GENERATIVE MOMENTS IN COACHING

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"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."
—GOETHE

AFTER READING THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Define generative moments and their value
- Discuss the source of generative moments and how to leverage these moments for significant progress
- Discuss how to use the TTM, NVC, AI, and MI in working with generative moments
- Name the skills necessary for creating and supporting generative moments
- List the five steps in facilitating a generative moment
- Define relational flow

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Generative Moments: Moments when clients are aroused along the path of change and growth. Such moments reveal underlying needs and can often be recognized by the strength of their emotional charge (positive or negative). In such moments, coaches and clients co-generate new perspectives and co-construct engaging designs for moving forward. Coaches often describe their experience of these moments as an “intuitive dance.”

UNDERSTANDING AND RECOGNIZING GENERATIVE MOMENTS

The material in this chapter on generative moments draws on all of the skills and theories presented in this manual. That’s because generative moments engage all of one’s coaching skills to energize and help clients stretch toward their goals. They are experiences to look forward to after lots of coaching practice, trial, and correction.

What Is a Generative Moment?

Generative moments are the peak experiences of coaching sessions that happen along the path to reaching the client’s vision. In these pivotal moments, client feelings, needs, and desires are investigated around the “topic du jour.” In generative moments, coaches and clients explore the nature of the agreed topic, clarify
desired outcomes, brainstorm strategies, and identify next steps.

We call these “generative” moments because they inspire clients to generate new ideas or insights or uncover capacities, which can lead to bold actions that can positively alter their future (Bushe, 2007). Generative moments are mini-transformations that energize both coach and client and catalyze the next stage of the client’s progress.

As clients become awakened and aroused (whether they get especially excited, ambivalent, or resistant), coaches and clients have a unique opportunity to take risks, expand perspectives, and challenge assumptions. The more clients can discover new perspectives, capacities, and actions that will meet their needs, the more progress they will make in moving toward their visions. It’s important to set aside a specific time for the generative moment in most sessions to focus on one topic that recharges the client’s batteries and desire to change.

The Vision Coaching Tool described in the last chapter (Table 8.1 in Chapter 8) can facilitate generative moments at the outset of a coaching program and whenever the conversation lags. It is good to revisit the vision in detail at least annually. When we commit to change and grow through building visions, lots of old and new topics emerge for consideration in coaching sessions en route to getting there. Many things may ignite a client’s interest in a topic that calls for a generative moment—whether clients are experiencing negative or positive energy. The energy and its underlying needs make a client ripe for exploring new ways to meet those needs.

One way to think about generative moments is that they are served up as things that clients want less of (aversive indicators), things that clients want more of (attractive indicators), or some combination of the two. The former are generally accompanied by increased resistance, while the latter by increased readiness to pursue transformational change. Both present equally valuable opportunities for deeper work. Table 9.1 shows a partial list of emotional indicators that may suggest that the client is serving up a topic for a generative moment.

Sometimes generative moments emerge when clients are still considering change—when they are in the Precontemplation or Contemplation stages (see discussion of the TTM in Chapter 3). This often happens in response to external events. Pain and bad news get people’s attention (e.g., a message of “change or die” from a doctor). Hope and good news also have a way of getting people’s attention. For example, many women stop smoking the instant they learn they are pregnant. The need for a healthy baby eclipses their desire to smoke. At these times, coaches and clients have a unique opportunity to shake things up and move things forward.

### IMPORTANT!

Given their impact, generative moments can feel laden with pressure for new coaches to demonstrate great skill, wisdom, or technique. The most important thing to remember is that generative moments are about the client’s needs and desires. By following the client’s lead, coaches can ease their way into collaborative, co-creative conversations.

Coaches remember that they are in partnership rather than in charge, attentive to the client’s feelings rather than distracted by their own thoughts, and inspired rather than inspirational. At their best, generative moments feel intense, exciting, deep, powerful, and moving, but not hard.

