

Episode 25: Seeking Deeper Understanding

Lions and Tigers and Bears MI is an interactive podcast focused on motivational interviewing

CASAT Podcast Network.

Lions of Tigers and Bears MI is brought to you through a collaboration between the Mountain Plains ATTC and NFARtec In episode 25, Paul and Amy welcome a guest to discuss, seeking deeper understanding for episode resources, links to episodes, contact us, and other information, please visit the Lions and Tigers and Bears MI website. mtplainsattc.org/podcast.

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.

Paul Warren: Hello, Amy.

Amy Shanahan: Hi, Paul.

Paul Warren: How are you?

Amy Shanahan: We're back.

Paul Warren: We are back. How are you?

Amy Shanahan: I'm, I'm having fun. I'm doing really good.

Paul Warren: Good. Glad to hear that. And, I can say happily how excited I am about our very special guest.

Paul and Amy welcome motivational interviewing expert Laura Saunders to the podcast

Today we are fortunate to be joined by Laura Saunders, who is with us in the studio, as I call it. Yes, as Amy calls it. And I want to invite Laura, who is here with us, to take a moment to say hello, introduce herself before we kind of lay out the journey that we'll all be taking together in this episode of the podcast. Laura, thank you so much for being here. The floor is yours.

Laura Saunders: Thank you. Paul and Amy, you're both such, I just respect you so much as colleagues, and I consider both of you friends. So it's really fun to be here with you today. It sounds like we're gonna have a lot of fun. so I come. I'm currently in Madison, Wisconsin. I work at the University of Wisconsin, where the Great Lakes addiction Technology Transfer Center, prevention Technology Transfer Center, and mental health technology transfer Center are located. I currently work, using my motivational interviewing skills to facilitate, an sBirt project in the state of Michigan. I've been kicking motivational interviewing around for the better part of 30 years. I, started doing stuff with motivational interviewing via, ah, the telephone and all this other stuff in the mid nineties. I eventually became a motivational interview network trainer in 2007, which is how I got to meet both of you and become your friend. So thank you for having me today.

Amy Shanahan: Great to have you.

Laura Saunders: Yeah.

Paul Warren: our pleasure, Laura. We're so glad you're here.

This week's episode focuses on an MI consistent approach in seeking deeper understanding

So, folks, as we sort of move forward with this particular episode and what we are hoping to focus on using our new special format is today we're going to focus on an MI consistent approach in seeking deeper understanding. And what we've asked Laura to do, as we are asking every special guest in this series to do, is craft questions

related to this particular topic that have not yet been shared with Amy or I that Laura will pose to us and we, the three of us, and we invite you, of course, as the listeners to also reflect on, ponder and share your thoughts and your reactions to these particular questions and then our reflection on these questions. So, Amy, before Laura, launches her first question, anything else you want to say about this particular episode or.

Amy Shanahan: I just want to say to remind folks that we're really focusing on these first three episodes of six in the series, that this is around having an MI consistent approach, how we are with people we may not be practicing mi, which we'll get into in the last three episodes. and I'm smiling. Thinking about how you introduced

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Amy Shanahan: Laura is going to ask the question. It feels like a game show. I really am enjoying this process because I don't know what Laura's going to ask us. And, if I get nervous about the answer, I'm going to just totally pick on you, Paul. But I know it's kind of fun. I'm looking forward to it.

Paul Warren: Excellent. So am I. So, Laura, having said that, all right.

Laura Saunders: I, so I, when I'm sharing motivational interviewing with people, I talk about the key skills in motivational interviewing, and we all know that the key skills, and you probably talked about them lots, are open ended questions and affirmations and reflections and summaries, but I always put listening on that list as well. And before I have people practice talking, I feel like, let's have them practice listening. Right, because m if you're not doing listening, the talking is m right. And so oftentimes, so we'll talk about that. People that I'm sharing motivational interviewing with accept that readily.

As a matter of fact, audiences, when I ask them, what do you know about good communication? 9.9 times out of ten, the very first word out of their mouth is listening. People helping people, the people we work with know that they're supposed to listen, and yet listening is hard. And when we're helping people really, truly learn motivational interviewing, we don't always hear listening. What do you think about that? Why? What makes it so hard. And what are your thoughts on that?

Amy Shanahan: M holy moly. That's a great question, isn't it?

Laura Saunders: I mean, we just, we throw that word around, like, listen, listen. Like, I'm telling you, they, when I say, what's, what do you do when you're trying to successfully communicate with person? Not talking about motivationally. We're not talking about anything. I just say, like, you want to have a productive conversation. What do you do? They tell me, listening.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I have some thoughts, if I could start. Oh, Paul, did you want to start first? Just, some thoughts about even just deciphering what you just said. So, to me, that's one thing that can get in my way of listening. Cause I'm deciphering what you just said, trying to figure out what it means. It's now going through my filters of my understanding. I'm also paying, attention to other things in my environment. The sound, the coldness, the light over here, somebody walked in the room. So, I'm paying attention to other things. And then, of course, we all refer to this fixing reflex. So then once those things get deciphered, my fixing reflex or my interpretation of things start to happen, and I got all this jumbled stuff going on. and I might not have heard all the things that you really were saying, and I mean, your words sometimes, but also the things you're not saying. So that's my first reaction to, analyzing what's going on with me physically, emotionally and in my head. yeah, I don't know. That's the first thing that

popped into my head.

Paul Warren: Yeah. You know, Laura, I've known you for a long time, and, I'm not in any way surprised or, at the relevance of your observation and the relevance of this question. And I love the fact that when you're talking about the core skills, you're also prioritizing the skill, the muscular ability. And I mean that emotionally and physically, to listen. And I share your conception and your experience that 9.9% out of 10% of times you ask people about what, like, good communication is, the first thing they'll say is listening. And yet, it is the hardest thing to do. And I think it's because, and I've heard Amy say this, actually, at times, that there's a very important distinction to be drawn between listening to speak and ask your next question and listening to understand what the person is actually saying. So it's the intention behind the listening, and listening to speak is really waiting for silence. It's not really listening. It's waiting for a gap.

