

THE DISCOVERY OF FIRE

People from disadvantaged groups design their future.

Griet Bouwen, Stebo

*You get the best effort from others not by lighting a fire beneath them
But by building a fire within them
(Bob Nelson)*

Welcome to FIREworks!

Before you dive into this section, I have one question for you.

Dig down into your memories and recall someone that you supported as a counsellor or supervisor and whom you know has turned their life around significantly since then. Maybe that person thanked you, or showed you his or her appreciation for your support in a very modest way. Bring that situation back to your mind's eye. Whom are you thinking about? What questions did that person come to you with? What did you do? What has changed since? Try to think why your support was so successful.

I asked my colleagues the same question: counsellors for job-seekers, people who have a job but who want to move in another direction, people who want to start their own business.

From their answers, it appears: that the strongest memories are the ones in which we helped another person get in touch with their passions, their talent, their values and their desires for the future.

Counsellors get the most enjoyment out of their work when they see that people 'are finding their path'. Those people become stronger and more optimistic. They take action to take control over their lives again. Nothing gives a counsellor more satisfaction than - even after many years - seeing a client who developed her (or his) talents and devoted them for 100% into her work, her free time, her family and friends.

What would it be like if those weren't just lucky shots, but the result of a consciously developed leadership style? How can a counselling style help us counsellors to bring out the best in the people that we meet on our professional journey?

FIREworks is just that kind of coaching style. FIREworks brings out the best that people have in them: their talent and their passions. We use them to develop a motivational future and to make it reality.

FIREworks is a way of looking at reality and focusing on what is possible. It is also a methodological framework that counsellors can derive inspiration from. That will help them to develop their own style that is based on people's potential, works with their dreams and talents, and develops competencies that can make those dreams come true.

I hope that you will have a lot of fun during your discovery of FIRE!

Competence management is hot

Each with its own competence policy, companies and organisations strive to get the most out of their 'human capital'. Employees' knowledge and skills are identified, measured, evaluated. The result is an 'objective picture' that managers can use to manage the human potential in their organisation better. Competence management is making headroads in areas besides personnel policy, though. It's also becoming increasingly important in coaching job-seekers and employment counselling. Digital competence databanks already exist and there are competence management instruments at company level. We may not be that far off from a large-scale data-management system that will be used in employment counselling. That kind of database would have to make it possible to easily link competence profiles of job seekers with the expectations of employers.

Are you your competencies?

The question is whether that will help us to put the so-called 'human capital' to the best possible use in the job market. Is it enough for someone to find a job that matches his competencies and development potential? To be blunt...are you suited to be a welder because you can weld well? Are you willing, never mind about the way things are now, to use the competencies that have been identified and to develop them further? Or are there other issues at play, issues that may go right to your core? What about what you want, for example? Maybe you can weld well because you learned how in high school, but you're only happy if you can help people who need care. Or maybe you do like to weld, but you don't feel comfortable with somebody looking over your shoulder. It's clear: managing competencies is not the only thing that's needed.

And how are we dealing with this as a society? Do we also want to take what people want and what they expect from their lives seriously? Do we also want to work towards a situation where people are happy in their work? Do we believe that happy employees are better employees?

Work and happiness

When he was asked what happiness in his work meant, Danny Volckaerts, a photographer with the Belgian Army and the happiest employee in 2007, said *"it's a combination of feeling good in what you do, both at home and at work. Photography has been my passion since I got a camera from my grandfather on my twelfth birthday. The circumstances are also important. Everything here has up-to-date equipment and is easy to get to by - free - public transportation. Every now and then, I get to travel, such as a trip I recently took to Morocco."* What Danny is talking about is passion, the context that he works in, the balance between his work and other things that he wants to do. Working is more than just earning money to be able to live. Work becomes one piece in the puzzle of a meaning-full life.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we have high expectations of our lives. We search for our own path, our talents, the passion in our lives. Magazines and newspapers pay increasing attention to

'meaning', books on spirituality and psychology fly off the bookstore shelves, courses on personal development and 'the meaning of life' are springing up like mushrooms.

New career counselling centres have sprung up all over Flanders over the past few years. That, too, is a sign that more and more people are searching for the proper place of work in their lives, for work that they want to do, in conditions where they feel like a fish in water. Workers in Flanders are now also entitled to free (subsidized) career counselling, once every six years.