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**TABLE 9.1. Emotional Indicators for Generative Moments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aversive Indicators</th>
<th>Attractive Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apathy, lethargy</td>
<td>Focus, energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worry, fear</td>
<td>Confidence, control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Contentment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distress</td>
<td>Eustress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>Arousal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sad, depressed</td>
<td>Happy, exhilarated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure, hesitant</td>
<td>Certain, willing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused, inarticulate</td>
<td>Clear, articulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>Safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocked</td>
<td>Released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuck in the muck</td>
<td>Free to move</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of balance</td>
<td>Equilibrium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distracted, disengaged</td>
<td>Mindful, engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigid or loose commitment</td>
<td>Playful determination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-sabotage</td>
<td>Self-support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intransient habits</td>
<td>Experimental action</td>
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When Do Generative Moments Occur Within Coaching Sessions?

Coaching sessions tend to have a distinct beginning, middle, and end. The beginning is the warm-up phase, which is about establishing connection, exploring and appreciating recent events and experience around client goals, and defining the “topic du jour.” The end is about identifying goals and developing innovative strategies that will carry the client forward until the next coaching session (and beyond). The end can be considered the cool-down phase after some more energetic work in the middle. In between lies the space for the generative moment—the energetic epicenter or workout of the session.

One caveat: Although there is a specific place and time in the process of a coaching session for the generative moment, generativity is not limited to this time and place. Ideally generativity is woven throughout the entire coaching session.

A good interpersonal connection and understanding of client experiences are crucial to setting in motion the first steps of the generative moment. Understanding a client’s experience with his or her weekly goals, whatever the progress or lack thereof, can reveal topics around which clients have aroused energy. Reviewing 3-month goals can reconnect clients with their values, motivators, and inspiration. In the absence of judgment and in the presence of support for growth, these moments reveal what is alive in and important to clients. Encouraging clients to share stories can shed light on their feelings, their met or unmet needs, and their hopes and desires. Such is the stuff that makes for generative moments.

DON’T FORGET . . .

Clients who share with their coaches in advance of coaching conversations (e.g., through email) the topics that arouse them may be able to move more quickly into generative moments. Then both clients and coaches are better prepared to pinpoint topics for generative moments. With or without advance preparation, however, coaches need to quickly establish a high-quality connection through mindful listening and appreciative questions.

What Generates Generative Moments?

Each time a client shows up for a coaching session, what is important to him or her shows up for the session as well, although a warm-up phase may be required to uncover what is important. To use the language of NVC, introduced in Chapter 5, clients show up for coaching with something that is “alive” or stirring within them at that moment. It’s the coach’s job to listen mindfully for that life force, reflect it back to the client, and inquire as to where the client wants to go with that energy (Rosenberg, 2005). Alternate between open-ended questions and reflections to clarify the topic:

- From our discussion, it sounds as though there are three potential topics that we could explore today (describe them succinctly).
- We have time to work through one topic. Which one would you like to work on?
- What makes this topic the most important for our coaching today?
- What outcome would you like at the end of today’s session?

IMPORTANT!

Client-driven generative moments represent a shift from traditional health education. It is not up to the coach to generate the moment. It is up to the client to show up with the energy to explore and the desire to learn. The client has that responsibility in every coaching session. Coaches enable clients to move positively forward by following the client’s lead, paying careful attention to the client’s feelings, needs, and desires through the use of empathy (NVC), inquiry (AI), and reflections (MI). Like a midwife supporting a mother through the transitional stages to delivery, it is not the coach’s job to have the moment but rather to support clients through the flow of the moment.

Once generative moments have run their course, coaching conversations flow easily into planning, including the use of behavioral SMART goals (as discussed in Chapter 8). Clients often require assistance to frame such plans as starting points for experimentation, discovery, and learning, rather than as blueprints for execution. Static planning models (make the plan, implement the plan) do not reflect the dynamic of human development. Innovative planning models (make the plan, innovate the plan) empower clients to make real-time adjustments and improvisations, thus better supporting the clients’ confidence in being successful.

