

## **Episode 24: Focusing**

### **Paul and Amy welcome a guest to discuss motivational interviewing in episode 24**

CASAT Podcast Network Lions and Tigers and Bears MI is brought to you through a collaboration between the Mountain Plains ATTC and NFARtec In episode 24, Paul and Amy welcome a guest to discuss focusing for episode resources, links to episodes, contact us, and other information. Please visit the Lions and Tigers and bears MI website at [mtplainsattc.org/podcast](http://mtplainsattc.org/podcast). please be advised that this episode contains content that may be triggering to some listeners.

Paul Warren: Lions and Tigers and Bears MI is an interactive podcast focused on the evidence based practice of motivational interviewing, a method of communication that guides toward behavior change while honoring autonomy.

Amy Shanahan: I'm Amy Shanahan.

Paul Warren: And I'm Paul Warren.

Amy Shanahan: And we've worked together over the past ten years. We've been facilitating MI learning collaboratives and providing trainings and coaching sessions focused on the adoption and refinement of MI. We're also members of the motivational interviewing network of trainers. Join us in this adventure into the forest, where we explore and get curious about what lies behind the curtain of MI. Oh, hey, Paul.

Paul Warren: Hello, Amy. How are you?

Amy Shanahan: I'm, really happy to be with you again in the studio.

Paul Warren: Me too. And we are joined. Well, let me just say this. We are rejoined by one of our former guests who, we will invite her to introduce herself yet again, and we're delighted to have her back with us. The floor is yours, special guest.

Helen Kaplan: Makes me think of that song. Paul, please allow me to introduce myself.

Amy Shanahan: We're already going to have singing.

Helen Kaplan: I love it.

Amy Shanahan: You sang the last episode. Just.

Helen Kaplan: I'll try. My name is Helen. Last name's Kaplan. I'm, a clinical social worker. Right now I'm in private practice. I have a great interest in MI Paul and I know each other from the trainings, and he works with a former teen that I was supervising in an outpatient clinic. And I love looking at how MI helps clients and practitioners to get to their goals and also to avoid burnout.

Amy Shanahan: So great to have you back, Helena.

Helen Kaplan: Thank you.

Amy Shanahan: Last time we chatted, it was about the upcoming changes that we were

anticipating in the fourth edition of the motivational interviewing book, which is out. It's out already, right? We got it in the summer ish.

Paul Warren: And, you know, I'm so glad we did that episode with you, Helen, because your responses to the changes were. Were memorable to me, and it helped me to have a lot of perspective about how folks might actually receive what in the Mi world may be considered, like, these seismic shifts. And in the real world, it's sort of like, okay, great. Call it tasks instead of processes. So I really appreciated your straightforward and insight into those particular changes. And in addition to enjoying your company, whenever I have the opportunity to be spending time with you, that's why we wanted you to come back and enjoy, hopefully, a conversation with us about task two, which is focusing.

Helen Kaplan: Perfect.

Amy Shanahan: I remember, I think the four, when we talked about the processes versus the tasks, then it seemed kind of no big deal initially. And then as we talk through it, we're like, maybe, maybe there's something to it. I still do think about our conversation. Anytime I tell folks in the training room about the four processes are now called the four tasks. And I think of our conversation on that podcast episode.

Paul Warren: Agreed. Similar. And it's interesting because people continue. You know, I recently had the opportunity to be at the Mint forum and there was more talk. Doctor Miller mentioned the fourth edition again, because of its recent publication and its availability. And you know, some

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Paul Warren: people are still like, you know, there's a reason they were called processes. And you know, there are other people that are like, I love that they're called tasks. And so just the fact that people are talking about it, I think is a good thing.

Helen Kaplan: Yeah, I guess humans are really stuck on words and semantics and people don't like change. So it doesn't shock me that there's a bit of a, kerfuffle on that front.

Amy Shanahan: The word kerfuffle.

Paul Warren: Well, it's funny. And I love the fact, Helen, that you said that people don't like change, because that's in some ways the whole point of focusing is at least my understanding of it, is to collaborate with that person to find if there is a change that they indeed do want to focus on and maybe have been considering and feel ambivalent about.

Helen Kaplan: And focusing, as we know, is one of the harder things for a, clinician to work on because I think we can get so caught up in being good listeners and making sure the person really feels heard and doing a lot of good evoking and all of our or skills. But then, as you guys know, since you guys code the, mini, what are they called?

Amy Shanahan: The mighty mighties.

