Episode 10-"Pushing" for Change

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

CASAT podcast Network. In episode ten, Paul and Amy explore the MI spirit and resisting the writing reflex. For episode resources, contact us and other information, please visit the Lions and Tigers and Bears MI website at nfartec.org/mipodcast That's nfartec.org/mipodcast.

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 Hello, Paul.

Paul Warren: Hello, Amy.

Amy Shanahan: Good to be back talking to you on Lions and Tigers and Bears.

Paul Warren: Agreed. I'm looking forward to this conversation.

Motivational interviewing explores the impulse to push for change in helping professions

And the topic we're focusing on today is pushing for change. Am I? Spirit and the writing reflex.

Amy Shanahan: Lots of things to consider. I'm curious too about pushing for change. Do we want to do that? Do we do that?

Paul Warren: Yeah. It's funny because I wonder if we feel the push to push for change in terms of, you know, we get into the helping professions for a lot of different reasons and, you know, we open ourselves up to what participants and clients and peers and patients are telling us and, you know, we have feelings about that and we want to help. We want to maybe solve, fix, save.

Amy Shanahan: Rescue, offer some resources and advice.

Paul Warren: Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. That's what we were trained to do.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And it's a human instinct or impulse to, if you see somebody in need

of a particular resource or in particular kind of pain, you know, some people are, really feel the push or feel compelled to want to, want to solve, fix, rescue the problem.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. It's part of the compassion that we have, that desire to want to do something to help someone, hopefully out of their suffering or pain or struggle.

Paul Warren: And again, as we talk about this and we talk about this in relation to motivational interviewing, I think it's important for us to kind of normalize and for us to sort of say to folks who may be listening to this conversation because you feel that push doesn't mean you're doing something wrong. It's normal to feel that it's human. and not that you needed us to tell you that, but, starting off with normalizing that impulse.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. And we're going to explore ways that we can go about managing that, dealing with that in an effective, more effective way. More. Am I consistent way? Of course, because this is about motivational interviewing and how we can lean in and collaborate with a person and not necessarily push our agenda on them or our desire maybe to fix or change or advise.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And really I think another way of kind of like summarizing

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Paul Warren: that in a very simple way is simply saying that, you know, motivational interviewing offers specific guidance about how we can put that impulse to work. And like you were saying, still respect somebody's autonomy. So ultimately we can care better or we can care more effectively and not let that impulse, which I think maybe. Drumroll, please. which is often referred to as.

Amy Shanahan: Drum. No, the writing reflex.

Paul Warren: The writing reflex.

Amy Shanahan: Yes, yes, yes.

Paul Warren: Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: I thought you wanted me to drum for change out of the blue.

Paul Warren: Oh, no, no need to do that. No need to do that.

Amy Shanahan: Well, I'm really glad that you highlighted caring better. That's really a nice way to think about it because it's hopefully mostly from our heart that we have that desire to want to help someone. And there's a way that we can care better in a, in that with the spirit in mind of partnering and collaborating and honoring someone's autonomy because they're the expert of themselves and how they want to make a change, if at all.

M: Am I spirit took me a while to understand intellectually

Paul Warren: So maybe it would be helpful to move our conversation given that we've hopefully normalized that impulse to maybe a specific focus on am I spirit? M and I'm wondering, I'll just say for myself that this conceptually was kind of a more difficult concept for me to wrap my head around. as I was being exposed to motivational interviewing, am I spirit? What the heck is that? So I'm wondering what your thought is

about that and where you are with that today. Cause I feel like I have a much deeper understanding now.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, I think I'm on the same page as you, if I'm understanding correctly. And certainly you can add your experience as well. that it was this something esoteric thing that you couldn't define or put your, that intuition of spirit, you know, I have it and I think I thought I had it coming out of the gate. In my career as a counselor, I hear people talk about I'm doing, am I? And sometimes think it has to do with that person centeredness and something around that. Right. So it took me a while to understand it and articulate it and it comes easier and easier the more you teach, the more you learn, and the more you bring it into your heart set. and I wish that I could come up with a specific point in time when I could say, oh, this is it. This is when I got it. It's just been an evolution for me of practice and I don't. I think it's unlearning some things, relearning some things, getting out of the way. I think the biggest part for me around the MI spirit was intellectually, when I understood the acronym of the spirit, which we know is partnership acceptance, which has a lot into it. more than just acceptance. We could have two or three PowerPoint slides on acceptance. Yes, it's pretty deep compassion and evocation. So PACE, partnership, acceptance, compassion and evocation. I could get it intellectually and I think that there were aspects that didn't always connect in my heart. And I'll give you an example. I feel very vulnerable even just thinking about saying it, that I think there were times that I didn't believe that people had it within them to change. I think I believe some people did and others didn't. I think that I had this thought maybe at times for maybe some of the other aspects, that there were some people that reacted better to me telling them, guiding them in a less guiding way, in a more directing way. when people responded to that. So I wasn't