How Do We Know When a Client Has a Therapeutic Need?

It is important for coaches to distinguish between topics that call for a generative moment versus psychological
needs that necessitate deeper help than the coach is qualified to provide. Although there is no simple formula for making such determinations, a lack of client movement over several weeks, or repeatedly dealing with topics related to healing unresolved pain or wounds from the past, may indicate that it is time to suggest to a client that the skills of a therapist are called for, either concurrently or as a prelude to future coaching.

DON'T FORGET...

Coaches work with functional people who want to reach their full potential rather than with dysfunctional people who want to work through psychological problems to become functional.

GENERATIVE MOMENTS ENGAGE EVERY COACHING SKILL

To leverage the full potential of generative moments, a coach needs to utilize every coaching skill and tool dynamically in the moment. At their best, generative moments spark the intuitive dance of coaching. Handled poorly, generative moments are not only squandered, but they can also set clients back in both motivation and action.

The following coaching skills, introduced in previous chapters, all need to be fully engaged to effectively move clients through generative moments.

Suspending Judgment

Generative moments require a judgment-free environment, characterized by trust a quality defined in Chapter 2 as the "willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent" (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Safety and a strong sense of support, preconditions for success in all coaching sessions, are especially important in creating optimal conditions for generative moments where clients are challenged to stretch to the edge of their abilities. Establishing such an environment enables clients to be open and authentic so that the important stuff can get said and considered.

Mindful Listening

Defined in Chapter 1 as the "nonjudgmental awareness of what is happening in the present moment," mindfulness is a way to break free from being on autopilot. There's no way to identify generative moments apart from mindful listening. By paying attention without judgment to what's happening in oneself, and in the client, coaches can help clients gain awareness of needs and choices. Chapter 11 further explores the relevance of mindfulness to coaching presence, as well as its impact on client relationships.

Expressing Empathy

Defined in Chapter 5 as the “respectful understanding of another person’s experience,” empathy uses both emotional and cognitive awareness to connect with and give voice to what clients are feeling, needing, and desiring. Without receiving empathy, clients will often fail to move through and derive full benefit from generative moments. Empathy differs from pity and sympathy in that it is a coach’s reflection of the client’s perceived experience rather than a sharing in it. Empathy, like mindfulness, is reviewed again in Chapter 11 as an essential part of coaching presence.

Evocative Inquiry

Inquiry was identified as a core coaching skill in Chapter 2, with special attention being given to appreciative inquiry in Chapter 4. If coaches ask too many leading questions, with an implied "right" answer, the generative moment can be lost. True inquiry comes from the framework of “not assuming” and “not knowing” the answers, that is, having a beginner’s mind. The more coaches navigate by open-minded curiosity, especially with regard to clients’ capacities and strengths, the more clients will discover about themselves and where they want to go. When coaches linger in the discovery phase of AI, with engaging questions that connect clients to their own best selves, clients are better able to put their strengths to work.

Open-Ended Inquiry

When it comes to generative moments, inquiry that evokes stories and images has far more power to generate an upward spiral than inquiry that leads to short or analytic answers. As described in Chapters 2 and 5, open-ended questions that start with “what” or “how” are the key to evoking such responses. Too many close-ended questions, which require short answers, tend to shut down this dynamic. "Why" questions feel judgmental or can lead to analysis paralysis. Full engagement follows most directly by encouraging clients to remember and fully verbalize the stories and images of their own best selves.

Perceptive Reflections

Asking too many questions in a row, even great questions, can feel like interrogation and can compromise a
generative moment. Such inquiry often has more to do with the coach’s desire to propel clients forward than with clients’ desire to figure things out for themselves. That’s why MI recommends the more frequent use of perceptive reflections (see Chapter 5). The five forms of reflections utilized in MI that are especially useful in the context of generative moments are: simple, amplified, double-sided, shifted-focus, and empathy reflections. They communicate the full engagement of the coach and connect the client with the motivation to change.

