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Watch This Brain Change!

The Power of Coaching in the Moment

by Teepa Snow, MS, OTR/L, FAOTA

In August of this year, I had another opportunity to spend time in Evansville, Indiana. For the fifth time, I worked with the amazing team at the University of Southern Indiana to provide a pre-conference workshop related to dementia and care for providers throughout the region. This year we did something different, something special, and something that many attending found **amazing** and **unforgettable**!

Olivia Nolan and her mom, Beth, our Lead for Research and PAC Speaker extraordinaire, drove down from Grand Rapids, Michigan to take part in a mini stage production of a family learning to cope with dementia. Our script was written by Charleen Phelps, our Canadian Mentor, Trainer, Coach, Consultant, and creative source of the Napa GEMS® Stage Show.

The learners loved the vignettes and story of a family on the verge, without awareness, knowledge, or skills, and then in contrast, when they have the tools they need, when they need them, in order to make life more likeable and livable.

There was an extremely cool, observable phenomenon for those of us who are working to help and support care partners in making new synaptic pathways. This process of assisting someone in changing habits of behavior and care is what we call **coaching in the moment**.

A [recent article](#), provided by the University of Queensland, explains the two major categories of long-term memory formation. There is explicit, conscious remembering, and there is implicit, unconscious remembering. Implicit memories and patterns of reaction are primed by a stimulus. Both the person living with dementia and the care partner are not thinking nor aware of their immediate reaction. Each has what happens, happen because there are procedural memories that get provoked by the visual, auditory, physical, or olfactory cues the other person triggers. And yet, only one person has dementia and will be challenged by their disease to form new explicit memories! The care partner has the potential to change and form new memory pathways, but only with rehearsal and supported practice.

As PAC Coaches, when we work with learners who have patterns of approach, interaction, and care, it is easy to think they should be able to get it, if we prompt them to use their new short-term memories from a classroom or practice session. It turns out, this is a slightly different and critical process in learning. We will need to help the learner develop a new procedural, implicit memory.

So now back to the workshop. In these three short clips, keep an eye and ear on Beth, Olivia, and me.

Olivia and I are trying to demonstrate to the audience how to use a scripted response pattern when someone is seeking assistance, but can't come up with words to explain what is being sought. Olivia practiced this the evening before, and typically uses it. Today is different, though; she is in front of an audience, and we had finished the rehearsed show. Now we were just working on an interaction.

[Click here to watch the video](#)

Olivia got support. She breathed, she regrouped, and Beth offered the words in a nonthreatening way. **And...** things went better. And yet, still more wiring is taking place, it's getting easier, and she is hooking together synapses.

In one of the segments, Olivia did **not** get it perfect! However, what you may notice if you listen from a coaching perspective, is that she was able to use a redirect in the middle of the interaction **and** make use of the information a second time in the interaction, without help. It is becoming hers to use!

So, the real questions are:

- A. Are you aware there is a better option for you to use?
- B. Do you know what the option sounds like, feels like, and looks like when you use it?
- C. Do you have the skill to recognize the moment, when **it** is exactly what could possibly change the outcome of an interaction?
- D. Have you got the competence to pull it out, insert it, and get it to happen without having to think about it?

And most of all...

- E. Do you have a skilled **coach** in your life to help you build that implicit memory with procedural supports in place in a supportive and exciting way, so your brain can hardwire the new connection in place, overriding the older, less successful pattern that is there?

At PAC, we make use of our Mentors and Coaches to guide others from what is common practice to what is *better* practice through the use of supportive drills and repetitions to develop that which make the positive difference.

The interesting thing, is that we learn in many ways. Did you notice a difference after Olivia had a 15-minute break?

It's not *rocket science*, yet there is a scientific basis to it, as well as an art.

Many thanks to Olivia, Beth, Mary Schuller, Katie Ehlman, and the entire MAIA Conference Committee for making this learning moment possible, and possible to share!