

Talking to Change: An MI Podcast

Glenn Hinds and Sebastian Kaplan



Episode 2: The Core Skills

Sebastian Kaplan:

Hello everybody and welcome to the second episode of the Talking to Change - A Motivational Interviewing podcast, with myself, Sebastian Kaplan and my good friend Glenn Hinds. Hello Glenn.

Glenn Hinds:

Hi Seb. Hi everybody.

Sebastian Kaplan:

So like I said, this is our second episode. First episode last week and mainly... Well, I guess did two things. We introduced ourselves and talked a bit about the podcast in general and what our hopes were for the podcast and then we really got into the motivational interviewing spirit and talked about some of the key elements of the spirit. Glenn, just wondering how you felt it went?

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah. I enjoyed it, Seb. And like I said, we started to cover some of the key aspects of the spirit. And certainly when I let friends listen to it, they were very happy with the content. One of my brothers-in-law took it for a run and told me that maybe the sound could be a bit louder, so maybe that's something that people could help us with, that they could maybe give us feedback on some of the technical sides of the podcast. Since last week, things had moved quite quickly for us as at this end as well, because now we've moved it from just listening to it online and the webpage to having it transferable to a download, which makes it much more accessible to people. And we're just waiting for a word back from iTunes. They're just reviewing the first episode, so hopefully people that are now listening to us have access through iTunes or one of the other downloadable sites.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right, technical aspects as well as some of the content. As we're moving along, we were certainly hoping to hear from audience members and to ask questions about some of the terms or concepts we might be sharing or discussing, and even maybe to suggest topics for future episodes.

Glenn Hinds:

Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.



Sebastian Kaplan:

So we just shared a bit about ways to access the podcast and ways to communicate with us. We realized that we hadn't mentioned anything about a very important website within the motivational interviewing community. And so maybe we'll take a moment here to discuss that and to discuss the professional group that we're both a part of. So there is a group called the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers, which is an international group of professionals ranging from clinicians to educators to researchers, all dedicated to the advancement and best practice of motivational interviewing.

Sebastian Kaplan:

And so, you might hear the term MINTie from time to time perhaps on this episode and in future episodes. So MINT just refers to.... It's just an affectionate term that we use to describe ourselves and those of us who are members of the MINT. And for people that are interested in finding out more about the MINT or finding out more about motivational interviewing, certainly there's a number of resources available to people that access the website as well as ways of contacting trainers from literally all over the world. You can find us at motivationalinterviewing.org. So, I just wanted to make sure we make that clear and so people know how to get a hold of us and to access more information really.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah, good idea. And I suppose just to confirm, if people are looking to contact us, the email address is podcast@glennhinds.com, podcast@glenn, G-L-E-N-N, H-I-N-D-S.com.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Great. Right, so today in episode two we'll be exploring the core skills of motivational interviewing, often described using the acronym OARS. And we'll be discussing each of the elements of the OARS and discussing how they help facilitate motivational interviewing conversations. How does that sound to you, Glenn?

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah, sounds like a plan.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. So, the first thing we'll go into some depth with are the OARS, and these are the core skills in motivational interviewing. When you listen to a motivational interviewing conversation, you will surely hear these four key foundational counseling elements, and we use these oars or these core skills in a particular way to make the experience of motivational interviewing rather unique. And so the first element that we want to talk about is the O in OARS, or open ended questions. Glenn, why don't you walk us through that for a bit?

Glenn Hinds:

One of the things we consider is, what is an open ended question? And the way I was introduced to them was the notion that it is a question that invites the person in the conversation to consider their answer and to be able to answer in more than a single word, that encourages elaboration, that encourages information to be offered. So it's the who, the what, the where, the when, the why, the how. And interestingly, from what we know from the psycholinguistic research is that very often, certainly in the UK, people will respond to what is essentially a command, which is tale. They will respond to a statement starting with tale in the same way as they would to any other open ended question. So essentially, what we're exploring is the notion that how do I invite an individual that I'm talking to give me information in a way that essentially assists me to understand things from their perspective.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. So there's some specific kinds of questions that, for instance, would begin a what or how and would certainly invite, not guarantee, but invite the person to go into some depth, but also an opener of, tell me more about such and such subject.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So essentially that invitation... So it's not does that hurt you when that happens? It's a case of how do you feel when under these circumstances, that allows the client to describe it from their own perspective rather than the practitioner dictating an understanding or a dictating the way forward.

