, when the client does not have an answer to the seller's question, the salesperson can again ask a series of questions:[205]

- *I know, I'm asking you difficult questions. Let's assume that you do know which goals you desire. What would they look like?*
- *What would your supervisor do? Which aspects would he/she particularly appreciate? How would he/she react?*

If these interrogative techniques still do not suffice to divert the customer in a more favorable direction, the salesperson can also insert a sequence of specialist-counseling.

Handling resource deficiencies by using specialist-counseling sequences

Each sequence of specialist-counseling aims at filling the customer's knowledge gaps. Therefore, such sequences are usually characterized by a one-way information transfer. Because a solution-focused salesperson is a typical process-counselor, he/she should consider the following guidelines:

> **Clear distinction of sequences:** The salesperson should clearly and visibly distinguish the stages of process and specialist-counseling. On the one hand, he/she can do so by making statements in order to prepare the client for the upcoming intervention. This introduction can be enforced through simple visualizations, e.g. by switching chairs. On the other hand, the seller can separate the two activities by personifying them. This is particularly suitable when the seller side is represented by two people who can assign roles among each other. The methodologically experienced person acts as process-counselor while the more technically versed salesperson acts as specialist-counselor. The advantages of the personalization are not indisputable. KÖNIGSWIESER advocates clearly:
>
> > "We see the personification of the complementarity in the advisor-system as a core element of our advisory approach."[206]
>
> WIMMER, however, adopts a different position:
>
> > "A genuine integration can only be achieved by an individual. Only an individual can *integrate* in the genuine sense of the term and exemplify that this caused something new and usable."[207]

Thus, it is up to the salesperson to decide whether and how to separate and integrate the two counseling philosophies.

Time limit: A solution-focused salesperson should only use specialist-counseling for a clearly defined reason. Especially for inexperienced practitioners, it is very tempting to remain in the expert attitude and to fall back into traditional sales patterns. Therefore, the seller should stipulate with the customer how long and for what specific topic the specialist-counseling should take place. This enables the seller to retake the role of the process-counselor after the information session.

Facts without valuation: As long as the client does not demand it, the seller should not personally comment on solutions, but concentrate on facts. This ensures that the client can make his/her choice afterwards without having been influenced or manipulated.

Conclusion

Interventions of specialist-counseling strive to enhance the client's resources. The salesperson, however, must be aware of possible negative implications that are associated with specialist-counseling, as the experience from therapy shows:

> "Clients, who intuitively felt how the therapist's plan reduced their freedom to explore and their choice of life plans, lost their interest in initiating changes themselves."[208]

Specialist-counseling should be used selectively and with care. This especially applies to problems that occur in *soft realities*. In such circumstances, specialist-counseling bears the risk that the salesperson imparts his/her own opinions and views without being explicitly asked to do so. This can become a problem when the seller makes statements under the guise of specialist-counseling that contradict the customer's personal view and when neither view is right or wrong. These situations usually occur when traditional sales methods are applied, but solution-focus aims at avoiding them.

Nevertheless, some sales calls can not move on without these interventions. Although the clientele is much better informed than in the past, the salesperson could still have more technical expertise, especially with respect to solutions (products). The sales process in general and the client in particular can benefit from these resources when they are presented in the right manner.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Solution-focus is more an attitude than a sales method. It can be applied independent of industry, company, or product line. The classical instruments like building on the existing positive, resource-orientation, solution-talk, change of perspectives, and scaling questions suit many different sales and life cases. Despite the fact that solution-focus can be applied independently from the specific case, a series of conditions exists that make its use particularly favorable. Similarly, there are also a number of requirements that must be met for its successful application.

When to use solution-focus in sales

The conditions in which solution-focus is particularly effective can be described from the perspectives of the client, company, product line, and general environment.

From the customer's perspective

The use of solution-focused methods can be determined by the customer's characteristics, needs, and demands.

Characteristics: Solution-focus is appropriate when the customer is informed, autonomous, critical, emancipated, and active. It also is suitable when the customer lacks trust in either the specific company or the industry in general. The Swiss financial industry provides a good example. A survey conducted in 2006 by the brand-consultancy BRANDTRUST revealed that more than a third of the surveyed customers believed that their relationship manager at the bank primarily pursues the interests of the bank instead of the customer's.[209] In such situations, solution-focus promotes mutual trust and the awareness for different counseling cultures.

Needs: Solution-focus should also be applied when the customer:

- wants to be considered an equal partner and an expert for his/her own situation,
- would like to be actively involved in the stages of problem analysis, goal setting, and solution development,
- prefers dialogues to monologues,
- wants to be respected for his/her own technical expertise,
- appreciates authentic and individual solutions,
- strives for enlarging his/her personal knowledge and expertise, and
- wants to choose from a variety of options.

Finally, clients can also explicitly desire a different sales culture to prevail. They are most likely to do so when they have had personal experience with the solution-focused methods.

Behavior: Furthermore, solution-focused methods work well when the customer tends to reject advice and when he/she explicitly does not like to be patronized by the seller. This behavior manifests when the customer frequently rejects the seller's proposals by using weak or unjustified arguments. In such situations, solution-focused methods reduce the client's resistance.

From the company's perspective

A company comes under pressure when its marketing department no longer meets its sales objectives. In such situations, the psychological strain increases considerably and forces the company's management to critically review the marketing activities on a strategic and operational level. The time to consider introducing solution-focused elements has eventually arrived when customers become more critical, achieve greater technical expertise, and want to be more actively involved. Some signals that a company can receive are therefore sent by its clientele. Others include diminishing market share, decreasing customer satisfaction, and falling effectiveness of marketing activities.

From a salesperson's perspective

Solution-focus can be a way out of a possible conflict of values. Such a conflict can arise when the salesperson has compunctions to make recommendations without being sure that these will meet the client's needs and interests. SPROSON writes:

> "It's often been suggested that one of the reasons that many professionals don't like selling is because of the connotations associated with the word 'sales.' They consider selling to be persuading people to buy something they neither want nor need, and often manipulating them against their will."[210]

In such cases, a salesperson can minimize these conflicts by applying resource-oriented elements.

From the product line's perspective

Solution-focus is suitable for both simple and complex product lines. Simple products have the advantage that the customer usually knows quite a lot about the requirements for his/her future solution. In such situations, the resource-orientation utilizes this expertise in order to find the customer's favored product. Moreover, it shows respect for the client's knowledge and promotes mutual trust. When the matter is rather complex, the success of the implementation of a new solution will be determined by various factors. In these cases, the solution-focus helps to reduce the implementation gap. Moreover, complex solutions usually require greater resources.

The more involved a client was in developing the solution, the more likely he/she is to decide in favor of the solution-focused salesperson. BELZ adds:

> "For all complex solutions, client involvement becomes crucial."[211]

Furthermore, solution-focus is suitable in environments that are determined by soft realities rather than by hard realities. Wherever no single best solution exists but instead various opinions, views, and assessments are valid, solution-focus provides many advantages.

From the general environment's perspective

The general environment's forces can be divided into politics, economics, and culture. On the political side, strict corporate-governance regulations can raise the need for more process-oriented sales methods. On the macroeconomic side, an ongoing trend in globalization and an enforced competition can call for a distinct selling method in order to differentiate from competitors. Microeconomically, a company can be forced to review its sales methods because of a loss in effectiveness. Finally, the suitability of solution-focus is also determined by the cultural values of a society. As SCHMIDT outlined, there are considerable cultural and structural differences between North America and Europe that affect the use of solution-focus in therapy.[212] These differences may also apply to the use of solution-focus in sales. Salespeople must carefully consider their specific cultural environment and assess how they can adjust the method to meet these specific requirements.

Rewquirements for applying solution-focus

In order to successfully implement and apply the solution-focus in sales, marketing organizations rely on a set of requirements that must be met. These requirements can be described from the perspectives of the company, salesperson, and customer.

Requirements for the marketing organization

A company's management can promote the successful application of solution-focus in sales through a series of adoptions as outlined hereafter.

> **Integrated marketing strategy:** Personal selling is one of six activities of the marketing communications mix.[213] As part of the entirety of all marketing efforts, it is essential that solution-focus is considered a sales philosophy and that it is integrated into the marketing strategy. A pushy, short-term strategy that aims at maximizing short-term profits can hardly harmonize with an evolutionary direct selling method that focuses on long-term partnerships. The importance of an integrated and harmonized marketing concept is also highlighted by KOTLER ET AL.[214] Strategic marketing activities, including advertising and product management, should consider the core elements of the solution-focused approach.

Adequate sales culture: The solution-focused approach substitutes short-term profit maximization with long-term sustainable partnerships. In order for a salesperson to create an intrinsic motivation to apply this method, he/she must be backed by an adequate sales culture within the company. If this culture does not yet prevail, it must be initialized by the company's top management, as BLÄTTLER outlines:

> "The change from supply focus to demand orientation is a change of culture which must originate from and be exemplified by the top management […].The adopted strategy must be reflected first by the company's mission statement, goals, and strategies, and second by its front staff and clients."[215]

A company's executives can create the necessary awareness among the sales force to successfully apply a new sales method. BLÄTTLER suggests:

> "The change in the corporate culture must be supported significantly by adaptation of leadership styles, leadership tools, and sales tools (tools of education, motivation, remuneration, and presentation)."[216]

Compensation schemes are of vital importance when a sales culture is to be shaped, as WITT outlines:

> "Above all, remuneration serves as appreciation of performance. Thus, it also serves as performance incentive in both a positive and negative manner. Remuneration affects the staff's commitment and has an impact on sales volume, sales prices, costs, and contribution margin. It follows that remuneration can be used as a tool to control behavior."[217]

Solution-focused compensation schemes are motivating, simple, transparent, comprehensible, comparable, just, flexible, performance-driven, convey the feeling of security, and are part of the integrated marketing concept.[218] Besides quantitative figures, they also assess and reward qualitative achievements that aim at long-term and sustainable client relationships.

