

Episode 30: Ambivalence and Motivation

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

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

Paul Warren: Hello, Amy.

Amy Shanahan: Hey, Paul.

Paul Warren: How are you today?

Amy Shanahan: Very good. I'm always happy to be in the studio with you.

Paul Warren: I'm always happy to be in the studio with you, too.

Our special guest name is Bob Jope and he's from Pennsylvania

And very excited about our special guest.

Amy Shanahan: I know. well, our special guest name is Bob Jope. Did you know that if you google Bob Jope, oftentimes you get Bob Hope because it thinks you're spelling it wrong? But I'd like to say I'm so excited to have Bob job here. I've met Bob Jope through our MINT collaborations and more importantly, in the state of Pennsylvania, the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Bob has been instrumental as a mentor in a statewide project. So I've had the pleasure of working with Bob there, and I want to share one little thing before I hand the mic over to Bob to say hello. Bob has a beautiful radio voice and a radio face. Don't. Don't doubt that. No, a tv face.

Paul Warren: But, I'm glad you cleaned that up, Amy. That was a. You've got a face only radio could love.

Amy Shanahan: I think you've said that about me in the past.

Paul Warren: no, no, no, no.

Amy Shanahan: But Bob has a lovely voice and a lovely face. And I wanted to tell listeners that Bob has, these beautiful pro tip series on MI on YouTube, I think, and he could clarify this for us. Joke consulting services or JCS Pro tips. I love listening to them. There's short, little clips about little things around MI m. So if listeners are enjoying the podcast, they may also love to put Bob in their ears and listen to the pro tips. But Bob, take it away. Say hello.

Bob Jope: Well, thank you so much, Amy. And I got to say, when you started talking about the Bob Hope thing, I thought, I didn't know that. I googled myself. And you're right, Google wants to know if I meant Bob Hope. But I'm delighted that I do seem to be somewhere in the list there, so that, at least I'm showing up. Ah, which is a good thing. so thank you for that. Yeah, no, and thank you for mentioning the pro tips as well. It's something that we love doing and love kind of making available to folks. so I'm very excited to be here with both of you and, looking forward to our conversation.

Paul Warren: Me as well. And I just have to say, just by way of telling a little Bob story, let me just say that, I'm glad that it's Bob job who's here because I believe Bob Hope has passed on. And that would be kind of a creepy episode. It would be sort of a post mortem episode. so there's that. And actually, the last time I was with Bob, I believe, was in Copenhagen when we were together at a workshop. And, I cannot say how happy I am that you agreed to be our guest on this particular conversation because to me, ambivalence, which we are going to talk about, we're talking about the practice of motivational interviewing and ambivalence in motivation to me.

Ambivalence is truly the motorhouse of the practice of motivational interviewing

And again, I'm very curious to hear what you and Amy think about this. Ambivalence is truly the motorhouse of the practice of motivational

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interviewing and meaning ambivalence about a particular behavioral change goal. And I think sometimes, and I've experienced this with some of the learners that I've been with, that ambivalence becomes this nebulous, non specific phenomena which then cuts away from how to employ that ambivalence when actually practicing motivational interviewing. So I just wanted to lay that out there and again say that I'm so delighted that we're having this conversation because my hope is that what we talk about will shed more light on this and help people to specifically link ambivalence to the practice of motivational interviewing and to change behavior.

Bob Jope: Yeah, I think that that's a great framing of that and an excellent point. I remember Bill Miller at one point saying that without ambivalence there isn't MI And I think that has a very pithy way of putting things and I think that's dead on. But just to kind of expand on what I take that to mean is that if the person is resolved on one side or another, then there's no scope for this. If they're resolved on the sustained side, well, then there's no movement to be had. If they're resolved on the change side, we shouldn't do MI because it's contraindicated now, we should just help them to move in the change direction, if they even need that help, which they may not.

Paul Warren: Yeah. Yeah.

Amy and Bob discuss the importance of normalizing ambivalence around change

Amy, any thought about that from your own experience working with practitioners or in the training room or listening to audio recordings? Because this is something that I hear a lot in audio recordings. This generalized, nebulous, unspecific kind of experience of ambivalence.

Amy Shanahan: You know, it's got me thinking about when I invite participants to think about a change that they've been considering and haven't done it yet, and then not necessarily tell them to reveal that, but then start to talk about reasons why they're not, doing it and personalizing it, so that they can then feel and understand the experience of. When someone tries to push or pull or suggest or advise, they then can put it into their own words and their own language about. I didn't like the feel of you telling me how to do that. and I know that we probably alluded, at several episodes that I predominantly have worked in addiction treatment and co occurring mental health care. And it's been my experience where some of the cultural nuance of language around the sustained talk is that someone is in denial or someone is resistant to change. And these words really are still part of the landscape at times. so to me, the importance of normalizing ambivalence, that we all are ambivalent about something at some time or another, and how do we sit with someone and not feel like we have to be the expert to push or pull in one direction of that ambivalence for a person.

Bob Jope: Yeah, it brings up for me, so when I'm, talking to folks about MI and we're talking about change talk and sustain talk, one of the things that really seems to resonate with folks is just pointing out that we used to pathologize ambivalence, and call it resistance, and kind of ignore the fact that we all do that. We all have this sort of

mixed set of thoughts and feelings around any given change because it demands something of us. And so just to normalize that and to have people think about their own experience of that and then in real plays when we do those in training experiences, I think that a lot of times, as you're saying, Amy brings it home for them because they're like, yeah, you know, you gave into your fixity reflex and started to pressure me, and I felt a certain kind of way about that. And so then that starts to really kind of bring the real experience into that.

Paul Warren: Both of you were really adding something that I want to draw, like a very bright line under which is kind of the humanizing and the normalizing of the phenomena of ambivalence, especially as it's associated with considering a change. And one of the things that I try to help practitioners to understand in the training experience

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Paul Warren: or in the coaching experience, if we're talking about an audio recording, is that ambivalence about a particular behavioral change goal is actually an opportunity. And I actually associate that in trainings with a sound effect, which I will do for you both now. and you can, it's perfect for radio or podcast. And if you want to write in, you know, pause the recording and determine what you think this, this sound effect is. I know Bob is very intrigued right now.

