

Coaching Conversations: Navigating the Art of Feedback in Motivational Interviewing

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CASAT: Lions and Tigers and Bears MI is brought to you through a collaboration between The Mountain Plains ATTC and NFARtec In episode 34, Paul and Amy welcome a return guest to discuss practice, sample coding and use during coaching. For episode resources, links to episodes, contact us and other information, please visit the Lions and Tigers & Bears MI website at, mtplainsattc.org/podcast.

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

Amy Shanahan: I'm Amy Shanahan.

Paul Warren: And I'm Paul Warren.

Amy Shanahan: And we've worked together over the past 10 years. We've been facilitating MI learning collaboratives and providing trainings and coaching sessions focused on the adoption and refinement of MI We're also members of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers. Join us in this adventure into the forest where we explore and get curious about what lies behind the curtain of mi. Hello. Hello. Hi, Paul.

Paul Warren: Hi, Amy.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I'm loving this series that we started because it's my favorite topic. I love the notion of coaching and feedback and supervision. I used to be afraid of it sometimes. Still am. But I am excited that we're joined by a, repeat guest on the podcast. And while I haven't been officially coached, well, I don't know, I guess officially coached by Bob. There have been some lovely, times and opportunities that I had the privilege of feeling like, I'm being coached by Bob.

Paul Warren: and those were probably times when you weren't afraid.

Amy Shanahan: Right? Because I wasn't planning for it. Right, right. Yes, Bob, Joep is our guest again. And I have had the privilege to be on projects with Bob and be able to just watch you. And I talk to folks when, I say, know, find mentors and coaches and sometimes we have them and we don't even know that they're really officially our mentor and coach. And I feel that way about you, Bob. I love watching you work and I love working alongside you. So I feel that I've learned so much from you. So say hello Bob, if you don't mind and.

Bob: Well, thank you, Amy. I really appreciate that it's a privilege to work with you as well. It's privileged to be here with you and with you, Paul. and I'm looking forward to our conversation. But yeah, like you, coaching, and supervision and kind of helping people step forward with their skills is really something that's near and dear for me.

Paul Warren: And I think part of the reason we wanted to certainly we wanted to invite you back to the podcast Bob, but as Amy said, I also have had the experience of sort of interacting with you and we really thought that it would be helpful to invite you to this conversation because of the MI consistent MI spirited approach that you bring to your interactions and I would only imagine that you would bring that to coaching as well. So

we really wanted to invite you to the table to discuss this topic, and to also be a model for people who will be coaches, or who are currently coaches.

Bob: M. Yeahah. I, I'm grateful for the opportunity. ah, it's always an honor to be part of someone's journey and that's how I look at the opportunity. Whether it's supervision or coaching into training or giving people feedback on recordings that they may send in, there's really a it's a humbling experience because that person is allowing you to inform their experience, to be part of their trajectory with whatever it is that they're working. Yeah.

Paul Warren: And that's really come out in other conversations that we've had about this topic. The vulnerability that is just inherent in the person either practicing in the moment with a coach or offering a sample and then waiting for feedback on that sample.

Bob: requires a lot of trust.

Paul Warren: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: Encourage.

Bob: Yeah, A.B.

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Bob: absolutely. That's one thing. So whenever we begin a new MI training, and particularly with folks who may not be experienced with it, we flag the fact that we're going to be moving into practice conversations and we normalize and validate the

anxiety that people have around because it's a big ask that we expect from folks to kind of put themselves out there and try on an unfamiliar, or potentially unfamiliar skill set in front of other people. Even in a small breakout room, there's two colleagues that you may or may not have met before and their job is to evaluate you. so we normalize that and we invite self compassion and a little bit of grace for ourselves.

Amy Shanahan: It's really beautiful that you start with that Bob. That whole notion of engaging and helping build that rapport and in this particular situation around giving people feedback and training folks to practice and be observed and not evaluated air quotes here, that we spend time with that and that easing the pain if you will, or easing the, the concern. And that has come up in our conversations around generalizing, coaching and feedback around me and I wonder about, I'm curious about your thoughts. To kick off the particular thing that we're going to focus on in this Episode around practice sample coding and using them during coaching. And how might that be in your experience? Similar or different? You do something different to build that rapport and that trust and comfort level if you will when folks are offering samples of their work.

Bob: Yeah, yeah. now that's. It depends for me at least a little bit on the context. and for us, my wife and I are both mighty coders and I cope with some other instruments as well. Ah, we both use the OARS system but it's frequent that people will just send us recordings through our website. and so we don't necessarily have a prior relationship with individual and so they may not know what to expect. I mean they might have done this before with somebody else. and so we don't really have there isn't that sort of structured conversation before they get feedback from us. So we really try to incorporate that into the narrative of the feedback that we offer to the individual. and we practice what in both of you. I'm obviously familiar with the strengths based approaches that we will often lean into with feedback. But beginning with something that we see as

a positive, giving them one almost always only one suggestion for improving their practice and then often ending with another positive that we've noticed as well. So that there's a gentleness to it, there's a recognition of both the effort and the achievement that's there already. and they also have something useful in terms of an attention point to move forward with. That's most often doing it in the context of a training of course is a little bit different because you've got that prior engagement and relationship. Particularly in a training series you often have gotten to know an individual a little bit and so that you've established that rapport with them where there is that trust and they recognize what's coming from you and you know hopefully they've been helped by the previous suggestions that you've given Bob.

Paul Warren: would it be okay if I asked you follow a question in regard to that?

Bob: Absolutely.

