

Episode 26- Exploring Behavior Change and Focus

An interactive podcast focused on the evidence based practice of 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 26, Paul and Amy welcome a guest to discuss exploring behavior change and focus. For episode resources, links to episodes, contact us and other information, please visit the Lions and Tigers & Bears MI website at mtplainsattc.org/podcast.

Paul Warren: Lions and Tigers and Bears MI 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 10 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 today?

Billie Jo Smith: Good.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I love being in the studio.

Paul Warren: This studio keeps getting bigger and bigger with every episode. Well, I am thrilled to be in the studio today because we have our very special guest appearance with someone who's no, first time at the rodeo participant in Lions and Tigers and bears. We are delighted to welcome back Billie.

Amy Shanahan: Jo Smith for the fourth time. Ooh.

Billie Jo Smith: Thank you both. And I. And I appreciate you inviting me to the studio. Every other time we've done this, we've been in the comfort of our own home. It feels serious now that we're in a studio. I want an honor for my fourth episode.

Paul Warren: And the studio is called the Billie Jo Smith Commemorative Studio.

Billie Jo Smith: I can't wait until the unveiling later tonight with the ceremony.

Paul Warren: And folks, there is no studio. We are all still in the comfort of our own homes.

Billie Jo Smith: But in our home, it sounded good.

Paul Warren: it sounds really good. Sounds good. It adds a layer of credibility to our, to our dialogue.

Billie Jo Smith: So after five seasons, I feel like you guys are there that credibility. Five seasons worth. That's studio worthy.

Amy Shanahan: Well, it would be helpful if we knew people were listening.

Paul Warren: Speaking of which, there you go. If you have comments or questions about this particular episode, and this is episode three. And today with our very special guest star, we are going to be focusing on an am I consistent approach exploring behavior change focus. So if you have comments, if you have questions about that after this episode, please email them to us and your question or comment may be shared. in the fourth episode of the podcast, Billie Jo, I'm confident that our listeners, who we hope are out there. I'm confident that our listeners remember you from your prior three appearances. I'm wondering though if you might want to tell anybody who's new to the podcast a little bit about yourself.

Billie Jo Smith: Sure. Thanks, Paul. So I, am a clinician by background. I'm a licensed professional counselor in the state of Pennsylvania. And so to this day I continue to do individual work with student athletes in the, who struggle with substance use and mental health. And so I think MI fits really well into that. I also work, as a program manager with the, our UPMC health plan on behavioral health integration. So working with physical health providers, to incorporate, to add in behavioral health components to the work that they're already doing. I am a member of Mint, and I joined in 2018 in

New Orleans. and as Amy and you have mentioned, this is my fourth time on this podcast. So I think that really, you know, just rises to the surface of all the things I feel like with each episode

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Billie Jo Smith: I need to come up with something new and unique. I, did go to Copenhagen for the tnt. no, I didn't. I went for the forum. I didn't go for the tnt. So that's my new bit of information since the last time I was on the show is I got an opportunity to spend some time with some friends and colleagues in Denmark. Not everyone on this show, just some.

Amy Shanahan: For some who don't know, the TNT is the training of new trainers. And you're not a new trainer.

Billie Jo Smith: I am not. I am not. I have been training before actually becoming a member of the MI network of trainers. I was fortunate to be part of a cohort in Pittsburgh. Amy was part of that. And Paul actually joined us from New York live and in person. just a bunch of MI enthusiasts really. And so we had a passion for MI M and as a result we embarked on trainings and other different things. And so that kind of set the stage for just my journey with motivational interviewing. Eventually, becoming a member of Mint, like I said, in 2018. So it's been a fun ride.

Amy Shanahan: I wonder if it's worth repeating that our time together in the beginning, Paul, when you traveled from New York to Pittsburgh, was really the conversation that I had when we started thinking about what would we name the podcast series. Because when we were practicing together it felt really nerve wracking and scary. And then we

pretty much, you know, locked arms and hung out together and got over those fears. I don't know that they went away from me, but I won't speak for you two. And, been hanging out together ever since.

Paul Warren: Yes. And you know, I have such fond memories of when we met in Pittsburgh. and I believe it was the first time I met both of you. and Christine Higgins was our trainer.

Paul Warren: And I remember we worked her last good nerve during that training.

Amy Shanahan: We did.

Paul Warren: God bless her for surviving us.

Amy Shanahan: Christine, if you're listening, we're sorry. Kind of. At least. We're sorry.

Paul Warren: Yes. and I have to say I, have such a large debt of gratitude to Christine because she really inspired me to want to learn more about motivational interviewing. and I was delighted when I heard she was going to be the trainer in Pittsburgh. And you know, Billie Jo, listening to you introduce yourself, I'm, I'm really.

