

Episode 27- Identifying Behavior Change

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

Mark Levin: CASAT Podcast Network.

Lions and Tigers and Bears MI is brought to you through a collaboration between the Mountain Plains ATTC and NFARtec In episode 27, Paul and Amy welcome a guest to discuss identifying behavior change for episode resources, links to episodes, contact us, and other information, please visit the Lions and Tigers and Bears MI website at mtplainsattc.org/podcast.

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: 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 MIHD. Hey, Paul.

Paul Warren: Hello, Amy. How are you today?

Amy Shanahan: Happy to be back in the studio with you.

Paul Warren: Thank you. You know, I love it when you say that, because you're painting this picture of that. We have these, this magnificent studio that we're visiting and we're sitting and actually we're broadcasting from our offices, which is great.

Amy Shanahan: I do imagine myself in one of those big gaming chairs. They look really comfy.

Paul Warren: Well, yes, I would go for a comfy chair about now.

Mark Levin is a clinical director for an agency in Pennsylvania

Amy Shanahan: Well, you know, I always get excited, too, because we have a special guest.

Paul Warren: A very special guest.

Amy Shanahan: Well, and I'm going to have the pleasure to say hello to Mark Levin, who I have worked alongside in Pennsylvania for a wee bit of time. But, we keep crossing paths and I'm grateful for that. And I'm going to pass the mic over to mark to say hello to the folks to tell them more about.

Mark Levin: Yeah, well, hello, and thanks for having me. as my old friend Avery would say, I'm tickled pink to be here. It's this. It's a great podcast and I enjoy listening to it. yeah, again, Mark Levin. And, currently I'm a clinical director for an agency in Pennsylvania called Presley Ridge. Well, actually, we're in six states. I work out of Pennsylvania. I seven now. We just got into Texas. and, I'm also in school. I attend a small, university called Indiana University of Pennsylvania. We have this, odd naming convention in PA where we name after the town, University of Pennsylvania. So we have both an Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a California university of Pennsylvania, which throws confusion people's way. And I'm part of their counselor education and supervision department, which has been really great, and member of Mint for the last few years. I did my tnt over the pandemic, so it was one of the, the virtual teams. but it was still a wonderful experience and it's been a wonderful to be a part of mint.

Paul Warren: Mark, could I ask you two quick follow up questions?

Mark Levin: Sure.

Paul Warren: Amy mentioned that she's known you for a wee bit of time and I'm wondering what that means. How long have you and Amy actually known each other?

Mark Levin: Well, I'll try to keep this story short, but essentially what happened was I became, I became part of a, ah, learning collaborative doing esper screening, brief intervention, referral to treatment with a good friend of both Amy and ours, Shannon Myers. And she at the completion of this year long cohort said, hey, we're starting another cohort, in NMI, it's going to be year long advanced mi cohort. If you want to be a part of it, we'd be glad to have you. And so of course I took the opportunity and it just

so happened that Amy and Billie Jo Smith, who you've had on your show a couple times, were leading that cohort and I met several great friends in that cohort and we've stuck together. Amy has done some consultation for us and we generally refer back to her and Billie Jo. We've got questions about our implementation of MI. We had a good time in Chicago together, so I like to keep in contact. Plus we are all part of the Mint plus committee now, which is for those who don't know, devoted to bringing in new members of Mint, but also hooking those folks up with folks they could mentor with so that they can have an easy transition into our wonderful organization.

Paul Warren: And my second brief question is, well,

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Paul Warren: it's more just a confirmation, which is that you said that this is a great podcast and I just want to make sure that you let our listeners know that Amy and I neither paid you or influenced you to give that endorsement.

Mark Levin: No, it's interesting because we have a couple programs where MI is our identified model. Cause their short term programs are really focused on behavior change and this is one of their favorites. They like their content, we like the focus on practice and of course we like you both too. So thank you, Marcia.

Mark is a perfect guest for this episode discussing the practice of MI

Amy Shanahan: Well, you know, speaking of which, that's why you're such a perfect guest for this episode when we talk about the practice of MI. And I know Paul's going to

share a little bit about it, but I wanted to put a plug in for you and Alex, who is also a member of Mint, and you have done a fabulous job. If anybody ever wanted to know how an organization can work well together to bring teams together to implement the practice of mi, the approach of mi, mark's your guy. Well, I didn't know that I was going to do a commercial for you, Mark, so you'll just have to send.

Paul Warren: Him a bill for that. Amy.

Mark Levin: It'S been an interesting journey as we're learning, as we're going, but I think we're getting to a place where we're really trying to transition as much knowledge as we can to the supervisory level and make sure that's where Mi will live and grow. And we've gotten some really good help from case Western Reserve University's Center for evidence based Studies. That's a mouthful. they really have added in around the implementation of Mi has been really nice. So thanks.

Paul Warren: You know, both of you, in the brief, time that we've been together already have mentioned mint several times, which is the motivational interviewing network of trainers. And, you know, this podcast is for everyone and anyone who is interested in the practice of motivational interviewing. And I wanted to mention that because, and this is not a commercial for Mint. I wanted to mention it because one of the many benefits of being a Mint member, if that's possible, is that you get to work with wonderful people from across the country and frankly, from across the globe. and again, this is not meant to be a commercial for Mint. And helpful, maybe, if people are interested in finding a way to further support their practice of motivational interviewing, a way to have a learning community. And I can also say, as a member of Mint myself, one of the wonderful things that mint is considering and doing is creating educational opportunities that are for folks who are not necessarily members of mint. So mint is

really aware of the fact that there's a need for people who, for whatever reason, don't want to or aren't able to become members of Mint and still want training, support and information about motivational interviewing.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I just had an email exchange with other members of our committee that Mark mentioned. So there's smaller committees within the mint. I don't want to call them small. They might not be small. They're mighty and small. we had a request from someone from Hungary who was looking for some help, some coaching and some support and connecting with other practitioners in their country. So just a plug about what we do, not the institution itself. but we all want to serve folks who are interested in bettering their practice of motivational interviewing. And that's why we're here today to talk about practice of mi.

