The problem with problems is that they seduce you into thinking about them. When you focus on a problem, it becomes all-consuming. History matters. Remember the England football team's hoodoo about taking penalties in major competitions? After decades of under-performance, England manager Gareth Southgate changed the narrative and built the team's confidence by encouraging players to own the process, work on their technique and practise, practise, practise. It got them to the semi-final of the FIFA World Cup in 2018. This is an example of taking a solutions-focus.

When to use it

When you notice:
- Your client focusing on problems, rather than finding solutions
- When the problems involve ongoing interactions with other people rather than fixing something specific – such as a process - that is broken
- When your client is denying things do sometimes go well

These might be indicators that your client is consumed by a seemingly intractable problem and has lost sight of the bigger picture and the possibilities that exist to move forward with it.

What it is

Problems do not occur all the time. Taking a solutions-focus to coaching involves helping your client spot useful things that do happen when their problem does not happen, and then encouraging them to do more of what works *before* stopping or fixing things that are not working.

I call it the PIG model – I you have a pig of a problem, you need a Pig of a solution.
- **P** Possibilities. Maintain a willingness to explore possibilities
- **I** Interaction. Unilateral action does not solve a problem
- **G** Go For it! Try things out. Learn from the experience and try again.

Part of the technique involves the use of Scaling – i.e. scoring things out of ten. The key point is using 10/10 as the ultimate goal, and your coaching aims to make incremental improvements in the client's self-score of the situation, i.e. step-by-step performance improvements towards their ultimate goal.

How it fits

The technique can be used during contracting to help your client focus on their perfect world scenario, which then helps you both breakdown the problem into specific areas of focus.

It is also helpful in-the-moment during any session when you notice you client is stuck with a people-related issue.

How to use it

1. First, invite your client to imagine a future scenario where their problem is fixed for good. This is an imaginary perfect world. Invite them to take a moment, put themselves there, in the future. How does it feel?
2. Invite your client to give this perfect world a score of 10 out of 10.
3. What would they score the reality of the situation today? (x out of 10).
4. Explore the reasons that they have scored x. Notice this is greater than (x-1). Some good things must already be in place – these are the things that happen when the problem does not happen.
5. What would it take for them to move one or two points up the scale?
6. Here we explore P for Possibilities in the past, present and future:
   - How have you handled situations like this before? (Past)
   - Who do you know that would be good at this? What would they do? (Present)
   - Imagine you have already succeeded. What did you do? (Future)
7. Also explore I for Interaction:
   - What happens when this problem does not happen?
   - What have you already achieved in relation to this problem?
   - What need to happen; what do you need to achieve first?
8. And finally explore G for Go for It! by testing each idea out in the real world:
   - Do you have the resources to do this?
   - Really, what is the worst thing that could happen if you tried this?
   - What else could you try?
9. Encourage your client to commit to actions and make the actions PORKY – so this is really the Porky Pig model!
   P   Practical – commit to actions that are achievable
   O   Own the process – like England footballers did under Southgate
   R   Resources – your client either has them or can ask others for help
   K   Know the dynamic – it is all about the interactions
   Y   You get what you focus on – so focus on solutions, not problems.

More ideas

Further reading

Jackson P and McKergow, M (2007), *The Solutions Focus: Making Coaching and Change SIMPLE (2nd Ed.)*, Nicholas Brealey International.

And for football fans,

Lyttleton, B (2015), *Twelve Yards: The Art and Psychology of the Perfect Penalty Kick*, Penguin.