Helen Kaplan: I was going to call them minis, but mighties, it's the opposite. It's easy to actually go nowhere. And I was thinking about a, this, I had this image into my mind of a person in a kayak. Maybe I'm thinking of myself in a kayak because I do enjoy kayaking, but I'm not good at it. Rowing and going in a circle. Have you ever done that in a kayak

where you're trying to go someplace, but you just end up circling? And I think a very well intentioned mi practitioner can be that person in the kayak unless they really hone the art of focusing.

Amy Shanahan: And it's interesting because if you know, what to do when you're talking to someone about how do you hone in on where you're going, you don't worry about using both or both sides of the or at the same time. So you're going in, hopefully one direction for a minute and taking a turn based on the client's goals. But it gets confusing. Like you said, people don't know how to hone in on. where are we going with a person?

Paul Warren: You know, I'd like to put a question on the table that's related to something that you both kind of touched on in terms of direction and before we actually get to direction, because focusing really provides us with a direction. Helen, you said just a moment ago, and I couldn't agree with you more, and I'm so glad you said it and not me, but I want to underline it, which is that you said that it is easy to get stuck in that kayak kind of going in circles because, you know, we're using the skills, and yet there's, the kayak is not going forward. It's just going in a circle. And many providers, I've listened to many audio recordings where providers are, they're using the tools and they're not practicing mi because they haven't determined a focus. And I'm curious, and I throw it out to all of us to consider, but also to anybody who's listening to this, what do you think it is that makes it so difficult to actually get to or guide toward a focus? Because it is a dynamic that I think is pretty prevalent. So I just want to throw that out there as something for us maybe to focus on for a moment, no pun intended. and then see where that leads us.

Helen Kaplan: Well, since you used the word focusing earlier, I would. Cojones. I think

that it has to do with cojones. and I do think that, especially when you're fresh off the mi boat, you might lack cojones. And so that can help you to stay still and not just take chances and get into a mode of like. And when I say take chances, like, take risks in a conversation with a person, m try to guide, right. You try to collaborate and guide and maybe miss the mark, maybe get it

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Helen Kaplan: wrong, and they correct you and then you have to do the course correction. But I think there has to be courage and a willingness to try. And I do think as far as I've watched, when I, I watch people get stuck in a circle or even when I get stuck in a circle, it's usually anxiety on the practitioner's part of getting it wrong. But that's just one hypothesis.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And cojones. You're really connecting that to having confidence that it's okay to take a risk. And maybe the direction you guide in is not going to be the right direction, quote unquote. And it's okay because you'll get feedback and you can, you can course correct and move into a correct direction. So people don't feel, they want to feel comfortable with what they're doing. Therefore they're not going to risk something, where that maybe they're going to get feedback that they missed it or didn't get it right.

Helen Kaplan: For sure. Or maybe that they, the thing is, sometimes we do upset a client or because it is such an emotional experience, depending on the intensity of the affect right in the conversation, that can also make us reluctant. Like, oh, this might intensify an emotional thing that's already hard in this conversation if I attempt. Because sometimes clients really need help, right. They came to us often because they are looking for that help guiding them to the focus. And then when we're reluctant to do it,

well, gosh, like good luck to you, client.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I'm thinking about that. The notion of guiding people and sometimes to the client, the person asking for help maybe isn't even clear themselves on what the focus is. Thinking about the practitioner maybe being nervous or anxious, not wanting to upset the apple cart, if you will, or making assumptions that if the person comes for a particular thing, that they know what that means, that they understand what the direction would be and that they clearly think the client is on the same page and that's a really big part of the tasks is making sure we're even on the right step together. What does that mean? and having the cojones to even explore that and do some eliciting while we're hanging out on this step. If I come in and say, hey, I've been feeling really anxious and you as the practitioner make an assumption about, you know, that's what I'm focusing on versus what. Is there something underlying there? What do I want to really focus on? Is it the anxiety or is it the outcome of something I want to achieve? I don't know, but there's a lot of nuance in it.

Paul Warren: I think you're making a really strong link, I think, Amy, to the importance of investing the time in engagement to really understand. Because if you're not investing that time in the engagement and you, you move too quickly or you make an assumption about what the, focus is going to be, that is a whole set of challenges or concerns. but I'm really hearing in what you're saying that maybe the time spent in really investing in the engagement can lend insight into maybe a less, I don't know, I wouldn't say less risky, but a less premature, attempt at, ah, trying to determine what the focus is. Because without the focus, and tell me if you think I'm going too far out on a limb saying this, but without a focus of behavioral change in the conversation, you can't really get into practicing, am I?

