

Abstract: Think Your Way Forward. A practical 4 question approach to understanding and resolving business problems.

Bio

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Think Your Way Forward

Wade Siers, Ph.D.

A quick visit to any bookstore – online or in-person – unleashes an avalanche of business literature promising the cure to every malady of industry. Authors range from pop-culture icons to top executives, each offering grandiose (and often contradictory) assurances that their complex doctrines, masquerading as simple formulas, will transform anyone into an entrepreneur destined for adoration and immortality. As business literature descends into empty - and even nonsensical - catchphrases, readers are more confused and uncertain than ever.

The travesty of these wasted pages is that the writers often know less than their intended audience, exposing a troubling void between theory and practice. Many are penned by “Business Bros” who weave fantastic narratives of “taking it to the next level” to “increase cash flow.” Their limited experience - usually in flipping real estate or building YouTube audiences - hardly qualifies them to lecture the Board of Directors at General Motors on how to “scale their business” using “top marketing tricks of the pros.” Even when readers are fortunate to get their hands on the work of a genuine, respectable leader, they must frequently endure complex, impractical equations wrapped in a biographical facade.

Absent a practical, universal approach, leaders find themselves the subject of an ongoing experiment in an ambiguous laboratory. Much of these stems from occupational myopia; executives tend to think like executives, just as physicians and lawyers think like physicians and lawyers. These restrictive patterns deprive the opportunity to incorporate foundational and philosophical principles beyond one’s intellectual sphere, hindering confident leadership.

The counseling professions offer an opportunity. Although this may seem unconventional or even implausible, the therapeutic arts provide unique psychological insight into the careful planning and appropriate responses to the myriad challenges facing business leaders. In particular, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), innovated by American social workers Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, is oriented in problem-solving using what is herein referenced as the *Four Questions*¹. Elegant in its simplicity, SFBT is both effective and efficient, relying on these core questions (adapted slightly from de Shazer and Berg's original framework adapted for broader application):

1. *What is the desired outcome?*
2. *What efforts have been made to achieve this?*
3. *What is the level of effectiveness of these efforts?*
4. *What, if anything, can be changed to be more effective in reaching this goal?*

In practice, an interaction between a counselor and client within SFBT's structure may resemble the following:

Counselor: What brings you in today?

Client: I have been experiencing a lot of uncertainty lately.

Counselor: Can you be more specific? Many things can cause us to feel uncertain, after all.

(Note that the counselor is attempting to answer the First Question, what the client desires)

Client: Well, I've been trying to take the next step in my career but I feel stuck and don't know how to move forward.

(The answer to the First Question, then, is that the client desires career advancement)

Counselor: I see this is very important to you. Tell me what you have been doing to achieve this.

(The Second Question is posed)

Client: I've been networking with colleagues and coworkers at my current company and keeping an eye out for internal job postings.

Counselor: Sounds like you've been proactive in your efforts to find the next opportunity. How has this been working out for you?

(Here is the Third Question)

Client: It hasn't. People really like working at this company and with the economy as it is, they're hesitant to walk away from the job security and pension.

Counselor: Understandable! Given everything you've told me, what else could you try to improve your chances?

(A variation on the Fourth Question)

¹ De Shazer, Steve. *Keys to solution in brief therapy*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985.

Client: I suppose I could try switching companies. I'd hate to take a chance that I cannot afford, but who knows? It may turn out better than where I'm at now.

At first glance, this approach may appear superficial or shallow. It is tempting to dismiss SFBT as just another in an unlimited line of contemporary leadership fads. Yet it is this streamlined, direct method that delivers results quickly while sidestepping the wasted time and confusion of more elaborate yet less practical approaches. Used correctly, SFBT is an instrument of precision, accessible to anyone regardless of their position, experience, or education. From the boardroom to the showroom, SFBT shows that even those with little or no formal authority can find direction and take effective action when faced with most challenges.

In the following sections, each of the Four Questions will be examined individually and within the broader context of the SFBT framework. Observant readers may notice parallels between SFBT and other well-known methodologies such as DMAIC (**D**efine-**M**easure-**A**nalyze-**I**mprove-**C**ontrol). While familiarity with DMAIC can be helpful, it is by no means required (though expanding one's repertoire is never discouraged).

