

OPINION PIECES

Practising Glimmering

Victoria Spashchenko^a

<https://doi.org/10.59874/001c.145261>

Journal of Solution Focused Practices

Vol. 9, Issue 2, 2025

This article explores the gentle power of glimmering - a practice rooted in noticing tiny powerful moments of joy and connection. Through reflective insight and personal experiences, it offers guidance, inspiration and invitation to exploring glimmering with creativity and curiosity.

“We’re not talking great, big, expansive experiences of joy or safety or connection. These are micro moments that begin to shape our system in very gentle ways.” (Dana, 2018)

The concept of glimmers emerged from the pioneering work of Deb Dana, a licensed clinical social worker and leading voice in translating polyvagal theory into therapeutic practice. She introduced glimmers as the subtle, often fleeting cues of safety that activate the ventral vagal state — the branch of the autonomic nervous system associated with connection, calm and social engagement.

First coined in her book *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation* (2018), Dana contrasts glimmers with the more widely recognised triggers and invited us to shift our attention toward the biology of safety and connection — a practice that not only supports individual healing but also fosters co-regulation and resilience within communities.

My introduction to glimmers was accidental; I came across this short three minute video where Deb Dana explains what glimmers are and how to begin noticing them in daily life - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPwp6nyotME&ab_channel=NortonMentalHealth.

I admired her approach and jumped to practise it immediately. Also, I believed that glimmering aligned naturally with the SFA: it’s all about shifting the focus, cultivating the skill of noticing for emotional healing and creating micro-moments that spark a meaningful preferred change.

^a Victoria Spashchenko is an SF practitioner and promoter, an SF coach, facilitator, and speaker, the author of the Practical Guides “How to Solve Problems Without Discussing Them. Solution-Focused Approach for Managers and for Others, too”, “Moving from Problem to Solution” and “WOWW-school. Working on what works. Solution-Focused Approach for Teachers, Parents and for Others, too” (in Ukrainian), as well as a co-author of the book “Using video games in the classroom. Challenges and Solutions: All you need to know to start using video games in your classroom” with Dr. Elena V. Shliakhovchuk. She is also author of #war_thoughts: Unfiltered and Raw Reflections on Recent russian Agression Against Ukraine (https://www.amazon.com/war_thoughts-Unfiltered-Reflections-Agression-Ukraine-ebook/dp/B0BVRSTCGM). She is an interculturalist and a Board Member of SIETAR Europa (2019-2024). Email victoria.spashchenko@gmail.com

This article invites you to consider the practical application of glimmering for your interactions with yourself and other people. Are there benefits? How will your life change if you go on a glimmering journey?

1. Glimmers and Triggers

Glimmers are not the opposite of triggers, but it's helpful to compare how they differ.

Glimmers	Triggers
• Subtle positive stimuli that evoke feelings of safety, connection or calm • Encourage feelings of peace, joy, comfort or hope • Activate the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest) • Strengthen resilience and supports emotional healing through mindful attention to small, uplifting moments • Create positive ripple effects: tiny glimmers accumulate, reinforcing a more hopeful and balanced outlook on life	• Negative stimuli that activate a stress response or trauma memories • Induce feelings of fear, anxiety, anger or distress • Activate the sympathetic nervous system (fight, flight, freeze) • Identifying triggers helps to work through trauma • Create negative ripple effects: emotional escalations, impulsive responses, negative thought patterns, and destructive behaviours

While we can't always avoid triggers or their immediate effects, counterbalancing them with glimmers and cultivating a glimmering mindset can make us more powerful.

2. You know how to glimmer

You *are already* a glimmering practitioner.

Take your mobile phone, find a photo that evokes in you a feeling of warmth, joy, happiness or deep satisfaction. Pause there. Think of the moment when it was taken. What was special about it? Why does it still stand out to you? If you feel uplifted coming back into that moment, there is a high probability that you captured a glimmer

3. Glimmering with five (or six, or more) senses

Many glimmers arrive unexpectedly — small, sensory moments that touch us and are immediately recognised by our senses. We can:

- See a glimmer (a breathtaking landscape, a soft light, a familiar face)
- Hear a glimmer (the sound of birdsong, laughter, music that stirs something inside)
- Taste a glimmer (a beloved dish prepared by someone we care about)
- Smell a glimmer (the scent of flowers, fresh rain, or just-baked bread)
- Touch a glimmer (a warm hug, the softness of a scarf, the feel of the sun on skin)

And if you believe in a sixth, seventh, or more subtle senses, glimmers may also reach you through intuition, energy, or spiritual connection. Glimmering is not limited by logic—it's an invitation to notice.