Paul Warren: Yes, and Mark, thanks for mentioning that, because this series in particular, is really intended to very specifically move into the fine details of the practice and the refinement of the practice of motivational interviewing. So to contextualize for everybody, before we go to our special twist, unique secret feature that we have in this podcast series, this is episode four of this six episode series, and the title of this episode is practice of identified behavior change. And you may recall from the earlier episodes we talked about the distinction between an am I consistent? Approach, a way of being that's kind of outlined and identified by mi spirit,

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Paul Warren: partnership, acceptance, compassion and empowerment, and the practice of motivational interviewing. And this episode is truly intended to be moving into the practice of motivational interviewing, which, of course, means, if we are being

mi consistent, that we are also engaging with the person, being with the person in an am I consistent way. So to that end, now that that hopefully, orientation is established, Mark, we are thrilled and also tickled pink that you're here, and this is your moment to reveal to Amy and I the secret yet to be disclosed questions that we, as a learning community will ponder that are related to this particular topic. So, Mark, there is no drum roll, but the floor is yours.

Mark Levin: Well, it seems like there was a lot of build up to that, though this, like, question doesn't come across as a sinker, so. But that being said, I'm a bit of a pragmatist when it comes to opportunities. And so, knowing that I had the opportunity to pick both of your brains and to talk about this, one of the problems we run into with the folks that I work with and do a lot of consultation with is that we're often handed to change behavior, meaning that we have the mandated client. Right. The person who comes in because they're true from school, they, have bad parenting skills. And we're told by the county or some other agency that this is what we'd like to see change in this family or this home or this person, and that's not necessarily where the person sees themselves at. And we also have this problem of having short periods of time to work in. So what do you and I know both of you have had experience in this, and so I just want to, you know, hear what your thoughts are about operating with this difference in opinion about change behavior.

Paul Warren: M before I, you know, continue to ponder this, there's something I just want to comment on Mark. I want to just say from my perspective, the question is definitely not a stinker. And let me. And let me also say that I think this is. I think you have perhaps a universal question that many people who want to actually practice motivational interviewing have as a conundrum of, like, I really want to do this, but this is the setting, the scenario that I'm in, and how do I do it in this scenario? So I just want

to thank you for the question and confirm wholeheartedly it is a very relevant and appropriate question. And I'm going to stop talking now because I think Amy's on the edge of saying something maybe not. and of course, Mark, please share your six 7825 cents about this as well. So whatever your thoughts are about it, too.

Amy Shanahan: But no, I was just going to piggyback and say, this is the \$64,000 question. If Billie Jo were here, she would probably roll her eyes about, I'm, dating myself again by using that phrase. Yes, it was a game show back in the day, and I don't think I was old enough to watch it, but my mother talked about it a lot.

Paul Warren: Anyway, m I'm putting this in air quotes, folks. My mother talked about it a lot.

Amy Shanahan: I was going to say, mark, I hope you come with your answers as well, because there's a lot that we could talk about with regard to how you navigate that conversation, in a collaborative way.

Mark Levin: I certainly have my thoughts, and I'll be glad to join in.

How do you transition into motivational interviewing when the behavioral change goal is externally imposed

Paul Warren: Fantastic.

Amy Shanahan: I mean, my first thought is, and I've been recently coaching a lot of folks that work with child and youth services in their state, and they struggle with this a

lot. and they don't know what the focus is sometimes. And yet the person typically seems to want their kids back, is one focus. And then the court has this focus of the person has to do a laundry list of things, not even just one thing. So it's nuanced with a lot of expectations. And what I've noticed that yields a lot of engagement in their conversations when I'm listening to their work, is when they ask out of the gate of what do you think is the reason why you're here? And what would you like to do about the situation to help navigate the beginning conversations of where are we going together?

Paul Warren: Yeah. Amy, I love the fact that you said

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Paul Warren: that, because my preliminary response to Mark's excellent question, and I think he has other questions, too. two, in fact. but my immediate response to Mark's question was first, to frame it and to frame it in the sense of Mark, if I'm really understanding your question, what you're really talking about is how does one transition into the practice of motivational interviewing when the behavioral change goal is externally imposed?

Mark Levin: Absolutely.

Paul Warren: And I love what Amy said because I was thinking of two words, three words in response to that question. One is priority. The second word is timing. And I can't remember the third word right now, but maybe it'll come back to me. But priority and timing, what that means to me is exactly what Amy just suggested. It's giving priority. I thought of the third word and hopefully I'll hold onto it, but it's giving priority to where the person is at in the moment of that conversation, which is focusing on the

engagement in the rapport building, but prioritizing them. Timing for me about this is, yes, as the worker, we have the externally opposed imposed behavioral change goal, and we're intentional about how and when we fold that external imposition into the conversation. And this is the third word. The third word is conjunction. And what I mean by that is sometimes by prioritizing where they are and where they want to go and being intentional about the timing, the introduction of the imposed change goal, you can actually have an intersection between their identified behavioral change goal and the imposed behavioral change goal. So the intersection can come out of prioritizing and timing. That's my initial, off the cuff response to such a great question and an important question.

