
Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

O'Hanlon, W. H. & Weiner-Davis, M. (1989). *In search of solutions: A new direction in psychotherapy*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Reviewed by: Norman Amundson, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology, University of British Columbia.

This book builds on the ideas of Milton Erikson and lays out the foundation for forward-looking, short-term psychotherapeutic strategies. Rather than emphasizing the past or the "here and now," the authors advocate a more future-oriented approach. With this orientation, the concern is not about how problems arise, but rather how problems are solved.

The ten basic assumptions of solution-oriented therapy according to the authors are as follows:

1. that clients have resources and strengths to resolve complaints;
2. that change is constant;
3. that the therapist's job is to identify and amplify change;
4. that it is usually unnecessary to know a great deal about the complaint in order to resolve it;
5. that it is not necessary to know the cause or function of a complaint to resolve it;
6. that a small change is all that is necessary; a change in one part of the system can effect change in another part of the system;
7. that clients should define the goal;
8. that rapid change or resolution of problems is possible;
9. that there is no one "right" way to view things, different views may be just as valid and may fit facts just as well; and
10. that the counsellor should focus on what is possible and changeable, rather than what is impossible and intractable.

Based on these assumptions, the authors present a series of practical counselling strategies which are interspersed throughout the book. In my opinion, these strategies are a major strength and it would have been helpful to have them summarized. I have abstracted the following ten counselling strategies implicitly or explicitly presented in this book:

1. Reduce the size of the problem in the client's eyes. Focus on what is possible and changeable and take small steps, rather than focussing on what is impossible and intractable.
2. Highlight the fact that the client often has the necessary resources and abilities to solve the problem. Help the client to look at how he/she has resolved difficulties in the past.
3. In some cases it may be possible to dissolve the idea that there is a serious problem by normalizing it as a common human problem.

4. Involve a client in observation of positive behaviours between counselling sessions. Focus on how things are changing for the better.
5. Look for positive exceptions. For example, a client may lack confidence to approach employers. Are there any times when the client has successfully approached an employer?
6. Discuss any positive changes between the time when he/she first thought about making the appointment to see you and the start of the first counselling session.
7. Look to the future. Have your client imagine that the problem has been solved (a miracle). What would have happened, how would it happen, and what would it mean to him/her?
8. In the phrasing of questions, the counsellor should assume that something positive has happened. For example, do not ask your client if he/she has ever done anything that worked. Ask your client to describe some of the things that have worked.
9. Break the cycles of negative activities. Change the frequency, timing, duration, or location of actions. Add something different if this is possible. The main idea is to start behaving differently.
10. Break the cycle of negative thinking. Interrupt and limit the client who is making unhelpful statements or questions (or who is talking endlessly about the same problem). In some situations you may be able to ascribe positive intentions and motivations to behaviours which had previously been considered problematic.

Overall, I quite enjoyed the book. It is very readable and I appreciate the model and the practical case illustrations. The material is interesting and should be of interest to a wide variety of counselling practitioners. My only caution would be the rather strident presentation of a future orientation in counselling. While this is certainly a much needed perspective, the authors tend to overstate their case.

Although the book does not specifically address the career counselling domain, I felt that many of the concepts would be relevant to people working in this area. The focus on solving problems within a future orientation is something that has broad application. I can see the value of using many of the concepts within an individual and group employment counselling context.

Spacapan, S. & Oskamp, S. (eds) (1992). *Helping and being helped: naturalistic studies*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Reviewed by: David Paterson, Doctoral Student, University of British Columbia.

How do offers of assistance affect the help-seeker? Who is likely to help? And what are the negative aspects or costs of helping relationships? These are among the questions posed by the authors of this worthwhile book.