Amy Shanahan: Me too.

Paul Warren: Okay. So oftentimes I will say to them, if you determine, if you, if through the conversation, you realize that somebody is ambivalent about a specific behavioral change goal. And we know that's an opportunity. Coaching.

Bob Jope: So coaching is the sound effect. Gotcha.

Paul Warren: That's the sound effect.

Amy Shanahan: And like a cash register.

Bob Jope: Yeah, yeah.

Paul Warren: Yes, yes. Thank you. And, you know, I never thought of it that way, Amy, that it's like, that's where you get change.

Amy Shanahan: I never thought, well, you know, I have to diverge for a minute, because before we recorded, we were talking about, the musical, the music event. Woodstock.

Bob Jope: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: But I was thinking about Pink Floyd's money, because my friends and I used to do that ching little onomatopoeia, you know, make the noise of the change.

Bob Jope: Yeah. A lot of MI trainers really have that habit of attaching, songs and song lyrics to these concepts of ambivalence, change, talk, et cetera, et cetera. It's a time honored tradition.

Paul Warren: It is. And I think it's because it's so universally human.

Bob Jope: Yeah.

Paul Warren: Especially associated with change.

Bob asks first of several secret questions about this topic

Now, clearly, we could go on about this for hours. And we, we do want to get to why we asked Bob to be here, which is to share the first of his secret, currently undisclosed questions about this topic that he wants to lay on the table for the three of us and you, of course, as well, to ponder, and we will discuss. So, Bob, if you feel the moment is right. Would you like to he I can see he's warming up and getting ready.

Amy Shanahan: To launch raised eyebrow.

Paul Warren: His first secret question.

Bob Jope: The time of unveiling has come.

Amy Shanahan: Drum roll. Speaking.

Bob Jope: And here we are.

What are your go to strategies for eliciting change talk in MI conversations

So, as we know, ambivalence is a construct that in MI we think of as being comprised,

verbally from the individual as change talk and sustain talk mixed together in varying proportions. and of course, as we think about the tasks of MI engaging, focusing, evoking and planning, it's that evoking task where we become particularly concerned with eliciting, inviting, encouraging, change talk, I should say, into the conversation, and then conversely with maybe softening the influence of sustained talk. And so the first of, my secret questions relates to that eliciting, of change talk. As an MI m practitioner, what would you say are your go to strategies for eliciting change talk in an MI conversation?

Paul Warren: Whoa.

Amy Shanahan: Game M.

Paul Warren: I will throw out my first reaction to your question, and I have to say I love this question because I love the fact that you framed it as the intentional use of a strategy to evoke change talk. And I really appreciate that you're framing it that way because that's part of the work of the practice of motivational interviewing. We intentionally employ a strategy that is going to evoke the verbal communication of this person's desire, ability, reasons or need to make this particular change.

Bob Jope: Precisely.

Paul Warren: And I love the fact that you're asking like, what's your go to strategy? And I have to tell you in all honesty that I don't have one. And I don't have one and this is just me. I don't have one because oftentimes

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Paul Warren: I base the choice of my evoking strategy on what's come before. and I love the technical piece of it as thinking about like, hey, I have evoking strategies in my pocket and I can pick from my pocket based on what you say as to what I think may be the most effective evoking strategy for you during our conversation in this moment, really tailoring based.

Bob Jope: On that individual, based on what's come before, based on, specifically, maybe even what kind of change talk you're looking to pull in that's going to make that decision, for you in that moment, for me.

Paul Warren: For me.

Amy Shanahan: I'm glad you went first because I was wondering what's my go to? Because my head was swimming in that. and of course I did have a, thought that maybe my go to is to reflect the change talk and then when you shared your answer, Paul, I thought, well, I don't know that I do that all the time, every time. So that's complimentary to what you said. And then I came up with a second thing. that I'm curious about what you all think, because I test the waters and reflect the opposite of sustained talk sometimes to see if there is change language there. And no, I know that sometimes the change talk is expressed and sometimes it's not so expressed. So that popped into my mind, too. So, I'll test it out. So, I guess for an example, if someone says, I really enjoyed, I really enjoy eating food, and I'm trying to, you know, whatever, I really enjoy food, and that they're trying yet to be healthier, and they don't say that other part. I might reflect the other side of that, you know, you really love food and you're wondering, what you might do to alter some things. Or, you know. So sometimes I wonder about that, because when I listen into practitioners work, I question, is that persuasive, or is it eliciting change talk, or is it testing the waters to see if change talks?

So I'm really curious about that part. But I know I wasn't supposed to ask the questions. But your question, Bob, brought that up for me, because sometimes, I guess, depending on the situation, I wonder if it's timely or if it's persuasive.

Bob Jope: Yeah, and I see the dilemma there. I mean, it's double sided reflection, of course, that's an MI classic. You reflect that sustained talk, and then you add that change talk at the other end of that, and then the question becomes, if the person hasn't articulated this change talk that I'm adding, how presumptuous am I being adding it? And are there situations in which it might get to the level of persuasion? And then maybe we're overstepping a bit. or, you know, or short of that, is it within what Miller calls lending change talk that we just, we intuit that change talk? Being there as a guest, we give it to that person and then they respond back to it. And probably we can imagine degrees of severity, you know, or intensity in which it might kind of cross a line and beyond, below which it might not.

Paul Warren: You know, I can almost, and I don't in any way mean to muddy the waters or calm or further, if this is a word, complexify this issue. Maybe it's not a word. It is now. If you use it, please mail in a quarter to lions and tigers and Bears am I? But not to further complexify the situation. As Amy was saying, what she said in Bob, your response? It really made me think of how the role of genuineness plays into this, because I, I could imagine Amy employing her strategy of lending that change talk if in her gut or in her heart there was some sense of it's there, but they just haven't said it. And she might be right and she might be absolutely inaccurate.

