

Motivational Interviewing Refresher: Delivering Effective Affirmations in Therapeutic Courts

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WA State Association of Drug Court Professionals and WA Association of Drug Courts Conference

October 15, 2025

 King County

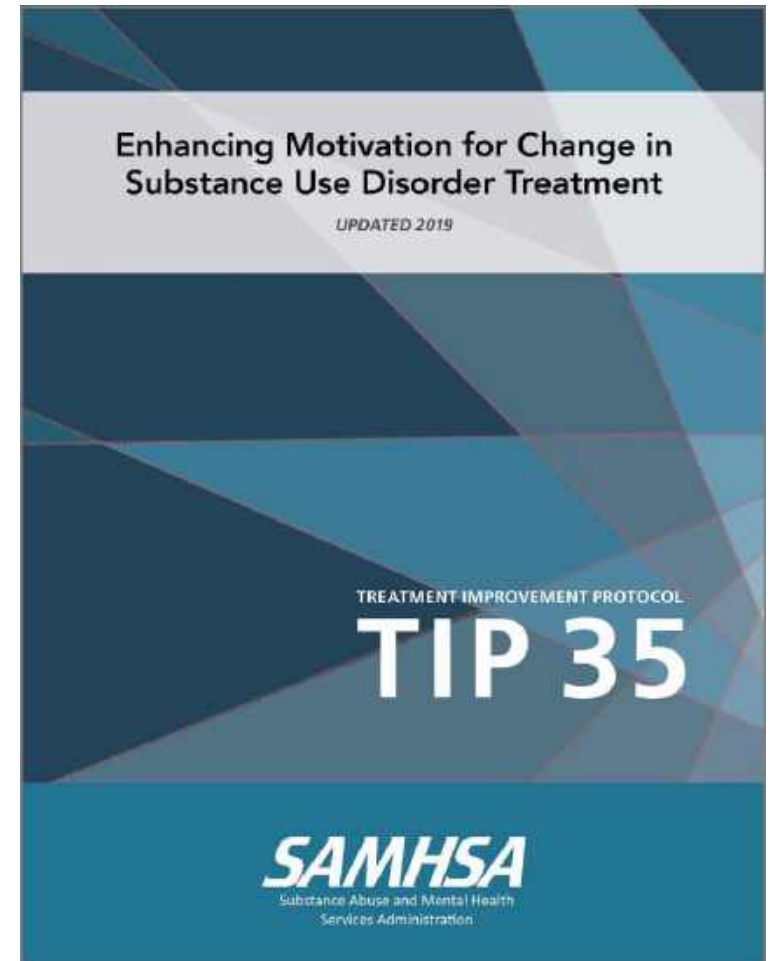
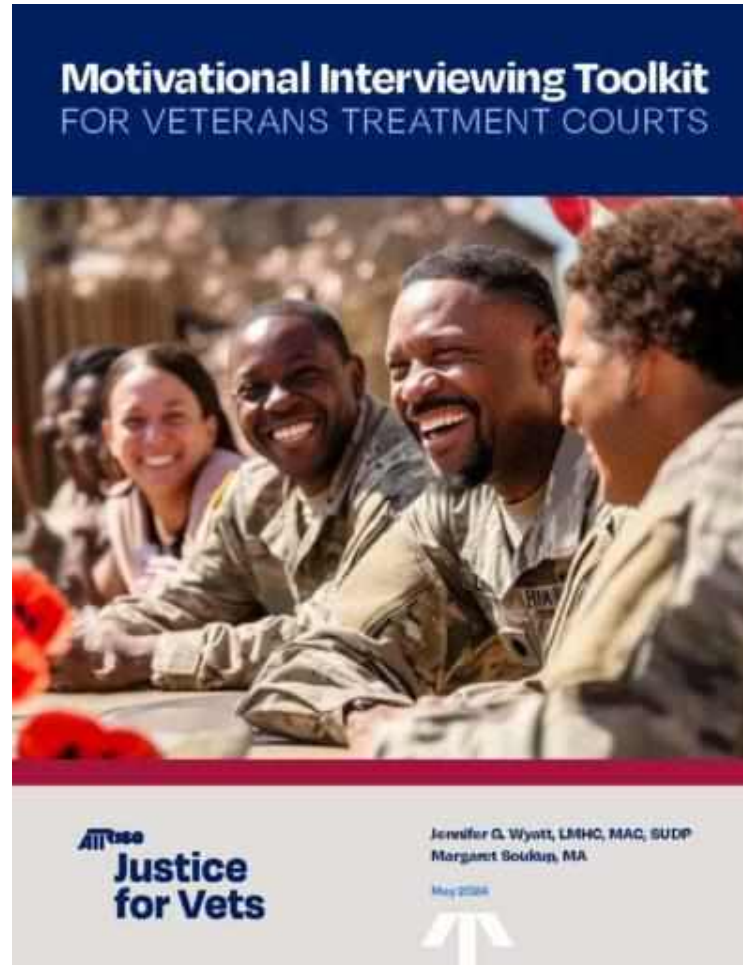
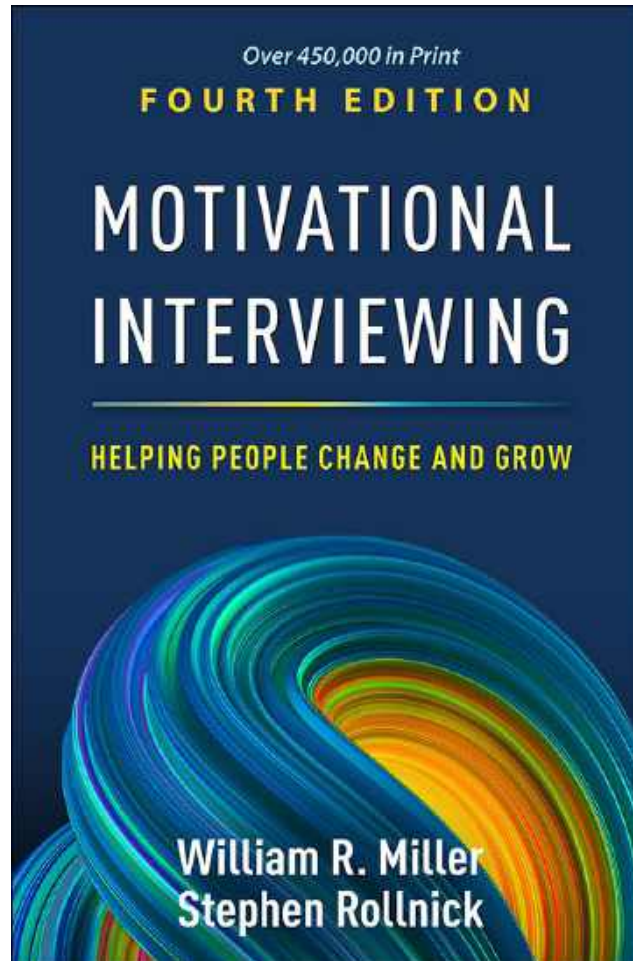
DCHS
Department of Community
and Human Services

Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

1. Describe how the relational and strategic components of MI work together to guide people toward change.
2. Distinguish between change talk and sustain talk.
3. Write genuine, specific, and accurate affirmations.
4. Discuss considerations when preparing for the therapeutic court hearing.

References





Roles in the room

- Peers
- Judges
- Attorneys
- Treatment Providers
- Coordinators
- Case Managers
- Others?

Ideal/Less than Ideal Person

Imagine a problem you've been trying to solve for a while. (It could be a real problem; we won't ask you to share it.) You're feeling stuck, and you decide you want to talk with someone about it.

Make two lists:

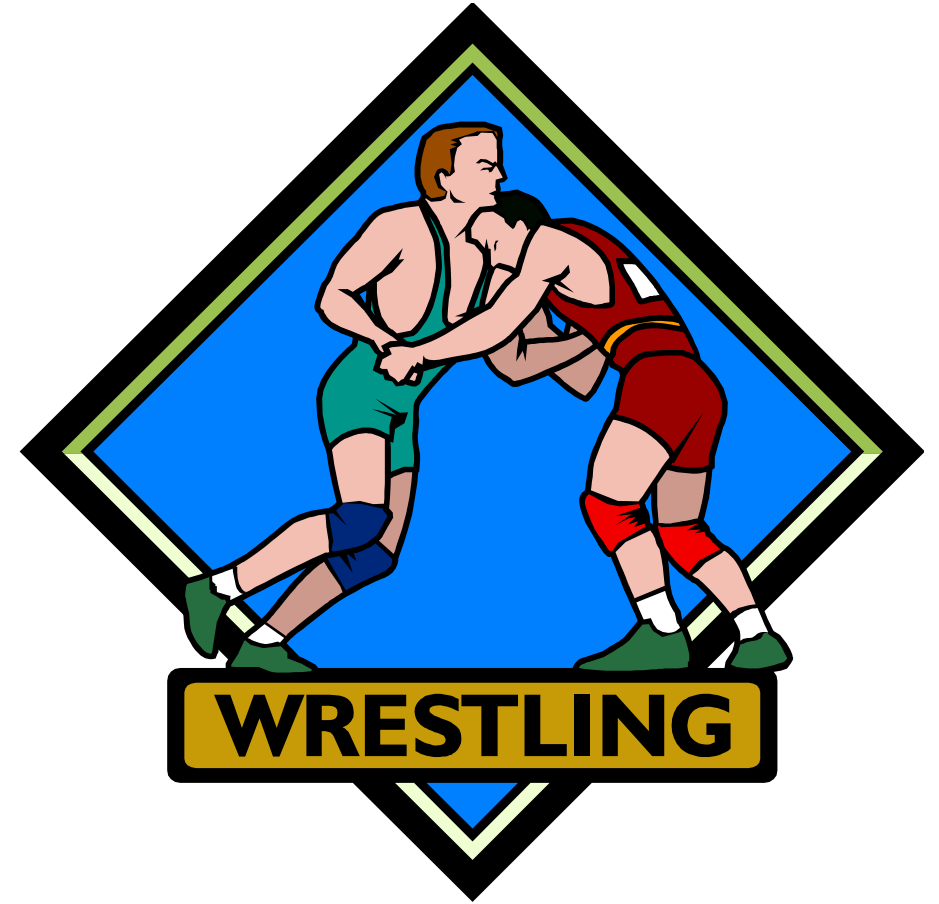
- Describe a ***less than ideal person*** to talk with who might evoke feelings of annoyance, discouragement, frustration, or not being heard or understood.
- Describe an ***ideal person*** to talk with about the problem.



MI Spirit



NOT



The MI Spirit is PACE + Cultural Humility.



Partnership: Two people working together toward shared goals.



Acceptance: Seeks to understand the person's views; shown through accurate empathy and reflective listening.



Compassion: Prioritizes the needs of the person considering change.



Empowerment: Helping participants realize and utilize their own strengths and abilities. Emphasizing choice.



Cultural Humility: Openness, respect, and interest in the person's cultural identity and experiences; helper commits to ongoing self-reflection and self-critique, and challenging inequities.

Communication Styles



Following



Guiding



Directing

MI in a Nutshell



SPIRIT & TASKS

- Partnership, Acceptance, Compassion, Empowerment,
- Engage, Focus, Evoke, Plan
- Cultural Humility

CORE SKILLS

- Open questions
- Affirmations
- Reflections
- Summaries

CHANGE TALK (DARNCATs)

- Desire
- Ability
- Reason
- Need
- Commitment
- Activation
- Taking Steps

STRATEGIES

- Ask-Offer-Ask
- Cultivate Change Talk
- Soften Sustain Talk

“Motivational Interviewing is a **collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication** with **particular attention to the language of change**. It is designed to **strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person’s own reasons for change** within an **atmosphere of acceptance and compassion**.”

(Miller & Rollnick, 2013, page 29)

Relational in orange; technical in green

Theoretical foundations of Motivational Interviewing

- Person-Centered Therapy (Rogers)
- Self-Perception Theory (Bem)
- Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci)



Through
research and
practice, we
have been
learning that
MI:

Miller & Rollnick, 2023



Crosses cultures well



Is learnable regardless of the helper's educational level



Can be effective in brief formats



Improves outcomes of other treatments, when combined



Works with people who are ambivalent

*“Motivational
Interviewing is a
way of doing what
you already do.”*

(Miller & Rollnick, 2023)





The problem with “resistance”

- Places responsibility solely on the person
- Blames the person for “being difficult”
- Pathologizes the person for what is a natural process of change

Rethinking ~~resistance~~

Sustain Talk

Reasons to stay the same, or not change

Natural part of ambivalence

Common response to pressure

Discord

Client and counselor are not on the same page

Related to counselor's style (e.g., Righting Reflex)

Signals the counselor to shift their approach



**Ambivalence about
change is natural.**

Two kinds of talk
within a person
who is ambivalent:

