

## CHAPTER 1

# What Is Motivation?

*“You need to be more motivated.”*

*“It’s just a matter of will power and motivation.”*

*“If you’re motivated enough, you can do anything!”*

How many times have you heard such statements? How many times have you made them yourself? And importantly, what do they *mean*? We talk about motivation as though it’s a tangible, existing “thing” that we all equally understand and agree upon. We also talk about motivation like it’s something you either have or you don’t. From your work with people struggling with motivation and change, you know that the reality of “getting motivated” is not quite so simple. In fact, you probably already knew that from experiences in your own life. Before we dive into the work of MI, we take a moment to talk about what we mean when we use the term *motivation*. In this chapter, we begin by defining *motivation*, considering important aspects of behavior, thinking, and emotion. We also discuss barriers and facilitators to motivation, with particular focus on those that most impact people with legal involvement. This sets the stage for the real work ahead—understanding the spirit of MI, evoking strengths and resilience, and our role in the important work of change.

## MOTIVATION SCIENCE

Did you know that there’s an entire scientific field devoted to understanding motivation? *Motivation science* is a subdiscipline composed of people from psychology, sociology, and cognitive science, as well as economics, political science, and organizational management. This range of contributions

from different disciplines underscores the complexity of understanding motivation. Is motivation a part of human nature, or is it part of our systems and cultures? Is motivation more about our brains and how we think, or is it more about how we act and interact with one another? Motivation is all these things. As you likely know from your work thus far, motivation is many different things to different people and at different times.

A fairly straightforward definition of *motivation* is “why people think, feel, and act the way that they do.”<sup>1,2</sup> Even that simple definition, however, is quite complex. It carries assumptions about our values, purpose or goals, and expectations of ourselves and others.<sup>1,3,4</sup> Motivation, then, is not just about what we do, but about who we are. What, then, do we mean when we talk about motivation in the context of MI? To begin, MI centers on the assumption of ambivalence. Though we will discuss ambivalence at greater length in Chapter 8, it deserves some attention here. *Ambivalence*, at its core, is feeling more than one way about something. Motivation may reflect feeling more than one way about a particular need, or perhaps about a way of meeting that need (e.g., a goal). For example, a person is hungry. This seems fairly easy to remedy, right? Maybe not. The person could feel a physiological pull to eat something to satisfy that hunger. That same person could also be trying to reduce their food intake for health or other reasons. Ambivalence ensues. Do they eat and resolve physiological hunger pangs? Or do they do something else until those feelings subside? Both are potentially desirable options. Suppose the person decides to go ahead and alleviate hunger pangs by having a snack. They have healthy options, which may give them a sense of accomplishment toward their goal of reducing caloric intake, but they may also have less healthy options that bring them greater pleasure. Oh, no . . . more ambivalence.

Ambivalence is at the root of many of the problems we hope to help people resolve. MI is a way of exploring that ambivalence, helping people understand and resolve it in a way that supports their hopes, wants, or needs. We use a person’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors—*who they are as a person*—to aid them in moving closer to desired growth and change. Motivation is what helps them not only understand themselves and what they want, but how to make these changes a reality. Rather than motivation being about what a person lacks, it is about what will help them move forward in their lives.

## WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE?

Take a moment and think about what motivates you (see Box 1.1). As you list things that motivate you, reflect on those for a moment. Maybe

you've listed different motivators for different aspects of your life. Maybe at work you are motivated by achievement or success or being recognized by supervisors or colleagues. It could also be the security of a paycheck or hope for a promotion. The list goes on. Maybe at home you are motivated by being around people you love, or by a sense of comfort and peace, or by planned activities. When you think about yourself, maybe you are motivated by a desire to learn, improve yourself, or take pride in your accomplishments. Return to your list. What values are associated with the things that motivate you? These could include ambition, integrity, commitment, authenticity, happiness, meaningful work, or serving others.

