

What If We Asked Our Students to Stop Complaining and Start Creating Change?

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What if ... we asked our students to stop complaining and start creating change; to stop imploding and start improving; to stop bemoaning and to start getting better? What if Motivational Interviewing (MI) was used daily rather than as a tool reserved for counseling?

Do not get me wrong, I am first to acknowledge the cathartic power of venting, and how such a session can reduce the anger or ease the pain of being disappointed by a brother or sister. To the right audience, the upchucking of emotions and feelings, especially about how others have wronged you, can be a powerful aid in lessening the sting the same way an anti-depressant can calm anxiety. Sixty minutes of pure venting from students, however, can be a drain. While I see a time and a place for it, it seems more and more students simply want to grumble during our monthly phone calls or during my time with them on campus. These students, Millennials, are different than those before them. Namely, Broido (2004) describes them as civically minded, socially engaged, and worldly. Moreover, she explains their need for any concept or educational moment to be applied to them individually. In other words, general examples do not drive home the point to Millennial students; instead, today's students want information broken down and specified for them and their situation.

This conundrum of understanding students' need for venting, identifying their want for individual experience, and the importance of moving forward led me to search for a way to help them in their moment of discontent. What I found was MI.

What Is Motivational Interviewing?

MI (Rollnick & Miller, 1995) centers on five stages through which people must proceed in a stepwise fashion. Each step builds on the next, and each step has specific characteristics. In the diagram below, some of those characteristics are explained as crafted by Miller and Rollnick (2002).

| Stage | Characteristics |
|------------------|--|
| Precontemplative | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unaware of problem behavior• Unwilling or discouraged when it comes to change• Not convinced that the negative aspect of the behavior outweighs the advantages |
| Contemplative | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledges there is a problem• Begins to think seriously about solving it• Experiences the most ambivalence at this stage |
| Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ready to change in the near future• On the verge of taking action |
| Action | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visibly modifies behavior• Positive feeling towards change that is occurring |
| Maintenance | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Works to consolidate gains attained during action• Works to prevent relapse |

MI has long been a standard practice in counseling (DiClemente, 2003). It is used to rehabilitate alcoholics, to curb smokers' cravings, and to help the mentally unstable face each new and difficult day. Identifying the want to change within the client is at the crux of the process; and asking questions, lots of questions, is the core of the method. MI shifts the paradigm. The session no longer consists of the person with the problem going to the

person with the solution. Instead, the latter ignites within the former the realization that the solution is available to him or her already.

How Can Motivational Interviewing Be Used?

As students complain, questions can be used to determine where students fall along the spectrum as created by Miller and Rollnick (2002). The point in determining where students lie is so they can understand where they might move next. That is, it is difficult to ask students to change a behavior or mindset if they are not geared up to change. They cannot be ready to change if they have never considered changing before. Further, if they have never realized the negative components, it is likely they have never considered changing the behavior. The process must be followed in order for the change to occur and for the students to maintain the change through the reoccurring triggers they face. While MI will not fix any issue in a single setting, utilizing it each time with a student allows for progression.

MI may be used to help a student correct both ill-conceived thoughts and detrimental actions. For this example, a student exclaims, "You're just wrong. Scheduling naps does alleviate the problem of the pledges not getting enough sleep." In the table below, the potential progression of this student is explored.

| Stage | Statements from the Student | MI Questions |
|------------------|--|--|
| Precontemplative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You're just wrong. Scheduling naps does alleviate the problem of the pledges not getting enough sleep. Scheduling their sleep is the best way to assure they are living healthy lives. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you define healthy living and how do you live in a healthy way without someone mandating it for you? What is your intended outcome of the schedule? Healthy living or control? |
| Contemplative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I see the structure may be causing more stress, but I am not sure I think it should go away. We have had the highest GPA for many years. I think it is because of this schedule, but it could be because we intake only those with a 3.0 grade point average. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You seem torn. Why is that? You are identifying the positives and negatives of the schedule. What other pros and cons can do you see? |
| Preparation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it would be best if we taught associate members about healthy living. We should have them practice the behaviors about which they are learning, but we should not mandate an agenda for them to follow. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are some resources available to educate your associate members about healthy living? What are some ways they can practice without causing more stress? |
| Action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We got rid of the schedule for the associate members. They are showing up on time to things, and they are energized. It is great. Wow, I was worried they weren't getting enough sleep, and now, I am glad to see them having a good experience. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What sorts of conversations have you had with the executive board about the impact of your decision? How will you be sure the schedule doesn't return in the future? |

| | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| Maintenance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have added a page to my transition binder about why the schedule was removed from the new member education experience. • I wrote down the contact information for the speaker from the academic resource center who taught us about how individuals should create their own weekly schedules that include everything from class to homework to working out to social time. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now, that we have addressed the sleep schedule issue, what other power dynamics are created by your associate member education? • Do you understand the implications of the control being exerted by the chapter onto the newest members? |
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While this example shows a student moving through all five stages, the length of time spent at each stage cannot be identified finitely. The student must be motivated intrinsically to change, and the professional aids the student in finding the motivation to change through very deliberate and intentional use of questions.

What Does Motivational Interviewing Mean for Fraternity?

Fraternity is at a pivotal place in its rich history. It is at a place where a few, large, and well-publicized occurrences not only will shape the future of all organizations but also will determine whether or not the organizations even exist in the near future. Right now, the most staggering of facts is that the largest group of people who will impact the future of the organizations are the 18- to 22-year-old students who are wearing letters, recruiting students, and performing Ritual. MI allows for professionals to have a powerful impact on those students who are shaping the future of fraternity. MI creates for professionals the opportunity and space where students realize they are shaping the future of fraternity. In turn, professionals are paramount in helping to determine the course of action to be taken by students, but not necessarily through implementing or adjudicating policy. Instead, professionals are helping students to find the motivation to do fraternity right.

References

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