Paul Warren: So you describe the situation where a person may submit, perhaps in a blind way they may submit recording and you and your wife both as coders go through a process and use a particular process that's strength based and kind of preparing that person for getting the feedback so that they don't walk away with a negative experience in terms of the co. The coding sort of environment. And it's so interesting to me because I think sometimes what can happen is people get the results from the coding instrument and they only focus on those results. And for some reason they have blinders on, and they're only able to see, quote unquote. And I'm putting this in air quotes, what they did wrong.

Bob: Yeah, yeah.

Paul Warren: And I guess I'm wondering when you coach somebody that it's not a blind sample, how do you help that person to move away from wanting to interpret sort of the mechanistic aspects of a coding instrument, how to not interpret

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Paul Warren: that in such a negative way?

Bob: Y. Ah, it seems like we're very wired to see the numbers, on the sheet and do the numbers match what I'm supposed to be doing here? And that seems to have more weight, in my mind than what the nice things this person is probably going to say about me, which they may say to everybody. And so we kind of go to the. I guess that what we see as more objective data, which kind of ignores the fact that the mighty and all coding instruments are eminently subjective. the numbers are just representations of opinion just the way that the words are. And so it's really It's a bit of a trap in a way. But yeah, I see what you mean. People do get very focused on that element of it. Where am I not measuring up and it can't become a threatening experience for the individual. well, in the case of repeated relationship what we generally do, and this is more something that is part of the mi process in general is really do what we can to establish engagement with them. and that sometimes doesn't really have opportunity to happen on a voice to voice basis. I say face to faceuse or don't say face to face. Cause we're not always. But we can do that. That's often desirable. One of the things that we sometimes do with people is have calls around feedback. and this is pretty common with coders is that you don't just do the written feedback. You also have an option of a call if the person wants that and I love when they do because it really gives us the opportunity to contextualize and give a little further support around that. because I feel like when it's just written, no matter what we do to try to mitigate the impact of the numbers, that's where people's

eyes go. and so we can use the narrative a little bit to to put a bit of a context on that. and we will try to do that. But where we have the opportunity to do that, voice to voice contact or even face to face. If we're doing that call on zoom. That's usually the preference for me.

Amy Shanahan: You mentioned, the numbers. And I was thinking back to one of the first times. I don't know if it was absolutely the first being, having the opportunity to have a coded session and to share with the listeners who might not be familiar. The mighty you're mentioning. The Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity Scale, has a one to five scale. And I know the Motivational Interviewing Competency Assessment has a similar one to five scale. and I'm familiar with others that have similar scales. I'm not familiar with all the instruments, as intimate as a few. and my eyes did the same thing. I went to oh, no. And even over time after practicing, have this thought and I'm going to be vulnerable a little bit here that oh, I should be here by now in my practice, because I've been practicing intentionally and getting coaching and feedback. And there's times when I was like, ooh, I didn't really hit the mark or something was, was just I have an expectation of what it should be. And on a scale of one to five, don't I ever get to that? Dang. Five.

Bob: Yes. Yeah. I think it's so essential to really be clear with folks about what those numbers are about. And they're not necessarily about quality MI they're about the appearance of certain processes or elements in the conversation that may not even belong in some conversation. They're a great example of this for me. We had u. we had a dear friend, and colleague that we had trained in motivational interviewing. We've come very close to her throughout that process or her who agency got trained. She and one of her colleagues, were so enthusiastic about MI that they applied to MINT. They got into the Copenhagen training. they went to Copenhagen, but six months before that,

you know, they're doing their, their applications, their standard patient interviews. and they sent us a copy of their standard patient interview because they wanted us to code it for them. Also they got hard to gotten their feedback from. And my wife coded it, and, and gave her a three on, cultivating change talk because she spent a lot of time engaging with this person. And they really didn't get into, you know, into the change, goal. They didn't really focus the conversation that. It wasn't a lot of evoking. But that was arguably the right thing to do. This person needed, you know, to kind of be heard and supported. And that three haunted, this young woman. And she still brings it up. This is two years later. And whenever we talk to her, she'll still occasionally tease Linda about having given her a 3 on cultivating changetock. but it could have that impact. And so we really want to be thoughtful about how we present these things and how we give people context around understanding this feedback. You're not supposed to get fives all the time. That's not what this is. And

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Bob: it's so easy for us to assume that that is the goal.

Paul Warren: And you're really acknowledging that within the context of that conversation that was not the work to be done. The work to be done was on the relational component.

Bob: Yes.

Paul Warren: And the person sufficiently and probably skillfully did that. And PS a three is adequate. Yes. a, three is adequate or meaning that it wasn't an issue. You know, cult softening, sustained talk maybe wasn't. There was no need for it.

Bob: Yes. So. No. So you can't get a five. Right. If the person. That's not that. With substantial sustained talk, you can't get a five and. Right. Yet why should, why should you be beating yourself up on that? That's what the other person brought in.

Paul Warren: You know, you prompt me to want to coin a new phrase which is sort of coding trauma.

Bob: Yes.

Paul Warren: Where people are sort of, you know, this expectation. And it's funny you mentioned that they, the two folks. This person that you were coaching, you and your wife were coaching and coding. Somebody who also applied to the mint tnt, who didn't get accepted, got sent their feedback but no explanation of what the feedback meant.

Bob: Yes. Yes.

Paul Warren: All, all they got was you, were one point below what was necessary to be accepted.

Paul Warren: So the person was very confused and really needed to be talked through. Exactly what the feedback meant.

Bob: Yeah. Which.

Paul Warren: Which then kind of led to what we could focus on in our coaching sessions.

Bob: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And. And I think one of the things that's. And you. You alluded to this, Bob. One of the things that's. So it's a limitation of coding is that coding is looking at something technical and, and specific. And it's not always. Yes, the mighty does have the relational component, but that's only one half of it.