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Paul Warren: It's waiting for an opportunity. To me, listening to understand means I'm doing everything that Amy just described, which is I'm, factoring in all the stimuli that I'm experiencing. I'm trying to understand it through my own lenses and I'm trying to get at what the meaning of what you're saying is. And to be quite honest, I would say if you prioritize listening, it means that you're going to ask more effective, open ended questions, be able to do more informed affirmations, reflections and summaries. So I'm really inspired by the question because it helps me as an MI trainer and somebody who also practices mi m, to want to think more deeply about the positioning of listening in the training.

Laura Saunders: Yeah. Sort of piggybacking on what you just said, said Paul. Right.

When you listen, the affirmation, reflection, open question becomes higher quality, deeper. Right. And yet it's hard to not be listening for, or, listening and waiting for your turn to talk. Right. And so there's this balance of helping people be okay. And I certainly can just keep reassuring them of this, but giving them an opportunity to really eventually experience this for themselves. That if you truly just listen and do all the hard work it takes to listen, like Amy was saying. Right. Like filtering out. I've got 8000 things going on my head, my, my environment. Right. Like filtering that out, listening and trusting that if you do that, when they're done, you'll know what to say and.

Paul Warren: Then you'll know if there's something to be said.

Laura Saunders: What?

Paul Warren: Because there isn't always. Right?

Laura Saunders: Right.

Amy Shanahan: I was thinking of a training that I participate in. I use this sometimes, around listening, where you invite partners to listen to each other and I. And the listener doesn't get to say anything. I think, actually, I think this was Nancy Rosenshine's exercise in the leadership institutes that the ATTC sponsored many years ago. But, ah, if we weren't listening or something got in our way of listening to what the person was saying, we'd give them a piece of candy that we had in our hand just to gesture that, oops, something popped into my head. So that was a really fun exercise. And when I invite people to practice that with or without candy, sometimes they struggle and say, it's hard to sit and listen for three minutes and not say a word. And yet so many different things come out of the speaker's mouth that they wouldn't have anticipated. Or it would

have changed direction if they said anything. And I'm just wondering if you do that because you, Laura, started off with, you know, when we train, we intentionally want to start with that communication skill of listening.

Laura Saunders: I do exactly that, Amy. I have an exercise that I borrowed from Steve Berg Smith where, and I've sort of changed it over time, but using his inspiration as the impetus for it. And I do just that. I say, you are going, and, I make it easy. You're gonna get in a pair, and the person with the long hair, you're gonna be the listener person with the short hair. And I invite the listeners to be present and patient and accepting and nonjudgmental and to use all their senses for their listening, and then to do it silently, do the listening without speaking. And I encourage them to. So I say there'll be no interruptions. And what I encourage them to do is they're not interrupting with their mouth. They're also trying to quiet the interruptions that are appearing in their head. And I think that's really challenging. But just like you said, Amy, the takeaway messages are, I learned I wanted to ask questions. Listening is really hard. Right? Like, that's what they say. Then they say, I learned more than I would have. I thought I had all these questions, but I either got the answer to them or I got the answer to questions I never would have asked.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Laura Saunders: And that's when I feel like, oh, when people can appreciate, and then they struggle, and I make them do it for five minutes. Five minutes. What

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Laura Saunders: happens with that elongated period of time is that oftentimes the

speaker, I call it speakingness. The speaker runs out of speakingness because they get through the topic. The topic is, who are you? What do you value and what's important to you? And the speaker will speak about that, but then they'll sort of rush through it because they don't know how long. I don't tell them how long they are. And then there's silence as the group, as the pair, just sort of looks at each other. Right. Because the listener's listening, and the speaker doesn't know what to speak about. And then what happens a lot is that speaker goes deeper.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Laura Saunders: Got someone to listen to them. And when was the last time somebody listened?

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. There's a parallel. I have a background in creative studies that when we ask people for their ideas, the first third of their ideas are typical stuff that any of us would come up with. And if we let the process keep going, people go deeper and get more creative. I always think about that, like, give it time and, people will go deeper and think of more, you know, more in depth things. Yeah.

Paul Warren: I think that we are leading parallel lives. I do a very similar activity, although my setup is a little more diabolical than long hair, short hair, which is where I have a person pick an a or b person, like decide who's going to be a, who's going to be Bjorndev. Of course they fight over who's going to be b because they think a is going to start. And then I say the b person will start.

Amy Shanahan: Nice.

Paul Warren: So it starts off with a little bit of levity. And to Laura's point, that powerful moment when the speaker pauses and the intentional listener knows that they're not going to act on their desire to ask a question and they're just going to provide the space for the person to go deeper. it's a palpable moment. You can feel that transition happen. And, I'll just also add that I think the other thing that makes listening daunting sometimes for folks is the fear that they're not going to remember everything that the person says. And I love it when people verbalize that in the training because I like to emphasize that when you're truly and sincerely and deeply listening, if you leave out a detail, the person will let you know.

Amy Shanahan: Good point, Paul.

Laura Saunders: yeah, and I also like to reinforce that people say, like, well, can I take notes? Is it okay to take notes? And they'll ask at any point when you're sharing motivational interviewing with them that that question can come up. And I always like to say motivational interviewing is not the arbiter of all things in the world. And, you know, you would be not not motivational interviewing if you were writing things down on a piece of paper. That's not an MI not adherent behavior, but what you choose to write down when you're MI adherent when you're using an MI consistent approach is so much different. so I think their fears about what they would forget, I think that that changes over time because the, what's important changes as you begin to appreciate more in the MI consistent?