Paul Warren: And my sense is, if she was absolutely inaccurate, the person would say so. And the fact that she's testing out her hunch through her reflection, again, through the lens of her genuineness of what she's perceiving, to me, that would move more

away from persuasion and more toward

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Paul Warren: the testing of, Did I hear, is that there or. Yeah, yeah.

Bob Jope: So yeah, I love that distinction. It makes a lot of sense to me, because if not right, if Amy was thinking, oh, this person really doesn't see any reason for change, isn't ambivalent, and she still adds that, then it does feel disingenuous, then it does feel to her, because she knows she's, you know, she knows she's stepping out or she thinks she's stepping outside what this person's meaning is. and so the empathy is not going to be there, and the grace that we tend to get for a wrong reflection that was well intended or intended accurate is not likely to be extended to us.

Amy Shanahan: I love that you added genuineness, because certainly that word has been bouncing around the rooms of how do you see it? How do you measure it? How do you know it's genuine? How do we know that we're genuine? And I think for this instance, I had a moment of clarity around this particular example of genuineness from the framework of, if I were reflecting a double sided reflection, like you said, bob, and reflected change talk, lending change talk that really maybe wasn't overt, but like you said, Paul, I have this gut sense that maybe it's there. My thought was, I don't have an agenda, put it on the table. My intention is to test my hypothesis, to see if the change is there. So for me, in that one moment, to me, that would be my own measure of genuineness. That. M well, am I trying to persuade? I wouldn't want to. That wouldn't be my intention. If I were reflecting back the other side of a sustained talk and a double sided reflection, when change talk was not overt or expressed, my intention would be strategically to see if it's there.

Bob Jope: Yeah, your intent is to understand, not to pressure.

Amy Shanahan: Exactly.

Paul Warren: Yes. And would it be fair to say, and I don't know if you agree with this or not, but would it be fair to say for whatever, pressure or motivation the worker might be feeling their own pressure or their own motivation that they might be feeling, would it be fair to say that if they were inserting this change talk, that that would be the opposite of accurate empathy and that truly would be an example of persuasion.

Bob Jope: Because you're pushing that into the conversation. there's an implied judgment that's there. And it's not because empathy, of course, would be seeking to understand the other, accurately. And that's not what I'm trying to do right now. I'm trying to show you that you're wrong about this, that you should think differently about this and that's what's actually going on.

Paul Warren: And that's not the practice of motivational interviewing.

Bob Jope: Exactly right.

Amy Shanahan: And you know what I've found too? When I've been talking with folks, a lot of times they know when their agenda's on the table and they'll spell it out. And I don't have to say, hey, was that double sided reflection persuasive? Because oftentimes when our fixing reflexes kicked in, at least I've experienced this myself. that my fixing reflex is loud and I'm trying to quiet it down or quiet myself from expressing what's going on with me. And sometimes persuasion is not just a one time instance in an exchange. But I've found too though, that practitioners typically know, man, I just really

wanted to give them that idea and I did it this way. Yeah, it was my agenda. At least I have that hope that most people have a sense too.

Bob Jope: I think I do see that. I mean, just in my experience with people learning MI that's one of the first things that they seem really good at seeing is their own fixing reflex, because they'll come back from a real play and say, well, you know, I was trying and it just didn't work. It came out anyway. And so that awareness is definitely accessible, I think, to folks. And I think what we as MI practitioners very often benefit, from is the fact that when we're able to keep that on the back burner and really just lean into that genuine, desire to understand that humble curiosity that Miller talks about and roll, they talk about, that people pick up on that and that's what this is about. It's not about me trying to get you to do something. It's about me really seeing where you're coming from and understanding your point of view on this. And people give us grace on that because people want to be understood.

Paul Warren: Yeah. Yeah. Bob, would it be okay if I asked you a quick follow up question?

Bob Jope: Oh, I wish you would.

Paul: Do you have go to strategies that you use when talking

Paul Warren: Okay.

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Paul Warren: So you posed this question for Amy and I, and clearly it's evoked, a lot of different dimensions than maybe I wouldn't have anticipated associated with it. And I'm curious for you, is, is there, do you have go to strategies that you use? I mean, because you're part of the roundtable, too. So if you're open, I would love to get your take on that.

Bob Jope: Or triangular table. Absolutely. Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: There's three of us.

Bob Jope: I mean, you can make a circle out of that, but, you know, the natural shape is that. Sure. now, I want to employ your caveat, Paul, because I do love it. Right. You want to be responsive. You want to be. You want to take into account what the person's saying. And so, yes, by go to, I'm not wanting to think about. Okay. I would always use this strategy. but there are some that I feel are maybe a better match for my style of conversation. There are some that I've had success with, and that's, of course, how reinforcement works, is if it works once, I won't go into that well again. Yeah. So, absolutely. I think there are a couple. One that I use quite frequently, another that I use in more stuck situations. but for me, the more frequently used one is, looking ahead, what, the fourth edition refers to as looking ahead. If you did make this change, what do you think would be different about your life in, say, five years? I've m had the good luck to be in conversations with some people who are quite imaginative and can really paint an elaborate picture of this future with this change in place and that the amount and the richness and the depth of change talk that can come out of that, the enthusiasm that sometimes can build from that has, often been really kind of inspiring, both to them, but also to me. And so I love the optimism of it. I love the hopefulness of it, because, of course, as we're aware, Miller's new book on hope has just come out. So I'm excited to. To look at reading that. But the power of hope is something that we sometimes talk

about in the MI realm, so it kind of brings in some of those elements for me that I think can be really, beneficial.

Paul Warren: M and you're drawing such a. I don't mean stark in a bad way. I mean stark in a, ah, distinctive way. You're drawing such a stark and distinctive comparison between the experience of addressing a problem and considering hope for the future. And those are two so dramatically different things. One, there's an implication at times of deficit, of failure. And all of those things, given the opportunity of using this open ended question, this intentional open ended question that invites a person to think forward, to think away from the current situation, can generate a kind of energy or dare I say motivation.

Bob Jope: You dare say.

Paul Warren: I did say.

Bob Jope: Yes.

