

How to Coach **with NLP**

Robbie Steinhouse talks about synergy, space and his latest book.

By Caitlin Collins

A few months ago I went along to a meeting of a personal-development coaching group in my local town. Having vaguely assumed that coaching and NLP were, if not actually married, at least engaged I was in for a surprise. The group comprised just two NLP practitioners, a large number of coaches apparently indifferent to or ignorant of NLP, and one woman who stated that she disapproved of NLP and then annoyingly clammed up when I asked her to tell me more. Following that experience, I'd like to recommend Robbie Steinhouse's latest book 'How to Coach with NLP' as the perfect introduction agent: NLP, meet Coaching; Coaching meet NLP. I'm sure it would be a lasting love match if only they'd get to know each other.

I found 'How to Coach with NLP' to be a great model of how such a book should be: clearly set out, informative, and full of easy-to-follow practical exercises. Comprehensive and cohesive, it spans an impressively wide range of interests and coaching contexts, including business, life, sports and performance, while carefully distinguishing between coaching, mentoring, therapy, consulting, and friendship. The presentation of the coaching relationship, including establishing the client-coach contract and setting up the first session, provides a widely applicable professional structure. I especially liked Robbie's use of analytical models to understand the wide range of possibilities of coaching, such as correlating levels of coaching with Robert Dilts's Logical Levels and coach to awakener model, and with Spiral Dynamics.

The field mind and therapeutic space

Robbie, who has trained and worked with Robert Dilts, has dedicated the book to Dilts, who wrote the preface. While applying Dilts's Logical Levels and coach to awakener model to coaching provides a great holistic approach, it also gives us a good springboard from which to begin our conversation: heading rapidly beyond the

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further reaches of the Logical Levels, we take off into the field mind...

'I owe a lot to Robert Dilts, and to Stephen Gilligan,' says Robbie. 'Stephen was of course one of the early greats in NLP. I find his model of somatic mind, conscious mind and field mind very useful. The field mind refers to some kind of intelligence beyond the individual: you can find it in the synergy that occurs when two or more people meet. Robert Dilts interprets this field mind as a meditative space: you can clear yourself as a vessel, trusting that guidance will come and

surrendering to that. This fits with coaching: at the cognitive level, you're listening to the client and trying to work out what to do; however if you can let go and relax into that meditative space, trusting that something will come out of that space, then what does come will surprise you! It's about trusting the NLP presupposition that people have the resources they need. The client will come up with something; or you'll come up with something; with two equals in discussion, something will emerge! If you're too strongly operating at the cognitive level, it doesn't happen; somehow you block it.'

In his book Robbie puts forward the intriguing suggestion that the field mind could offer us a content-free form of faith. That sounds a helpful idea to me – a common ground – or in this case common space – free from doctrinal disagreements must be

The Rescripting process

Part 1: The story

- Set the mood for story-telling: what's your favourite childhood story?
- Find a positive character, maybe fictional, maybe in real life, you can identify with.
- Tell your own story from that hero character's perspective; base your story on your own family story, from your grandparents to the present day. This means that a character you feel wholly positive about takes your role, rather than yourself – who you probably feel ambivalent about, thanks to the family curse!
- Give the story a title.

Part 2: The curse

- Identify a family curse (some families have many curses – just choose one!) and phrase it as a negative double bind ie If X then Y; if not X then Z – where Y and Z are both 'loser' outcomes (eg If you do what you want you'll let others down; if you don't do what you want you'll let yourself down)

Part 3: Distilling the good of the curse into a metaphor.

- Find the positive intentions behind the curse

(there's always at least one!) and find a metaphor or symbol to represent them.

Part 4: The curse buster

- Continue the story into the future with the curse transformed, bringing the metaphor along with the hero character; the metaphor may either destroy the curse or be a support for the hero that helps them to move forward.
- Give the new story a title.

Part 5: Putting the new show on the road

- Identify where your past and future appear on a timeline. Point to all occurrences of the curse; if any appear in the future, move them back into the past. If this is difficult, remember that you can keep any positive aspects of the curse; you're only moving the negative aspects.
- Put the title of the new story onto your future timeline in your own way.
- Notice how things are now you have made these changes.



