~1989

FACILITATOR DIALOGUE

I am going to introduce you to the Dependable Strengths Process. The process takes approximately three hours. Before beginning, have any of you worked either individually or in group settings where you concluded that the participant(s) needed to enhance their self-esteem? Or where participants felt incapable of writing a resume because they were convinced they had no skills or strengths? Or felt incapable of pursuing a job because of lack of confidence? What strategies did you use? What were some of the specific skills you utilized?

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

Using the information presented at the beginning of this section, briefly introduce the program to the learners covering the major points as follows:

- Purpose of the process.
- Background information.
- Assumptions of the counselling process.

Define and discuss the following terms by writing on the board or flipchart.

Dependable Strength

A "dependable strength" is a skill, talent, or quality that has been developed over a lifetime, from childhood to the present, and which, when used in combination with other strengths, enables one to do certain things well.

Good Experience A "good experience" is defined as a time when:

1. You did something well.
2. You enjoyed doing it.
3. You felt proud of it.

Some discussion of the definitions may occur. An important point to emphasize is that the participant should be encouraged to reflect on experiences that he/she perceived as "good" and not how others might have perceived the experience.

Go Back

Step 2 Model Interview

FACILITATOR DIRECTIONS

Ask one of the learners if they would be willing to volunteer for a brief interview. Have them recall an experience they had when they enjoyed doing something, did it well, and felt proud of it. Instruct the volunteer to be as detailed as he or she can and be prepared to spend about fifteen minutes describing the experience. Ask questions which facilitate the telling of the story in order to model this process for the learners (as demonstrated in the following interview). Before the volunteer begins his or her story, instruct half of the class to listen for positive strengths, qualities, and skills that she or he would have used immediately preceding the "good experience." Suggest to the learners that they may want to record some of the strengths. Instruct the other half of the class to observe and record the kinds of competencies used by the counsellor during the interview.

> **HINTS:** Reflective listening, attending behaviour, and various kinds of questioning all help the volunteer (client) to describe the experience. In order to gain more information, encourage the client to be as specific as possible. Elaborating the details of the experience will not only help the client to re-live the experience but will also help the listener (counsellor) to draw out the strengths.

The following transcript of a counselling interview is for facilitators to review prior to engaging in a live demonstration with learners. It is helpful to get a sense of how the "client's" story unfolds by posing specific questions.

Counsellor: Can you tell me about an event in the past which you would label a "good experience?"

Client: Anytime in my life?

Counsellor: Any time in your life. You can go back fifteen years or you can go back to last week or whenever you would like. If you can just

Go Back

describe an experience for me and try to give me as much detail so that I can get a clear picture of what that experience was like for you.

Client: The experience I'm thinking of happened when I was about 8 years old. What I did was I wrote a stage version of Alice in Wonderland's Mad Hatter's Tea Party. In other words, I scripted it from the book and I sort of blocked it and I drew in the other kids from the neighborhood and produced it. We sold tickets and invited all the other neighbors and families from around. We then lined up all the chairs and put on this production for everyone.

Counsellor: That sounds wonderful. So you actually wrote out the script and did all the planning. (Pause) I wonder if you can recall some of the steps you went through to get this off the ground?

Client: Well, I was very excited about theatre at that point. I had seen a number of productions by the time I was eight years old. I had actually had a few roles in amateur theatre productions and so theatre was part of my life. I was wild about theatre so what I did was I got this inspiration to adapt a story that I had read. There was quite a bit of dialogue in the story so it was quite easy to do but I sort of added and elaborated some of the dialogue and made it more interesting, at least I thought so. So that's the first thing I did is that I took the unit out of the book and more or less filled in more of the dialogue according to my vision of what it would look like and sound like on the stage.

Counsellor: So first of all you had an idea or a concept of what this production would look like and then you started to write out the script.

Client: Yes, a concept of what it would like like to begin with. I wrote it out in a little notebook with all the physical movements they would

Go Back

have to use because I knew about blocking and what they would have to do. I can just remember the feeling so vividly about being wildly excited about the whole endeavor. So the next thing I remember was trying to get the other kids to be as excited as I was and trying to convince them about how much fun it would be. We could all work together and rehearse and work on the costumes together. I convinced them that working together could be so much fun.

