

## Interview for Golfinho

### Questions for Joseph O'Connor

#### *Question one*

*From Music to NLP – what was the aspect of NLP that had most impact on you?*

NLP answered three important questions for me when I worked a musician and teacher. The first question was how to be in the best emotional state to give a guitar recital. My second was how to help my students control their emotional state. I had many students who played very well but suffered badly from 'performance anxiety', which meant that they did not do themselves justice in a live performance.

Also I believed that the best teaching is student centred. Good teachers know how their students learn, then they teach in that way. Learning is what is important. A teacher can never say that they taught something but the student did not learn it. That is nonsense. My third question was how could I know how my students learned, so I could teach them in just that way?

Once I learned NLP many more things had impact. First was the importance of outcomes. Not just setting them, but also having an outcome orientation – always looking to see what outcome I am achieving, what resources I had and what more I could do. I started setting outcomes well into the future, goals for five and ten years, and looking back I was often surprised at how many I achieved. This led me to coaching. Long term goal setting is important in the coaching too. In our coaching trainings we are doing in Brazil now we teach how to set and achieve goals, and equally as important, that you congruently live the values that made you choose the goal. These values provide the energy to attain our goals. Many people do not achieve their goals because they are not congruent with their values. I think coaching is one of the most powerful tools we have now for people to achieve their goals and values.

Secondly the balance of conscious and unconscious process in NLP had a big impact on me. Outcomes are generated by our conscious mind – they are what we want, but we need to balance this with our unconscious wisdom. The focus on unconscious process from Milton Erickson rebalanced NLP. We are far more than our conscious mind. Our conscious mind is only the tip of the iceberg of everything that we are. In fact there is good neurological evidence that we make decisions milliseconds BEFORE we are consciously aware of them. In other words they are made unconsciously, and only then do we become consciously aware of what we decided. The unconscious mind is a powerful friend when you treat it with respect.

Thirdly, NLP taught me that I had a choice about my emotional state and showed me the best ways to exercise this. It is not always easy to get out of a negative state, even when you want to. Sometimes too, emotions need to be experienced and worked through even if they are unpleasant. Choice of emotional state does not mean you are always happy and do not feel deeply. It does mean that you have the tools to get into the best state based on what you want to achieve.

Lastly, patterning and modelling was a wonderful discovery for me. When I first came across NLP in 1985 I was a professional guitarist and guitar teacher. I was always interested not only in what my teachers and role models did, but also *how* they

did it. I was already paying attention to the process of learning as well as the content. Music is pure pattern; the same piece of music can be transposed into different keys without altering its nature. Music makes visual, auditory and kinesthetic patterns and one of the first things I did in NLP was to map the Meta Model onto music.

Now we can apply modelling to our coaching work and find exactly what the best coaches do to get the best results with people. This makes our coaching training particularly powerful.

#### *Question two*

*In your last book, 'The NLP Workbook', you gave William James, Constructivism, Eric Berne and TA together with some others as major influences on NLP, but you do not give transformational linguistics and Chomsky. What about the importance of this in the Metamodel?*

This is just my personal view. NLP had many influences and I picked those that seemed particularly pertinent to me at the time. The early definition of NLP was 'NLP is whatever works'. Given this definition and the fact that NLP modelled the best in many areas, it is no wonder that it has deep roots in many disciplines. For example, other influences include Carlos Casteneda, Eric Berne, Carl Rogers, Frank Farelly and the Palo Alto therapy movement of Jay Haley and Paul Watslawick among others.

Chomsky's transformational linguistics certainly was important to the Meta Model. The whole science of linguistics was a big influence and John Grinder was professor of Linguistics at the University of California Santa Cruz when he met Richard Bandler and they began the discipline of NLP. Linguistics is a huge subject; Chomsky was very influential in linguistics during the seventies when NLP was beginning.

Talking of '*The NLP Workbook*', I would like to congratulate Quality Mark on the wonderful job they have done in publishing '*The NLP Workbook*' in Portuguese. It is beautifully produced and I am very happy with the result. For me it is one of the very best books I have done on NLP.

#### *Question three*

*How do you see NLP integrated into the academic world?*

I am delighted that NLP is progressing in the academic world. For me it is a natural study for universities for a number of reasons. First it has deep and diverse intellectual roots in cybernetics, cognitive psychology, linguistics and communication studies.

Secondly, not only is it a fascinating and useful study in itself, but it also contains the tools for learning *how* to learn. This makes it the only subject that makes you better at studying anything as you study it! In fact I would like to see NLP taught in all schools as well, even young children. Very often schools teach subjects without teaching *how* to study the subject in the best way to get the most out of it. I am very interested in introducing NLP into schools and would welcome other people with similar interests to get in touch with me.

Thirdly, because NLP is so useful, many of the tools and ideas are being used by other disciplines, sometimes without acknowledging where they came from. It is

important to establish NLP as a discipline in its own right and stake its claim in the academic world.

Lastly, the core of NLP is modelling. We need good research into modelling, how to model and to make the results of the modelling known. NLP has tremendous potential to capture best practice in every field.