Try this experiment:

Think of a moment in your past when you experienced a glimmer. Try to trace it through your senses. What did you see, hear, smell, taste, touch.... Take a minute to write it down:

- I saw...
- I heard...
- I smelled...
- I tasted...
- I touched...
- I.....

Let the memory remind you that glimmers are already part of your life story.

4. Train your brain to glimmer

Glimmers might come unnoticed and thus, they risk being partially wasted. Paying conscious attention to them could serve as a useful and rewarding practice.

Try this experiment:

To train your brain to glimmer, start by setting a clear *intention* to invite these moments into your life. When you notice a glimmer in your day, allow yourself *to stop or slow down* to really take it in. Engage and anchor the experience to your five (six or more) senses. Acknowledge what's happening in your body.

Keeping a *Glimmer Diary* might be helpful. You can start with as little as one glimmer a day and soon you will see how your skill in recognising micro-moments of joy and connection strengthens.

If you were to start your Glimmer Diary right now, what would be the very first moment you'd want to capture?

5. Engage yourself in glimmering conversations

When talking to yourself or others, set up an intention to notice what in their stories glimmer for you, name these moments – those sparks of hope, strength or joy, connect them to your senses, feel how they resonate in your body. If appropriate, share your experiences with your conversation partner and invite them to do the same. Let this exchange become a meaningful part of your dialogue and help both of you to(re-)discover something about yourselves.

Try this experiment:

Next time you have a conversation, try to identify and name at least one glimmer in the other person's story. Notice how this shifts the tone and depth of your interaction.

6. A Glimmer of Hope

The Ukrainian National Mental Health Programme "*How are you?*" ([«Як ти?»](#)) includes a chapter about glimmers. Practicing glimmering even (or especially) in the darkest times can be a vital source of strength, resilience and healing.

In preparation for my SolWorld 2025 conference presentation about glimmers, I asked people in my country if and when they experienced micro moments of joy in situations that to many inside and outside Ukraine looked unimaginably difficult. I asked about really small, tiny, fluid moments. A soldier on the front line saw and immediately adopted a kitten who survived russists' bombing, a neighbour stared at stars at night during the blackout, finding solace in their quiet beauty, a mom of a four year old appreciated a moment when they did together a "teddy bear breathing" after an air raid attack (a breathing techniques to teach children to regain control over the body, grow strong and build resilient: you place a teddy bear on your/kid's belly and observe it rise and fall with each breath...).

I noticed that simply asking about glimmers makes people slow down, pause and go glimmer hunting in their memories connecting those small but important episodes to the present moment and introducing a change.

Try this experiment:

Try Glimmer Journaling. Think back to a "dark time" in your life. What was a small moment that brought you a sense of calm, strength, or connection?

7. A Glimmer as a Miracle. A Glimmer Question?

Some people claim they don't believe in miracles; they are sceptical or even dismissive of the idea altogether. During my SFA talks with Ukrainians I also discovered that we somehow arrived at the conclusion that a miracle is something we have to create ourselves first before it manifests itself in life (and in many ways, that's true).

Yet, everyone has experienced glimmering. So, wouldn't we agree that a well-placed Glimmer Question can be a powerful way to negotiate a preferred future?

I'm still exploring the "perfect" Glimmer Question, but here are some I've been experimenting with:

"(On a scale from to..) what do you think is the probability that some unexpected and positive for you, change can happen? How will you know/feel/see.. that it's happened? What sensations might you notice in your body? How will this unexpected sparkle of joy influence your relationships/people around you? How does your glimmer of hope feel like?"

What is your Glimmer Question?