Mark Levin: And, ah, I think that what happens a lot with our folks I see, is that because they had this imposed, goal, externally driven, they end up truncating the engagement in a lot of ways. So one of the things I tell my folks to worry about is to really authentically be present for that person and listen to them so that they identify you as a person that's going to hear what they have to say, and somewhere in that conversation is going to be something that emerges that leads you to a goal that's going to just as you said, Paul, conjoin those things together that are external and internal and then to work that and go in that direction.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And Mark, I really appreciate you focusing on the engagement like Amy did as well, because, again, hopefully we've made this point clear in our prior episodes that this is why an, am I consistent approach is so critical. Because without that engagement, a, you're probably not going to be having a conversation, and b, you're not going to have the opportunity to experience or guide toward that conjunction where these things can actually come together.

Amy Shanahan: You prompted me to want, to share something around, Oh, gosh. Train of thought. There we go. Paul. It's in the water. Just left me as soon as it showed up. They can edit this gap out about, managing when someone comes to us. So I like to get into the practical pieces when someone comes to us and says, hey, my doctor sent me here, or probation sent me here, or child and youth services sent me here. As workers, as helpers, m it makes sense that we make assumptions about what's going to happen next, especially depending on what our types of service we're providing. Well, you came to an addiction treatment clinic, so therefore, I would assume you're going to do something about your use. And what I was prompted to bring into the conversation is something that has helped me and I've shared it with others. When Bill Miller says, you know, put that beginner's hat on and be curious. So to me, I put that hat on and move my assuming hat off and

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Amy Shanahan: put it aside for a while, sorting hats. If you're a. If you're a Harry Potter fan, m. move one hat aside and put that beginner's hat on and be curious about them for a while. So I was just thinking of something practical in the moment.

Mark Levin: You know, we often have, we will spend time with folks that are working in the other end of the system. So the county worker, and one of the other pieces of advice that I give folks when they want it, or I get permission to give it, is that we have to educate those folks a little bit about what we're doing. And the good news is that Mi is becoming more and more, the awareness of mi has gone up quite a bit. And we're seeing, especially at the county level, folks, they buy the notion that this is something that'd be effective, but we often have to wait a little bit before we get to the. Where the rubber hits the road part of things.

Paul Warren: M. You know, I'm so glad you put it that way, because Amy was alluding to that, too. Mark. And this is where I think we also have to talk about timing. And I don't mean the timing of when we introduce or touch on the external behavioral change goal. What I mean by timing is that sometimes I think it can be, it can feel necessary to move away from the engagement at the beginning because you're afraid the clock is ticking and you need to get to the issue, right away. And what I would throw up for people to consider is if you actually invest the time in the, you know, so how are you doing, and what are your thoughts about why you're here today and what your goal is that you want to achieve? I would throw out for consideration, and again, if any of our listeners disagree with this, or Mark or Amy, if you disagree with this, please say so. But I would throw out for consideration that if you invest in that, you're actually going to be able to maximize the impact of maybe the brief amount of time you have with this person, because you're going to build engagement, you're going to build rapport, and you may actually get to practice mi around, an attainable or at least a truly client centered behavioral change goal.

Mark Levin: I have another associate that just finished his dissertation. and his whole dissertation was about professional quality of life for people who practice mi. And what he found, it was qualitative study. And what he found is, yes, people who are practitioners of mi m generally do better in professional quality of life because they understand this notion. It's not their change behavior that they're what they're working on, it's somebody else's. And that lack of ownership is a way of disengaging your own sort of emotional charge that goes with it. And to your point, Paul, I think that's. I've often said that is that we're better off being engaged with somebody, somebody that we have a relationship with for when they are ready to change, then overshooting that person, damaging that relationship in some way, and then not being around when they do make the choice to change. So it's absolutely about maximizing that potential point

where something's going to happen.

Amy Shanahan: M m. You make a good point about readiness to change when we're at this point of identifying and exploring with someone what they might want to do or what they're thinking of doing. They're just thinking about it. Especially to your question, if someone's mandated that ambivalence probably is there. I would imagine, not always. Maybe someone's willing to make the change to do whatever they got to do. but it's just such an important piece to be mindful of. When we push one way or the other too fast, we not only. We just disengage, and then our agenda shows up on the table because it's hard to navigate that conversation after that.

Paul Warren: Yeah. You know, this may seem elementary, to say, but I'll say it, which is that it's really also refreshing and important to be reminded that m mi is not a way to make somebody change. And it's about maximizing the potential. And I don't mean the person's potential, I mean the potential for this person. And Amy, you use the word considering, maximizing this person's consideration of the change, if indeed they are considering at any degree whatsoever. So I think it can't be repeated enough because of the misconceptions about

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Paul Warren: motivational interviewing, that Mi is not a method to get people to change. It is a way to work with what's there and to maximize the impact of their consideration, which could then lead to the identification of their own intrinsic motivations and the resolution to enough of a degree of their ambivalence around that change.

Mark Levin: It's interesting you say that, Paul. I was listening to another discussion

about motivational interviewing and one of the questions that came up was with people who have ill intent, especially politically, using motivational interviewing to sort of persuade somebody to their side and those representatives, would we be concerned about that? And the answer essentially was anybody who's truly practicing mi would never do anything like that. That's not what it is. and so that's why the foundational spirit of motivational interviewing is so important is, this idea that it's a skill, but it's also a heart set too, that you're at a place with somebody, that you're willing to accept that person and what they're willing to do for change.

Mark Levin: You know what?

Amy Shanahan: I'm curious too. If I, if you, Mark or Paul of experience when you're working with practitioners, that they're not always aware of their intention and you use the word intention and certainly if there was ill intent, well, we wouldn't do that in motivational interviewing. And when I've been coaching people and practicing myself, I was using the term get someone to do something before. My mentor, gave me feedback, which was quite impactful. And I didn't realize that the heart and the head wasn't connecting for a while and I wasn't aware of it. And so I was wondering too, if you hear from other folks that they think their intention is good, their intention is that I'm not trying to get you to do anything. And sometimes I ask myself that question when I'm talking with people. Especially when I'm a trainer of mi, I have a hard time with it because I want to get people to drink the Kool Aid because I really believe in something. So. And I think that our workers, our helpers really feel that same passion for wanting to help others. So I don't know what are your thoughts about it? I could see someone's jumping off their chair in their office. Go ahead, Paul.

