

Steve de Shazer

Chris Iveson

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[The Guardian](#)

Although the death of Steve de Shazer, at the age of 65, went unnoticed outside a relatively small, albeit international, group of followers, he has indirectly touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in Britain.

Through the Brief Therapy Practice, the London-based clinic and training centre, more than 50,000 health, education and social services staff have been trained in the solution-focused brief therapy he developed.

The beginnings of this quiet revolution were first reported in the Guardian in 1993. The idea that therapy needs only about five sessions and the problem does not need to be mentioned was intriguing if not proven.

Since then the evidence has been sufficiently strong for the Department for Education and Skills to initiate two major solution-focused programmes: one on behaviour management and one on coaching for headteachers. Elsewhere in government, the solution-focused approach is being considered as a possible baseline for the new children's service, and in the mental health field almost every hospital and every community service will have frontline professionals quietly using solution-focused techniques in their everyday work.

De Shazer was not a man to seek glory: he was seeing clients until the day before his death, he was proud of the people who are carrying on his work, and he attributed his success to his wife and lifelong colleague Insoo Kim Berg, who, like him, has stayed committed to the world's "have-nots" and the often-maligned professionals who share that commitment.

Tributes to Steve and condolences to Insoo have come from all over the world, from people who knew him and people who knew only of his work. In Britain the solution-focused revolution is only just beginning because, however unusual the idea, however unlikely it is that some of the most extreme problems imaginable can be overcome so simply, the evidence is overwhelming. And in health, education and social services the idea of success is especially attractive.

De Shazer was born in Milwaukee on the shores of Lake Michigan. His father was an electrical engineer and his mother an opera singer. Steve himself was a professional musician and gained qualifications in art, social work and research before finding his metier as a therapist. In the 1970s he and Insoo founded the Brief Family Therapy Centre in Milwaukee, where their groundbreaking ideas would come to fruition. For the past few years Steve suffered from an increasingly debilitating blood disorder. He made a conscious decision to continue his worldwide travels despite the risks to his health ("What sort of life would it be sitting alone all day at home?" he said only days before his death). He spent the week before his death in London, where he presented a brilliant workshop, flew to Vienna on Saturday, caught pneumonia and died on Sunday with his wife beside him.