



Paul Burke Training Group

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

Thoughts on Improved Practice (TIP) #1721



When you get even just a brief whiff of motivation – that’s where you should dig. Learn to recognize the symptoms of motivation and then ... GO FOR IT!

“Dig Deeper! Go For It”!

While training a group of new learners in Fredericton, New Brunswick, I was doing an “orientation discussion” with the participants, as I always do at the beginning of the first day of each new course. To get things “kick started”, one of the questions that I ask each participant to address is “how much do you already know about MI?” One of my all-time favorite responses to that question came from a participant named Mark Noel who said, as he introduced himself, “I don’t know anything about MI to be honest. All I know is that in my own work with youth, ***whenever I find motivation, I go for it***”. His comment had an instant impact on me! I loved it!

Everyone who takes a course from any of our trainers knows how adamant we are in stressing the point that it is very important to avoid trying to “install” motivation in clients. MI is not about installing. Any attempts at installation always end up in “persuasion”. *When clients smell persuasion, they almost always feel that the helper is trying to change them. My experience has always been that people don’t really resist change so much – but they certainly do resist “being changed!”* That’s why Mark’s explanation made such a big dent in my thinking. Effective helping, when it boils right down to it, involves exploring for internal motivation. It requires getting curious enough to dig around a bit, inside the client’s thinking, to see if we can’t discover a little nugget of motivation. And, when we do find that golden little “nugget” we know we’re in the right territory. We know we need to dig deeper – right in that exact spot – right around that exact thought.

So – how do you know that you have found some motivation? What signs alert you that “this is a good place within which to dig a little deeper!” To answer that, let’s deconstruct the concept of motivation a little.

The word “motivation” comes from the root word “motive”. In order to pursue a change, clients need a “motive” that provides fuel for the process. Motive is another word for “reason”. In order to fuel-up a



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process of change, people need to be aware of their reasons to change. When we hear our reasons for change, and when our reasons for change hold more weight than our reasons for staying the same (status quo), it becomes a logical (and almost natural) thing to begin pursuit of the “logical change”.

For a long time now, M.I. folks have known that recognizing “change talk” is crucial if we are to be effective, as helpers, in helping people “fuel-up” a plan for change. Change talk includes a variety of statement about *Desire, Ability, Reason, Need, and Commitment* related to the behavioral target. And – when change talk starts to emerge out of your client’s evolving argument that things need to be different, and as change language begins to emerge out of their mouths, you can bet that your client is becoming aware of his/her internal “motives”. Such motives eventually provide fuel for a planned change. As *Change Talk emerges, and as it grows, and as clients hear themselves saying it, motivation grows. Change is on its way!*



“Motivation grows whenever important motives show”. Our job is to help the client get their motives into the spotlight. Rosengren, in his wonderful MI workbook (2009) sums it up nicely when he explains that in the practice of MI conversations “we find the motivation that lies within [the client] and help them to recognize it. We direct them toward the discrepancies that already exist between what they want and how their behavior already impacts these goals” (p. 10). Sometimes, as we explore reasons and highlight discrepancy, Change Talk begins to whisper – and sometimes even to shout!

Beyond Change Talk however, what Mark reminded me of in his comment about “going for it” whenever he smells that a little motivation might be lurking in the bushes, was that motives (reasons for change) show up in other bits of client speech as well. For example, when a client speaks of the importance of change, they are building a reason for change. ***Can you hear the reason for change that’s hiding in the bushes in the following client statements?***

1. CLIENT: My marriage is important to me. My wife says that if I don’t change the way I relate to our kids, she might leave. That scares me a lot. I don’t think my relationship with the kids is all that bad, except for those last few times when I kind of lost it with my oldest son, but I can’t afford to let this ruin my marriage too.	HELPER’S “GO FOR IT” RESPONSE: Your marriage is an important reason for you to work on your relationship skills in regard to your kids. Sometimes, people need motivators to help them pursue change, and another of your motives is to try to prevent what happened with your son those last few times.
2. CLIENT: Yah, I guess I’d be willing to talk to that nurse about how often I seem to need to pee these days. I know it’s probably related to my blood sugar issues, although this has happened before and it eventually just kind of took care of	HELPER’S “GO FOR IT” RESPONSE: I’m glad to hear you say that you’d be willing to talk to the nurse. Even though you know that she might want to bring up the topic of taking your meds more regularly, you’re willing to acknowledge that there



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<p>itself. This time it's a lot more often though. I go at least once an hour. I hate the idea of making a big deal out of it though. I'll probably get heck for not taking my meds regularly.</p>	<p>would be an advantage to nipping this recent spike in your sugar levels in the bud. I think I hear a subtle message in what you're saying, which is that "there's might be a bit of a downside to talking to her, but the upside is probably worth it." That makes good sense.</p>
<p>3. CLIENT: Well, I suppose I could try to talk to the Principal, and see if maybe she would let me do some make-up work while I'm on suspension. It's sort of stupid that they punish you by making you wreck your whole semester by kicking you out for three weeks. I mean, how does it help anybody to teach me a lesson by ruining my whole school career? They're all just a bunch of idiots. Do they honestly think I could catch up three whole weeks once I get back there?</p>	<p>HELPER'S "GO FOR IT" RESPONSE: Yah. You're clear that there is one thing you could do here. You're saying that you have the ability to have a talk with the Principal. You don't want to be the victim in all of this. You're willing to try to do something to make the most of a kind of "bad situation" here. Saving your semester is a pretty good reason to see if you can't find a way to convince her that you'd be willing to do some make-up work if she could compromise a little.</p>

In all, what I like best about Mark's comment is the notion of "going for it". **MI is not a passive process of the helper sitting around and hoping that some Change Talk will eventually appear. Instead, MI is all about digging for motives (reasons) that the client has that would build a logical argument for a specified change. Digging. Mining. Exploring. Looking beneath the bushes. Searching. Using binoculars – or maybe even a microscope at times!**

Yep. It's just as straight forward as that. **Motivational Interviewing means interviewing for motives.**

This week, when you're speaking with your clients, imagine that you are mining for gold! Go for it! Dig a little. Ask some questions that might bring some desire talk to the surface. Evoke some reasons that would support an argument for change. And – if you happen to hear a little shiny golden nugget – even if it's only very small, shine a light on it. Steve Berg-Smith is a wonderful MI trainer in San Francisco. He says "If you don't recognize motives when they whisper, you miss the chance to dig".



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