



Future Protocol a.k.a. Back to the Future

Developed by Scott Murphy and revised 8/7/02.

A good time to use this protocol is in the early stages of creating a plan or project that ultimately will have an endpoint. Ideas should be formulated, but not completely finalized. If finalized, it might be used to consider improvements almost like a “tuning” protocol.

Purpose of protocol

To vision into the future and tell what it would look like in the very best-case scenario. Also to initiate discussion into the steps, players, actions, and timelines it will take to be successful.

Goals

- To expand and clarify the vision of what a group or individual is really trying to accomplish
- To identify opportunities and avenues for focused improvement
- To guide purposeful actions and reduce wasted efforts

Considerations

- May be presented by an individual or an entire group
- Members of groups should have similar investment in and context to that which is presented
- Uses our ability to tell stories as a way to imagine the best-case scenario
- Does not focus on the obstacles, but rather the opportunities...stays very positive

Time

Approximately 1 hour.

Protocol

1. Present what you are trying to accomplish: (5 minutes)

Presenter: shares what he/she is trying to do and how it might look when it is all done.

Group: presents with each other what it would like to accomplish and how it would look when done.

2. Clarifying Questions: (5 or 10 minutes)

If presented by a single person and not a whole group, the rest of the group asks clarifying questions. *If a group presents together,* no clarifying questions.

3. Probing Questions: (10 minutes)

If a single presenter, the group asks probing questions to further the presenter’s thinking. The presenter may choose to answer, think aloud or quietly consider it.

If a group presents, they raise probing questions to the whole group with perhaps no real expectation of answering them in this step. Again, the idea is to extend the thinking about what they want to accomplish.

— presenter steps out —

4. Project into the future (whatever timeline seems appropriate) and thoroughly describe what it looks like, sounds like and feels like having accomplished this endeavor. (10-15 minutes)
 - Must talk in **present tense**.
 - Describe *what is* in this best case scenario. Do not yet describe *how*.
 - Focus on the sights, sounds, behaviors and feelings surrounding this accomplishment.

Examples:

- 5 years later in a school's reform efforts
 - The end of a team's project with students
 - Results from a group of *new* teachers that focused on classroom management for one year
- * It is really helpful to chart steps 4, 5, and 6 so that each can see publicly what is being said.
5. Look "back" from your *projected present* and describe how it looked when it started. (5-10 minutes)
 - Must talk in **past tense**
 - Think about issues, culture, conversations, teacher's work, student achievement, etc.
 - Try to remain as tangible as possible

* Continue to chart this conversation. It is helpful to put dates at the top of the chart to identify the time period to which the group is referring. (5-10 minutes)
 6. Continue looking back from the "projected present" and discuss how you addressed the starting place and how you moved from that to the projected present. (5-10 minutes)
 - Must talk in **past tense**.
 - Directly relate the previous description of how it looked when it started.
 - Consider discussing *how, when, with what resources and by whom*.

— presenter returns to conversation —

7. Return to "projected present" and discuss if it can get any better than it is or is this as good as it could possibly be? Again, think about how it will look, sound and feel if it can get even better. (5 minutes)
8. Presenter shares with group thoughts about the future and info s/he has gathered. (5 minutes)
9. Debrief the process. (10 minutes)