Although compensation schemes are important for shaping a company's sales culture, they tend to lose effectiveness to do so:

> "The power of performance-driven reward systems to motivate people is declining. This gives reason to think about other leadership tools with which the sales force's commitment can be stimulated."[219]

Business executives must consider additional measures to promote a new sales culture. RACKHAM ET AL. offer some:

> "Four elements are needed to support your sales force's shift to creating customer value: a clear vision, new structures, capability building, measurements, and compensation aligned."[220]

Product line: Despite practicing solution-focus selling, a salesperson will hardly be successful when the quality of his/her goods and services does not meet the clientele's requirements or when they are inferior to the competitors'. After customers have developed a suitable solution, they are likely to screen the market for alternative providers and to choose their partner on the grounds of the best offer. The solution-focused salesperson might have the advantage of building on existing mutual trust, but this lead will be of little value especially with pragmatically driven customers.[221]

Additionally, the variety of the product line and the possibility to customize a solution are also of great importance. The greater the possibilities to tailor a product, the smaller the expected implementation gap and the higher the seller's chance to close the deal.

> "The increasing transparency and comparability of basic products and services requires a company to clearly differentiate itself from its competitors […].The individualization of the product or service is then the point of differentiation and the advantage to create added value for the customer."[222]

Furthermore, a high modularization also enables to implement the solution in small steps, which again promotes higher acceptance among the people affected within the company. A high degree of flexibility can, however, also cause disadvantages for companies, as BELZ ET AL. outline:

> "Inaccurate customer orientation results in exploding numbers of variations and, ultimately, in decay."[223]

Differentiation can not only be achieved through high modularization, but also by providing mutual adjustment with other factors:

> "In many companies, the buzzword 'client orientation' seems to justify every solution, regardless of how exotic it is […]. However, variation may not only apply to products, but also to services, prices, and other market-penetration activities."[224]

Requirements for the salesperson

The success of solution-focused selling stands and falls with the seller's commitment and competence.

Commitment: Only when the salesperson is convinced by the fundamentals of the solution-focus will he/she be able to apply its instruments and techniques in sales calls. This includes accepting the findings from radical constructivism and autopoiesis and requires that the salesperson generally adheres to the concept of resource-orientation. The seller must be willing to drop his/her personal problem-solving competence and refrain from making personal contributions. This particular point is one of the major reasons why solution-focused counseling in therapy and coaching fails: The advisor leaves the resource-orientation unpredictably and thus undermines the solution-focused processes.[225]

Methodological competence: The application of solution-focus in sales requires high methodological competence. Distinctive empathy, a sense of the appropriate use of the instruments, as well as high question competence are only some of the skills that a salesperson must possess. These abilities can only partly be acquired through technical training. A salesperson must be willing to try the new methods step-by-step in practice, to attain experiences, to accept failure, and to develop his/her personal style. ZECH writes on the importance of practical experience:

> "The sales situation […] is the true learning field for customer orientation."[226]

Requirements for the clients

The customer plays the most important role in the sales process. He/she must be willing to invest time, to engage actively and to take responsibility for the contents of the sales process. BLÄTTLER outlines:

> "If prospects are willing to invest time into the development of a solution, they express their interest in a positive result. However, if they do not want to contribute, the salesperson has to critically reflect on the clients' interest in an optimized solution. In that case, there is no point in creating countless offers and various variations—the chances for closing the deal are marginal."[227]

Most customers are accustomed to specialist-counseling and design their expectations towards the sales process accordingly. Since solution-focused selling assigns the client a new, more active role, it requires rethinking. On the importance of the customer's expectations, KÖNIGSWIESER ET AL. write:

> "Systemic process-counseling aims at long-term, sustainable development. In times of acute, life-threatening crisis and difficulties, thus, managers usually contract specialist-counselors and commission them to deliver rationales and recommendations for short-term, effective actions. However, even in times […] where positive long-term expectations are dominated by concerns about tomorrow, the management team often lacks the time, knowledge, and understanding to engage in sustainable organizational development. In this sense, the

> expectations of the client […] also determine the practice of the advisor […].”[228]

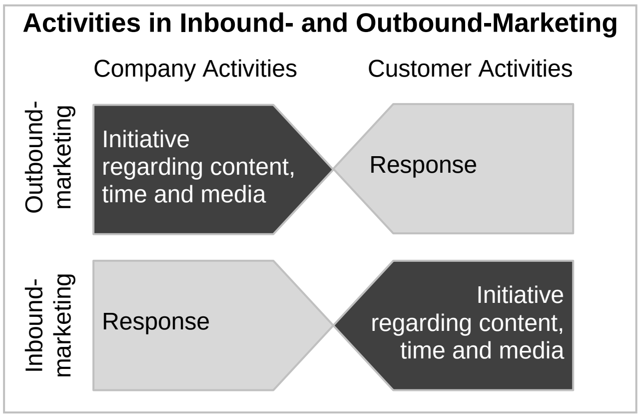
Mutual trust is another important condition for applying solution-focus. If the customer’s faith in the seller is disturbed, it has to be rebuilt first. LUHMANN writes on the meaning of trust in relationships:

> “Trust is the greatest single complexity-reducing mechanism […] which is extremely relevant for the practice of the advisor and for sustainable advisory success.”[229]

Finally, the client must also have faith in his/her personal problem-solving competence.[230]

Solution-focus and strategic marketing management

The fundamentals of solution-focus can also enter the strategic levels of marketing management. Although they would affect various stages of the marketing process, their influence would be particularly great in product development. Today, product development usually takes place according to *outbound principles*. This implies that a company designs and develops its goods and services in-house and leaves it to the marketing organization to create a need among possible purchasers.



The *inbound marketing concept* by BELZ provides an approach that fundamentally differs from traditional outbound marketing.[231] Inbound marketing describes a new marketing culture, in which the customer’s desires and needs are placed at the very center of each activity on the corporate value chain. As opposed to outbound marketing principles, research and development takes place in direct contact with the customer and therefore ensures that only products are brought to market that actually meet the clientele’s needs. The marketing organization is not so much pressured to focus their efforts on creating this need first.

Some industries already act as pioneers in applying inbound marketing on the entire value chain. The IT sector provides a good example: Marketing organizations in the IT industry often provide online panels or sponsor online communities in order to gain direct access to the user’s thoughts on how a product can be improved. In contrast, the financial sector can be mentioned as an industry with potential in this respect. In banking, for instance, services are usually developed based on the ideas of in-house specialists. They rarely consider the clientele’s inputs and it is left to the sales force to create a need for the solutions among prospects.

There are benefits and drawbacks to outbound marketing. On the one hand, many successful innovations arise from a few masterminds and are often created without the contributions of the client. On the other hand, every product that is developed this way bears the risk of missing the clientele's actual needs. BELZ, however, argues that increased competition forces companies to aggressively market their product and that this procedure puts pressure on the customer. Together with the overwhelming variety of choice, providers, information, channels, and services, this leads to disinterest and passivity of the client.[232]

> "Pressured customers become increasingly passive and loosen their bonds with their providers. The increasing pressure on the firms leads into a narrow dead end."[233]

BELZ advocates for an enforced inbound marketing approach so as to benefit from one major advantage:

> "Activation, time, and matter are right for the customer. One core problem of marketing is therefore solved, because most people just don't want to deal with an offering at a particular time […] It is essential to meet the client's needs and not just to advertise the offering."[234]

In order to effectively implement inbound marketing, BELZ developed a model that combines different marketing approaches, client activities, and distribution channels.

Solution-focused selling represents the ideal starting point to migrate from an outbound marketing organization to an inbound marketing culture. The instruments and approaches of solution-focus enable to collect the very information that is needed to align product development to the needs of the customers. The statements, demands, and desires that a client expresses during a sales call can be recorded by the salesperson and flow into all stages of the corporate value chain. ZECH adds:

> "Many products and services are created through cooperation with the customer, in a dialogic relationship between a demanding client and a delivering company."[235]

RADATZ also confirms that a solution-focused approach can serve as an innovation driver for product development.[236] Solution-focus and inbound marketing therefore complement each other in a unique way.

PART III

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Advantages of solution-focused selling

The benefits of solution-focused selling can be described from multiple perspectives as outlined below.

Solution-focused selling and the demands of a modern customer

Chapter 2 of this book described some of the changes that Western civilization has undergone in the last few years. It also outlined the implications for modern marketing management, from which the demands of the new customers were derived. By recalling these findings, it can be said that today's customers are better informed, more autonomous, critical, active, and emancipated; that they want to be part of the solution-finding process and enhance their technical knowledge; and that they act more individualistically, proactively, and independently. These results are supported by ZECH, who was commissioned to conduct a survey among the customers of an American multinational company.[237] Similarly, he found out that customers were satisfied with a sales relationship when:

1. the salesperson allocated enough time and showed patience,
2. the client could gain more competences,
3. the advisor respected the customer's wishes and problems,
4. the customer did not feel instructed,
5. the solution matched with the client's needs,
6. the freedom of choice laid with the customer, and
7. the sales call produced additional options in the customer's scope of action.