We certainly want to work with Universities, and we have already given a Postgraduate Coaching Course that incorporated some NLP, for the University of Derby in the UK in 2002. This was a particularly interesting course for us.

In general, I think Postgraduate study in NLP could be the application of NLP principles and tools to a particular field involving a modelling project. We need to build a group of Postgraduate supervisors for this work. The possibilities are wonderful.

When John and Richard started giving NLP seminars, they antagonised the academic establishment by emphasising how NLP was different. NLP started with a strong mismatch metaprogram. In fact NLP has strong academic and intellectual credentials but it has taken a long time for NLP to make its way into the academic world and I think it is essential for a healthy future for NLP.

This discussion also brings up the important question of the quality and standards of NLP that is taught. The standard of NLP training can vary enormously. Some are very good. Some are not. NLP never had the rigour of academic standards to ensure the overall quality of the training. I was lucky to study with John Grinder and Richard Bandler, as well as Robert Dilts, Charlotte Bretto and David Gaster. The NLP training that Andrea Lages and I do at Lambent do Brazil draws on all the main schools of NLP, as well as our depth of experience in the fields of business, systems thinking, communication studies and self development. We also offer Trainings (Practitioner, Master practitioner and Trainer) and give an International Certification and adhere to International standards. We are very proud of this.

#### *Question four*

##### *How does NLP come into coaching training?*

When you add NLP skills to existing coaching skills you will have a remarkably effective coach! However, the coaching skills are the foundation. NLP helps you to be a better coach, but NLP alone is not enough to be a coach.

Let me say something about coaching, because coaching is a new field and it is a perfect application of NLP tools and principles. When I moved to Sao Paulo in 2002, Andrea Lages and I started our company Lambent do Brasil to give our International Coaching Certification Training as well as NLP training to the highest standards. Andrea and I give these courses together.

Quality and standards are just as important in coaching as in NLP. We are dedicated to making sure that the coaches we train and the coaching we do has the highest quality of skill and ethics. Coaching can help businesses to become more productive, more profitable and more attractive places to work. We believe that business can be a tremendous force for good in the world and we want to help with that. This is part of our vision in Lambent do Brasil.

We have given our coaching training in many different countries; we are building a true International Coaching community. We are also starting a Brazilian Coaching Association and have been founding members of Coaching Associations in Denmark, UK and Mexico.

How does NLP relate to coaching? Coaching is a partnership between coach and client so the client can achieve their goals, live their values and get past any blocks that stop them being the very best they can be. Coaching is sometimes confused with therapy and counselling. However therapy and counselling are remedial, they assist a client who needs help with their problems and is unhappy. Coaching is different. It is generative, it helps the client build the future they want, as it explores the present and designs the future. The client does not have to be unhappy; they just want to get more from life.

Coaching is not training, it does not give answers, it helps the client find their own answers. The client has the best answers; the coach has the best questions.

Coaching is increasingly important in business. Companies need to invest in their people to keep them. Companies want their people to be the best they can be. Coaching targets business resources exactly where they are needed to make the biggest difference. Coaching is important for executives, because when you help an executive to make better decisions and to be clear about company goals and values, the results are enormously rewarding. Without exaggeration the difference can be millions of dollars in extra profits. Finally coaching is important to follow up training. So much training is wasted because people go back to the same environment in their company, with all the old anchors – no wonder the effects of the training are lost. This can be true however good the training was. Good training with follow up coaching makes sure the results of the training make a difference where they need to – in the business.

Life coaching is also growing as a profession. A life coach helps a person in every aspect of their life. Of course business coaching and life coaching may overlap, you can't consider a person's life without considering their work.

NLP has wonderful tools to help coaches, dealing as it does with goals, values and beliefs. Rapport between coach and client is also important and NLP has a lot to say about rapport. NLP has the linguistic influencing skills of the Meta Model and the Milton Model. Finally NLP helps you appreciate your client in their world, not judge them from your own. Judging someone means you cannot understand them. These are all an essential part of coaching. However, coaching is more than this. The beauty of our International Coaching Certification Training is that you do not need prior NLP training to come to our coaching course, all the NLP you need is included. Our next course is 2-11 May in Sao Paulo and we are planning to run this course in other cities in Brazil in the future. I would say if you want a perfect vehicle to apply NLP then coaching is an ideal step.

#### *Question five*

*In 'Introducing NLP', you said that the name Neuro-Linguistic Programming was made up by Bandler and Grinder while they were drinking Californian wine. What was the wine?*

I don't know! John Grinder told me this story, but he did not mention the make of the wine. Personally I hope it was a Napa Valley Zinfandel; that's a great wine.

There is also another story of how the name 'Neuro-Linguistic Programming' came into being. John and Richard were driving back from a seminar when they were stopped by the police at a checkpoint. The policeman asked them what they had been teaching. Richard looked down at the books strewn on the floor of their car and took a word from the title of each book - there were books on Neurology, books on Linguistics and books on computer programming. Perhaps we should be thankful they

did not have cookery books in the car at the time. Neuro Linguistic Pasta does not have the same impact!