A new chasm

The results from the career counselling centres have shown something else, though: it's usually the educated workers who contemplate the meaning of work and life. The people in the so-called 'disadvantaged' groups are not being reached in anything like the same numbers.

Is it possible that the educated workers are more often in a position that makes it possible for them to make a freer personal choice? Maybe their knowledge, skills, and often broad experience make them less vulnerable in today's tight labour market.

School leavers, members of minority groups and the older workers are currently feeling a great deal of pressure to get (back) to work in sectors where there is a shortage of workers. The needs of the market have become so compelling that they overshadow personal expectations of a professional future. Those who have the coveted competencies, or can develop them quickly, are pushed into accepting this or that job, even if neither the job nor the competences have anything to do with an individual's personal ambitions. And so you become a welder, dreaming all the while of being a child-care worker.

The personal ambition of people from disadvantaged groups seems to be becoming increasingly less important in job counselling. Economic need, on the other hand, all the more so. Is that evolution leading to a new social chasm between those who are able to position themselves in the labour market on the basis of choice and others whose job 'choice' is driven by skill shortages?

That cannot be the objective in a society with pretensions of showing solidarity and that finds personal development to be important. School leavers, members of minority communities and older workers are entitled to a life that matches their personal passions and to look for work that fits with that life. If people are able to do work that matches what they want, they will do their work with more enthusiasm, do it better and keep to it longer.

Waking ambition

"A lot of people spend their whole lives fishing", Norman Peale said, "without knowing that they're really not looking for fish." Appreciative Inquiry is an outstanding way for reeling in what someone really wants in his life, so that a future plan can match personal ambition. Once someone becomes aware of their ambition, they can focus on the future. By doing that, people from disadvantaged groups can also rediscover the motivation of creating their future themselves. After all...a choice is only possible when you realize that you have choices.

Before we explain how we put that appreciative inquiry into practice, we would like to explain some underlying concepts.

Reflections on competencies, talent and passion.

*There's something magical about enthusiasm.
It's the difference between mediocrity and success.
(Norman Vincent Peale)*

The terms "competencies" and "talent" are often used as synonyms for each other. That may not be justified. By using those words interchangeably, the content of both is weakened and we ultimately find ourselves in a tower in Babel. Terms evoke associations, emotions, images, opinions, expectations. All of those work together to determine how we respond to the term, which is why clarity is so important. The fact that 'competence management' is something different than 'talent development' will be shown in the following sections.

Some terms

Competencies' according to the definition used by the Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), "the real and individual capabilities to apply knowledge, skills and attitudes in action in actual, daily and changing working situations and in the context of personal and social activities." Competencies are about what you know and what you can and your attitude. Competencies are expressed in behaviour. Competencies are observable and, subject to extremely well defined criteria, are also measurable and capable of being developed.

"Talent" is defined in the Dutch-language Van Dale dictionary as "in inborn ability to do something well: gifted, aptitude, predisposition". "He's gifted," we say if we see someone perform exceptionally in something. Aptitude is the bud of development. That bud, of course, needs the metaphorical water and light in order to grow. It's only when you invest in that personal aptitude from an attitude of sincerity and persistence and develop specific competencies that the aptitude will truly become visible and usable talent. Talent, therefore, is developed aptitude. Talents are expressed when people do one thing or another in a way that is natural and almost expected, apparently effortlessly and with love and pleasure.

That love and pleasure bubbles up from our "passion". Passion is defined as: "exuberance, being inspired or enthusiastic." In daily life, we also used words such as enthusiasm, excitement, and passion. It's the experience we have when we are *hungry* to do something: the values that are important enough to do something about, the environment where you feel comfortable, the other people who are important for you, the goals that you pursue in your life, the directions that you want to grow in. All of that....together....is passion.

That enthusiasm can be a strong driver in the things that people do.

Marco is the manager of a 'molto comodo' Italian restaurant. The natural flair with which he receives his guests is very special, surprisingly sincere. Marco is a talented host who takes obvious pleasure from creating a pleasant atmosphere and serving an honest Italian meal. And each of the waiters in his restaurant is friendlier than the next. They are hospitable, polite, helpful, and discrete. Even so...the difference between their 'competence' and Marco's 'talent' is clear even without being defined. You just feel it.

