

Making Changes

Tools from the Ida Institute

In 2009 I was fortunate to attend a program titled “Motivation Tools” at the Ida Institute. (This March I attended its twelfth seminar in Copenhagen.) The intent of the program was to develop or adopt some methods for increasing people’s motivation to make necessary changes in what they do that would be helpful to them in dealing with hearing loss. This article presents several of the motivational tools that have been developed or adopted by the Ida Institute to this point in time.

There are two purposes in writing this article for *Hearing Loss Magazine*. First, is the hope that readers will be able to personally use the information and tools and derive benefit from them in their efforts to live effectively with their own or someone else’s hearing loss.

Second, we hope that readers will share the information with their audiologists to encourage them to become familiar with the Ida Institute website (www.idainstitute.org) and expand the information they currently provide.

Change is Difficult

Most of us have experienced how difficult it is to make even simple changes in how we do things. Eating different types or amounts of food, getting outside for a walk, or stopping smoking can be difficult to start doing or maintain over time. Doing things differently in order to better accommodate hearing loss can be equally challenging. Sometimes, it is you or I who know we need to do something differently ourselves, but we resist making the change. I know it would be beneficial for me to use a pocket talker during meetings, but...

Sometimes it is clear to us that it would be beneficial for someone who we care about to make some kind of a change. For example, if only Dad would wear his hearing aid... or, if only Mom would get her hearing tested... he or

Established in 2007 with a grant from the Oticon Foundation, the Ida Institute is a non-profit independent educational institute located in Copenhagen, Denmark. The Institute seeks to foster a better understanding of the human dynamics of hearing loss. By serving as a catalyst for knowledge sharing and the development of innovative and practical tools, the Institute assists hearing care professionals in helping people with hearing loss address the physical, psychological and social challenges of loss of hearing.

she would be more comfortable around people, go out more often, and be less depressed.

We have found that nagging or badgering the person to do something differently is often counterproductive. He digs in his heels and finds more excuses, or she tunes out; both refusing to consider the likely benefits of making the changes that are suggested. There are reasons why this happens, and there are also ways of overcoming our resistance to making the desired change.

Motivational Tools

One of the tools that the Ida Institute has developed or adopted, *the line*, is useful for assessing how motivated a person is in terms of making a particular change. For an issue related to hearing loss one might ask, “How important for you is it to understand more of what people in your family (or at work) are saying?” A useful device for determining the importance is *the line*.

The Line

0 _____ 10
(Unimportant) (Very important)

The person, perhaps you, then places an x somewhere on the line to indicate the degree of importance to

them. Placing the x at or close to the 10 indicates that this is a very important issue for them, or you. Placing the x at or close to the zero indicates that this is not at all an important issue for them (although it may be for their communication partners). If a person placed the x in an area indicating that the issue does have importance for them, ask another question to be rated along a second line.

“How motivated are you to do what is required to increase your ability to understand more of what your family members (co-workers/employers) say to you?”

0 _____ 10
(Not motivated) (Highly motivated)

Go through the same procedure as you did for determining the level of importance, and if the person indicated that he or she is very willing to do what is necessary, help the person find out what needs to be done, e.g., wear the hearing aid or get the hearing evaluation, and do it. On the other hand, if the person indicated little motivation to do what is required, it is very useful to first, determine the factors that keep the motivation level down and second, get some clues about what might be helpful in increasing the level of motivation. A second Ida tool that is helpful in accomplishing these tasks is *the box*.

The Box

Everything we do or contemplate doing has perceived costs and benefits. These costs and benefits may be categorized in terms of money, time, effort, relationships, self-esteem, status, health, mood, etc. Usually, we persist in doing something when the perceived benefits of the action outweigh the perceived costs. Conversely, we don’t continue doing something when the costs of doing it outweigh the benefits. In the

latter case, if we believe that an action is important to do, but our perception of the costs of doing it are higher than the benefits for us, we have three options:

- a. Increase the benefits relative to the costs, or
- b. Decrease the costs relative to the benefits, or
- c. Whenever possible, do both a. and b.

