



**INTERFAITH**  
**ACTION** OF GREATER  
SAINT PAUL

## Opportunity Saint Paul Motivational Interviewing

*"The work we do at East Side Learning Center could not be done without volunteers." —Chris Flippo, East Side Learning Center*

### Volunteer impact

Within their individual assignments, Opportunity Saint Paul (OSP) volunteers interact with a wide range of community members. Volunteering is a journey. At its best, it connects people of diverse backgrounds in a mutual effort to improve their world.

Volunteering also has its challenges. When people of differing cultures and socio-economic backgrounds work together, their communication styles and expectations can vary. In OSP's previous learning event, we focused on addressing these challenges by working to build strong volunteer relationships. In the current event, we focus on one specific method for achieving this outcome — Motivational Interviewing.

*"Motivational interviewing is a counseling method that helps people resolve ambivalent feelings and insecurities to find the internal motivation they need to change their behavior." —Psychology Today*

### From therapy to volunteering

Motivational interviewing has its roots in the world of therapy and was initially developed by clinical psychologists William Miller and Stephen Rollnick for use in chemical dependency counseling. The core of the approach is to begin a relationship from a place of acceptance and from the premise that people are capable of achieving positive change.

*"Motivational interviewing does a fabulous job of being able to help people build a stronger therapeutic alliance ... building a relationship between the person that needs help, and the person who actually gives the help." —Reginald Prince*

Through the use of Motivational Interviewing, one focuses on commonalities and mutual humanity, and seeks to set aside differences. By "leveling" relationships and

defusing power dynamics, one seeks to generate authentic conversations on a person-to-person level.

### Unconditional positive regards

As presenter Reginald Prince noted during his OSP talk, the key to Motivational Interviewing (MI) is to "really see the human being" at the center of an inter-personal interaction. Price calls this "unconditional positive regard." From there, MI conversations are intended to work as a form of guidance, with the aim of eliciting motivation and strength. In a therapeutic setting, the aim is to elicit positive change through a process of mutual cooperation. In a volunteer setting — where a volunteer is providing mentoring or assistance — the same techniques can be used to equalize the power dynamic between individuals, and to foster deeper, more positive interactions.

*"We have a lot of biases, and we have a lot of labels that get in the way of how we look at the people we work with. The spirit of Motivational Interviewing helps to remove those."*—Reginald Prince

At base, Motivational Interviewing is about finding human commonality, and the technique works with all manner of people. Reginald Prince also notes that its precepts have been shown - through clinical studies - to work particularly well with African American and Hispanic males.

*"With volunteers, often there's an unbalanced playing field. You have someone who has accomplished certain things and wants to give back. And you have someone who is struggling. By using principles of Motivational Interviewing, you can level that playing field."*—Reginald Prince

### Promoting behavior change

In volunteer situations that involve mentoring - such as job training or other skill development - Motivational Interviewing techniques can help to facilitate personal achievement by stressing empathy and personal autonomy. By focusing on individual autonomy - the power that people inherently possess - individuals can learn to recognize their own power and can learn to develop their own capabilities for change.

### Faith perspective

At the end of OSP's learning event, Professor Earl Schwartz related a story from the Book of Jeremiah, in which dueling prophets confront each other with contradictory messages. Professor Schwartz urges us to take lessons from this example, in the service of facilitating open and honest discussion.

*"Let's take some inspiration from a prophet, who knew when to honestly and forthrightly speak one's own mind."*—Prof. Earl Schwartz