Competence development

Competence development is about developing human capital in the context of a company or in response to the needs of the labour market. It is concerned with revealing the competencies of employees, applicants, job-seekers, or people on courses. It identifies people's development potential for current or future jobs and careers. A development plan is drawn up and tracked as it progresses. Ideally, the emphasis in a personal development plan is much more on developing the strengths, and much less on neutralising the weaknesses.

However one looks at it, competence development is based on the needs of the system.

No one is competent in a vacuum, however. Competencies can only manifest themselves in an appropriate context. Your striking creative abilities will quickly go into hiding in an environment where every proposal is greeted with derision. The reverse is also true: in a team where you feel safe, you will express your ideas more easily, even if you're not more creative than the next guy (or girl). The impact of the context, and the relationships that you have within that context, are decisive in determining whether a competence will be put to use effectively.

Our passion is just as important in expressing our competencies and the willingness to develop them further. If no one is willing to notice, it's understandable that the employee or the job-seeker doesn't recognise herself (or himself) in the (objective) competence profile. The willingness to develop one's weaker points will also be minimal, as a result.

Developing talent

Talent develops on the basis of a person's possibilities. Finding out what someone's aptitude and interests are is unquestionably a more positive focus. A person's experience that his or her talent is acknowledged and appreciated acts as an immediate invitation to develop it further and to apply it.

Those whose strengths are being addressed will be open to learn. The development of well chosen competencies that strengthen our talent is a challenge that we will be enthusiastic about.

Talented chef and host Marco has to be able to do more than that if his restaurant is going to be successful. His natural gift for welcoming people and making them feel at ease has also helped him to create an enjoyable atmosphere among his personnel. But he also had to develop other skills, too. Without insight into business administration or proficiency in the Belgian context, his business would never have gotten off the ground.

One thing we are not doing is putting all of the attention on a person's strengths, and forgetting about all of the weaker points. Sometimes, we really do have to eliminate a shortcoming. If that weaker point is close enough to the talent, that's entirely possible, too. Turning a true weak point into a strong one is not very likely to succeed. At best, we may be able to camouflage our shortcomings a bit, or file down the sharpest of its edges.

The first step in developing talent is discovering it. Sometimes, that's not very difficult, but, very often, talents are buried under a thick layer of dust. Especially those who have faced rejection on top of disappointment, repeatedly, can be blind to their potential. Those who rediscover and acknowledge their talents, develop self-respect. The appreciation of what is, and what can yet be, is a source of energy and ambition. So we have to look for the right tools to dig up those hidden talents.

Passion drives talent and competencies

On their own, competencies and talent do not get people moving. People only apply their good qualities if they are motivated to do so. People find that motivation in their passions, the relationships that they enter into with one another and the personal experiences that they have.

It's not only what you know and what you can do that is important...what you want, what you dream about, what you believe in, and where you draw your energy from....all those things are equally important. "Passion", although that is more difficult to identify. How do you find out what is really essential in your life, what drives you forward, what makes you happy?

The Appreciative Inquiry can help in your search for what makes you hungry enough to come into action. You get a picture of your talents, of the ideal context that you feel comfortable in, of the values that are the most important for you. You discover where you get your inspiration from, what ultimate goals you pursue, the direction that you want to grow in. All of that....together....is passion. And once you know where your passions lie, where you derive your joy, what you want to go for with all your heart and soul, then you can also very consciously choose to make those situations and conditions reality. You feel the energy flowing, and you start to move. Passion gives quality to your life, because living from the place where your own honest desires, values and ambitions originate gives direction, and therefore, meaning, to your life.

Conclusion

Competence development is first and foremost functional. It's preparing people for a specific role or task, now and in the future. Developing talent begins with the unique abilities of the individual. Competencies can be developed to be available over the long term if they are based on the talent or support the talent. Passion provides the energy to develop the talents and the competencies in a context that works for the person in question. "We have to practice to be the person that we want to become", according to nature photographer Craig Tanner.

It's about discovering where, now, at this point in your life, your passions lie. The long-term development of competencies relies on that personal passion.

The "colouring competencies" project: in search of passion

Logic makes people think, passions make people act.

The context of the project

"Colouring Competencies is a project of Stebo, a Limburg-based organisation that supports the socio-economic development of neighbourhoods and regions. Long-term job-seekers, school leavers, members of minority groups. Stebo makes them resilient and encourages them to take on a more active role in society.