Helen Kaplan: You need a target behavioral change goal. And that is like the bottom line, right? At some point, if you're going to call it mi, and if you're going to work in that model, there's got to be some target. And maybe for some people, and I've definitely seen this in like, say, the addiction world, sometimes the target is just the exploring. Like sometimes that's the best a person can do, is just commit to exploring their ambivalence about the topic itself, and that, if it can be accomplished, is Herculean like for the person and feels like a great accomplishment and at least maybe acknowledges the stage of change that they're at.

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Helen Kaplan: Right, which is so critical to acknowledge if you're going to be where the person is versus be a few steps ahead of them.

Amy Shanahan: I'm glad you mentioned, in the addiction realm because that's where this stickiness comes up a bit. When I talk to practitioners, trainees, other people, I've done it myself, make those out of the gate assumptions that the person comes in. I'm referred here from my doctor or my probation officer or whatever external recommendations invited them to come. They chose to come that out of the gate. The assumption of the focus is that they're going to do something with their substance use in order to achieve whatever they have to achieve. And sometimes that's not really clear to the person that decided to come in. They're ambivalent about whether they still want to be there. They're also ambivalent maybe about the behavior change around that substance use. How do you navigate those waters, in the kayak with the person?

Helen Kaplan: Well, like, yeah, there's three I think in the old book, and I don't know, you guys can tell me, as the experts of the new book, which I haven't actually laid eyes



on yet, there's like three sources, right, of focusing. There's the client, the clinician, and then the context. And, you know, we really want to pay attention. I mean, the person, say, came to, you know, the hokey pokey clinic, supposedly to turn their life around, but that may not be, where they're at in life. And so we, the hokey pokey clinician may be like, oh, good. Another person that wants to turn their life around. I love it when, in fact, they're, they're just not there. And they've come because they have a whole other different feeling, and they think that you, the hokey pokey person, can help them with it.

Paul Warren: Yeah. yes. And, you know, being in the role of the hokey pokey clinician, which I really like, I love this analogy because, and I also love the fact, Helen, that you mentioned these, like, three components, the individual, the clinician, the program, or the organization. That is the context, because we're balancing all of that. And again, I have found, and I'm speaking from my own practice experience, I have found that if I can find out what the client, the patient's behavioral change goal is, the thing that they're interested in, and if I can meet them at that place, chances are there's intersections between what perhaps I might see as the clinician, hokey pokey clinician goal for them and what the programmatic goal may be, too. Only, though, if I start with what their identified behavioral change goal is, which may sound very different than I'm here to turn my life around and completely give up alcohol.

Helen Kaplan: correct. And can I give an example of one of these situations? There's a guy that I work with who drinks a lot. I mean, we're talking definitely drinking in a, more than his healthy, alcoholic way. But he came to me because his wife is drinking in the same way, and he's concerned about her. And it's funny, because before he got to me, he talked to my boss, who also got the sense that this man himself has a concern to work on. But for the first few months of our work together, our whole focus was where he started, which is, I'm, concerned for my wife. These are the things I'm worried about.

And they had just had a fight where the police got involved, and he had gotten violent with her, and he was really just concerned about his reactions to her. Because he's recognizing that her problem is making him angry. The alcohol abuse and the intensity of it was so secondary or tertiary to him because he himself had not made the connection, although he's incredibly bright between any of these issues with the wife and the violence and his own tremendous drinking problem. So it's really interesting, but because I have studied am I with Paul and I've done this work, I was able to be very patient in a way that probably before this training would have been harder and I would have done the premature, fallen into the premature focus trap of, being like, hey, buddy, you know, can we talk about your drinking? Like, I don't want to hear about this wife anymore. I'm kind of over the wife, can we

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Helen Kaplan: talk about you? And I didn't do that, which was good.

Amy Shanahan: And what was your outcome? I'm curious. That's a really nice example of what I hear time and time again. And some of us use the it's not about the nail video. When we kind of hit, hit this point, it's hard not to. It's hard not to have the puns, but you know that we see this problem and hello, that problem is causing all these other things. What happened when you didn't try to hit the nail on the head?

Helen Kaplan: Well, I was able to explore his values. I was able to explore and really emphasize what matters to him and focus it around the wife and then eventually work our way to him. But, you know, it really was, it was the values exploration and honoring what he said was important that allowed us to navigate in a less distressing way back to him.