Sebastian Kaplan:

And there's something quite different, I suppose, experientially for both the client and the practitioner to have open ended questions being the primary form of questioning that the practitioner uses, as opposed to a series of closed ended questions that are seeking just small bits of information or data along the way.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah. And very often, clients will tell me, or students that I'm working with, that it invites the practitioner to think before they seek information. It's what is it they're trying to understand. And they will talk about clients that they've worked with, feeling empowered by the experience of been asked how do you feel about this? And I'm thinking, very often working with the likes of social workers who have family and childcare responsibilities, that the expectation of the client of the practitioners is that they're here to tell me what to do and to tell me how to do it. Whereas when they meet a practitioner trained in motivational interviewing, they're working collaboratively to navigate a situation and they are genuinely curious as to how the family member thinks that this can be done in a way that will resolve their issues on a long term basis. And that can be quite strange for some people that have grown accustomed to being told what they should be doing, how they should be doing it, when they should be doing it, and that they're working with an expert to whose job it is to give them answers.



Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. I'm glad you brought up, in essence, some of the elements of the MI spirit that we discussed in episode one, and open ended questions therefore is, one of the ways any way, to put those elements of the spirit in action so to speak.

Glenn Hinds:

Sure.

Sebastian Kaplan:

If you're asking these really open questions that invite some depth on the part of the client, that the implicit message is what you have to say is really important here and your perspective is as important, if not more important than mine is as the practitioner. And so it just really leads to a much different kind of conversation than one that is primarily focused on closed questions.

Glenn Hinds:

Sure. It reinforces that collaboration, let's both of us think about this and reflects back that what I'm endeavouring to do today is to really understand what this means for you and how this affects you and what are your ways forward for this. And again, that very often for individuals, clients, that's strange to begin with.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. Well, maybe we could talk about the second piece of OARS, the A in ORS, and the A stands for affirmations. You might think of an affirmation as an observation that a practitioner makes about a client. It's a particular kind of observation. It's an observation of strength, of resource that the client possesses, and it's an observation that comes from evidence that is portrayed in the conversation, that there's information that is exchanged. And so, part of it is just the specific pieces of information that you're trying to make sense of, but the practitioner when doing MI is also considering, what does this say about this individual? What characteristics are coming up that are being either described explicitly or that you're just picking up on in an implicit way? And then it's offered back to the client. So in essence, it's a description of a strength that they possess.

Glenn Hinds:

It's really recognizing and acknowledging that what is good about this individual including, I suppose very importantly, the inherent worth of them as a human being. It's not necessarily just about what they're doing or how they're doing it. It's that beginning point, which is that I value for who you are, that there's a belief in that other person and in many ways fits with Roger's notion of positive regard. That the notion of somehow that the feelings of the way I approach you transcends and persists no matter what the circumstances, that there's nothing that you necessarily can do that's going to change my view of the nature of who you are as an individual. I may not be agreeing with your behavior, but I'm not judging you solely on your behavior. I'm seeing you as an



individual, as a person and in that effort to communicate my experience and view of who you are to yourself.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. And you could imagine that it puts the practitioner in a really different place from what they're attuned to and what they're listening for. You can imagine a client who's gone through some really difficult experiences, perhaps made some behaviors that we might find possibly even abhorrent.

Glenn Hinds:

Sure.

Sebastian Kaplan:

But as a practitioner, if one of the goals of a conversation is to pick out and to notice strengths, however they may come up in this individual, it's really quite a different listening experience and really changes the dynamic of the conversation between the practitioner and the client.

Glenn Hinds:

Right, yeah.

Sebastian Kaplan:

And sometimes I also will talk about affirmations and contrast it a bit with the notion of praise, because that's something that I think sometimes learners will view an affirmation is just another way of praising the person. And just to make that distinction, a praise statements is more so something like, "Good job or I'm proud of you for how you've handled that situation."

Glenn Hinds:

Right.

Sebastian Kaplan:

And I know there's different opinions about praise. Personally, I don't think that they're that terrible, and in some cases people really enjoy the experience.

Glenn Hinds:

Sure.

Sebastian Kaplan:

The distinction that's important for people to think about is praise, in a way, is a judgment that I as the practitioner am making on the other person. You could say it's a positive judgment. I'm trying to be encouraging and I'm saying, "I, in essence, agree with what you're doing or what you've done." But it does put me in a different position there as one who is able to judge the client or judge their choices. Whereas an



affirmation isn't so much a judgment on their behavior, on who they are, it's recognizing strengths that come out from their story, what they're telling me, and it's really these strengths that they possess, and I'm just noticing them and commenting on them.