Paul Warren: You mean in the studio?

Amy Shanahan: In the studio, yeah.

Paul Warren: Well, you know, I want to say, Amy, that I think you've kind of hit the nail on the head. And it's interesting because it's so complex and so kind of wonderful. And this is why Mi is so on the surface, straightforward and simple and actually is far more complex and nuanced, is that a lot of people are very aware of their intention, I think. And their intention is they want to help because they care. And they think that the most effective way to care and to help is to tell the person what to do or is to give the person the answer they think the person needs. So their heart is actually in it. And, I really am passionate about this idea because there's a video that I've probably seen 903 times that I use in my training, and I'm not counting, but I'm guessing about 903 times. And it's called the ineffective dentist. And one of the questions that I ask participants after I show them this video is, does the dentist care? And many of them will have like a knee jerk response and say, no, she does not. And many of them will also say she actually cares very deeply. Her caring is getting in the way of her ability to be effective and actually practice motivational interviewing, which is not trying to get the patient to do something, trying to understand where the patient is coming from and what the patient may want to change.

Mark Levin: Yeah, Dan, I'll add that I use the same video. I think it's a good set of videos for sure. and speak of intentionality is the other side of this that I see quite a bit. And wait, back to your point, not to get too confused here. I think that speaks to the importance of seeing work product, hearing somebody actually working with a client. Amy, your point too? Sometimes we just don't see what we're doing. And if we have an effective supervisor can point out that, like, hey, I'm, you know, you did this and I want to know what you were thinking at that point in time to sort that out with you together. I think

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Mark Levin: that's how you build intentionality. And the other side of this that we see sometimes with folks is that there isn't really a change goal that's identified. And so they just find themselves in a room with somebody using open-headed questions, affirmations, reflections, and summary, and they're not really going anywhere because they haven't decided what that's going to be. So I always talk to folks about two questions around this topic: what is the change topic and who decided that that is the change goal? and if we can figure out those two things, we can understand why maybe we're treading a little bit as if we decided it was a change goal and maybe we just haven't really identified it. Or the change goal is so broad that it's almost like you really need to get into a little more detail or increments to get to that thing that you're working towards.

Amy Shanahan: Right. The big goal might be, I want to get off of probation, but there's so many other things I have to do and I'm ambivalent about some of them and not others. Right. So there's a laundry list of things to communicate and kind of sort out.

Paul Warren: And it also speaks to the fact that a behavioral change goal does need to be specific, and it does need to be client-centered, because motivational interviewing only works if it's the person's intrinsic, and that doesn't mean that they can't be external motivators, but the person's intrinsic motivations of why they're considering this change, not why we think they should, not why the court thinks they should, not why their doctor thinks they should, but what their considerations are. And, you know, their considerations may seem counterintuitive to us or may seem unfathomable to us, and it doesn't mean that they're still not their motivations, and it's their motivations that are actually going to move them toward commitment, language, or possibly planning.

Amy Shanahan: I was listening to. Yeah, I was. Go ahead. Go ahead, Paul.

Paul Warren: No, no, go ahead, Amy.

Amy Shanahan: Well, I was just listening to, a worker talk with a dad who, out of the gate, seemed pretty clear of what he didn't want to do, that he thought it was a waste of time for him to have to do certain things in order to have custody of his children. And the conversation didn't last 15 minutes. And by the end of this very artful conversation, guiding this person and validating them and affirming their autonomy, by the end of the conversation, he said, well, you know, I have to do what I have to do. I'll do anything to get my kids back. Just because I think it's ridiculous doesn't mean I'm not going to do it. So that was really powerful to witness and hear. when people feel free to choose, when they know they're free not to. How wonderful this worker navigated this conversation with this gentleman who at the end of less than 15 minutes decided he was going to do what he needed to do.

Paul Warren: And let's not let the opportunity slip away to underline the distinction between that gentleman saying that himself.

Paul Warren: And the worker telling him that.

Amy Shanahan: Exactly.

Paul Warren: Because there's a world of difference between those two things. and I can hear the worker saying, but hey, you've got to do these things in order to get your kids back. That's not going to motivate this guy. But if he says it and it's authentic and it's what he's come to out of the conversation. Wow.

Mark Levin: Yeah. And one of the other things I really emphasize with the folks that I work with is that most people who come to you have probably been to a bunch of other people before you and have probably had some pretty awful experiences with those folks. And so we have this opportunity to be something different. And it's almost like you've had a world of bad cops out there and you get to step in and be the good cop. Not that we're cops, but the point being is that if you can contrast your approach as one that's going to be engagement, that you're going to meet that person with acceptance, there's an opportunity there and you can sit with that for a little while. That change bubbles to the surface because you are that person that they're comfortable with doing this with.

Mark: Having a good change goal is important. Having intentionality is important

Paul Warren: I was going to ask earlier, Mark, if you had any thoughts or reflections on our dialogue about your question and if you thought that we were ready maybe to proceed to your next question.

Mark Levin: No, I think you really hit some high points. I think that this idea that we're all agreeing on

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Mark Levin: the fact that we need to understand that, the client's going to come up with a change goal and if it doesn't quite meet up with something that we're being presented with, there's going to be an opportunity for that to join together. If we can be patient and

listen to that person and really, help them to tie together how their change can work with the change that's being imposed on them. And I guess it's that art of being patient sometimes with folks and really listening, without, imposing what you have in your brain on you, taking off that assumption hat. And then the other part of it being, intentionality is so important. Having a good change goal is important. If we don't have one, then we have to figure out what that is and make sure that it's detailed enough that it's measurable and achievable and it might be an increment to that bigger thing that we're doing.