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Amy Shanahan: partnering as much. So I didn't really embrace the spirit completely, if that makes sense. So I almost compartmentalized it based on what I thought about a person, if you will.

Amy Shanahan: And the more I practiced and the more I learned from the people that I served, the more I realized that everyone has it in them. Everybody is the expert of themselves. Even young people are really smart about what they want to do or what they don't want to do and how they want to go about it. And you know, I used to pick certain people or groups and think, no, I don't know. So I think my curiosity, curiosity killed the cat, if you will. And I bought into it more and more as the more experience I had a what about you?

Paul Warren: Yeah, you know, I think the thing that has helped me the most with it because again, I think I intellectualized it on some level.

Pace helps me prioritize interactions with others from a place of compassion

and this is something that I really try and discuss, and really invite people to think about and work on in trainings is that to me, am I spirit? And again, you went over the acronym. Pace really gives me specific guidance about the state of me when I'm in the company of that other person and meaning that it gives me guidance about how I want to position myself to interact with this person. It gives me guidance about how I want to prioritize this person's, autonomy, this person's idea, and to be able to do that from a

place of compassion, that, yes, as the worker, I may have an agenda, but compassion is helping me to prioritize the person I have the opportunity to work with to prioritize their agenda. And that doesn't mean we don't have a collaborative agenda. It just means that I'm very clear that I'm holding onto the idea that I'm interacting with them in a compassionate way. And then, of course, the evocation really reminds me that, like you were saying, they have it in them. And my role when I'm practicing motivational interviewing and acting in an am I spirited way is to draw it out from them as opposed to trying to put my best idea in.

The opposite of partnership we would talk about is more of self interest

Amy Shanahan: You know, I was thinking, as you were talking, another aspect of maybe teaching and learning. I remember entering the forest with you and our colleagues early on and exploring the training material, and I wonder if you recall and maybe we could offer this to the listeners. One thing that stood out to me, I love when there's a compare and a contrast, because it helped me to visualize and understand what the opposite would look like. So the opposite of partnership we would talk about is more of self interest, or in what you said kind of sparked that for me, that it's not putting your agenda on the table necessarily as a priority. It doesn't mean you don't have something to offer, when it's time and when it's appropriate and when you've been given permission to do so. So the opposite of partnering is more about your own interest, your own self interest as the worker. And I think about this early on in my career as a counselor, I wanted to do good, I wanted to be good. I wanted to have, success in helping people. So I went more through a menu of things. And so it was hard to get out of my own way because of that desire. So I had my own self interest that maybe was more prominent than it

could have been from an am I consistent perspective.

Paul Warren: And I'm going to throw this idea out and tell me if I'm kind of capturing what you just said, which is that as your understanding and your practice of MI spirit increased, you were able to not necessarily keep

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Paul Warren: centering yourself in the conversation. You were able to really, deprioritize your need to be good, your need to accomplish your agenda and really be with that person in a compassionate, curious way in that moment.

Amy Shanahan: Right? Yeah. It took a while for me to gain my wings, if you will, to be okay without the net or without having that agenda of and anticipation for what I was supposed to be doing.

Paul Warren: You know, it makes me think that, and it's funny, I, wonder what your thought is about this, but it makes me think that, you know, this is where I taking the risk to do, you know, even a practice audio recording with somebody can be really helpful because, you know, MI spirit is, it's, there's nothing ephemeral about it, there's nothing mysterious about it. It's actually actionable. As the worker, you can choose to position yourself as a partner, you can choose to accept. And maybe we should break down what the four a's are that go under acceptance. But, you can make choices about how you're going to interact. And in an audio recording, you can actually hear that? Yes, you can hear am I spirit in the conversation or the lack thereof. M and, you know, I can say for myself as an example that the more I've practiced motivational interviewing, trained it and talked about it, I think the more MI spirit I've been able to actually bring to

conversations.