Now think for a moment about what motivates the people with whom you work. These are people who have engaged in behaviors that are problematic and illegal, facing or living through sanctions as a result of that behavior. What motivates them? Again, make a short list in Box 1.1 based not only on what you know from conversations with these individuals but also what you know about your own system or agency. Perhaps they are motivated by a desire for happiness, choice, or freedom.

<b>BOX 1.1. Motivation and You: Motivation and Clients/People with Legal Involvement</b>	
Things that motivate you:	Things that motivate your clients/people with legal involvement:
Barriers to your motivation:	Barriers to motivation for your clients/people with legal involvement:

Maybe they are motivated by a desire for more stability and to prove to others that they can be better. What values underlie their motivations? Self-determination, growth, accomplishment, or self-respect and pride may come to mind. As you think about what motivates you, and what motivates your clients, you may note similarities. This connection between shared motivations and values is a key aspect of the work of MI, and it aligns with the collaborative spirit that we discuss in Chapter 2.

### THE MANY ASPECTS OF MOTIVATION

When we return to motivation science, we learn a great deal about the technicalities of motivation. Much attention has been given to the role of intrinsic, or internal, self-driven motivation versus extrinsic motivation, or motivation arising from external factors and tangible rewards, like gifts, praise, or money. Important research in this area<sup>5-9</sup> holds that three primary factors are key to motivating people: (1) autonomy, or being able to make one's own choices; (2) competence, or feeling that one has the required skills to grow and change; and (3) relatedness, or feeling connected to and respected by others. These intrinsically motivating factors promote change, whereas extrinsic factors like money, incentives, or other external rewards, actually bypass long-term motivation in favor of short-term compliance.

Here we have that word again—*compliance*. We work in systems that often promote and reward compliance, and as we noted in the Introduction to this book, our goal is *lasting change*. Thus, we hope to promote factors that support change rather than temporary compliance. Once extrinsic incentives have ended, or the sanctions used to motivate have been completed, then real change—change that lasts—is unlikely. For real, lasting change, rewards that are solid and *come from within* carry greater weight. Rewards that align with internal hopes, needs, and desires return us to choice, ability, and connectedness.

In addition to intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, we also must consider characteristics of the goals involved in anticipated change. We either have positive, growth-oriented goals that we *approach*, or our goal is to explicitly *avoid* a negative or punishing experience. For instance, using our earlier example related to alleviating hunger, we could have a health-related approach goal like “having more energy,” or we could have an avoidance-related goal like “not having clothes that are too tight.” Both goals are valid. But this approach–avoidance distinction has long been present in motivational science, and we know that approach-oriented motivation is superior to avoidance in promoting lasting behavioral

change.<sup>10</sup> Thus, for a person who is contemplating change, it may be more important to emphasize what that person is moving toward than what they're trying to avoid.

In later chapters we address “change talk,” or ways that people express reasons for change. Some change talk reflects “approach” goals (e.g., “I want to be healthy”) or “avoidance” goals (e.g., “I can't stand what this does to me”). Both are legitimate forms of change talk that we accept and can use in our work. But here we speak of goals, and effective goals are framed as the presence of something we need or desire, not the absence of something we want to avoid or eliminate.<sup>11</sup> For example, if a person is troubled by explosive anger, telling them to not hit someone is less effective than asking, “When you lose your cool, what might you do instead?” This person ultimately seeks different ways of handling anger rather than stopping one single action. That concept is the heart of this chapter.

Motivation also involves other important factors, like our expectations, or the importance or meaning of a particular goal. For example, a goal may be clear and achievable, but without meaning or importance, an individual is unlikely to pursue it. Being able to do something and wanting to do it are two different things. Likewise, a goal may be meaningful, aligned with individual values, and perceived as critically important, but social or situational considerations also play a role.<sup>1,3,4</sup> People may struggle, or be inspired, to change because of others in their lives. Thus, motivation involves other people. Connection. This is an important point we'll return to again and again.