Sometimes there isn't an identified behavioral change goal for a client during a conversation

Paul Warren: M m I want to throw this out, a reflection, kind of a question for you and Amy, Mark, before we move to your next question, based on something that you just said, and I just want to see what your thoughts are about this, which is that let's say there's a conversation between a worker and a client patient, and during the course of that conversation there's an am I consistent? Approach. The client, the patient builds rapport, and yet by the conclusion of that conversation, there's no identified behavioral change goal. So there has actually been no opportunity to practice motivational interviewing because there's no identified behavioral change goal. Therefore they're not invoking change. Talk about that. Or exploring and resolving the ambivalence around that. Is it fair, and I'm really interested in your reactions to this. Is it fair to say even in the absence of the identified behavioral change goal, that conversation can still be considered successful because there was engagement and there was rapport and there's the possibility of a future conversation where an identified behavioral change goal can rise to the surface. And the reason I wanted to ask you both to comment on

this is because I don't want to leave people with the impression that if a behavioral change goal isn't present or if they haven't collaboratively unearthed one, it means the conversation was a failure. Because I have had people say that to me like, well, there wasn't any identified behavioral change goal. ah. And so obviously I didn't do it right and I just wanted to throw that out for both of your reactions, because sometimes there isn't an identified behavioral change goal for that person at that moment.

Mark Levin: I you know, there's, there's two ways of this, maybe more, but in my brain right now, the first one is, yeah, I mean, you gotta got to engage before you can take the next step and start focusing. Right. So sometimes that takes a little bit longer and I've certainly heard stories about it being months of being rejected and then finally getting in with somebody and then I'm really wanting to work at taking time. That, that's one type of, there's some sort of something that's holding this client back, from making the choice to make a change. And so you have to stay with them in some way. The other side of this though is there are some folks that a session for them is successful if they have a good conversation with somebody, but they might not move the needle. And I've seen this happen sometimes where that goes on far too long or you're too far into the work to take a day off and just have a conversation. I think that the difference between MI and clients are in therapy is this idea of directionality that we are guiding towards something. I don't want to lose sight of that, certainly. I think that after having one conversation, we haven't quite fleshed out where we're going yet. That just might mean we need a little more time to engage.

Amy Shanahan: My thoughts exactly. if someone doesn't have a clear, identified goal, maybe we're just having an MI approach or we are doing person centered counseling where we're following wherever the person wants to go until perhaps they choose a particular focus or a goal that they're ambivalent about making a change.

Paul Warren: Thanks for entertaining that.

One of the things that I encourage folks to do in engagement is a value sort

Amy Shanahan: Good question.

Mark Levin: Yeah, it was a great question because it comes up quite a bit, and with the folks I'm at is that you have these folks that are very skillful and engaging, but not necessarily sometimes taking that engagement into action. and it's about

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Mark Levin: having a clever ear, not clever. Close year for change talk. And sometimes it's very nuanced and subtle, but doing things that help to bring that to the surface. One of the things that I encourage folks to do in the, in their beginning of, engagement is a value sort, because oftentimes in those strengths that people identify inside themselves, there's opportunity for affirmation. And typically, after somebody hears this good thing about them, especially if you can make it a complex affirmation, it often leads to a change talk or examples of where they've used that skill in the past to make something happen that you can build on later on. And so it's a very practical way to get to know somebody, too. But there's a tattoo for this idea that you find out what something is important to somebody, there's their skills and strengths, and then you have this opportunity to mine for some change talk.

Amy Shanahan: It's interesting, mark, because, you took the change talk right out of my

mouth around change talk. You know that, sometimes the change talk is so subtle, we're not really trained yet enough, or we're not hearing it, or maybe our intention is that we're just engaging. Whatever reason, there could be lots of reasons why we're not hearing it. And what's interesting is the example that I just shared earlier about the gentleman that in a short period of time made, a decision to do something that he didn't want to do. The worker didn't do a values card sort. At the same time, they reflected back their values. They reflected back what was important to this guy. And I thought that that was. I don't know if it was intentional. It seemed intentional. And it moved. It moved the conversation, because of the attention on the strengths and the positives and not the problem and how to find the solution to that problem, which I think many of us as helpers are so skilled and trained to do. And you mentioned way earlier around how that can tire us out. Because we have this agenda and we feel like we can move people to this change goal that we think they should do. And it's actually so relieving and less stressful to just pay attention to what they have and honor that up.

Paul Warren: And more effective in the long run.

Mark Levin: Yeah. And you point something out, Amy, is that the value sort sometimes as a way to get to those things. But if you're skillful enough to really pull out. That's why I liked your episode on complex affirmations. It's something I'm very interested in. I'm not sure which training this was in. but Doctor Rolnick was talking about, ah, an affirmation he gave to a client. It was just a simple statement, you're a very dignified mandehead and very short. But boy, does that get right to something about this person. thats a value for that person and can really evoke the strong sense of, I can do something about this because of the person that I am. Somebody can do that in session and find they really dig below the surface and say, when this person is saying this, this means they have this strength, this value, this characteristic thats valuable for

this work.

Paul Warren: And you know, Mark, that makes me want to repeat a phrase that you said earlier, which is that, that's that ability to have close listening. Because unless you're listening closely with your eyes, ears, heart and gut, and your goal is to really understand this person, you're never going to be able to reflect that, and affirm a that strength that the example that you gave about that you're a dignified person because it requires close listening to actually see somebody for who they are.

