

Guidance for Learning of Motivational Interviewing

A Resource for Trainers

Four DVDs of a three-day training
Steven Malcolm Berg-Smith, recorded December, 2008
Available at www.berg-smithtraining.com
\$100.00 (US)

Review by David Prescott, LICSW¹

Years ago, when first studying motivational interviewing with Steve Berg-Smith, I lived next door to an elementary school baseball coach. Fascinated by the idea of coaching, but having no competence in sports whatsoever, I asked, "If you could only have one skill for assessing and improving baseball players, what would it be?" His answer was, "Study what they do with their feet."

It took months for me to see the wisdom of his answer. I was expecting something about inspirational pep talks. The coach knew that the best way to help aspiring baseball players was to set the conditions for them to learn to stand and move correctly. In this coach's mind, collaboration and building autonomy simply came with the turf. His chief daily concern was in evoking and awakening the best behavior in his students so that they could see their own progress.

This set of DVDs is our opportunity to study an excellent trainer. Steve Berg-Smith truly embodies the "spirit" of MI, and his trainings offer a unique experience. He consistently connects with trainees, remains focused on their learning, and models MI at every turn. However, unlike being in the room and the moment, these DVDs provide insight into how Berg-Smith does it. Metaphorically speaking, these DVD's make it possible to study what he does with his feet. There are many helpful MI DVDs. This is the only DVD resource for trainers that focuses on the training process itself and not simply MI.

The DVD set begins with eight important guidelines for providing training (not to be confused with the eight-step model of learning MI). Steve boils these down to their essentials. Even his description of these principles exemplifies them in action. They include:

1. MI is also a style for training.
2. Model, model, model motivational interviewing from the beginning to the end of training.
3. Keep it simple. Less is more.
4. Decrease content, increase involvement.
5. The trainer is the most powerful visual aid, not the slides.
6. The wisdom is in the room.
7. Make it multi-modal.
8. Expect and respect the unexpected.

Steve's brief explanation of this nexus of style and principles is not only concise, but he delivers it in a style that is completely consistent with the content. On its own, it provides guidance to any trainer who wishes to deepen their trainees' experience. As one might expect from someone who spends his days and nights honing his skills, Steve's

insights in this area provide a reference standard.

The DVDs then proceed through what many trainers would expect: a healthy dose of MI spirit, the four basic principles, OARS, drumming for change talk, responding to change talk, etc. The set includes larger group discussions, but not the copyrighted movie excerpts and small group exercises. However, the viewer does see Steve as he circulates through the room responding to questions. In some situations, high-speed playback provides a sense of the overall feel of the live program.

There are a number of strengths in this set of DVDs. MI trainers know the importance of the trainer-trainee nexus well. Steve has clearly worked to capture it. This is clear in some of the smaller details. For example, in one segment he works with a trainee who is thoughtful and bright while appearing determined to gain others' attention. Steve's graceful handling of her provides a better experience for all. The opportunity to watch Steve, with the option to stop, rewind, and watch again means that the pearls (for example, Steve's brief but powerful discussion of ambivalence) that might otherwise escape our attention are now available for deeper study. While DVDs often lose much of the magic of the moment, this resource is a rare exception. Steve's own motivation for this work shines through in every moment, providing an excellent inspiration for who we can be when we are guiding others.

At the same time, there are some weaknesses. Some of the microphone and camera placement make it difficult to hear and see many of the attendees, making some of the learning process difficult to absorb. Likewise, Steve possesses a great talent at using materials such as bells, shakers, and posters to heighten the learning experience. It would have been helped if Steve gave the viewer a brief tour of these materials and his recommendations for their best use. DVD resources such as this are notoriously difficult to produce, and so this project's shortcomings must be understood in that context.

This resource is essential for all who provide MI training. For newer trainers, this resource provides an excellent format and ideas for making the training experience come alive. For more seasoned trainers, Steve's carefully honed statements and examples will provide new ideas. However, as effective as these DVDs are as a resource for trainers, they are not intended as a resource for learning MI, and so professionals entering the world of MI will want to start elsewhere.

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