Paul Warren: A kind of motivation that can actually move the ball forward.

Bob Jope: Yes, yes. and a lot of times under their own steam. because as the person, this is not a question that necessarily they're getting asked in their day to day. and so this may not be an exercise that they've participated in, even internally or mentally. And I find it very often for folks who have struggles that tend to foreshorten their view, thinking about say, substance use disorders, or depression, for example, that tends to really it robs hope of the future and hope for a better future. But just the question that can inspire a person to look past that, and really think into those possibilities. And so

yeah, there's a delicious optimism that comes with that. There's so much scope for the person experiencing their own strengths and for me to be able to cheat a little bit and get a look at those strengths myself. So now we've got some affirmations that maybe I can bring in, or some self affirmation that they're doing that I can reflect. And there's really a lot of really beautiful things that can sometimes transpire.

Amy Shanahan: You said something, around your go to, in a way, the one that you use commonly because it fits your style. I love that you say that because when

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Amy Shanahan: we invite practitioners in training or in practice, we often say this is. Try it on. Does this fit you? I've heard, certain people like certain strategies, and you mentioned one of the evocative strategies. And some people like using the rating rulers. But I love that you shared that, Bob, because whatever's in the toolbox doesn't mean you have to use all of them all the time. Timing is important. Or when you use them. And does it fit your style? Because I think that also speaks to genuineness. And you also mentioned that future hope and optimism, from my experience, and we talk about this and normalize this somewhat too, that many of us have been trained to look at the problem, to figure out what the barriers are and try to solve that problem. And, boy, I know the more I work with folks and work on my own fixing reflex, my fixing reflex gets kicked in when I go back in time and, well, let's see how we could not do that again. Or what did you learn from that? And it's less optimistic and feels kind of I'm the parent teacher kind of person and guiding you through a conversation about lessons learned. And we know that people have probably already learned their lesson before they're sitting and talking with us about anything, any choices that they've made. So I really enjoyed you highlighting the hope and optimism in your individual kind of your style. But

you mentioned that there was something other than just this one you were considering sharing, another go to or tool that you put in one of your pockets.

Bob Jope: There is another that I use less often and more for those stuck situations. But just two things real quick on what you were just saying, amy, if I could. It really brought up for me what Rollink says about the deficit, detective, and the warning that, sure, we got to be aware of problems and challenges that people face, but when that's all we talk to them about, that's not really the message we want to be sending. and two, what you said about the impact of style or the necessity of being aware of that, that's, something that I say a lot to people as they're being introduced to MI is you can come away from an experience with an MI trainer thinking, okay, to be good at MI m, I got to sound like Paul or I got to sound like Amy, or I got to sound like Bob. And that's not it at all. You have a voice with this, and it's a matter of finding what good MI m sounds like when you're the one doing it. And that means you're going to use the skills differently than I do, you're going to use strategies differently than I do. There will be some kinds of complex reflections. Are going to be the ones that just are ones that work for you and are compatible with your way of interacting. Others, not so much. So really, the individuality of li, I think, is something, that a lot of times we can lose sight of, but is really important.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And you know, this may be inflammatory language, but I'll share it.

Bob Jope: You, Paul.

Amy Shanahan: oh.

Paul Warren: I don't know what you're saying there, Bob, but. And not but. And I would venture to guess because I've seen it go across, practitioners faces at times.

Paul Warren: When you communicate that they have agency over finding their voice and using, the strategies and the skills in a way that's going to be right for them in the moment with that person. I've seen go across people's face a certain kind of terror because, and I don't know if. I don't know if you've experienced this, but I've experienced it because they're operating under the impression that there's a right way to do it. Yeah, there's a script. That's right. And since Bob is the trainer, and since Amy is the trainer, they must be using the right script. Therefore, I must use their script. And it's very hard to get people to say, let go. Trust your script. Be intentional about your use of tool based on what you interpret is going on in this moment.

Bob Jope: It really is, reminiscent of Jedi training. Yeah. You've got to let go.

Paul Warren: Right?

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Paul Warren: Trust the force.

Bob Jope: Free your mind. Trust the force, Luke. Trust the force.

Paul Warren: I like that. You threw a little matrix in there, too. Free your mind.

Bob Jope: Yeah, it's true. Yeah, I'm mixing up my Sci-Fi analogies there.

Paul Warren: That's okay. I'm here to clarify them.

Bob Jope: Yeah. The blended metaphor is one of my hallmarks.

Amy Shanahan: That's a new, complex reflection that we don't know about yet. That's a blended metaphor.

Paul Warren: So to not lose the wealth of Amy's follow up that you were going to share what you might pull

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Paul Warren: out in a tight situation. What's your thought? there?

Bob Jope: I had a delightful experience with, it was introductory MI training, and it was a lovely group of people. And there was young, there's one young practitioner there. Young, because everyone's young to me now. and she was asking great questions throughout, the experience, but it was clear from the questions and the way she was asking them that she was on the. I'm not really, you know, I'm not really. Yeah, I get what you're saying, but was kind of the recurring thing. and so, of course, when it comes time to do the demonstration conversation, I want to volunteer from the audience. She is right there. Exactly. And I'm thinking, ah, all right, well, I know what this is going to look like. And true to form, you know, she brings in, and she's being completely, you know, transparent about it, but, she brings in a dilemma that she personally feels very stuck on, which it was both exercise. and so we engage, we focus, and I'm doing some evoking, and it's not going anywhere. She's giving kind of minimal responses there's really not a lot of possibility that she sees it moving forward, not a lot of reason, or

would she give a reason? She would counter it with some sustained talk. So that's going on. and so then I tried one last, question, and I said, so let me ask you this. Lets imagine that maybe 510 years down the road, its the future. Youre that much older, and youve solved this, youve figured it out, you got past it, you resolved the issue, and youre where that part of you that wants to be there, wants to be. If you look back from that future perspective, whats your best guess about how you did it?