Paul Warren: To me, that's one of the things that I really love about deep listening in an MI consistent approach and the practice of MI. What I really love about it is that you do get the opportunity to hear and feel through what actually is most important to the speaker. And if you allow yourself to be influenced by that as the listener, there's no way

you can forget it.

Laura Saunders: No. When people are sharing their essence, their juicy bits. Right? Like, you're just, you're not gonna forget it. Yes. You're gonna forget how old their dog is. Right. And, you know, and then I always, like, reinforce, like, they'll be like, why the question? I had these questions. I was really wondering. And I say, well, who decided whether that was an important thing to this person? And they'll say, well, the speaker. So if the speaker didn't mention the names of their kids, they didn't think it was an important part of this story. Right. Or if that isn't an avenue that they pursued,

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Laura Saunders: it's not important to them. And when we ask questions and we jump in and we're not doing good listening, we grab that conversational steering wheel and go off in our own direction. Yep.

Paul Warren: We're inserting our agenda.

Laura Saunders: Yeah. Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: What?

Paul Warren: We've determined what's important.

Laura Saunders: So can I ask another question?

Paul Warren: By all means, yeah.

Laura Saunders: So what do you see as the difference between good listening and the overuse of following? So here we've been talking about, like, being present and patient and curious and delighted and sometimes silent. Right. Not necessarily in real life conversations. For three or five minutes, you're not going to set a clock and be like, oh, I can't say anything for five minutes. Right. But when we're helping people see the difference between just following and good listening. Where's the line?

Amy Shanahan: Oh, my. Making me think. I couldn't say, holy moly. Again, I got to come up with other expletives that are safe for radio.

Laura Saunders: Only to come with questions and not tell you ahead of time. Now, everyone can clearly hear that you didn't know these questions ahead of time.

Amy Shanahan: I know.

Paul Warren: Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: well, and hopefully our pause and our little antics in between will give the listeners time to consider what their answers would be. They could also pause the tape.

Paul Warren: Laura, could I ask you a follow up question before I dive into that? Amy saying no. But you said yes. So since, since you asked the question, I'm going to go with your guess. Could you say a little bit about what you mean by following?

Laura Saunders: Yes. So when you think of the three guiding, directing and following is really. Bill has that great cartoon out right now with, the tour guide. Right. And so a

following is truly just following, like letting the person talk and just trotting along behind them, metaphorically, not particularly doing anything to direct the conversation. And we know that that's not particularly helpful. And so when you're trying to help somebody learn well, zip it and listen and let the person get it out. How do you help them draw clinically or helpfully draw a line between this conversation is going nowhere, or I'm just giving this person a good listening to and that's a good idea.

Amy Shanahan: Still a good question.

Laura Saunders: There may not be an answer, I'm not sure.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, you know, I think that the thing that stands out to me is to draw any kind of distinction. which I'm going to give this much thought is following is listening to be with someone, right. Perhaps, guiding is what are we listening for? So we're listening for something. Where do you want to go? What do you want to do about how you're going to get there? Or. So there's some intention set in that. So there's a line drawn there a bit. because what do you respond to then? If you're just following? You could respond to anything. Or maybe there's a theme of the person repeating something. When we're guiding, we have an intention, perhaps depending on what our work is and what we're doing with a person where they want to go. So I don't know if that made any sense, but that's what's going on in my head that just came out of my mouth. Paul, go ahead.

Paul Warren: It certainly made sense to me and it helped illuminate how I might answer Laura's question, which is that when we're presenting or taking the stance of an am I consistent approach, we're not necessarily guiding toward anything. And the guiding really comes in once we start to make the transition into focusing in an identified

behavioral change goal, because then we are intentionally guiding the conversation and we are intentionally listening for other things. So it's interesting and I'm glad, Laura, I asked you what you meant by following because what I would say is relevant to both an MI consistent approach and the practice of motivational interviewing is the desire to understand. And that can be done from the perspective

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Paul Warren: of following because you're trying to understand what the person is telling you and trying to understand once we've transitioned into the practice of MI, because there's an identified behavioral change goal, you're actually seeking to understand through the lens of the shared behavioral change goal. So it parameters the listening. When we're in an MI consistent approach and there's no identified behavioral change goal, we are seeking to understand what the person is telling us and how we use an open ended question. An affirmation or reflection or summary is not parametered by any identified behavioral change.

Laura Saunders: Goal, and thus it could be a little bit called following.

Amy Shanahan: yeah.

Laura Saunders: Like, I don't.

Unidentified

Paul Warren: Lions and Tigers and Bears Am I. An i: I think.

Laura Saunders: I think when I, when I thought of that question, I was, I didn't mean it or the way that you were just talking right now. Paul helped me sort of un vilify following. Like, there are times when I think it's just like. And your, your recent, thoughts and, and workshops on, am I consistent approach and engaging? Right. Like that. Maybe you start out with that sort of tabula rasa. I'll follow you around a little bit. Right. I'm going to just follow you a little bit. Oh, now I'm getting. Okay. Okay. Okay. And knowing when to do that. Right. And not then have your fixing reflex be the thing that says, oh, that, oh, they just mentioned that. That's, oh, we got to fix that. We got to fix that.

Paul Warren: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: You know, it's interesting, a session that I just listened to popped up into my mind, and I was listening in to this practitioner who was getting to know the person. And I think in a following type of way, there probably was some, inherent or unspoken reason why the person was in the session and what the worker was doing. So there was this overarching, probable, we know where we might be headed together, but without worrying about what the goal was of what this person needed to do or was going to do or had to do, this practitioner listened in for values and in things that were important to this person, things about who they were as a human being, as a father, as a whatever. It was interesting to me. I mean, I'm, not comparing it necessarily to other things or other practices that I've listened to, but that this person really moved quickly to focusing. Soon after that engaging process of following, this fella talked about his job, he talked about his kids in a short, short period of time and engaged with this person and listened in for what was important to, the person outside of a goal or a problem or an issue to focus on in this particular way. It was interesting how swiftly they moved together in their dance towards a focus which wasn't what would have seemed to be the obvious focus based on the worker.

