

The Miracle Question

Type of Activity: Visioning, discussion, analysis

Length: 1-2 hrs depending on the depth of conversation and time available

Purpose/Objectives: To encourage participants to imagine the world as they want it to be and develop detailed thinking about the changes that need to happen in order to get there.

Group: This tool works particularly well with community workers and social workers who use solution focused therapy in their work. However, the tool can be used to work with any group that wants to vision the world as they would like it to be and the changes required to get there. This tool is ideal for groups of 30 or less.

Facilitator knowledge and skills needed: Standard facilitation skills, with the ability to encourage participants to dream big.

Resources needed: Newsprint (pre-prepared, see below), markers, whiteboard

Instructions:

This tool was developed for a workshop with community workers, social workers and therapists who were working with single-parent families. However, it could easily be adapted for other groups working for social or environmental justice. The following explanation is based on how it was used in the above setting.

Use a creative way to break the group into smaller groups of 4-5 (see another of our tools, 'A collection of energisers, name games and ways to break into small groups' for ideas). Then give each group a large piece of pre-prepared newsprint with a medium-sized circle in the middle and time-slots for the day written sequentially around the outside of the page (e.g. wake up – breakfast, breakfast – morning tea, morning tea – lunch, etc, or whatever time-frames will work for the group).

Ask each of the groups to draw a family in the middle of the circle, explain that they will be using this family as a case study. Invite them to name the family members and come up with some basic information about them. It helps if the all the groups have some commonality between their families, depending on the area in which they work. E.g. single parent families, queer families, families experiencing poverty, families where grandparents are caring for their grandchildren, families living in location, etc. Give the groups a few minutes to complete this task.

Now, ask the groups to create an 'average' day for the family. Acknowledge that this will involve some generalisation and will not fully capture the diversity of the families that the groups work with. However, there may be some key themes that emerge that are common for many of the

families that they work with and it is often useful to capture these, even in a limited way.

Fill in the timeslots with the activities and stressors that the family may experience during each of those times. For example, when working with organisations that work alongside single parent families, the morning period of getting children prepared for school and the evening period of dinner, baths and bed were particularly stressful times.

Once the groups have completed this activity, ask for attention from the full group. Invite reflections about their case-study family's day. What are the stresses that the family is experiencing? What are some of the key words that they would use to describe that family's average day? What aspects of wider society are supporting/going well for the family? Where is wider society falling short?

Now, explain that, "while this is how the world is working now, when we all wake up tomorrow we are going to live in a very different world. This is because, while we are sleeping, a wonderful miracle happens! When we wake up, we will suddenly live in a world that supports (e.g. single parent families)". Make sure you put passion and belief into your delivery; it's important as part of taking the group along with you.

Now, ask each of the groups to go back over their family's day. Look at each of the time slots and think about the ways in which life would look different for the family in the miracle world and what kinds of specific supports would be available. Encourage groups to get specific and take notes.

Bring the full group back together to reflect on the process. Ask questions such as 'how was that?' and 'how did you feel about waking up in the miracle world?'

Next, ask the groups how the miracle world was different than the one we are in now and what kinds of additional supports were in place for their families. List these up on the whiteboard.

Congratulate the group – "You have now created a great list of tangible changes that would help make the world better for the families that you work with. What a great collection of ideas about real changes that could be made that will make your families' lives happier, healthier and more joyful. Nice work."

Now, give the full group time to review the full list and ask questions to elicit more discussion from the group. For example, How do people feel when reading it? Despairing? Empowered? Inspired? Are there key changes that feel achievable? What changes do you think would make the biggest impact? Etc.

Once the list has been reviewed, ask everyone to pair up with someone who was not in the same small group as them. Give them a few minutes each to share which change they believe needs to happen first and a few key ideas that they have about how the change could be brought about.

You could finish the exercise here, by making an agreement about who will be responsible for caring for the 'miracle' list and how the group will work on making these changes happen. Alternatively, if you have more time, you could continue this piece of work by facilitating a prioritisation exercise and developing working groups to work on the priority changes and give them time to do some specific planning. It will all depend on how much time you have with the group.

Facilitation tip: It's important to prepare your delivery for asking the 'miracle question', to ensure that your delivery is compelling. It's also useful to acknowledge the generalisation inherent in this exercise at the beginning. By acknowledging the exercises limitations, participants are more able to dive into it, rather than recognising the limitations themselves and getting stuck focusing on that.

Acknowledgements: This activity was designed by Tanya Newman for Kotare Trust. It draws on the work of solution based therapy and the 'miracle question', developed by Steve de Shazer and others.

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