Bob Jope: And she stopped for probably 10 seconds and then she said, yoga. Its going to have to be yoga. And that led to a whole conversation about why it needed to be yoga, how it could be yoga, how she could move forward with that. And after we debriefed, she owned it. Shes like I entered the conversation with the intention of not moving towards change. And that question is the one that really made me open that up and made me look, yeah, go ahead. I was going to fit in. I used it a couple of times since then in those similar kinds of situations, and it's never disappointed me. It doesn't necessarily get us to where we want to go, but it always is something thats really thought provoking for the person.

Amy Shanahan: Im finding that youre in my mind, youre taking complex reflections and doing a double metaphor, and now youre taking a double evocative strategy and looking forward but reeling it back to present time. Really strategic around, I was also actually thinking about using that type of evocative questioning, to actually strengthen maybe some change commitment language, because what are you seeing? What are you doing is an actionable step. So even though your intention was to not even worry about, well, she was not worried about moving towards change talk, that seemed to be, wow, really explorative of not just the future, but how do you see yourselves getting there? How do you see yourself getting there? So it actually brought it back to the present in a sense.

Bob Jope: Yeah. Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: Very interesting.

Paul Warren: You know, the thing that I find really inspiring about that example, and I do find it actually inspiring, especially since she entered the arena, so to speak, with, with the intention of, I'm not moving anywhere. And let, and let's face it, would it be fair to say that sometimes clients, consumers enter into the arena with like, let me just tell you something, I'm going nowhere and you're not going to make me go anywhere.

Bob Jope: Absolutely.

Paul Warren: And the thing I love about.

Bob Jope: What.

Paul Warren: You, the conversation you had with her is first and foremost, you met her where she was at. you accepted the fact that, you know, she was going to offer change talk with one hand and slap it down with sustained talk on the next hand, and you let her do it. And you were still with her.

Bob Jope: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And, then you handed her the opportunity to come up with her own solution. You didn't make a suggestion, you didn't offer information, you didn't educate her. You said, if you look at it from this perspective, what do you see?

Paul Warren: And she came up with her own answer. And that to me,

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Paul Warren: is inviting somebody to exercise their own autonomy in their choice. Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: Those words were popping up in my head that, what a beautiful, synopsis of an MI practice at its finest? In a sense. We're not here to judge or compare or say something is perfect, am I? Because we don't have that. We don't have that picture. But what a beautiful depiction. And autonomy and volition and choice kept popping up that you're not even going there. Her choice to just stay in sustained talk was her choice of, hey, you know, that's, that's all right, because good practice of MI m, certainly has helped people feel free to share whatever it is that they want to and feel safe to share, you know, which brings me to, ah, the aspects of ambivalence that I've been curious about. And I, and I wonder if either of you have dug into or explored Miller's, book on ambivalence. It's called on second thought, how ambivalence shapes your life. because I was super intrigued by this notion of horizontal and vertical ambivalence and wonder if you've read the book, have you given these two distinct definitions of thought? Or I'm just going to leave it there for a minute because I think it ties into this whole notion of what you're doing as far as the strategies to explore change talk and not pushing the change talk and being genuine. Because there's something about the vertical ambivalence, I think, that plays, an important role here in understanding it. What are your thoughts about it?

Paul Warren: I have not read the book, and I will be frank and say that I'm a little confused by the geometry.

Amy Shanahan: So. Yeah.

Paul Warren: And I'm just making an I statement here.

Bob Jope: Yeah. Yep. I mean, we've been over circles and triangles already, so maybe.

Paul Warren: And you know, I did really good in geometry in high school, but it's been a few years. A few.

Bob Jope: About ten. Yeah.

Paul Warren: Or more. So I would be very curious, Amy and I mean let's hear what Bob has to say about this. But I would be very curious if you could kind of give kind of your overview or your take about the geometry, the vertical horizontalism, if that's a word, of what doctor Miller is kind of conceiving in this. So Bob, I don't know if you've read the book. I don't know if you have any thoughts about it.

Bob Jope: yeah I do. I'm always amazed by what Bill puts out. Because inevitably, invariably he writes about something that I think I know about already. And so I think about maybe not picking up the book. And then I pick up the book because it's Bill. And he blows my mind every time. There's always angles on this and depth to this that I really have not considered. And this book of course is no exception.

Paul Miller defines vertical ambivalence as a conflict between conscious and unconscious

So a horizontal ambivalence is what we have been talking about. Is the expressed ambivalence that we encounter in most conversations. It's on the table. The Person's talking to us about it. And vertical ambivalence, as I understand sort of Miller's conceptualization of it is that it's not necessarily Obvious to the person where that aspect of the ambivalence is coming from. And so He gives examples of people who have toxic relationship cycles. The person who ends up in relationships With emotionally distant people. And then struggles with that. But then next relationship it's the same. So where is that coming from? Well of course Freud would have many things to say about that and maybe not unjustifiably because is this person trying to resolve something that's unresolved and they're not necessarily recognizing it? Well, very possibly. And that would be vertical ambivalence. How they feel about this relationship, about should I get in, should I stay out is partly influenced by that vertical Ambivalence. On the sustained side for example, about maybe not getting into another similar relationship.

Paul Warren: Is it. Again, I'm trying to wrap my head around this. Is it the idea that the verticality of it is that there's something unresolved and unconscious for the person. Therefore the horizontal, the expressed, the conscious and the unconscious are not really working together. Because the unconscious remains the barrier. And the vertical, the horizontal is the overt. It's the expressed.

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Bob Jope: They intersect at a point.

Paul Warren: Got it.

Bob Jope: And two, that the horizontal is in front of us and we can see it, whereas the vertical is in them. and not necessarily something that we're going to have easy access to or that they're going to be articulating to us, if that makes sense.

Bob Jope: I came across, actually I was on the receiving end of this piece. we did a real play conversation where I was the client, in a recent training that we did and I brought up, as I sometimes bring up the difficulty that I have getting ah, a steady habit of practicing a musical instrument that I purchased. And the helper, the MI learner really got into my reasons. Well, why is it important for you to learn to play a musical instrument? And so type of things I usually talk about, you know, I've always wanted to, but as, and I mentioned just in passing that my father played and that he had passed away and they reflected that back to me. They said, so this is really a connection to your dad. M and my mind went because I really hadn't thought of it like that. I just mentioned in passing that my dad had played a and they remembered, I said earlier that I've always admired people who play music and put those two together. And it was kind of a bit of an epiphany for me.