Paul Warren: I love what you just described, Amy, because to me, that makes the strong case for an am I consistent? Approach, that through the art, and I'm choosing this very specifically through the art of listening, you can get a sense of what this person's values landscape is. You can get a sense of what is important to this person. And because you're building rapport while engaging in that depth of listening, you could potentially arrive at a focus more quickly and a more informed focus based on a deeper understanding of what's important to this person or where they may want to go.

Amy Shanahan: And I wish I could share a snippet of that recording because the person seeking support or help, resolved one piece of ambivalence in those moments by saying, I know I have to do this. I just don't want to do it, but I'm going to do whatever I have to do to achieve this goal, so I'm going to go ahead and do it.

Laura Saunders: Sometimes people just need a good listening to.

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Amy Shanahan: Gosh darn it.

Paul Warren: Yahoo.

Laura Saunders: If it would be okay with you, I want to explore a little bit of, a little bit about what it is about curiosity and how that helps us in this, how that's related to the topic of listening. That would be okay with you too. So in my introduction, actually, of, setup of the exercise, where I have them listen silently, I say you are, because by virtue of who you are, that you're a helping person who's curious about learning something about motivational being. And you came to this conference or this setup, it would

appear that you are a curious person, that I feel like there is some baseline level of curiosity that is required of us as helpers to be good at what we're doing. And I add on to that, that because of who we are, we're also sort of delighted to hear people's stuff. We're genuinely curious, and it's delightful to hear people's stuff. And I urge them, although they're not speaking, to bring that to the interaction. So if I'm saying that all helpers are innately curious and genuinely delighted, is that true?

Paul Warren: my initial reaction to that is it is not. No, I didn't say, stop saying that. But I think it is not true. And I think being genuinely curious and being openly curious as opposed to worker, mining curious is an important distinction because one of the things that I love about curiosity and one of the reasons I love to work with Amy and Amy, I don't know if I've ever told you this before, but you bring such a curiosity and you are constantly reminding practitioners and learners, to invest in curiosity and the benefits of curiosity. And I love being reminded of that because curiosity says, I can set my worker agenda aside for a moment and I can put the focus on you, the client, the patient, to understand it from your perspective and to know what's important to you, what moves you, what brings you here, as opposed to I'm going to ask you my set of questions, and I'm curious about your answers because they're going to facilitate my work. And that to me is a kind of worker centric curiosity as opposed to a client, patient centric curiosity. And sadly, I think the pressures of many work environments crush out client centered curiosity, privilege and prioritize worker driven. I'm curious to get this answer because it's going to make my work easier. And that's, I don't think that's because people are bad workers. I think it's because they're juggling a lot of things and they're under a lot of pressure.

Amy Shanahan: Busy. Well, I know the listeners couldn't see that I had this huge smile on my face that was hiding a chuckle, laughed, because as you were affirming me and

stroking my ego, and I really appreciate that. Paul. I think, like, listening, curiosity takes work and takes energy. Because as you were affirming me, I was judging the crap out of myself. Because when I'm, not being curious is when I'm being judgmental. It's when I have a strong opinion. It's when, Nope, I don't think you should be saying that, Laura. Right. So I have these thoughts that go on in my head, and I'm glad you took the mic and affirmed me because it made me feel good in the moment. Certainly, while I was self deprecating about, I'm not always curious, and I don't know what you all think about that answer, but I think I have to manage that. I have to, because if I think about something that I'm very charged by, that is politics. Am I listening in to the other

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Amy Shanahan: side and being curious about why do you agree with that? Why do you think that? Why is that your position then? I'd be less judgmental and less emotionally charged by being in a discordant kind of space. I think it takes work to be curious as much as, for me, as much as it takes to listen, because my judgmental mind gets right in the way.

Laura Saunders: So in his affirmation and recognition of all of your beautiful strengths, Amy, Paul mentioned that you invest in curiosity. What? Say more about that.

Encourage people to invest in curiosity because that was actually one of my questions, is, can we build up a greater sense of curiosity? Right. We've just been talking about, well, maybe we can have people practice listening. Like, we're going to pull up his tape over your mouth. We're going to help you practice listening. Right? Like, is there something we can do to, help people who feel like, yeah, I'm just not really that innately curious.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, there's quite a few things. I'm standing on the shoulders of giants who've offered me morsels of their work and their practice. And one was one of my beautiful mentors who I often, try to do. Her North Carolina accent. God love her. Mary Murdoch is no longer with us. She was a professor at our creative studies department. She would say things like, you know, cheap, like hell, as long as you're learning to, And her attitude for learning made me want to stay in school for the rest of my life. Play with this, ask questions, shoot holes in things, ask why? Why is that so, so I learned how to be curious, starting well, probably in many ways, but that was one big thing for me. so fostering that, especially in a classroom, when some people are mandated to be in the classroom or some people are skeptical and think they're already doing motivational interviewing, anything of that nature. Adult learners, ah, are often defensive, because they think they know things. another native, american person, shared in a training that we did. It's so important that you helped us be skeptical to, ask questions about what we're about to learn and was curious about what we already knew. So those are some things that are very much in line with motivational interviewing. So, and I've been criticized sometimes as a trainer, when I invite people to, define the opposite. What's the opposite of, accurate empathy, what does inaccurate empathy look like? And one gentleman, split hairs over, well, why isn't motivational interviewing a technique? And I didn't answer the question and move along. I said, well, let's look up the word technique, let's dissect this. and I think because I was offered that opportunity to learn in a way where I'm analyzing something, that's pretty deep learning when you're able to invite people to analyze things in a way. And I think that that is a way to invite people to be curious.