Bob: Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: So what a good point about the. How powerful the numbers can be and most importantly how powerful it is to be able to have that conversation and have that feedback. To your example, Paul. Ah. That someone may have gotten a written, you know, feedback with very limited information that. That can feel not very helpful and perhaps traumatizing, especially if they got a three and they're obsessed with that three. And you know, in a previous episode, one of our guests, Laura Saunders, mentioned that another context is that the sample is a snapshot. It's a snapshot in time, a very small snapshot in time. And to your example, one conversation of a piece of a conversation where perhaps, the person that you are coaching, you and your wife were coaching Bob, if they had more time, more than 20 minutes or more sessions, that would be moving towards that conversation. I love that because I'd love to tell that person, I would bet that the person that she was listening to and giving feedback or the practice session that people would want to come back and listen to her. Right. The relational components were all there.

Bob: Yeah. And those are the more powerful elements. Those are, that's the essential component of the spirit of mi that's represented in those globals. Yeah. I always go back to what Terry says about the mighty. It's a blunt instrument. And so as she put it, if

you're looking for something very kind of specific and fine tuned, you're probably wrong because not. It's not supposed to give you that. It's not what it's for. It's supposed to give you this sort of broad overview. There's gonna be, you know, a little bit of noise in the signal all the time.

Paul Warren: You know, it makes me think of two things and I'm not sure which direction will go in here with this, but it makes me think of overall. I wonder what it is about the evidence based practice of motivational interviewing that causes folks to feel like they want to be or have to be perfect at it. Which is the desire for all fives. Yeah, it's this drive for. And it makes me think of something Steve Rolnick says that, you know, people get m. Am I right? About 70% of the time. And if you're doing it, you know, effectively 70% of the time, that's really good.

Bob: Yep.

Paul Warren: But who wants to see.

Bob: Yes. Because we're so conditioned to expect excellence from ourselves. We,

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Bob: you know, most of us are our own worst critics, as we commonly say. And so there's that, that getting even a four on a five point scale. We, you know, that rankles us, ah, on some level. And we wanted to, well what. How could I have gotten that five? What do I have to do to get that five? Cause we want just it, I, you know, it's, it's, it's a big part, I think, of just the way the human is wired of American culture, particularly of the gamification of almost everything. Now that we want a high score.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Bob: This is the fruit of that.

Amy Shanahan: You know, I love the metaphor, that it's a blunt instrument that you mentioned that Terry has referred to the one instrument, the mighty. And I was thinking about the other nuance in context, that we do other things besides motivational interviewing. When we're talking with people, it's not the only thing that we're doing. Because I was thinking, as you both were talking, that when I'm intentionally practicing, I'm intentionally practicing motivational interviewing. And when I'm intentionally coaching people, intentionally giving them feedback in the context of motivational interviewing, it doesn't mean this other stuff that they did was not good stuff and not good tools and other tools that aren't the blunt instrument to use that in context. We're really kind of being myopic around the practice of motivational interviewing sometimes when we're coding and giving feedback and probably worth mentioning to folks that you're doing other beautiful things, you're using other beautiful skills and tools.

Bob: They just don't fit in our boxes.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Bob: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And it goes back to another point, which is what is the purpose of coding?

Bob: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And. And what I would often tell people that I had the opportunity to coach is that the purpose of the coding is to get a sense of where you are right now in this conversation, to identify your strength and to see if there are any opportunities for growth.

Bob: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And that ultimately that's the reason to code.

Bob: Yes. Yes. It's about taking a look, at what's happening in the conversation, and looking at it through a lens that brings out those strengths, and that brings out those areas for discussion, those areas for exploration. And it really is, if we can have that growth mindset to it, that's, you know, that's, I think, the best way to approach it. It's one thing to say that, however, and another thing for the learner to really just sort of unplug from their own expectations of themselves.

Amy Shanahan: The feedback part is a wholeher set of skills. How, we give people feedback and because we have to be mindful of individuals who have their own way to receive feedback in their own mental models or filters and how. How they're receiving the feedback and what.

Bob: Their previous drama might be around. Feedback.

Amy Shanahan: That's right.

Bob: You know, how it's been offered in the past.

Amy Shanahan: M.

Paul Warren: Which really makes sense, Bob, that you would prefer to be able to have a conversation. Maybe you're not seeing them face to face, but you're at least connecting with them through voice as a way to kind of contextualize your tone of voice. Communicates all of that is critical to effective use of a coding sample.

Bob: Yeah, it lets you do things that you cannot do on paper like ask or ask, which a very gentle way of doing feedback in MI M. And then the way I will typically do feedback in a verbal conversation. Can't really do it in a written conversation because I would have to send the email. Would it be okay if I offer you some feedback this point and then wait for a response? Yeah. Unnecessarily clunky.

Amy Shanahan: And yeah, you could do the offer ask without the first ask because the offer ask.

Bob: Yeah, ask is important. And it lets us do the other essential piece. One essential piece. But the other really valuable piece for me is it lets us begin that verbal feedback with the question. So what have you noticed here?

Bob: You know, what's really sticking out for you? in terms of things that you were doing well, things that you were less satisfied with, things that you're picking up from the coding feedback so that their input is in the conversation and again written feedback, you can't do that. You know, use they're not going to submit a written assessment of their own work. But with the recording, that's, that's just too much to ask.

Amy Shanahan: I think it's helpful, as I'm thinking about having coached folks just in

writing at times when the opportunity was there not to ask a question that's meant to be answered, yet ask a question of them, to invite them to reflect.

Bob: Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: More than answer it to me as the coach.

Bob: Yeah, yeah. Some things maybe you know, you could think about

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Bob: dot dot dot and just kind of leave that to them, to their expertise to interpret or pursue.