Mark Levin: Well, I really enjoyed that part of the discussion. I think that, the folks that are going to be listening to this, we're going to get a lot out of that. And I'm certainly nothing, we could probably talk about just that question, the \$64,000 question for now unto eternity, because it's one that we've certainly hashed over a lot. I do have some others if you want to hear them.

Amy Shanahan: Excellent. Well, you get kudos for honoring my, ancient metaphor analogy.

Mark Levin: I was aware of the reference. I made a reference the other day to Max hedrum because, one of my. There is another child of the eighties. his computer screen was glitching, and so his head on Zoom was moving back and forth. And that was my immediate thought. It's like, oh, you look like Max headroom. That's so cool.

Paul Warren: And for those of you who don't know who Max headroom is, please feel free to write in or just google it.

Mark Levin: What are you talking about? Yeah, so my follow up is really related to the

first one, which is. So sometimes we get a change goal that's initiated by somebody from the outside. but then we're sitting with a client, and we know where we're

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Mark Levin: supposed to go. So we have an idea of what's causing the problem in this person's life, and maybe we can identify it. And I understand they got to make their own change goal. But sometimes I hear client change goals that might be inappropriate for some reason. For example, it might lead to another dangerous behavior. So they might be substituting one dangerous behavior for another. a pretty classic one we hear a lot of in the world of substance use is somebody might say, instead of using a substance, I'm going to choose to use this substance. that might be considered less harmful, but really it's just a replacement for a behavior they're already doing. or it might be that instead of stopping something altogether, they're going to choose an approach where it's really just the same behavior in a different way. Essentially, we can see that the outcome of that change behavior is something that's inappropriate or unsafe. and how do we honor somebody's autonomy at the same time, understanding that this is really not something that we can agree on as a good change plan.

Amy Shanahan: Was there a sequel? \$65,000 question.

Paul Warren: What would the equivalent in today's financial market actually be? The \$83.3 million question. I don't know.

Mark Levin: Gotta be up there at this point.

Paul Warren: Yeah, it would have to definitely be up there. You know, Mark, as you said

that, it's so funny, because, again, this is the workers, quote, unquote, assessment or judgment coming into the picture again, and which is very relevant. The worker's there. You know, the worker understands this scenario, understands it. And I have to tell you, and, you know, both of you may say, like, how naive you are, Paul, but when you were describing the scenario that you did where the person, and I'm going to use this metaphor, and many people may know this one, the person is switching seats on the Titanic. The ship goes down no matter where you're sitting. So if the worker is sitting across from that person, and that's the fear that's coming up for them. I thought of two things as you were introducing this idea. One of them is that, how wonderful for the worker to actually know that, to know that, like, this is what's going on inside of me. I'm really concerned that this person is now switching to another substance which could equally do harms or potentially even be more harmful. So I can appreciate that the worker is having possibly those feelings and thoughts. And as you said, what you said, and here's where you may think I'm naive. I said, in my mind, I immediately went to an affirmation which was, as we're talking about this, you're really trying to figure out a way to move forward that's going to be best for you. You're putting energy into thinking about solutions or some sort of change that actually is going to be best for you. And I might affirm that and then feel if there was a need to share information or to share feedback or perspective, to then possibly ask permission using the EPE or ask tell, ask setting, to offer information and then engage in further dialogue, as opposed to five alarm fire. I need to jump in and rescue, fix and solve in this exact moment. So it's kind of like allowing yourself to have a delayed reaction and find the strength in what they are attempting, even if it is, quote unquote, switching seats on the Titanic.

Amy Shanahan: Well, what a big part of the spirit of accepting the person's own, decisions about how they're going to make this change. And it is scary to see it if you think it's going to put them in harm's way. Paul, your answer has a lot baked into it, is

around their autonomy. I was thinking about acceptance, and being curious. So if that's their chosen strategy or goal, to switch to another substance, or I do something less harmful. I'm thinking of the phrase that in substance use disorder, people cringe about is harm reduction, or which I heard a physician say, health optimization. Sometimes folks choose to do one thing and it's

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Amy Shanahan: not moving anything, or they move chairs on the Titanic. And we could see the shipping, the ship is still sinking. it's still their choice, and it can be scary for us. And you mentioned, and I know you're passionate about supervision how do we navigate our feelings around watching the ship sink if we think it is and we don't know, we don't have a crystal ball. If we honor someone's autonomy, and I've seen it happen, they walk out the door and walk back in later, perhaps, and make a different choice because they've seen it themselves or they've experienced it, that, oh, this wasn't, a good choice to make. So I think autonomy and acceptance comes into play really big in this one. I don't know, Mark, I'm curious what your answer to your \$65,000 question is.

Mark Levin: I'm in agreement with both of you for sure. And, to Paul's point, I guess it's the, being skillful about what you're affirming is going to be important. Right. The fact that they're willing to move in some way, is the part that I affirm. I might not affirm that choice. Right. And say that this is something you, this is, this is going to be really effective for you. It's But I hope my memory is right. But I was in a training once with Doctor Terry Moyers and she talked about this idea of confronting with permission. So it was, it was, it was until, you hear those two words together and you're kind of like, oh, wait a second, that's, that's not mi, in here hearing at all. But the way she explained it was that if she hears something that somebody is going to choose to do, and I think the

example she was referencing was somebody who was trying to moderate their drinking and it just wasn't working. and maybe we need to move to a different type of approach. This is to ask permission to kind of like what you're saying, Paul, to provide some information, maybe not in a confrontational way, but persuading with permission and saying this isn't, this is not going to be effective. And I think I hear about things like, okay, so somebody's got a problem with gambling and they play online blackjack and they're losing money hand over their fist and they say, okay, I'm going to stop playing blackjack. I'm going to only play craps because that's the game that has the better odds. Right. And typically we know it's going to lead to losses of money over time. That's just the way it works.