Counsellor: So you began by trying to get them just as excited as you were?

Client: Yes, I even told them that we could probably make a little money.

Counsellor: That's always a good incentive! (laugh)

Client: So we had several rehearsals and one of my best friends, Shirley, played the part of Alice. She was just perfect. She even looked just like Alice in Wonderland with her long honey-coloured hair. She was pretty and all that kind of stuff. There weren't that many characters actually. There was Shirley, the doormouse, and there was . . . help me out here I can't remember.

Counsellor: I'm amazed that you can remember as many as you can.

Client: And there were the other kids who weren't in the production but were there to build things. I made a list of things that had to be done like building things and scrounging things from their parents and I would assign kids to try to run around collecting these things.

Counsellor: So once you got to that stage, then what happened? What about the actual performance? Can you describe some of the details?

Go Back

Client: Um...let me see. Well once we felt we knew our lines, and we rehearsed it several times. We did a lot of drilling to learn the lines. I was really central to the whole thing. I had to keep everything going it seemed (laugh).

Counsellor: So they'd fall apart without you.

Client: Of course, they were just kids and at times they would want to just play Cowboys and Indians, but I was committed to the show going on. And then we sent out invitations and explained that they would be charged admission at the door (laugh). So we divided up the neighborhood and tromped around delivering all these invitations by hand and then quite a few people came. We borrowed chairs and some people just sat on the grass.

Counsellor: So, quite a few people came. It sounds like it was a great success?

Client: Well I don't think the production was nearly as successful or not nearly as fun as the whole process of doing it . . .that is planning it and so on.

Counsellor: So you really enjoyed the build up and all the planning.

Client: Yes, that was it. The planning and the creating. Watching something come together, the creative process. Watching something come together out of nothing was quite exciting for me.

Counsellor: Yes, I can tell by the way your face lit up that the creative process is what you really enjoyed. So after the production the excitement was still there for you.

Client: Yes, after that I got into musicals and variety shows. I did a Christmas variety show that was really exciting.

Go Back

Counsellor: Well thank you, Sharon, for sharing your good experience with me.

Once the volunteer is finished relating his or her experience, ask the learners to brainstorm for strengths the client would have revealed. Write these on the blackboard or flipchart. If a strength is mentioned more than once, put a check mark beside it. (This affirms the strength for the client in that he or she can see that more than one person identified that particular strength). When the class is finished identifying strengths, ask the client to share what it was like to hear some of the feedback. For example, did she feel embarrassed, encouraged, proud? Encourage the client to share feelings, reactions, and thoughts about doing the exercise.

FACILITATOR DIALOGUE

To the client:

What was it like for you to relate a previous "good experience"? What feelings, thoughts, or reactions do you have to telling your story?

To the class:

I would like you to brainstorm for skills, strengths, and abilities that the client used during his or her "good experience" and I will list them on the board. If a strength is mentioned more than once, I will put a check mark beside it to indicate to the client that the strength was identified by more than one person.

Strengths Used During the Experience

organizational skills	knowledge of theatre
creativity	application of knowledge
responsibility	ability to improvise
perseverance	people skills

Go Back

sustained enthusiasm	ability to aspire others
thoroughness	motivational skills
focussed	leadership skills
attention to detail	verbal and written ability

HINTS: Once the strengths have been listed, it is important to process the experience with the volunteer client to provide some closure to the exercise. Following is an example of a debriefing process.

FACILITATOR DIALOGUE

To the client:

How do you feel right now?
What its like for you to see all of your strengths and assets listed in front of you?
If you could put all your modesty aside for a moment, how would you say those qualities fit for you right now?
In what ways do some of the strengths and assets feel familiar to you?
In what ways do they feel alien to you?

HINTS: Sometimes "clients" experience a sense of loss for unfulfilled dreams and perhaps potential. These feelings may come up and should not be minimized. Comparing what they were then with what they are now can be upsetting. Be prepared to deal with some of these issues and allow for time to process some of the feelings that surface for the storyteller.

Go Back

To the class:

What competencies did you observe the counsellor using?
In what ways did the counsellor contribute to the "telling of the story?"

