

**Steve de Shazer**  
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**QUESTION** - > The field of brief therapy is seen, rightly or wrongly, by therapists of some other orientations as heavily dependent a) on techniques and b) formulaic ways of talking with clients. To what extent do you believe that is a justified criticism of brief therapy in general and of SFBT in particular? How might you counter this?

**RESPONSE** - > a) First of all, I simply want to agree with the observation that most of brief therapy, including SFBT is "heavily dependent on techniques." Of course. What else? Technique is the "foundation" of doing SFBT. Second, then, I wonder how can this be a criticism? What would a therapy be like that did not fit this description? I guess that this would mean that the therapist does whatever she or he feels like doing.

[Can you imagine some one trying to drive a car (or cooking) after just having read a book or two? Driving a car involves a lot of techniques, frequently done simultaneously. For most people, after enough practice, these techniques become second nature and the driving is more or less automatic and frequently highly effective and efficient.]

As I see it, doing therapy is a craft and is entirely a matter of technique. Only masters, such as Milton H. Erickson or Insoo Kim Berg, can put aside technique - since the techniques have become second nature to them. This allows them to use their highly trained "intuition" to invent new approaches and techniques. For me, and I suspect for most therapists, techniques are necessary so that I know what to do and when to do it. Without techniques I would not know what to do and thus I would just sit there and do nothing - just as I would if given a cello.

Techniques are necessary tools for therapists to help them with the damn hard work of staying on the surface - listening to and accepting what the clients says - rather than following the all too human urge to look behind and beneath (which is urged by most Theories). By staying on the surface the therapist is able to avoid interpretations (and mis-interpretations and over-interpretations) and useless searches for meaning.

Of course, when training therapists, it is necessary to focus on the techniques and procedures of SFBT since many of the techniques are unique to our approach. After years of training therapists I have come to believe that the only way a person can learn to do SFBT is by doing it. Thus learning the techniques is the way to learn to do SFBT. If I did not help people learn via teaching through techniques, what would I use?

[Have you ever tried listening to someone playing the cello or the sax or the piano without technique? It is no fun whatsoever.]

Secondly, b) I assume that "formulaic ways of talking with clients" refers to the Miracle Question in particular. Indeed, when training therapists and helping them learn how to use the MQ, I emphasize the exact wording since this wording - including the pauses - is the product of almost 20 years of experiments and experience in the use of the MQ. It seems to me that this current version most consistently elicits the most useful responses from the client(s). Other versions, and we've tried plenty over the years, did not get as consistently useful responses.

For me, at least, it is also a matter of convenience; since I know exactly what I am going to say, I do not need to spend time and energy figuring out how to word the question and thus I am free to be able to watch and listen to the client as I am asking the MQ and am totally ready to be able to watch and listen to the client's response. If I had to figure it out each time, I would lose the ability to watch and listen since I cannot think (talk to myself) and listen at the same time.