

Motivational



This powerful interviewing technique can be extremely effective at helping teachers establish rapport with clients.

by Kevin Bowen

Shortly after I first opened my FIRST - studio in Miami in 1997, I took on a new client who was quite enthusiastic about “doing” Pilates. She had heard that “all the celebrities” were doing Pilates, and she wanted to, too. She also had a personal trainer and would not even consider putting her “gym training” on hiatus, even for a short amount of time while she integrated the Pilates method into her regimen. She failed to realize that Pilates was “whole” body. She would tell me, “I worked my arms with my trainer today, so I don’t want to do any exercises involving the arms.” Try as I might, convincing her otherwise was just not a possibility.

Fast-forward 17 years. I recently completed a training course to become a

Patient Navigator for the new Affordable Care Act. Part of this involved two modules in what is known as Motivational Interviewing, a goal-directed form of counseling that harnesses the individual’s own motivation to change in order to help them commit to change.

HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

Looking back, I realize that if I had Motivational Interviewing skills back in 1997, I would have known how to present the pros and cons of my client’s situation to her in a different light, and allowed her to make the decision to give up gym training for a time. Instead, I was trying to get her to listen to and agree with my reasoning. I think if I had

The Basics of Motivational Interviewing

While there are a number of Motivational Interviewing courses offered online, Stacey Penney, a content strategist and developer at the National Academy of Sports Medicine, explains the basics of the technique.

Express empathy. You want to show that you understand a client’s situation. “This is not sympathy or always agreeing with the person,” Penney explains. “It requires you to hone your active listening skills, understand their situation, reflect on what they are communicating and accept without judgment. Clients need to feel they are being listened to and understood. Also, avoid offering advice or warning them of what could happen if they don’t change their behavior.”

Avoid arguments. “Arguments are counterproductive and can make the client defensive and resistant,” Penney says. “The goal of MI is to motivate clients to make changes. We tend to believe what we hear ourselves say, so avoid having the client argue against the behavior change.”

Support self-efficacy. “Help your client realize they have the ability to change and maintain that change,” she advises.

Roll with resistance. “Understand your client may have a different perspective of the situation, so roll with it,” she says. “Don’t argue about the changes, rather take the opportunity to explore what the client may perceive and keep them involved in finding solutions.”

Develop discrepancy. “This is when a client grasps where they are today and their future goals. It’s an

opportunity to explore the consequences their actions may have on their values and achieving their goals.”

Overcome ambivalence. “When a client has mixed feelings or views about making a change, this is referred to as ambivalence,” she says. “They may argue for reasons not to change. Ambivalence is normal. When they talk about making the change, they may include ‘but’ statements, such as ‘I want to exercise, but don’t have the time.’ The goal is to get them to start ‘change talk’ to help them pinpoint their motivational reasons.

“Change talk includes:

“**Desire:** What does the person want to do?”

“**Ability:** Can they do it? How?”

“**Reasons:** Why do they want to make the change?”

“**Need:** Is there a need or necessity to make the change?”

“The above four types of change talk, **DARN**, are pre-commitment,” Penney says. “There are two additional types of change talk, commitment and taking steps, when the client has committed to and has begun taking action. As clients expand to using these last two types of change talk, it predicts a more durable change of behavior. When a client shares an action they’ve taken to attain a goal, such as increasing how many days they are exercising, affirm their efforts!”

allowed her to decide for herself, things would have progressed quite differently.

I believe that it is imperative that we as Pilates professionals utilize the tools of Motivational Interviewing to create an exercise plan that engages our clients to become actively involved in setting and achieving their goals. We need to allow them to be able to hear themselves say what positive changes they want to make and what outcomes they expect from their Pilates regimen.

We need to be able to take the information we’ve gathered in the tools we already use, namely the health-history questionnaire, and to develop our Motivational Interviewing skills so we can create a plan together with the client. We also need to employ our Motivational Interviewing skills as the client progresses, so we can update the plan as necessary.

You want to establish a relationship with a client, not just view them as a business transaction.

A SPECIAL KIND OF INTERVIEWING

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is an especially effective technique for helping teachers to engage with their clients and to maximize their clients’ chances of success. Originally developed in the 1980s for use in working with problem drinkers, “Motivational Interviewing offers a collaborative conversation style, along with specific skills aimed at strengthening a person’s motivation and commitment to change,” explains Melinda Marasch, a licensed clinical social worker who provides training and consulting services at Aspire Training & Consulting in Denver, CO.

“A formalized intake process, which includes an intake questionnaire and Motivational Interviewing approaches, is highly recommended for Pilates teachers who are dedicated to establishing a safe and effective

HOW WE ESTABLISH RAPPORT:

Four Pilates Studios' Intake Processes

I asked four different studio owners with successful intake processes about how they get to know new clients.

Pat Guyton of Pat Guyton Pilates in Boulder, CO

About our form: I utilize the PMA Health Screening Form and include additional questions: Has your health-care provider added any restrictions to your exercise-recommendations protocol? Has your physician released you for an exercises program?

I also utilize the ICF model for Health (the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, which was developed by the World Health Organization and is available at www.who.int.) You ask questions to determine the client's perception of their current fitness state so that you can set goals accordingly. For instance, how much physical activity do you do? What activities did you do when you were younger? This indicates the client's movement experience.