Paul Warren: As you've kind of talked about this Bob, and as the three of us have looked at it, it's really started to shape in my mind this idea that if you're sitting across from somebody or if you have a voice connection with somebody, your first order of business is to contextualize the use of the coding instrument and helping people to understand what that means, the limitations of it.

Bob: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And then the second piece that it really makes me think of, that I'm getting from what you're saying in terms of the coaching is after that contextualization, asking them before you go to any of the numbers, before you go to any of the results, asking them what is their thought about what happened in the conversation, what are they noting as what they thought was effective or what worked and what did they see as an

opportunity to refine or where did they feel stuck? And you haven't even gotten to the results of the coding instrument at point.

Bob: Using m MI to coach MI is the phrase that I like to use.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Bob: and I try to. We incorporate that. So when we do a training with a group a, basic or intermediate or advanced or you know, or others, we teach them to code and using the OR system which is the, you know, for my money, the simplest way to kind of do MI coding, we teach them to do that and we also teach them to give feedback by inviting that, by using that sort of a question, asking the interviewer, what do you feel like you did well in this conversation? And then reflecting those responses before they offer their own opinion about what the person did well and then moving to what would you like to do differently next time? Reflect those responses before asking permission to offer a suggestion. And we try to encourage them to stick to that pattern, or something like it at least once they get the hang of it. This may be more of a fit for them, but something that really brings in that person's perspective as opposed to just going oh, I counted this many reflections in this many questions or getting into the numbers or the data of it.

Amy Shanahan: Offering that framework is a dual purpose. You're inviting them to have an MI approach to giving feedback and giving them a framework to give feedback. Which is really nice because a lot of folks haven't been trained to give feedback and like you said, based on numbers, they'll get into the mechanics of. You use this many open ended questions.

Bob: Yeah, there was one instance where we had a luxury of time to teach people

motivational interviewing. And one thing I experimented with doing, but we discarded cause it was a little too clunky is you know, as they were in a triad, the coder is giving feedback. The person who was the client, the speaker codes the coder on feedback conversation and then gives them feedback on that. Then I thought to myself wa. You can keep this going forever. You know, just kind of.

Paul Warren: Yes.

Bob: Sort of like an painting's a bit like an eher painting of mi feedback.

Amy Shanahan: Y.

Bob: Yes, yes.

Paul Warren: The play within the play within the play.

Bob: Ye. But the idea was, you know, can we, can we really do High fidelity? Am m I to coach the person's use of Emma? and we can because it's the same. It is a change conversation. It is about moving in a direction, that's going to be helpful to the person and so it's really a perfect setting for that. but yeah, you can, you could make that a little bit much if you keep going around that particular memory. Go round.

Amy Shanahan: What has been your experience, Bob? Using the instruments to help guide and invite a conversation around. What next? What do I do now? So I don't know if you'd continue on the path with your friend who was bothered by the three and Change Talk.

Paul Warren: Who is now immortalized in this podcast.

Bob: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: Hopefully she'll list.

Bob: She will be happy to be immortalized because she listens to this podcast and is a big fan of it.

Paul Warren: So lady of the Three will call.

Bob: No, no, Jess will be very happy, with that and I'll just use her first name because she, she knows who she is and she knew when I first said it or she was. I just want to, And I'm sorry Amy, I'COMPLETELY lost what your question was.

Amy Shanahan: What do you do when, how do you move the conversation or guide the conversation towards activities or reflections or learning things that folks can do? What's your style? you know, I know we talk a lot in this and these series and in a lot of things that we're all different in how we approach thingslyious.

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Bob: Yeah. So if it's verbal, then then it's always the same thing. It's asaso or ask. It's what you know. So given this area that, that we're talking about, what do you think would be most helpful for moving forward? It know, is it more recordings or is it maybe doing some focused practice or would you be interested in some resources that I could suggest and maybe there are books or maybe there are videos I can kind of point them

to. we try to cultivate on our YouTube channel. We have a variety of different kind of conversational examples that the idea is to sort of hit areas that people might want to focus on and give them example videos that kind of speak to that. We've got one where my good friend and colleague Jennifer, Carvalo does a conversation where her task is just to use as many different kinds of complex reflection as she can in response to this person. And so she's like just popping different line as a values reflection. There's an analogy there. And the idea is to really to give people examples of what different complex reflections look like. And that's for beginning to Intermediate level learners who are really trying to get the hang of complex reflection. if it's a written feedback, it's a little tougher because of course you can't do the ASKCO offer thing. So I'll kind of give a list of different things that might be helpful, but I'll make it really clear that they're the judge, as to which of these might be useful for them. Or maybe they have a better sense of where they might want to go. But it offers those resources, or even different sort of things to think about. Like, well, given one behavior that they use, I might give a couple of examples of how that can be done in a different way. and again invite them to respond on that.

Paul Warren: While emphasizing their autonomy.

Bob: Absolutely. Yeah. That's the key piece is that people just like in AM I, you know, we got to be cognizant of the fact that this person has to be the gatekeeper around their use of their time and people have different demands on their day besides just getting better at mi, which I can easily forget.

Amy Shanahan: It's another good example of the offer ask in writing. You're offering up some menu of options and again inserting honoring their autonomy at the end. What do you think about that and what stands out to me in my experience of doing similar things

and also receiving. Sometimes folks have had the experience, the coded example, and some time has passed. So the proximity of the feedback is important for some and, or folks hear it and go, oh my gosh. For me, I had an example and I think actually Paul, you were one that gave me feedback on this session. I remember distinctly, leaning to sustained talk a lot. And I was like, what the heck? It's something that I already knew. And just the mere fact of being coached or actually coded on it and seeing the results made me go, oh well, gosh, I know what I need to do. It didn't particularly need to be a, focus of my coaching session per se around activities. It was just seeing the feedback for me was powerful. And I would imagine that you both experienced this as well. When you're coaching folks that the feedback alone written or verbal, maybe they already have a sense without the, I'm sorry, without the feedback they may or have a sense. I think I asked a lot of questions in this session.