Long-term work is an important part of the process of emancipation and activation. For a large group of people, long-term work is simply not in the cards. Those who, for whatever reason, didn't complete their education, or had to climb a mountain of social problems, usually don't have a lot of choice in the job market. In times of growth, they join the labour market, but when the economy is doing less well, they are the first to fall away.

When there is no work available for them, they learn to live with limited financial resources and often in social isolation. Without the 'obligations' that provide structure to the day, with little money and social contacts, people start living from day to day. Because the future is uncertain, they concentrate on the short term. It happens frequently that people grow comfortable in that situation and take comfort in their short-term certainties. It takes more than just several tens of euros more in income to get them to go back to work. People who have been without work for a long time have to rediscover what it is that gives them the energy to move forward: discovering talents, passions, and enthusiasm, and then realising that it is possible to develop an attractive future.

The question that comes up immediately is: how can we discover passion? Can passion be measured? Can we study it, measure it, and map it? Or will we have to think of something else? Does passion

provide just the energy that people need to retake control of their futures? What do we have to do to increase their self-driving capability?

The "Colouring competencies" project was looking for the answers to those questions. In doing so, Stebo received assistance from the Centre for Organisational Psychology at the Louvain Catholic University, Hasselt University, the Kluster services voucher company, the activities cooperative Entrepreneurs' Atelier, the Evenwicht Foundation, and Kessels & Smit. The project was supported by the European Social Fund and the Flemish government.

In our search for a suitable methodology, we discovered Appreciative Inquiry. The decision to go searching for the sources of energy, the concrete and narrative and playful way of thinking about the future, was attractive to the project team. We decided to learn more about AI and gradually developed a coaching methodology and tools for working with the disadvantaged on developing an energetic picture of the future, based on personal passion.

From "Appreciative Inquiry" to "FIREworks"

What can Appreciative Inquiry mean for our work with long-term job-seekers and workers, often without much education or living in neighbourhoods where the problems just keep piling up? How can we, even in difficult circumstances, still help them to find their energy and use it to develop a motivating picture of the future? How can we awaken their own sense of responsibility, to pry them loose from their victim role?

Step by step, we discovered the strengths of AI. We developed a modified questionnaire, collected and developed additional aids and exercises, formulated recommendations for counsellors. The result is "FIREworks", a methodology and tools to help people from disadvantaged groups to develop a life plan that matches their passions. In the sections that follow, I will explain how we implemented AI.

Focus

The appreciative approach, at its source, is a way to look at and implement change processes in organisations, and is ideal for engaging (large) groups of people in that change. FIREworks puts the focus on the individual process of growth and change. We were looking for our own approach to help people express their personal ambition. Of course, we respected the fundamental idea, the basic principles and the methodological choices.

Our focus is expressed in imagery and language, a basic question and the development of interim steps over four phases.

Image

Explaining passion? There are a lot of words required to be able to do that. It works better if you use metaphors and symbols. Without saying a single word, a symbol spontaneously generates thoughts, ideas, and associations. We wanted to use those strengths. Fire became the symbol for passion because of the power that it generates and the associations that it spontaneously brings to mind.

Language

Appreciative Inquiry is first and foremost a verbal methodology. First we tell stories and then we identify the positive core in those stories. So there's a lot of talking, and usually about subjects that are very close to the person himself or herself. With a sober choice of words and sentence structure we clear out a lot of language barriers: a simply basic question, short and concise help questions, a lot of simple synonyms. By putting the story at the centre as the information carrier, we connect with different cultural traditions.

Four-plus-one phased plan

The four phases of the appreciative approach were respected as being essential. We suggest setting up a step-by-step plan within those phases and generates results. We add a preliminary phase, during which we state the points of attention and provide tips for good preparation.

FIREworks: four-plus-one phases in a process

FIREworks is structured around four phases: discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. It may appear that those steps are milestones on a line and progress from a starting point to an end point, but that's not entirely the case. We use them rather as points on circles in a helix leading to results. In the first circle, we define the major objective: designing a future that suits the personal passions and the talents of the individual. In every subsequent pass of the helix, we use the phases to think about the more concrete challenges, all in service of the major objective.

Phase 0.

Preparation

Just how powerful an instrument FIREworks is became clear in the many tests that we ran. Even so, FIREworks is not a box of magic tricks. Although the basic principles of the appreciative approach do

have some general applicability, it is not necessarily the best way to do things at every single moment.

Before counsellors start on 'the discovery of fire', they should probably spend some time just marking time. That is essential during this preparatory phase. The counsellor would do well to ask a couple of questions before getting started.