Paul Warren: You know, I love the fact that Amy asked you that question, Helen, and I love the fact that what you described, and I'm going to say it in a slightly different way than you, but what you so eloquently described in terms of the values exploration and the helping him come around to himself is that you were genuinely curious and wanted to understand it from his perspective. And knowing his values, knowing what was important to him, made it possible for you to see him for himself and then maybe frame even a broader picture of his sort of contribution to the dynamic with the wife. And I love that because had your approach been, well, actually, you're spending an awful lot of time talking about your wife, but I really want us to talk about you. You might have never known who he is. You might have never gotten to what was important to him, what his values were. And I think until we can establish that, we can't really know what somebody's focus is. Focus is their focus. It's the thing they're invested in.

Helen Kaplan: And I didn't want to, I know at this stage of my career that if I don't help highlight strengths in a big way, particularly when a person's coming in with lots of, like, shameful things, say, like, violence and, you know, police coming to your house, like, if I don't emphasize the good stuff and affirm the good stuff, I'm not even going to get to the sort of the stuff that's on the horizon, that's painful, that really needs focusing on because they're going to feel so ashamed. And so that was part of the equation, too. It's like, I know this guy feels embarrassed, and I know deep down he knows he's got an issue. And I, it's like the big elephant of the room, but we just have to be patient because going right to the jugular is going to be a problem.

Amy Shanahan: You have a follow up question to that, Helen? I have this conversation with folks a lot. When they talk, when they start to practice, they have a hard time not looking at the problem that's so glaring to them. And what do you do with, this person and other people like him? I suppose to stay that course, because that's really, how do

we stay on this same step with each other. How do you stay the course when you see this glaring thing that if you only made these changes, all those other things would get better. And I hear that from a lot of people, but I'm just curious what you do, and you too, Paul. What do you do to navigate that for yourself when you're seeing it and, you're trying really hard not to shift the focus to what you see.

Helen Kaplan: I mean, for me, I think about how I want to be treated in those situations and how painful it is when the development of a relationship and safety and engagement and trust and, like, building the safe container, in a sense, to have that harder focusing conversation. If that's, that other stuff isn't built, we're not going to have a very m. I can go straight to that stuff that's obvious and glaring, but it's not going to be very successful. And I may even lose that client and not even be able to get to that focusing conversation because

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Helen Kaplan: I've effectively sabotaged the relationship building because I'm so eager to, like, let's just get to the point, buddy. Don't waste my time, you know, not going to waste yours. Like, just get, let's just get to the good stuff.

Paul Warren: Well, you know, it's funny, I have so many thoughts about what you just said, helen, and I love the fact that, you know, you really, that internal dialogue of, like, let's just get to the good stuff. And, like, the thing is, is that, like, when people are ready to change, they changed. A and that comes in their time, not our time. And we're either an agent that helps them move toward their time of making that change, or we're an agent that's getting in the way of helping them move toward that. It really also made me think, too, that, and this is kind of related to Amy's question, it made me think that, you

know, change a focus evolved. The more that you build rapport, the more you know somebody, the more you're having a conversation with them. So it could start off as kind of one thing, and through the course of the conversation, it could nuance or morph into being a change focus that is very different than how it originally started, because the conversation, it evolved in the conversation to that. So I think the thing that I tell myself to not jump to premature focus is if I see that there's this glaring, like, you know, like, flashing light, that it's like, you know, pay attention to me. I acknowledge to myself, okay, well, that's what I see as the focus. I'm going to set that on the shelf for a minute, and I'm going to try and see what they see as the focus and where they want to start this. I know that I've put that thing on the shelf, and I want to come back to where they see it. And it might be a slightly different version of the flashing light. It might be a completely different ver. It may not be related at all. And as long as I'm willing to hold off my, or to test it out and see what happens and move away from it, I just don't want to get too invested in what I think, quote unquote, is the right focus.

Amy Shanahan: It connects with having the kahunas to really test the waters. And we often say, how is the person responding to that? If you decided to test that, if you decided to take a look at what you think they might be willing to look at with you, and if they don't, they. They pretty much give you that feedback.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And, you know, it makes me, it prompts me to. I'm curious, Helen, in terms of this particular scenario that you shared with us, because it's, it's a very evocative one. it's curious. I'm very curious to get a sense from you is like, how did this guy, how did he frame his change focus? Because it wasn't about him, it was more about his wife. I'm just curious as to how he kind of verbalized that or how he articulated that and if that sort of evolved. I'm, just curious.