Amy Shanahan: What do you think about some of those things?

Laura Saunders: Yeah. Really shaping it in the workshop or classroom experience and

hoping that that sort of, that, that becomes part and parcel of their am I consistent approach. Right. That then they sort of, look, it's okay to be curious. Like this is, look, I modeled this for you, that we can be curious and client curious, not just worker curious.

Paul Warren: Agreed. And I would add that in relation to listening. and we talked about the work that can be intentionally done in a training environment, in a coaching situation. also keeping in mind that, like, curiosity can be fostered as well and helping people to understand, like, you know, the client keeps coming back to this particular piece of their story. so why not invite them to elaborate on that piece of their story? Yeah, maybe it's not necessarily part of, quote unquote, you know, what you need to do, but there's a reason they keep coming back to it. And can we be curious and how can we pursue that? And again, one of the things that I love about an am I consistent approach is that it's basically saying, you know, our job is to try and understand it from this person's perspective.

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Paul Warren: And because we are not that person, we really need to bring curiosity to it because we need their input on it. We can't make up their story.

People ask questions because they're curious about what they're hearing

Amy Shanahan: I was just thinking about skills, and people struggle, and, I wonder if you hear this a lot. Gosh, reflections are so hard. And I don't like to tell people what they're thinking. I don't like to tell people what they're feeling. And I just got this light

bulb moment in this conversation around the notion of curiosity, that people ask questions because they're curious about, well, why did you or, have you thought about doing da da da da? Ah? So how can we foster that? You're curious. You have a question to ask, and you could also put that out in a statement to let the person know, hey, I'm curious about you for the sake of understanding better than, barreling a bunch of questions at you. So I think, how do you define that in a way that invites people to use those curious questions and frame them in a reflection. But I'm just now getting in the weeds of skills.

Laura Saunders: I was thinking of that, Amy, when you were talking about your fabulous classroom experience and you're a creative education, right? And that the, that the professor encouraged you to ask questions and ask, why is that so? And I'm thinking, like, why? You know, like, totally could. I was right there with you in the classroom and imagining, you know, this beautiful, professor speaking with this nice southern accent, right? And then I thought, man, we would never want to say that in an MI workshop. Like, well, the show curiosity, you're going to ask a lot of questions, then you're going to ask, why is this? Right? Because that's sort of the anti message, not to vilify questions, because that's certainly not the case. But that isn't something that we emphasize. We emphasize reflection instead. And so Paul's going to take this away. He's got something to add to this.

Paul Warren: Well, I do, because actually two things just fuse together. Because a reflection is the way to confirm listening and express curiosity at the same time. Because the reflection is the fusion of what you've heard and that may be what was said or maybe what wasn't said, because we have complex reflections and it's the way to invite further elaboration because, we don't. And again, I think it's important to acknowledge, even during an am I consistent? Approach using any of the core skills is

relevant because they confirm listening and they invite elaboration about what we've taken in from that person. So clearly it's a fusion between, the reflection is the mechanism that can bring those two things together. And it's not the question, it's the reflection.

Laura Saunders: Yeah.

Laura Saunders: Yeah, that, and then again, helping work on, it's often not the belief. Right. It's not the belief that, oh, reflections are that. Amy, you mentioned some good points, that sometimes there is a little skepticism, like what, I'm just supposed to say what they're saying or I'm supposed to put words in their mouth like I should guess what they're feeling. Shouldn't I just keep asking them, how did that make you feel? My worst question, how does that make you feel? How did that make you feel? I'm like, they just told you how it made them feel. Just guess and just say and just.

Paul Warren: Reflect back what they said.

Laura Saunders: They just, they were pretty clear they were expressing a feeling whether they said the word or not. You know, the word feeling words. Sad, mad, glad.

Amy Shanahan: Right. Trust your, trust your instincts that, that facial expression was not happiness.

Paul Warren: And, and that's the beauty of the deep listening. Listening. Because, because the deep listening, not only will it pick up the auditory content, it will pick up, the affective communication as well. And that's why, and again, some people are really frightened to offer their hunch, and I respect that, and I don't in any way want to

disrespect that. And I will also add, that's one of the things that I love about motivational interviewing is that it gives me the, and an am m I consistent approach is that it gives me the opportunity to listen deeply and then communicate what I heard.

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Paul Warren: The listening that then can evoke further elaboration.

Laura Saunders: Deep listening coming from a place of, I am genuinely curious about you as a person. I'm not running every single thing you say through my filters. Right. I have some like, right. So how do I not? Well. Oh, this is. Oh, boy. This story. This fits into this lane. This is. This is. Right. And then that's what I see that as a threat to curiosity. Like, that is the threat to curiosity.

Paul Warren: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: Well, when it fits, it all mental, right? When it fits our mental model, I shared with a beautiful group of really curious people in Ohio that also was stuck, I think. Paul, you mentioned, like, when we have, they have this institutional expectation that they have to do certain things. And when I shared, I think it's Bill Miller's metaphor of putting that curiosity hat on or put that beginner's hat on or go in with a beginner's mind. However, we want to decipher that. This is the first group that ran with that. We did an artistic depiction of a summary of what we did on day one. And every small group, there were four or five of them, drew, a hat, a curiosity hat or a beginner's hat on. because sometimes they didn't realize that they had this mental model of this person coming to me, has these diagnoses or these Personas or these symptoms or whatever the details are. And I know that seems simplistic, and I just wanted to share that story

that this group really ran with that. Wait a minute. I can figure out a way to put, put away those mental models, put away those diagnostics, those labels, those words that I am putting together to formulate an opinion about somebody and put on my beginner's hat. Another just way to answer your. How do you invite curiosity?

