

Instant Influence: A Six-Question Process for Allied Health Clinicians

Based on Michael V. Pantalon's "Instant Influence"
method

Adapted for allied health clinical practice by
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Introduction - Why "Instant Influence" Works in Clinical Practice

You've just explained the treatment plan. You've outlined the evidence. You've made it clear what the patient needs to do to get better.

And they look at you and say: "I don't think I can do that."

Or worse: "I'll think about it."

Translation: They're not going to follow through.

This isn't a knowledge problem. **It's a motivation problem.**

After 30 years as a clinician, I've learned that telling patients what to do—no matter how right you are—rarely creates lasting change. External pressure triggers resistance. Facts don't change behaviour. And the harder you push, the more they pull away.

But what if there was a way to help patients find their own motivation in under seven minutes?

That's exactly what Michael Pantalon's "Instant Influence" method does. Originally developed at Yale for emergency medicine applications, this six-step questioning process taps into a person's intrinsic motivation rather than imposing external pressure.

It's remarkably simple. It respects autonomy. And it works.

In this guide, you'll learn:

- Why internal motivation is more powerful than external pressure
- The six questions that unlock intrinsic drive for change
- How to navigate resistance without triggering defensiveness
- Practical tips for implementing this in your clinical consultations
- Real patient scenarios showing the framework in action

Your patients already have enough motivation to change. The key isn't creating motivation—it's uncovering the tiny spark that's already there and helping them amplify it.



Core Philosophy - The Power of Internal Motivation

Why This Works When Other Approaches Don't

The cornerstone of the "Instant Influence" method is a fundamental belief: **lasting change occurs when motivation springs from within rather than being externally imposed.**

This approach deliberately counters traditional "tell and sell" methods, where the clinician attempts to convince someone using their own reasons for change.

Instead, the framework operates on three key principles:

1. Respecting Autonomy

The method fundamentally respects an individual's freedom to choose their own path. By explicitly granting people the right to say "no," it reduces defensive walls and creates psychological safety.

When patients feel they have genuine choice, they become more receptive to considering change.

2. Tapping Into Intrinsic Motivation

Rather than attempting to manufacture motivation, the approach helps individuals identify and connect with their own existing reasons for change.

This self-generated motivation proves far more powerful and sustainable than externally imposed incentives or pressure.

3. Focusing on the "Why" Before the "How"

Similar to Simon Sinek's "Start With Why" concept, this framework prioritises understanding the deep, personal reasons someone might want to change before addressing implementation details.

This alignment with personal values creates stronger commitment and sustainable motivation.

"This reduces walls by respecting the other person's autonomy and their right to make a choice."



The Six-Step Process

Six Questions That Unlock Motivation

Pantalon distilled his approach into six carefully crafted questions designed to be completed in under seven minutes. This streamlined process helps individuals unlock their own motivation and commit to meaningful action.

01

Why might you (insert change)?

This initial question reframes the focus toward goals rather than problems.

Instead of: "Why are you always late to your appointments?"

Ask: "Why might it be a good idea to show up on time?"

This amplifies the person's own reasons for wanting change. It's important to acknowledge any resistance and gently redirect back to this question.

Clinical example:

"Why might it be helpful to do your home exercises between appointments?"

03

Why didn't you pick a lower number?

Described as "wonderfully hypnotic" and unexpected, this question creates a "massive pattern interrupt."

It prompts individuals to justify their existing level of readiness, thereby building commitment and ownership over their reasons for change rather than focusing on why they aren't more motivated.

Clinical example:

[Patient says "5"] "That's interesting. Why didn't you pick a 2 or a 3?"

This question invites them to articulate the motivation they already have—even if it's small.

02

How ready are you to change on a scale of 1 to 10?

This question quantifies readiness rather than willingness or desire. The numerical scale provides a concrete reference point for the subsequent questions and helps both parties understand the current state of motivation.