Paul Warren: So would it be fair to say that the complex reflection.

Paul Warren: Taps the vertical and makes horizontal what was vertical before?

Bob Jope: Yes, yes. It takes the vertical and puts it onto the horizontal plane. Because now it's part of our conversation, now it's part of my conscious awareness. And it wasn't before.

Paul Warren: I understand better. Thank you.

Amy Shanahan: And I love that description and love, Paul, that you were able to put it in those words to help articulate it as well, because I've been mulling around these different examples too. And Bill tells a beautiful story of his own vertical ambivalence in the book, and I'll just leave it at that, about not wanting to be a dad at some point in his life and, and how some caring folks in his life brought to his conscious awareness. Not that he wasn't aware of these other things, but I think your story was quite similar, Bob, in that, wow, I never really connected the dots in this way. And this person just did this complex reflection or this complex interaction with you, to bring it more to your consciousness and certainly up to you to decide does it fit or doesn't it fit? I think the thing that stands out to me lately is, for me, when I've listened to practitioners and talked about reflections and complex reflections and when people start to reflect back people's values and something that's really important to them, it really starts to bring to the forefront that vertical aspect of their conflict in their lives. Sometimes, I mean, maybe I'm getting too broad and generalized. but I've seen when people go to those deeper, complex reflections around their values and beliefs, people are able to examine, at least minimally, the conflict that they're having with themselves. Well, I really, you know, I want to be a social worker. At the same time, my family's pressuring me to be in this professional doctor lawyer job to make more money. And I. I didn't even realize that those things were conflicting in my life, that I have these kind of familial values or other societal values that are kind of swimming around in my maybe subconscious or not at the fore connected to this. So it's just really, it hits home for me when we were talking about ambivalence, how powerful it could be as a practitioner to understand that some people are not in denial. It's just there's these other things that aren't always connected to their current beliefs or behaviors that are, we're seeing on the horizon, pun intended, under the surface, as it were. Yeah.

Bob Jope: Yeah. I gotta say, I've never regretted bringing in something like a values card

sorter or a values selection list or something like that into a conversation. Because even if it doesn't necessarily go anywhere, there's a depth that it can bring into a conversation.

Amy Shanahan: Hm.

Bob Jope: That, can be very eye, opening for me in understanding this person, but often for the person themselves, as they sort of think differently about with me about these things that are important to them.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Bob Miller: When change talk naturally occurs, we have to do something with it

Paul Warren: You know, bob, I wanna go back to a specific moment of the story that you told us about tapping into your vertical understanding of your ambivalence,

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Paul Warren: and then it becomes part of the horizontal landscape. You said that the helper, the person in the helper role, reflected back to you the connection that this consistent practice of this instrument is in some way making a connection with your father. And to me, that's a powerful example of somebody using a complex reflection, which I would refer to as employing your change talk. Because you offered in the narrative of what you were saying, that your father played a musical instrument and the

helper was able to connect that with the change that you were considering. Yes, and I only wanted to mention that because as we talk about ambivalence, part of what's contained within ambivalence is the gold of that change. Talk. And I don't know how many audio recordings I've listened to where change talk has come up in the conversation, naturally occurring, or where the worker has skillfully employed it, and then they did absolutely nothing with it. They've skillfully evoked it, and then they never did anything with it. And, I feel it might be helpful if we kind of underlined this idea of that. When change talk naturally occurs, or when we evoke it, we have to do something with it for it to get its maximum impact. And I just wanted to put that on the table to see if you and Amy had any thoughts or comments or reactions about that.

Bob Jope: I mean, certainly, yes. I think that, fourth edition and the previous editions, too, really have looked at. All right, so you get the change, doc. You just kind of watch it go by. You've worked so hard to get this stuff. Let's make use of it. Let's really get curious about it. And that's where they talk about what we commonly call that ears acronym. asking for elaboration is the e. affirmation for the change talk, affirming the change talk, reflecting. Miller talks about lending change talk, as we mentioned before. so a little bit of amplification or continuing the paragraph. And then, of course, summarizing change talk once we've got a bit of it. But yeah, I think that that's a, it's a skill that, comes, later. I find a lot of times to MI learners because, of course, they've got a lot to work with. Right. First, suppress the fixing reflex. Okay. Now learn to reflect really well. okay. Evoking, Okay, let me think about these strategies. Oh, okay. Now I have to think about what I get with that, what I do with that change dot that I get from the strategies. So, yeah, all part of the process, I'd say.

Paul Warren: And I really appreciate that you're acknowledging the stages of learning the practice of motivational interviewing, that it would probably be unrealistic to expect

that those new to the practice of motivational interviewing are going to know how to effectively employ or ears that change talk.

Bob Jope: Yeah. Occasionally you get somebody that just seems to have a knack for these things, and I always resent those people.

Paul Warren: Because, because you've worked really hard to get your skill.

Bob Jope: Oh, I worked so hard. I was, I was awful. I just took me forever to feel like I was doing this halfway decent, and always still looking to try to refine and improve where I can.

Amy Shanahan: I'm so glad you said that because I was thinking about the early days when I was a practicing and heard the acronym ears, and I thought, come on, why are we coming up with yet another acronym? Isn't it just the ors with an e? And I thought it was a very wise, yet a neophyte question, only from the painful reference that I wasn't yet there in the. I'm, using the ears specifically and intentionally to highlight the change talk. And, and I remember getting feedback from a mentor who shared, you know, Amy, you're using, complex reflections, and that's what we're shooting for. At the same time, you're not getting any response from the person other than, yep, you got that? Yes. You understand me? And I was like, oh, I'm supposed to do something else.

Bob Jope: So, very good.

Amy Shanahan: And, and how do we move the conversation towards highlighting the change?

Bob Jope: Stop.