- Is FIREworks the right answer to the question? Acute problems require a different approach, for example.
- Is FIREworks a good methodology for this situation? Is language not a problem...is there sufficient trust between the counsellor and the person, etc.
- What is the right setting? We encourage counsellors to free themselves from the obligatory formal office interview if the person would be more comfortable in other surroundings.
- Do I have enough time? During phases 1 and 2, interviews will only be successful if the counsellor is able to devote complete attention to the job-seeker's story. Interruptions can also block the process.
- What aids will I use in this situation? Is FIREworks being used in a group or individually? With someone who talks easily or not so much? With someone who has a lot of ideas very quickly or is more likely to need the inspiration of others? Questions, exercises, ice-breakers, things to think about are selected and prepared on the basis of the actual situation.
- Is the person okay with this way of doing things? Counsellors are well advised to tell the person about the methodology and to explain the precise objectives.

Phase 1. Discovery

'the discovery of fire'

Discovery is making visible what is hidden. It's looking for the inner spark and fanning it into a flame of passion.

A well chosen basic question inspires the recall of good memories. We are looking for stories where the person has an active part. Telling someone about a happy memory is usually a very pleasant experience. The original enthusiasm of the memory returns and provides new energy. Sparks from that energy also reach the counsellor. Together they discover what made the event from the past such a special experience. Without addressing it directly, the passion is being unveiled. The person (re)discovers what he or she can do well and believes in, what the sources of joy are. He searches for the right words to express it, and holds on to them.

Four steps

- Step 1 – ask an inviting question. The initial question sets the tone for the process that we will be going through. Whatever we focus our attention on will be what starts moving. The initial question focuses attention on strong moments from the past. Our initial question is:
"Think of three moments in the recent past when you were doing things that made you feel good, gave you energy, did what you liked to do, and when you may have lost track of time . In short, something that makes you say "I want to experience that good feeling again." Tell me about it so I get the feeling that I was there."
 The important aspect is: that we ask about actual moments, about activities that the person experienced himself. We ask about multiple memories because that will cause a greater variety of elements of passion to come up.
- *Step 2 - tell the story.* The person chooses one situation and tells his story so that the counsellor can almost see it, hear it and feel what happened in his or her mind's eye. The counsellor asks questions to understand the situation better. We see that the energy that people once felt re-emerges when they tell others about it.
- *Step 3 – identify the passion.* After the story has been told, the teller and the listener(s) search together for everything that contributed to that strong experience. Together they look for words to express what the storyteller experienced as his values, his skills, the ideal circumstances for functioning well.
- Step 4 – hold on to the passion for the future. We complete the storytelling session with reviewing all of the elements that contributed to the successful experience. It only becomes possible to use them in creating a picture of the future when they are discussed in more general terms, separate from that one situation. We look back at the other situations that were conceived in step 1 and fill out the word list with additional insights.

Phase 2. Dream

'I dream that I can fly'

Dreaming is being free from reality just for a bit. Someone who thinks that he can fly sees reality from a different perspective. It means becoming free from the Earth and discovering the universe of infinite possibilities.

Imagine that all of those important and positive things from the stories of the past were to become part of one's life a lot more in the future...what would that life look like? It's an invitation to ignore the

reality of today and to imagine a dream of the future. It's about telling about your future desires as if they were being met right now. It's also about discovering what, precisely, makes the dream worthwhile.

The four steps:

- *Step 1 - Introduce the dream phase.* Take the step to 'dreaming', which is often where resistance spontaneously arise, may be the most difficult part of the whole process. Some people don't see the sense of it right away, are afraid to try, or have lost the ability to be creative. That's why careful preparation is necessary, with the counsellor explaining clearly that this is a step to release creativity and to explore desires.
- Step 2 – Asking the miracle question. The miracle question focuses the attention on the future.
"You close your eyes and open them three years later. Your dreams have become real and you are doing what you would like to do. Tell us what that entails. Tell us what happens from the moment that you get up until you go to bed, both in your private life and at work. When doing that, think about what you learned from your previous story."
- *Step 3 - Telling about the dream.* The person tells about his dream and takes the elements from the discovery phase with him into the future. The counsellor listens and asks questions in order to get a clear picture of the dream.
- *Step 4 – Identifying the core of the dream.* Dreams often represent an ultimate goal in an ideal situation. That detailed picture is not feasible simply for having been stated, however. But that's not what this phase is about. The dream is not a goal; it's a way to get to the essence. It's about the foundations of the dream, what holds the dream up, and what would crush the dream if it were not longer there. The storyteller and the counsellor now try to get to that core. Together, they look for the essential elements and name them.