Bob: Yeah, so it's confirmatory or disconfirmatory. I frequently had the experience of the person says oh, I feel like I was asking way too many questions. And they were over two to one reflections to questions. But they're hearing that their self critical voice is really hearing those questions that they are using you. You see that again kind of in the intermediate level where they become kind of phobic about questions sometimes because they. They're really thinking about that ratio and how do I get there? It means I can't ask any questions. But yeah, both of those certainly are.

Paul Warren: And sometimes questions are very warranted.

Bob: Yeah. Yeah. And I try to really emphasize with people you need questions. so you really want to not fall into that trap of just viewing them as the thing I have to cut out. Not at all. That's not good. Ami. It's hard to evoke without questions. I mean they're really the primary tool for that. But people are. I'm a huge offender in this. You think

black and white. Okay. if I want more I want to hit this ratio. I got to really not use questions.

Amy Shanahan: How about moving into. And this is just popping into my head from my experience of folks honing in on some things that are considered what we would refer to as MI inconsistent and typically in the might for example that would be persuasion and confrontation. I'm happy to report that even though I've

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Amy Shanahan: been in the addiction treatment field for several decades where confrontation was the commonplace early on, I don't see a lot of confrontation. and even when I do there was one time where it was masked in a really beautiful Heart.

Bob: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: And the practitioner meant well but kind of did a warning if you will. If things don't change something bad might happen kind of confrontation. And What are your thoughts about that from ah offering feedback in the instruments. If they offer up some MI inconsistent things. What have been both your examples or experiences with that?

Paul Warren: It's interesting. I'm trying to recall. I don't really recall any instances of where I've experienced more persuasion than without permission. in the attempt to use logic to sort of guide the person to a particular direction. but not confrontation so much.

Bob: Yeah, yeah. In my experience it's quite rare also in fact I'm racking my brain to

trying to think the last time I actually coed to confront in a conversation from a learner. Now it's sometimes been the case that we get pre training samples. M. You know that's happened before and when that's the case then yeah. you know I come across a little bit of that. but you know s. There's no expectation that they're. That they know Am I. And so there's really not, you know, a lot to you know, a lot to challenge. that with. The other thing that kind of brings up for me is And something I've heard Terry remark on a couple of times is that yeah, those are m ami non inherent behaviors and we would code that accordingly. And at the same time there's been some evidence that in certain circumstances, in certain relationships, those behaviors can have a net positive impact. you know we want toa be mindful of the fact that yeah, back in the day when confrontation was the way we always did it, some people did get better. And so that it is something that does have this ability to be helpful. And at the same time we need to be really clear eyed and recognize the fact that generally it's a behavior we wanna be avoidant dove and only in relationships where we feel really sure that we can do this and it's gonna be good would we entertain that as an intentional behavior in non right.

Amy Shanahan: I guess for me as a coach and I was thinking of a situation, I think I've shared the story historically somewhere in the podcast episodes where I had a good relationship and was working with someone and this was before I was really kind of polishing up am I, knew it more intellectually than I did practically. And I won't particularly say what I said here but let's put it this way, there could be better ways I could have handled the exchange and the person whom I saw years later was doing very well and that very thing that I ever said to them was what they said kept them sober if you will. and I'm not saying it that ooh, I'm proud your find your confrontational statement and stick with it.

Bob: Go and do likewise.

Amy Shanahan: And work. Sometimes I think my commentary from my experience would be to offer up again from a strength based perspective. Maybe if I were coaching me, you built rapport. You have those mad skills of empathy that you expressed and you never know how someone's going to receive that level of feedback. It was just what felt right to you at that moment ``eah.

Paul Warren: And I think there's the responsibility of attuning to what the person's reaction is to what you offered because if you're just kind of charging forward without noting what their response was because it felt right to you in the moment. So I think that can be part of the consideration of, you know, the impact. Although the instrument is really looking at the practitioner, it's not looking at the client's response.

Bob: Right, yeah. And even with that. So I would be wary of saying in a training that confront is something that we could consider, just because it would be so easy for people to just be like, oh okay, you know, let me rump that. you know, I have this relationship with this person. and we're not always the best judges of that. at the same time we've

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Bob: got those behaviors seeking collaboration and emphasizing autonomy and the mighty that can change that code if we're using those along with maybe less a confront, but certainly a persuade, we're in very different territory at that point. And that person's autonomy and right to self direction, and the, and the collaborative nature of the conversation is safeguarded and we're still able to be direct with them and share a concern with them. I'm really worried about this for you. and that all becomes very much in bounds with mi and that's I think where the bang for the buck is in that area is looking

for the opportunities to help them shift those am I not inherent behaviors. Just with a slight tweak, they become MI adherent. and they can see a very different response on balance from there.

Amy Shanahan: I think the theme of our conversation is all around how the nuance of the numbers and the context and the person receiving feedback may already be wondering, oh, should I have done that? Or oh, if you tell me it's am I inconsistent? Is that another translation that I'm not doing? Am m I very well? you know, the nuance in their own clutter in their own minds when they're receiving feedback. And I've thought about this a lot, hearing people coach and being coached myself. certain adjectives can be a little stingy and hurt a little bit depending on how you go about talking with folks in a strength based way.