Honoring Silence

In response to empathy, inquiry, and reflections, clients will often pause to think, feel, or connect with their truth. This especially happens in generative moments. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is essential for coaches to honor this silence, be comfortable with pauses, and not intrude prematurely. Once the ball is in the client’s court, it is usually best to wait until the client hits it back. Intervening too quickly prevents clients from maximizing their discoveries. Silence affirms the coach’s desire to hear what the client has to say and, even better, implies “I know you know the answer.” It is a special gift to be with clients in silence, especially those who are introverted, because silence gives them time to organize their thoughts, feelings, and desires before translating them into words.

Creative Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an essential skill of coaching, especially when it comes to generative moments. With increased motivation to change comes increased interest in specific change strategies. Such strategies are not handed to clients by coaches. Rather, they are co-constructed with clients through the creative brainstorming of ideas, questions, approaches, and frameworks. Coaches and clients can generate an enormous number of possibilities without evaluating the relative merits until later. The mood can be alternately playful, insightful, courageous, and realistic. Taking turns in coming up with possibilities is a good way to build and maintain momentum through the brainstorming process.

Unfailing Affirmation

Also referred to as championing in Chapter 2, unfailing affirmation is about steadfastly acknowledging the client’s capacities, characteristics, and strengths for change (see Chapter 11). In this way, coaches positively impact both client self-efficacy and self-esteem (see Chapter 6). “My certainty is greater than your doubt” expresses the framework that coaches come from in working with generative moments. When clients know that coaches believe in their capacity to change and achieve desired outcomes, they are more likely to get out of their own way and try new strategies. Such an endorsement enables clients not only to get excited about the possibilities generated through brainstorming, but also to move forward with one or more of them.

IN SUMMARY

Generative moments grow out of the connection that coaches make with clients at the beginning of each coaching conversation. By establishing a “no-fault zone” where clients can blamelessly and shamelessly open up and share, coaches make it possible for clients to learn from their experiences and to move forward. Early and effective use of empathy, inquiry, and reflections in reviewing client goals (both weekly and three-month goals) helps uncover the topics clients want to explore in greater depth.

FACILITATING GENERATIVE MOMENTS

The generative moment evolves through five steps:

1. Identify and clarify the topic to work on.
2. Get permission to work on the topic now.
3. Uncover the heart of the matter—what is really going on here.
   a. Use AI to connect with the positive.
   b. Use MI to overcome reluctance, ambivalence, and resistance.
5. Design action plans.

Identify and Clarify the Topic to Work On

To identify topics, pay attention to the feelings, needs, and desires of clients:

- What are they feeling?
- What are they attracted to?
- What do they want less of?
- What are they celebrating?
- What needs are alive in them?
- What are they resisting?
- How ready are they to change?
- What gives them energy?
- What moves them to action?
- What do they highlight and remember from the previous week?
Sometimes several topics emerge that are intertwined, or are ambiguously defined. Inquiry in advance of coaching conversations (e.g., through email) and the use of reflections, particularly simple reflections, are needed to drill down to a topic underlying others or clarify a clear topic definition.

Ideally, the topic of a generative moment will be self-evident to the client and coach alike. It will shine, like a light in the darkness. When that happens, it will be easy to name the topic and move to the next step. More often, coaches and clients will float different topics for consideration until one clearly rises to the surface. After all, it’s hard to talk with clients about their vision and goals without also hearing how they feel and what they need.

Coaches may name a topic and ask if it is an area the client would like to explore. When clients agree, it may be useful to use an MI-style ruler to measure how much energy they have around that topic (see Chapter 5). If energy is low, there may be another topic worth pursuing. Or, it may be possible to invigorate their energy by discussing their energy rating. When clients disagree, the conversation should continue until they identify a topic on which they would like to concentrate.