Phase 3. Design

'A suitcase full of plans'

The future is a destination. Travelling plans are made, suitcases are packed. Packing a suitcase means making lists of what you need and then gathering it together. And then: close it up...we can go now!

With the essential links from the dream, the person forges a concrete and achievable future. That's where the impassioned scenarios come in. He makes plans for the trip. He thinks about his competencies and what he still has to learn. He learns to deal with people who support or oppose him. He prepares for how he will develop a network. And during all of those preparatory steps, he casts an appreciative glance on the possibilities and difficulties.

Here, too, there are four steps:

- *Step 1 – Imagining the future: creative thinking, evaluating, and choosing.* With the essential elements from the dream, the person and his counsellor conceive of various activities, professions or hobbies that have some kind of relationship with the core concepts. The ideas are then evaluated and the person makes a choice: where do his ambitions lie? Where does he want to put his time and energy? What does he really want to make happen? What does he see as the result? He formulates his choice in the form of a story.
- *Step 2 - Packing the suitcase.* With the concrete picture of the future before them, the co-conversationists investigate together what talents and competencies are required, what formalities might have to be completed, who could provide support and assistance. Some thought is given to how the person could achieve balance between his dream and all other areas of life.
- *Step 3 – Make a plan of action.* With all of the information collected, a global plan of action is formulated.
- *Step 4 – Discuss the effort.* And finally, the person contemplates the total investment in time and effort. If he supports the whole plan, feels like going for it, and has sufficient time available to pursue it, the picture of the future is realistic enough. At this step, the counsellor also tells about his or her effort in achieving the objective.

Phase 4. Destiny

'Making my dream come true'

Creating reality is going on the road. It's closing the suitcase with a determined click and pulling the door closed behind you. It's taking steps in the world. You encounter the world, and the world encounters you. Stepping stones mark your path.

At this point, the person and the counsellor start doing things to create the future. Desires, deliberation and doubt are turned into doing: expanding networks, collecting information, taking courses, practicing, applying, gaining experience, taking care of formalities, looking for support. Learning is what it's all about here, because learning opportunities are primarily embedded in the action itself. Support and appreciation are essential so that growth is possible.

Phase four in six steps:

- *Step 1 – Prepare actions.* The global plan of action is now refined into concrete actions that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-sensitive (SMART).
- *Step 2 - Organise support.* A lot of attention goes into developing a network of people who can help in achieving the actions. The counsellor is part of that network, too!
- *Step 3 - Execute.* The counsellor and the person now execute the agreements.
- *Step 4 – Appreciate and learn.* The goal is not the only thing that matters, the journey towards it does, as well. Learning is in the action. As the plan is being carried out, the person grows towards increasing autonomy. He learns from his successes, doubts and failures. He internalises the appreciative glance.
- *Step 5 – Correct the course.* It sometimes happens that the future picture changes during the course of the action phase. Sometimes the future picture is maintained but changes are necessary in the plan of action. In that case, you fall back to the approaches used during the earlier phases or steps.
- *Step 6 - Let go.* There are limits to the professional support provided by the counsellor, of course. The important thing in FIREworks is that people come into contact with their own passions, and stay in contact. We teach them to have a positive focus and give them instruments to keep hold of it. Which is when it's time to let go. The counsellor and the person evaluate the process they have been through together and place special emphasis on the learning moments and the challenges for the future.

Structure for the FIREworks counsellor

A methodology offers a concrete, sometimes detailed structure for a counsellor's actions. That applies to FIREworks, too: clearly structured phases, each with its own objectives, with clear steps within

each phase, example basic questions and supplementary questions and, finally, planning aids. A methodology is a well conceived aid, and that's all it is. The more important aspect is understanding the intentions that lie behind the methodology. Counsellors who get the chance to connect with that find themselves able to act authentically and enthusiastically.