Bob: Ye. And you have very little control over that in a written format. you know, how it's gonna land on them, is really outside of that. I mean in a verbal engagement you can, you can gauge the response and then, you know, follow up. written. Yeah, not so much.

Paul Warren: I was also thinking that, you know, a theme that I think has been part of this conversation is certainly having a coded sample. Using an instrument to code a sample when it's contextualized and when it can be done in a strength based perspective can add a really powerful element to the coaching relationship and conversation. And I would also say at the same time, without some of those safeguards, the addition of using a, ah, coding instrument can Add a certain degree of pressure or terror to the person as well. And I think really acknowledging the fact that you have this tool as a coach, you have a tool at your disposal and of course you want to be using the tool in such a way that it empowers the person as opposed to raises their anxiety. and making sure that one is investing the time before just saying well now we're going to

move to coding your audio recording or yeah, it's a lot.

Bob: Yeah, it's a lot of pressure or the person can feel that as pressure. Some people are delightfully open books and they're like you just put it all out there and they're very open to them. But for a lot of us, yeah, others it is an ask to be that vulnerable with people. and that's one of the reasons that we learned to highlight that in the trainings that we do and validate that, we revisit that right before the first conversation, the practice conversations. We remind them of that, to try to take the sting out of it as much as we can. both for the individual who's received that feedback, but also a reminder to the person to the code or the coach in their group, around that gen, we even printed on the coding sheet those guidelines as to how to do the conversation so that they've got that right in front of them there. Because that is I think one the more, one of the riskier areas of MI training, in terms of the person's felt sense of psychological safety.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, I'm going to bridge the points that you're both making, around consistency and terminology that we use encoding around consistent or reliability and what do those words mean and how do you get to that point? And I wonder if we can take a couple minutes even just bouncing that around. And I was thinking of a group that I've had the privilege of working with that are learning how to code and they're also practicing their own motivational interviewing while also practicing coding. And then that whole other layer of how do you give feedback? And we've had different instances of well

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Amy Shanahan: Bob did a really good job last week and now I need to give him

feedback this week Or I really like Paul and I got to work with Paul and how am I going to give Paul that 2 or that 2.5 on this scale? Not that you would be there, Paul.

Somewhere in our travels we've been there and just that level of how do you get to that point of consistency and reliability when you are a coder and you want to use these instruments to enhance your coaching and feedback.

Paul Warren: You know it's interesting because I was part of a research study once that was using the MIA step coding instrument which I believe was 16 codable items and it was a research study. So there was a need for inter rater reliability and all of us coders were trained together and then we all were given five of the same samples to test our inter rater reliability. And then there was a prescription for each one of us that we got special training for the particular area that we needed to develop in order to move toward inter rater reliability. And that was for a research study. So it was very rigorous and very specific to the goal of making sure that there was very little variability between one rater and the next. my sense is, is that not a lot of programs or institutions have the resources of the time to invest in that degree of inter rater reliability. unless they're doing a research project and maybe they're bringing somebody in a coding ah, team in or something. I mean for me just using the instruments and having conversations with people who are using the instruments, particularly the mighty, the one I use, and really having dialogue about well you got this score and I got this score and what does that mean exactly and what are you basing it on? I found that very illuminating. It maybe didn't result in inter rater reliability but it certainly raised my awareness or understanding of how to use the instrument.

Amy Shanahan: I like the description of, in your experience with the inter rater reliability and now veering towards a group of folks that probably won't ever measure that level of specificity of how well but to what level can they move towards reliability or consistency

when they're perhaps coaching a department of people or a group of people, how can. So if the three of us were working together in an institute, what would we do to be more consistent and reliable if we didn't have that rigorous inter rater reliability? What are your thoughts about that?

Bob: For me I belong to a coding team out of the Health Education Training Institute in Portland, Stephen Andrews Agency. and we have for years, I mean since before Mighty four came out, have been meeting once a month, and online and just getting together, coding things together, discussing our decision making process, our where things land with us and all that sort of stuff. And that's been something that's been very edifying to be a part of and has been Very valuable for me. Linda also participates with them and Linda and I of course, since we train together all the time, do a lot of coding of similar material together. we haven't checked our reliability. so I don't know what ours is. the coding team for a little while years ago was actually tracking in a rate of reliability to support our applying for research projects and stuff like that. There was such a struggle though because the number of us and the sort of the ways that different things with land. It was really elusive to get to what most programs were looking for. 0.80, 0.85, we weren't able to reliably hit that. it's been a long time since we even looked at it at this point. So absent research I think the rigor, the demand of that really isn't there for an individual learner and the value of it probably isn't as salient to justify the effort that's going to be involved in getting to that level of inter rated reliability. so while there's absolutely value in it and you want it for research purposes, I tend to leave that to coding groups that really have that personnel and bandwidth that do that volume to be able to support it.

Amy Shanahan: So what I'm taking away then would be if the three of us were working together, we

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Amy Shanahan: might benefit from meeting monthly or some level of routine to see where we are together so that we have some consistency and not the rigorous reliability that we have some consistency in our cause. Coding is its own skill set as well.

Bob: It is, is, yeah. That would reflect my experience is that you want to have some regular format for that. and that certainly served us well.

Paul Warren: Ande could certainly serve coaches well if coaches could be part of a coding group where they're using the instrument, where they're reflecting on using the instrument, where they're talking about how they arrived at the ratings that they got and they could bring that ongoing experience into the coding that they may do with the folks who are, they're supporting.