Amy Shanahan: Yes. I was thinking about coaching someone who worked with, homeless people, predominantly in his work. And I, he recorded a tape for me to listen to. So on that notion of acceptance, the, a part of PACE, I, was thinking about the clear opposite might be judgment, right? And he and I listened to his tape together. I asked him what part of the tape did he want to listen to? And he listened in and I, it was, it was just interesting to be in that space of thinking. In my head, I have a judgment, an opinion about what was just happening. And I had to suspend that judgment. So I was hopefully modeling to him and asking him what did he think? And luckily that happened because he said, well, I don't think that I really have the spirit there. And I said, tell me what you heard or didn't hear that makes you think that? And he said, well, I was noticing the tone of my voice and I know that this particular person, I was really frustrated with them, I was judging them. And he explained it and I won't get into the details, which are irrelevant, really, because he was judging the person and frustrated with the person. And he said that he was having a hard time getting out of the way, and being able to help. And it was such a powerful experience to a remove my own judgment because I heard and saw the same thing or heard the same thing in the tape. And that knowing. And so it further, like, validates for me that he had it within him, too. I didn't have to teach him that I heard it and he didn't. And, and what a relief. I mean, we talk about motivational interviewing, actually decompressing and minimizing maybe some of our feelings of burning out because we don't take the responsibility of fixing someone. And it was such a relief to not have to worry about telling him what I heard because he heard it. He knew it was there.

Paul Warren: Yeah. And you invited him to reflect on it.

Amy Shanahan: And I think the important thing I wanted, the point I wanted to make, is, and that I suspended my judgment. It's not that it doesn't exist. I just suspended it. I know we talked in further episodes or previous episodes about me wearing a rubber band on, my wrist. And my mentor told me anytime I had a judgment to, like, kind of give myself a little whack. So I remember that, well,

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Amy Shanahan: we have thoughts and judgments about things, good or bad, and just really solidifying that practice of suspending and not sharing it in that moment. And if I had chosen to do so, I would have done so with permission and in a very mindful, m kind way.

Paul Warren: Yeah. Which, again, would be consistent with MI spirit.

Amy Shanahan: Right. Yeah. So that was maybe a more detailed expression of the acceptance piece and also navigating the opposite. When you have the judgment, what can you do with it?

The piece about accurate empathy guides me when practicing motivational interviewing

Paul Warren: I think one of the things that I like most about the acceptance part of MI spirit, and this also really helps me, guides me as to how I want to be when I'm in the moment with the person, is the piece about accurate empathy. And for me, I take that to mean that it is my job, when I'm practicing motivational interviewing, to really try and

understand the experience and the perspective and accurately empathize with that of the person that I happen to be in that conversation with. And, that one a of the four a's really gives me the permission to suspend whatever my thought may be, because my goal is to understand.

Amy Shanahan: I'm often curious. I'm smiling. Not that others can see me, but I'm smiling. And I've asked several of my mentors this question, and I may have asked this for you, but it would be great to get it on recording and invite the audience to think about it. How would they answer it? What's inaccurate empathy? So if I'm talking about the opposites of the PACE, the, spirit aspects. And I think about accurate empathy. It helps me to clarify what's inaccurate empathy. If I were being empathic and it was inaccurate, what is that about for you? What do you think?

Paul Warren: I like the question, and I like it because you, said I'm being empathic and maybe I'm inaccurate.

Paul Warren: And of course, motivational interviewing is not necessarily about getting it right. It is about attempting to understand and acting on what you think that understanding may be. And if it's, quote unquote, inaccurate, hopefully you have enough rapport, there's enough partnership in the conversation that you'll get, you'll get feedback and you'll get clarity as a deeper understanding or a more accurate understanding of the person's experience. so I think being inaccurate in what we may understand, as long as we're committed to seeking to understand. So I don't think it's so much about that. It, quote unquote has to be accurate. We do have to actively seek to understand, though.