While the first three points could probably also be met by traditional specialist-counselors, points 4 to 7 demonstrate the uniqueness of the solution-focused approach. Due to resource-orientation, the customer feels respected, benefits from suitable solutions (and small implementation gaps), maintains freedom of choice, and gains additional scope. Moreover, ZECH writes:

> "Customers who realize that they have been persuaded to buy something against their own decision will not stay with the company for long."[238]

Solution-focused selling ensures that the clients can be actively involved in the solution-finding process, that their solutions are tailor-made, that they will not feel persuaded, that they can increase their knowledge, that the implementation gap is kept to a minimum, etc. In short, solution-focus selling meets the demands of modern customers like no other specialist-counseling sales method.

Advantages for marketing organizations

Solution-focused selling meets the demands of the new customer. If this becomes manifest in higher customer satisfaction, it can lead to greater customer loyalty and directly affect the company's course of business. This is clearly the main benefit for marketing organizations, although two additional ones can be named.

> **Saving resources:** A firm and its sales force have the chance to save time. Since solution-focused selling focuses on the future, it becomes obsolete to extensively analyze the current situation or behaviors of the past. The discussion starts concentrating on possible solutions earlier than traditional sales methods. Moreover, the salesperson can mostly bypass the stage of handling objections, since customers develop the solution themselves and are unlikely to raise any objections at all. Thus, the seller is less prone to engage in sales processes that only have little chances of success. Solution-focused selling ensures that sales calls are customized to the clients' needs and that time is used efficiently.
>
> **Unique selling proposition:** A company that applies solution-focused selling has the chance to establish a unique selling proposition. Traditional selling literature perceives selling as being a *value communicator*.[239] The sales force's task is determined by *communicating* the product features to the prospects. RACKHAM ET AL. take a new position by assigning a new role definition to the sales department:
>
> > "The sales force's mission as value communicator is over […]. Companies are realizing that their survival depends on their ability to create direct and tangible customer value in every part of their enterprise, including the sales force."[240]
>
> By introducing a new sales method, a company can differentiate itself from its competitors in a new dimension.
>
> > "With so many similar products competing in today's market, a company can create new customer value by focusing simply on how the customer acquires the product. Consumers increasingly place value on how the product is sold to them rather than on the product itself. The sales process itself plays an increasing role in creating customer value."[241]
>
> In this sense, a marketing organization can benefit from the innovation value of solution-focused selling. This can go as far as that the news of a new sales culture spreads in the market, making clients select their prospective partners according to the manner in which they sell.

Advantages for salespeople

The most important benefits for salespeople emerge when increased selling effectiveness and higher customer satisfaction lead to higher sales. Additionally, solution-focus can promote greater job satisfaction. As SPROSON outlined, some vendors do not quite like their job because they associate activities like persuading and manipulating with selling.[242] Moreover, he writes:

> "They don't want to be branded as a 'sales person' because no one likes them (and everyone wants to be liked)."[243]

In a solution-focused sales culture, sellers do not necessarily have to be pushy and force their prospective clients into accepting the offerings. This takes away pressure of the sales force and removes the concerns of being manipulative. Additionally, solution-focus can also help reduce natural fears that a seller might experience in the face of a sales situation. Some salespeople are confronted with fears in their job that negatively affect their sales competence and make them less effective. KUMPF has analyzed the phenomenon of sales fears and defines it as the combination of subjectively experienced uncertainty, threat of self-concept, and helplessness. He adds that fear is closely associated with the loss of power, social acknowledgement, and security and that it can occur in the contact, advising, and closing stages of a sales process.[244] Solution-focus provides the opportunity to reduce the fears of salespeople. The change from a culture of persuading and manipulating to a culture of developing and partnerships withdraws a lot of pressure from a salesperson's shoulder. Furthermore, due to resource-orientation, the salesperson is less exposed to customer objections, one of the major fear drivers in sales.

Disadvantages of solution-focused selling

When introducing solution-focused selling, a company must deal with a number of difficulties that may arise. Only when companies cope with those challenges will they be able to fully capitalize on the benefits of process-counseling.

> **General difficulties of introducing new sales methods:** Changes in sales methods usually cause changes in marketing strategy and management culture. Such transitions can be difficult, since the system memory of a company strives for maintaining what is familiar. RACKHAM ET AL. admit that it is not easy to change a company's sales culture:
>
> > "What makes sales-force change so hard? For one thing, most executives grossly underestimate the difficulty that is involved in changing the sales force […]. Change is tricky in any area, but sales forces have shown to be the most change-resistant of all business departments."[245]
>
> They provide possible solutions to these challenges:

> “To facilitate change, keep these four cautions in mind: it takes longer than you think, there is no silver bullet, you can’t hire your way to capability, you can’t improve salespeople without improving sales management.“[246]

Introducing a new sales culture also causes high costs. The efforts to train the sales force and to align internal processes must not be underestimated. Furthermore, a change from short-term profit maximization to a long-term, sustainable partnership culture can result in a momentary sales drop. Although the long-term benefits will outweigh these drops, they can still strain a company considerably.

Rejection by employees: The solution-focused approach is distinct from traditional sales methods and relies on the commitment of its practitioners. Although this commitment can be promoted by various measures, it can still be rejected by a company’s salespeople. The requirements of high methodological competence necessitate great efforts for training and practical experience. There will be some sellers who do not believe in the advantages of solution-focus and who will thus react reluctantly.

High requirements can also lead to excessive demands on the sales force, which can negatively affect motivation and productivity. It is management’s task to assess the suitability of the sales method for the organization in advance and to take appropriate measures before introducing it.

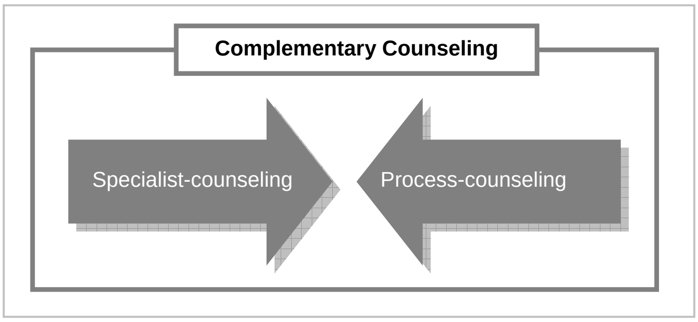
Rejection by customers: Similar to employees, the solution-focused approach also relies on the customer’s commitment. People who want to attain external expertise, who strive for quick solutions, or want to delegate responsibility will be better off with a specialist-counselor. They might thus resist playing the role that the solution-focus assigns to them.

Limitations of solution-focused selling

Solution-focused selling also has its limitations, the two most important of which are described here.

Resource deficiencies

A strict adherence to the principles of constructivism usually does not make sense. Even if there are multiple realities, most people do not think and act that way. They need objective criteria to make decisions and the assurance that some things can be objectively identified, described, and evaluated. As a result, the customer’s goals or solutions can indeed be unsuitable or even wrong from a view of best practice or state of the art. Moreover, the customer might ask the salesperson at some point in time to comment on a particular issue or to state his/her personal opinion. Hence, it is unlikely that a salesperson will find a situation where resource-orientation can be consequently applied.



Therefore, the salesperson must develop the competence to integrate process-counseling and specialist-counseling. The consulting industry is just about to realize the importance of this combination. In the field of organizational development, this is already practiced with success under the term “complementary counseling”.[247] Originally, complementary counseling was a result of the deficiencies of pure specialist-counseling. The advocates of the combination found out that the implementation gap in business consulting was considerably high, especially when external advisors were commissioned to analyze a company’s problem and to suggest appropriate solutions. By combining the two counseling cultures, they could benefit from the advantages of both fields and thus leverage the quality of the advice they received. The same conclusion also applies to selling. Since a strict resource-orientation has its limitations, a salesperson must have the ability to combine the two counseling cultures in favor of an efficient and goal-oriented sales relationship. One example of this integration is provided in Chapter 7, where it is also outlined how such a combination can be successfully applied.

Closing the deal

Another major limitation is given by the sellers' objectives. As representatives and wage earners of a company, the sellers' primary task is to sell their employers' goods and services. The customer, however, may well develop a solution that the company’s product line cannot offer or for which a competitor has a superior supply. In such occasions, the sellers will find it very difficult to bring their own company back to the game, and they risk losing the deal to a competitor. This is the case even if there is a profound mutual trust between seller and buyer and if the customer appreciated the solution-focused sales method. All of this will be of little value at this stage of the sales process. Companies that offer superior advisory services to complement a product are often confronted with similar situations: Customers might capitalize on the service component but buy the goods from the discounter.

In this book, I have not found a way of solving this problem. It should be the focus of future research to develop a method or instrument that enables the seller to still make the sales process rewarding even if he/she cannot directly meet the customer’s demands. However, such situations might represent the cost that a solution-focused marketing organization must pay for applying resource-orientation.

Summary & final remarks

This book introduced a new selling method that builds on the fundamentals of solution-focus, a counseling approach originally developed and applied in psychotherapy. The objectives of this work were to examine where today’s most commonly used sales methods no longer suffice, how solution-focused selling can be applied, and what implications this causes for practice.