### IMPORTANT!

The point is not to be “right” about the best topic to pursue, but rather to invite clients to look more deeply at what is alive in them. Regardless of whether the coach or client first names the topic, the key is to hold that topic as an opportunity for deeper connection and learning. The generative moment is the heart of the coaching conversation, and the client’s heart determines the focus of the generative moment.

Although it is not the coach’s responsibility to create generative moments, masterful coaches often provoke them, energizing clients who are making, or struggling to make, progress.

Increased resistance and readiness to change both present valuable opportunities for generative moments. It is important to remember that through a lack of engagement with their goals clients are also expressing feelings and needs worthy of exploration. The generative moment can be the catalyst for a shift in feelings or a recognition of what is really happening for the client. When clients find it hard to identify their needs, it can be helpful for coaches to offer empathy reflections using authentic, judgment-free feeling and need words (see Chapter 5, as well as Manske & Manske, 2006).

Clients are often invigorated when coaches volunteer their own empathy reflections or empathy guesses (Chapter 5), without judgment or evaluation, because it can be both clarifying and stimulating to hear such perceptions.

Another approach is to engage the client’s body in the search for topics. Encourage clients to pay attention to physical sensations in the moment by having them move around, strike poses, change body positions, walk, or use finger labyrinths (Rehm, 2000). Stretching, breath work, and guided meditations are also ways to invigorate the moment. Richard Strozzi Heckler refers to this as Somatic Coaching (2002).

### Get Permission to Work on the Topic Now

Once a topic has been identified and clarified, the coach and client agree on the appropriateness of working on it now. Coaching always protects the freedom and choice of clients, which increases both the motivation for change and the probability of success. If you find that the client chooses not to explore the topic, discuss whether it can be a topic for a session in the future. If so, the coach and client share responsibility for making sure it is revisited.

As presented in Chapter 3, according to TTM, the client’s stage of change significantly impacts both his or her readiness to address the topic as well as the approach that should be taken. If clients are in the earliest stages of change regarding a particular topic, it may be difficult for them to mount the energy necessary for a generative moment that would move them forward to action. However in these stages, clients can do valuable thinking and feeling about possibilities, working the decisional balance for change, and exploring new supportive relationships or environments. A generative moment that builds hope can be a catalyst for increasing readiness that will eventually lead to transformational action.

### Uncover the Heart of the Matter—What Is Really Going On Here

The work of the generative moment starts with drilling down to the heart of the matter. It is a dance of self-discovery for clients, which challenges them to view and think differently about the topic and themselves. “Ah-ha!” experiences are common. Frequently, clients say things such as “I’ve never thought about that before” or “I never realized that until now.”

AI and MI models offer different paths to getting to the heart of the matter. In general, it’s valuable to first start with AI to build and harvest as much positive energy and emotion as can be elicited at a given moment.
Reconnection to a client's strengths and capacities may be sufficient to move forward into brainstorming and planning. If not, MI offers many tools to understand the roots of ambivalence, to play with ambivalence, and, even better, to resolve it. Often, coaches find themselves using a mix of both models.

**Use AI to Connect With the Positive**

It is important to approach each topic as a possibility to be pursued rather than as a problem to be solved. Working from a deficit-based framework, focusing on what is wrong and what needs to be "fixed," can negatively influence how coaches view client potential as well as compromise client self-efficacy.

Instead, masterful coaches first explore a topic from a strengths-based perspective, even when clients are experiencing resistance to change. Strengths-based inquiries focus on what is meaningful and compelling to clients, rather than on what they do not want. In addition, strengths-based inquiries invite clients to recall and reconnect with past successful experiences.

The benefits of using strength-based inquiries are plentiful. They include generating optimism and positivity, reminding clients of their capabilities and encouraging more of the behaviors that created previous success. Remember the AI principle: what we appreciate, appreciates.