## BARRIERS TO MOTIVATION

Just as we asked you to think about what motivates you and your clients, now turn to barriers that can get in the way. Take a look again at Box 1.1. What things demotivate you? What are obstacles that get in the way of being motivated to change or maintaining that motivation? After you've written these, reflect on them for a moment. Some may be tangible barriers, like lack of money or resources. Others may be logistical barriers, like time in your schedule, available transportation, or interfering commitments. Still, others may be more internal or individual, like feeling overwhelmed or not knowing where to start, or social, such as lacking support from important others or them directly discouraging change-related behavior.

What we face as we contemplate growth and change is a balance between things that motivate us and barriers that demotivate us or block our way. This reflects ambivalence. On any given day, or during any

given opportunity to move toward change, an individual can feel ambivalent (e.g., want to/don't want to, think I can/don't think I can), resulting in lack of action. Return to Box 1.1 to see how this ambivalence plays out. As you can see, each of these motivators, as well as barriers, may be compelling in their own way, and in their own moments. It is no different for people with legal involvement, who must also resolve ambivalence and then work on barriers that inhibit the change they seek.

Now, think about the barriers faced by people with legal involvement. Make a list in Box 1.1 of what you've heard from your clients. It's likely a combination of similar barriers—lack of money or resources, lack of time, feeling overwhelmed, or not having transportation. They can feel an absence of support from others in their lives or even a lack of confidence from repeated failure at past efforts to change. These may not be so different from the barriers to important changes in your own life, even though the end goals may be different. Here again we have a point of shared connection. The reasons that drive us, as well as the barriers to success, may grow from a shared root. Thus, we are able to understand the struggles that others face as they begin their journey toward change.

Barriers may lie hidden, yet there are those that cannot be overlooked. Sometimes we, and our agencies, serve as barriers to change for people with legal involvement. Systems and rules are often designed to punish rather than promote growth, using overcomplicated operating procedures that dictate how to handle problems rather than allowing case-by-case flexibility. Many people with legal involvement actively working toward change experience setbacks, and in these moments, a “no second chances” attitude and policies that leave little room for mistakes can be demoralizing. They become obstacles for someone who was once motivated and on track. We can grow immune to this, blaming not our systems and rules but the person themselves for what we see as lack of motivation and progress. Large, bureaucratic legal and justice agencies can hinder meaningful change. Add to this the pessimism of a staff member who feels burnt out or who has been let down in the past by someone who promised but failed to change, and we see how our very systems and individual “helpers” can become obstacles.

With MI, we seek to address these types of barriers and to make you a proponent of connection and growth. An emphasis on “do no harm” is key. A sanction has already been issued, and we do not need to make our own interactions and relationships additionally punitive. Instead, we strive to reduce institutional and attitudinal barriers to change by carefully cultivating an environment of safety and respect and by building relationships that emphasize connection over contempt. (We have more about that for you in Chapter 4.)

## PEOPLE WITH LEGAL INVOLVEMENT

MI is a way of building connection and having important conversations about change. It is a way of simply *being* with people as they explore their potential for growth. MI has been used with a vast range of people and problems, beginning in the realm of smoking cessation and alcohol and substance misuse but extending over several decades to the areas of health care, mental health, education, sports, and corrections and probation, to name a few. It is being taught in as many as 75 different languages and across five continents.<sup>12</sup> In this text, we focus on the use of MI with people with legal involvement, a distinctly unique yet very diverse population. These are people who may be in many different stages in their journey when we encounter them. Some have legal charges yet to be resolved and feel the weight of pending sanctions (e.g., at arrest, pretrial, or during court proceedings). Others are deeper within our systems, where they work to satisfy court requirements or sanctions (e.g., fines, incarceration or supervision programs, hospitalization, or mandated treatment). These differences occur across interprofessional care systems that involve first responders, legal and judicial professionals, custodial and supervision agents, and mental health and health care professionals. Their one universally shared characteristic is their involvement with legal and justice systems, where we await them with hope that they will evaluate their lives and contemplate change.

