

Solution Cafe

Facilitator Manual

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About Solution Café

Solution Café was created by **Solution Surfers Romania**. For more information, check our website: <http://www.solutionsurfers.ro/>

Objectives

The Solution Café is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to work on a topic important to them and:

- get some fresh perspectives
- gain some insights
- build clarity and confidence to move forward with the topic
- leave with some ideas about next steps
- get a taste of the power and simplicity of Solution Focus
- meet some like-minded people

Format

The format is an informal, café-style discussion with supporting materials and a simple structure and is designed to last around 2.5 hours. It can be run as an open event or in-house.

Participants

The Solution Café is highly flexible and works equally with people without any previous contact with Solution Focus or with Coaching and with experienced practitioners or coaches.

The minimum number of participants is 4 and there is no maximum – it can be run with very large groups.

Facilitator Team

The number of facilitators and support depends on the size of the group.

Our experience is that one facilitator can handle groups up to 32 with one additional person in a supporting role. Where larger groups are expected, additional facilitators and support people are recommended.

Facilitator

Role	Recommended Qualities/Experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a safe and positive climate• Hold the energy of the whole event• Brief the Solution Café• Be available to support table groups where needed• Model Solution Focus approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be very familiar with Solution Focus approach• Attended a Solution Café as a participant• Confident speaking to a group• Positive outlook and energy• Sensitive and responsive to group dynamics• Deliver clear and concise briefings• Manage time and move things along

Support Person

Role	Recommended Qualities/Experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set-up the room (seating, materials)• Contribute to a safe and positive climate• Welcome participants as they arrive• Help participants get settled in the venue• Complete attendance sheets• Collect evaluation sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be familiar with Solution Focus approach• Attended a Solution Café as a participant• Warm and approachable• Organised

Programme

<p>Preparation and set up Room and materials set up</p> <p>Welcoming Greeting and seating</p>	30 minutes
<p>Briefing the Café Facilitator presents the purpose, structure and detailed briefing for the Café</p>	20 minutes
<p>Appetiser On each table, each person in turn shares something positive from the day</p>	10 minutes
<p>Main Course Each person has 15 minutes for their topic. Others ask questions from the pack and listen. At the end of each topic, the others give positive feedback to the one with the topic</p>	75 minutes
<p>Dessert Change groups and share what was most meaningful from the discussions and process</p>	30 minutes
<p>Closure Make a clear end to the café.</p>	15 minutes

Total time: **2.5 hours** plus 30 minutes preparation

Preparation

In Appendix 1 you will find a preparation checklist. We recommend the facilitator team arrive at least 30 minutes before the start of the Solution Café to set up the room and prepare themselves.

Room Set Up

The room should be set up with chairs arranged in groups of 4. This seems to be the optimum size.

Groups of 3 can work and gives each person a little longer with their topic though misses a greater range of input from the others.

Groups of 5 can also work if there is a little more time available (15-20 minutes)

As far as possible pay attention to the physical setting to create a safe and welcoming environment including:

- Lighting
- Privacy (if in a public place then it needs a separate room for the café)
- Refreshments (tea, coffee, water, juice, snacks)
- Flowers, Candles etc.
- Music (at the start to create a relaxing setting)

Materials

Each table will need:

- Solution Café Menus – enough for each participant
- Speaking piece – 1 per group (something easily held, natural materials and smooth, for example wooden egg, small pebble)
- Set of cards – 1 per group (we recommend these are **handed out after the briefing** and not put on tables initially)

Team

We recommend the team check-in with each other to connect and focus on the event. This could be each sharing something that happened during the day they especially enjoyed and sharing their best hopes for the event.

Welcoming

Welcoming participants

This should be handled by the facilitator and support person to greet each new arrival (with a smile!). This helps participants know they are in the right place and establish the start of a positive climate.

Inform participants about the arrangements for **refreshments** and sign them off on the **attendance sheets**.

Seating participants

We notice that people have a tendency to sit with people they already know. The café works best if they are with strangers on a table – or at least people they do not know well. We have found there is greater depth and trust when there is not already a relationship with the other people on the table.

When inviting people to take a seat, **encourage them to sit with people they do not know** or do not know well. If you find they ignore this advice then gently remind them when they are seated. We do not recommend you force people to move but rather invite them.

In exceptional circumstances there might be some individuals who are not comfortable sitting with strangers and this should be respected.

Briefing the Café

We have experimented with various ways to brief the Solution Café. Below is what we find works best and helps the café run smoothly. Feel free to adapt it to your own style and comfort.

Once everyone is settled **attract their attention**. This can be done with your voice (difficult in a large group) or with a gong or mediation bowl where the sound is gentle but persistent. Avoid using harsh sounds such as a whistle or bell as this risks creating a 'school-like' climate.

Welcome

- Formally **welcome** participants.
- **Introduce yourself** and consider sharing **something personal** (eg what this Solution Café means for you).
- Say something about **your organization** (if applicable).

Purpose

In our experience people rarely leave with a completely figured out solution to their topic. More likely they get some new insights and some clarity about next steps – without necessarily having a complete plan. **We suggest you do not raise expectations beyond what is realistic.**

Remind participants of the purpose:

- An opportunity to **work on a topic important to them** and
 - Get some fresh perspectives
 - Gain some insights
 - Build clarity and confidence to move forward with the topic
 - Leave with some ideas about next steps
- Get a taste of the power and simplicity of **Solution Focus**
- **Meet some like-minded people**

Emphasise they may get some Solutions for their topic and more likely they get some ideas about what to do next or the direction to go.