Practical examples prompt reflection to identify and discard deleterious processes and behaviors by understanding *where so many leaders get it wrong*. The emphasis is deliberate; after all, even the most well-intentioned leaders have seen their organizations fall to ruin due to errors in thinking. Consider this a call to action; each section concludes with a personal challenge designed to inspire growth and improvement. With genuine commitment, these exercises can deliver meaningful - and perhaps even surprising - results.

The First Question: Finding Our Way

Janet is the Chief Executive Officer of a national pet food company that distributes products from over two dozen factories through multiple distribution centers across the 48 continental United States and Canada. She arrives Monday morning, reviews the quarterly reports, and is concerned that sales in the Midwest have fallen by 20 percent. She calls an immediate meeting with the Chief Operating and Financial officers, who report with laptops in hand. They inundate Janet with a barrage of graphs, charts, and market trends, proposing any number of answers that fail to identify the true source of the declining revenue.

After 30 minutes, Janet is overwhelmed and no closer to solving the problem. This is an all-too-familiar challenge for many leaders. A single problem often stems from multiple underlying issues, not all of which are equally relevant. Failing to properly assess these can lead to conflicting priorities and further delay action.

Here is a classic leadership trap. Janet is tempted to state the First Question as, "How can we increase revenue in the Midwest?" This is both too broad and too generic. People often think they know what they're after, but fail to *ask the right questions*. Noble as increasing production is, this simplified query does not, on its own, set clear objectives to reach measurable goals. It is

easy enough to authorize unlimited overtime and increase the local marketing budget, but what if the problem persists?

This is the waste of time and resources that too many engage, the result of *not asking the right question*. A CEO of a for-profit learning enterprise recently hired a second Vice President of Operations (!!!), thinking this would ease his burden, only to release the selected candidate after a mere six months of employment when nothing had changed. “Turns out,” he sheepishly admitted during an all-hands meeting with the entire company, “what I really needed was a Chief Operating Officer.” By then, the damage was done, with thousands wasted in salaries and recruiting.

The absence of concise inquiry in this instance had far-reaching consequences. A demoralized staff lost confidence in the CEO’s ability to *make the right decision at the right time*. This also had a very real impact on the candidate, who was now facing unemployment in a tumultuous job market. It is no surprise, then, that the CEO was shown the door a few months afterward, along with several dozen who were affected by multiple rounds of mass layoffs as a result of his incompetence.

Janet must articulate her concern in the most intelligent way possible. Here, it is not asking *how* to increase sales but rather *why* they have fallen. It is in the *why* that the solution is often presented. Former Toyota executive Sakichi Toyoda’s “Five Whys” can be insightful. Toyoda proposed the Five Whys as a tool for root cause analysis. He explained that rarely would the initial question reveal the true answer, and that systemic flaws in human and mechanized processes often eluded initial examination². In practice, it may resemble Janet asking the Chief Operating and Financial officers these questions:

Janet: Why has revenue fallen by twenty percent in the Midwest?

Chief Operating Officer: We had to slash our overtime budget to align with payroll forecast over future quarters.

Janet: Why did we forecast payroll in such tight parameters?

Chief Finance Officer: Our overtime budget over the previous year surpassed the neighboring three divisions combined.

Janet: Why were we paying so much overtime to begin with?

Chief Operating Officer: There were a variety of factors. Staffing levels, available facilities, and maintenance all contributed.

Janet: Why have these issues not been resolved?

Chief Operating Officer: We continue to address them as they arise.

Janet: Why have we not been more proactive in preventing them from happening in the first place?

Chief Finance Officer: It goes back to the regional budget combined with available resources in the area.

² Deane-Spread, David. “3 powerful root causes and remedies for systemic flaws.” Forbes, March 27, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2024/03/27/3-powerful-root-causes-and-remedies-for-systemic-flaws/>.

Although it appears Janet is on the right track, care must be taken in the skilled use of the Five Whys. For all of its champions, there are plenty of detractors³. As a method of narrowing focus, the Five Whys can offer a fresh perspective. Unfortunately, it is too easy to spiral downward as a fifth question inevitably leads to a sixth which leads to a 12th, and so on. A conversation that begins with stalling production can ultimately lead to why paid time off is capped at two weeks, leaving Janet even further from finding the answer.

It is imperative to never lose sight of the critical First Question: *What are we after?* In balancing competing criteria, as both the Chief Operating and Financial officers may offer contradictory perspectives, Janet must establish a solutions-focused foundation that is simultaneously well-defined yet open to multitudinous possibilities. From the example above, it is the First Question, *Why has revenue fallen by twenty percent in the Midwest?*, that clarifies the guiding principle and restores equilibrium.