What else do we know about this population? We know many have had prior contacts with the legal system. Large-scale meta-analyses of global crime data show that of people released from prison, between 20 and 60% are rearrested and/or reconvicted of a new offense within 2 years. Of those who serve community-based sentences (e.g., probation, fines, or other community service), approximately 10–50% are reconvicted of new sentences within that time.<sup>13, 14</sup> A report from the U.S. Council of State Governments Justice Center<sup>15</sup> determined that nearly half of state prison admissions in the United States are due to violations of probation or parole, by way of both new offenses or technical violations. New offenses aside, it is particularly disconcerting that a high number of these state prison admissions are for technical supervision violations, such as failure to report or not completing community service work as directed. Though violations of supervision requirements, these are not actually illegal behaviors and may not represent potential harm. The community-based portion of this system is intended to act as an alternative to incarceration but may instead serve as a return-to-prison pipeline.

There is a first time for everything, and not everyone we encounter has prior legal system involvement. But a common reality is that many

persons with legal involvement will have a history of other justice system encounters. This introduces a host of potential barriers or challenges to motivation that may arise as we engage in conversations about change. In Box 1.2, we list important factors related to legal system involvement that carry implications for our work in promoting and facilitating meaningful change.

What else do people with legal involvement bring with them as they approach their journey toward change? Unfortunately, this population also faces a range of adversities that can impact their motivation, self-confidence, and ability to adaptively cope with everyday challenges. This includes trauma and maltreatment, functional and relational impairments, and mental health symptoms and needs. It would be helpful to consider each of these, one by one. First, people with legal involvement experience frequent and overlapping occurrences of abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction as children, adolescents, and adults, with meta-analytic findings suggesting that two-thirds of justice-involved women and nearly half of justice-involved men report childhood victimization.<sup>16</sup> Collectively, youth with legal involvement are 12 times more likely to present with a history of at least one traumatic or adverse childhood event in comparison with youth with no legal involvement,<sup>17</sup> and those with

### BOX 1.2. Barriers to Motivation That Arise from Legal Involvement

#### Barriers related to prior legal and justice system contacts

- Patterns of learned behavior that may be more difficult to interrupt or alter
- Prior failed attempts to change
- Hopelessness, guilt, or shame
- Lack of support from important others, including staff or providers
- Cynicism from self or others about the ability to make lasting change
- Negativity from staff or providers who've seen prior failed efforts to change
- Familiarity with the status quo

#### Barriers related to current charges, sanctions, or legal status

- Fear, hopelessness, or sadness about being in the system again
- Guilt or shame about harms caused by recent behavior
- Negative sanctions that interfere with life course
- Harms or inconveniences caused to family (e.g., legal costs, loss of income)
- Stigma, public knowledge of recent behaviors

#### Barriers related to risk and dangerousness

- Threats of continued monitoring or sanction that decrease willingness
- Feeling as though nothing one does will make a difference in mitigating risk
- Personality features that overlap between risk and lack of motivation to change
- The length of time that may be needed for lasting change to occur

one or more such events have a higher risk of future recidivism.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, people with legal involvement often continue to be exposed to abuse and interpersonal violence in adulthood, with a greater frequency of high-risk behaviors associated with victimization and trauma like substance use, incarceration, engaging in abusive or violent relationships, or associating with peers who engage in illegal and aggressive behavior.<sup>19-22</sup>

A second consideration is functional and relational impairments that may impact one's willingness and ability to change, many of which are more often observed among people with legal involvement. These are individuals who may come to us with:

- Lower educational levels
- Disrupted work experience or primarily unskilled labor positions
- Lack of prosocial activities and achievements
- Limited prosocial support networks

As a result, they may also have fewer economic resources to promote positive quality of life or prosocial activities. What we know from the research is that many of these factors are critically important in promoting desistance from criminal activity<sup>23,24</sup> and are linked to models of rehabilitation that emphasize the importance of human needs like social relationships and meaningful work.<sup>24-26</sup>