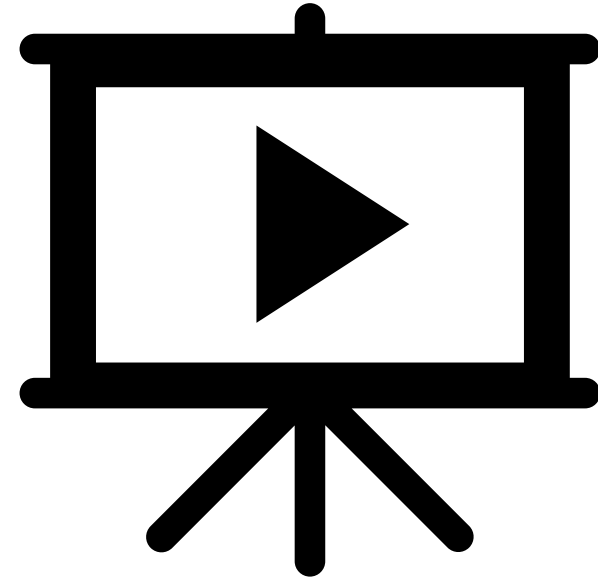
- *Change talk*:
Person's own
statements in
favor of change.
- *Sustain talk*:
Person's own
reasons for *not*
changing.

The Fixing Reflex:

The Change Companies

Notice ambivalence as a natural part of change.

Notice what happens when you push for change before a person is ready.



CHANGE TALK

- Desire
- Ability
- Reason
- Need
- Commitment
- Activation
- Taking Steps



<i>Type</i>	<i>Change Talk: What it might sound like</i>
Desire	"I'd like to feel better."
Ability	"I stopped fighting; maybe I can do the same with drinking."
Reason	"If I quit drinking, I'd be closer to handling this charge."
Need	"I can't take care of my kids if I don't take care of myself."
Commitment	"I will stop hanging out with people who use."
Activation	"I've talked to 3 potential sponsors."
Taking steps	"I have attended 2 different meetings this week and I'm going to try one a friend recommended."

Type	Sustain Talk: What it might sound like
No desire for change	“I really like smoking.”
Inability to change	“I’ve tried to quit before; it’s impossible.”
Reason for status quo	“Smoking helps me focus.”
No need for change	“I don’t need to quit smoking.”
Commitment to status quo	“I’m not giving up drinking.”
Leaning away from change	“I don’t think I need to do all this stuff.”
Steps away from change	“I can keep hanging out with my friends.”

Goal of MI



Change talk



Sustain Talk



OARS: THE CORE SKILLS

Open questions

Affirmations

Reflections

Summaries



In a study looking at the impact of individual therapist behaviors in MI, affirmations were found to be the ***only*** core skill that both increased *change talk* and reduced *sustain talk* (Apodaca, et al., 2016).

Affirmations add wind to a person's sails, motivating forward movement.

- Start with “You” rather than “I”
- Specific
- Genuine
- Meaningful to the person
- More like a fact than an opinion



Affirmations are different from praise or compliments, and they can be simple or complex.

PRAISE	SIMPLE AFFIRMATION: Something commendable the person said or did.	COMPLEX AFFIRMATION: Reflection of an enduring quality, value, or characteristic.
<p>“Great job!”</p> <p>“That’s awesome!”</p> <p>“You’re a rock star!”</p>	<p>“You’ve been going to treatment groups.”</p> <p>“You’ve got a few months substance-free, and you’re discovering new interests.”</p> <p>“You know what works for you.”</p>	<p>“You had the courage to take the first step.”</p> <p>“You are committed to serving others.”</p> <p>“Helping your family is important to you.”</p>

Practice composing affirmations: Exercise 1

- Handout pp. 4-5.
- Work with your group.
- Think about a participant who is **doing well in the program**. They might be achieving goals, attending appointments, and giving negative UDS.
- Use the list in your handout for inspiration.
- Write a few affirmations that you might say to the person. Write a few affirmations that you might say to the person. Affirm one item per sentence; effective affirmations are specific and genuine.

TIP

Affirm one item per sentence; effective affirmations are specific and genuine.

Practice composing affirmations: Exercise 2

- Same exercise, except this time think about a participant who is **struggling in the program**. They might be missing appointments, have some positive UDS, got arrested, and not have clear goals yet.
- Use the list in your handout for inspiration.
- Write a few affirmations that you might say to the person.