8. Further Along the Path of Practising Glimmering. A personal story from Julia Kalenberg

Glimmering is a practice available to all of us to try. My colleague Julia Kalenberg, a leadership trainer and executive coach, embraced the glimmering practice with curiosity and creativity, allowing it to evolve naturally into something deeply insightful.

To highlight this, I'm honored to share this section written by Julia, whose personal experience beautifully illustrates how glimmers can emerge in unexpected ways. Her story is a testament to how this practice can resonate uniquely with each individual, encouraging us all to explore our own glimmers with fresh perspective and heart.

"In May 2025, I attended Victoria's workshop on "Practising Glimmers" at the SOLworld conference in Mechelen.

The opportunity to explore something that could calm the nervous system, foster a sense of strength and safety, and contribute to resilience immediately drew me in. I thought this might be helpful not only for myself but also for my coaching clients.

Even though I had never heard the term "glimmers" before, the idea felt familiar. It landed on fertile ground. For years, I have been collecting and experimenting with tools to help shift my focus deliberately. And still, new and different aspects continue to enrich my existing "focus-changers."

Let me introduce you to a few of these and explain what's similar and what's different in the glimmering practice.

The Bean Experiment: A few years ago, I came across the "story of the old earl" online. It's about counting "special moments" (such as hearing a bird sing or receiving a smile) using dry bean seeds, which you move from one trouser pocket to the other as you notice them.

The "Diary of Happiness": Inspired by Martin Seligman's idea of cultivating gratitude, I've been writing down one to three small, positive experiences from the previous day as part of my morning routine. I use a tiny notebook for this. It helps me notice positive moments more consciously and makes them last longer by writing them down. After a few weeks of practising this, I became convinced that even on "shitty days," there would always be a tiny moment worth noting.

So, being aware of special moments was already part of my life. What was new to me about glimmers was:

- They could be even smaller (for example, a single sunray breaking through the trees).*
- They could be perceived through all of our senses.*
- We are encouraged to set an intention in the morning.*
- We pause to anchor the glimmer, taking it in fully through our senses and noticing its effect on the body.*

I was also deeply drawn to the idea of glimmers as the contrast to triggers.

Feeling highly motivated, I enriched my gratitude practice with glimmers. I began writing them in my regular diary—using an iridescent glimmer pen. I'd write "GLIMMERS" and then note a few from the day before. Even only writing the word "GLIMMER" evokes a pleasant feeling. I now pause whenever I notice a glimmer, anchor it and observe how my body responds. The experience is deeper and more satisfying than anything I had previously encountered in my gratitude practice. Opening my glimmer-radar to all five senses significantly increased the number of moments I noticed.

Motivated by my own experience, I began introducing the idea of glimmers to others.

On the way to a family gathering, my aunt was complaining about how my cousins had planned the event. I listened to her concerns and gently invited her to count tiny special moments during the celebration by watching out for glimmers. Two days later, she called me—enthusiastic and joyful. She told me it had been the best family celebration in a long time.

Earlier this summer, my 94-year-old mother-in-law went through a mentally challenging time. I shared my excitement about Victoria's workshop with her and how much it had impacted me. We began sharing our glimmer moments via WhatsApp. A few weeks later, she told me that she now notices things like the many tiny individual flowers on a large hydrangea blossom.

As for my own glimmer practice—I love to create habits around things I find useful. So I looked for something to regularly remind me of glimmers. As a fan of sketchnoting, I handcrafted a bookmark that says "Enjoy Glimmers"—one for each family member. When I had finished them all, I thought: "I need one too," and made one for myself."

Conclusion

Glimmering can be manifested in every moment.

It invites us to slow down, pause, and notice the small sparks of light that brighten our inner world, even amidst challenges. By intentionally focusing on what glimmers to us, we gently redirect attention toward strengths and resources and support a move to the preferred change.

My colleague's story underscores how glimmering can evolve uniquely for each person—serving not as a fixed method, but as a path to personal insight, connection, and wonder.

What in this article glimmers to you to begin, continue, or deepen your own journey into the glimmering?

Submitted: July 23, 2025 BST. Accepted: October 07, 2025 BST. Published: October 09, 2025 BST.



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