Some of the kinds of competencies used by the listener or "counsellor" will be:

Specificity: Encourage the client to be specific by asking questions such as:

> *Can you tell me exactly how you planned the event?*
> *What were some of the circumstances which led up to the good experience?*
> *In what ways did you contribute to the experience being "good"?*

Encouraging: I can tell by the look on your face that it was a very exciting time for you. Can you tell me more about it?

Recording strengths: When a strength is mentioned, it is alright to reflect it back to the client; however, try not to become preoccupied with identifying strengths at this time. Listen, instead, to the client's story. You may find it helpful to jot down some of the strengths and assets on a piece of paper.

Listening: Convey to the client that you are truly understanding her experience by helping her to elaborate and produce more details.

HINTS: Some learners or clients may have difficulty recalling "good experiences". If this occurs, encourage them to choose events that perhaps were not extraordinary but were actually quite normal. As long as they meet the definition of a good experience, they are appropriate. For example, planning on a camping trip, making a soccer team and so on.

Go Back

Step 3 Preparing Learners to Share Experiences

FACILITATOR DIALOGUE

I would now like you to relax and find a comfortable position. Close your eyes if you feel so inclined and begin to centre yourself. Recall a time in your life when you had a good experience. This may have happened in early childhood, in your teens, or some other time. A "good experience" is defined for our purpose as a time when you did something well, enjoyed doing it, and felt proud of it. Do not think about how someone else might have perceived your experience either in the past or right now. This is your "good experience" and belongs to you alone. We are not here to judge one another but to share some of our positive experiences. You may want to scan a few of your good experiences before deciding on one that you would like to share with other learners. Once you have selected a good experience, you may want to sketch a picture that reminds you of your experience or jot down a few notes to hold it in your memory. Use whatever you need to do to remember. I'll give you about five minutes to relax and remember before regrouping.

Now that you have selected your "good experience," get into groups of four. One person will be the storyteller or "client", one will be the "counsellor" and the remaining two will be observers. Each learner will have approximately 25 minutes for his or her turn (15 minutes to relate the story and 10 minutes to receive feedback).

<u>To the client</u>: *Be prepared to be as descriptive as you can while relating your good experience. Allow for about fifteen minutes to tell your story.*

<u>To the counsellor:</u> *Remember to ask the kinds of questions that will encourage the client to elaborate his or her experience.*

<u>To the observers</u>: *As observers, you will need a separate piece of paper to record the emerging strengths and assets. Your paper will be given to the*

Go Back

client at the end of the session (after observations have been discussed as a group).

HINTS

If the learners are inexperienced in interviewing, you may need to give examples of the kinds of questions that facilitate elaboration of stories. For example:

Tell me more about...?
How did you feel at the time?
Who were you with?
How old were you?
What were you thinking at the time?
How exactly did you do this?

They may also need to be reminded to ask questions in a non-obtrusive way so that the questioning does not detract the speaker from his or her experience.

As observer and counsellors you will be required to write down skills, aptitudes, and strengths the clients would have used during his or her experience. Being able to listen and take notes at the same time can be distracting but with practice this will become easier.

Once you have listened to the first "client's" good experience, each group member will have a chance to report the strengths that stood out for him or her. Once all the group members have had an opportunity to report on strengths they identified, each participant will give his or her list of strengths to the client so that they can leave the class with their own list.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Once each learner has been a counsellor, client and observer, bring the large group back together and pose the following questions:

Go Back

What was it like for you, as a client, to talk about your "good experience"?
As a counsellor, what did you find was helpful in encouraging your client to tell his or her story?
How did you feel when you were given your list of Dependable Strengths?
Was it easier to identify someone else's strengths rather than your own?
In what ways could you use this process in your counselling practice?
What other implications for counselling can you identify?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Haldane, B. (1988). **Career satisfaction and success.** Seattle: WA: Wellness Behavior (N.W.)

Haldane, B., Haldane, J. & Martin, L. (1984). **Young people's job finding guide.** Washington, DC: Acropolis Books Ltd.

Forster, J. (1989). **Rationale of the Dependable Strengths Articulation Process.** Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association for Counseling and Development, March 15-18, Boston, Mass.

Go Back