Glenn Hinds:

Right, so you had been very considerate in the way you're putting this and recognizing that there is a time and a place for praise. At the same time, that's separate from what an affirmation is. And I know that at one of our conferences, one of the things that was talked about was an affirmation is that interestingly, the research around it is that when someone receives a genuine affirmation that the brain releases oxytocin and that this experience in itself has a very positive impact on the relationship.

Glenn Hinds:

Because when we look at when else oxytocin is released, some of the examples would be at childbirth, when someone's making love, and when a child is being fed by its mother, which seems to suggest that the brain is experiencing intimacy, the individual is experiencing intimacy and how that's communicated is through the release of oxytocin and it's about realizing what the impact of that might be for a client who's seeing a practitioner and receives genuine affirmations. And I think that's a really important part to emphasize is that when we're offering affirmations, that they must be genuine in nature. That it is something that they have seen. It is something they have experienced. It is something that I do notice. I'm not blowing smoke, essentially, up your chimney to try and make you feel good. It's about that authentic relationship. You're getting the real version of me as I witness the version of you back to yourself.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right? No, well said. And yeah, a lot of interesting findings coming out as far as the neuroscience of motivational interviewing goes. Perhaps a future episode for us to consider.

Glenn Hinds:

When I'm doing my training, one of the things I have learned to talk about is that people are very keen to have something practical to leave with. And what expose people is, as we master the affirmation, the notion is if you consider what we're doing as a toolkit, the affirmation itself is probably the single most powerful tool available to us in our tool toolbox because we are again, witnessing that individual, that inherent worst of the individual, who because of circumstances have found themselves at this point in their life. Recognizing that under different circumstances, the person in front of us probably would be a different version of themselves, that the environment that they lived and grew up in or currently existing is in itself having a very powerful impact on how they present. It's an invitation to practitioners to again, build on that notion of the strengths based approach, to notice what's already there rather than trying to fill in what's missing.



Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah, no. Excellent. All right, so the next piece of OARS, the R, a particularly important one in the world of motivational interviewing. What would you like to say about reflection?

Glenn Hinds:

Reflective listening, one of the things you're going to hear most in any motivational interviewing conversation is what's called reflective listening or what may be described as accurate empathy or it's the attempt by the practitioner to, again, communicate back their understanding of what has been communicated by the client in that moment to moment conversation. And it's emphasized as almost the most important part of the core skills and very often for people, it's probably the most complex part of the learning to master, but one that as it develops, it allows the individual to perhaps hear things that they didn't realize they were telling us. Because a very important part of the reflective listening is that we're not just trying to communicate what the person was saying, but seeing behind that, almost like listening in three dimensions.

Glenn Hinds:

What did that person just say? Do we have a sense of what they meant when they were saying that? And on an even deeper level, how are they feeling as they described that situation, and communicating that back to the client. Very importantly as a statement rather than as a question. So we'll talk about this in analysing the knowledge session, which is the idea that the way we communicate or the way the listener communicates back in itself is guiding the talker as to what to be doing next. So that by asking a question, we're inviting the person to think. Whereas with the reflective statement, we're just endeavouring to hypothesise and to help the client just to notice, are we accurate and to continue walking rather than to move up and down from the cognitive to the emotional experience.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. And it is also another opportunity for the MI spirit for there to be some action behind that. I guess what I mean by that is, you use the word hypothesizing, and it really is a great word to describe what a reflection is. It is simply a hypothesis on what we are hearing and what our developing understanding is of the client's experience and what they're saying. Now, because it's a hypothesis, it may be inaccurate. It may be wrong. It may be wildly wrong. And every time you offer a reflection to a client, the client has the opportunity to say, "Actually, it's not quite like that," or "No, I didn't really see it that way," or "Let me help you understand it better," which is one of the very nice ways of maintaining that collaborative partnership that runs throughout any motivational interviewing conversation.

Glenn Hinds:

So, in some ways, this is about supporting the practitioner really. This is not a about you getting things right. The idea that you can't be wrong if you're not trying to be right. You're simply sharing with them, "This is my understanding of what it is you're saying."