Current sales methods usually take place as specialist-counseling. They are based on the role definitions of the expert (salesperson) and the layman (customer). These principles were developed in a time that was different in many ways. Nowadays, the modern customer is better informed and wants to engage more actively in the sales process. Today’s sales strategies no longer meet these demands, and both marketing organizations and salespeople have to critically reflect on their selling methods.

One way to better cope with modern marketing challenges is to enlarge the stake of process-counseling by applying solution-focus. In this approach, salespeople mainly act as change agents who support the customer in discovering his/her own resources and developing a suitable solution. They can do this in all stages of the sales process, including scheduling the appointment, opening the sales call, analyzing the situation, setting objectives, developing solutions, and planning actions. The seller can make use of classic solution-focused instruments such as scaling questions, miracle questions, solution-talk, compliments, situation picture, intervision, and changes of perspective.

A salesperson will rarely encounter a sales situation that is suitable for applying a pure solution-focused approach. The principle of resource-orientation in combination with sales creates a few special situations that a salesperson must manage. These include the customer acting with hidden motives, showing resistance, and lacking resources. While the first two can easily be handled with classic solution-focused instruments, the latter forces the salesperson to combine process and specialist-counseling for the sake of superior advisory quality.

In order to apply solution-focused selling successfully, a number of requirements must be met. On the one hand, marketing organizations must provide a broad product line that allows for high flexibility and mutual adjustment. They must also integrate the solution-focus in their general marketing strategy and initiate the development of an appropriate sales culture. On the other hand, salespeople must have great methodological competence and commit to the fundamentals of this new counseling model.

The single best advantage of solution-focused selling is that it improves advisory quality and therefore bears the potential for increasing sales. Moreover, it can represent a unique selling proposition for marketing organizations, achieve higher customer loyalty, lower resource expenditure, and increase employee satisfaction. However, introducing new sales method can increase costs and temporarily decrease sales. Furthermore, it can be rejected by employees or customers.

Today, solution-focus is almost unknown in connection with sales. Abundant literature exists on the topic of sales, but few articles make a link between solution-focus and selling. No publications exist dedicated to this topic, it has not been subjected to empirical research, and there is clearly no training provider in the market. A few practical experiences, however, uncover the great potential that this method incorporates. Taking this as a starting point, further research can be conducted to prove the method's superiority compared to traditional approaches, to find ways of closing deals when the customer does develop a solution that cannot be fulfilled by the seller's product line, and to discover more advantages and disadvantages from different perspectives. Moreover, practitioners shall try to find out more about the differentiated suitability regarding industries, product characteristics, cultures, client segmentations, and countries.

When researchers and practitioners jointly develop the ideas presented in this book, selling will gain a new meaning.

APPENDIX

Lists of references

Literature

Beavin, James H./Jackson, Don D./Watzlawick, Paul (2000): *Menschliche Kommunikation. Formen, Störungen, Paradoxien.* 10., unchanged edition , Verlag Hans Huber, Berne

Berne, Eric (2002): *Spiele der Erwachsenen. Psychologie der menschlichen Beziehungen.* 7., unchanged edition, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg

Blättler, Urs (2005): *Neukundengewinnung für Asset Manager.* 1. edition, Haupt Verlag, Berne

De Jong, Peter/Berg, Insoo Kim (2003): *Lösungen (er-)finden. Das Werkstattbuch der lösungsorientierten Kurztherapie.* 5., improved and enhanced edition, Verlag Modernes Lernen, Dortmund

De Shazer, Steve (1989): Der Dreh. Überraschende Wendungen und Lösungen in der Kurzzeittherapie. 1. edition, Carl Auer Verlag, Heidelberg

De Shazer, Steve (1992): *Das Spiel mit Unterschieden. Wie therapeutische Lösungen lösen.* 1. edition, Carl Auer Verlag, Heidelberg

De Shazer, Steve (1994): *…Worte waren ursprünglich Zauber.* 1. edition, Verlag Modernes Lernen, Dortmund

De Shazer, Steve (2005): *Wege der erfolgreichen Kurztherapie.* 9., unchanged edition, Verlag Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart

Dilts, Robert B./Epstein, Todd/Dilts, Robert W. (2000): *Know-How für Träumer.* 2., unchanged edition, Junfermann Verlag, Paderborn

Duden (2001): *Das Fremdwörterbuch.* 7., revised and advanced edition, Dudenverlag, Mannheim

Farrelly, Frank/Brandsma, Jeffrey M. (1986): *Provokative Therapie.* 1. edition, Springer Verlag, Stuttgart

Fink, Klaus-J. (2004): *Bei Anruf Termin. Telefonisch neue Kunden akquirieren.* 3., unchanged edition, Betriebswirtschaftlicher Verlag Dr. Th. Gabler GmbH, Wiesbaden

Geyer, Günther (1998): *Das Beratungs- und Verkaufsgespräch in Banken.* 6., unchanged edition, Betriebswirtschaftlicher Verlag Dr. Th. Gabler GmbH, Wiesbaden

Harris, Thomas A. (1975): *Ich bin o.k., du bist o.k. Eine Einführung in die Transaktionsanalyse..* 41., unchanged edition, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg

Höfner, Eleonore/Schachtner, Hans-Ulrich (1995): *Das wäre doch gelacht. Humor und Provokation in der Therapie.* 1. edition, Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg

Holzheu, Harry (2007): *Wer nicht lächeln kann, macht kein Geschäft. Emotional Selling.* 1. edition, Redline GmbH, Heidelber

Königswieser, Roswita/Sonuç, Ebrû/Gebhardt, Jürgen: *Integrierte Fach- und Prozessberatung,* published in: Mohe, M. (Hrsg.; 2005): *Innovative Beratungskonzepte.* 1. edition, Rosenberger Fachverlag, Leonberg

Königswieser, Roswita/Sonuç, Ebrû/Gebhardt, Jürgen/Hillebrand, Martin (2006): *Komplementärberatung. Das Zusammenspiel von Fach- und Prozess-Know-How.* 1. edition, Verlag Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart

Kotler, Philip/Keller, Kevin Lane (2006): *Marketing Management.* 12., revised and enhanced edition, Pearson Education, New Jersey

Kumpf, Andreas (1997): *Ängste im Verkauf. Zur Bedeutung von selbst bezogenen Kognitionen und verkaufsrelevanten Dispositionen bei bereichspezifischen Ängsten innerhalb eines Verkaufsgesprächs.* 1. edition, Peter Lang Verlagsgruppe, Frankfurt am Main

Lewis, David/Bridger, Darren (2001): *Die Neuen Konsumenten. Was sie kaufen, warum sie kaufen, wie man sie als Kunden gewinnt.* 1. edition, Campus Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main

Lippmann, Eric (2004): *Intervision. Kollegiales Coaching professionell gestalten.* 1. edition, Springer Verlag, Berlin

Lueger, Günter/Korn, Hans-Peter (2006): *Solution-Focused Management.* 1. edition, Rainer Hampp Verlag, München

Maturana, Humberto R. (1994): *Was ist erkennen?* 1. edition, Piper Verlag, München

O'Connor, Joseph/Seymour, John (2005): *Neurolinguistisches Programmieren: Gelungene Kommunikation und persönliche Entfaltung.* 15., unchanged edition, VAK Verlags GmbH, Kirchzarten bei Freiburg

Pichot, Teri/Dolan, Yvonne M. (2003): *Solution-focused brief therapy. Its effective use in agency settings.* 1. edition, The Haworth Clinical Practice Press, New York

Rackham, Neil/DeVincentis, John R. (1999): *Rethinking the sales force. Redefining selling to create and capture customer value.* 1. edition, McGraw-Hill Publication Company, New York

Radatz, Sonja (2000): *Beratung ohne Ratschlag. Systemisches Coaching für Führungskräfte und BeraterInnen.* 4., unchanged edition, Verlag Systemisches Management, Wien

Radatz, Sonja (2006): *Einführung in das systemische Coaching.* 1. edition, Carl Auer System Verlag, Heidelberg

Rauen, Christopher (1999): *Coaching. Innovative Konzepte im Vergleich.* 1. edition, Hogrefe-Verlag für Psychologie, Göttingen

Rauen, Christopher (Hrsg.; 2006): *Coaching-Tools. Erfolgreiche Coaches präsentieren 60 Interventionstechniken aus ihrer Coaching-Praxis.* 4., revised and enhanced edition, managerSeminare Verlags GmbH, Bonn

Rogers, Carl (1999): *Die nicht-direktive Beratung.* 10., unchanged edition, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt am Main

Schulz von Thun, Friedemann (1999): *Miteinander reden 1. Störungen und Klärungen. Allgemeine Psychologie der Kommunikation.* 43., unchanged edition, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reinbek bei Hamburg

Sutrich, Othmar/Schindlbeck, Ulrike (2005): *Es gibt viel zu tun – wer packt mit an? Nachhaltige Beratung als Verbindung von Fach- und Prozessexpertise im Beratungsprozess,* published in: Fatzer, Gerhard (Hrsg.; 2005): *Gute Beratung von Organisationen. Auf dem Weg zu einer Beratungswissenschaft. Supervision und Beratung II.* 1. edition, EHP Verlag, Bergisch Gladbach

Thommen, Jean-Paul (2004): *Managementorientierte Betriebswirtschaftslehre.* 7., revised and completed edition, Versus Verlag, Zürich

Tracy, Brian (1995): *Advanced selling strategies. The proven system of sales ideas, methods and techniques used by top salespeople everywhere.* 1. edition, Fireside Books, New York