Helen Kaplan: Yeah. So it started off well. He brought himself here after a recent, police contact, and, he didn't like that experience. Even though he hadn't been arrested or nothing really, happened of consequence other than being embarrassed. I think he framed the change needed as his anger toward the wife. and so he recognized that his anger had crossed a line and that he didn't like becoming angry and laying hands on her. And he felt like she caused his anger. Right. Which a lot of people like you, made me mad. And that he wished for her behavior to change so that his anger could be decreased. So that's the general gist of it.

Paul Warren: He m wanted to manage his anger and he wanted his wife's behavior to change so he wouldn't be triggered into his anger.

Helen Kaplan: Correct.

Paul Warren: Okay. I could see that as. As a very powerful behavior change focus as a starting place in a conversation, which would. Which would completely inform how

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Paul Warren: I would use the core skills in proceeding in that conversation.

Helen Kaplan: Right. And I think, you know, to look at things like, from a transference or counter transference point of view, like it would be. I think when I talked with my boss about this situation, he, he's a man, and he said, oh, gosh, like, doesn't this trigger you? Like, I don't like, you know, I don't like it when men hurt women. Like, doesn't this, like, upset you? And kind of just, doesn't that become provocative for you? And I thought that was a really honest, genuine response. I could have gotten sucked into judgment a

little, even though on the surface, right, clinicians can be really cool. And I could have gotten a little caught up in maybe disliking this guy and not even really caring that much about him and his blaming of his wife, if that makes sense, because I think that's. It can be a perspective that's pretty obnoxious. It can feel noxious, especially for a female. That's all for men, too, to listen to that justification. But for whatever reason, and I really credit am I for this, I was able to just settle into a, compassionate, open hearted space where I'm trying to just think about things from his perspective and what it might feel like to be that triggered. And of course, I'm knowing that he's also intoxicated. So I have the understanding that he's not him, his best self, not aligned, so then he's stepping out of his integrity. And so I tried to like am, I really allowed me to like kind of changed the way I was experiencing things, even though I don't think violence is ever okay.

Paul Warren: M hm.

## **How did you manage the focus and not worry about what you would focus on**

Amy Shanahan: Some really, really important points that you made that adds to how did you manage the focus and not worry about what you would focus on, which took supervision, a, reflection of your own feelings. Did you have any feelings about this? And just knowing that it was really your intention to listen, to understand his perspective and not allow your stuff, if there was anything there for you to get in the way. And a lot of people struggle with that. And that's where I hear a lot of folks talk about their fixing reflex kicks in, or, you know, they react to it, thinking that they're doing a good thing. And of course it comes from a good place of, you know, hey, that's nothing good. And wanting to connect, you're doing this, but it's against your values and kind of getting

persuasive, if not more than that, because they're eager to point it out to the person or what they think is mirroring to the person what the person supposedly doesn't see. Like, I'll hear people say it recently even, well, they don't have insight. So I need to give them insight and point out what they're doing so that they could get better. And so it comes from a good place. And you, ah, were really able to see that it's really up to him to get there and you could just be the guide to listen without judgment.

Helen Kaplan: For sure. For sure. But yeah, it does. I think it's hard to, it takes time. And that's why mi m is like such a, an art in a sense, because it's a process of learning how to also just control your own impulses and not do always what comes naturally as a human being.

Paul Warren: You know, it's funny, Helen, that you'd say that, because I think when you and I had the opportunity to be in that learning community together for that first time, I think that's where I came up with that phrase that a lot of the times mi feels wildly unnatural. And for you to choose as the provider to avoid going into a judgmental place, to avoid the fixing reflex, so that you could try and understand him from his perspective and align, with him about his behavioral change. Goal and then see where that, you know, once the canoe, once the kayak was kind of moving in that direction, to then use the core communication skills, affirming his strengths to see where the destination, where it was really going to evolve to. And I think that that's a very different commitment than thinking. Like, I got to

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Paul Warren: go in and figure out exactly what the behavioral change is. This person wants get on that and, you know, just keep going forward with that. It's focus, I don't



think is ever that fixed or that simple. And that's. I mean, I could be going out on a limb saying that I don't think in human behavior it's ever that fixed or that simple.

Helen Kaplan: No. And sometimes you have to just take the kayak out of the water and lay out your picnic blanket, eat your lunch, and I'm being ridiculous, but it's like, it's similar to the yellow brick road. Right.

Amy Shanahan: I know.