Motivational interviewing invites us to understand on cognitive as well as emotional levels

Amy Shanahan: Something just popped into my head about empathy. I listened to a woman talk about the aspects of empathy, which I never really dove into it, and it helped me in this frame where she talked about cognitive empathy. So she first told a piece of her story and asked us to think about, literally underlined, think about what she might have experienced. And we went into small breakouts, and we came back and we talked about what our thoughts were about it. And then she deepened her story, and then she asked us to imagine what the feeling was. What were we feeling when we were hearing her tell the story? And what did we, what did we anticipate her feelings might have been and talked about the emotional aspects of empathy. And I wondered too, like, wow, am I stuck in my head sometimes trying to think about what the person is talking about? And it helped me to really connect the heartset and the mindset that we talk about around,

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Amy Shanahan: empathy. And sometimes, if I'm just thinking about it, maybe cognitively, the cognitive part of empathy, maybe I'm more, more or less not so accurate. If I'm not understanding enough yet, I don't know enough yet, I'm not leaning in enough to the emotion, because as we know, Brene Brown says it's a vulnerable place to go to the emotional part.

Paul Warren: And ultimately, one of the wonderful things about motivational interviewing is that it really invites us, to seek to understand on that cognitive as well as emotional level. And as I say, that I can't help but think of one of the tools we have, which is a

complex reflection. And oftentimes complex reflections are related to affect and they're related to affect that we may have, have a hunch is there. So that's being open on that emotional empathy sort of plane.

Paul: Compassion and evocation are the opposite of indifference

Amy Shanahan: So, Paul, as we continue to explore the other two pieces of PACE. Compassion and evocation. What do you think the opposite, or what did we used to talk about? The opposite of compassion is if compassion is suffering with or responding to the desiree want to help someone out of their suffering. What do you think the opposite of?

Paul Warren: That would be the first word that popped into my head when you said that was indifference.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Paul Warren: So focused on oneself that one is indifferent to the other.

Paul Warren: That, to me might be the opposite.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, that's, that's a good one. Just not even having that connection to the heart of it and wanting to understand and help someone out of that, whatever suffering or space that they're in, almost like not caring.

Paul Warren: Mm

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Evocation, to me is the interesting thing when we think about the well, and we usually use a picture of a well in our slides. Sometimes when we talk about evocation that depicts that, there's a lot in there that the person across from you has information that we want to draw out of the well. so the opposite is thinking that we're pouring information and education in. And to me, the e. The opposite of e evocation to me is about that education and really highlights this notion of pushing the push kind of thing about our title.

Paul Warren: Yeah.

Amy Shanahan: Because with good intention, we care, hopefully. and we want to give people information thinking it makes them better. I mean, come on, didn't you know smoking was bad for you? Yeah, I read it on the carton and the billboard signs and see it on tv. Of course I know that it's bad for me. And, and yet our health systems, and a lot of the workers in our healthcare system still can be our heads up against the wall, offering these warnings and threatened threats. Not to threaten, but didn't you know, that's not good for you.

Paul Warren: And I think you're right. I think people do know. I wonder if sometimes the, the pushing comes from, and I'm going to use a word that I used earlier, if it comes from sort of the, desire to position oneself as the expert, because, you know, the expert wants some experts. I don't want to say all, I don't want to paint that with a broad brush, but some experts want to impart what they know, they want to install what they know. And again, I think one of the things that's so powerful about motivational interviewing, and it speaks to the p of MI spirit, the partnership is that it's two experts and they're collaboratively working together. So, you know, perhaps the opposite of the evocation is the desire to be the expert.

Amy Shanahan: Right. I often tell the dentist story. I think I alluded to it in one of our episodes, but never told the whole story. Can I tell my dentist story? I think it sure kind of highlights some of the aspects of the opposite. And I'll tell the story in a yemenite in a room, of folks learning about motivational interviewing and asking