Billy Joe: You exemplify what is best about MINT motivational interviewing network

And I have a confession to make, which is that I had said to Amy as we were putting this six episodes together, and we were thinking about the topics, and we were thinking

about who to invite on, to best illuminate each of the topics. And Amy told you this before we started recording, but I just want to say it to everybody that I said to Amy when we were talking about Billie Jo, I said, you know, we really could have Billie Jo on for any of these topics because the contribution that she would make would be invaluable. And I, and I wanted to underline that, and I wanted to underline why I believe that. I mean, certainly knowing you, but the reason that I know that to be true Billie Jo about you is because not only are you a top shelf reflective practitioner of motivational interviewing, you're also one of the finest trainers of motivational interviewing. And to me, you exemplify what is best about MI, the motivational interviewing network of trainers. Because not only can you train MI, you can also do it. And it's the way you are when you're with people. So I don't know if I've ever told you that before, but, it seemed like the right moment to spring, that on you.

Billie Jo Smith: Oh, and I totally appreciate that. I'm at a loss for words. If I had an Apple computer, I would make the little heart hand so that the hearts just shot up everywhere. But for our listeners who aren't in the studios, I don't have an Apple product, but Amy just did it. and I think that means so much to me because I do think that in some way it outlines my MI journey. And I know that Amy has heard this in trainings because I want to normalize for people that not everybody gets into motivational interviewing because they're ready to go and they want it, and they're hungry for it. Sometimes we get exposed to it in different ways. And so the very first time I was exposed to it, I went to a training because I was told I needed to go to the training. and it was fine, and it was great, and it made sense. And of course, I was like, yes, I do these things. and it wasn't until a while later that I kind of was just reflecting on my work. I was like, wait, I. I don't think I'm

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Billie Jo Smith: actually doing these things. And so I think because of it, I then dove in as well. I refrain from using the drank the Kool Aid metaphor, but it is really my go to. but I really dove in, and I could see how it benefits the folks that I'm working with, which is what I'm doing in this field to begin with. And so it's hard for me not to get excited and not to get passionate and not to want to continue to have these conversations with you all and anybody else who will listen, because I do think that it's made a big difference in my life, in my life as a practitioner, I hope, in the lives of the folks that I work with. and so just to be able to have really frank conversations amongst friends and colleagues about the impact, you know, that it's had, it's a joy, and I look forward to doing it every season that you have moving forward.

Paul Warren: I'm not sure if I get.

Amy Shanahan: Your communication there, but your direct communication.

Paul Warren: Well, speaking of which, we've asked you here today as a special guest, to play a game. No. To. To share with us your particular questions or ponderings about this particular topic. And before you launch the first one, to sort of put on the table for all of us to think about and talk about together, I just. Amy, I just want to check, is there anything you'd like to add or anything you'd like to say before, or do you have any reaction to what Billie Jo just said, before we go, to Billie Joe's questions?

Amy Shanahan: Well, it relates, and it's been swimming around in my head anyway, that I'm realizing that this feels like coming home to the forest, if you will. Not that I want to live in a forest, but I'd rather live in the studio with you both. And, I want to point out something that's really important to me is that all those years ago, when we first started coming together, it was like 45 years ago. Right.

Paul Warren: It gets longer every time there's an episode.

Amy Shanahan: My fishing story, I was like, I.

Billie Jo Smith: Feel like I need to add. For anybody who doesn't know me, I'm not 45, and so that can't be possible. But continue, Amy. So for the 52 years that we've been working together, I think I could.

Amy Shanahan: Estimate that it was approximately 14 years ago that you two are, my go to mentors that I reach out to that I feel safe and comfortable with. And, and I'm so fortunate that we have had our time together. And I say that with intention for listeners who want to come together with people that, they want to practice with. I mean, we pretty much brown bagged it and joined each other for lunch and continued to find opportunities to work with each other. And it's been invaluable to my, my journey. And I thank you both for your mentorship.

Paul Warren: You're welcome. Yeah. I have an IBM too, but I'm making heart hands too, and I can certainly say ditto to that. Yeah. Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: So let's get to it. I think, we're ready.

Billie Jo Smith: Yeah, I'm ready.

So, um, the structuralist in me, before we jumped on Amy's

So, the structuralist in me, before we jumped on Amy's like, so did you come up with

questions? Not only did I come up with questions, I wrote them down. so.

Amy Shanahan: Holy moly.

Paul Warren: And you have not shared them with us?

Amy Shanahan: No. We have no idea what you're gonna ask.

Billie Jo Smith: I have not. It's a mystery.

Paul Warren: It is a mystery.

Billie Jo Smith: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: Ah, I can't wait.

In training, the four tasks place a lot of emphasis on engagement

Billie Jo Smith: So I think of the questions that are on my paper around this idea of focus. I think that I'd like to start with just kind of laying the foundation a little bit. In training, the four tasks, we place a lot of emphasis on engagement. There's a lot of talk about skills that we can utilize to engage individuals, the importance of it, how it really is the foundation of the work that we're doing and that, it becomes difficult to get, to get to move through the other tasks if we aren't engaged with the individual. Now, from a training perspective, when we get into focus, this one seems to me that it is a much shorter discussion. It almost feels like, okay, do, we understand together what it is we'd

like to talk about or what it is that brings us together? Great, let's check that off and move to the next. So I'm going to start by kind of putting that out from my. With my trainer hat on.