Paul Warren: The house always wins a yes.

Mark Levin: And so the point being is, I guess it matters. Back to your, I believe in harm reduction, too, and I think if we can get people to take steps to move away from whatever they're doing. That's a step and it's in the right direction. And it's also this idea that you can only help somebody who's still around, and so keeping them safe is going to be important. all that being said, if it was a situation where the magnitude between the two behaviors was so equal that it wouldnt be acceptable, I guess there would have to be a point where id have to persuade with permission and say, can I share something with you? Going back to this idea of heres what I know about this, and I want to get your feedback about it. So let me tell you what ive heard and what I know about this particular topic, and then I want to hear from you thatll, add to my knowledge about whats going on here. Considering the client to be the expert, in a lot of ways, can tell us a lot about whats going on with that particular problem.

Amy Shanahan: Well, it sounds even to me, a little bit like developing discrepancies,

too. And I know that that has to do with timing and your engagement and your relationship and what you know about what the person's life goals are, that you could, show them the mirror of you say you want to achieve this or go here and you're making choices that aren't heading in that direction. For lack of details, developing discrepancies was another thing that popped up in my mind besides ask, offer, ask, depending, on what material you have on the table, based on your timing and your relationship.

Paul Warren: Yeah, absolutely. And Mark, I want to thank you so much for bringing harm reduction to the table in regard to this, because I don't know if we've ever overtly talked about harm reduction on the podcast before. And I feel like this is a great opportunity to overtly, like, address this because people, I'm going to make a general statement here, and Amy, you alluded to this by saying that sometimes people cringe when they hear that phrase arm reduction. I will make a general statement, and, you know, you may or may not agree with this, but the general statement I'll make is that people, workers, providers have feelings about harm reduction and have feelings about the harm reduction approach. And I think that one of the things, and I'm happy to say that I think at least in New York state, where I have the opportunity to be

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Paul Warren: located, there, has been more of a movement, at least, externally, to embrace a harm reduction perspective and practice. And I want to throw out that one of the things that I love about motivational interviewing is that motivational interviewing embraces the idea of harm reduction, that is incremental change, potentially leading to larger changes. And for some people, that's a challenging concept because they may have in their mind or maybe in their own experience, that abstinence is the only way.

And abstinence doesn't work for everybody. And some people need to go through harm reduction in order to get to a place where they might consider or choose abstinence. And I also think to your point, mark, in regard to there are limitations, realistic limitations to autonomy support if we feel like this person's safety or the safety of others is at risk. I mean, Mi is not about allowing people to harm themselves and harm others where we are called upon to be very clear about what the limits of that are.

Amy Shanahan: I think, ah, there's a stickiness to that. When I've heard folks say, well, this person's putting them in harm's way, themselves in harm's way. So therefore I have to confront or tell them what to do or tell them how to do it. And it was their judgment call about that harm. So it's really contextual as well. I don't need to get into the details and have worked alongside a, practitioner who was able to vacillate between having an Mi approach and practicing m mi and going right for the direct conversation, depending on what was going on with a person. And she said, they know I have their interest at heart and if they're using a harm reductionist kind of approach to their goal changes. she feels like she'd be better off knowing that and setting an environment and engaging with someone so that they're honest with her so she can make an informed decision about their care. And this was a physician I'm talking about. And there were times when it's timing, I think. Paul, you mentioned it several times that if something was happening and this person was, doing something that was putting them in physical harm's way, she would just really own it and tell them, this is not okay for you to do that. And, you know, and she'd be direct, too. I have a responsibility to be honest with people. So how do you balance that mi approach, practicing mi m and then doing these other things? Because mi is not the panacea.

Paul Warren: Yeah, mi m is not. The practice of mi m is not for every conversation. An, mi consistent approach can be the foundation for every conversation as a way of

interacting. The practice of mi m is not for every conversation.

Mark Levin: Yeah, I think we, sometimes we hear something like harm reduction, we go to extremes, right? We have this idea that we're sort of allowing, any old thing in a way of it just being a little different or less than what they're doing. And I think that there's common sense still needs to reign. Right. We talk a lot about is, again, I train experts bringing brief intervention, referral treatment. And one of the things we talk about is we'd rather have somebody who's choosing to drink at a party, find an uber home or a lyft or a friend that's sober, and then make a choice to get in a car with somebody who's not. And the point is, that's a great example of how harmonization is a very common sense thing at that early stage of change. And maybe when they have decided to do this, then we can start understanding a little bit more about how we can reduce the actual other behavior that's going on, because at least that person will be around to talk about change later on.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And I could imagine in that scenario, mark, there is a great opportunity to affirm, that person's choice for getting an Uber or, going in a car with a friend who hadn't and would still give the opportunity for that person to reflect on, you know, how drinking is impacting them, that they're using their good judgment in order to take care of themselves. And

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Paul Warren: And how is the drinking? So I could see that being a win win in regard to harm reduction.

Mark Levin: Yeah. I guess for me, when I thought about this question and I threw out

these ones because they are hard sometimes. These are real conundrums to go by. Is that my fallback position? And anytime you find yourself in a position where things are, you know, iffy for you, ethically, seek out consultation and supervision, and go with the folks that you trust that will give you good advice about where you're moving clinically and don't operate in a vacuum and have somebody check out what you're doing.

Paul Warren: Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: You don't have to do it alone, that's for sure.

Paul Warren: Absolutely.

Mark Levin: So, do we have time for maybe a quick wrap up question?

Amy Shanahan: You have a third question. Oh, my goodness.

