



Paul Burke Training Group

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Beyond training: Looking at learning MI in a whole new light!

Thoughts on Improved Practice (TIP) #1513

Practice Making Simple Reflections

Learning M.I. can overwhelm people who try to learn it “all at once”. Like learning to play the piano, it’s best to practice your new M.I. approach “one piece at a time”. Our trainers are fond of telling people about “MI chunklets” – small skill sets that can be practiced one-at-a-time, in brief periods (perhaps for a week or so each). In time, as you feel more comfortable with various “chunklets” you can start “stacking” them in practice. That way, over time, you begin playing more sophisticated pieces as it were – by gradually putting all the components together.



One the most important chunklets required for the competent practice of MI involves the use of Simple Reflection. Some have suggested that “Simple Reflection” is something of an oxymoron – given that there is little that is “simple” about deciding which elements of a client’s statement ought to be reflected, when, and how best to simplify the statement (usually be shortening it as much as possible). Still, everything difficult eventually becomes simple with practice!



So – you might want to practice forming simple reflections and becoming more deliberate and strategic in the way you use them. It’s worth asking “do my simple reflections have a target? Do they hit the spot – or do they miss the mark? ***This would be a good week to go back to the absolute foundations of MI and practice with making simple reflections of the important elements of what your client tells you.*** Once you get in the habit of doing that (and doing it as least twice as often as you ask questions!) – you can then begin to practice “reflecting with strategy”.



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Strategic use of simple reflections is all about reflecting those elements of the client's speech that are connected in some way to the general direction or "target behaviour" toward which you want to guide the clients. Simple reflections serve as the puzzle pieces that you collect up, while listening to your client. When the time is right, you then hand them back to the client – to ensure that the client has heard what they've said, and, more importantly, to ensure that they have heard what they mean, beneath what they've said.



Like pieces of a puzzle, the argument for change starts to come together to form an image of readiness, willingness, and ability to pursue the target behavior that is at the center of the interview. Sometimes, clients may feel that these important reflections are appearing out of thin air! On the contrary however, your simple reflections simply help the client to hear themselves think – and to think about what they hear themselves saying (through your reflections). Simple!

	Client Statement	Simple Reflection	Rationale
1	I don't know, I suppose it might help if I talked to a counsellor about this. It's been bugging me for a long time now. I kind of hate the thought of talking about it, but it's really starting to cause problems in my relationship.	Your relationship is important to you and for that reason, you're thinking maybe this is a good time to chat with a counsellor about this.	Reflecting change talk is useful. (In this case, the client is using "Reason Language" and the reason is what is reflected here.)
2	Every time I see my dentist the scenario just gets worse and worse. I used to rarely get a cavity and now I have a new one every time I see the dentist. It really freaks me out.	This is a real worry for you.	Spotlighting the client's "worry" makes that the subject of the conversation. As the client hears himself speak more about his worries, he moves closer to change talk (e.g. to stating that "this needs to change", or "I want to do something about this").
3	I've told myself a thousand times that I need to stay on top of this. It's stupid how lazy I get about following through. I can't rely on my good intentions to keep things rolling. My good intentions never last. I get lazy as time rolls on. I don't know. Maybe I am not really meant to change. Maybe this is just the way it has to be.	Good intentions aren't enough to get the job done.	Highlighting the problem, as stated by the client, invited further conversation about what more he needs to do to achieve success.



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4	I'd like to eat better, I guess. At least that's what I think when I'm not hungry! But then I get to the point when I'm famished, and the next thing I know I'm eating chips – or worse! Its nuts. My family has a major history of cholesterol problems. That's always on the back of my mind. My Dad died of a heart attack at 52. That's a worry for me.	Cholesterol is a serious matter in your family.	Keeping the focus on the problem may trigger change talk (likely desire or need talk).
5	It would be great if I could do something about this – eventually. I've been trying for years. I've never managed to pull it off – but I keep trying don't I? I've journalled about it a thousand times. I even made up a “wishing wall” about it. Oprah said that might help. Geesh! You'd think one of these days luck would be on my side. I've been wishing for a long time that I could put this behind me and move forward, you know?	You've been wishing.	Drawing attention to the word “wishing” in this case, may cause the client to expand on that thought – and to realize that something more is needed than just “wishing”.
6	It really knocked the wind out of me. I didn't see that coming at all. It couldn't have happened at a worse time either. I was sick about it. It almost made me sick to my stomach. I'm not kidding. I couldn't sleep for days. I was really blindsided.	The shock of it really took a toll on you.	This simple reflection serves to demonstrate accurate empathy on the part of the helper.
7.	My Gramma always said “stay focused on the bright side”. She was right. Optimism is best.	Mmmm (nodding). Optimism.	Serves as a prompt [for the client to say more about optimism.

Try SIMPLE REFLECTIONS this week! Experiment with them. PLAY a little! Then, when it starts to feel too easy – you're probably ready to pay attention to the ratio of your questions to your total reflections. (Shoot for twice as many reflections as questions).

See you next week!

Paul Burke,
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