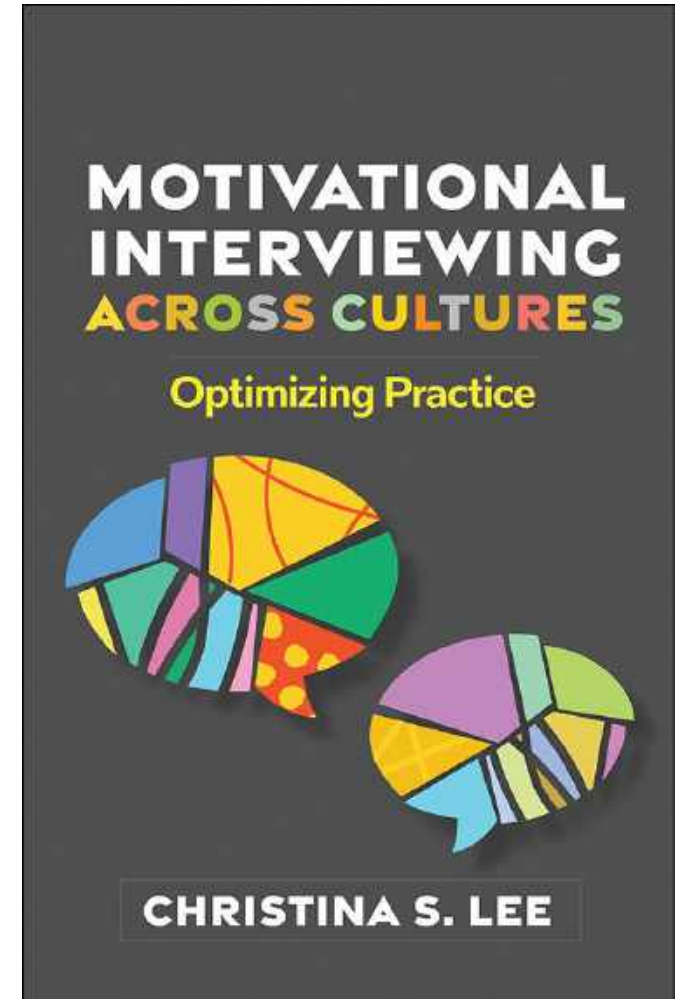
A graphic consisting of a large light teal circle and a smaller teal circle to its upper left. Inside the large circle, the word 'TIP' is written in large, bold, black capital letters. Below it, the text 'Affirm one item per sentence; effective affirmations are specific and genuine.' is written in a smaller black font, with 'Affirm one item per sentence;' underlined.

TIP

Affirm one item per sentence; effective affirmations are specific and genuine.

Self-affirmation: Culturally-Adapted MI

- In MI, affirmations are offered by helpers to participants in recognition of their strengths, abilities, values, skills, and culture.
- Culturally-Adapted MI (CAMI) promotes the use of *self-affirmations*, in which the helper evokes participant statements about their own strengths, cultural values, and successes (Lee, 2025).
- Remember from self-perception theory that people are more likely to remember what they themselves say.
- Self-affirmation may be protective against stigma and marginalization, as participants are reminded of their resources and connections (Lee, 2025).



Similar to how helpers evoke change talk, here are some examples for *evoking self-affirmations*:



Affirm or use open questions to guide the person in talking about how they responded effectively to challenges, used their strengths toward change, and feel connected to their culture, identity, and values.

- “You are up for the challenge of **[going back to school]**“ (Simple affirmation)
- “That took **[courage]**.” (Complex affirmation)
- “Tell me a time when you **[handled stress well]**.” (Open question)
- “What are some ways you feel connected to **[your culture]**?” (Open question)
- How do you feel when you **[insert cultural activity]**?”

Cheerleading trap

- When offering positive feedback, the intent is to motivate the person. To say something encouraging that might make them feel good as they're progressing through the program.
- For affirmations to be effective they must be genuine, specific, and accurate.
- Watch out for the Cheerleading trap which might lead you to give general praise which doesn't move people toward change.
- Working with people in recovery calls for a balance between holding the person accountable and being supportive, which means making space for both successes and challenges.



Team considerations for court

Staffing:

- What is the goal of the hearing in terms of guiding the person toward successful change by authentically honoring where the person is at the time?
- Is everyone on the same page with the goal of where the person is in the **process** and where the team wants to go with them?
- Consider the impact of multiple people providing praise.

This is a continual conversation. It is more helpful for the participant to have a consistent message.



Team considerations for court

- How can the team members help the Judge with the Open Questions?
- Discuss the strategy for giving the affirmation and who will deliver it.

Preparation:

- Review status.
- Develop goal.
- Develop Open Questions.
- Identify possible Affirmations.



