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*ARTICLE***The Glint of Light on Broken Glass Or: The Power of the Micro-Moment**Katti Jisuk Seo

In August 2020, I attended the BRIEF Online Summer School, hosted by Chris Iveson and Evan George of BRIEF in London, joined by their international colleagues, Elliott Connie and Adam Froerer in Atlanta, Georgia. It was the first time for me. Little did I know this journey would take me to a broken bottle in the moonlight.

About ninety participants from five different continents appeared on the screens. In the background windows, you could witness the dawn in California and the dusk in New Zealand. Some attendees were sitting in the warmth of European Summer, others in the cold of South-African winter. I joined from the heart of Berlin, where I was surrounded by the ambient sounds of choirs and Kung-Fu groups, coming in through my window, pushed to practice outside by the pandemic.

When I watched the first couple of live sessions, I must admit, I was baffled. It was not the central questions themselves that surprised me, like the Best Hopes Question ('What are your best hopes from our talking together?') or the Tomorrow Question ('If you woke up tomorrow and you had achieved your best hopes, what is the first thing you would notice?') but the surprising part was the way the practitioners took it from there. Three things were hugely different from my training and my practice. For one thing, the follow-up questions sounded strangely repetitive to me. I was under the impression that the practitioner asked the Difference Question ('What difference would that make?') and 'How would you notice' again and again. For another, the sessions mainly focused on one moment or narrowed time window in the preferred future and wouldn't go to other places like times of exceptions in the past or some other point farther in the future. Thirdly, the ending of the sessions appeared very abrupt to me. There was no sum up, no experiment invitation, no next steps for the client on how to take it from here. I wondered, if I was in the client's shoes here, I might feel lost. First this deep dive into my preferred future and now what? How do I actually get there, I might think. These three things, the seeming repetition, the focus on a narrow time frame, and the ending without any bridge from reality to desired life, perplexed me. But the further the Summer School went on, the more this style of solution-focused practice grew on me. The eventual eye-opener was the final coaching demonstration where I was the client.

I was experiencing traumatic flashes back then. Evan George was the practitioner for my session. This is how I remember the most impactful parts of the session, roughly and shortened:

Evan: What are your Best Hopes from our talking together?

Me: I want to separate the past from the present. I want to live in the here and now and not have painful memories attack me.

Evan: So, if you woke up tomorrow and you were able to separate the past from the present, what would be the first sign that would tell you that you are living in the here and now?

Me: I would wake up with still having some visuals from my dreams in my head and eyes. I would notice the room. Instead of scrolling through memories of yesterday, searching for things to regret or to mourn, I would feel every part of my body waking up. I would feel my toes, my feet, my legs, my knees.

Evan: So on that morning if you still have some visuals from your dreams in your head and you feel every part of your body waking up, if you feel your toes, feet, legs, knees, what difference would that make?

Me: My mind would feel so free, I would just have blue sky in my head.

Evan: If you have blue sky in your head, what would be different about the way you are getting up?

Me: I would float like a feather. I would just feel light and free. And I would appreciate how independent my life is. That I can make my coffee exactly the way I like it because I make it only for myself.

Evan: So, how do you like your coffee?

Me: Not very strong. A French press coffee, a very yum coffee.

Evan: When you have that blue sky in your mind, what would be different about the way you are going from your bed to where you make your yum French press coffee?

Me: There are two routes from my bed to the kitchen. That day, I would take the sunnier route. I usually take the shorter, darker route through the corridor, but that day I would take the sunnier route.

Evan: When you are on your way to making yourself a very yum coffee, when you are taking the sunnier route, floating like a feather, having blue sky in your head, how would you know that today you can separate the past from the present and live in the here and now?

Me: I would feel my bare feet on the wooden floor. I would think to myself how beautiful it is to have a wooden floor. I would see the sun reflecting on it and feel how warm it is.

Evan: And at that moment when you feel your bare feet on the wooden floor and when you see the sun reflecting on the wooden floor, if an attacking thought came up, what might be different about the way you respond to it?

Me: This time, I would notice the thought before it is hitting me, and I would just leave it in its envelope. I would not open it. I wouldn't give it any landing place. I know what's in there anyway. I would see the envelope in the corner of my right eye, and I would just send it far away to the horizon where it fades instead of letting it hit me and dwell on it.

Evan: And if you send the envelope to the horizon, what difference would that make?

Me: I would feel that I am able to protect myself. I am able to take good care of myself.

I am sharing this part of the session to show the three aspects that make this approach so impactful for me: (a) *weaving*, (b) *zooming in* (c) *staying in the micro-moment*.

