Tool for Measuring Change Talk and Sustain Talk

Directions: Follow the procedure below to record a coaching session, and then identify client change talk and sustain talk. Also, notice your (or another coach's) responses and how these may have influenced the coaching conversation.

PURPOSE

Within a coaching conversation, you might hear signals that the client is moving toward the desired change. As this happens, one expects a higher percentage of change talk to sustain talk as the session unfolds. This shift is predictive of future change (or no change) and could provide indicators of your growing skill of evoking.

SETUP

- Get written consent from your clients to record the session. Explain the policy for disposing of recordings after a specific time.
- Audio record a coaching session. While not required, consider an automated recording software that provides a written transcript of the recording. A simple internet search for accurate and economical programs will provide many choices.
- Make any edits to the transcript as needed and identify the speakers. (Some programs will automatically label speakers after you enter the names once or twice.)
- One option is to print out the transcript so you can "mark it" or color code as you listen. However, a Word document can also serve this purpose since there is a way to "mark" text with colors.

ACTIVITY

This simple system is a way to observe and visibly code the client's change-talk and sustain-talk statements in a session. A first pass lets you identify and highlight the client's change talk and sustain talk. Afterward, you could review the session a second time to notice what you (or another coach) said that seemed to strengthen and evoke change talk or soften sustain talk. As mentioned, you can use this to reflect on your own sessions or give feedback to others.

If you have a printed transcript, one option is to use a green highlighter to mark client change-talk statements and a yellow highlighter to mark client sustain-talk statements. This provides an immediate snapshot of the amount and ratio of change talk to sustain talk. If you prefer not to print the transcript, you could try the highlight text feature in a Word document to mark change talk green and sustain talk yellow.

Step 1

1. Read the transcript of the coaching session.
2. Find the ***client*** statements that indicate movement toward the desired change (change talk). Use a green highlighter to mark these statements.
3. Find the ***client*** statements that indicate movement away from change or toward sustaining the target behavior (sustain talk). Use a yellow highlighter to mark these statements.

Step 2

1. Read the transcript a second time.
2. Find the ***coach*** statements and consider these questions.
    a. When change talk appeared, what happened just before it? After it?
    b. When sustain talk appeared, what happened just before it? After it?
    c. What seemed to evoke change talk? (Change talk is often mixed with sustain talk, and you may have to look closely to find it.)
    d. What did you do to maximize or minimize sustain talk?

Step 3

Review the session for proficiency. Now that you have a visible representation of your client's change talk and sustain talk and your responses before and after, what is the proficiency measurement? As we said, specialized tools are available to code change talk and sustain talk, but for starters, a simple count of change talk and sustain talk statements can be informative. You can also notice how much the ratio changes as the session unfolds. An equal frequency of change to sustain talk reflects ambivalence and predicts no change, but as the session continues, one hopes to see the balance shift to more change talk.

   Here is one suggestion for reviewing the highlighted transcript to measure and plan for your growth in MI. As you would for those you coach, wear the strengths-colored lenses while you view your own (or others') transcripts. Remember to celebrate what went well and your progress so far, then choose one thing to target for further practice. We offer this as only one way to measure your skills of acknowledging, inviting, and strengthening change talk while minimizing sustain talk. You can look at several things in addition to what is listed below, and of course, consider developing other strategies that work for you.

1. Count the number of change-talk and sustain-talk statements.
2. How many change-talk statements are there compared to sustain-talk statements? How does this change throughout the session?
3. Consider a few things you did especially well and one specific area you would like to focus on for future practice and improvement. You may have noticed the ability to soften sustain talk effectively. Maybe your affirmations evoked more confidence (ability) talk from your client. What did you notice after you offered a posy or a bouquet summary of change talk? For one growth area, for example, perhaps you would like to find ways to strengthen the change talk you heard. (One idea is to use the questions in Table 15.1 or Handout 15.1 to review the session.)