Bob: We talked a lot about change talk, evoking change talk

Paul Warren: Yeah, speaking of which, I'm wondering, Bob, we did invite you to come up

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Paul Warren: with one, two or three additional questions, and I wonder if you had any other question or question that you wanted to put on the triangular table to see if there was anything else we may want to discuss in regard to this.

Bob Jope: I did, yes. I went, always wanted to sort of do, what the requirement is. I went with two, three of the questions, and, the second is sort of the mirror image of the first. So we talked a lot about change talk, evoking change talk. And sustained talk is, of course, the flip side of the coin, naturally occurring. It's the obverse of the change side. People are going to admit it. we all do. And, it really is just the other side of that ambivalence. Now, we know, that while it is normal and not something that we need to be afraid of like we used to be, it is still something that we need to deal with thoughtfully because it does reduce the person's momentum towards that positive change that we're helping them work towards. And so I was hoping to get some thoughts from the two of you around what, the mighty calls softening talk. you know, when you find yourself doing that in conversation, what sort of techniques do you usually use or more often use, you know, what works well for you or what have your experiences been?

Amy Shanahan: I love this question. I don't know that I have an immediate answer, and

I've always been curious about the language around softening sustained talk. What does that really mean when we soften it? so I guess I'll offer one thing that I do, maybe more in teaching and coaching, is use a metaphor to describe what I think that means. What has helped me is that softening sustained talk is we don't want to ignore it. When someone certainly brings it up, we want to let them know we're hearing them. We don't want to dismiss it, because in the absence of. I, mean, when doing that, it's almost like we're ignoring it, that it's almost like we intentionally are pushing towards the change language. So we want to let people know that we're listening to understand them. Because sometimes change is hard, and at the same time, they're still wondering what they're going to do. So I've considered this notion of a light. I think maybe we even talked about it previously, Paul, where maybe in a conversation that we've had, not in the episodes, but when we shine the light on sustained talk because someone's sharing it, we actually want to move the light towards the change talk more so that we're not ignoring the sustained talk. another metaphor that I have thought about is the other thing about softening sustained talk is not adding fuel to it or not shine the light on it all the time, because then that's where the light stays and that's where we stay, and that's where they stay in the conversation. So, it's not a specific employee strategy yet, but just this use of a metaphor to say that we don't want to ignore it and we want to move more light over to the change talk. But that's what I have at this time. So I'm going to pass Mike over to you, Paul.

Paul Warren: Consider the mic accepted.

Sustained talk is as important as change talk in the language of ambivalence

You know, I have to begin my response first by acknowledging a perspective that I've grown toward, because I didn't start with this perspective, but I've grown toward it. And partly I've grown toward it because I've had the great opportunity to work with Doctor Kate Speck. And she has deep insight into sustained talk and the role of sustained talk. And the perspective that I've grown into is that sustained talk is as normal and as important as the change talk in the language of ambivalence. And I've grown into that. I used to see it as something to be afraid of and avoided. And I think that's partly because that's how I was trained.

Bob Jope: Yeah.

Paul Warren: but I've grown, my, my understanding has, has taken on some nuance. And one of the things that Kate has often said is that sustained talk also contributes to our understanding of this person's experience. And yes, I'm not necessarily going to be asking well,

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Paul Warren: tell me more about why you want to keep smoking weed. And I'm not going to turn a deaf ear to somebody telling me that side of their ambivalence.

Bob Jope: Absolutely, absolutely.

Paul Warren: So to use Amy's light metaphor, I certainly want to be present. I want to attend to both sides of the language of ambivalence and I definitely want to invite further elaboration and increase in strength of the change talk. But both are part of the experience to be honored in what the person is telling me.

Bob Jope: Beautifully said, beautifully said. And particularly that last phrase really sticks with me is that it's part of that experience to be honored. and so it's absolutely yes. Not something that we want to push aside or think of as the enemy for us. That sustained talk is a legitimate part of this person's experience. Legitimate part of all of our experience.

Bob Jope: and that said, we also want to be thoughtful about it because we know its influence in the conversation. One of the things I often lean on with learners, especially as they sort of move into understanding the evoking task, is that in engaging. Yeah, by all means, lets delve into that sustained talk. Lets let them tell us their story, their point of view on this and draw that out and start to explore both sides of it. As we get into evoking, were going to start to want to be more careful, and more thoughtful about how we respond. and can we respond in ways that validate but do not develop the sustained talk? where that does come up.

One strategy that I use frequently is emphasizing autonomy in sustained talk

Amy Shanahan: So Bob, do you have your, what fits you go to strategies for the softening part of sustained talk?

Bob Jope: There are some things that I tend to do. Yeah, I work like you, Amy, with a lot of folks with substance use disorder presentations. and Paul, I know you're no stranger to that as well. so, for me, one that I use very frequently is emphasizing autonomy. is where sustained talk comes up. I very often suspect that underneath that sustained talk is this sense of the person, that they're getting pressure from the court system, from

their loved ones, from whoever that might be, and really just be explicit about. it sounds like you are getting some pressure and I want to be clear. I'm not here to tell you what to do. I really want to explore with you what you want to do here. And very often that explicit removal of that pressure in our conversation is helpful because the person now feels like, all right, yeah, I'm not getting that from this guy. And in that sense, the sustained talk is in a way, coming from a legitimate place, but also a place that it doesn't need to come from with me.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Bob Jope: and so I show the person that, you know, you don't need that here.

Paul Warren: Yep.

Bob Jope: and that's very helpful.

Paul Warren: Yeah, you can suspend that defense because. Because I'm not pressuring you that way.

Bob Jope: Yeah, yeah. I'm not part of this front in your, in your life. That's, that's, you know, trying to assault the northern side of the hill. I'm up here on the hill with you just saying, wow, this is a weird situation. How do we want to deal with this? so that's kind of what I'm looking to do there. of course, double sided reflection. I love that. I've had a lot of, good response with that, because, again, it validates the sustained talk, but also invites the person to think on the change side.