This is where Janet should begin. Rather than entertain endless data streams that entice her to over-think the problem, she can open the conversation by stating a clear objective:

Janet: I've read the most recent quarterly report and noticed that sales in the Midwest have fallen by twenty percent. I understand you will both have unique concerns and opinions, and I am interested in hearing them. Please prepare a one- or two-page synopsis and send it to me within the hour.

At this junction, Janet does not have the available information to make an intelligent decision. For now, her smartest move is *asking the right question*. Anything beyond this carries an inherent risk of wandering too far from the stated purpose of addressing falling sales. Yet even after Janet receives the information she requested, it is premature to take action. This is another mistake of leadership, in rushing to establish goals before thoroughly investigating the root cause. This requires answering the first three questions, and can only be appropriately established in the Fourth Question, as seen later.

Call to Action:

The right answer always begins with the right question!

Reflect on your current department or career stage. Identify the First Question that offers the most direct path to improvement. Keep it simple and within your immediate scope. Ask yourself: "Why have things stayed where they are?"

Congratulations - you've identified your First Question! Read on to see how Janet will navigate the remaining three questions to solve her problem....

³ Card, Alan J. "The Problem with '5 Whys.'" *BMJ Quality & Safety* 26, no. 8 (August 2017): 671–77. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjq-2016-005849>.

The Second Question: Where Are We And How Did We Get Here?

It is a sweltering summer afternoon in Phoenix as Derek seeks refuge in his work vehicle, air conditioning on full, a cooler of ice water in the empty passenger seat. He takes advantage of a rare few quiet moments between dozens of clients to review the ledgers for his mobile auto repair business. Satisfied that the current figures will result in a larger margin than the previous month, he heads out to assist a long-time customer in Tempe.

Along the way, Derek reflects on everything which has led to his success. Careful planning, use of all available low- or no-cost resources including online social media and good-old-fashioned, word-of-mouth networking for both clients and suppliers, and never refusing a job no matter the size has established his reputation as a reliable mechanic. Over the years, he has been trusted with small passenger automobiles, heavy diesel trucks, and even outboard boat motors. Recently, a friend paid him to repair the engine for a blower fan on the roof of the family restaurant.

Derek is in the middle of the Second Question: *What efforts have been made to reach the goal?* For him, the mobile auto repair business is exactly where he wants it. As a small, independent enterprise, Derek has no need to proceed to the Third and Fourth Questions, as he does not suffer from a drop in business or other urgent threats.

Janet is not so fortunate. Reading the synopses renders the answer all the more elusive. She finds herself dwelling on profit-and-loss reports, wondering how such a large region could decline at an accelerated rate.

Since she is familiar with the Second Question, Janet organizes all available information and endeavors to *identify recurring themes*. This is where many risk the same failures of the First Question: Over-thinking, a frequent peril. Janet is acutely aware that the danger of information overload is real. As with the First Question, one theme can easily reveal multiple supporting themes of varying significance that can mislead efforts. Just as a professional athlete ignores the roar of the crowd to maintain focus on the goal line, so must leaders isolate extraneous details that distract from the primary intention.

In sorting recurring themes, Janet seeks to narrow the top three or five contributing factors, with all else secondary and (hopefully) remedied by resolving the predominant issues. For small business owners, this can materialize in an afternoon. Janet, however, finds herself at the helm of a nationwide organization employing tens of thousands with a customer base in the millions.

To narrow the scope of the investigation, Janet must isolate the Midwest region. She contacts the Regional Vice President (RVP) and instructs them to plan a visit to each of the four production facilities the following week. Throughout, the RVP is to document all observations, no matter how disfavorable, and prepare a comprehensive report for delivery the following Monday.

In two weeks, Janet opens the report to find some rather unpleasant surprises. Of the four facilities - located in Kansas, North Dakota, Iowa, and Ohio - only two (Ohio and North Dakota) are operating at capacity, with Kansas and Iowa generating 75 percent of their projected outputs. She learns of substandard facilities with outdated machinery and decrepit buildings, disruptions in the supply chain due to a series of recent tornadoes and other natural disasters, and a chronic labor shortage endemic to rural areas⁴.

What draws Janet's attention above all else is the low number of agricultural products including grain and other items specific for farming. With such a high number of potential clients, she is shocked that these facilities continue to emphasize domestic household pets, similar to those areas with a large urban population.