Verweyen, Alexander (1997): *Erfolgreich akquirieren. Instrumente und Methoden der direkten Kundenansprache.* 1. edition, Betriebswirtschaftlicher Verlag Dr. Th. Gabler GmbH, Wiesbaden

Watzlawick, Paul/Weakland, John H./Fish, Richard (2001): *Lösungen. Zur Theorie und Praxis menschlichen Wandels.* 6., unchanged edition, Verlag Hans Huber, Bern

Watzlawick, Paul (2004): *Wie wirklich ist die Wirklichkeit? Wahn – Täuschung – Verstehen.* 3., unchanged edition, Piper Verlag, München

Watzlawick, Paul (Hrsg.; 2006): *Die erfundene Wirklichkeit. Wie wissen wir, was wir zu wissen glauben? Beiträge zum Konstruktivismus.* 18., unchanged edition, Piper Verlag, München

Witt, Jürgen (1996): *Prozessorientiertes Verkaufsmanagement. Grundlagen, Konzepte, Organisation.* 1. edition, Betriebswirtschaftlicher Verlag Dr. Th. Gabler GmbH, Wiesbaden

Zech, Rainer: *Rat und Unrat. Eine kleine Reflexion über Beratung,* published in: Thedorff, Andreas (Hrsg.; 2004): *Schon so spät? Zeit, Lehren, Lernen.* 1. edition, Hirzel Verlag, Stuttgart

Zech, Rainer: *Der Kunde ist der Kundige! Die umfassende Bedeutung von Kundenorientierung für die Unternehmensführung,* published in: Brink, Alexander/Tiberius, Victors A. (2005): *Ethisches Management. Grundlagen eines wert(e)orientierten Führungskräfte-Kodex.* 1. edition, KNV Koch Neff Volckmar GmbH, Stuttgart

Trade publications, journals and newspapers

Fink, Dietmar: *Unternehmensberater: Sanierung in eigener Sache,* in: Manager Magazin of April 23, 2004

Freudenthaler, Sabine: *Verkaufserfolg nachhaltig sichern,* in: Lernende Organisation No 35, 2007

Koye, Bernhard: *Informierte Kunden machen Druck,* in: Neue Zürcher Zeitung NZZ of November 1, 2006

Lippitt, Ronald/Lippitt, Lawrence: *Widerstand als konstruktive Quelle für Veränderung,* in: Profile 5 (by EHP Verlag), 2003

Möllenhoff, Stefan: *Wer hinhört hat gewonnen,* in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung FAZ of December 5, 2005

Radatz, Sonja: (Interview), in: Direkt Marketing, 39. Jg., 2003

Ruigrok, Winfried: Komplementaritäten. *Eine neue Sichtweise beim organisatorischen „Fit“,*in: GDI Impuls 2/00, 2000

Staub, Romi: *Praxiserfahrungen einer Anwenderin. Qualität und Erfolg von Coachings sichtbar machen,* in: CSO-Journal 1/2006, 2006

Strom, David: *Unzufriedene aber träge Kunden,* in: Neue Zürcher Zeitung NZZ of January 28, 2007

Wimmer, Rudi: (Interview), in: führung + personalentwicklung, 2006

(no author): *Was ist Komplementärberatung?,* in: führung + personalentwicklung 11/12_2006, 2006

(no author): *Systemisches Coaching – Neue Wege für Kundenbeziehungen,* in: Direkt Marketing 10/2003, p. 120 – 121

Internet

http://www.solutionsurfers.com, January 3, 2007

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autopoiese, January 11, 2007

http://www.solution-centre.org, January 11, 2007

http://www.swissbanking.org/home/medienmitteilungen.htm, February 17, 2007

http://www.amazon.com, February 17, 2007

http://www.getabstract.ch, February 17, 2007

http://www.brief-coaching.com, March 3, 2007

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beratung, March 3, 2007

http://www.mcwise.at/fuer24.html, March 4, 2007

Interviews

Belz Christian, Ph.D., Head of Center for Marketing and Trade, University of St. Gallen, St. Gallen: Personal interview on November 10, 2006, in St. Gallen, 90 minutes

Blättler Urs, Business Developer, Credit Suisse, Zurich: Personal interview on November 4, 2006, 240 minutes, Telephonic interview on February 21, 2007, 30 minutes

Fehr Lukas, Relationship Manager, Credit Suisse, Zurich: Personal interview on February 16, 2007, in Zurich, 15 minutes

Meier Daniel, Coach, Weiterbildungsforum Basel, SolutionSurfers: Telephonic interview on February 20, 2007, 20 minutes

Radatz Sonja, Managing Director, Institute for Systemic Coaching and Training, Vienna: Telephonic interview on February 22, 2007, 20 minutes

Ricklin Anita, Managing Director, Sales-Network salestrainer.ch, Zurich: Telephonic interview on February 26, 2007, 25 minutes

Stark Beat, Managing Director, PSI AG, Wallisellen: Personal interview on November 17, 2006, 60 minutes

Sproson John, Managing Director, Breakthrough Solutions, Burghfield (GB): Telephonic interview on February 26, 2007, 35 minutes

Unpublished sources

Belz, Christian (2006a): *Verkaufskomplexität. Erste Hinweise zum Thema.* Unveröffentlichtes Skript der Universität St. Gallen

Belz, Christian (2006b): *Kundenengagement. Dialogmarketing „revisited“. Diskussion am 1. November 2006 mit den Fachexperten. Unveröffentlichtes Skript der Universität St. Gallen*

Credit Suisse (2006): *Der Credit Suisse Beratungsprozess im Private Banking. Ein Lern- und Arbeitshandbuch.* 2. Edition

Güttinger, Marc (2004): *Verkaufspsychologie und Verkaufstechnik.* Unveröffentlichtes Skript der Hochschule für Wirtschaft Zürich HWZ

Schwinn, Klaus (2002): *Differenzierungspotenzial im Wettbewerb für Banken. Vom Kundenbeziehungs- zum Kundenbedürfnismanagement.* Version 1.0, Systor AG, Zürich

Duc, Thierry (EBIC): Email to the author of January 3, 2007

List of researched sales literature (Chapter 1)

For the abstracts mentioned hereafter, the following single source applies: http://www.getabstract.ch of December 12, 2006

Bauer, Joel/Levy, Mark (2004): *How to persuade people who don't want to be persuaded.* John Wiley & Sons

Dale Carnegie and Associates/Crom, Oliver/Crom, Michael (2003): *The sales advantage.* The Free Press

Detroy, Erich-Norbert (1998): *Mit Begeisterung verkaufen.* moderne industrie

Eades, Keith M. (2004): *The new solution selling.* McGraw-Hill

Gebhardt-Seele, Stephan (2003): *Vergessen Sie alles über Verkaufen.* Gabler

Harrison, Tina (2000): *Financial services marketing.* Financial Times Prentice Hall

Heiman, Stephen E./Sanchez, Diane (1998): *Verkaufen mit Strategie. The new strategic selling.* Warner Books

Holden, Jim (2002): *The selling fox.* John Wiley & Sons

Holzheu, Harry (2000): *Wer nicht lächeln kann, macht kein Geschäft. Emotional Selling.* Wirtschaftsverlag Carl Ueberreuter GmbH

Lejeune, Erich J. (2000): *So verkaufen Sie sich reich. Das Erfolgsprogramm einer faszinierenden Persönlichkeit.* moderne industrie

Miller, Anne (2004): *Metaphorically Selling.* Chiron Associates

Mortensen, Kurt W. (2004): *Maximum Influence. The 12 universal laws of power persuasion.* American Management Association

Parinello, Anthony (1999): *Selling to VITO, the very important top officer.* Adams Media

Rackham, Neil/DeVincentis, John R. (1999): *Rethinking the sales force. Redefining selling to create and capture customer value.* McGraw-Hill

Scherer, Hermann (2003): *Ganz einfach verkaufen. Die 12 Phasen des professionellen Verkaufsgesprächs.* Gabal

Schiffmann, Stephen (1994): *The 25 sales habits of highly successfull salespeople.* Adams Media

Schiffmann, Stephan (2004): *Ask questions, get sales.* Adams Media

Schiffmann, Stephan (2005): *The 250 sales questions to close the deal.* Adams Media

Schiffmann, Stephen (2005): *Upselling techniques (that really work!).* Adams Media

Serafino, Len (2003): *Sales talk. How to power up sales through verbal mastery.* Adams Media

Shook, Robert L. (2003): *Hardball Selling.* Sourcebooks

Tracy, Brian (1995): *Advanced selling strategies.* Simon & Schuster

Tracy, Brian (2005): *The psychology of selling.* Thomas Nelson Publishers

West, Scott/Anthony, Mitch (2000): *Storytelling for financial advisors.* Dearborn

Woehr, William A./Legat, Dietrich (2003): *Hemmungslos verkaufen. Radikal innovative Vertriebsleistung in der globalisierten Wirtschaft.* Neuer Wissenschaftlicher Verlag

List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
cf.	confer
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
et al.	et alii (and others)
et seq.	et sequential (and the following)
etc.	et cetera (and the rest)
No	number
p.	page
q.v.	quod vide (also see)

Endnotes

[1] cf Güttinger Marc (2004, p. 1)

[2] cf Thommen Jean-Paul (2004, p. 654)

[3] cf Kotler Philip et al. (2006, p. 555 – 556)

[4] Kotler Philip et al. (2006, p. 536)

[5] cf Güttinger Marc (2004, p. 3)

[6] Witt Jürgen (1996, p. 54)

[7] cf Kotler Philip et al. (2006, p. 616 – 628)

[8] cf http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beratung of March 3, 2007

[9] cf Sutrich Othmar et al. (2005) and Königswieser Roswita et al. (2006)

[10] Königswieser Roswita et al. (2006)

[11] cf Sutrich Othmar et al. (2005, p. 272); Translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Fach- und Prozessberater gehen […] von unterschiedlichen theoretischen Modellen, Wirklichkeits-konstruktionen und Werten aus. Sie repräsentieren zwei konträre Denkformen."