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Amy Shanahan: them to identify parts of the PACE and or the opposite and pay attention to what things they heard in the story. So I went to this dentist, for years, I went to this dentist for years. And I went one day and the dentist wasn't there. It was a new person. And she, swung her seat around. She was at my level. She shook my hand, introduced herself kindly, said hello, proceeded to look at my x rays and said, one of the first things she said was, wow, wow, your nose looks better in person than it does on the x ray. And I was like, oh, my gosh. I was, like, feeling my nose, thinking, that's one of the parts of my body that I actually don't mind. I like my NOCE. What's wrong with my NOCE? And then she proceeded to talk about my fair skin. So I have some european, irish german descent, and I have fair skin for people who can't see me. And she started to talk about the risks of cancer with people like me who have fair skin and started to talk about what I could do for that. And she got back to my nose and asked me if I got punched. And I said, no, no, no. I had a, deviated septum. In my twenties. I had surgery for my deviated septum. And she said, oh, we know so much better now. So I kept, like, I was so focused on my dang NOCE, like, what is wrong with my NOCE? And I said, I said, yeah, I had a bad allergy. So I'm talking to her about stuff. And then she started giving me advice about my allergies. I'm, not exaggerating the story, and I could probably go on and on, but I won't. So I get up off the seat to leave and make my next appointment, and she's telling me that I have to have an extended cleaning and you know what's really interesting? I'll tell everybody here. She didn't know that I used

to work for a dentist, so I know a lot of the lingo and the things that if you have pockets in your gums, you might need an extended cleaning. I didn't have big pockets in my gums. I know that. But she never engaged me in a conversation about what I was doing, what I already know, and talked about my nose and my skin. And I want to highlight, too, she was very kind. She was sweet in her tone. She stayed at my level. I couldn't answer a whole lot of questions if she asked any because I had stuff in my mouth. but I walked away thinking, gosh, I don't know what she thinks about my teeth, but she certainly worried about my nose and skin cancer, that, I found it very powerful. Even though I'm kind of tongue in cheek, chuckling about the experience. I literally drove away from the dentist's office thinking, I don't want to go back there, no matter how nice she was. And I literally started to worry about skin cancer. I mean, I'm in my fifties. I know that I have fair skin, and I know that I know all about skin cancer and using SPF cream in the summer. It was just a really powerful exchange that, to me, was a lot about the opposite of the spirit.

Doctor started talking about biofeedback before I asked a question about teeth

What are your. What are your thoughts about the story or what questions do you have about it? How it fits in here?

Paul Warren: Yeah. I mean, for me, the first place that it fits in, and I really appreciate your emphasis on this, is the idea that, you know, her manner, her tone of voice was all kind of what you would hope in someone who is kind of a helping professional. And yet her inability to sort of focus on your agenda because you were there for your teeth really created, like, tremendous confusion and discomfort for you, to the point where,

again, and I'm just repeating what you said, that you were never going to go back to this person. And it's such a great example of somebody, a, not meeting somebody where they're at, and b, kind of directing the agenda in such a way that is really off putting to the person they're supposed to be having a conversation partnership with.

Amy Shanahan: And there were

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Amy Shanahan: so many other things. It's just, like, jaw dropping in a way for me. my mom had just passed away, and she said, oh, I see that you grind. And I said, yeah, that's why I have a mouth guard, which was in my chart. And she mentioned that earlier, and I said, she said, well, so what are you doing to take care of yourself, you know? And she started to talk about biofeedback before she even paused. She didn't pause to let me answer the question. Had she paused, she would have heard that I was getting back into some meditation and yoga after my mom passed away. And she would have known some stuff, but she started talking about biofeedback. And the only question I was able to ask as I sat up was, why do you keep trying to push biofeedback on me? I'm really confused about why you're talking about that. So when we talk about watching how our manner and our style of questions or reflections land on, people, she wasn't paying attention. She couldn't pay attention to my facial expression because she was talking to me with, when she was behind the chair sometimes. But when I asked her the question, I finally gave her a little bit of feedback with my frustrating tone, like, why are you talking to me about biofeedback? and she answered the question. It was really a hypothetical, sarcastic, I'm really getting frustrated with you, doctor. Could you please stop? And she didn't even heed that warning. just how important it is. Sometimes we don't see the subtlety of the reaction of the person when we're quote,

pushing or putting our agenda on the table. They, might, and we may have talked about this in previous episodes, that people may just acquiesce and say, sure, okay. And I did that for quite a bit in this exchange until the end, I thought, I just can't anymore. And she let me know. She's on the board of some cancer Center. And I'm like, oh, boy, it's just not good.

Paul Warren: You know? I also think it's a really, sort of intense example of the writing reflex because clearly she had very strong opinions, which she felt free to share, about, like, what would fix the situation, what, ah, would solve the problem, and also what you should focus on.

Amy Shanahan: That had nothing to do with what I was there for.