Paul Warren: You know, I'm inclined to think that another way to do that, and I'm inspired, to this, Amy, based on the story that you just told, is that we couldn't intentionally remind ourselves that, like, we don't know and, and that we're there to find out what they have to tell us.

Laura Saunders: Well, and sometimes I think they don't know. Like, I. I feel like if doctor Bill Miller had asked John at the beginning of his conversation with him in the silent John video, if he had said, well, what brings you here today? as, you see in the video. Right. To have been able to give voice to what was really at issue. And it wasn't until he got listened to by somebody who was curious who. Right. And really helped that sort of like, let's go all the places this could potentially go. And I'll help you by reflecting because you're just not a super verbose person, but yet your presence is emanating and telling me this stuff about what's going on with you and, through that I will help you.

An am I consistent approach can help someone discover their direction, discover their goal

It's not just that I don't know what brought you here, you might not know what brought you there.

Amy Shanahan: Wow.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And that's powerful because to me, an MI consistent approach can help that person discover their direction, discover their goal, which they maybe didn't have. No. And I want, I want to underline that. That doesn't necessarily mean that you need tons and tons of time and multiple sessions. It means that if you can bring deep listening and curiosity and offer space for the person to do their own curious reflection, you, you might actually get somewhere where you can then make the transition to actually practicing motivational interviewing.

Laura Saunders: Do you see that this, that being curious is what's at the, is at least in, that is a very, is it a very large part. Sorry. Of helping, of the writing reflex? Like where do those two intersect? Is it lack of curiosity that causes the writing reflex? Is

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Laura Saunders: it lack of curiosity that contributes, how are they related?

Amy Shanahan: That's a chicken and an eggs question, isn't it?

Paul Warren: Well, actually, I don't know if it is a chicken and an egg question because to me, I think what is the, driver behind the fixing reflex or the writing reflex is the desire to help. The desire to feel like we've nailed this down. And let me guide you through what you need to do in order to get better. And I think that helps providers feel competent. It helps them to feel like they're making a difference and they want to help. They want to help, Brian, they want to help. And that's a beautiful thing. And I think what an MI consistent approach and the practice of MI is saying is, why not help the person to find out what they really want help with and what may actually be causing them to want that help or that change. And the practice of MI really allows for that because

people find their own motivation, not the ones that the provider.

Laura Saunders: Says are what time in that scary? And what if they leave your office and they don't have a fix?

Amy Shanahan: Mm. Uh-huh.

Laura Saunders: And isn't it just easier to assume we know, like, I wrote down what you said, Paul, that we have a driver, a desire to help. We want to nail it down. We want to sort of say, I've got something for you, because I have a really big helping heart. We, I think we can assume that everybody who's in the helping profession has a helping heart. Right? Like, there are so many other easier ways to make more money than what helpers, right. Like, and yet I tell helpers this, that you probably didn't have much of a choice, right. Like that you were kind of predestined. And when I asked them, I'm like, were you ever thinking like, oh, I think I'll help people or maybe I'll build bridges, I don't know. Right, like that you were never, ever at that, at that point. And I tell them, like, I know that you, that you're a helper because, and I'll show you all the other people, I heard this from Glenn Hines. All the other people in the world know you're a helper. And then I say, what happens? You're not wearing a hang tag. You're not wearing a, I am a helper who works at this community agency. You don't have any name tags on. You don't have anything. You're in the line at the grocery store, you're on airplane, you're ready, you're in a parking lot. You're, and what happens? And you know what they say? People, people just come up and they just tell me their problems. so that makes it, you're a fixer. You just are. And it gets you up out of bed every day to do this really hard work because you don't want m, ah. And everybody knows you're a fixer. And you know you're a fixer. But then somehow curiosity, right. It's hard to maintain our curiosity when, when I think it's so, I think the fixers, I think it's extra painful for them when people don't

fix.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And, and honestly, that's one of the things that I think is also beautiful about motivational interviewing. You learn how not to become over invested in this person's next step. And that doesn't mean you don't care. It simply means that you're meeting them where they're at and you're walking along with them as opposed to telling them, run faster and do this.

If we provide deep listening with a spirit of curiosity, we are creating opportunity

And Laura, based on what you said, too, it really prompts me to want to make this statement, which may, I don't know how people will perceive it, but I'll make it. I'd like to make the argument that if we are providing deep listening with a spirit of curiosity, we are actually creating more of an opportunity and perhaps doing more good than if we went into full blown fixing.

Laura Saunders: Oh, for sure. Oh, for sure.

Paul Warren: And I just want to, I just want to underline that

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Paul Warren: because I want, I want to affirm the value of deep listening and curiosity. And oftentimes people think yeah, yeah.

Amy Shanahan: yeah.

Paul Warren: Ah, yeah, those are great things. But here's the solution that I'm giving you and, and sadly, that is what can actually cause the person to never walk through your door again.

Laura Saunders: Sometimes I invite learners, I say, you know what? If you can meet people, figure out what's troubling them and then come up with a plan and tell them what to do, and you, and they participate a little bit in the planning, right? And they, you write it down and you put it on a piece of paper and then they go do that thing. So you find out who they are, what they need and how to fix it. And that works for you. You can go, you don't have to work really hard at learning motivational interviewing who are you, what's wrong and how are we going to fix it? Who are you, what's wrong and how we going to fix it? If that works, then there's no right but that way of being who are you, what's wrong and how we're going to fix it is probably better for the bridge builder than it is for the professional. And when we have that, why might you want to participate in this fixing of this thing? It's not motivational interview.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

What's the intention around curiosity questions in motivational interviewing

You know, I think what I was going to say might be related to all of that because I was thinking about this desire to help and certainly every helper comes in and they have that desire to help. I think the curiosity piece and the listening. Again, what's the

intention? Now when I've asked people, why did you ask that question? Well, because I needed to know why they started using substances. So therefore they are curious. But about what and for whom. So I think curiosity isn't just putting a curious hat on, it's the intention of what you're curious about. And for whom are you curious? do I have to get a diagnosis? Am I gathering information so that I could put that in the treatment plan or determine, their level of care? And I've heard it a lot. Well, I was just curious about what makes them m tick. And so when you ask about what they asked and why they asked it, I think people would say that they're curious. I'm curious about what symptoms you have that formulate this diagnosis based on a lot of the things that we're saying, what's the institutional expectation and what's the checklist on their job list. So, what's the intention around the curiosity too, I think has to do with some depth of listening and depth of understanding what your hope is with this person. I hear people say, I have to get them to do these things. Still, I have to move this person from a to b. And so I have to ask these questions which are curiosity questions. I don't know. Did I just throw some flies in the ointment?