Amy Shanahan: Also, I love the intentionality around supporting, autonomy at that time,

especially in the beginning. we often talk, that we have our own fixing reflex and, or our expectations, or our institutional expectations, and a lot of trainees talk about that. How am I supposed to talk to you about, you want to reduce your use? When I work in an abstinence based program, for example, and I get a lot of those types of questions, how do we use MI when the court system is forcing or pushing the issue that the person has to go to a certain type of program, etcetera, and, how to navigate those conversations around autonomy and choice? Because they come to us with the expectations that we're going to align with those external forces or etcetera. So I love that intentionality around, especially if it's true and it's honest that you're genuine about it and you can, bespokes. Some practitioners struggle with that. I don't feel like I can support their autonomy when it's not really

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Amy Shanahan: what I can do because.

Bob Jope: Yeah, yeah, we did a series of trainings, for the Vermont Department of Corrections and just recently for the Connecticut department of Corrections, for facilities folks. They're in the prisons with people. So the topic of emphasizing autonomy is one that we really have to unpack.

Bob Jope: With folks, because they're working with individuals who live in these really restricted environments until we have to really help them, realize that it's not about saying, oh, you can do whatever you want. It really is about saying, I'm not trying to constrain you. You make the choices around your own behavior, and you may choose to go in the direction that it looks like you're going in, and risk whatever might come along with that. And that is your choice. or you may choose to go.

Amy Shanahan: In a different direction in revisiting the horizon. The horizontal ambivalence. Bill identifies those things in horizontal ambivalence that, well, I'm choosing two good things. Do I want to keep this job or take this promotion? I want both. or two conflicting things. I don't want either. do I go to jail or do I go to treatment? I don't want either one of those, but I know I have to choose. And how do you invite folks to understand that? Here are the two choices in front of you. You may not like either one. And how do we as practitioners, help you explore the ambivalence about these. I don't want either one of these choices because I know for me and my history and some practitioners that I've worked with, we want to sell that treatment is the better option, and it's all good. And that's when our fixing reflexes kick in about wanting to sell that treatment is the better option, and that's when.

Bob Jope: Their defenses go up.

Amy Shanahan: Exactly. Right. Yeah.

Paul Warren: because who wants to be sold?

Bob Jope: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Paul Warren: Yeah. Yeah.

Practice of softening sustained talk involves condensation of change talk

You know, Amy, I was so intrigued by your question about the phrase that's used about softening sustained talk. And like, the quote, unquote, the practice of softening sustained talk. and Bob, certainly the idea of reiterating, emphasizing that you're on the side of their autonomy. I can certainly understand that from, a partnership alliance, the relationship you're building with that person. And I'll also throw out a very technical thing that I do sometimes that touches on the strategy that Bob mentioned earlier about using a double sided reflection, two reflections joined by the word. And. And if I want, to honor both sides of this person's experience, what I will intentionally do sometimes is consolidate their sustained talk into a dense representation of what they said in a few words, without all the details associated with what they've enumerated about the change talk. But, ah, ah. An honoring and a condensation of that.

Bob Jope: Yeah. A tight summary.

Paul Warren: A tight, tight summary. A condensed summary. And, a further elaborated restatement of the change talk.

Bob Jope: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And of course, I intentionally end on the change talk. I'm not dishonoring the sustained talk.

Bob Jope: No.

Paul Warren: But I'm not reiterating it word for word in the sense of reinforcing it.

Bob Jope: Yeah. Yeah.

Paul Warren: So. And that's just a technical thing that I do sometimes.

Bob Jope: It validates without expanding.

Amy Shanahan: Yes. Right?

Paul Warren: Yep.

Amy Shanahan: Shines the light on it without adding fuel to it.

Paul Warren: Yes, yes. Yes.

Paul: I think ambivalence is normal, its part of human experience

So, you know, I'm wondering, as we start to bring our conversation to a close today, I'm wondering if we were going to offer any final words that we'd like our listeners to walk away with around this particular topic and maybe further food for conversation between them and their colleagues or further reflection individually, any thoughts about any key messages that you would want to make sure that we either reiterate or state or underline as a way of kind of tying

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what can be tied up about this kind of complex topic.

Bob Jope: M for me, I want to go back to something that you said earlier, Paul,

because, yeah, for, for my money, if you are reliably coming from a place of humble curiosity, ah, about both the change and sustain sides, you're going to be okay. there's a lot that, that does, for us and, and people are, are very often eager to tell their story. And so I think that if there's you know, where there's a lot of nuance to evoking change talk and softening sustained talk and a lot that you can really develop to optimize, how well you're able to navigate these conversations, that the fundament of it is really that, the spirit of MI can we be collaborative, accepting, empowering, compassionate and just learn about this person?

Amy Shanahan: I think it's just restating for me the, the episode title that people wonder when am I supposed to use mi? When am I not supposed to use mi? And a good cue is when you hear folks saying yes, budge, or I'm not sure, or I do and I don't. And all that ambivalence language, that, that's the time to pull out that toolbox and not worry about abandoning all those other wonderful skills and tools that you use for other things.

Paul Warren: And I guess for me, hearing what you're offering as kind of concluding perspectives, I think for me, and again, im just restating something that we talked about before, that ambivalence is normal, its part of a human experience. And if it's ambivalence about an identified behavioral change goal, ka ching. it really presents an opportunity to practice motivational interviewing and again, getting that deeper understanding. All right, Bob, we can't thank you enough for making the time to be here with us, and expanding our thinking and understanding around this particular topic.

Bob Jope: Well, Amy, it's been an absolute pleasure and my understanding has really been expanded as well. I always value a conversation between like minded MI enthusiasts, and I have not had, this kind of a one since Copenhagen. So I want to, thank you very much for the opportunity.

Amy Shanahan: Thank you, Bob. It's always enjoyable talking with you and learning your pearls of wisdom. I've learned so many things. I took lots of notes.

Bob Jope: Well, thanks for having me.

Paul Warren: Our sincere pleasure. Take care.

Bob Jope: All right, bye.

Thanks for listening to episode 30 of Lions and Tigers and Bears MI be on the lookout for new episodes coming soon.

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