Third, people with legal involvement often experience higher rates of current and lifetime mental health symptoms and the need for mental health care. Exact prevalence of mental health concerns varies by gender, age, and other group characteristics, though a review of reported mental health diagnoses in prisons in multiple Western countries<sup>27</sup> revealed that approximately one in seven people incarcerated in prisons meet criteria for major mood or thought disorders,<sup>28,29</sup> with lifetime rates of psychiatric diagnosis at nearly 50% across multiple studies. Disorders ranging from depression to substance misuse, to posttraumatic stress disorder, to more serious forms of psychiatric illness like schizophrenia in people with legal involvement have clear implications for their health and well-being both within custodial settings and within the community.

Historical and current symptoms of mental illness can interfere not only with a person's wellness, but also with their perception of others and the world around them, their hope for the future, and their ability to make important changes in their lives. If you take it a step further, prognosis of mental health symptoms, and whether or not the individual is able to receive effective treatment, can further influence their motivation and ability to move in the direction of change. In Box 1.3, we list ways that trauma, social and relational challenges, and mental health concerns can impact a person's motivation to change.

### BOX 1.3. Barriers to Motivation That Arise from Life Experiences

#### Barriers related to experiences of abuse and maltreatment

- Difficulties with developing trust
- Guardedness, suspiciousness, or hostility
- Trauma-related behavioral responding
- Posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, or other resulting psychological symptoms
- Hypervigilance to signs of threat from others or the environment
- Overdeveloped “fight or flight” response
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, self-doubt
- Feeling unsafe in the world and in relationships

#### Barriers related to social and functional impairments

- Lack of positive, supportive others in one’s life
- Feelings of isolation or loneliness
- Limited examples of prosocial success to look upon
- Limited achievement
- Difficulties with maintaining commitments
- Limited opportunities for prosocial engagement
- Barriers related to mental health concerns
- Presence of mental health symptoms that interfere with progress
- Frustration with or hopelessness about interference of mental health symptoms
- Stigma and isolation
- Lack of energy or drive
- Feeling a lack of control over one’s self or future
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Side effects from medication that may interfere with daily activities (e.g., sleeping too much or too little)

Finally, people with legal involvement frequently experience multiple and overlapping forms of marginalization and stigma. This may arise from lack of economic or educational resources, systemic bias or discrimination against certain people or groups, stigma associated with legal involvement, including stigmas associated with particular forms of crime (e.g., sexual offenses, crimes against children), or stigma associated with being a victim of trauma or having a mental health diagnosis, to name a few. As was briefly noted in Box 1.2, these stigmatizing beliefs can detrimentally impact a person’s motivation to change or their belief that they are capable of change. Such beliefs can also influence your perspective as well, perhaps making even the most well-meaning helpers doubt that a person has the capacity to change.

What do we do? In the face of so many seemingly insurmountable obstacles, *can we really expect to see positive growth and change?* In short, yes. Despite barriers, people show incredible strength and

resilience. They overcome legal, personal, and other challenges. They begin with the side of them that holds hope for change and rely on you to guide them toward their ultimate destination. But just understanding the process of motivation isn't enough. We must also have the right mindset to form a meaningful connection. We must find our compassion, our curiosity, and our own motivation to do this work. This leads us to our next chapter, where we discuss the spirit of MI and how to be an effective guide on this journey toward change.

### KEY CONCEPTS

- Motivation is a complex scientific concept that involves how people think, feel, and act.
- Motivation and goals can be driven by personality, experience, and internal and external factors that influence thoughts and behavior.
- We and the people with whom we work (i.e., people with legal involvement) may be motivated by many of the same things. Likewise, we may share barriers or obstacles to motivation.
- People with legal involvement also face unique barriers to motivation, including trauma and mental health concerns, functional and relational impairments, and challenges arising from the legal system.

### NOTES

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