A good example of using the box relates to informing others that one has a hearing loss. Many people are reluctant to do that; their motivation for doing so is quite low. However, once they see the costs for not doing so, they often decide that it is really in their best interest in the long run to let people know. What are the costs and benefits of maintaining the status quo or not informing people, and what are the costs and benefits of informing them? **The box** is presented below.

Status Quo

(not informing others)

Costs

They think I'm not interested, stupid, or weird when I make mistakes due to misunderstanding what they said.

Benefits

I don't have to risk being rejected or devalued or need to invest the time and effort involved in informing them.

Making the Change

(informing others)

Costs

Time, effort, and the risk that the person will think less of me or not want to bother talking to me.

Benefits

People will be able to know that mistakes I make are due to hearing difficulties, not due to personal inadequacies. I can stop worrying that they will find out I have it.

Of course, one could and should continue to list as many costs and

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The Circle-Within-the-Circles *By Sam Trychin*

There are instances in which the individual may not be motivated to make essential changes for themselves, believing that they can get along just fine the way things are and deciding to maintain the status quo. In many cases when the person considers the effects of the hearing loss on many other people, even people beyond those with whom he or she lives or works, that realization can motivate the person to make some changes. It is also illuminating to see the variety of people with whom one interacts over time and to see the many ways that using assistive devices and adopting effective communication behaviors would improve the quality of one's life. A useful tool also developed at the Ida Institute is, what I call, the Circle-Within-the-Circles and what Ida refers to as the circle.

The idea is for each person involved to place themselves in the central circle (You). The first outer circle would contain those people closest to the individual, e.g., close family members, co-workers and friends.

The next outer circle would consist of more distant relatives, acquaintances, and more remote people at work.

The third circle would consist of people who have some importance, but are only seen infrequently, such as physicians, dentists, certain shopkeepers, mechanics, etc. The task is to fill in the names of all the people one can think of for each ring of the circle.

Then think of the impact of the hearing loss on them as well as on oneself when interacting with them. Going through this procedure also alerts the person who has hearing loss to the variety of people who need to be aware of his or her hearing loss and who need to be instructed on how to communicate in order to be understood.

An interesting point to consider is that a person who usually resides in one of the outer circles, for example

one's physician, will move into the inner circle whenever he or she is in direct contact with the person with the hearing loss, e.g., during an office visit. At that moment, the physician is a most important communication partner and temporarily moves into the inner circle; and it is very important that the patient be able to understand everything the physician is saying. Seeing the broad range of people potentially affected by one's hearing loss and who also may contribute to communication problems can be a wonderful eye-opener that triggers an increase in motivation to take steps to do whatever is necessary to prevent or reduce communication difficulties. ■■■



The Circle-Within-the-Circles was created by Joseph Montano, Ed.D, who is associate professor of audiology in clinical otolaryngology and director of audiology and speech-language pathology at Weill Cornell Medical College, New York Presbyterian Hospital. He is also a member of the HLAA Board of Trustees.

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Ida Institute** *cont. from page 33*

benefits as possible. Doing so usually sheds light on several things that need to be addressed in order to begin doing what is necessary for improving one's circumstances. Additionally, it is useful to complete an additional box focused on the longer term costs and benefits of doing what has been deemed to be important.

Many times, short-term costs are outweighed by longer-term benefits. For example, the hassle of putting on the hearing aids, dealing with the batteries, etc., is outweighed by improved relationships over time when I understand more of what is said. Finally, it can be quite illuminating to see the results of having close communication partners (spouse, children, grandchildren) fill out the box focused on short- and longer-term costs and benefits for them if you make the desired change. After diligently filling out the box and considering many factors, if your motivation level is still less than sufficient for making the desired change(s), there is still another Ida tool that can be very helpful—the Circle-Within-the-Circles sidebar on page 33.

I recommend that the readers go to the Ida website at www.idainstitute.org to see all the interesting information that they are generating and handing out for free. 

Sam Trychin, Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist who is the mental health and rehabilitation advisor to HLAA. Dr. Trychin has had hearing loss himself for many years and specializes in teaching strategies for improving communication for people who have hearing loss and their communication partners. He currently conducts such workshops and classes in Erie, PA, and, by arrangement, throughout the United States and Canada. He can be contacted at samtrychin@roadrunner.com and readers can obtain books and DVDs he has produced at www.trychin.com.



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