[12] Königswieser Roswita et al. (2006, p. 43)

[13] cf Sutrich Othmar et al. (2005)

[14] cf Kotler Philip (2006, p. 620 et seq.)

[15] Güttinger Marc (2004, p. 1), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Je nach Bereich – *B2B (Business to Business), B2G (Business to Government), B2C (Business to Consumer)* oder *C2C (Consumer to Consumer)* – ist der Verkaufsprozess anderen Regeln und Normen unterstellt und fordert vom Verkäufer andere Verkaufstechniken und Tools."

[16] Source: author's own observation

[17] cf http://www.amazon.com of February 17, 2007

[18] cf http://www.getabstract.ch of February 17, 2007

[19] q.v. appendix for detailed listing

[20] Source: author's own observation based on the study of the abstracts as listed in the appendix

[21] Source: author's own observation based on the study of the abstracts as listed in the appendix

[22] Geyer Günther (1998, p. 19), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Verkäufer wollen den Kunden überzeugen und zum Abschluss motivieren."

[23] cf Kotler Philip et al. (2006, p. 540)

[24] cf Schulz von Thun Friedemann (1999)

[25] cf Watzlawick Paul et al. (2000)

[26] cf Harris Thomas (1975)

[27] cf Geyer Günther (1998)

[28] Verweyen Alexander (1997, p. 170 – 171)

[29] Kotler Philip et al. (2006, p. 540)

[30] cf Güttinger Marc (2004, p. 4)

[31] Verweyen Alexander (1997, p. 121 – 123)

[32] cf Geyer Günther (1998)

[33] Source: author's own observation

[34] cf Witt Jürgen (1996, p. 56 – 59)

[35] cf Schiffmann Stephan (2005)

[36] cf Fink Klaus-J. (2004, p. 93)

[37] cf Verweyen Alexander (1997, p. 158)

[38] cf Tracy Brian (1995)

[39] http://www.mcwise.at/fuer24.html of March 4, 2007

[40] q.v. Chapter 8 for more on inbound-marketing

[41] e.g. Holzheu Harry (2007)

[42] e.g. Eades Keith M. (2004)

[43] cf Rackham Neil et al. (1999)

[44] Belz Christian, interview of November 10, 2006, translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Für mich ist eine der grossen Herausforderungen, dass viele Unternehmen sagen, alles habe sich weiterentwickelt, aber der Verkauf ist im Wesentlichen relativ still gestanden."

[45] Zech Rainer (2005, p. 149), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „[…] der moderne Kunde ist kritischer geworden. Er ist in der Regel besser informiert als der traditionelle Käufer und misstrauischer gegenüber den Werbeversprechen der Anbieter."

[46] Rackham Neil et al. (1999, p. 18)

[47] Source: author's own conclusion

[48] Source: author's own observation

[49] cf Stark Beat, interview of November 17, 2006

[50] cf Thommen Jean-Paul (2004, p. 787)

[51] cf Sutrich Othmar et al. (2005)

[52] cf Zech Rainer (2005, p. 131)

[53] cf Credit Suisse (2006)

[54] Source: author's own observation

[55] Lewis David et al. (2001, p. 36), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Während die Kaufgewohnheiten der traditionellen Verbraucher häufig von Warenknappheit bestimmt waren/sind, ist beim Neuen Konsumenten vor allem die Zeit und damit die potenzielle Aufmerksamkeit knapp. Demzufolge lässt er es sich gerne etwas kosten, wenn er in der einen und/oder anderen Richtung sparen kann."

[56] Lewis David et al. (2001, p. 44), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Als authentisch empfundene Produkte und Dienstleistungen sind ihr Geld wert, weil sie durch Qualität und Zuverlässigkeit bestechen und einen langfristigen, tendenziell steigenden Wert darstellen. […] Der Reiz der Authentizität liegt aber viel tiefer, in der Psyche des Menschen: Selbsterfüllung heisst das Stichwort. Bei seinem Streben nach dem Echten, Authentischen sucht der Neue Verbraucher in Wahrheit sich selbst."

[57] cf Sutrich Othmar et al. (2005)

[58] Fink Dietmar (2004)

[59] Königswieser Roswita et al. (2005, p. 11), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Was in einem Unternehmen richtig ist, kann im anderen falsch sein."

[60] q.v. Chapter 8 for more on inbound-marketing

[61] Lewis David et al. (2001, p. 91), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Eine Umfrage unter 3000 Marketingdirektoren führender britischer Unternehmen hat gezeigt, dass Kundenorientierung noch immer eher ein Lippenbekenntnis denn systematische Praxis ist; ein kundenspezifisches Beziehungsmanagement und eine

Individualisierung von Produkten und Dienstleistungen wird durchweg noch als ein unbedeutender Aspekt von Kundenpflegeprogrammen betrachtet."

[62] Blättler Urs (2005, p. 34), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Zwar wird die grosse Bedeutung der Kundenorientierung allgemein anerkannt, doch kaum jemand handelt danach."

[63] cf http://www.swissbanking.org/home/medienmitteilungen.htm of February 17, 2007

[64] cf Strohm David, *Unzufriedene aber träge Kunden*, in: Neue Zürcher Zeitung NZZ of Januar 28, 2007

[65] Source: author's own observation

[66] Manager Magazin (2004, p. 52), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Die Moden, die das Geschäft vieler Berater in der Vergangenheit aufgebläht haben, die ziehen nicht mehr. Die Kunden wollen Basisdienstleistungen, mehr nicht."

[67] Manager Magazin (2004, p. 52), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Es wird sicher schwer, sich auf diesen Wandel einzustellen, weil viele Berater verinnerlicht haben, Moden zu vermarkten. Davon werden Firmen profitieren, […] bei denen die Methodenkompetenz ausgeprägt ist."

[68] cf Belz Christian et al. (2006)

[69] cf Bleicher Knut 1996 (quoted from Belz Christian et al. 2006, p. 3)

[70] Belz Christian et al. (2006, p. 7), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Die Vielfalt an Vorgaben und Aufgaben für den Verkauf äussert sich in vielen und differenzierten Zielen, breiten Sortimenten, einer hohen Anzahl betreuter Kunden sowie ausgedehnten internen Beanspruchungen wie z.B. durch Informatik, Reporting und internen Befragungen, Bestellabläufe, interne Aufträge und Rückfragen, interne Projekte, Sitzungen, Workshops, Schulungen, usw. Flankiert werden diese Massnahmen nicht selten durch Programme der Produktivitätssteigerung und Kostensenkung, was die relativen Ressourcen im Vergleich zu den Aufgaben schmälert."

[71] Source for all successive quotes: Belz Christian et al. (2006, p. 9 et seq.)

[72] cf Belz Christian (2006, p. 4)

[73] Belz Christian (2006, p. 8), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Komplexität im Verkauf mündet in der Überforderung des Aussendiensts und im verpassten Geschäft, weil er sich nur noch um einen kleinen Teil der angestrebten Aufgabe wirklich kümmern kann."

[74] cf Belz Christian (2006, p. 16)

[75] cf Belz Christian (2006, p. 8)

[76] cf Kotler Philip et al. (2006, p. 13 et seq.)

[77] cf De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 19 – 24)

[78] Source: Email of January 3, 2007, translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Leider haben Sie Recht mit Ihrer Vermutung, dass es nicht allzu viele Publikationen […] gibt, die Verkauf in Verbindung mit Coaching oder Lösungsorientierung behandeln."

[79] cf Radatz Sonja 2003 (quoted from Direkt Marketing 2003, p. 120 – 121), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Wenn ein Kunde ein Auto kaufen will, dann wird er über systemische Fragestellungen dazu gebracht, nachzudenken und sich darüber klar zu werden, welches Produkt für ihn das geeignete sein könnte."

[80] cf Radatz Sonja, interview of February 22, 2007

[81] cf Radatz Sonja, interview of February 22, 2007

[82] cf Lueger Günter et al. (2006)

[83] Sproson John 2006 (quoted from Lueger Günter 2006, p. 199)

[84] Freudenthaler Sabine 2007 (published in Lernende Organisation No 35, 2007)

[85] Source: author's own experience

[86] cf Fehr Lukas, interview of February 16, 2007

[87] cf Blättler Urs, interview of February 21, 2007

[88] cf Blättler Urs, interview of February 21, 2007

[89] cf Blättler Urs, interview of February 21, 2007

[90] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, 1992, 1994, 2005), De Jong Peter et al. (2003) and Pichot Teri et al. (2003)

[91] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 74) and De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 163)

[92] De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 69)

[93] Watzlawick Paul et al. (2001, p. 108), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Doch während eine […] Einsicht in die Genese der gegenwärtigen Schwierigkeit eine überaus plausible und intellektuell befriedigende *Erklärung* liefern mag, so trägt sie meist wenig, wenn überhaupt, zu ihrer *Lösung* bei."