Bob: Yeah, that's actually very much what Iya and I have been in the middle of for the last probably goodness, six months or so now. there's a development here in Massachusetts where we live, the State Department of Children and Families, the Child Protective Services Agency issued a ah, number of contract announcements that make clear that a lot of new programs that they're looking to give to vendors. The requirement is that staff in these programs are being coded regularly using the mighty, and that they're fluent on that, that they know how to do MI M. That throughout the structure of service delivery that MI M is infused there. It caught a lot of programs off guard. our phone started ringing off the hook and a number of other MI trainers I know around here as well. but the way that we help them to, we work with six or seven different vendor of agencies now. But the way that we're helping them do that is we're teaching them the Mighty as we teach them MI M. So we're using the Mighty as the delivery

system for MI training. So they're learning from go not the ORS system of understanding mi, but the Mighty system of understanding mi. And so, and what we've seen to notice so far is it seems to substantially accelerate their uptake of both motivational interviewing and of coding as a skill set. I was accustomed to thinking of coding as something you had to do your own sort of 18 hour training to. and there's value in that I think. But you know, we get people through 18 hours of MI training and they're pretty good coders at that point. Even on the Mighty, which is not the easiest instrument to get the hang of.

Amy Shanahan: So you're finding the simultaneous or close proximity of learning both has been helpful in this project. Yeah, I've heard that before. Around being Able because you're being coded and practicing coding. So you actually start to get the nuance, of MI in general. And like you said, it's worth repeating that it's also a blunt instrument. It's not the only thing. And I know that, the newest book that I've picked up and haven't finished yet, but the MI M From the Inside out book talks about being mindful to not just lean into just being coded. That there's other, other ways around practicing your MI and you don't want to always practice to the test. You might be missing some things. And I think that that could you know, relate to some of the items in the Mighty that they don't have a lot of reliability on certain pieces of it. So it's that, you know, that spirited nuance to MI that we know when we're doing well and we can see it, we could touch it, we could measure it and then there's some imperfections there. What are your thoughts about that?

Bob: I mean for me, I've been using the Mighty for a long time. I teach MI M for a couple of graduate level classes. And the skill with using MI is part of their grade and we use the Mighty. and so they, they become very good as students do in, as you say, me sort of teaching or learning to the test. they try to convert all of their questions into seeking

collaboration so that it makes the ratio easier to achieve. They kind of overdo very short complex reflections to try to bulk up their numbers. And so it becomes a kind of an exercise in accomplishing what they need to accomplish to get the A as opposed to or it can become that. And I coach them on that and I guide them on that. But. But it is definitely a phenomenon that wenna be cognizant about the Mighty. You know, as we've said several times, Terry' statement that it's a blunt instrument. It's not supposed to be the be all end all of m MI we.

Paul Warren: Don'T want the coing instrument to wag the dog.

Bob: Exactly. Yes. That's a great way of thinking about that because at that point we're practicing Mighty, not mi

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Bob: and mighty is not what mi M is supposed to be. It's just a snapshot of what good MI m can look like.

Amy Shanahan: I remember early on being exposed to the notion of coding. And the first instrument I learned was actually sitting in a classroom alongside Paul learning the M MIA Step. And I know that there's some conversation that that's not on the list of reliable instruments, but it's a good coaching and supervision tool to use. And one of my professors mentors would also tell me that research assistants were super good at coding. Mightyuse it's black and white to them. They don't have the clinical nuance he would say of is it this or is it that? They just see it and they count it and it's there.

Bob: Yeah, I know Terry is kind. We keep quoting Terry but she commented that the

best coders that she worked with were engineering undergrad students.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Bob: Cause they are really good at ah, figuring out what boxes things go in.

Bob: And that's what coding is.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, well it speaks to that. It speaks to why the Mighty is a blunt instrument. And it has its purpose and it has its use. And there are other coding instruments that are less nuanced if you will, and not as blunt and has some flexibility around. It's for coaching and feedback for you to use and improving your skills if you chose to do that.

Bob: And others that are more nuanced and more challenged. The BS Step is a great example of that. It's a great tool, but it's a beast to code a conversation on the me a step. I mean, that's a. My brains leak out of my ears after, after one of those. and misc. You can't even use the motivational intering skills code. You can't even use in a live conversation. You have to listen to the conversation three times to use the. Because you've got to code. The behavior counts for the counselor, behavior counts for the client. The globals. I mean, there's just so much, to it. it's an amazing instrument for capturing the nuances of the conversation, and it's invaluable in research. but to try to use it in a training, you could never.

Amy Shanahan: I have never used the misc. So the way you just described it made me think, it's good that I just understand what it's used for.

Bob: Yeah.

Paul Warren: Not a direction you're gonna run toward the mth.

Bob: Yeah. I usually bring up misc when people complain about the mighty. When learners are like, this is really complicated. I'm like, oh, yes, there's another one the might be is based on.

Paul Warren: Yes.

Amy Shanahan: You'll learn to love this one.

Bob: Yeah. Once I describe the myist to them, they're happy to work with the mighty.

Amy Shanahan: I was wondering, thinking about my questions about consistency and reliability and think about, well, why would people hire any of us to coach them? And how would we support our skills and, our knowledge and practice of using any of the coding instruments support that? Why should anyone care? Do we always need a coding instrument? What are your thoughts about that as we.

Paul Warren: I mean, the first thought that comes to my mind in regard to that, and it's funny, Amy, I think you almost read my mind because I have thoughts that coding, using a coding instrument, I would base that on where the learner is and where they are kind of in their stage of development. Because to introduce it at the wrong time could be very overwhelming to them. And it's funny because it reminded me of when I got the opportunity to train kind of intermediate practitioners that oftentimes I would share the mighty, manual with them as a way to increase their understanding, their depth of

understanding of the practice of mi, because it can be a wonderful way to get an overview in a less sort of or specific way of the practice of mi. So I would say there are some instances where I might be coaching somebody and coding their sample or might not be an effective way to begin. We might grow there, but I don't know if I'd always begin there.