Using the AI interview protocol (presented in Chapter 4) the following represent a sample of questions that can generate positive shifts in thoughts and behaviors:

- Tell me about a time when you experienced a similar challenge and navigated your way through it?
- What did success feel like?
- What are the values reflected in how you have handled this situation?
- How does this connect with your wellness vision?
- What are the needs that would be met if this vision were true for you?
- What are the structures (environments, frameworks, relationships, routines) that would enable you to be successful with this goal?
- What are your hopes for how you would like to handle this issue in the future?
- Name your wish.

The primary objective of using the AI approach first is to engage clients in conversations that re-connect to their vitality—that place of deep longing that brought them to coaching in the first place. Such questions and requests shine a light on the hope and enthusiasm clients have for their visions, and realign the situation with their visions. Table 9.2 summarizes how this might work in a coaching conversation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 9.2. AI Generative Moment Coaching Tool</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarify and summarize topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discover best experience</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe dream, vision, or three wishes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Energy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Design actions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Destiny</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summarize and confirm</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ready, Confident, and Committed</strong></td>
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Use MI to Overcome Reluctance, Ambivalence, and Resistance

When the principles of AI do not uncover the heart of the matter and elevate clients’ readiness to move in the direction of their desires, MI tools can be useful to help them understand and dislodge their “stuckness,” resolve ambivalence, and move forward.

Expressing empathy, developing discrepancy, rolling with resistance, and supporting self-efficacy are all designed to create a safe space for clients to explore their thoughts, feelings, needs, and intentions (Chapters 5 and 6). When the space is right, clients can leave behind their resistance to change and open themselves to new possibilities. This is often a critical part of successfully coaching clients through their generative moments.

Clients are more likely to act on what they say, not what they hear.

Arranging the coaching conversation so that clients describe their reasons for changing (change talk), instead of the coach telling clients why they “should” change, is one of the most difficult shifts for a new coach (Chapter 5). Keep in mind that clients are more likely to move in the direction of change when they have figured out and described in their own words what outcomes they really want, define what challenges may be getting in the way of their success, and what it will take to reach their goals (change talk). After clients have been “sitting in the muck” for a while, dealing with the discrepancy of the needs to not change and the needs to change, they will gain motivational energy and be more ready to take action to move forward.

Of the many MI tools reviewed in Chapter 5, the use of rulers to stimulate conversation about a client’s readiness is particularly useful. These rulers encourage clients to think out loud and quantify how ready, willing, and able they are to change. Rulers also give clients a different way to articulate the importance of their visions and level of commitment.

Using rulers, coaches ask clients to assess, on a scale of 0 to 10, the importance of change, their confidence in their ability to change, and their readiness to change. Once clients pick a number, coaches can engage clients with several compelling inquiries:

- The reasons they picked that particular number
- How they feel about the number they picked
- Why they didn’t pick a lower number
- What would assist them to move to the next higher number
- What needs would be met by moving to the next higher number

IMPORTANT!

The use of rulers, or any of the MI tools, will not work unless the intention of the coach is purely to understand the client’s experience. The more coaches try to manipulate behavior or force an outcome, the more these tools will increase rather than decrease resistance. When that happens, they will work against rather than support the generative moment. Self-determination theory makes it clear that the human propensity for personal growth toward integration and cohesion only happens when change is freely chosen, in the moment, through the interplay of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick, 2005). Table 9.3 summarizes how MI tools might be used to move things forward in a coaching conversation.

Move Forward: Brainstorm Options

Once change talk has begun and client energy is high, and as indicated in the generative moment coaching tools, it’s helpful to engage clients in the brainstorming of ideas and approaches for moving forward. In brainstorming, possibilities are generated but not evaluated. A good rule is the more the better when it comes to brainstorming. Coaches can often assist clients through the brainstorming process by taking turns in the generation of ideas and approaches. It is challenging for coaches to generate possibilities in the moment, but it is well worth the effort. Sometimes, coaches come up with possibilities that clients would never have thought of on their own. When coaches take a turn, clients are given the space to think more deeply about or jump off from a possibility in a whole new direction suggested by the coach. Such brainstorming is essential to extract full value from the increased desire to change created by generative moments.