[94] cf Watzlawick Paul et al. (2001, p. 108 – 109)

[95] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 75 – 76)

[96] cf Radatz Sonja (2000, p. 67, 69 – 71)

[97] Von Foerster Heinz 2002 (quoted from: Watzlawick Paul 2006, p. 40), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Die Wirklichkeit entsteht im Auge des Betrachters."

[98] Watzlawick Paul (2004, p. 7)

[99] De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 405), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Die Erkenntnis, dass sich Wahrnehmungen und Definitionen der KlientInnen verändern und dass es unter KlientInnen multiple Realitätsdefinitionen gibt, trägt zu unserer Skepsis hinsichtlich der Angemessenheit eines wissenschaftlich begründeten, problem-lösenden Ansatzes der Arbeit mit KlientInnen bei. Wenn die Probleme und Lösungen weitestgehend Definitionssache sind und diese Definitionen sich mit der Zeit und in kooperativer Interaktion mit anderen verändern können, wie können sie dann in einem objektiven, allgemeingültigen und wissenschaftlich erfassbaren Sinne ‚real' sein?"

[100] De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 68), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Die gesamte […] Therapie baut auf der These auf, dass der Klient seine eigene Lösung auf der Grundlage seiner eigenen Ressourcen und Erfolge entwickelt."

[101] cf Maturana Humberto R. (1994)

[102] cf http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autopoiese of January 11, 2007

[103] cf Radatz Sonja (2000, p. 39 – 40)

[104] De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 70 – 146)

[105] De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 120), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Die allgemeine Systemtheorie geht schon seit langem von dem Grundsatz aus, dass ein Unterschied oder eine Veränderung eines Teils eines Systems zu Rückwirkungen (und Transformationen) in anderen Teilen des Systems führt. Dieser einfache Gedanke bildet die Grundlage der Kurztherapie […]."

[106] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 76 – 77)

[107] cf Radatz Sonja (2000, p. 64 – 67)

[108] cf Radatz Sonja (2000, p. 75)

[109] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 46 – 88)

[110] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 25) and De Shazer Steve (1992, p. 141)

[111] De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 74)

[112] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 68), De Shazer Steve (1992, p. 106) and De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 119)

[113] cf De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 57)

[114] cf De Shazer Steve (1994, p. 85 – 87) and De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 60)

[115] De Shazer Steve (1994, p. 100)

[116] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 46 – 88)

[117] cf Radatz Sonja (2006, p. 35)

[118] cf Radatz Sonja (2006, p. 35 – 42)

[119] cf Radatz Sonja (2006, p. 39 – 42)

[120] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 24 – 25) and De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 116)

[121] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 46 – 88)

[122] De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 54)

[123] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 46 – 88)

[124] cf http://www.solution-centre.org of January 11, 2007

[125] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 25, 117 – 118) and Watzlawick Paul et al. (2001, p. 118)

[126] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 130)

[127] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 119) and De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 67)

[128] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 46 – 88)

[129] cf De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 184)

[130] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 42 – 43)

[131] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 27 – 290)

[132] De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 30), transated by the author from the original quote in German: "Ob ein Ereignis ein ‚Problem' ist, das der Therapie bedarf oder nicht, hängt davon ab, wie die Beteiligten ihre Erfahrung interpretieren."

[133] cf De Shazer Steve (1994, p. 108)

[134] cf De Shazer Steve (1992, p. 102)

[135] cf De Shazer Steve (1992, p. 103)

[136] cf De Shazer Steve (1992, p. 129)

[137] De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 131), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Ohne Ziele können Therapeut und Klient nicht wissen, wann die Therapie zum Erfolg geführt hat oder misslungen ist. […] Der Therapeut muss wissen, was nicht getan werden darf, und das beste Beispiel für das, was nicht getan werden darf, ist gewöhnlich das, was der Klient bisher getan hat."

[138] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 127 - 138, 260) and De Shazer Steve (1992, p. 130)

[139] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 28)

[140] De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 73), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Weiss man, was funktioniert, macht man damit weiter."

[141] cf De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 96)

[142] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 216) and De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 211)

[143] cf Radatz Sonja (2006, p. 30 – 33)

[144] cf Von Foerster Heinz et al. 2002 (quoted from Radatz Sonja 2006, p. 30)

[145] cf Radatz Sonja (2006, p. 30 – 33)

[146] Rogers Carl (1999, p. 119), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Der nicht-direktive Standpunkt legt grossen Wert auf das Recht jedes Individuums, psychisch unabhängig zu bleiben und seine psychische Integrität zu erhalten. Der direktive Standpunkt legt grossen Wert auf soziale Übereinstimmung und das Recht des Fähigen, den Unfähigen zu lenken."

[147] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 44)

[148] Source: author's own wording

[149] Schmidt Gunther 2005 (quoted from De Shazer Steve, 2005, p. 238)

[150] cf Königswieser Roswita et al. (2006, p. 37)

[151] Schmidt Gunther 2005 (quoted from De Shazer Steve, 2005, p. 236), translated by the author from the original quote in German: “Wenn ich die Werthaltung vieler amerikanischer Patienten mit der von deutschen Patienten vergleiche, scheint es wichtige Unterschiede zwischen ihnen zu geben, jedenfalls in der Tendenz. […] In unserer Kultur scheint aber das Bedürfnis nach Geschichtlichkeit, Sinn etc., auch nach Ursachensuche, noch grösser zu sein.“

[152] cf Schmidt Gunther 2005 (quoted from De Shazer Steve, 2005, p. 237)

[153] Schmidt Gunther 2005 (quoted from De Shazer Steve, 2005, p. 237 – 238), translated by the author from the original quote in German: “Sowohl viele Therapeuten als auch Patienten haben sich bei uns an den Gedanken gewöhnt, dass Psychotherapie nur erfolgreich sein kann, wenn viele Gespräche über lange Zeit […] stattfinden. […] Viele Patienten gehen dann davon aus, dass ihnen diese Stundenzahl auch zusteht und dass weniger nicht mehr sein kann, sondern Ausdruck einer Unterprivilegierung und Bestrafung für die Besserung ist. Solche Implikationen stellen sich im Kontext des amerikanischen Systems nicht. Patienten sind dort oft eher erleichtert, wenn Kurztherapie in Aussicht steht, weil es für sie weniger Kostenbeteiligung bedeutet.“

[154] Pichot Teri et al. (2003, p. 13)

[155] cf De Shazer Steve (1992, p. 176)

[156] cf Watzlawick Paul et al. (2000)

[157] cf De Shazer Steve (2005, p. 17)

[158] cf Radatz Sonja (2000, p. 119)

[159] cf Radatz Sonja (2000, p. 118)

[160] Source: author’s own experience

[161] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 50)

[162] cf Spreckelmeyer Walter et al., *Die sozialisierende ICH-Sprache,* in: Rauen Christopher (2004, p. 86)

[163] following Rauen Christopher, *Vorgespräche führen,* in: Rauen Christopher (2004, p. 31)

[164] Source: author’s own observation

[165] cf O’Connor Joseph et al. (2005, p. 47 et seq.)

[166] Sproson John, interview of February 26, 2007

[167] Source: author’s own observation

[168] following Minor Marc, *Metaphorik,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 103 et seq.)

[169] cf De Shazer Steve (1994, p. 114)

[170] cf Szabó Peter, *Scaling for Coaches,* downloaded from http://www.brief-coaching.com on March 3, 2007

[171] Szabó Peter, *Scaling for Coaches,* downloaded from http://www.brief-coaching.com on March 3, 2007

[172] cf http://www.solutionsurfers.com of January 3, 2007

[173] following Stöger Johan, *Lebensrad,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 153 – 155)

[174] cf De Shazer Steve (1989, p. 25)

[175] following Schäper Carsten, *Zirkuläres Interview,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 90)

[176] cf Radatz Sonja (2006)

[177] cf Dilts Robert B. et al. (2000)

[178] following Hübner Björn, *Stimmigkeits-Check,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 128) and Rückle Horst et al., *Werte-Ziele-Zielgruppen-Analyse,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 179)

[179] cf Backhausen Wilhelm, *Beobachten des Beobachtens,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 77) and O’Connor Joseph et al. (2005, p. 199 – 204)

[180] following Tomaschek Michael, *Reflecting Team,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 305)

[181] following Lippmann Eric (2003, p. 71)

[182] following Steinhübel Andreas, *Gegenwind,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 232)

[183] following Wieland Uwe, *Notation der Coaching-Sitzung als lösungsorientierte Intervention,* in: Rauen Christopher (2003, p. 252)

[184] Source: author's own observation

[185] cf Staub Romi (2006, p. 2)

[186] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 98 et seq.)

[187] cf Berne Eric (2002)

[188] Königswieser Roswita et al. (2005, p. 5), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „In vielen Fällen steht das Motiv im Vordergrund, durch grosse Beratungsunternehmen für den Aufwand oder für mögliche unpopuläre Massnahmen legitimiert zu sein."

[189] e.g. Verweyen Alexander (1997, p. 116-118)

[190] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 118)

[191] cf Lippit Ronald et al. (2003, p. 18), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Widerstand ist ein vorhersehbarer und notwendiger Teil von Veränderungs- und Lernprozessen und ein Teil der Auseinandersetzung mit schwierigen Themen."