Clinical example:

"On a scale of 1 to 10, how ready are you to start this exercise program?"

04

Imagine you've changed. What would the positive outcomes be?

This step encourages visualization of the desired future state, bypassing resistance by making it "just pretend" and therefore "safe."

It aligns the individual with the positive feelings of achievement, amplifying desire and making the potential benefits more concrete.

Clinical example:

"Imagine you've been doing the exercises for a month and your shoulder is feeling much better. What would that allow you to do that you can't do now?"

Why are these outcomes important to you?

Similar to Toyota's "5 Whys" process, this question delves deeper into core values and "deep desire."

Connecting the desired outcome to profound personal values significantly increases motivation by tapping into fundamental drivers of human behaviour.

Clinical example:

"You mentioned being able to play with your grandchildren again. Why is that so important to you?"

What is the next step, if anything?

The final question reinforces autonomy by leaving the choice entirely to the individual, putting them "at cause rather than at effect."

It encourages taking a small, achievable "baby step" to build momentum, rather than an overwhelming grand plan.

Clinical example:

"So, what's one small step you could take this week—if anything?"



Before You Begin - Setting the Stage

Three Essential Pre-Process Considerations

Before launching into the six-step process, these preliminary steps create the psychological safety and rapport necessary for the approach to work optimally.

1

Ask Permission

Begin by requesting permission to engage in the process:

"I can see you're struggling with..., is it OK if I ask you a few questions about this? Of course we can stop anytime, and you don't have to answer if you don't want to."

This reinforces the autonomy principle from the outset and reduces defensive reactions by establishing a collaborative rather than confrontational approach.

2

Start Small

When implementing changes, begin with manageable actions to build momentum gradually.

"Once the freight train starts moving, the momentum builds. Start with baby steps."

Small initial successes create confidence and positive reinforcement that support larger changes over time.

3

Maintain Ethical Practice

The power of this method necessitates a focus on influencing "for good," always being mindful of the reputation one wishes to cultivate.

The approach should never be used manipulatively or to pressure someone into actions that don't align with their values or best interests.



Putting It Into Practice

A Real Clinical Scenario

Let's see how this works with an actual patient conversation.

THE SITUATION:

James, 58, has chronic lower back pain. You've recommended a daily walking program, but he's resistant. He's tried exercise before and "it didn't help." He's convinced rest is the only answer.

THE CONVERSATION:

You: "It seems like you're really struggling to do these exercises, is it OK if I ask you a few questions about the exercise program and your back pain? You don't have to answer anything you don't want to, and we can stop anytime."

James: "Sure, I guess."

Question 1: Why might you want to change?

You: "Why might it be helpful to try gentle walking for your back?"

James: "Well... I suppose it might help me feel less stiff. And my doctor keeps telling me I need to move more."

Question 2: Readiness scale

You: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how ready are you to start a gentle walking program?"

James: "Maybe a 4."

Question 3: Why not lower?

You: "Interesting. I'm curious, why didn't you pick a 2 or even a 1?"

James: "Well, I know sitting around all day isn't helping. And I used to enjoy walking before my back got bad. I miss it, actually."

Question 4: Visualise success

You: "Imagine you've been walking gently for a few weeks and your back is feeling a bit better. What would that allow you to do?"

James: "I'd be able to play with my grandson without worrying about my back seizing up. Maybe even get back to some light gardening."

Question 5: Why important?

You: "Why is playing with your grandson important to you?"

James: "He's only young once. I don't want to be the grandfather who just sits in a chair. I want to be active with him, make memories."