Consistent practitioners need to ensure that focus is accurate throughout relationships

And so my first question is, how do we, as MI Consistent practitioners continue

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to ensure that we're keeping an accurate focus throughout our relationship with an individual and that it's not just this one. And done.

Paul Warren: I love this question. And I love this question. I love this question because you are acknowledging right off the bat that focus is evolutionary. It's something that can evolve in the course of the conversation and that we need to try and resist, as am I, consistent practitioners, we need to resist the idea of grabbing onto something and thinking, okay, that's it. We. There has to be enough breath in the conversation about what we start with for it to potentially refine, clarify, resolve itself into something that is perhaps more accurate, more articulate for what the actual behavioral change focus actually is. And the subtlety of that, I think, is sometimes hard for people to grasp because somehow grabbing onto something right away causes a sense of. And, I'm going to frame it this way, maybe a false security.

Billie Jo Smith: And Paul, one thing that stood out when you were. When you were

coming up with kind of like your response to that, you said this idea of start with. And I think that's such an interesting concept when we talk about focus, because we may start with one particular focus that a person comes in with. somebody may decide that they want their. Interested in changing their drinking, and they're not interested in making changes in any other behaviors that may be associated with that. And so in. In the spirit, in an am I consistent approach, we found our focus. And the longer that we are able to dance with this individual, the focus really has the ability to evolve. As conversations are happening, as change may be occurring in the person's life that, we want to be mindful of, is that always the focus or has the focus potentially changed based on where a person's at today?

Amy Shanahan: I was thinking of a lot of the experience that you have shared before Billie Jo with the athletes that you work with. I think we talked about mandated folks that are coming to us. And what keeps popping up into my mind is this notion that sometimes they're not 100% sure what the focus is. And what you said just really kind of was highlighted for me that being with them and that whole engagement piece and exploring and traveling with them to this task, you know, may happen. They might know right out of the gate where they want to go. They might know where they want to go. They don't know how they want to get there or what. You know, I want to do something with my alcohol use, but that's it. Nothing else. So I'm not sure how I want to get to where I want to go. So how do you navigate even? They don't, they're not clear.

Paul Warren: you prompt me to want to throw out maybe coin, a term which I would call like co evolution, meaning that through the conversation of what may be the initial focus, the, the client, the patient is also refining and clarifying their vision of what that is. Just like we are and hopefully we're, we're collaboratively co evolving and co shaping that focus. And also to your point, Billie Jo, even if we've gone through that process,

priorities change, things, things come up. So I think the benefit of that co collaborated focus, that co evolved focus is that the client is invested and it may lead to something that goes beyond that or something that goes in a slightly different direction. And

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Paul Warren: that's part of the journey of practicing motivational interviewing. And again, I love the way you put it because it's not just a one and done. it's not like okay, drinking. That's the focus. Let's chop chop, chop through, you know, evoking planning and done. It's, it's, there's much more of an organic, shared. And part of the beauty of the engagement, the foundation that's laid in the beginning is that the person has the space, the client has the space to reflect on their focus, reconsider it, reshape it, refine it, clarify it.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, you said start with. It may not end with. Because it evolves.

Over time, as things begin to happen, our focus evolves

And I was thinking of a particular case where a gentleman clearly wanted his children back. There was no ambivalence about that. What he didn't want is the things that he had to do to get them back because he didn't agree with them. So navigating the focus of what he was ambivalent about was those other things, to get him down that path to get his children back. It was a, it was a different, a different shift. We thought the initial thing was get the kids back.

Amy Shanahan: It was the other activities.

Billie Jo Smith: Well, and Amy, as you had mentioned, like immediately, a lot of particular client situations that I've, that I've experienced over the years come to mind. But even if I think about my own motivation and change as a human being. Right. Because that's, we're working with other human beings. is that I may in the moment be motivated to start being more physically active and then once I find some, some success in that change, then I also am evolving, as Paul had mentioned. And now maybe I want to focus on something different. I feel like I'm pretty confident in the change in physical activity. And now what I want to do is be more mindful of my food and my eating choices. And so over time, as things begin to happen, our focus evolves. And I think as practitioners, it's important that we are aware of that so that we're reminded about the importance of checking in. And as you know, as Paul had mentioned, it's not a one and done. I didn't check it off, therefore I don't have to look at it again. But part of that relationship is I want to make sure that I'm consistently staying on the same path as you and not assuming that you went one direction or another, but really taking the time to check in.