Equipped with this refined data, Janet prepares for the Third Question. Some may find this unconventional, wanting to immediately solve these problems. This is the lesson of the Second Question, in that it is largely preparation for the Third Question. This in no way indicates the Second Question is of any less value than the other three; it may be said that it is the most important question in that it will eventually guide the best response.

Janet is ready to begin the second half of the Four Questions. Now, she will enter the problem-solving stage, measuring the effectiveness of current measures against expectations. With the recurring themes top of mind, Janet charts a course forward.

Call to Action:

What recurring themes are hidden within your First Question?

Think about your current status identified in the previous question. What common issues and attempts keep appearing? Write down the 3 or 5 most important - this should provide insight as you move ahead!

What will Janet do next? Read on as she traverses the treacherous waters of the Third Question....

The Third Question: Looking In The Rearview Mirror

John sat in disbelief, wondering what had happened.

The business was at the top of its industry when he assumed the role of CEO, with international name recognition of which most could only dream. Despite the company's glowing reputation, it soon found itself falling behind the growing trends of consumer technologies and personal computers emerging in the late 1980s and continuing through the Nineties. After posting billions in losses that led to a collapse in share prices and slashing staffing numbers -

⁴ Haltom, Renee, and Jason Kosakow. "Are Labor Shortages in Small Cities and Rural Areas Worse than Urban Ones?" Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, August 15, 2024. https://www.richmondfed.org/region_communities/regional_data_analysis/regional_matters/2024/rm_08_15_24_labor_shortages_rural_urban.

thereby ending a longstanding policy of workforce retention - John was ousted from his position and forced into retirement, a most undignified end to a storied career^{5 6 7}.

Thus, the fate of John Akers and his reputation with IBM was sealed. Akers is often cited as a textbook case among famous career implosions. His legacy is instructive in what happens when the Third Question - *What is the level of effectiveness of current efforts?* - is not allowed sufficient evaluation. This is where Akers faltered, by not comparing IBM's current efforts to the shifting consumer environment.

Janet well remembers Akers' story from her days in business school. Not wishing to repeat his mistakes, she pauses to compare and contrast where the company has been with where it is. This requires the most time and attention, measuring prior expenditures with the identified recurring themes. Knowing the value of preparation for Question Four, Janet cautiously begins to bring things into focus.

The first theme, of lacking relevant product lines specific to the area, is confirmed by a historic ad campaign that neglects the geographic peculiarities of agriculture. As Janet has already discovered, the majority of advertising in the area is spent on television and web traffic focusing on domestic pets. Although this is a worthwhile venture, with plenty of pet owners in Kansas and Iowa, there remains a 60 percent gap with the other facilities. To be certain, Janet goes online to review the annual reports of the two largest competitors. She observes they do, indeed, hold a substantial regional market share in agriculture, indicating that the answer to the Third Question for her first theme is "Not at all."

But this alone does not account for the reduction. Janet proceeds to the theme of labor resources. Checking online job boards, she sees few if any postings. The prevailing philosophy of attraction by presence, effective in larger metropolitan areas with a sizable number of potential applicants, cannot surpass the lack of aggressive recruiting efforts around these facilities. She notes figures provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that reveal both high unemployment around the Kansas and Iowa factories and limited opportunities outside the farming and retail sectors. As with the first theme, the answer to the Third Question for the second is "Not at all."

Janet then shifts her attention to the matter of weather and seasonal supply chain disruptions. She compares this not only to the North Dakota and Ohio plants but others across the country. Be it a hurricane on the East Coast that impacts the Carolinas, a blizzard that halts all of New England, or a tornado in Oklahoma, Janet sees that the company's plan to remediate, rehabilitate, and reopen as quickly as possible is well-prepared to accommodate specific occurrences for all facilities.

⁵ Lazzareschi, Carla. "Chairman Faces Immense Task in Reshaping Ibm : Technology: John f. Akers' Frustrations Are Reflected in Reports of Lectures to His Managers, but He Has Been Criticized for Not Making the Tough Decisions." Los Angeles Times, June 2, 1991. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-06-02-fi-442-story.html>.

⁶ Kirkpatrick, David. "Breaking up Ibm Facing Horrendous Challenges, John Akers Is Taking Big Blue Apart and May Even Sell Stock in the Pieces. His Reforms Rate a b- so Far, but the Job Will Need an A+ Effort." CNNMoney, July 27, 1992. https://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/1992/07/27/76699/index.htm.

