

No heroes any more

It's time to ditch the hero leader. The new imperative is for all staff, whatever their position, to bring leadership to their work. Colin Reeve explains how NLP can help make it happen.

There's a common assumption in business today that we need heroic leaders. This is entirely wrong. Passionate, engaging leadership is increasingly important but the solution doesn't lie in personality cults. What is needed instead is for companies to develop a widespread culture of leadership.

All companies are under pressure to deliver more for less. Whatever their unique circumstances, all companies face pressure to improve constantly. The way to meet such a challenge is to release leadership at every level across their operations.

So how can this be achieved? The answer is surprisingly simple. In the same way that you would expect to invest in the latest technology to gain IT advantage and the latest equipment to gain service or manufacturing benefit, with leadership you need to invest in the leading edge in people technology: neuro-linguistic programming (NLP).

NLP isn't the end goal. Better business results are the objective. But these are achieved when leaders – whatever their hierarchical role – bring more energy, motivation and passion to work. This is where the application of NLP is so valuable.

A useful metaphor is to think of the energy that companies need. People have many forms of energy – one type will get them to work in the morning; another will help them complete their work projects; a third will inspire them in their work. Unfortunately, too many managers block motivational and inspirational energy by taking too much control – by insisting that



A chance comment by a woman while I was out jogging put me in touch with my values. What she had provided quite unconsciously was NLP leadership in action.

they make all the decisions and by communicating poorly. If they want to be effective leaders and inspire leadership around them, they should be encouraging people to take more responsibility and bring more of their positive energy into the workplace – while finding ways of increasing that energy flow.

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I have asked thousands of people how much more they could bring to their work if only they felt passionate and inspired. Typically, the least amount by which people say they could improve their performance is 30 per cent and many people feel confident that they could double their impact.

NLP helps people to think more clearly about what they want and how to get there. It also massively improves communication and provides extraordinarily creative ways for people to access their inner resources.

When we work in organisations with leaders and teams, one of the first questions we ask is: 'What do you want it to be like around here so that you can give and get more from yourself, for the business you work in and the family you

neuro-linguistic programming

live in?’ This helps people to think about the direction they want to head in and the conditions under which they would be able to contribute most to the business. Once the desired outcome is identified, there will still be work to be done in clearing the path but what this question sets in motion is the realisation that if people can align their mission with their values then real breakthrough is possible. It is this notion of alignment that is central to NLP and which makes it so relevant to business.

The focus of NLP is to help companies get better results through the development of distributed leadership. Unlike heroic leadership, NLP underpins the notion that we all have leadership greatness within us and simply need permission and coaching to bring it out. In this respect, the role of the hierarchical leader can, sometimes, be to get out of the way.

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If you have people working in silos and not communicating then NLP would probably benefit your organisation. By using just a few of the skills in the NLP toolkit, your leaders could break through such divides by encouraging their people to work across boundaries, challenging them to share their expertise and prompting them to engage with their colleagues in far more productive relationships.

In my work with companies I often talk about people feeling exhausted; being out of touch with their inspiration; of working in a way that is somehow incongruent with themselves. When I speak on this topic I invariably see people nodding in agreement. This is clearly how many people experience work. But it doesn’t have to remain so.

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Recently, at the end of a long day, I went on a run around the streets where I live. I didn’t feel much like doing it but I put on my running shoes anyway because I am committed to my health and I knew I would feel better for it afterwards. As I was jogging, and feeling like slowing down, I passed a woman in the street who said: “You make it look so effortless.” What then happened was that I had an immediate surge of energy. I ran better and my whole posture improved.

The point of this story is that we all have this energy inside us. The woman, with a friendly comment – exquisitely timed and with just the right tone and content – reminded me of who I could be. She had helped me to be more aligned, put me in touch with my values and my humour and led me to lead myself. What she had

provided quite unconsciously was NLP leadership in action.

Should your people learn and apply NLP skills? You might as well ask should your organisation use computers? It really is that simple. If you want people who know the importance of aligning their values with the company’s mission then, yes, you should. If you want to have people who bring more energy and inspiration to work, then, yes, you should. If you want to achieve better business results, then NLP is an absolute must.

By Colin Reeve



Examples of NLP at work

I was coaching a manager whose approach to leading was to arrive every Monday morning at her team meeting with a large file of financial analyses. She was trying to control her team through hard measures but the impact she was having was far from motivational. Indeed, she quickly came to see that her approach was severely suppressing the energy and inspiration of her people.

It took courage to try something new but, when this manager started to come to these meetings with no notes - just the intent to listen and talk to her team - things began to loosen up. And when she later asked the team to look after the business themselves, she couldn’t help but notice the transformation in motivation, morale and results. It was all because she was no longer in the way.

People’s attitudes and beliefs often hold them back. NLP can help managers and teams to address this aspect of change as well.

I was recently working in a company where

supervisors were not being considered for promotion to management roles. On investigation, I found that managers believed that the supervisors were ‘not good enough’. The supervisors believed that nothing could get you promoted in this company. It was a vicious circle, with neither side communicating.

So we got people from across the managerial divide to work together on tasks which they could only achieve by co-operating. Combining this with some core NLP input on how beliefs drive behaviour, we found that long held attitudes changed. Indeed, when we surveyed this company a year later we found that managers had completely changed their perception and now recognised the vast managerial potential in their supervisor community.

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