Incidentally, although programming sounds like computer programming, in NLP, the Programming aspect refers to our sequence of steps by which we attain our goals, the equivalent of an action plan in coaching. People do not work like computers.

#### *Question six*

*You have always written your books alone, or with another man as a co-author. 'Coaching with NLP' is written with Andrea Lages. How was that experience?*

It is true that so far I have only worked with men as co-authors, but being a man is not a qualification for writing a good book! Andrea is a wonderful writing partner to work with, inspiring, skilled and with a great depth of knowledge. I admire her enormously as a professional. We also share many important values. That we are partners in Lambent do Brasil also makes it easy to work together. I also believe that the masculine and feminine energy working together gives the book a wonderful balance of energy.

We co authored 'Coaching with NLP – How to be a master coach' at the end of 2002. This was a great experience. We wrote most of it in Majorca over the course of two weeks, devoting at least twelve hours a day to writing to meet the publisher's deadline. I remember the wonderful dawns and sunsets in Majorca, looking out over the silver sea. We enjoyed the view and the swimming too! Writing a book is a lot of work. It needs research and it needs to be structured before writing anything. The writing itself takes time and then has to be edited. We did a great job.

We believe this book will be published by Quality Mark in Brazil, but we do not know the exact title yet in Portuguese.

#### *Question seven*

*What was your metaphor for the war in Iraq?*

This war is a tragedy for everyone. In the past of the United States, especially in Texas, George Bush and Saddam Hussein would have had a gunfight at OK Corral. They would have picked a hot dusty street one Sunday afternoon to glare at each other, their hands hovering over their guns slung by their sides. Sergio Leone music would be playing in the background. There would be referees there to see fair play. Bush and Hussein would then have turned their backs to each other and walked ten paces - turned, drawn their guns and fired at the referee's signal. The fastest gun would have won. What they would *not* have done is stay as far away from each other as possible and then collaborate to kill thousands of people they don't know.

What impresses me about this war is that it is intensely personal and absolutely impersonal at the same time. All the media talk of 'George Bush versus Saddam Hussein'. Yet the way it is being fought is very impersonal. Remote controlled missiles are fired from hundreds of kilometres away and kill people who will never know the man who fires the missile. He will never know them and has no quarrel with them personally. If he knew them, he would not be able to kill them. When you see a person as a fellow human being you cannot kill them, because it is like killing yourself. War thrives when people behave as less than human.

*Question eight*

*Are you writing another book?*

Andrea and I are writing a book on what we call 'tactical coaching'. We do a lot of co-coaching together – working together coaching one client. We can get extraordinary results in less than an hour. Tactical coaching is how to make powerful changes in the client's life in one session. Strategic coaching is spread over longer. Both share some patterns, but we have a unique and powerful approach to tactical coaching that we want to share. We think it is particularly important in business coaching, where speed does make a big difference.

**Question for Andrea Lages**

*Question nine*

Andrea, what is it like to train all over the world with Joseph, in English, when English is not your native language?

O Joseph e eu começamos a trabalhar juntos a tres anos atras e progressivamente passamos a fazer todos os trabalhos em parceria. Hoje a grande parte do nosso trabalho eh feita em conjunto atraves da nossa empresa, Lambent do Brasil, com excecao de alguns compromissos que ja haviam sido assumidos antes de nossa parceria profissional.

Ha um pouco mais de um ano começamos a morar juntos no Brasil. Nestes ultimos anos, todos os trabalhos que fizemos foram na Europa e America Latina e do Norte, porem apenas dois cursos no Brasil (contando com o ultimo dado em marco deste ano). Durante o ano passado o tempo mais longo que passamos no Brasil, entre um curso e outro foi de uma semana, e as viagens nao duravam menos de um mes, com muitos compromissos e cursos que foram realizados todos em ingles. Atualmente estamos encontrando um melhor equilibrio a esse respeito.

Quando em setembro do ano passado viemos para o Brasil dar o Primeira Certificacao Internacional em Coaching, no Rio, depois de mais de dois anos sem realizar um unico trabalho em portugues, confesso que tive que fazer um certo esforco para encontrar as palavras corretas em portugues, mesmo porque o nosso curso foi concebido todo em ingles, o manual foi elaborado primeiramente em ingles, e o livro que escrevemos sobre Coaching e PNL tambem foi escrito puramente em ingles. Ainda hoje, neste ultimo curso tive que pedir auxilio algumas vezes com relacao a algumas palavras ou expressoes, mas claro que com muito menos frequencia, afinal, a primeira lingua a gente nunca esquece! (risos)

Joseph O'Connor and Andrea Lages were interviewed by Joao Nicolau Carvalho During their Coaching Certification course in Rio de Janeiro 20-29<sup>th</sup> March 2003

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The next International Coaching Certification Training in Brasil will be 2-11 May in Sao Paulo. The next one after that will be 1-10 July.