The receptionist was willing to be in a partnership with you about dental care

I think another point that would be important for me in this experience, and I've experienced this in much lesser degrees because this was pretty. An unbelievable conversation. It sounds unbelievable when I tell the story, but every aspect of it's true. you know, I can exaggerate, but I'm not in this instance, that if she did a little bit of it along with partnering or along with engaging me in a conversation or evoking or getting to know what I did or didn't do, I, may not have walked away thinking, I'm never coming back. And I walked out and I, I may have mentioned I had been going to this office for quite some time, and I adored the secretary and was walking out and made my appointment like a good patient. And, she texted me trying to get me in for that intense cleaning. And I texted her back saying, no, I'm not going to make that appointment. And

as a matter of fact, I'm going to cancel my appointment. I'm not coming back. I didn't even have the, I wasn't courageous enough to do it in the office. And she said, can I ask you why? And I said, yeah, let's talk. So she was that wonderful of a front, end staff that she picked up the phone to ask me why not? And I told her that I missed my other dentist. And I didn't, I wasn't negative about this dentist. I just said, I really miss my other dentist. And I know I don't need intense cleaning. And I've trusted this office for many years with my dental care. And, you know, I just don't feel comfortable. And we know it was interesting. This is just a sidebar. Nothing. The dentist that I loved was her niece. She's like, oh, that's my niece. She went off to teach dental school. So I'll tell her that you miss her.

Paul Warren: You know, I'm struck by the bit you added to the story because the receptionist was the one who was willing to be in a partnership.

Amy Shanahan: Absolutely. And yes.

Paul Warren: And really wanted to understand what your experience was

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Paul Warren: and also attended to your cue.

Amy Shanahan: You're right. Good catch. And that's what I loved about going there. It wasn't just her, it was her niece who was the dentist. It was, it was, I mean, who enjoys going to the dentist? I can't say I enjoyed going to the dentist. At the same time, I didn't dread it because it felt like that, it felt like a partnership. It was a good relationship. If I didn't want to get an expensive something or other done, I just said, no, I'd rather go on

vacation. Thanks. Yeah.

Motivational interviewing invites us to engage in a different way

Paul Warren: You know, you make me with the story, you make me think of one other thing as we kind of move forward in this conversation, which is the writing reflex. I think the thing to acknowledge, again, we normalized it kind of at the beginning. And the person means well. Yes, they really mean well. And again, motivational interviewing as a method of communication invites us to engage in a different way and not just act on our meaning. Well, I'll also venture to throw out. And, I don't know if you or anybody listening to this conversation might think I'm going a little too far by saying this, but I would venture to imagine that after that dentist told you everything that she told you because she thought that was what was right for you. I bet, and I'm just guessing here, she might have been left with the feeling of like, I did a really good job. And I, know for some folks, when they're learning motivational interviewing, when they intentionally hold back sort of either the education that they've been trained to give or the opinion that they have, when they intentionally hold that back to inquire about the other person's thought or reaction to evoke from that person, there's a discomfort, because not only have they had the experience of believing that it was their job to do that, m it also helped them to feel good about their work. And again, the thing we can take away from the MI experience there is that we can feel good, good about inviting the other person to elaborate, suggest, offer a plan.

Amy Shanahan: Gosh, you know, Paul, I cringed when you was asking the listeners and me to consider what that doctor might have thought afterwards. Like, I feel really good about what I just did. I cringed because I don't know the answer, how that dentist felt

after I left or after that encounter. And I put myself in her shoes and know that I've been there, in my times in the helping professions, that I probably did that at times where I walked out of a session thing, yes, that was great. They loved all the resources I gave them. And maybe, like me, they walked out going, I'm never coming back. So I felt a little aw, that was me. I did that before, oh. And I lost my other thought about the MI stuff. But just being able to not do, oh, feeling good. Now, the opposite happens when I bring the spirit to the table and partner with someone and evoke from them. I feel much better. Even though there's, I mean, there's times they give me credit and they'll say, oh, that was a great idea. And I put it back in their lap and say, you came up with that idea, it was your idea, or, you know, I'll validate them and affirm them. so sometimes I do get a pat on the back from people because they think I gave them the information or ideas and it's really them. I just reflected back, what they said, if that makes sense.