Laura Saunders: Depth of curiosity should, do we have simple curiosity and complex curiosity.

Amy Shanahan: I think we have to write am, I fifth edition now?

Laura Saunders: Right, because I mean, because you're, I mean, like I go through that same thing. Like, tell me what went into you asking this question. And I will too also hear like, well, because I really felt like I should know. And I'm like, okay, right. Fair game. Uh-huh. Let's say they said this. What would you do with that? Well, I would know. Well, and then let's say the answer wasn't that, it was this. And what would, how would that, how would that change how you're helping this person right now? If you're

learning motivational interviewing, you're trying to use motivational interviewing to help a person resolve their ambivalence. How does that piece of information right now in this conversation help you help them resolve, to help them explore what they want to talk about or. Right. And then that's when it sort of falls apart. learning to do that in the moment when you've got these sort of, well, I wonder, how old were you when you started using.

Amy Shanahan: Right, like, yes.

Laura Saunders: And saying like, not, not useful right now. That won't be useful right now.

Paul Warren: I want to take this back to a technical consideration, which is as human beings and as human beings who have job responsibilities that we have to meet and whatever, yes, we do have answers that we need. And those questions could be framed as curiosity. And the thing I want to go back to is reflection versus question because.

Laura Saunders: We.

Paul Warren: Can be more grounded in deeper

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Paul Warren: listening and more client centered curiosity. And I don't mean curiosity about the client, I mean being curious about what the client is prioritizing or what is important to the client, we technically can put ourselves as the worker more in the position of that through the use of reflection instead of questions. Because if we offer a

reflection, be it simple or complex or double sided or any kind of reflection, if we offer a reflection, we are affirming our deep listening that we've heard this person say, and the reflection invites that person to take their own idea further or not. And that in and of itself is going to give us some direction. So I would just throw out from the perspective of as we technically try and move away from. Well, I'm indulging because basically, let's call it what it is. If you have a bunch of questions that you're kind of curious of asking, you're indulging your own curiosity. And again, you may need to ask these questions because you're doing an intake or whatever, and that's fine. Right. But don't insert your, your personal worker curiosity, because you can, you can choose to do a reflection, which means you're honoring what the person has offered you, and you're also inviting them to go deeper with what they've been offered.

Laura Saunders: Yeah. You're inviting them to do whatever they want. Right. You're inviting them to, I say, like, you're inviting them to agree, to verify, to verify, to say no, to elaborate, elaborate, refine all of the things they could do. But when you ask a question, there's only one thing that we expect. When you ask a question, it's just one thing. When you ask a question, the person is supposed to respond with an answer. But reflections say, right, I'm curious as to how you're going to receive my.

Paul Warren: Reflection, and I've deeply listened because I can make a reflection.

Laura Saunders: Right, right.

Paul Warren: Because you can't offer a reflection if you haven't listened.

Laura Saunders: No, no. And I would, that reflect or, listening is the start of it. And letting your mouth practice a lot and being okay with perfection is not necessary.

Getting over that and being willing to just reflect and reflect and reflect and trusting that you're listening in, your curiosity is going to, be the appropriate, just fine fodder for your reflection. And if it needs correction, the client will tell you.

Laura Saunders: We tell people that all the time. Oh my gosh. We'll just tell you, oh, that was wrong. That's crazy.

Paul Warren: And you'll know if it's appropriate to make the transition into the practice of mi m because you will, organically, an identified behavioral change goal will come into the conversation, or you may reflect something back which invites the person to identify a behavioral change goal. Or maybe there isn't an identified behavioral change goal at this particular moment, and you've still communicated to this person that you're trying to understand them, that you're deeply listening, and that you're curious about what's going on with them and what.

Laura Saunders: They said was important. And, uh-huh. Keep talking to you. Yes, m. Yeah, I heard you.

Paul Warren: You are important and I care.

Laura Saunders: So, I mean, in addition to what you said, Paul, I think what reflections really say, ah. And I struggle like, is this in quotations or how do you represent this? But what I tell people is when you reflect, you're saying what you're saying is important. Please tell me more. You have value. I'm here for. I really want to understand you, and I want to help you understand yourself better.

Amy Shanahan: Yes, I'm listening. I'm curious, and I want you to hear what you just said.

Laura Saunders: right, right. It's not. People will say, like, well, you know, then I get more information. I'm like, well, yeah, you want more information because

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Laura Saunders: you are part of the partnership. But really, the other person needs more information too, meaning they need a clarity. And your reflections can really be helpful to people.

Paul Warren: Yes.

Laura Saunders: In that part, it's not just, it's not an, information collecting session. It's, let's all get on the same page so I can help be your. Am I consistent guide.

Paul Warren: and the client patient's clarity is very important to them.

Laura Saunders: Yeah. Well, you saw it and you see it in the silent job radio. I see it when he might decide, she doesn't want anything anymore.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I'm wondering. You mentioned that video, and it's such a powerful one, especially around the conversation and topic that we have here. do listeners have access to that video? Will we be able to put a link somewhere for them to see it or just so they. Because if they might start looking for it, if they're listening in and now they're curious about Silent John, and if.

