

On the Trail of Solutions (Lösungen auf der Spur)

How to lead effectively with the help of Solution Focus

Dominik Godat

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Review by Amina Eperjesi

When I heard about the opportunity to write a book review about Dominik Godat's book *Lösungen auf der Spur* – in my own translation *On the Trail of Solutions* – I got really excited and immediately offered to write one. I read this book over the summer, not long after it was published, and wanted to translate it immediately into English and Hungarian at the same time. I am an executive coach, and as I was reading I kept thinking, this needs to be available for the leaders I am working with, for it is exactly what they need.

A number of different metaphors could be used to describe *On the Trail of Solutions*. For example: reading this book is like participating in a Master Mind group with an excellent facilitator and many experienced peers who are eager to help. An issue is presented and many helpful examples are shown that each lead to a solution. Questions are asked and no solutions are forced onto the reader, who then can learn from all the examples, the tested and proven methodology and the practical tips of the trade, as well as from the careful explanation and reasoning of the facilitator – in this case the author. With this book in hand a leader gets most of the benefits of a Master Mind setting without all the expense, lacking maybe the human connection, but Dominik Godat's writing style and tone are so personal and friendly, while at the same time highly professional, that I would argue that it largely compensates for all the benefits a live conversation can offer.

Another way to describe the book is that it is an SF user's manual for leaders. It is written with very careful attention to what practical advice and examples leaders might find useful when looking for better, more effective approaches to leadership. It is not a book about SF theory – although we do get a concise introduction into the methodology itself – and it doesn't contain lengthy discussions of the theoretical background or the philosophical arguments. It is practical and reader-focused all the way through. I am quite convinced that any and every person in a leadership role will find this book incredibly useful and very, very helpful when it comes to practical advice. It is almost as if one should be carrying it around in a back pocket, referring to it in any given situation as we would do with any other user's manual, except this one is for people leading people effectively.

Although the book is addressed to leaders and managers, I would readily recommend it to coaches, trainers, advisors, and anyone who works with leaders. For me as an executive coach it was clearly very useful and interesting. Not only did it allow me to learn more about my clients' dilemmas, it offered a very practical and effective guide to how I can support them in finding the best solutions, but through all this I got quite a thorough education in the SF methodology and way of thinking as well. Which is why another way to describe the book would be to say that it is like completing an SF leadership training with heavy emphasis on experiential learning and practice.

Let me say a few words about the structure of the book, for it plays a big role in the user-friendly outcome. It is divided into 3 main parts:

- Solution focused Leadership – An Overview
- Solution focused Leadership from A to Z
- Solution focused Leadership: Success Stories.

The introduction to the overview begins as follows:

“This book is a travel guide, inviting you to become familiar with the world of solution focused leadership. Apart from a compact overview, it offers practical interventions and success stories from real practices, all presented to you so you can develop a more effective leadership style. Start with what interests you most and discover the first traces of this new world. Let the discovery process be as unique to you as your own individual leadership style.”

Wow! It is already practising what the book will be preaching all along: namely the importance of offering an invitation instead of giving instruction, encouraging the process of self-discovery as opposed to telling me what I should or shouldn't think or do, and allowing me to go at my own pace, following my own interest without forcing any decisions or solutions on me. I immediately want to read on!

While the first part of the book, the Overview section, explains the main points of the SF approach, demonstrates what an SF conversation looks like – yes, step by step – and asks Reflective Questions at the end of each chapter, the second part consists of the actual what-to-do-and-when kind of step-by-step guide for leaders. Not only does it show how to use the SF approach in everyday short conversations and interactions, but it also has specific sections titled Practical Ideas, where it invites the reader to try using very specific tools in their everyday work and reflect on what they have found. This way the person reading the book is completely engaged in the learning process. It is almost like having an executive coach trained in the SF approach. From managing conflicts and 5-minute coaching conversations all the way to handling criticism, working with teams, asking SF questions, measuring performance in a useful way and managing by objectives within an SF framework, a number of very specific and relevant topics are addressed here, which any manager or leader will find useful and rewarding.

The last section, Success Stories, is the shortest and sweetest of the three. In each success story we know the leader who wrote about the experience, the company where it

happened and we get to know all the tools used, with references to the pages in this book and where that specific tool is introduced, so that we can also learn to use it and implement it in our own practice. At the end of each story there is a short summary of the Learnings, the take-home message of that successful intervention.

All in all I can't praise this book enough for being concise, practical, user friendly and very, very easy to refer to in any given leadership-related situation. To put it simply, it is completely solution focused: a delight to read and a treasure to own for any leader – and I firmly believe that each and every one of us has a leadership role in some part of our life. Two thumbs up for Dominik Godat and his new book: *On the Trail of Solutions*.

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