And interestingly, what you're describing is that even when the client experiences you maybe been a bit off beam, they seem willing to make an effort to help us understand, that almost the client wants us to get it and they will help us to do that.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. Exactly. I often talk about in trainings that it's actually a nice sign if I'm getting corrected, which could be kind of awkward and unsettling perhaps for some practitioners who might feel like they always have to be right or they always have to have the answer. But if you can just sort of sit for a moment and embrace the idea of a client correcting you in that moment, the client's also saying, "I'm with you. We're in this together and it's very important to me that you understand where I'm coming from," and that is a really good sign in a way. Now of course, if they're correcting you all the time, maybe you need to listen a little bit more carefully or work on the reflection that you're using. But if there's an occasional correction that comes up because you're just missing the mark in some way, it really is a nice element of a conversation.

Glenn Hinds:

So this is not a competition.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah, right. Right.

Glenn Hinds:

This is, again, as you were talking, I just saw the roadmap and that the client is just gently shifting our steering wheel from side to side just to make sure that we're still alongside of them moving in the direction that they feel comfortable with, that individual wants to be understood. And maybe that's something for listeners to consider. What is it, that when you're talking to people, what is it you're seeking most and who are the people you feel closest to? Who are the people that you feel most supportive in your life? And would it be fair to say that most of not all of them get you from your perspective? Who sees things, even when they may live a life different from yours, can communicate their efforts to try and understand it from yours.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right, right.

Glenn Hinds:

And in a sense, in some ways that's what you're describing. That's what we as MI practitioners are trying to do is just acknowledge, "It sounds like this. It seems like this for you or that's difficult for you, you're working very hard at that. You seemed disappointed that people aren't listening," and trying to get it.



Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. Well, and also there's sort of a double effect to a reflection, but if you think about what a question, the power of a question, especially an open ended question, it invites them to say more about a particular thing.

Glenn Hinds:

Right.

Sebastian Kaplan:

A reflection has the same impact when you say something like, "It seems that you're very disappointed in how that turned out for you," that is also an invitation to say more about how that turned out for you. The added element to that invitation is that expression of understanding or the ongoing efforts to make sure that you are on the same page and seeing the situation from their perspective. So it has two, sort of a double effect it in my eyes.

Glenn Hinds:

Sure. There are many times perhaps that we have traditionally learned to ask a question, "How did you feel about that?" Whereas what we're exploring and reflective listening is, if I have a sense of how that individual may have felt about that, rather than me asking, "How did you feel about that," it's just acknowledging, "That seems, that sounds or you were." That almost maintains the pace of the conversation in the sense that, I'm not always checking with you via a question. I can check by acknowledging my understanding what that was like for you or what it was often the meaning behind what the person was trying to communicate to us from my perspective.

Sebastian Kaplan:

And Glenn, I wonder if you've had this experience with in some trainings or with MI learners that some might feel that a reflection is a bit imposing perhaps or it's almost like an interpretation of sorts. I know I've received that question sometimes, that people have just been a bit uncomfortable with it. Is that something that you've encountered?

Glenn Hinds:

Absolutely. Frequently, I'm told, "How do I know how someone else feels?" or "That sounds patronizing," and these are valid questions. These are valid concerns and it's about acknowledging that individuals asking these questions are keen to ensure that their intervention doesn't threaten the relationship, or worse, damages the client's experience in a way that could be detrimental to them in the future. So it's, as with any motivational interviewing conversation, it's about how do we navigate the concerns that the trainee has at that moment and acknowledging, I suppose, from an affirming perspective that it sounds like what's important to you is that when you're helping people, that it's done in a way that maintains the wellbeing of the person that you care for and you're not going to introduce a reflective statement into your conversation just because you've been taught it. This has to make sense.



Sebastian Kaplan:

Right? Yeah. The wonderful thing about that question that comes up is just the real importance to be genuine in the conversation and in the relationship.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah. It's recognizing that when training practitioners in motivational interviewing, we're working with them as individuals. So ideally what's happening is their experiencing our use of motivational interviewing strategies. They hear us practice in the spirit of motivation and that we're not trying to impose this intervention as a way forward. It's an invitation to recognize motivation interviewing is certainly a very effective way, but it's not the way. It's a way of helping. And the point of our conversation today is introduce the concepts of motivational interviewing and for people to choose which bits of it they can connect with and to build from there and that to invite their own curiosity and to investigate how what we're talking about or what it is their experience in that training room can translate back into work environment in a way that allows them to continue to do what it is we're trying to do, which is to be of benefit to other people. So for yourself, what I'm thinking about is the fourth of the core skills, the summarizing.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. Right, summary. So we've gone through the OARS now, open ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and finally summaries. I guess I view a summary in a way as sort of an extended reflection. It can take several forms. It doesn't necessarily have to happen at the end of a conversation. Sometimes if you meet a client and a client is rather talkative and they really just open up about a rather long, painful experience that they've had, it can be a very useful experience both for myself as practitioner and for the client for me to try to emphasize or to summarize what the client has shared with me, both to make sure I'm understanding it, for the client to rehear it in the way that I've heard it.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah.

Sebastian Kaplan:

It also provides the client an opportunity to make any corrections, again, much like with reflection. But also it could be a useful strategy towards the end of a conversation as you're starting to wind down or maybe transitioning into the ending moments of an encounter to sort of step back, think back to what ground you've covered in the conversation that you just had.

Glenn Hinds:

So it sounds like in some ways they serve a couple of different functions. It's almost like they allow the practitioner to take a breath, take stock of each element of a conversation rather than waiting until the end. It's almost like one of the metaphors, I've heard it described, as we walk through a meadow with a client, that from time to time we just take a moment and pick up a flower. And by the end of the conversation, we may have



developed or collected a bouquet, and that's the transitional summary where we offer back all of the conversation at the end. Today we've talked about this, we talked about this, we've talked about this, we talked about this and that's the final summary off the session. But throughout the journey, there have been smaller maybe three or four sentence summaries just to ensure that understanding.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah, exactly it. And again, really just emphasizing the importance for both participants in the conversation. To have that sort of bouquet offered back to the client is yet another example of the practitioner trying really hard to pick out some of the important points, the important details, the important aspects of a story. And that can be helpful, and certainly clients often appreciate that, and really just to emphasize also, the gathering of those flowers and the offering of the bouquet goes a long way to really clarifying in the practitioner's mind, these are the key elements of this person's story. These are some of the critical factors that will help people ultimately in making changes in their life, which is what motivational interviewing is all about.

Glenn Hinds:

Right. So really putting the issue in the context with everything else that's going on for the person. And it offers the practitioner an opportunity to, as you say, emphasize certain aspects of what's been described. So in some ways we can be quite directive in the nature of what it is we choose to summarize. So later in the series we'll begin to talk about what's called change talk or what's called sustained talk, which is essentially the language we know that influences an individual's willingness to move towards change or their determination to stay the way they are. And that by attuning ourselves to that language, and very often we'll hear both forms of that language in a conversation, we can be very strategic and which forms of language that we emphasize or reflect upon or summarize when we're communicating back our understanding of the client, and we can influence the direction, where we go next by what it is we say to summarize back.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. But it's a great point, and I suppose you could say the same about your choice of open ended question, your choice of an affirmation, your choice of reflection even, that that's where the strategy of motivational interviewing comes in, provided it's done in a way that maintains the MI spirit, which we discussed in episode one. And so these are nudges and sort of suggestions perhaps to kind of consider the change talk, which again a term that we'll talk about more in a little bit, suggestions to consider the change side of the equation, all the while being prepared and mindful that the client may not be ready to do so at that point. We'll just go alongside with them if that's what occurs.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah. And that leads us nicely into understanding the four processes and the stages that people follow on the journey from making up their mind to actually implementing the change and what we as practitioners need to consider about how we assist an



individual within the spirit, using the four core skills to navigate what we describe as the four processes.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Which is actually a nice segue into mentioning our next episode, which will be a more in depth discussion about the four processes. But for now, we covered quite a bit of ground for today. And Glenn, maybe you can remind the audience how they can get in contact with us and the ways of accessing the podcast.

Glenn Hinds:

So there's a number of ways people can contact us. There's by direct email at podcast@glennhinds.com, [podcast@G-L-E-N-N H-I-N-D-S.com](mailto:podcast@G-L-E-N-N-H-I-N-D-S.com), or on our Facebook page at Talking to Change or Twitter [@TalkingtoChange](https://twitter.com/TalkingtoChange).

Sebastian Kaplan:

Okay, great. Well, another great episode, Glenn. Nice talking with you today and for all the audience, hope it was an enjoyable experience. So we'll see you again next time.

Glenn Hinds:

See you, Seb. Thanks