Paul Warren: I really appreciate, Billie Jo, that you shifted the focus kind of onto your own sort of behavioral experience, because you really prompted me to flash back to something that, like, occurred for me as a behavior change, probably in the early 90s or late 80s. And, you know, I, know you may find this, like, unbelievable. It was really hard for me to take vacation. Now, I know some people, like, they can take vacations really easily. It was really hard for me to take a vacation. And for lots of reasons. I was afraid. I felt overwhelmed and afraid by planning and all of that. And a friend of mine took a vacation to a place that I really, really wanted to go. And it's funny because he. He wasn't, you know, quote unquote, practicing mi m with me, but he did provide me the space to talk about my ambivalence about planning vacations. And he helped me to work through, like, identifying like, a particular location that I wanted to go to. And I have

to tell you, m. Once m. I built some confidence because I actually was able to plan a vacation, follow through on it, and then reap the. The joy of it. Then my behavior, it was like, now I've gotten really good at going to this one particular place, which I've been to 11 times. now I've learned how to take vacations to other places too. So, yeah, it really took me. Took me back to that because that was a very. It was a very serious. Like, I knew I needed a vacation, but it was very frightening for me on a variety of levels to actually take one.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I, am curious about what the 11 times were. Was. But that's not the

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Amy Shanahan: question I'm going to ask now. But perhaps you'll let us know. The listeners might want to know. Maybe they want to go there. But just even thinking about that it seems like going on vacation or not going on vacation, something that you're ambivalent about, seems on the surface, not that big of a deal. Just decide to go right, and you're sharing something so important that some things that seem eating, for example, let's just, you know, talk about eating and eating less or eating lower, whatever, cut down on your carbs. But people have a relationship with the change that they're considering. And it may seem simple on the surface and it can be very, very deep for people to make decisions.

Paul Warren: M. And to Billie Joe's earlier point, all that depth, all. And I'm going to use, I'm, going to attach another word to it and tell me if you're okay with this, Amy. But the additional word that I would attach to it is all this importance or meaning that it has for the person. That's all, that's all critical in understanding and refining the focus. With.

Paul Warren: It's not just as simple as stopping or cutting down the amount of alcohol you're consuming. Yeah, there's, there's a lot that's around.

Amy Shanahan: That I was in a role play with somebody who was asking me about, being in recovery and don't I want to be in recovery and don't I want to go down this path of recovery? And, and it was a role play and we were practicing some of the skills and, and I questioned, well, what does that mean to you? Because recovery can mean so many different things. So when you, when you really want to go into the depth of what, what does somebody m. What do they mean by this change?

Billie Jo Smith: Yeah. And really trying to understand that again, it, I feel like it always comes back to the spirit and I hate to be like, like that's where I always go to, but that really is where my head takes me and thinking about, are we truly trying to put ourselves in somebody else's shoes, understanding why this focus is important to them. And so if this is a guided journey that we're on together, you know, are we doing our best to really connect and build that, that foundation of a relationship so we understand why this is where we're focusing right now.

Paul Warren: Yeah, I, I feel like, and maybe this is, this is too overt and pull me back, both of you, if you think it is. I feel like the primary message that we're trying to convey here around this is don't get as the worker, don't get too attached or too comfortable with what you've, aha. light bulb moment. What you've, aha. the focus to be more. Put your energy into trying to more deeply understand what the person is saying and allow the person to come to a greater understanding of their own desire M For this particular focus, if it indeed is their focus.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Billie Jo Smith: Now Paul, I'm definitely following, on that because this idea of just getting attached to a focus I think has, has been a trap for me and my professional career and has left me in situations where I get frustrated as the practitioner with my clients or the individuals that I'm working with. Because wait, I thought your focus was to not do this or to do this thing. And so when you return to our next interaction and say, well, I had to return to my drinking or I didn't exercise at all this week, then because I'm so attached to that focus, I'm frustrated. I'm frustrated because you're not doing the things that you said that you wanted to do versus the way that you just put it. Paul is truly trying to have an understanding of where that person is. and continuing to follow that. Maybe the focus changed or shifted in some ways or maybe it just, it continues to remain the focus and instead what we need to talk about is what happened.

Billie Jo Smith: In the interim, but not getting so attached to it that emotionally I'm bringing something that I don't want to the table.

Amy Shanahan: I'm wondering, Billie Jo, how do you overcome that stuckness or I don't, I don't want to put that word, that's not the right word. But where you think

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Amy Shanahan: it's this focus and you said you felt frustrated. If they come in and something has shifted, what do you do as a practitioner to adjust that? You said earlier, check in. This is. Now you're realizing, oh, I'm, I'm over here and this person has shifted. What are some things that have helped you?

Billie Jo Smith: I think one thing that immediately comes to mind is my understanding of acceptance and kind of one getting in touch with that, my level of acceptance for where

a person is, and trying my best to put myself in their shoes again. I think that's one of the reasons that in this topic I talked about my own focus and how I've seen it change. That helps me when sitting with somebody because it helps me humanize, normalize the process in that just because I choose to focus on something today does not mean, mean that my journey to the end goal is going to be perfect because that's not what it's like. And so I think having that level of acceptance and compassion for people and the truly difficult process of making change. I also think it's important to utilize supervision. And I get that not everybody, who may be listening in, has that ability to have supervision. If you do, you're lucky. and this can be an opportunity to utilize that, to be able to have conversations of, hey, I noticed that when I was talking to this individual, I felt disappointed or I felt frustrated. and to be able to work through that with somebody, who can help us process it so that we can go back in and have conversations to just explore that we're still on the same page. M. You know, and we may still be right, because taking steps in a different direction doesn't necessarily mean the focus changed, but it could mean that the focus changed. and so we really need to kind of sit in our relationship with that person with where they're at. And if appropriate, I think sometimes we can very directly ask, hey, I just want to check in and make sure we're still on the same page. and elicit that from them.