Paul Warren: It makes complete sense. And it, I also think speaks to the power of a reflection, because sometimes somebody can offer a suggestion or an idea and the fact that they do receive it back through the reflection or through a summary, it's almost like they're hearing it for the first time. I mean, they may be articulated, they dug

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Paul Warren: deep into that well and they found it and they kind of put it out there. But the power of motivational interviewing is that they get to hear it again if we reflect it back to them, if we add it into a summary and give it back to them. So I could totally understand the idea that they might think like, oh, well, you know, yeah, this is a great idea because you said it too.

Amy Shanahan: Right, right.

Paul Warren: But you were simply reflecting what they said.

Amy Shanahan: Exactly. They, they, yeah. And especially if you use a complex reflection and you reframe it or add some meaning to it, they think that you came up with it and it's really just mirroring back your hunch about what you heard them say. Yeah.

Have you ever really overcome your ambivalence? Did it disappear

Paul Warren: You know, one other thing that I think sometimes people have at least reported struggling with is when they're working with somebody, and exploring their ambivalence, helping strengthen their motivation. And their ambivalence doesn't completely disappear.

Paul Warren: And ah, again, I think some people struggle with like, well, am I really doing it if all their ambivalence hasn't like vanished or melted away? And I'd like to throw out, and I'm curious as to what your take on this, Amy, is that it's not so much about making the ambivalence completely disappear, because sometimes, that's just not possible. It is, though, about engaging in a conversation and the balance shifts. There, in essence is more motivation than there is existing ambivalence. So the person is still, they still have a little bit of ambivalence and it doesn't keep them from either making a commitment to make the change or coming up with a plan or actually even taking steps.

Amy Shanahan: And I'll add, I thought about my mom, and committing to doing something, knowing they really don't want to do it. And the example that popped up into my mom, God, rest her souls, after she stopped smoking. And she's older, born in the

twenties. And when smoking was so normalized, she smoked three packs of cigarettes a day for a long time. And she started when she was a young teenage. And when she stopped smoking in her sixties, she went through a really rough time. And she would tell us, it's not funny, but it's kind of funny. She'd say, if I ever start smoking again, I am never going to stop. So it reminded me of this notion of sustaining a behavior change and that my mom had made the behavior change. So, in essence, one might think that her ambivalence about smoking or not smoking was resolved because she chose not to smoke. And to your point, it didn't really disappear. So. And, I'm not certain, and I wonder what people think about that. Have you ever really overcome your ambivalence? Did it disappear? Did you come to a resolution, that you made a decision, you made a choice, you're going to change your behavior and you're not going back, and you're not ambivalent about it? I'm not sure I'd have to think on that a bit about some things. But in your description, it made me think of my mom, and she was, her ambivalence still existed, and she let us all know that.

Paul Warren: Yeah, yeah. So it's a really great example of, and I really appreciate that you shared that. She said if I ever start smoking, she knew it would be a trigger.

Amy Shanahan: She just knew she wasn't going to go back through the pain of stopping.

Paul Warren: Yes, yes.

Amy Shanahan: She'd never do it. She goes, I don't care if I die of lung cancer, I'm not going to stand. Don't ever even try to tell me. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Paul Warren: You know, like ambivalence, which, again, it's probably a very unique

experience for anybody who experiences ambivalence to the degree that it diminishes or doesn't. the writing reflex, probably. I know for myself the writing reflex has not vanished or gone away.

Amy Shanahan: Yes.

Paul Warren: There are times when I'm engaging in a conversation and I can feel my desire to want to solve, rescue, or fix.

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Paul Warren: And I, I am able, for the most part, not always successfully, but I am able, for the most part, to suspend that. But I do have to accept that that's probably something that's never going to go away for me.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. I don't know if I asked, Bill Miller or if somebody asked Bill Miller. I just fantasize that I'm now friends with Bill Miller, and I ask him all these questions. Just kidding. But I remember hearing him say that very thing about the writing reflex. Does it ever go away? Does it ever disappear? And he said, I think with time and practice, it just gets a little either quieter or easier to manage. I'm not, I'm, paraphrasing. So, Bill, if you're listening, you can write in and let us know what you really said. Something along the lines that it just either gets quieter or you, you learn to manage it a little differently and don't respond to it when it pops up. Like you said, you get this gut feeling like you jump out of your skin and tell somebody, hey, hey, I got this great gig that will help you and pausing. To me, the art and the practice of pausing has saved me so much from responding to that urge to push, or respond to my writing reflex. Just taking a breath and noticing my stomach is tight. Or breathe. Don't say anything. Wait.

