Passion in Action –
the wisdom of the cognitive mind

By Judith Lowe and Judith DeLozier

Come as you are – everyone is welcome!

We are so looking forward to meeting you on our special masterclass day at the NLP International Conference.

The Passion in Action masterclass is a day for *everyone*. It's a day for us to come together as an NLP community and work out what we have to offer the world by way of our hopes, dreams and skills for a positive and sustainable human future.

We aim to use the power and magic of our collective intelligence on the day to find ways to bring out the creative new possibilities of life – for ourselves and for others. The value in the day is the experience you have, and where that takes you as a person.
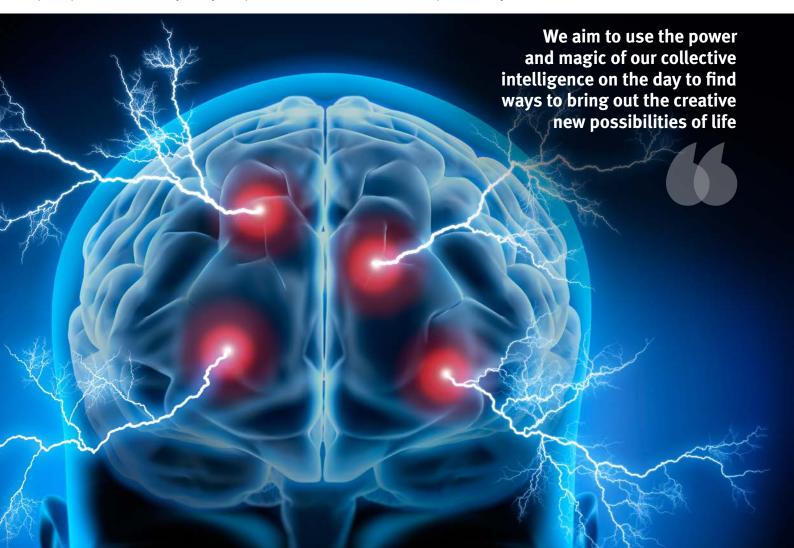
You can just come as you are. There are no expectations or commitments. Your presence and willingness to participate in whatever way suits you is perfect.

Goals and dreams – your passions, plans and actions

For some of you who join us in May, the focus for that positive future might be a personal one. How can I live my life to the full? How can I nurture my special gifts and bring them more fully into the world? How can I deeply support my own health and wellbeing?

For some, the masterclass might help you focus on family and close friends. Can I bring more love and joy into my intimate life? How can I strengthen and enrich human connection in my everyday world of home and family?

And for some, your special 'passion project' for the day might be in a particular area like education or climate change or social care or sports or arts or politics or business or any other issue that has a feeling of urgency and importance to you.

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NLP, bodies and minds

In our first article (*Rapport* 60; Passion in Action), as well as talking about some of the deeper patterns and developments in the field of NLP, we listed some of the wonderful projects that have come out of the Passion in Action work.

In our second article (*Rapport* 61; The wisdom of our bodies), we focused on the wisdom of the body, the life and knowledge in the body, what is also known as somatic intelligence, and invited you to step into some of the activities and try a few things out for yourselves.

In this third and final piece we want to share with you a couple of the simple ideas and tools we use in the Passion in Action process to support people to think clearly, make good plans, and take these plans into action in the world. This article is focused on the more cognitive aspects of NLP, giving a *very* brief background to some of the ideas that generated the field, and also asking, 'What is the *wisdom* of the cognitive mind?'

The bigger conversation

NLP has a basis in the field of cybernetics. Norbert Weiner described cybernetics as *'the scientific study of control and communication in the animal and the machine'.* This is where the metaphor of 'programming' in NLP is sourced – taking concepts from computers and machines across to humans, and vice versa.

The interesting thing about the first- and second-tier cyberneticists is that they were all bringing different maps – biology, psychology, anthropology, medicine, mathematics and linguistics – to a conversation to find patterns that connect. They knew they were at the edge of a new possible approach to science and knowledge. They were interested in the conversation with the bigger mind of systems.

The history of NLP as a field has its foundations in these conversations about systems and the mind, and the cognitive approaches and tools from NLP have a direct relationship with these intellectual and academic encounters and discoveries. The trans-disciplinary approach of cybernetics now focuses on social systems such as businesses and includes modern concepts like 'emergence' and 'self-organisation'.

As we have mentioned in previous articles, the thinker and researcher Gregory Bateson, who was a key figure in many of these early debates, was influential in the development of NLP. He was a guest teacher on the campus at Santa Cruz and many of the original team of developers knew him and were taught by him. His ideas about communication, about learning and change in living systems, about families, addiction, culture, art, consciousness and ecology, provided an early intellectual resource to the emerging scope of NLP, and have shaped and energised our own conversations about the ethics and efficacy of our approaches.

Some of the systems-based ideas and models in NLP that relate to goals, evidences and to feedback – the TOTE model for example –come more or less from the labs in the 1950s and 1960s that were working on the cybernetics research for guided missile systems. The NLP meta model – a model about how certain questions can be used to help people systematically shift their thinking – was developed from the tools and frameworks in the academic linguistic field of transformational grammar.

The ideas in NLP 'reframing' now take us forward in time to the heart of twenty-first century research into meaning-making, cognitive bias and perception. There are many more links that NLP has with contemporary approaches to psychology, cognition, linguistics, neuroscience, etc. and you can find many

of them at the online *Encyclopaedia of Systemic NLP and New Coding NLP* by Robert Dilts and Judith DeLozier (**www.nlpu.com**).