Amy Shanahan: Still a check in, check in with yourself and then check in with them.

Paul Warren: And I think the other thing that you can do, and maybe this is one of the things we hope that this particular episode will offer people, is you can just remind yourself, hey, ah, a person can evolve in their understanding of their focus. So it's like the self talk in regard to that. The other piece of it is you can also use a reflection by reflecting back to the person the new focus and seeing what their reaction to that is. Oh, so what you're really thinking about changing right now is this. And then see, you know

what, what that evokes?

Billie Jo Smith: And that really stems from our genuine curiosity. Right? Like because of the fact that I want so badly to walk with you in this journey, I'm going to remain curious as to are we in the same place? And so help me understand what is our path? Are we still on the same path? Or has it shifted so that I can better adjust to walk with you in that journey? That itchy mind? You know, we'll say that this discussion actually tied in with one of the other questions I had written down, which was what if our focus is different from the focus of the individual that we're working with? And I think that that kind of ties in a little bit to this idea of being attached to a particular focus. And I'm wondering one, do you guys see the connection to what we were just talking about and that question? And what do you think about how do we as Practitioners manage when our focus might be different from the focus of the person that we're working with.

Amy Shanahan: They do relate to me. I think they relate. It just depends on when we realize did the person we're working with change their focus and, or have we been on a different step or page than the other person. Did it shift? And I was thinking of a gentleman that I was working with and I'm sure I brought him up before. He's a very good conversation around MI M where his impetus for coming to care was to keep his job.

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Amy Shanahan: And he tried everything on and did stuff to reduce and stop his drinking because that was the mandate for him to stay in his job. And he shifted focus and he realized he didn't want to come to treatment anymore. and it was hard for me, I remember back in the day to move with him, to shift the focus. I mean, not that I had a

choice. His focus was to end care and to go back and see what happens and test the waters out. And I kept grasping at straws to try to get him somewhere that I thought he should go. Like do you want to talk about a relapse plan? I think the good thing that I did back then was ask him permission. But my permission was followed by a bunch of persuasive conversation, questions around what I thought he might want to do to maybe keep what he already worked on to help him, maybe keep his job longer. because of course I knew I had my crystal ball out and I knew that what might happen if he picked up drinking again. So it, it, it was it was a, it was a big pivot for me to like, I felt like I didn't have the tools back then to have a conversation with him other than asking permission and giving him all kinds of advice that he didn't want.

Paul Warren: You know. Billie Jo, I think your follow up question definitely I see a connection between that and what we talked about before. I also think, I think you, I think you could be touching on something and I could be mistaken, but I think you could be touching on something that is a position that I myself as a worker have found myself in and maybe others have found themselves in where I'm employed by a particular organization that has a particular mission and the program has a particular goal. I'm, I'm a clinician and I'm working with this person and I'm getting a sense of what they're, what they might need or what might help them. And then there's the person and what's their behavioral change goal too. So it's almost that juggling act of these three, agendas, if that's the plural. and the thing that I love about motivational interviewing. And again, please write in, call in, you know, send, you know, carrier pigeon if you disagree with this. But the thing that I love about motivational interviewing is that I can hold the organizational focus, I can hold the worker focus. My goal is to understand the client's focus, and I'm hoping at times that there can be a conjunction or an intersection between those. That's not always the case, though. M. And if I'm practicing motivational interviewing, it is to the client benefit. And my benefit is the worker. If I wish to continue

to engage this client to prioritize their focus, that doesn't mean that I may not, in an am I consistent way, check in with them about the thing that I have on my agenda. And I will hopefully respect whatever boundary or decision or clarification they give about that, if indeed that's not an area of interest for them.

Amy Shanahan: It's interesting because I was thinking of the case that I just told the story about to your plug into your points about the institutional expectations or, you know, what the institution expects. And I had to negotiate with this person about what would. What would we tell your employee assistance program? What would we tell your employer about the things that you achieved and that you shifted focus? And how do you do that collaboratively? And. And we did do that, but it did divorce from the expectation of the treatment clinic because the treatment Center would say that he didn't meet all his treatment goals or that he left against medical advice. And how did you. And how we negotiated that with an MI approach was collaborating on what's going to happen. What would happen if your EAP is not satisfied that you didn't complete these

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Amy Shanahan: expectations and help make that decision for the person, not make the decision for the person, help that person make the right decision for themselves.