[192] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 120)

[193] cf De Shazer Steve (1984), *The Death of Resistance,* published in: Family Process (1984), Vol. 23

[194] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 120), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Was wir als ‚Widerstand der KlientIn' gehalten haben, lässt sich genauer als ‚Widerstand der PraktikerIn' beschreiben."

[195] cf De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 119)

[196] De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 120)

[197] cf Farrelly Frank et al. (1986)

[198] cf Höfner Eleonore et al. (1995, p. 29)

[199] cf Höfner Eleonore et al. (1995, p. 27)

[200] cf Watzlawick Paul et al. (2001, S: 160)

[201] Belz Christian, interview of November 20, 2006, translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Der Kunde kann zwar seine Lage gut beurteilen, aber das heisst nicht unbedingt, dass er auch die Bankprodukte gut kennt."

[202] cf Zech Rainer (2004, p. 204) and Königswieser Roswita et al. (2006)

[203] Meier Daniel, interview of February 20, 2007, translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Der Kunde würde sich nicht gut beraten fühlen, wenn der Verkäufer Informationen zurückhält, die ihn bei der Lösungsfindung weiter bringen würden."

[204] following De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 117)

[205] following De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 278)

[206] Königswieser Roswita 2006 (quoted from führung + personalentwicklung 2006, p. 20), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Wir halten diese Personifizierung der Komplementarität im Berater-System für ein Kernelement unseres Beratungsansatzes."

[207] Wimmer Rudi 2006 (quoted from führung + personalentwicklung 2006, p. 20), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Eine echte Integration kann nur ein Einzelner leisten. Nur der Einzelne kann im eigentlichen Sinn des Wortes integrieren und er kann dann vorleben, dass dadurch etwas brauchbar Neues entstanden ist."

[208] De Jong Peter et al. (2003, p. 260), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „KlientInnnen, die intuitiv fühlten, wie sehr der Plan der TherapeutInnen ihre Freiheit zur Erforschung und zur eigenen Wahl möglicher Lebenspläne reduzierte, verloren immer mehr das Interesse daran, selber Veränderungen vorzunehmen."

[209] cf Strohm David: *Unzufriedene aber träge Kunden,* published in: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 28 January 2007

[210] Sproson John 2006 (published in Lueger Günter 2006, p. 197)

[211] Belz Christian, interview of November 10, 2006, translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Immer bei komplexen Lösungen ist Kundeninvolvement entscheidend."

[212] Schmidt Gunther 2005 (quoted from De Shazer Steve, 2005, p. 238)

[213] q.v. Chapter 1 for more on personal selling in the context of marketing management

[214] cf Kotler Philip et al. (2006, p. 558 – 561)

[215] Blättler Urs (2005, p. 34), translated by the author from the original quote in German: "Beim Wandel vom Angebotsfokus zur Bedürfnisorientierung handelt es sich um einen Wandel der Kultur, der von der Unternehmensführung ausgehen und dort vorgelebt werden muss. […] Der eingeschlagene Kurs muss zunächst seinen Niederschlag im Leitbild, in den Zielsetzungen und in den Strategien der Unternehmen finden, dann schliesslich auch bei den Frontmitarbeitern und Kunden."

[216] Blättler Urs (2005, p. 34), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Der Wandel in der Unternehmenskultur muss mit Anpassungen der Führungsstile, der Führungs- und insbesondere auch der Verkaufsinstrumente (Ausbildungs-, Motivations-, Vergütungssysteme und Präsentationshilfsmittel) massgeblich unterstützt werden."

[217] Witt Jürgen (1996, p. 223), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Die Vergütung ist zunächst *Leistungsentgelt.* Damit wirkt sie gleichzeitig in positiver oder negativer Weise als *Leistungsanreiz.* Sie beeinflusst die Leistungsbereitschaft der Mitarbeiter und schlägt sich in den erzielten Absatzmengen, den Verkaufspreisen, Kosten und Deckungsbeiträgen nieder. Daraus ergibt sich, dass die Vergütung als ein *Instrument zur Verhaltenssteuerung* eingesetzt werden kann."

[218] following Blättler Urs (2005, p. 31)

[219] Witt Jürgen (1996, p. 225), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Die rückläufige Motivationskraft auch leistungsorientierter Vergütungssysteme ist Anlass, darüber nachzudenken, über welch andere Führungssysteme sich die Leistungsbereitschaft der Mitarbeiter aktivieren lässt."

[220] Rackham Neil et al. (1999)

[221] Source: author's own observation

[222] Schwinn Klaus (2002, p. 3), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Die zunehmende Transparenz und Vergleichbarkeit von Standardprodukten im Internet macht es notwendig, sich von der Konkurrenz deutlich abzuheben. […] Die Individualisierung der Leistung ist dann das Differenzierungsmerkmal gegenüber der Konkurrenz und der Vorteil, der beim Kunden einen entsprechenden Mehrwert erzeugt."

[223] Boutellier Roman 2006 (quoted from Belz Christian 2004, p. 4), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Falsch verstandene Kundenorientierung führt allerdings zu explodierenden Variantenzahlen und schliesslich in den Ruin."

[224] Belz Christian (2006, p. 4), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Auch rechtfertigt das Losungswort ‚Kundennähe' in vielen Unternehmen jede noch so exotische Lösung. […] Dabei lassen sich Varianten nicht nur bei Produkten, sondern ebenso bei Services, beim Pricing oder anderen Aktivitäten der Marktbearbeitung ausmachen."

[225] cf Radatz Sonja (2006, p. 94)

[226] Zech Rainer (2005), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Gerade die Verkaufssituation […] ist das eigentliche Lernfeld für Kundenorientierung."

[227] Blättler Urs (2005, p. 23), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Wenn es […] gelingt, den *Prospect* so eng in die Erarbeitung eines Lösungskonzeptes einzubinden, dass er in eine gemeinsame Lösung Zeit investiert, dann zeigt er, dass er an einem positiven Ergebnis interessiert ist. Ist er andererseits nicht bereit, einen eigenen Beitrag zu leisten, dann ist sein Interesse an einer optimierten Lösung kritisch zu hinterfragen. Da hilft es auch nicht, unzählige Offerten und verschiedene Varianten zu erarbeiten – die Abschlusschancen sind als sehr gering einzustufen."

[228] Königswieser Roswita (2005, p. 4 – 5), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Weil systemische Prozessberatung auf längerfristige, nachhaltige Entwicklung abzielt, werden in Phasen akuter, überlebensbedrohender Krisen und Schwierigkeiten üblicherweise Fachberater zu Hilfe gerufen, die Entscheidungsgrundlagen und Handlungsempfehlungen für kurzfristige, wirkungsvolle Massnahmen liefern sollen. Aber auch in Zeiten […], in denen längerfristige positive Zukunftserwartungen von der Sorge um das Morgen

überlagert sind, fehlt meist die Zeit, das Wissen und die Einsicht, sich auf nachhaltige Organisationsentwicklung einzulassen. In diesem Sinne bestimmt die Erwartungshaltung des Klienten […] auch die Praxis des Beraters […].“

[229] Niklas Luhmann 2005 (quoted from Sutrich Othmar et al. 2005), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Vertrauen ist der grösste einzelne komplexitätsreduzierende Mechanismus, […] der extrem relevant für die Beraterpraxis und für den nachhaltigen Beratungserfolg ist.“

[230] cf Radatz Sonja (2006, p. 94)

[231] cf Belz Christian (2006)

[232] Belz Christian (2006, p. 4 et seq.) and Belz Christian, interview of November 20, 2006

[233] Belz Christian (2006, p. 7), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Bedrängte Kunden werden laufend passiver und lösen die Beziehung zu Anbietern. Der steigende Druck der Unternehmen führt in eine enge Sackgasse.“

[234] Belz Christian (2006, p. 14, 22), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Aktivierung, Zeit und Sache stimmen für den Kunden. Ein Kernproblem des Marketings ist damit gelöst, weil die meisten angesprochenen Personen sich nicht gerade mit einem Vorschlag des Anbieters befassen wollen. […] Es gilt, mit dem Inhalt die Kunden und ihre Wünsche zu treffen und nicht einfach Angebote auszuloben.“

[235] cf Zech Rainer (2005, p. 135), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Nicht wenige Produkt- und Dienstleistungsangebote entstehen auch in direkter Kooperation mit einem Kunden, quasi in einer dialogischen Entwicklungsbeziehung zwischen einem nachfragenden Kunden und dem dienstleistenden Unternehmen.”

[236] Radatz Sonja, interview of February 22, 2007

[237] Zech Rainer (2005, p. 134)

[238] Zech Rainer (2005, p. 133), translated by the author from the original quote in German: „Ein Kunde, der feststellt, gegen seine eigene Entscheidung zum Kauf ‚überredet’ worden zu sein, wird nicht lange Kunde dieses Unternehmens bleiben.“

[239] cf Kotler Philip et al. (2006)

[240] Rackham Neil et al. (1999)

[241] Rackham Neil et al. (1999)

[242] Sproson John 2006 (published in Lueger Günter 2006, p. 197)

[243] Sproson John 2006 (published in Lueger Günter 2006, p. 197)

[244] cf Kumpf Andreas (1997, p. 56 et seq.)

[245] Rackham Neil et al. (1999)

[246] Rackham Neil et al. (1999)

[247] cf Königswieser Roswita et al. (2005)