Bob: I concur with that. it's something that I find to be invaluable in a lot of situations. But you, you know, you want to be mindful of the tool and where is the best use of the tool,

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Bob: for individuals that might be a little more challenged by feedback, we might begin with more of a verbal approach and just observation and inviting their thinking, doing some of that ask offer, ask piece. if I can transition someone into maybe submitting something and doing a verbal consultation around it, I'm going to tend to prefer that for such an individual, others very much the opposite and they're wanting to kind of dive into that from go. I think what it comes down to in terms of the germ of the question, for me it sounds a little bit like what's the value of it in MI m generally. And for me it's really about well how do we know we're doing Emma?

Bob: You knowuse cause one it repeated finding the worst, one of the worst predictors of whether you're doing good mi m or not is whether you think.

Amy Shanahan: You'Re doing good m when you think your own report.

Bob: And so we want toa be clear eyed about that. You know, I know what I think I'm

doing. but who's to say that's actually what the research has told us repeatedly is gonna move the needle with this person on helping them think about the possibilities of positive change for themselves? How do I know? And so coding gives us a way to at least address that qu I won't say answer that question, but at least address that question. and it's the really the only way that I know of to address that question.

Amy Shanahan: I was, I was thinking about a gentleman that Paul and I have met through our training and coaching sessions over the years. And and I'm summarizing the conversation around this weather decodde or not to code and when in the context and the summary of what we've been talking about and the two words that pop up in my head is it depends. And the gentleman that joins our practice sessions question that are you going to say it depends again? Ye And I was thinking of a person that I've been coaching who intentionally wanted to adopt an MI approach in their communication style. They have a lot of other skills, a lot of other tools and had attended an in depth MI training and wanted to use MI to help them improve their communication. And as of this point in our relationship it doesn't feel appropriate to you to use a coding instrument at this point because they're not really practicing MI with that intention to navigate and converse about change or growth that somebody's ambivalent about. It's really more about taking on the spirit of partnership and collaboration and acceptance and more of the spirited aspects. And I haven't really found the appropriate time. I'm going to trust my instincts that that may happen. but in this particular relationship it doesn't seem to be appropriate.

Bob: So really bringing in those relational elements and there, that's all that this person is really looking to do. And so the mighty would be really not a good fit at all because it's so focused, on the technical aspects, but not that even the relational pieces are still there, but. Right, that makes sense.

Paul Warren: Any final words to coaches about using any of the coding instruments in coaching session?

Bob: I mean to me we always want to be mindful of the learner, and the fact that a lot has been asked of them to submit a practice sample or to agree to be coded in the first place. and so we want to be thinking regardless of which instrument we're using the Micah, the Mighty, the Ores or whatever. We want to be really cognizant of using the skills that we know ah, in MI to deliver feedback in a way that's AMI consistent. so that again they're being supported to move in a positive direction, as opposed to, you know, feeling like, oh, this is corrective feedback.

Amy Shanahan: This is.

Bob: I'm being called out, you on something here.

Paul Warren: Like you said earlier, using MI to.

Bob: Coach mi M yeahah.

Amy Shanahan: I think one thing that I would add to that and based on the vulnerability of the process of being coached and coded especially is to as a coach, for me what I try to practice is being consistent myself with. If I

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Amy Shanahan: gave someone a three that I understand specifically why and can really anchor my feedback if it's needed and comes up, in the why. Because I'm a human

being and it's subjective why I pick the three, right. If I'm not in a group and we're swapping notes about why it's a three, that I as a coach feel confident enough that I can have a conversation with a person when they wanna know why did I pick a three?

Bob: Cause as we've learned today, that three can really stick with them.

Amy Shanahan: Right? And little did your friend know she was gonna be the threthead of our conversation.

Paul Warren: I would like to repeat that a 3 is adequate. When Denise Ernst trained me, she said start with the three and either go up or down.

Bob: Down there. Ye. So the default is 3.

Paul Warren: The vault is line.

Bob: Yeah.

Paul Warren: not to take away anybody's reaction to three.

Amy Shanahan: And in the Micah language, in the Micah in The motivational interview, incp competency assessment of 3 is client centered.

Paul Warren: M literally 3. It's a magic number.

Amy Shanahan: It is.

Paul Warren: Bob.

Amy Shanahan: So if you had three wishes, it has.

Paul Warren: Well, one of my wishes is that Bob would come back to our podcast again.

Bob: I would be delighted. It is always a pleasure to chat with both of you and I'm so grateful to you for putting these out and being such a part of so many people's journey, in their own, trajectory with me. So it's really a great service that you provide.

Amy Shanahan: Uh-huh. Well, it's further enhanced by your contribution, for sure. And my one wish is that listeners would send us an email and let us know what stands out, what's helpful, and what they'd like to hear in the future. Because we have been getting feedback that people have been finding the segments helpful at times. So. All right, you get to end Bob with the third wish.

Bob: A wish around coding, coaching. And, so I wish that really, as many, people whose role it is to provide feedback, supervisors, administrators, I wish as many as them as possible would really look at ML as a means of engaging with people. A, means of helping folks find their own path towards growth. That's one of the great things, I think, that our friends at Milo really contribute is challenging us to really look at what does ML look like in the supervisory relationship, and what can it do there? And I think the answer is really good stuff. And so I would just wish that.

Amy Shanahan: Beautiful.

Paul Warren: Thank you.

Amy Shanahan: Thanks again, Bob.

Paul Warren: Thanks for listening to episode 34 of Lions of Tigers and Bears MI. Be on the lookout for new episodes coming soon.

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