About Solution Focus

Introduce the main principles of Solution Focus:

- **Solution oriented** – it is about building solutions not about analyzing the problems
- **Future focused** – it is about creating a picture of a good future not about staying stuck in the history
- **Resource oriented** – it is about what qualities, skills, experiences and other resources exist that can help move forward
- **Small steps** – looking for small signs of progress and realistic immediate next steps.

Selecting a topic

Invite participants to think of a topic to bring to the discussion, where they will have around 15 minutes to explore with the help of their colleagues on the table.

The topic could be from any area of their life (e.g. work, family, self) and should be something alive for them – it is current and they have some energy to move forward with it. It could be a problem or challenge they face or an opportunity they would like to move forward with.

It should also be something they are comfortable sharing with others and something where it is realistic to at least make some progress within 15 minutes.

Allow a few minutes to think about the topic before moving on with the briefing.

Process

Explain the process:

- Before starting, invite them to each in turn **share something positive** from today – something they did or something that happened.
- They will then **each have 15 minutes** for their topic
- During those 15 minutes they will get **Solution Focused questions** to help them explore various aspects of their topic.
- At the end of 15 minutes they will get some **positive feedback** from the others.
- To help manage time, one person should be nominated as **timekeeper** to indicate when 15 minutes are over and it is time to move on.

Menu

Point out the menu which gives details of the structure and process to remind them if they forget anything. For the moment they will have time for the Appetizer and Main Course.

Tell them there will be another short briefing for the Dessert once they have finished the Main Course.

Also draw their attention to the guidelines:

- **Talk or listen** - it is hard to do both at the same time.
- The **Speaking Piece** is a way to focus attention. Holding the Piece says, *“Give me time to think about my topic by listening to me. Feel free to also ask me questions and trust this is enough.”*

Cards

Explain the cards which will be given out once the group is ready for the Main Course.

1. **Question Cards** – each has a different Solution Focus question.

Only use these questions and avoid introducing your own questions. There are various ways to use the questions and what seems to work best is when they are shuffled before each topic and dealt (like playing cards) to those who will be asking the questions (i.e. the person with the topic does not get question cards).

Trust the questions. We have experienced that questions that do not appear relevant to you when asking them turn out to be the most helpful for the person with the topic.

2. **Yellow Cards** – these are used at the end of each topic to give positive feedback to the person who has just been talking.
3. **The Joker** – when you have the topic this card is to remind you that you have permission to ask for a different question or to signal you are hearing advice (when you do not want it).

Invite participants to start.

Monitor each group and when they have completed the Appetiser (checking in round) give the pack of cards. You do not need to wait until all groups are ready but take it group by group.

Briefing the Dessert

Gently monitor progress and bring the Main Course to a closure at about the same time for all groups.

If it happens that some groups finish long before the others, invite them to take another topic or return to one of the topics where it could be useful to spend a little longer.

When all groups are finished attract attention again.

Invite them now to move tables so they are with a different group of people and when they are seated to share what was most meaningful for them – maybe some new insights they got about their topic or maybe something about the process and questions they found especially helpful.

Closure

Once all groups are ready make a clear closure to the Café.

This could include:

- Something personal – maybe some insight you got or something you appreciated about this Café.
- More information about your organisation
- Ideas about where they might learn more about Solution Focus
- Ask them to complete and hand back the evaluation form before they leave
- Remind them to pay for refreshments (if applicable)
- Say Goodbye!

Appendix 1 - Logistics Checklist

Venue set up in groups of 4 chairs (with a café table if available)	
List of participants printed	
Solution Café menus printed (1 per participant)	
Set of cards printed (1 per table group)	
Evaluation Sheets printed (1 per participant)	
Speaking Piece (1 per table group)	
Gong, meditation bowl, or similar (to attract attention)	
Drinks (if not provided by venue)	
Roll-up (optional)	
Music (optional)	
Flowers (optional)	
Candles (optional)	

What do you enjoy doing?

www.solutionsurfers.ro

What do your family and friends appreciate about you?

www.solutionsurfers.ro

How will you recognize this conversation was useful for you?

www.solutionsurfers.ro

Suppose, at some point from now things turn out to be solved in a very good way for you.

What will you do differently then?

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What gives you confidence that your goal is achievable?

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What personal qualities will help you achieve your desired outcome?

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What else?

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What might be the positive consequences when you reach your goal?

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What was the best you did up to now?

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What would others say is the best you did up to now?

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**When you look at the big picture,
what is already working quite well?**

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Who else will benefit? And how?

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**What worked best when you solved
a similar situation in the past?**

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**How did you manage to solve a
similar situation in the past?**

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**How are you going to keep track of
your own progress?**

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**Just imagine you have made
progress. What benefits will that
bring for you?**

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**What would be an indication of one
step of progress?**

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**What would you advise a friend who
was having this situation?**

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**What do you know about
yourself (or your situation)
that reassures you that you
can deal with this?**

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What else?

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Suppose, you are really at your best. What will other people recognize in you?

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Who would you want to thank when you achieve your goal?

For what?

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What did you already manage to achieve in relation to your situation?

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What else?

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What do you take with you from our conversation today?

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When will be a good time for you to take a first step?

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Thank you!

I would like to take that question away
and think about it on my own

Please ask me another question!

Thank you!

I would like to take that question away
and think about it on my own

Please ask me another question!

Thank you!

I would like to take that question away
and think about it on my own

Please ask me another question!

Thank you!

I would like to take that question away
and think about it on my own

Please ask me another question!

I can imagine that.....

- **You are good at**
- **You have a talent . . .**
- **You like**

Feedback Card

I can imagine that.....

- **You are good at**
- **You have a talent . . .**
- **You like**

Feedback Card

I can imagine that.....

- **You are good at**
- **You have a talent . . .**
- **You like**

Feedback Card

I can imagine that.....

- **You are good at**
- **You have a talent . . .**
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Feedback Card