So NLP has its roots in some big ideas – about life and learning, about art and culture and systems. We want to bring this sense of the bigger mind, this bigger conversation, to the Passion in Action masterclass.

What is the *wisdom* of the cognitive mind?

Cognitive scientists study intelligence and behaviour, with a focus on how our nervous systems represent, process and transform information. NLP fits into this space. NLP is about the mind, how we know, how we represent our experience and what underlying frames are organising our world of experience, and creating our inner landscape and map of the world, the neverending web of meaning.

In NLP we go inside this space and focus on *strategies,* how we represent our goals, and how we represent and sequence the mental and behavioural processes to achieve them, to change them, to think about them, to be creative, to make decisions, to remove barriers of various kinds, and to pattern and process many types of information in a subjectively meaningful way.

All of these concepts, strategies, descriptions, techniques and models are products of the cognitive mind describing our inner and outer worlds.

Our cognitive minds produce our reality, and to do this, our cognitive minds filter, distort, delete and generalise the data in order to maintain stability and sense in our thinking.

On the one hand our mental and linguistic capacities are our stand-out human glory, and on the other hand our minds can lead us astray and into delusional worlds. So what to do but to have some core guidelines as to how to use our cognitive minds to operate at their wisest?

This is what NLP offers – tools to help us be somewhat less crazy, and somewhat more clear and focused. NLP gives us tools to help us to be in touch with whatever reality is, to be rational ▶

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▶ in just the right kind of way, to have some basic sanity and good will, to function at our best, to help each other out, to be amazing geniuses in our own way, and to build a world we all want to live in.

Passion in Action – the NLP cognitive toolbox – finding 'true north'

What's important to you? What really matters? 'Where,' as Judy DeLozier asks, 'are you spending your heartbeats?' Or as the poet Mary Oliver says, 'What are you doing with your one wild and precious life?'

In the Passion in Action process we aim to help each person to find their energy and direction. It's as though there's a compass needle that's swinging and oscillating that will eventually settle on your personal magnetic north, a direction that physically and emotionally draws you. It's your place of need and desire and imagination, where there is a natural, spontaneous, felt sense of meaning and expansion of being. Yahoo! It found me! We found each other! My project for the day is …!

This is an iterative process, more conscious for some people, and more hidden for others. Eventually this feeling, these values, this dream, and this energy can be translated in stages, into an explicit goal and a project that we call a *BHAG – a Big Hairy Audacious Goal!*

There are many processes in NLP for helping people identify what's important to them and then helping them to build some kind of viable action plan and take it into the world. For example, even a fairly loose application of the NLP model of 'well-formed conditions for outcomes' can begin the process of organising and framing this 'true north' mind-body information.
• What do you want? What do you want to make/have happen?
• What's really important about this to you?
• What will you use as evidence of progress and achievement?
• How will you know it's working? Or successful?
• What's the context for this?
• When, where, with whom do you want/not want this?
• What impact will this have? Is that what you want?
• Might you or others lose anything?
• What's already working well? Or already in place? Or currently beneficial?
• Does this fit/resonate with who you are as a person/team/organisation?
• Are you/others congruent about it?
• If you have doubts, or there are obstacles, what are they?
• What is the positive intention(s) behind the obstacles?
• Can you take ownership to get your goal started?
• Can you keep it going, and make it happen?

Also you can use Robert Dilts' 'neurological' levels model to further organise and explore what you have in mind. Here are some examples of the questions you can ask, and the different levels at which you can offer support and advice to others.
• *What is the purpose? And bigger vision for this project?* **(VISION)**
• *Who does it serve? What is the contribution to the larger system?*
• *What is your sense of who you are in this project?* **(IDENTITY)**
• *What is your identity, your personal contribution, or role?*

• *What deep values does this project bring to life*? **(BELIEFS AND VALUES)**
• *How is it meaningful to you?*
• *What beliefs support both you and the project?*
• *Are there any beliefs that require updating?*
• *What key skill, tools and cognitive capabilities are needed?* **(CAPABILITY)**
• *Which key energy and emotional states are needed?*
• *What kind of emotional and social intelligence is relevant?*
• *What actions and steps will you take?* **(BEHAVIOUR)**
• *What type of interactions with others will be required?*
• *Which actual words will you use?*
• *What types of vocal tone and body language is appropriate?*
• *What types of contexts will this project thrive in?* **(ENVIRONMENT)**
• *How might you adapt and transform an environment/context to be more supportive and welcoming to your project?*
• *When, where, with whom will you be creating this change?*

There are many ways to take this journey from a 'true north' awareness to a focused and energising goal and project. The unconscious mind takes the lead, and then the conscious, more cognitive mind can begin to form ideas and representations. Then you can start to actually talk about your dream, to draw it, to make plans, to get and give advice, to put things in your diary, and to make those phone calls… whatever. Something's happening! It's exciting!

In this process you can proactively engage with and transform the obstacles and doubts that will inevitably pop up. We can help people transform difficult beliefs, explore different perceptual positions, and build new connections even with alienated parts of the system.

We'll draw on NLP meta programmes, on the Disney model, the SCORE model, the meta model and much of the mainstream, rich, cognitive toolbox that NLP offers.

Also we'll ask, 'Who sings your song?' We'll 'gather the allies'. We'll call up the best in ourselves. We might even dance, who can say?

And much, much more… from the *bigger* conversation of course!

We look forward to seeing you in May. ●