Helen Kaplan: Where they just, they don't just keep hoofing it the whole time. They stop and talk to people. They get apples thrown at them, like, things happen, but they stop. And I think with mi and focusing, you have to be willing sometimes also to just hit the pause button and make sure that you give space or room for there to be a few detours. As long as you, as a practitioner, are doing that in a mindful way and then can skillfully get back there, it can de-intensify sometimes what can be a hard experience for a person. Like you said, if you're just like a taskmaster who's trying to whip the person into moving at your PACE.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And it's unfortunate. It's a very evocative image. I can really see what you just said, and I've seen what you just said. and I think that there's something about mi m that is seductive that way, because it's sort of like, okay, I've engaged task one. Task two, we've now found the behavioral focus. Three, I'm going to evoke everything about this. Task four, let's plan, you know, voila. It's done. And I think. I think there's something that is seductive or appealing about that from the provider's perspective, because, and I'm going to use this word, it implies some degree of control. And the change process in the practice of mi is a collaborative dance, and it's not. It's. It's not that kind of necessarily.

Amy Shanahan: I love the visual of the picnic blanket. Put the picnic blanket down. And from the perspective, too, of, sometimes the client changes their focus, it's maybe gets a little blurry or maybe gets even more clear and, or maybe it changes and it shifts to, and even inviting that calmness to not I think in Paul, your description of get to the engaging, then the focusing, then the evoking it becomes a task checklist task. And people think, wait a minute, we're going this way. Don't talk about that or don't shift this and allowing yourself as a practitioner listener, but also to invite that person to be calm and take a look at and reflect and think about and maybe rethink about has the focus shifted and have that deliberate conversation sometimes.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And you know Helen, you alluded to this earlier. You didn't say it, but the way you said it really painted this picture for me. And if I'm hawthorning Hawthorne affecting Orlando or haloing you by saying it this way, please tell me if I'm using either of those terms appropriately. But you really alluded to approaching the person in an MI spirited way and giving them the opportunity to kind of unfold their values, their focus. And to me that's, that's the piece we're kind of calibrating how quickly or not quickly we're moving because we are responding to what the person is communicating to us. And to me that's the essence of an MI spirited approach.

Helen Kaplan: And you really want the person to feel like you see them as more than their problem. And a focus is a wonderful thing, but when it's done poorly it can in a sense make it so that the individual in front of you feels like they're just a problem for you to solve. It's reductive being who's got a lot more to them. And I do think we have to honor the fact that it is so, it makes a person feel so vulnerable to, to get into that focus at times. So we have

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Helen Kaplan: to hold the other parts of them and say those are important. And this problem doesn't define you necessarily. Even this focus, as hard as it is, isn't the be all and end all. It's just what we're deciding to spend time on because we've decided it's important together to do that.

Amy Shanahan: You know, that's such a good way to put it. And it's the whole person, and a lot of folks like in the helping professions have been trained to solve problems, look at the diagnosis, figure out what the prognosis is, and not looking at the whole person, even though they're in, they want to and they think they are. Their intention is to do that. It actually derails the focus of looking at the whole person and all the parts. And some people say they do it and they'll give lip service to it and really not be able to look at the whole picture. And I'm curious. It made me want to shift to a scenario of what do you do and what skills do you use or how do you use MI to navigate a person whose focus isn't clear at all and it's all over the place or there's a lot of things on the table and maybe it's the same with the person that you are talking about, Helena. And maybe you have an idea of who you've worked with, Paul too. How do you navigate and what skills help you to help guide that conversation to even know where you want to go if there's a lot of stuff on the table.

Helen Kaplan: Well, I'll let you start, Paul. I mean there's so many different ways you could like approach it. yeah, yeah.

Paul Warren: And you know, it's interesting because this, perhaps this is just my kick of the moment but what my kick of the moment really kind of is or my, my issue of the moment is that I'm a believer in that. until there is some identified behavioral focus, you're not really practicing MI. You're, what you're doing is you're employing an am I consistent approach and it's my belief, and again I'm you know, I'm going on air saying

this is my belief, it's my belief that you can do that in any and every conversation. And if you employ that same consistent approach in any conversation there's the possibility of collaboratively identifying a behavioral change goal that then one can practice around that behavioral change goal. So in the absence of a behavioral change goal, in the evolution of a behavioral change goal, I would be sticking and trying to adhere as closely as I could to an same consistent approach. Partnership, acceptance, compassion, empowerment in terms of my way of interacting with that person and creating the environment where in which that behavioral focus, if indeed there is one because there isn't always, but where that could emerge if that was relevant.

Helen Kaplan: To our work hash halls and my spirit in motion.

Paul Warren: If you say so. What are your thoughts, Helen? What do you think?