Question 6: Next step

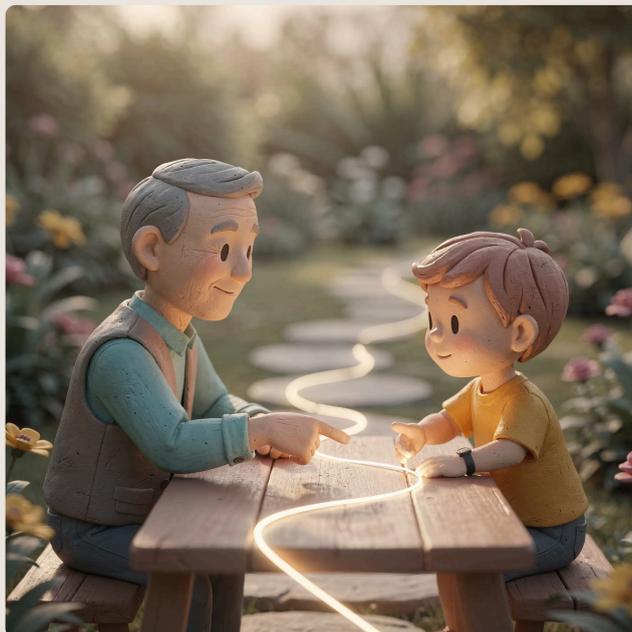
You: "So what's one small step you could take this week—if anything?"

James: "I could try walking to the end of the street and back. Just once. See how it feels."

You: "That sounds like a great starting point."

WHAT JUST HAPPENED:

James went from resistant to committed—not because you convinced him, but because he convinced himself. He connected gentle movement to his core value (being an active grandfather), visualised the positive outcome, and chose his own first step.



Implementation Tips

Making This Work in Real Consultations

Successfully implementing the "Instant Influence" approach requires more than memorising the six questions. Here are the skills and attitudes that enhance the method's impact.

Active Listening

The process begins with attentive listening. Pay complete attention to responses without interrupting or formulating replies while the other person is speaking.

Note non-verbal cues and emotional undertones that might reveal deeper motivations. Create space for reflection by allowing silence after questions rather than rushing to fill pauses.

Questioning Technique

How questions are asked significantly impacts their effectiveness. Use a genuinely curious tone rather than sounding judgmental or leading.

Phrase questions in a way that focuses on possibilities ("Why might you...?") rather than problems ("Why haven't you...?").

Maintain open body language and a neutral, supportive facial expression.

Patience with Process

Allow the individual time to consider each question fully. Resist the urge to offer suggestions or "help" with answers.

Trust that people can find their own motivations when given the right prompts and psychological space. Remember that even small shifts in motivation can lead to significant changes over time.

Navigating Resistance

When encountering resistance, acknowledge it without judgment and gently redirect to the question at hand. Avoid defending or arguing.

If resistance persists, consider saying: "It sounds like this might not be the right time to discuss this. Would you open to talking about this another time?"

This reinforces autonomy and reduces defensiveness.

Practice Makes Progress

Begin by applying the method to low-stakes situations to build confidence before addressing more challenging scenarios.

Consider role-playing with a colleague or friend to refine your technique and develop comfort with the questioning sequence.

Why This Works - The Psychology Behind the Method

Aligning With How Humans Actually Change

The "Instant Influence" method isn't just a clever set of questions—it's grounded in fundamental psychological principles about human motivation and decision-making.



Autonomy Reinforcement

When we're given genuine autonomy, it reinforces our sense of freedom and agency. This reduces the psychological reactance (the defensive response we have when we feel our freedom is threatened) that often accompanies advice or directives.



Internal vs. External Motivation

Research consistently shows that intrinsically motivated actions are more sustainable than those driven by external rewards or punishments. By helping people connect with their own reasons for change, this method creates self-sustaining motivation.



Value Connection

When behaviour change is linked to deeply held personal values (being a good parent, maintaining independence, living with integrity), commitment becomes emotional, not just logical. This emotional connection provides the fuel for sustained effort.