Why *weaving*? That's the term Adam Froerer used to describe the way of building solution-focused questions. The practitioner would take the client's words and weave them into the next question. And from the following answer, they would again take some words and weave them into the next question, and so on. That is how the moment becomes fuller and fuller of all the ingredients that make the preferred future. For example, Evan took my "visuals from my dreams" and me feeling "my toes, my feet, my legs, my knees" as the thread that he interlaced with the question "what difference would that make". Next, he would pick up my "blue sky in my mind" to weave into the conversation, again asking what would be different, and so on. What had seemed to me like repetitive questions at the beginning of Summer School, now started to make sense. I realized it might be the same Difference Question over and over again, but every time they are filled with new material delivered by the client. What makes this so powerful? It is not only the words that are interwoven. It is moments and meanings that become interlocked with one another. In the aftermath of the session, it has become impossible for me to not associate the bright reflections on my wooden floor with that »blue sky« state of mind. I automatically connect my beautiful floorboards with my ability to protect myself, to take good care of myself. Those things are inseparable now.

What do I mean by *zooming in*? Compared to most solution-focused conversations I had experienced so far, including my own practice, the Summer School sessions focused on a remarkably narrow timespan. They wouldn't talk about upcoming weeks, months, future milestones, but only focus on one or two slots, mostly the morning in the preferred future, not even the whole morning, but the tiny moments, the fractions of those moments. The conversation with Evan made me zoom in on the few seconds between the bedroom and kitchen. Thereby it led me to unlock body sensations, thoughts, images that are waiting for me in my preferred future and that I didn't know about before. My feather float, my sunnier route, my appreciation of my independent life, expressed in French press coffee.

The third aspect I noticed is staying in the *micro-moment*. What makes this so important? In one of the live demonstrations, Elliott Connie relentlessly stayed in the microsecond before the client would leave the bedroom to make coffee — very similar to my session with Evan. I asked Elliott what made him focus on the moment before leaving the room rather than the actual coffee-making or any moment after that. He said because there is richness in every moment. What fascinated me about all the sessions I witnessed at Summer School was this persistence to stay in the micro-moment, the nano-second between the previous step and the following step. To me, that means resisting the temptation to shift attention, to move on to any other moment in the future was so present. That requires a high level of trust in the process from the practitioner. Firstly, you have to believe that there is more to discover if you keep the focus on this point in time. Secondly, you have to truly believe that big change can thrive from the tiniest moments. Taking this approach, you rely on the belief that it is not necessary to zoom out on more extensive periods or jump to several points

in the future to ensure significant change. You purely count on the power of the micro-moment that might spread to other times in the client's life after the conversation.

That's what I experienced in the months after Summer School: My desired change was infused into every fraction of my morning, into the smell of fresh furniture in my kitchen, into my pillow, my bedding, my relaxed eye muscles, the summer sounds of Berlin from outside. And from there into every cell of my system. Looking back now, I can say that the number of painful memory attacks has gone from thirty per day to three per week first and now to zero per month. The session endings that had seemed so abrupt to me at the beginning of Summer School, make total sense in hindsight. You wouldn't make the client define practical steps on how to get from reality to the preferred future because you just let the session unfold in its aftermath.

My first session as a coach after the Summer School was with a client who said she was longing for a feeling of having arrived in her life. Her whole life, she had felt as if she was waiting for arriving. I applied the approach of weaving, zooming in, and staying in the micro-moment. After our journey into her morning when she would feel like she has arrived in her life, she told me something that fascinated me. She said that she had never quite believed that this feeling to have arrived existed at all. She always reckoned that it was just a weird utopian theory of hers, something that is absolutely out of reach, something she had made up. And now, during our session, she did experience this feeling with every fibre of her system. It was like time travelling, and not only as in you jump into a different time but also you jump into the body of that version of yourself, with everything it comes with, the mind, the bodily sensations, the emotions.

In comparison to the Summer School live demonstrations, my coaching sessions before had a zooming out perspective and focused on practical steps how the client would get to the life they wish for, be it change in their inside or outside or both. I still value that approach and the new angle I learned is not a replacement but an extension of my coaching practice.

The power of the micro-moment is also nurturing other fields of my work. Besides solution-focused coaching, I teach scriptwriters and write screenplays myself. In the art of storytelling, the rule of "show, don't tell" is crucial. This doctrine is graphically described by the Russian playwright, Anton Chekhov, writing, in 1886, to his brother, Alexander:

In descriptions of Nature one must seize on small details, grouping them so that when the reader closes his eyes he gets a picture. For instance, you'll have a moonlit night if you write that on the mill dam a piece of glass from a broken bottle glittered like a bright little star, and that the black shadow of a dog or a wolf rolled past like a ball. Throughout time Chekhov's instructions have been reformulated and compressed into the beautiful tagline

Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass

The style of questions that I learned from Summer School has enriched my creative process of teaching and writing when I aim at finding that "glint of light on broken glass". It inspires me to ask my students and myself questions like 'What will be the first sign that will let the audience know it's a moonlit night even before we see the actual moon?' And then I keep staying in the micro-moment to gather lively details by asking for more signs. It feeds into creating visual scenes. As writers, we don't want to simply inform our audience by stating the facts. Instead, we want to paint images in our reader's mind, we want to take them through a whole inescapable lively experience. And that's what the approach of weaving, zooming in and staying in the micro-moment enables.

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