Helen Kaplan: Go ahead and, oh, I'm thinking of acceptance, commitment therapy. Russ Harris talks about how sometimes it's less important to focus on achieving every single goal we have. But he says if you are focused on the direction, and you've got the right direction and you have the right attitude and are, creating the right environment, you will move toward the goals. You will get to something, maybe not the original goal or what you thought was important, but you'll get to something good along the way. And that's how I'm hearing it. You have to just have the right attitude. Be patient, be open hearted, be compassionate, and recognize that we, we don't have all the answers. We can't do this by ourselves. We and the client together could do something cool. And sometimes we'll not come together. Here's the thing. Sometimes we can't find a way to come together. Or the particular time that we're meeting that person isn't necessarily the moment we're going to be able to collaborate, but to have faith that if the person is really interested and has that urge or need deepen down, they will return. And so

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Helen Kaplan: I guess part of it is keeping hope, keeping hopeful, even when things feel dismal.

Paul Warren: You know? I'm prompted to want to underline something based on what you just said, Helen, which is, it's my belief that everything that comes before focusing has as much value as anything that comes from focusing and what you do after focusing. So there's, there's good work, there's the opportunity for engagement, growth, rapport, trust, whether there's a focus or nothing in the presence of all those things, if a focus is agreed upon and MI can be practiced, more good work can be done. I wanted to really say that because I think people think it's not good until there's a focus and they're practicing MI. And that, I think, is a very problematic misconception, because without everything that comes before the focusing, because it is the foundation on which the house rests.

Helen Kaplan: And don't you feel so, this is my experience. And Amy, you tell me, Amy and Paul, you tell me this is different. If I've done enough of the stuff before the focusing, and I've really given my all to engaging and eliciting all these fun things, the focusing is easier if I've really established a good relationship and listened intently and really attuned to what's happening, the focusing, and even, like the chain, the change talk comes more easily if I'm less, if I'm just, if I'm not rushing the process.

Amy Shanahan: The thing that, that's been standing out for me in this conversation around the hope and the spirit and what skills, I think, to me, it doesn't matter what the skills are. Like you said, they come. They can come naturally. But the thing that was, spinning in my head was the notion of believing that the person will get to wherever

they want to go. And that took me a while to get there because there were times, a lot of times, even in practice of mi, there was a part of me still left thinking, I can influence change. I can get the person to see something, that I had this kind of magic, you know, black bag to hand out a heart to people and brains to some other people to go with the wizard of Oz theme. But, that there was a part of me that was still hanging on to thinking I could get someone in a good way, get someone to get somewhere. And the other ingredient that just adds to your wonderful list is just believing that they'll get there on their own, wherever it is they want to go.

Paul Warren: And that wherever we interact with them in the course of their journey, the manner in which we interact with them, whether there's a focus found or not, it's still all contributing to what will happen going forward in a positive way.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. It doesn't mean that we stopped caring because we don't want to push someone towards a healthy change or a change that might make their lives better. Even though they say that that's what they want.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And it would be. Am I inconsistent to attempt to push them, even if it's toward their own good, quote, unquote, what we determine as their own good? And. And that is a whole. You know, that's a whole other can of worms. And. And that's where being non judgmental and not imposing our agenda becomes very critical, because we may care deeply about this person. We may want them. Please, please don't fall into that hole. I see it right in front of you, and that's not. It's not our journey to control.

Helen Kaplan: For sure. Then that is the, conundrum of being an Mi practitioner is being able to be present with somebody and care and want the best for them, but recognize that at the end of the day, they have autonomy, and they call the shots because they're

the boss of their own lives, and

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Helen Kaplan: we're just there to. To be part of the journey and attempt to support them, moving in the direction that they said was important to them.

Paul Warren: I'm almost speechless. I mean, almost, That was so beautifully said, helen, and I couldn't agree with you more, and it really. It helps bring perspective. Mi is simply a method of communicating with people about change. It's not, a program to become a savior for somebody.

Helen Kaplan: Oh, crap, Paul.

Paul Warren: I know. I just ruined it.

Helen Kaplan: Forget it. I thought that was the ultimate, like, nirvana of the mi, therapist is to find salvation for self and others. Okay.

Paul Warren: You might not be alone in that, but that is not my take on, what this method of communication is about. But I'm one person in a very rich mi community.