Stories create cohesion

People like to tell stories and learn more about themselves in the telling. When someone is telling a story, they make connections between the events, the environment, and their personal experience. A story is never just about competencies. The storyteller is often talking about the broad context: the surroundings that he prefers to be in, the way people treat him, the things he likes to do, what motivates him. A lively story also creates a lively 'wide-angle picture' for the counsellor, too. A story provides more insight into everything that relates to everything else and influences each other. Exchanging stories is inspiring and, above anything else, pleasant. The relationship between the job-seeker and his counsellor deepens. It invites counsellors to free themselves from rigidly following interview techniques that they've learned well and to have a relaxed relationship with the job-seeker.

Fatima was given the chance to get experience as a receptionist with Stebo for a year. At the end of the work experience, her counsellor asked her about the direction she wanted to apply for jobs in. Almost automatically, Fatima thought about the social services, about helping people. It was quite natural...she had been watching her colleagues do that for a year by then. When she was invited to tell a story about a strong memory, however, her talent and motivation turned out to welcoming customers, fashion and jewellery. Her future plan looks quite different now, because telling stories brought insight into what was really important for her.

Focussing on the positive

Whatever gets your attention will start to live. Positive images stimulate. It seems simple. And it is. Dealing with that in a conscious way requires a bit more effort and attention, however. Counselling means helping to focus the attention and by doing so, helping to focus people's energy. We let go of the idea that our primary task as professionals is to solve problems (unless it's urgent to do so, of course!). We teach people to cast an appreciative glance on the reality around them and look for the possibilities together. We name the strength that people bring to bear to keep going even in difficult circumstances. We can still solve problems, but now as part of the possibilities that we are helping to turn into reality.

"One of my clients couldn't set any goals for herself. She just didn't know what she wanted. Thanks to FIREworks, all that changed. She discovered what it was that gave her energy. She became aware of her talent. After that, it became possible to develop a positive plan for the future. She went looking for work actively and found it," a counsellor says.

Building authentic relationships

Telling about strong moments from the past and dreaming about the future is a lively and pleasant activity. The atmosphere is informal and constructive. The relationship between the counsellor and the client is equal and reciprocal. That is only possible if the counsellor can present herself as she really is. The best way to invite people to show their true selves is for the counsellor to do that, too. Being authentic means daring to be personal, sincerely involved, and, of course, ethical: do what you say you're going to do. Authentic counsellors act from a position of spontaneity that makes contacts smooth and human.

*A counsellor said it with just a few words:
"Talking about passion is good for the relationship with the client."*

Encourage creativity

The appreciative voyage of discovery may begin on the familiar path of strong memories, but leads to new paths in the future. Leaving the beaten path requires creativity: seeing new possibilities, making new combinations, suspending judgement.

The dream phase is the ideal creative phase. The biggest challenge for the person is thinking freely, suspending the inner judgement, putting the 'yes, buts' on hold for a while. That's a difficult assignment, because the brain is accustomed to judging and selecting immediately. It requires a conscious effort on the part of the counsellor and the job-seeker.

In phase 3, the focus is on developing a realistic plan for the future, and, here, too, creative skills are useful. Designing a plan for the future starts with combining the different components of passion and using those combinations to think of possible activities that incorporate all of those elements.

Those creative skills are extremely important for people today to be able to participate in this complex and constantly changing society. Counsellors who are aware of that will teach those creative skills and offer chances for practice throughout the Fireworks process.

During the dreaming phase, a job-seeker came to the conclusion that three things were very important for her future: she wants to help people, being creative, and she needs a lot of movement in order to feel good. Along with her counsellor, she thought of 20 professions containing those essential elements. The variation between them was great, ranging from sports monitor to setting up a flower shop. She didn't simply latch on to the first idea, but kept a variety of options open for the

future. Based on her competencies, her current situation, financial resources, etc., she decided where to concentrate her energy. If that doesn't succeed, she still has a lot of options in reserve!

Creative reframing

A counsellor's creative abilities are often challenged in a lot of different ways: to deal with all of the problems, objections and obstacles that clients throw up, openly and constructively. "There's something good about everything bad," is one appropriate proverb. The art of counselling is to turn the problem around in such a way that the possibilities that are hiding within it become visible. 'Yes, but' can usually be translated creatively into 'how can we make sure that?'. The counsellor who teaches her client to look at the same thing from a different perspective has done her a big favour. It's not about wanting to be naively positive. It's about recognising the energy and the strength in people and using it positively. Even when dealing with problems, and especially how people deal with them, positive power can be named and used.

"Employers don't want to hire Moroccans because they're all racists," Abdullah said, refusing to continue looking for work.