How we use it: We then take notes on each client and reiterate certain aspects of those notes to keep the client motivated. Instructors frequently refer back to the form and update it. Clients are given homework exercises so that they can have "ownership" in their fitness workouts.

How we engage with clients: Having worked in a doctor's office for years back in the time when Colorado allowed insurance reimbursement for Pilates for rehab after car accidents, I learned the importance of keeping clients motivated and personally involved in their rehab and Pilates exercise training. Now I have taken those skills and applied them to my business.

Eduardo Perez, national director of Pilates for Lifetime Fitness, which is based in Chanhassen, MN

About our form: New members fill out a form that covers all of the most important questions regarding health history, as well as some lifestyle questions and fitness and movement likes and dislikes: Do you like outdoor activities? Did you participate in sports, dance or gymnastics at any point in your life?

How we use it: Based on conversations with members, we connect with them individually to understand their health objectives, athletic aspirations or fitness goals. Each instructor is encouraged to set up milestones in partnership with members; at each milestone, the instructor and trainer can refer back to the form.

How we engage with clients: Instructors make notes regularly and let the client know when they have achieved a goal or made progress.

Susan Carrick, senior director of Pilates at Equinox Clubs in New York City

About our form: We have a Pilates Client information form that asks about goals directly and indirectly. Some people have very clear fitness goals and others not as much. We ask questions about what they do for a living, if they are planning for something, etc., which can help the client identify their goals. We also ask, is anything uncomfortable in your body? So many people live with pain that they don't even realize it anymore.

How we use it: Pilates is a subtle workout. We have to make Pilates relevant for them, and show and tell clients how Pilates can help them achieve their goals. So we're not only picking and teaching the exercises, but also explaining why they are doing a particular exercise and what it is working. It is also great customer service.

How we engage with clients: We spend time as a team talking about ways to motivate clients to do Pilates and achieve their goals and set new ones. Using a Pilates programming booklet is helpful. This is where instructors can take notes on their clients and sessions, to not only work on the goals the clients say they wanted to achieve, but to celebrate achievements and then perhaps set new goals. For example, to tell a client that they can now do a Teaser, when just three months ago they could not, is really something. Then the instructor can say, now let's work on a more advanced version! We also focus on making sure we are motivating our clients to come in at least two times a week. As goals are achieved, we set new ones with the client. If they never see any results, it is hard to set new goals.

Melody Morton, owner of The Good Space Pilates studio in Houston, TX

About our form: We have created a form that asks for information and about injuries. We also include an open-ended question, "Please explain what your fitness goals are."

How we use it: We look at clients' goals as we design and implement a Pilates program for them; it's always a part of the theme of the session. We keep current notes online through our client logs; it's proving to be effective, as all instructors can sign in, read update and input when sharing clientele.

How they engage with clients: We rely on open communication with the clients and instructors alike so that we have "buy in" involvement for the clients' entire fitness process. This process just makes sense and keeps our studio experience that much more engaging.

Research and practice have shown that people need to feel heard in order to accept information or advice.

to that change," explains Stacey Penney, MS, NASM-CPT, CES, PES, FNS, a content strategist and developer at the National Academy of Sports Medicine.

"Unless someone perceives there is a good reason to change a health behavior, they probably won't do it," Penney says. "As we've all experienced in one way or another, just informing someone of the reasons why it would be good to change an unhealthy behavior doesn't mean they'll take action.

"Let the client tell you the reasons they want to change and what the positive benefits will be for them," Penney continues. "It may be tempting to ask them about the challenges they foresee for themselves with making these behavior changes (e.g., exercising will take

workout program for each client," Marasch says. "The process communicates the importance of the client's involvement and sets the tone for the training relationship. While the trainer is the expert on health and fitness, the client is the expert on their body and their life."

"Motivational Interviewing uses the individual's own motivation to change, and commit

time away from other activities I enjoy, etc.), but by turning it around to focus on the positive outcomes, they'll better believe in the possibility of change (e.g., I'll have more energy to keep up with my kids)."

A CLIENT, NOT JUST A CUSTOMER

You want to establish a relationship with a client, not just view them as a business transaction. "The importance of developing rapport with clients cannot be emphasized enough," says Marasch. "Research and practice have shown that people need to feel heard in order to accept information or advice. That, in a nutshell, is rapport; offering the opportunity for clients to feel heard in order for them to move toward success. Active involvement and participation by clients results in more success.

"The intake process, including a questionnaire, can aid in the development of rapport and engagement of clients," she continues. "It can help solidify the teacher-client relationship, in which the teacher supports the client toward the client's goals in a way that challenges the client—in a relatively comfortable manner—to maximize opportunities for success. The intake process also helps clarify the problems and solutions, as defined by the client, along with the ambivalence associated with change. An intake questionnaire can help solidify the collaborative relationship necessary, can identify the client's strengths, and can help harness the client's intrinsic motivation toward change." **PS**

Kevin A. Bowen has been a progressive leader in the health/fitness and Pilates profession for more than 25 years. He was the co-founder of the Pilates Method Alliance (PMA) and is currently the director of Core Dynamics Pilates.