Billie Jo Smith: And Amy, I like that you use that word negotiate, because I think that that's what these conversations really are about. Especially in these scenarios where the focus of the institution, versus our focus versus the focus of the patient might not always match up right at the start, is how can we negotiate them together again, it's still that collaboration. And when we train MI M, one of the images that Amy and I like to

use when talking about the tasks, really like a set of stairs, for lack of anything better, and the steps continue to run through each other. So as you step up to the next engagement, still runs across the entire bottom of the visualization to demonstrate that even if you move to the next task, it still is a very important part. And so that engagement, while we negotiate the focus and where that is, and ultimately, as Paul mentioned, that our client or our patient is. It's really about their focus. And so, you know, Amy, when you were talking about your situation, I had mentioned I work with student athletes. there's a lot of different, A lot of different entities that have focus. NCAA rules in the United States say, like, they have very clear substance use policies. coaches and trainers have their own focus. When an athlete comes to me, I may have a focus for the individual in terms of what I think might be helpful for them. And then, of course, the client also has their level of focus. And how can we negotiate the reality of the situation? Right. We're not pretending it doesn't exist. Oh, yes, please do whatever you want to do. Don't worry about anything else. We're realistic and that these things do exist. And how in that partnership can we help to find the focus for that individual? and I think another thing that comes to mind is sometimes their focus doesn't always feel good to me because I want to see people out of pain and I want to see people reach, potentials and all kinds of things. And sometimes that, that their focus doesn't necessarily match that. For example, if I'm sticking with the student athlete, ideally it would be probably great if you stopped using substances so you could continue to play, so that maybe you could become a professional athlete someday. And that might not be their focus. That doesn't always feel good. and how to, how to work, work with that, how to negotiate that and still partner with the individual that we're working with.

Paul Warren: I want to thank you for underlining that doesn't always feel good. And Billie Jo, I know you're the special guest and I know you're the one who's asking the questions. And I'm also wondering, though, if you will indulge me, because I'd love to

ask you and Amy this question.

Billie Jo Smith: Oh, well, Amy already asked me one question and put me on the spot. So. Yeah, go for it.

Amy Shanahan: Paul, I forgot to ask you permission.

Paul Warren: So, so, and this is, this is very related to what you just said, and it's related to what we were talking about earlier too. And, and to me, it kind of, it, it, it all sort of boils down to what I would frame as autonomy support and the Question. And I want to use Amy's exam. I think it's. Amy was Amy's example. But let's say we have a client or a patient that they decide, you know, the, the. Their employer is saying, this person has to be abstinent. And the person is like, well, you know, I, I've kind of figured out through our conversations here that abstinence is not what I want and that I'm going to continue to use alcohol in a way that's responsible. And, I'm done with this program. Now, from an MI perspective, again, as Amy said, you try to collaboratively negotiate and explore. You know, okay, if that's the focus, if that's the goal that you want to achieve, what are the ramifications of that? Let's talk through that. And I guess the question that I'm trying to raise here, and it's related to what you said, Billie Jo, like, sometimes we do not like the goal or the choice people

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Paul Warren: make. And yet, even if it does, and I'm going to frame it this way, even if it does have negative consequences for them, is it possible that that's exactly what they need in order to go into wherever they may go with their change goal next? And, and I'm. And I'm raising that question because, you know, I like you. I, I don't want to see a

person continue in pain. It's not my choice, though. It's. It's their choice. And it feels very risky and controversial saying that because, you know, there are certain instances, if they were harmed to themselves or others, we would have to, we would have to take actions to maintain their safety. Short of that, there's a lot of gray area. So I, hope I've made that clear. I know it's complex, but I'm wondering if you have any thoughts or reactions.

Billie Jo Smith: I think that, it does feel controversial. And so I appreciate you bringing that to the surface because I think that, it's not. We don't want to say that we are encouraging someone to engage in a behavior because we're not telling them not to do it. and I think that that autonomy support, I think just with the MI consistency, we recognize, like, we can't get people to do things. and the reason I wanted to respond before Amy is I wanted to take a shot at the quote that she often says but sticks in my mind, is that people feel free to change when they know they're free not to. Amy, did I get it right?

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. And I don't even know whose quote that is. So if it's yours and you're listening, let us know that it's yours, because I stole it and Billie Joe's taken it from me. I just am not taking credit for it. I just loved it when I heard it, and it helped me relieve a lot of pressure that, yeah, yeah, let me do it the way I want to do it.

Billie Jo Smith: I think that if we're talking about finding a focus and supporting autonomy, that we can lose a lot of time by trying, by wrestling with people to get them to try to do the thing that we think they should do, versus being. Taking a more am I consistent approach, engaging in that dance. So, like we talked about at the beginning of this podcast, people can find their focus, and then that can possibly evolve, right? So if we stick with the situation of the individual Amy worked with, maybe in that moment,

he no longer wanted to engage in treatment and wanted to continue drinking. And that doesn't mean that all of the work that he and Amy did together was lost. And there still could have. Could be or could have been, I don't know, some sort of behavior change on the back end that we didn't get to see. And I think that happens more often than we're aware of is that if we've planted the seeds with an individual that when they get to a place where they feel confident that it becomes important for them that they might then find that focus to make that change. But I don't think it's our job to get them to do it as uncomfortable as it can sound and. Or feel.