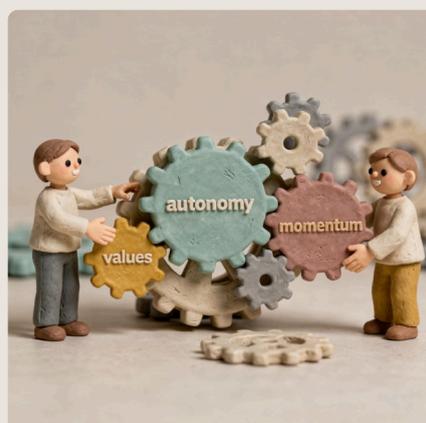
Small Steps Principle

Starting with manageable "baby steps" leverages the psychological principle of momentum. Small successes build confidence and create positive reinforcement loops that support larger changes over time.



Visualisation Effect

Asking someone to imagine positive outcomes activates similar neural pathways as actual achievement, making the desired future feel more real and attainable.



When to Use This Approach

Ideal Applications in Allied Health Practice

The "Instant Influence" framework is particularly effective in specific clinical situations:

Treatment Adherence Challenges

- Home exercise program resistance
- Medication or supplement compliance
- Lifestyle modification recommendations
- Attendance and follow-through issues

Behavioural Change Conversations

- Weight management
- Smoking cessation
- Activity modification
- Sleep hygiene improvements
- Implementing treatment plans
- Implementing exercise programs

When Facing Initial Resistance

- Patient expresses doubt about treatment effectiveness
- Previous treatment attempts have failed
- Patient has strong preconceived ideas about what will/won't work
- Defensive or closed body language

Time-Constrained Consultations

- The method can be completed in under seven minutes
- Provides structure for quick but meaningful motivational conversations
- More efficient than lengthy persuasion attempts



Quick Reference Card

The Six Questions at a Glance

☐ Before you begin:

- Ask permission
- Start with small steps in mind
- Maintain ethical practice

1 Why might you change?

Focus on goals, not problems

2 How ready are you (1-10)?

Quantify readiness

3 Why not lower?

Amplify existing motivation

4 Imagine success—what outcomes?

Visualise positive future

5 Why important to you?

Connect to core values

6 What's the next step?

Reinforce autonomy, identify baby step

Remember:

- Listen actively without interrupting
 - Allow silence for reflection
 - Stay curious, not judgmental
 - Acknowledge resistance without arguing
 - Trust the process—even small motivation matters
-

The Transformative Potential of Internal Motivation

Small Questions, Big Impact

Michael Pantalon's "Instant Influence" framework represents a paradigm shift in how we approach motivation and behavioural change.

Instead of external pressure, it unlocks intrinsic motivation.

Instead of lengthy persuasion, it works in minutes.

Instead of creating resistance, it builds commitment.

What makes this approach particularly valuable for allied health clinicians:

It respects patient autonomy while guiding them toward healthier choices. It works with human psychology rather than against it. It creates sustainable change because the motivation comes from within.

And it's accessible—no extensive training required.

Once you understand the principles behind the questions, you can pull the model apart to create something that works for you.

The six questions are deceptively simple. But their power lies in how they help patients articulate what they already know deep down: **they have reasons to change, and those reasons matter.**

Your role isn't to create motivation—it's already there, however small. Your role is to help them find it, name it, and amplify it into action.



Additional Resources

Continue Your Learning

Original Work:

- **Pantaloni, M.V.** *Instant Influence: How to Get Anyone to Do Anything—Fast.*
The original book this guide is based upon.

Other Resources by Annette Tonkin

Complementary Guides:

- [Handling Patients with Preconceived Ideas: A Guide for Allied Health Providers](#)
Practical strategies featuring the R.E.S.P.E.C.T. Framework for "Dr Google" conversations.
- [7 Steps to Help Minds Change: A Comprehensive Guide for Allied Health Clinicians](#)
Understanding the psychology of belief change based on David McRaney's research.

Workshops and Coaching

Want to master these communication approaches in your clinical practice?

I offer live and online workshops on:

- Patient communication and behaviour change
- Motivational interviewing for allied health
- Handling resistance with confidence
- Building treatment adherence through internal motivation

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