Is Solution-Focused Brief Therapy similar to Problem Solving Therapy?
A: SFBT is not similar at all to Problem Solving Therapy. As the name, Problem Solving Therapy, implies, the goal of that model is to focus on a problem and get rid of it. In contrast, as the name, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, implies, the goal of this model is to focus on what the client desires (within the context of the client’s system). In SFBT, one of the basic principles is that the problem and the solution are not necessarily connected.

Is Solution-Focused Brief Therapy similar to Person-Centered Therapy or Reality Therapy?
A: Of course there will be some overlap between all of the many models, however, I find that the different models are best understood by focusing on how they are different rather than how they are similar. I often use the analogy of how one learns to tell identical twins apart. Focusing on how they are similar will only increase the confusion, while looking closely for the subtlety of how they are different will make it very simple to tell the twins apart. Both Person-Centered Therapy and Reality Therapy build on the problem solving philosophy. This means that both approaches seek to understand the problem with the intent of resolving it. In contrast, SFBT seeks to understand what the client wants (within the context of his/her system) with the intent of asking questions that help the client create this desired future.

What if client responds "I stopped at 16 drinks because I passed out." What do I say next?
A: I love this question. It comes up very frequently when I train. My response would simply be. “Ok. . . So when you came to again, how were you able to not continue to drink?” Another common question from alcohol and drug counselors is, “What if they say ‘because I ran out of money’?” I would simply respond, “So, what kept you from finding more alcohol another way? . . . I’m sure you could have gotten more alcohol even though you didn’t have money. . . How did you keep from doing this?” All I’m doing here is truly believing that it was not dumb luck that my client stopped drinking. They did something that worked. They took action or made a decision. My role is to discover what they did, how they did it, etc. Our clients stop drinking all the time. Our role is to explore this and help them to become more cognizant of what is working when they do this.

It sounds like solution-building contrasts with problem solving in that it is less diagnostically driven and more goal driven? Is that correct?
A: Yes. That is correct. SFBT is not diagnostically driven in any way. In fact, I don’t have to know the problem at all. (This is one of the reasons it works so well with clients who might not be forthcoming with the truth about the problem, might not remember the truth, or whose lawyer has instructed them not to talk about the incident.) I am seeking to understand their desired future within the context of their system (this is what holds the client accountable to a realistic solution). All of my focus is in this direction.