"How many percent of the Moroccan young people are unemployed in this neighbourhood?" the counsellor asked.

"At least 30%," Abdullah said emphatically.

The counsellor raised his eyebrows and asked "and where do the other 70% work then?"

The FIRE works,...

Nora is 25 years old and Portuguese. Five years ago she met a Belgian man. She followed him to Flanders and married him. She learned Dutch and had her foreign diplomas recognised for their equivalency. She has, unfortunately, not yet succeeded in finding work at her level.

Her counsellor introduced FIREworks and she went through the four phases. She designed a dream and a concrete plan of action with the passionate elements: independent, results oriented, growing and learning, helping others and experiencing closeness with family and friends.

She then formulated the following feedback:

"In general, I had a clear purpose in my life, which was 'try to be happy' but the way to achieve that was pretty vague. (...) After the dream session, I knew what was important for me to feel better and to see where I could draw positive energy from. I also saw what negative energy did to me. With the

step-by-step plan, I have guidelines for moving on, but now in a more aware way. That doesn't mean that I won't encounter any more obstacles, but I'm going to try not to get distracted from what I really want.

I had never been given such an opportunity as part of counselling before. Unfortunately, there are not organisations that allow people to dream and look for their own well-being. Everybody knows that the more involved you are, the better the results will be. I found it exciting, but, above everything, very useful to achieve my life's project in this way."

FIREworks aims to teach an extremely important skill through doing: choosing positive images, appreciating what is, looking for what gives energy, learning to look at difficulties from another perspective. Throughout the whole process, clients practice on focusing attention. They learn to turn objections into challenges, to see the strength in problems.

Through FIREworks, people create new perspectives in their lives themselves. That is a crucial step for a great many people who had thought that they were not allowed, or able, to make fundamental changes in their lives.

Of course, we don't deny that we will encounter difficulties on the way, but with a motivating dream driving us on, problems and conditions take on a different dimension. They become bumps in the road rather than thorny bushes that it's almost impossible to get through.

Ria really wanted to become a salesperson in a fashionable clothing shop. She is crazy about fashion, material, accessories and having a lot of people around. Looking for good child care for her small children meant a step towards her dream. For somebody else, the cost of child care might be just the argument to not go out to work.

Anne is a process counsellor. She has been working with long-term job-seekers for more than 15 years.

"I've been inviting clients to tell me about their dreams and their talents for years. By using the FIREworks step-by-step approach, I actually get more elements to come out. Some very important elements in that process include the conditions in the context and support in the job-seekers social environment. I'm going to apply the appreciative methodology more now because I can find a good job-target better by doing that. It's just faster."

And, no...of course, we can't, not even with FIREworks, guarantee that people actually achieve their dreams. That requires effort, and support, and, yes, a bit of luck here and there, now and again. But

we *do* know that a motivating and achievable picture of the future acts as a renewed source of energy. We want to give people their dreams back, and to make them stronger so that they can stop others from denying it or taking it away from them.

The fire goes out...

*Every great and commanding movement in the annals
of the world is a triumph of enthusiasm.
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Passion is a strong theme for our personnel, too. Not only did the process counsellors recognise that it would be a good approach in working for the emancipation of the disadvantaged. People also felt the passion in themselves being aroused.

All of the personnel were invited to become familiar with FIREworks on the basis of their own experience. They thought about their own passion, learned to verbalise it and created a picture about a future in which their personal motivators could shine through (even more).

It was very inspiring to share personal passions with colleagues. It brought out the talents, values and sources of joy that support the colleagues in their lives and work.

In the course of the exchanges, we collectively built up a new field of expertise about the often concealed richness within our organisation. That knowledge continues to be felt in the organisation even though the training sessions have been concluded. Colleagues remember one another's dreams, and give each other tips, information, and networking contacts. Some of the personal dreams of our employees are good ideas for future projects in our organisation.

Talking about passion is feeding the passion at the same time. If someone shares something about his own passions, he encourages his colleagues to think about the same things for themselves. Those who learn to recognise their own passions and to express them, become enthusiastic and motivated. And motivated people exude infectious energy.

Experience a collective passion increases the strength of an organisation. The organisation becomes, as it were, the vehicle that the personnel can use to live from the position of their personal passion. Working at Stebo means making a life goal reality, living from talent, values, and joy. That awareness does something to people. Together they carry the organisation, and present it to the world.

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