IMPORTANT!

It is helpful to designate a particular time during the generative moment for brainstorming ideas, questions, or approaches. Brainstorming too early can overwhelm clients and provoke resistance. Whereas, failing to brainstorm at all can squander the potential of the moment, either because no possibilities are generated or because one possibility takes over the energy of the conversation before others are considered. Running with the first idea that comes up is not only limiting, but it may also be dangerous. As French philosopher Emile Chartier writes, “Nothing is as dangerous as an idea when it is the only one you have” (O’Hanlon & Beadle, 1997, p. 31).
TABLE 9.3. MI Generative Moment Coaching Tool

| Clarify and summarize topic | Let’s clarify the topic we want to explore so that we understand what we’re working on and the outcome we’d like to achieve. |
| Revisit vision and goals   | Describe your vision, values, and goals as they relate to this issue. What do you really want to have happen? |
| Decisional balance        | **Pros:** Explore concerns about staying the same and reasons (benefits) to making the change and how they serve your vision. What will your life be like if you change?  
                          | **Cons:** Explore reasons (benefits) to staying the same and concerns about change. What will your life be like if you don’t change? |
| Discrepancy               | Use thinking and feeling rulers to explore the weight of the pros and cons in the decisional balance. Notice the energy and energy shifts. What does it feel like to live with this ambivalence? What would it take to tip the balance toward change? Away from change?  
                          | If a miracle happened overnight and the change was made by tomorrow morning, what would you notice? |
| Importance                | Having explored the discrepancy, rate the importance of making the change now on a scale of 0 to 10. Why is it not a lower number? What would it take to make it a higher number? |
| Next steps                | What next steps do you want to take to bring your dream, vision, or wishes alive? Brainstorm multiple options. If you were your best self now, what would you do next? What can you do to build confidence? |
| Confidence                | Having identified next steps, rate your confidence for successfully making this change on a scale of 0 to 10. Why is it not a lower number? What would it take to make it a higher number? What strengths can you use to be successful? |
| Summarize and confirm     | Summarize the situation and next steps. |
| Ready and committed       | How ready and committed are you to moving forward? How important is this to you? |

Basic protocols for successful brainstorming include:

- Setting a time limit
- Withholding judgment or evaluation of ideas
- Encouraging wild and exaggerated ideas
- Letting no idea go unsaid
- Setting a minimum number of ideas or questions to generate
- Building on the possibilities put forth by others
- Combining and expanding ideas

With many compelling and relevant ideas in mind, the client will eagerly move with confidence and energy to goal setting, the next step of the coaching conversation. With high self-efficacy, clients will be ready, willing, and able to commit to specific behaviors that will contribute to realizing their visions.

**Design Action Plans**

The transition to goal setting at the end of the generative moment is more likely and more compelling when coaches champion and support the client’s ability to move forward with one or more of the brainstormed ideas or approaches. Forward movement is made possible when clients believe they can do it (self-efficacy; see Chapter 6). If clients do not believe they have what it takes to move forward, or believe that their circumstances make progress impossible, they will not take action, learn, or grow. Understanding this dynamic, coaches support self-efficacy throughout the entire coaching session, especially through the generative moment. By acknowledging what clients have brought to the generative moment, the good work they have done in brainstorming, and their capacity to see their dreams through to fruition, coaches enable clients to commit themselves and to take actions that will generate success.

W. H. Murray of the Scottish Himalayan Expedition famously addressed this dynamic when he wrote:

"Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things
occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one’s favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no one could have dreamed would come his or her way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe’s couplings:

Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.

Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.”

(1951, pp. 6-7)

Championing the client at the close of the generative moment is an essential part of masterful coaching.

**IMPORTANT!**

This five-step process provides a framework for handling generative moments. Yet, in many respects, these moments are never “handled” at all. Rather, they have a playful, surprising, improvisational, flowing quality that cannot be scripted. The best generative moments move seamlessly and organically in flow—they feel like a dance—sometimes slow, and sometimes salsa.