Laura Saunders: There were a copy out there, Amy, I think it would be not a copy that. That we would want to endorse. I'm not sure whether or not a person could find a copy

of the Silent John video, but it is part of the professional videotape series, I'm hoping.

Amy Shanahan: Okay.

Laura Saunders: That's part of a lot of foundational motivational interviewing trainings that at least some of the people on our call have. Have had the pleasure of seeing is the best example of how reflections with very few questions can really draw a person out, and how listening is just so important. Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: Great. So it's a part of a learning series that some trainers may use, some people may have access. Yeah, because I know me, I'd have been youtubing that one and see if I could find it, because I, was curious. But I just wanted to save some time for the listeners who might not have that video series.

Laura Saunders: But we've already established that you're unusually curious because it was fostered in you.

Paul Warren: Laura, thank you for beating me to making that reflection I was about to offer you.

Laura Saunders: That was really kind. I'm not sure seeing starting a reflection with. I don't think. I think it was a, But.

Amy Shanahan: That'S all right. Unusual is my middle name.

Laura Saunders: Amy and Paul, I have a short, less than probably 1 minute reading of, an excerpt from a fictional book that I read as an inspiration when I'm trying to help

build importance and confidence around listening. And I'm wondering, if you would be, if we could close out today with me reading what I read to people and chanting.

Amy Shanahan: I'm, absolutely curious just to rephrasing the way.

Paul Warren: Tell us something we don't know, Amy.

Laura Saunders: Okay, so this excerpt comes out of a book called the Art of Racing in the Rain by Garth Stein. And Amy is giving me a thumbs up, which makes me think Amy has read it.

Amy Shanahan: I read the book, but I tell you, I probably don't remember the excerpt, so I'm looking forward to hearing this.

Laura Saunders: And I bet you remember that there were some tears when you read this book.

Amy Shanahan: Yes, lots of tears.

Laura Saunders: Lots of tears because it's a dog book, and tears go with dog books.

Amy Shanahan: Yes.

Laura Saunders: Your dog on the COVID you know you're going to be crying. Yeah.

Garth Stein's latest book is about a dog who wants to become human

So, so the reason, so this book is, and we won't spoil it for you, the story for you, because I want you to actually read it. Garth Stein is a beautiful author, and so on the front cover of the, of the book, you see a picture of a dog. He is the narrator of the story, and he tells you very quickly when you open the book that he will be telling you the story of his life and that he feels a sense of urgency about that because his life is about to be done. He has outlived his dogness, his dog vitality, and he is ready to go. And, he's okay with going. You might not be. That's where the tears come in really early on in the book, but he's fine with it because as he continues telling you throughout the book, as he's telling you all about his life, he's a strong believer in reincarnation, and what he wants to be reincarnated is the same thing as his beloved owner. His beloved owner, hence the title of the book, the Art of Racing in the Rain, is a grand prix race car driver named Denny and Enzo. The dog loves him tremendously. They have a beautiful partnership. So throughout the book, because he has this intention of becoming a human, he has little observations of humanness from his dog perspective, and he sets goals

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and ideas about things that he's going to do when he comes back as a human. One thing that he'll tell you about quite frequently is he can't wait to come back as a human, because when he does, he'll have a thumb. And if he had a thumb as a dog, he could let himself out. He could feed himself. He'd be totally self sufficient. He really wishes he had a thumb, but he doesn't. So when he gets to be a human, he'll have one. And it turns out that he also has some ideas about how he's going to do listening. And that's what I want to share with you. So here's what Enzo says about listening. Here's why I will be a good person. Because I listen. I cannot speak, so I listen very well. I never interrupt. I never deflect the course of the conversation with a comment of my own.

People, if you pay attention to them, change the direction of one another's conversations constantly. It's like having a passenger in your car suddenly grabs the steering wheel and turns you down a side street. For instance, if we met at a party and I wanted to tell you a story about the time I needed to get a soccer ball in my neighbor's yard, but his dog chased me, and I had to jump into a swimming pool to escape, and I began telling the story. You hearing the word soccer and neighbor in the same sentence, might interrupt and mention that your childhood neighbor was Pele, the famous soccer player. And I might be courteous and say, didn't he play for the cosmos of New York? Did you grow up in New York? And you might reply that, no, you grew up in Brazil and the streets of Tres Corsoins with Pele. And I might say, I thought you were from Tennessee. And you might say, not originally, and then go on to outline your genealogy at length. So my initial conversational gambit that I had a funny story about being chased by my neighbor's dog would be totally lost. And only because you had to tell me all about Pele. Learn to listen, I beg of you. Pretend you are a dog like me and listen to other people rather than steal their story.

Amy Shanahan: There's nothing more to say.

Paul Warren: Woof.

Amy Shanahan: That was a perfect ending to a, beautiful conversation.

Paul Warren: Thank you, Laura. Thank you so much.

Amy Shanahan: Mm

Laura Saunders: Thank you for having me.

Paul Warren: Of course. Our sincere pleasure. And, folks, as you know, what we're going to invite our listeners to do is ponder this conversation. And if you have comments or if you have questions or thoughts about what we talked about, please email them in, and we will start our next episode. Or an episode, possibly not the next one, but we'll start an episode drawing from some of the comments or the questions that are submitted. So if you have thoughts, ideas, reflections about this particular topic and our conversation with Laura Saunders, please email in. And who knows, we might use your question or comment on, the broadcast. Thanks so much Laura and Amy. Wonderful to see you.

Amy Shanahan: You too. Thanks so much Laura. I can't wait to hear the listeners answers to your questions. They were fabulous.

Laura Saunders: Thank you.

Thanks for listening to episode 25 of Lions and Tigers and Bears MI be on the lookout for new episodes coming soon.

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