⁷ "John f. Akers." IBM, n.d. <https://www.ibm.com/history/john-akers#:~:text=In%201993%2C%20after%20IBM%20had,three%20children%20and%2010%20grandchildren>.

Kansas and Iowa were impacted by adverse weather over the preceding month. Pulling the latest weekly report, Janet sees that both facilities nonetheless appear on their way to recovery, with numbers quickly approaching previous quarters. Experienced leaders understand that stopping here will not provide solutions for the remaining recurring themes, even though the answer for the third is, “Exceptional.” Turning to the outdated machinery and facilities, Janet concedes that more could have been done.

The Kansas and Iowa facilities, acquired through a series of mergers and acquisitions, have been in continuous operation for nearly seven decades, the oldest in the entire company. Janet consults the expense report for each factory, noting a increase in replacement parts and building maintenance for roofing, electrical, and plumbing issues that exceeds all other facilities combined. Thankfully, there have been no accidents or injuries as a result, but incident reports reveal multiple dangerous conditions that required temporary closures and hold the potential for further losses or expensive workers’ compensation claims.

With the answer to the Third Question for the fourth theme, “Unacceptable,” Janet again reorganizes the themes in descending priority to address them in the correct order for the Fourth Question:

1. Outdated machinery and facilities
2. A lack of available labor resources
3. A lack of relevant product lines specific to the area
4. Weather-related and/or seasonal supply chain disruptions

The Third Question is more than a reflective period. It is the Grand Organizer offering the appropriate categorization and strategic mapping to proceed in the best sequence. Janet now has everything she needs to finally act. With this newfound clarity, the answers now rise to the surface and the Fourth Question awaits.

Call to Action

Feel free to rearrange your recurring themes when answering the Third Question. Have your priorities shifted? Are some themes more pressing than others? Will you reduce or even dismiss any of your recurring themes as a result?

Janet has finished the Third Question - congratulations to you for doing the same! Next up: the exciting conclusion as she answers the Fourth Question to save the day!

The Fourth Question: Changing Lanes

Jorge always dreamed of more.

Even in childhood, he knew he would leave behind the cattle ranch that had been in his family for generations. Perhaps it was the hardship of a demanding farmer’s life. Maybe it was the gruesome memory of his grandfather ordering him to jump on the abdomen of a cow in labor

to help expel the calf. Whatever the reason, Jorge knew he was destined for the bright lights of the big city.

As industrious as he is ambitious, Jorge spent years working his way up the ladder to eventually create his signature line of apparel. His success is evident in the multiple fashion shows featuring his designs, spanning from Phoenix to Kansas City. He also recently procured a distribution agreement with an upscale boutique in Scottsdale. Jorge is plenty busy, with orders pouring in from across the United States that have led to a recent expansion to a small yet impressive online international presence.

Still, Jorge thinks there is more to accomplish. He envisions a day where his apparel is featured in the same fashion journals as the biggest names in Europe. True to his persevering nature, Jorge has completed the first three Questions. His goal is clearly stated, the First Question answered. So far, he seems to have done everything right, spending years of study, acquiring as much free advice as possible, and leveraging all the management and marketing principles learned in college at full utility, completing the Second Question. In the Third Question, Jorge identified gaps in his use of third-party financing and paid media advertising to reach larger audiences and gain the interest of major retail clothing outlets. This leaves him ready to answer the Fourth Question: *What, if anything, can be changed to be more effective in reaching this goal?*

Janet is also ready to answer the Fourth Question. There is always a visible gap between the Third and Fourth Questions. What does this look like? For Janet (and most others), it is a simple rephrasing of her reorganized themes with a *preliminary answer* that will fill space between the Third and Fourth Questions. Yet again is another trap, leaning on these simple rewordings as the final response instead of viewing this as the first of two steps contained in the Fourth Question.

1. **Theme:** Outdated machinery and facilities
 - a. **Preliminary Answer:** Bring machinery and facilities current
2. **Theme:** A lack of available labor resources
 - a. **Preliminary Answer:** Expand hiring campaigns to reach a larger applicant pool
3. **Theme:** A lack of relevant product lines specific to the area
 - a. **Preliminary Answer:** Expand local product lines to best meet consumer needs
4. **Theme:** Weather-related and/or seasonal supply chain disruptions
 - a. **Preliminary Answer:** Continue use of current resources and personnel for future events

Stopping now is the layman's mistake. Preliminary answers, ostensibly adequate, exist in a prosaic vacuum and do not clarify specific planning. Janet must take the Fourth Question's second step and identify *how* to uncover the true course of action:

1. Theme: Outdated machinery and facilities

- a. Preliminary Answer: Bring machinery and facilities current
- b. **How: Compare/contrast building remediation with building new or acquiring existing structures in better condition**
- c. **How: Solicit vendor quotes for new or newer machinery comparable in quality to those in use with more modern facilities**
- 2. Theme: A lack of available labor resources
 - a. Preliminary Answer: Expand hiring campaigns to reach a larger applicant pool
 - b. **How: Use all available resources beyond online job boards - newspapers, billboards, etc. - to compensate for regional technological limitations and reach broader applicant pools**
 - c. **How: Review compensation structure to ensure competitive salaries, benefits packages, and retirement/pension plans that surpasses area competition**
- 3. Theme: A lack of relevant product lines specific to the area
 - a. Expand local product lines to best meet consumer needs
 - b. **How: Explore reduction of unprofitable product lines in the area to shift resources - labor, facilities, utilities, etc. - into agricultural production**
- 4. Theme: Weather-related and/or seasonal supply chain disruptions
 - a. Continue use of current resources and personnel for future events
 - b. **How: Safeguard allocated budgets to this area to prevent reductions**
 - c. **How: Review biannually to adjust for inflation**

Janet is now ready to move. She has answered the Four Questions, identifying the correct themes, preliminaries, and answers, avoiding reckless (and irresponsibly reflexive) reactions. Janet is fully prepared to make the best use of her time in reconciling these matters in the correct order.

Call to Action:

Take another look at your revised themes. What are the emerging preliminaries? *How* will you address them? Place these “hows” on your calendar with deadlines for completion. Be realistic - ensure you have the appropriate time and resources to see this through!

Let’s check in with Janet a few months down the road to see how everything is going, shall we?

The Finish Line

Five months later, Janet arrives Monday morning and is pleased to see that Kansas and Iowa have made significant strides in the right direction. The decision to rehabilitate and

modernize each factory has saved tens of millions over relocation or construction of new buildings. Placing ads through local billboards and the classified section of print newspapers, a common strategy with large organizations that have production facilities in rural areas with limited online access, has decreased scheduling gaps by more than half. Enhanced manufacture of agricultural products has yielded exclusive contracts with large corporate farms in the region.

A pollyanna outcome, to be sure, but not entirely beyond possibility. Looking back, Janet owes her success to one final element of the Four Questions: continuously revisiting Questions Two and Three to assess the effectiveness of her answer to Question Four. Janet constantly asks if what is being done (Question Two) is parallel (Question Three) to Question Four (ironically, the new Question One), illustrated in a new, revised series:

1. *What is the desired outcome?*
 - a. To restore production to the Kansas and Iowa facilities through:
 - i. Facility rehabilitation and replacing outdated or nonfunctional equipment
 - ii. Expanded efforts to reach local labor markets to resolve staffing shortages
 - iii. Emphasizing agricultural products to meet the needs of local consumers
2. *What efforts have been made to achieve this?*
 - a. Coordinating with local contractors for building repairs
 - b. Consulting with vendors for new or used machinery in excellent condition
 - c. Reserved space with local billboards and placed ads in the local newspaper's classified section to advertise career opportunities
 - d. Dedicated an existing team entirely to production of agricultural products
3. *What is the level of effectiveness of these efforts?*
 - a. These efforts have met or exceeded expectations
4. *What, if anything, can be changed to be more effective in reaching this goal?*
 - a. TBD - all is working well at present time

It is important to understand that SFBT will not - and cannot - apply to every situation. SFBT's previously-mentioned risk of over-thinking can be distracting, requiring dedication and focus to avoid straying too far off course. This, however, should not deter anyone from using SFBT in decision making. In today's warp-speed corporate culture, SFBT can facilitate the critical thinking necessary to see an issue from multiple angles, encourage creative solutions, and strengthen critical thinking and analytical reasoning.

Call to Action:

Now that you've completed the Four Questions, take a moment to reflect on how effective your answers have been in moving you toward your goal. Do you need to revisit Question Three and adapt your approach? Consider whether this process has revealed any new goals or objectives that could broaden your perspective. Where else might you apply the Four Questions framework, and are you ready to test it on a larger or more complex project? Keep in

mind, however, that SFBT has its limits, especially when problems are too ambiguous. Be sure to share your experience with a colleague or mentor to invite their feedback!