

## Boosting your Client's Confidence

*There's no substitute for getting smarter faster.  
And the way that you get smarter is to  
screw around vigorously. Try stuff.  
See what works. See what fails miserably.  
Learn. Rinse. Repeat.*  
Tom Peters

*When you lose, do not lose the lesson.*  
Dalai Lama

Confidence is not something we can give to our clients. It emerges from within. Motivational Interviewing helps clients with confidence-building in a profoundly powerful manner. It involves working with two primary concepts, **what** is important to a person and **how** the person is going to get it. In Tip # 20 we looked at how to unpack what is important to a client. Here we look at the skills the client needs to adopt these new behaviors and the confidence to carry them out. For the counselor, this means deliberate focus on a client's confidence.

First, the two of you **assess the client's current confidence level**. It works best to examine one specific behavior at a time rather than the overall goal. For example, rather than examine the client's confidence to lose weight, focus on confidence to keep food records or to bring lunch to work. The easiest way to do this is to ask, "On a scale of one to ten, how confident are you right now that you can take your lunch to work most days?" In order to answer this question your client's brain needs to scan his current lunch-making skills, knowledge and resources and his experiences with lunch at work. Quickly the resources and the obstacles will pop up for him. For example, he may not have any ideas for what to take for lunch.

Resist the temptation to give advice immediately. Instead, continue this line of questioning. This keeps the client active in the process.

Here is some suggested language for you:

- What makes your confidence as high as it is? (Ask this even if it is very low. This causes the client to scan his brain for what resources and supports he has already.)
- What would cause your confidence to go up a few points? (This gives you ideas of precisely what he needs from you or others.)
- How can I help you succeed? (This implies that, of course, we all need support. It also encourages the client to ask you for what he needs from you. He will then be more receptive to your advice.)
- Would breaking down the behavior make the process easier? (This may be necessary if he is feeling overwhelmed.)

You two can also glean useful information from past experiences:

- How have you successfully made changes in the past?
- What support did you get those times? (Again, you are implying that support is OK. You may also find out specifically what kind of support works for this client.)
- What attitude worked for you?
- What can you learn from times you did not succeed in changing?

As you wind up a session, ask the client again to rate confidence to adopt the chosen behavior. This allows the two of you to assess progress and to summarize the action plan.

Using this line of questioning keeps your focus on the client. All of the answers to confidence problems are in the client and so this directs the conversation in the most effective style.