Amy Shanahan: I think m. My addition to the conversation is around this notion of having an am I consistent approach. So it's honoring their autonomy. Billie Jo, you mentioned the spirit. The autonomy support sits in the spirit of acceptance as well. And I'm thinking of the situation with this gentleman that decided he didn't want to come to treatment anymore. He's the expert of himself. So from the spirit of things I wished I knew then, because I wasn't a practitioner of motivational interviewing, I might have been at the stage of I thought I was doing am I, but honoring. Honoring his autonomy and supporting his decision as an expert at the same time, knowing that I had some things to offer him just in case. So ask, offer, ask. Ask him if he knows about his type of diagnosis or situation. What I did know about this particular gentleman is that we know that it's likely that if he started to drink again, he might head down the path, where he was when he came in for care, and it was. It was pretty, pretty severe. So I. I could ask him

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Amy Shanahan: that. Does he know that? if he wanted to know it and were there some things that he could do to safeguard and still meet his goal of keeping his job? So I

want to wrap up that point by saying that we don't divorce ourselves from our expertise for the sake of honoring and supporting someone's autonomy. We can still dance with them and offer them some information that might be helpful because we care, because we want to help alleviate pain or safeguard them from further pain. What about you, Paul?

Paul Warren: I guess I think it's important to acknowledge that. And this is a bit beyond just focusing. and I think it is important to acknowledge that sometimes when the people we're providing care to, sometimes when they exercise their autonomy, it doesn't always feel good for us as the worker. So that's. That's. And. And that doesn't mean that we still couldn't be using an MI consistent approach. It doesn't mean, as you said, Billie Jo, that we still haven't done good work with them, and that there aren't seeds that are planted that could somehow, help them know their strengths or what. What they can leverage going forward in their lives.

Paul Warren: And to your point, Billie Jo, you know, am I. The practice of MI M is not a way to get people to do what we think is going to make them feel best. It just isn't.

Billie Jo Smith: And that's a tough pill to swallow. Right? It doesn't feel good. And I can't. I can't emphasize that enough because I. I think it was that feeling that caused me to kind of get stuck sometimes because I just wasn't doing a good enough job to get the person to see the light of the change they really wanted to make. When. When we're taking an MI approach, it's not that at all. It's supporting them with their focus, and doing our best to try to understand their world and respecting that autonomy. Right. Sorry, Amy. I didn't mean to cut you off.

Amy Shanahan: No, no, no.

Billie Jo Smith: I'll go send my pigeon while. While you.

Amy Shanahan: I'm glad you both pointed it out that it doesn't erase the work that we did together, because I could tell you that back then, I did feel uncomfortable. I didn't. I didn't know what to do. I was like, oh, I wanted to save this person. And I also questioned myself as a worker. Like, did I do enough? Oh, gosh, what did I do wrong? Or what could I have done differently or whatever was going on in my mind and, and having that notion and that feeling now of not really being responsible for getting him to do this way or that way or succeed or not succeed is not my responsibility one way or the other. I can't take responsibility for his success or his choice to do something else. So it's, that's a hard pill to swallow sometimes.

Paul Warren: And I appreciate the way that you put that, Amy. You know, I think what we can take responsibility for is creating that foundation using an mi consistent approach, putting our efforts into trying to understand it from their perspective and understand their world. And we can take responsibility for not immediately latching on to what may be the most recognizable focus for us as the worker and allowing the process of focus evolution for the person. Because my feeling is, and again take it for what it's worth, my two cents is that if we allow that the focus that actually emerges is going to be possibly one that we may actually be able to practice motivational interviewing with. We may actually be able to evoke change, talk around a sharper, more articulate, more meaningful focus for that individual. And having said that to your earlier point, Billie Jo. And it doesn't mean that when we meet with that person tomorrow or next week that that focus may not have shifted. And again our job is to try and understand their, change their current focus and then is this an appropriate opportunity to

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Paul Warren: practice motivational interviewing?

MI has talked about finding focus in terms of conversations with people

Billie Jo Smith: Now I'm curious. We have talked about finding the focus in terms of conversations with people, right? And that's one thing that we know about MI is that it is a style of conversation, with an individual. But I'm curious that if we're interested in enhancing our ability to find focus. I know that agenda mapping is something that is often talked about and, or trained in this kind of task. And for folks who aren't familiar with agenda mapping, it's this idea of writing a lot of different areas of focus down to kind of guided discussion about what to prioritize. And I may have way oversimplified that. but what I'm, what I am curious about is so aside from agenda mapping, are there any other tools or strategies that the two of you have used to help find focus in a session with the folks that you're working with? Yes, I know, it was a fantastic close ended question. So which I should then follow up with? no, because that would be closed too.

Paul says uninterrupted listening is key to successful change conversations

I'd be like. Would you like to share? Yes, you'd like to share? Paul can you share with us, what it is that you've used and how it works?

Paul Warren: I can. Oh, no, I'm just teasing you.

Billie Jo Smith: I'm falling into the question answer trap. Somebody get me out of here.