Helen Kaplan: the focusing focus, of today is actually one of the harder mi tasks that are out there. And I'm really glad that we've been talking about it, because I really love thinking about how to do a better job myself, of focusing. And often in sessions, I'm aware when I have actively let a focus go, sometimes it's just because I got sloppy and let it go. At other times, I do it on purpose, but it takes skill and it takes awareness and

mindfulness to really stay the course. So, you know, I am glad to be thinking about it more with you guys. And I actually really want to go read the new, edition of, the Mi Bible is what I call it, because I'm curious how the old, chapters on focusing compared to the new.

Amy Shanahan: Less complicated, less complex, I should say, easier to read.

Helen Kaplan: Cool.

### **Helen says it's more effective to invite focus rather than impose it**

Paul Warren: You know, in regard to what you just said, helen, and, you know, maybe there'll be other final comments before we wrap up this particular episode, but, you know, it sort of, like, was a little bit of a challenge. Like, well, how do you focus on, focusing in an episode of a podcast? And I love the way we kind of went to what it is, what it isn't, and kind of are exploring together as, hopefully, a learning community what our relationship and investment in focusing actually is. And to realize that, yes, of course, until there's a behavioral change goal, quote, unquote, we can't, you know, we can't explore the ambivalence about it. We can't find the motivations and strengthen those motivations. True. And perhaps more effective to collaboratively allow the focus, invite the focus, as opposed to imposing something that is. Is not going to have any true meaning for the person.

Helen Kaplan: Absolutely. And the truth is, when it's, a lot of times, clients will, superficially engage with us on a focus. And I've seen that, time and time again where somebody, especially in a mandated situation, but you know what? Not always where



they. People want to do and say what you want them to do and say, and then you just are going somewhere with a person in a kayak, and you're doing all the work and they're.

Amy Shanahan: Just asleep, and then you get frustrated that the kayak keeps spinning and you're working harder than the person. I hear that a lot too.

Helen Kaplan: You're growing dead weight. Absolutely. And that's partially on you because you haven't to wake them up and maybe figure out if you're actually going on a kayak trip all by yourself because you're the person who's created the focus.

Amy Shanahan: some folks I was talking to yesterday, they realized that around any of the steps, tasks, that focusing too takes patience, that it's really almost like that curious evocation piece, but you're actually hanging out and focusing by being patient and inviting them to be calm and thinking about it. So that patience of

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Amy Shanahan: learning how to get the kayak to go in a straight line instead of spinning is worth the investment than doing what you said, Helen, just agreeing on maybe a focus that is not really what they want to focus on. They think we want to hear that part.

Amy Shanahan: That's what they're supposed to focus on.

**Helen says being patient means inviting something to come out**

Paul Warren: And I want to go back to what, Helen, what you described I think so beautifully before was the investment in understanding who somebody is. Like that open curiosity about what is important to you, what are your values, who are you, and seeing what that brings out. And you said it several times about being patient. And, and, you know, it's possible to be patient and not need a lot of time in order to be patient. It just means, patience means not exerting your own force. It means inviting something to come out. It doesn't necessarily mean time.

Amy Shanahan: I love that.

Helen Kaplan: Yeah, that's great. Yeah. Patience doesn't necessarily mean time. That's very profound. Paul, you're on a jag today.

Paul Warren: I think we should stop now.

Helen Kaplan: Because.

Amy Shanahan: People will remember the last thing that was said.

Helen Kaplan: Waxing poetic.

Paul Warren: Absolutely. Helen, thank you so much for joining us again. And Helen, I don't know if you know this. This is our, 24th episode.

Helen Kaplan: Holy crap.

Paul Warren: yeah. And it's the conclusion of our most recent, six episode series. So

what a wonderful way to conclude our series with having you as our special guest.

Helen Kaplan: Well, thank you and congratulations, guys. I'm glad that you've been, you know, persistent and stuck to this and, you know, really enhanced the world of MI and the greater learning community by dedicating yourselves to this task. It's a huge gift to our community.

Amy Shanahan: As people like you that join us, that really enrich the conversation.

Helen Kaplan: Thank you.

Paul Warren: Absolutely.

Amy Shanahan: Thanks for all you're doing, Helen, and for sharing your stories with us.

Helen Kaplan: Thank you. And I'm glad to join you guys. Always so it's a. It's a gift.

Paul Warren: On that note, we would say thank you, and hopefully we'll have more episodes together.

Helen Kaplan: Sounds good.

Amy Shanahan: Thanks again, Helen.

Helen Kaplan: Okay. Take care, guys. And, Lions and Tigers and bears, MI. There you go. Bye bye.

Paul Warren: Thank you.

Thanks for listening to episode 24 of Lions and Tigers and Bears MI be on the lookout for new episodes coming out in the near future.

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