Mark Levin: This one's more. And this is maybe to take you out of your comfort zone a little bit. And I don't want this to be too provocative, but I have a friend, Bob, and he and I, we have lunch together. We talk about the Application of motivational interviewing and maybe a group or family setting. So I know Chris Wagner has written a really good book about Mi and groups and so were thinking about this idea of am I in families? and a family approach. And have you ever had experiences where you're working with groups, with families where people are in vastly different places as far as what the change behavior would be, especially if it's a collective change behavior. So for a family, it might be something like we, want to stop fighting, so often. And one person's like, we don't fight hardly at all. Mom's like, we're constantly fighting. I mean, how would you, what would it be your, I mean, it's kind of a goofy question because it's, it kind of falls a little

outside of motivational learning and more into family work. But just curious. I mean, we don't have to go too long on this one, but what your thoughts would be there.

Paul Warren: Amy's looking at me, I'm looking at her.

Amy Shanahan: I was going to say, well, we, we could end this one because I could just say, nope, I have no experience with that. I certainly have have thoughts. Again, it's the tension in the space. So, I don't know, in family work, do you treat the family like a group? As Karen Ingersoll and Chris Wagner wrote about, is the group your client? Is the family, the whole client? And then how do you help navigate that tension and explore and be curious? So I'm going to steal some stuff from doctor Steve Rolnicke. I love his three c's. Become be curious and be compassionate. That's all I got for that one.

Mark Levin: M. That's a tough one. I'm going to show this one to my friend Bob and say, you listen to this now because I brought it up to other people. Because when we sit down and answer this or talk about this, I'm like, I don't know, Bob. It seems like a kind of a, we'd have to do some real thinking about that one. Paul, do you got any thoughts?

Paul Warren: I have two. And, and my first thought is that one thing that you could always rely on and always bring to quote unquote, the group setting, because I would be inclined to think of the family as a group or a unit is an, am I consistent approach. And I think using an MI consistent approach to help people to explore what may be of importance uniquely to each person in that particular group. And that could be vastly different because, what may be important to, you know, one of the siblings may be the furthest thing. And I think the beauty of that is helping people to understand what's important within the context of the group helps people maybe to feel heard, seen a little

bit more connected to each other. And I think through that approach, creating an opportunity for people to be seen and heard and connect, then I might move to the conversation of. From this place, how do we see ourselves going forward as a family, and what are our thoughts about that? And entertaining everybody's thoughts about that. And that's very different than what's our family's problem.

Paul Warren: It's more about what's our family's future and how are we going to contribute to the. To the evolution of that future. And again, my take, my two cent, for whatever it's worth, is that that comes out of creating

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Paul Warren: a context where people can feel seen and heard and understanding as individuals what's important to each other.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I'm not, an expert in family work. And a flash kept coming in my mind when you were talking specifically, Paul, about your response to Mark's question is this double sided reflection in the space. You see it this way and you see it this way, and then the curiosity comes in and. And that's the navigation. Right. Navigating and helping guide that family to communicate with each other effectively. Because there's this gap of understanding, belief, awareness. It's almost like ambivalence is in the middle of the family units, and you're closing the gap by honoring both sides of that ambivalence. That's just kept flashing in my head. But I would love for family practitioners to chime in and let me know that I've lost my mind or something.

Paul Warren: I would like. Go ahead, go ahead, Mark.

Mark Levin: I think you hit it there because I did a mediation class. It was very good mediation class. And one of the things that we talked about a lot is if you're presenting two opposing views to somebody, never use. But it's the idea of. The idea of Paul thinks this and Amy thinks this, and so what do we think about that? And back to Paul's point is that's what our thoughts, and I think that my friend Bob and I kind of came to in other conversations, is you really have to negotiate individual change plans with folks that contribute to this overall. Good. And how can you, going back to the very beginning of this podcast, where are those things? Where's the conjunction of those things? And how can they both contribute to this overall family goal or group goal? Right? Yep. And not to hijack your entire podcast with my super secret questions, as you keep on referring to them, too. I want to make sure that you have time to cover any of the other points. It was a bit of a tough.

Paul Warren: Question, for sure, a, fantastic question, and I hope that friend Bob will comment or write in or others would.

Amy Shanahan: Chime in their ideas and thoughts.

Paul Warren: Absolutely. And Amy, was that also not a feature of this too, that we wanted? Oh, yes. Another thing that we want to remind you of, which is we're going to be reminding you in the prior episodes as well. And we want to remind you in this episode, is that if you have a follow up question to add to Mark's super secret, prior to this podcast, not disclosed questions. If you have questions that are follow ups to Mark's questions, we invite you to use our email and write in. And in our next episode, we are going to start that episode with two of your write in question. So we want to remind you, if you have questions related to this topic and to the questions that Mark shared with us that you'd like us to entertain, we will begin the next episode

entertaining your questions.

Amy Shanahan: I was just thinking as a rep, I was walking away one time and I thought, gosh, I missed that whole thing. I could have used these types of reflections because I was missing the meaning of what the person was saying. I know I walk away from these conversations and have so much more that I think about and think, oh, could we rewind and come back so I know you'll all have questions and thoughts and answers for some of the questions. Thanks for joining us, Mark.

Mark Levin: This was wonderful. And, again, if something comes up that you had, something I said that maybe you have a question about, Amy and Paul, you're welcome to share my email as well for folks that might want to reach out to me. But again, this was a good time, and I really appreciate being here.

Paul Warren: Thank you so much, Mark. And we're so thankful that you accepted our invitation to be our super special secret prior to the podcast, undisclosed questions.

Mark Levin: Special guest such a buildup. You're setting somebody up there, Paul, for sure, but no.

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

Amy Shanahan: Thanks, Mark. It was a fun conversation.

Thanks for listening to episode 27 of Lions and Tigers and Bears MI. be on the lookout for a new episode on using an MI consistent approach to engage. Coming soon.

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