**RELATIONAL FLOW IN GENERATIVE MOMENTS**

**What Is Relational Flow?**

Relational flow happens when coaches and clients perceive themselves as being “in synch” and engaged in generative, interdependent dialogue. In reflecting upon peak coaching experiences, coaches and clients often describe their best moments as like being in an intuitive dance: “a relational dynamic between coaches and clients when they enter a zone where they are fully challenged at a high level of skill and awareness. This dynamic, conceptualized as ‘relational flow,’ may underpin how and when both coaches and clients make large steps forward in their work” (Moore, Drake, Tschannen-Moran, Campone, & Kauffman, 2005).

It is a challenge to create relational flow, let alone capture or measure it. That’s because it is an intuitive and synergistic dynamic that is created by the coach, the client, and the field between the two. Like learning to dance, the fundamental steps must be mastered before style, fluidity, and flow can be demonstrated.

Being comfortable with the five steps of the generative moment fosters an environment that enables coaches and clients to move through the conversation seamlessly and organically. In flow, coaches aren’t married to a plan that determines what happens next or attached to a particular outcome. Instead, they are able to use what is happening in the moment to determine what will happen in the next moment, improvising with agility based on what is most important to the client in the now.

**What Supports Relational Flow?**

Although research into the dynamic continues, several bodies of knowledge illuminate and support the intuitive dance of coaching. These include:

1. **Flow studies**—As defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow exists when one is engaged in a challenging situation that requires fully engaging and stretching one’s skills at a high level in response (2000). In flow, one becomes immersed in an activity with greater attention, less effort, and an altered sense of time.

2. **Reflective practitioner**—The ability to dance effortlessly also comes from practice. A coach with experience is “less tied to explicit rules, processes and contextual clues in order to know how to act effectively—and yet does so with less effort” (Moore et al., 2005). Experienced coaches rely more on intuitive thoughts and perceptions. They draw upon previously successful experience—lots of it. The intuition of a master is powerful, whereas for novices it’s limited.

3. **Readiness to change**—A client’s ability to engage in flow depends upon his or her stage of change. As presented in Chapter 3, the coach must be cognizant of the client’s readiness to change and adjust the approach accordingly. Masterful coaches do not push clients through the stages of change. Rather, they draw clients out by honoring the needs of the moment.

4. **Emotional intelligence**—As defined by Daniel Goleman, EI is the ability to “recognize our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (1998). In the coaching conversation, the competencies that contribute to EI are necessary for both coach and client. The ability to detect emotion, either through the senses or intuition, and utilize it for positive outcomes are an essential part of the empathy that contributes to relational flow.
5. Relational competence—In the generative moment, the dance is a collaboration between two connected people. From Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, Walker, & Hartling, 2004; Walker & Rosen, 2004), we know that growth through connection, rather than separation, leads to healthy functioning. In deep connection with their coaches, clients feel more vital, empowered, clear, worthy, and driven toward more connection with others (Moore et al., 2005).

Hall and Duvall conclude:

“The coach dances with a client to facilitate the unleashing of potentials and the experience of change. The dialogue dance creates motivation and energy in the player or the client. The dance creates readiness for change, the power to change, and the leverage for change. In this dance, new frames of mind are co-created for facilitating that change. The dialogue is a dance around support, celebration, accountability, fun, and actualizing potential. It’s a dance for enabling dreams to come true. Do you want to dance?” (2005, p. 6)

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is a generative moment?

2. When do generative moments occur within coaching sessions?

3. Who is responsible for generating a generative moment? Explain why.

4. What might indicate that it is time to refer a client to therapy, either concurrently or as a prelude to future coaching?

5. Name and explain the coaching skills that need to be fully engaged to move clients forward through generative moments.

6. What are the five steps through which generative moments evolve?

7. Define relational flow and describe its value in the coaching dynamic.

REFERENCES