Learning more about Motivational Interviewing

- Using MI effectively takes training, practice, and feedback.
- Start by listening for change talk and sustain talk.
- Practice delivering effective affirmations.
- Look for opportunities to further develop your skills.
- There are reading suggestions listed in the handout, with two free publications.



Summary

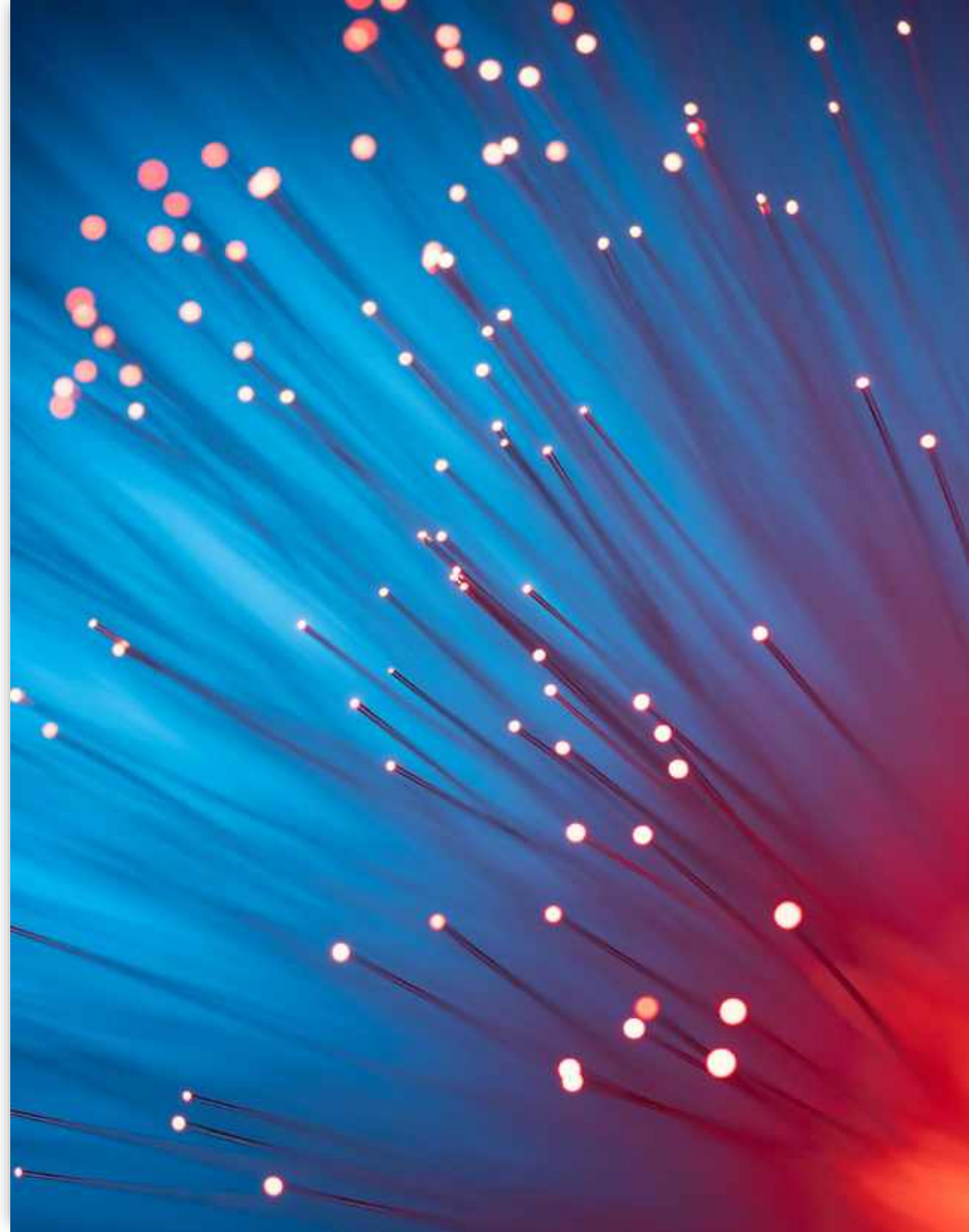
MI uses relational and technical elements together to guide people toward change.

People are convinced by what they hear themselves say.

Ambivalence is natural when considering change. Notice the person's reasons to change and reasons to stay the same.

Use genuine, specific, and accurate affirmations. Avoid the Cheerleader Trap.

Work together as a team to prepare for court and convey consistent messages to participants.





What might you
bring back to
your work with
participants
after this
session?



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