“ You can trust the presupposition that people have the resources they need ”

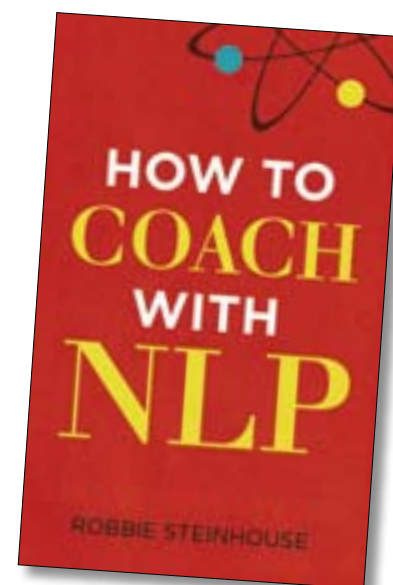
through obvious processes; in fact it can alienate someone if you keep pushing them through NLP processes. In the coach to awakener model, you embody the beliefs and values of your client's outcome. And you find that the presenting problem is never the real problem! If a client comes up with outcomes you find unpleasant or strange, probe deeper: there's always something else. Remember the NLP presupposition of a positive intention underlying even an apparently negative behaviour or desire.

Family stories, family curses

Out of the many practical exercises in the book, I really liked the Hero's Journey, a process designed by Robert Dilts based on Joseph Campbell's studies of the structure of myths, that 's a great way to set up a positive future. However, when I ask Robbie about his own favourite processes in the book, he answers immediately: 'The Rescripting process. The Hero's Journey is about accepting your calling; it deals with your future. Rescripting helps you to deal with your past, so you can go forward on your journey.'

I know it's naughty to boast, and I know that most people can claim the dubious distinction of a more or less dysfunctional family, but since the death of my parents recently some spectacular skeletons have clattered out of my family's closet. So naturally I had, um, overlooked Robbie's chapter on identifying family curses and gaining new perspectives on one's personal history.

'It works at the Logical Levels level of Identity,' explains Robbie. 'The idea that everyone has a script, usually inherited from their family, comes from TA [Transactional Analysis]. With the Hero's Journey, you enter the journey with your script already in place, which can create obstacles on the journey. Your script shapes your destiny, so it's a good idea to identify the destructive elements in it so you can change it. What I've called the



family curse is a double bind that you take on as a child: for example something like "If you succeed you'll be alone and if you don't succeed you'll be unlovable". We're entering the area of therapy here – it can be very useful for coaches to be a bit more grounded in psychology.'

It's not like 'The Fly'!

What about a last word of advice for coaches? 'You know those science fiction films, where the scientist experiments on himself and swallows the potion – with terrible consequences? Well, it's not like that in coaching! Start with yourself! If you can't coach yourself, you can't expect to coach anyone else! Coaching isn't something you do 'to' someone else; it's 'with' someone else – so you have to do it with yourself, and work through the processes with yourself first.' So this advice fits in with the necessity for authenticity and integrity? 'Yes!' agrees Robbie, adding, 'I can understand the scepticism of the coaching world towards NLP. It's more than just a naivety in failing to credit NLP; it's also about people's negative perceptions of NLP. There's a shadow side to NLP, for example the dubious guru stuff, NLP used for seduction, and no unifying body so lots of myths around. There's also an element of academic snobbery – NLP isn't in the club!'

It seems to me that there are 'shadow sides' to many fields of human endeavour; knowing how to spot the valuable and steer clear of the dodgy is a necessary part of our life-learning. So let's hope the scepticism in the coaching world can be transformed into a wise discernment that recognises the genuine contribution to be found in NLP – and let's hope they read this book! ■

a good thing. 'That's right,' agrees Robbie, 'and of course, from an NLP point of view, it's extremely useful to recognise that forces beyond the conscious mind can produce outcomes! It ties in with so many things, for example the concept of unconscious competence. You can have the confidence that what you need is in the body, in the muscle, and it will avail itself to you when you need it: if you need an NLP process, you can relax in that space and trust that it will appear! There's also the concept of limbic resonance – there's a lot of research going on in this area, showing the changes that take place when people operate as a team, or somebody is stroking a cat, or with a horse and rider.' So something emerges out of such a connection that is greater than the sum of its parts? 'Exactly: something happens that is greater than just one person, or two people – and that space or field or whatever you want to call it has healing properties.'

Robbie emphasises the importance of integrity in coaching. 'I think that sometimes in the NLP world we can see a difference between someone 'on-stage' and 'off-stage'. State-management can be effective and professionally necessary at one level, but it can also mean a lack of authenticity. I believe it's a mistake to underestimate people: you can't fool them – or at least, if you can, they're naive – you'll alienate anyone intelligent! Once you master coaching, you embody it. You can trust that whatever you need will appear out that therapeutic space, and you can use the principles of NLP discreetly – you don't necessarily have to put somebody