

**Motivational Interviewing Ideas for Peer Mentors**  
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There appears to be great utility in using both principles and strategies from Motivational Interviewing (MI) in the role of Peer Mentor.

As Peer Mentors we want to teach a process that allows others to create their own solutions to problems in their system(s). We do not want to be in a role of trying to solve problems for them. The fundamental approach of Motivational Interviewing is comprised of:

Collaboration: MI involves a partnership that honors others' expertise and perspectives.

Using MI provides an atmosphere that is conducive rather than coercive to change.

Evocation: The resources and motivation for change are presumed to reside within each person. Intrinsic motivation for change is enhanced by drawing on his/her own perceptions, goals and values.

Autonomy: MI affirms a person's right and capacity for self-direction and facilitates informed choice.

We know that readiness for change involves a number of things. We can assess an organization's readiness for change. We know the people within an organization can be at different stages of readiness for change. We know that readiness to change can fluctuate over time. When we work with organizations where both the organization and the persons within the organization are all motivated and ready for change there is little to do but teach the process and assist with their learning and improving. Experience, however, suggests that it is common to find persons or situations where resistance/ambivalence exists. In these situations there are several ideas from MI to keep in mind.

There are actions or approaches by the Peer Mentor that can lead to or increase resistance/ambivalence. In MI these are called "Traps to Avoid". Three of the most common to Peer Mentoring are:

Righting Reflex: The impulse to fix or solve something for someone else rather than supporting their ability to fix or solve it

Expert: Similar to the righting reflex, we present solutions "to fix" the problem or convey the impression we have all the answers (or let ourselves be pulled into this position)

Premature Focus: There are two types of premature focus. One is where the Peer Mentor has a differing idea of the problem from the Change Leader/Team and sets the focus on this problem and not what is of concern to the Change Leader/Team. The second is where the Peer Mentor believes the Change Leader/Team is ready for the next step in the process when he/she/they are not.

When assessing readiness for change or, conversely, resistance/ambivalence, it is important to assess both Desire/Importance and Ability/Confidence. Both are necessary for change to occur. As you have noticed, when I have written about resistance I have included the term ambivalence as well. A key aspect of MI is to reframe resistance as

ambivalence which allows for a “both/and” discussion rather than an “either/or” discussion. This approach is more conducive to introspective exploration of the ambivalence leading to its resolution (Evocation). If the ambivalence is due to Desire/Importance, motivational enhancement strategies are used. The basic skills used in MI are Open questions, Affirmations, Reflective listening and Summarization (OARS), with Reflective listening being the most important of these skills. There are a number of more specific strategies using these skills found to be effective in resolving ambivalence in Importance. These include: Simple Reflections, Double-sided Reflections, Amplified Reflections, Shifting Focus, Reframing, Agreeing with a Twist, Scaling, Importance Ruler, Decisional Balance, Querying Extremes, Looking Back/Forward, Developing Discrepancies and Coming Alongside.

If desire for change is solidly in place, people and teams can still have ambivalence about change due to concerns regarding Ability/Confidence. Here too, there are “Traps” to avoid and strategies found to be effective in resolving ambivalence regarding Confidence.

The “Traps” to avoid are:

“I’ll Take Over Now, Thank you”: This trap is the idea of meeting low confidence with a prescription. A form of the Expert trap described above.

“There, There, You’ll Be Fine”: This trap is where you don’t take the confidence issue seriously enough. It is also another form of taking up the “can” side of an argument, inviting a “can-not, can-too” struggle.

Gloom à Deux: This trap is to fall into and share the person’s perception of helplessness or hopelessness.

As with addressing Importance, MI identifies specific strategies effective in improving Confidence. These include Evocative Questions, Confidence Ruler, Reviewing Past Successes, Brainstorming, Reframing and Giving Information and Advice. For this last strategy, MI offers specific guidelines on how to offer information and advice. A motivational interviewing-consistent context for giving information or advice is when the person/team asks for your input. If you wish to offer information or advice but have not been asked for your input, it is recommended that you do so using the Ask-Provide-Ask formula, where you ask permission to offer information or advice (and do not offer it if you are not given permission to do so), provide the information or advice and then follow up by asking the person’s/team’s thoughts about the information.

Lastly, a benefit to using MI in Peer Mentor work is to model the principles and skills for the Change Team and especially the Change Leader since s/he will be facing many of the same challenges we face as Peer Mentors.

The above information is only a brief overview of benefits to using Motivational Interviewing principles and strategies in the role of Peer Mentor. For a detailed account of the principles, skills and strategies please refer to the reference text listed below.

Reference:

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick. S. (2002). *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people for change* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Guilford Press.