Let's wait to see what the person comes up with again. Practicing that pause, that moment of silence between utterances, we would say.

Paul Warren: It also makes me think that part of the way, and we've talked about this in a prior episode, but it also makes me think about the way I manage my writing reflex sometime, is that I, in an am I congruent way, use the illicit, provide illicit strategy. Because if there is something I want to offer, if there is information I want to share, or if there is a suggestion that I want to make, that strategy really makes it possible for me to do that. With permission, of course, and to also affirm the person's autonomy. So I really appreciate what you shared that Bill said, because it, or at least that you're attributing to Bill Miller. is that it really does help me to manage what is a normal impulse that can get in the way of the client actually moving toward change.

Bill tells the story about a guy he worked with who had alcohol problems

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. You know, and while, if we could, I know we need to probably start to wrap up, and I was thinking of another bill story, and it's around this notion of pushing and what we know about that. And, I'll give you time to, as I start to invite the story in about what Bill also said or the story he tells. What, do you think about, or what do you know about what happens when we push people? Or I'll ask the listeners, what happens when you feel pushed by a caretaker, a loved one, a helping professional, you know, push a little bit or give you more than maybe what you're ready for. Bill tells the story about a guy he worked with who had alcohol problems. And in our diagnostic world, we would know that it was probably a severe alcohol problem and the probability. So we have this information because we're experts in our field to maybe predict that

this person probably couldn't drink moderately or in a harm reduction kind of format for a way. And the guy told Bill that his goal was to reduce his drinking, that he didn't want to stop drinking. So, Bill, I, Would imagine, in his MI consistent way, engaged this guy in a relationship partnership and guided and, you know, helped him along the way. And eventually, the long story, made short, hopefully, is the guy comes back and says, I can't do it. I tried it. It didn't work. I have to stop drinking. So Bill refrained from the reflex of responding with his knowledge, knowing diagnostically, prognostically. I'm getting very, medically jargoned here, that he resisted that and guided the person to what they wanted to do.

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Amy Shanahan: And eventually the guy came and said, I can't do it. And the powerful point is the guy was engaged in the relationship because he was free to choose. And I love that notion of people feel most free to, change when they know they're free not to.

Paul Warren: Yeah, I think that that is a really powerful point to maybe conclude this conversation with, that example is what a wonderful example of the person being supported and then coming back to the conversation because there was a partnership and offering that I have figured out that I can't do this, and this is what I need to do. I mean, talk about powerful change. Talk.

Amy Shanahan: And to add one more, Morsel around the spirit that we talked about is I didn't get a sense. Now, I wasn't in the room and I wasn't with Bill. I heard the story that, but he didn't judge. It wasn't like he was sitting in the chair when the guy returned with the, ha ha ha, gotcha. You know, like, and I think some people think, oh, I'll just use MI m until I get to that point. that it wasn't this. He truly was guiding the person, believing

that this guy would figure it out. Not the, I don't know. I think you'll be coming back and we'll be having a different conversation. I didn't get that sense. And, you know, we talk about MI is not used to trick people. And I think I wanted to highlight that, to not give this exciting nuance that, oh, we could just guide them and eventually they'll come back to what we think is right. Not necessarily. I worked with a guy on the opposite way that actually chose. He tried to not drink. And when he came forward, after months and months and months of working with him, he decided he didn't want to do it. He didn't want to stop drinking. And that was tough in a helping profession, like navigating that. Did I fail him or didn't I fail him? He made his choice, and I had to sleep well with that. It was his choice. It's not mine.

Paul Warren: You honored his autonomy.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. And sometimes people make choices that we don't know what's best for them, even though we think what seems best for them.

Paul Warren: And it doesn't feel maybe good to us because we care and we want something different for the person.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, but I really love that notion. And probably worth repeating that people feel free to change when they know they're free not to.

Paul Warren: Well, thanks for restating that. And I really, I really am left with a lot to think about in terms of this particular conversation.

Amy Shanahan: I always leave our conversations with more depth and understanding, and I hope others do as well. Thanks so much for your wonderful conversations, Paul.

Paul Warren: A pleasure. Thanks so much, Amy.

Amy Shanahan: Bye bye.

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