

The ART and MAGIC of Solutions Focused Negotiation

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When it comes to negotiation, most people think of *Getting to Yes* by Roger Fisher and William Ury of the Harvard Negotiation Project. First published in 1981, this has quite rightly become a classic text, and has changed the way we think about negotiating. Other books have followed from this school of Principled Negotiation, including *Getting Past No* in 1991, and more recently *Beyond Reason* and *The Power of a Positive No*.

When we set about finding ways to build and transform negotiations with Solutions Focus, we found in these books a wealth of wonderful ways to move negotiations forward. We also found some confusion – many people told us that the ideas weren't "sticking", and they weren't quite sure how to actually go about negotiating.

We think it's time to take negotiation to the next level – by building on these great ideas, putting them into a simpler form, building in the pragmatic power of Solutions Focus – all to make it easier and quicker to become a really effective negotiator.

We are drawing on the tradition of Solutions Focus (Jackson and McKergow, 2007). SF started out in the field of therapy, and has been found both remarkably effective and remarkably quick to learn. Studies have shown that it can take just 20 hours to learn to start deploying SF competently. The body of research on its effectiveness is now very significant, showing that solutions focused approaches are as effective as any other method, yet take considerably less time to deliver these results.

This paper begins to introduce some new models of SF negotiation. In the best SF tradition they achieve their effectiveness through surprising and ingenious simplicity. First we come to the **ART** criteria for effective negotiation: *Agreement, Relationship* and *Time*.

We say that the best result from a negotiation is an Agreement that all sides *want to keep*, with an improvement in Relations between parties, and effective use of Time. Agreements that the people involved *want to keep* are very effective. Agreements can of course be enforced, but that is costly and time consuming. This is even more important in a world which functions less in terms of organisational hierarchy and increasingly in terms of negotiated relationships and agreements - with more and more pressure to deliver results quickly.

A novel element of SF negotiation is the role of Negotiation Partner. This can be a member of the team or it can be someone brought in especially. The Negotiation Partner looks after the process and guides through the MAGIC elements (even when others at the table wish to use adversarial techniques, tricks or power). The Negotiation Partner helps develop the Agreement, Relationship and Time-efficiency dimensions of the negotiation, leaving the primary interested parties free to focus on their interests and aspirations for the deal.

"MAGIC has given me a lot of confidence to tackle seemingly "no-hope" situations and really get them moving."
Robyn Smith, Area Manager for UK retail chain

So how to achieve these ART results? Solutions Focused negotiation takes the form of **MAGIC**; *Mapping, Aspirations, Ground, Innovations and Closure*. These can be used as a process or as individual tools to help move a negotiation forward. Let's look at these one by one.

Mapping: Before negotiating, it is important to map out the territory, to get the 'lie of the land'. MAGIC offers a very clear structure for how to do this mapping - to get a clear picture of your desired outcome, how you might achieve this through this negotiation, and under what conditions you should simply walk away.

This mapping process is most effectively done through coaching – either within a negotiating team or even with an outside coach. We have found the results of this can be remarkable, especially in terms of the confidence with which people can then approach their negotiation.

Aspirations: The key to getting what you want from a negotiation is knowing what you want! This obvious fact is easy to overlook in the heat and pressure of the negotiating table. Solutions Focus tools provide ways of clarifying interests and aspirations, in such a way that they are both concrete and meaningful, while maximizing room to manoeuvre at the table. These tools ease the way to the collaborative relationship that is the key to achieving good Agreement, Relationship and Time results.

Ground refers to two things. The first is the importance of beginning with common ground. After all, what's being sought is agreement, and that is best built on whatever agreement is already in place. Neglecting this stage results in time wasted in needless disputes. Ground also refers to the separate ground of each party – where they stand if negotiations fail. SF gives us efficient ways to build on this ground – which is the key to leverage and power in negotiation.

Innovations refers to the creative problem solving process that negotiators have aspired to since "Getting to Yes" was first published. It is far from easy to get from the natural adversarial negotiating position to the position of trust in which genuinely creative problem solving is possible – and SF tools can really help make this happen.

Closure is the final stage of a negotiating process. Sometimes difficulties remain, and there are many ways of dealing with these, but sometimes all it takes is a simple handshake to recognize that we have innovated our way to agreement. Closure draws together all that has gone before in building the MAGIC and makes it real. Taken together, these ideas offer a genuine leap forwards in negotiation technology.

Sfwork, the Centre for Solutions Focus at Work, leads the world in applications of SF in the workplace. We are now offering training in the ART and MAGIC of negotiation. The next event is in a 2x1-day format in Central London, 30 June 2010 and 20 July 2010. Readers of this White Paper can obtain a **special price of £349 plus VAT** by booking two or more people onto the event. Full details of the programme at <http://www.sfwork.com/jsp/index.jsp?lnk=460>. To book, call us on 08453 707145 or email info@sfwork.com and we'll contact you.

As an extra special offer, any fees are **fully refundable if you book in-house SF negotiation training** in your organisation within the next 12 months.

Reference: Paul Z Jackson and Mark McKergow, *The Solutions Focus: Making coaching and change SIMPLE*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing 2-ed (2007)

