



The NLP Toolbox for Coaches

Sarah Frossell of HumanTechnics gives her view on what the NLP model brings to executive coaching, and suggests there is always more for us to learn.



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Let me start by putting my cards on the table. I am an executive coach, OD consultant, facilitator and I am also an NLP Master Trainer. So you might well suppose that I am biased in terms of my approach to what I do, and of course you would be right, I do like working with NLP.

“Wisdom comes from taking multiple perspectives”

Gregory Bateson

But what I like doing most is using whatever works for my clients, and that for me means working with various disciplines. Since the roots of NLP lie in modelling excellent practice in any field, I feel it a duty to my clients to adopt a similar attitude to exploring and utilising what is out there.

Would I want to limit myself solely to the current NLP canon? Certainly not! Not when the likes of Tim Gallwey, John Whitmore and David Hemery are out there to model and other methodologies like Transactional Analysis and Solution-Focused Therapy. Do I want to use NLP as a methodology when I am working with people? Absolutely. And especially when I am working to support people who want to enhance their own and their team’s performance. The reasons for this are quite simple.

The basic principles of NLP include the beliefs that:

- Every individual has an in-built ability to resolve her/his own issues.
- There is no failure, only feedback
- Each one of us has our own individual, unique ‘map of the world’.
- Rapport is an essential component of excellent communication.

With these as the starting point, it’s clear that the coach’s job is to build sufficient trust to be able to ‘hold the space’ for clients to refocus their thinking about what has been going on, find, define and rehearse more creative strategies for the resolution of their presenting issues.

“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it,”
Einstein.



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Secondly, Robert Dilts' Neurological Levels Model offers a template for effecting change in any environment. This model is most useful as a diagnostic tool helping us distinguish where our challenges have surfaced, where and how they may most usefully be resolved. It allows us to support ourselves when we are involved in re-invention by establishing and powerfully aligning our behaviours, skills, values and beliefs with our identity and purpose. As coaches we know that the real skill lies in creating a momentum for lasting change in our clients. This model helps hugely in that process.

"A prudent question is one-half of wisdom,"
Francis Bacon.

Thirdly, one of the most impressive things that NLP offers its exponents is a very powerful, two-pronged questioning model. And, for me to be an excellent coach, there is no doubt that my questioning skills need to be honed.

The more workshops I run on communication, leadership and coaching, the more amazed I am by our apparent inability to ask questions and - on the few occasions when we do - to pay careful attention to the answers we get. We're really great at telling people how things 'should be done'.

Consider for a moment how you might approach putting someone else's strong suggestion into practice. Think about the last time you attempted to do that. Was it easy? Did you believe in what you were doing? How effectively were you able to follow through? How different would your experience have been had your coach asked you a question about your issue, in which the very act of answering caused you to come to your own resolution?

"Language mirrors the World,"
Wittgenstein.

Fourthly, NLP is derived from an approach to analysing the way our brains interact with that most human of things, language. Language is our most powerful tool. It totally reflects - and in most instances creates - our internal state, our internal maps of the world. Change the language and you totally transform your state. Change your state and your world becomes radically different.

"But, that's another story,"
Kipling

of the use of metaphor and analogy. It knows the value of and offers the storytelling process as part of its tool-set...



Fifthly, there is a way of influencing people known in the trade as the 'My friend John ' approach. It's the one where you avoid telling someone what to do directly; instead you tell them what someone else with a similar issue did in similar circumstances. NLP makes much of the use of metaphor and analogy. It knows the value of and offers the storytelling process as part of its toolset.

"And thus concludes our tale,"
Shakespeare.

So, while using NLP is not the only way to coach effectively, it certainly is a discipline that has tools and techniques that can be used extremely effectively. More importantly it is an approach and an attitude that allows us as coaches to work alongside our clients and support them in extending the breadth of their vision, values and experience as they explore and gain the changes and results speedily, effectively and elegantly.