Paul Warren: Well, better that than the sand trap, I guess. although I know nothing about golf. it's. It's funny because when you said that, Billie Jo, immediately the thing that popped into my head, and this may seem wildly simplistic, but immediately the thing that popped into my head was uninterrupted listening in terms of truly giving somebody a space without inserting my agenda to kind of comment on, you know, how they're doing, where things are going, and listening very attentively to that within the context that you're in, and then maybe exploring, based on what they said, what sort of emerges from that? Because my sense is, is that many people come into a situation and they feel that the focus has already been predetermined and they're a little, disoriented when the worker doesn't, like, grab right on to that and invites them to sort of talk about, like, well, what's going on? What's important? Where are things right now? And then allowing that to maybe begin to go in a particular direction. And that is all based on the ability to engage and create an uninterrupted space for listening.

Amy Shanahan: I love the. The responding to the. Their change talk, reflecting back their change talk and exploring and choosing which path they'd go down at this time. That's one thing that really stood out to me when, when we worked with Antoine, one of our other guests in a previous episode, he would use that phrase a lot at this time. So. So it's really phrasing questions that supports people's autonomy, hopefully is curious. And it's not my agenda to get them to go somewhere. Some people struggle with, oh, I'm on this evocative, maybe I'm focusing and I'm evoking where they want to go. but really just exploring things like, well, what. What would you do next? Or if you were to prioritize one thing that you would focus on at this time, what would it be? So being able

to sit in that space of ambiguity, not the ambivalence, but the ambiguity that the person's not sure yet. I've worked with folks that had big, insurmountable changes to make, and they couldn't see the path. So helping them choose their path, helping them figure out what one step. I just want to drink more water. I'm not ready to change my diet yet. So just inviting them to explore things in an evocative way.

Billie Jo Smith: And that's really helpful. Hopefully helpful for others. I know. Always helpful for me to find more tools

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Billie Jo Smith: for. In my tool belt, when working with individuals and especially around this topic of being able to find a focus, because I do think it's so important, it really can impact conversations that we're going to have around making change. and if it feels like a dance or if it feels like a.

Amy Shanahan: Wrestling match, it's a good question. Especially how do you navigate that? Inviting them to consider and explore a path that they're not clear about without making it seem like we're pushing or trying to put our agenda on the table. It's, I think the words we use and how we say them and when we say them are really important.

Paul Warren: You know, as we're talking about this, I'm. I'm almost imagining a scenario and, and I. And I think it's important to just throw this out because we're probably, you know, the. Maybe the person sitting across from us, it may not be their first time at the rodeo, meaning that, like, they've worked with other providers before, they know, quote, unquote, the ropes or whatever. So they could. And again that maybe, maybe not, but they could come in like, you know, I am in this substance use treatment Center,

therefore, the context. And I could almost imagine the dialogue kind of going this way. The worker saying, like, you know, hey, thanks for. Thanks for coming in today. What's going on? how are you doing? Whatever. And the client's kind of like, well, you know why I'm here. And I could imagine that a, response to that could be, well, yeah, that's true. You know, I work here. This is the substance use disorder clinic. You're here because you were referred here. And it would be helpful if we could talk about what's important to you, what you're thinking about, what you see as the goal or the focus here. So sometimes we do have to acknowledge that, in your face kind of context. And it doesn't mean that we still can't be open to where the conversation might go. So, Billie Jo, this has been your fourth time on Lions and Tigers and bears. And just as a way of maybe bringing this episode to conclusion, based on what we talked about today, this particular topic, is there anything in particular that. That jumps out to you? And then, you know, maybe Amy and I can answer that question as well.

Billie Jo Smith: I think what really stands out to me about Our discussion today is, being able to recognize within ourselves the feeling that can be created when our focus is different from the person that we're working with and what things we can do as practitioners, to help us kind of resolve that, help us to manage it in a way that we can remain. Am I consistent? And stay with the spirit, have that spirit with us as we continue to engage the individual about their preferred focus. I think that's really the big thing, and that it doesn't always feel good. And I'm not different because I felt that way.

Paul Warren: To me, that's my biggest takeaway too. I did not imagine when we started this conversation that we would actually touch on that point. And I feel that that was a valuable, at least for me. And I hope it is for our listeners as well. I, feel like that was a valuable, reflection that we entertained. That it doesn't always feel that great. And it doesn't mean that we haven't still done good work.

Amy Shanahan: I'm taking away the word evolution. Evolve. It evolves. It's fluid. And I think for us, it goes back to the comfort or discomfort of how well we move through that fluidity with someone. It's really important to check ourselves sometimes because it feels uncomfortable. Yeah.

Paul Warren: Billie Jo, thank you so much for joining us as our special guest star and for your excellent questions. And, we do want to encourage the listeners, if you have any reactions or comments or questions about anything that we talked about about this topic or anything that came up during the conversation, please use the email and write in. And who knows? Your comment or question

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Paul Warren: may appear in the next episode of Lions and Tigers and Bears.

Amy Shanahan: Am. I.

Paul Warren: Take care.

Amy Shanahan: Thanks, Billie Jo. Bye.

Thank you. Thanks for listening to episode 26 of Lions and Tigers and Bears MI Be on the lookout for new episodes coming soon.

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