

## **NLP for Project Managers Author Interview**

Following the publication of NLP for Project Managers, author Dr Peter Parkes answered a few short questions about his new book.

### 1. What is the main aim of the book?

The aim of the book is to develop project management competences using NLP tools and techniques.

In my project management career I undertook a lot of training in NLP and behavioural skills and read a lot of books. In the main, these adopt a technique by technique approach, focus on counselling and life coaching, and are taught in a very 'new age' fashion which does not sit well with most PMs. I wanted to group tools and techniques by application and present them in a business context using our language. After all, NLP and rapport is about meeting your client on their map of the world, rather than trying to drag them to yours.

### 2. What prompted you to become an NLP practitioner?

Personal and professional development prompted me to undertake a range of courses in behavioural competences.

I came from a very technical background and we used to recruit a lot of highly qualified scientists and engineers in the nuclear sector. When the UK utilities were privatised, we had to adapt our skill sets to be more customer focussed and commercially oriented, supporting business development across the world. NLP-based training was introduced to help develop some of the people skills and was very effective in achieving a step change in behaviours. As I progressed to more complex projects and more customer facing roles I continued to train and develop these skills through more courses, including a month residential in the south of France for my Master Practitioner and a dissertation on modelling entrepreneurs in project management and professional services companies.

### 3. What does NLP actually mean?

I prefer to use this simple shorthand label as I think that the full name for NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), like SAP, is not particularly useful.

It is, however, accurate in that we are looking at the deep structure of language (linguistics) to tell us what is going on in peoples' heads (neurology) and how this programmes their behaviour. Conversely, through use of language, we can affect neurology and behaviour, as demonstrated by eminent psychologists and counsellors such as Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson, who were extensively modelled by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, the founders of NLP. The term

originated from the fusion of neuro-linguistics, developed by Korzybski, with Cybernetics, or the model of the brain as an organic computer, developed by Bateson. (Bateson is known to many in IT from his development of systems theory).

4. Do you think some people see NLP as a form of psychology and it's not taken seriously?

NLP is indeed a form of applied psychology.

I spoke recently to a psychology graduate at one of my talks and I used the analogy that psychology is like looking at the intricate engineering of how an internal combustion engine works, whereas NLP just says, 'press this gas pedal to go faster and this one to go slower'. I got them involved in one of the exercises and they were converted in a few minutes and went away with a copy of the book.

5. There's a good selection of reviews listed in the front of the book. Are there any that you are particularly proud of?

I am proud of gaining the support of Bob Assirati, from OGC and the BCS, and Mike Nichols, chairman of the APM, for the foreword. In addition, it does not hurt to have a quote from the chairman of the Institute of Directors, with whom I am a regional committee member, on the back cover.

I thought the book would be a bit of a 'Marmite' subject, ie some people would love it and some would hate it. Hence I thought that only about half of the people that I approached would be supportive, and only half of those would get around to submitting a review in time for the deadline. I was really surprised when practically everyone sent back really supportive comments. In fact, we got so many back that we had to edit them down from eight pages to two. I kept the full list and put it up on the website for completeness. It is now being added to by people reading the book and coming along to talks.

I think the most significant quote is the one from Andy Murray, lead author for PRINCE2;

*'Consistent feedback when we released early drafts of PRINCE2 was the need to describe those vital behavioural competences (or soft skills) that project managers require for successful project delivery. But it is not the remit of PRINCE2 to describe such skills as PRINCE2 is just a method, so we took the approach of sign-posting the additional competences that those involved in projects require. At last there is now a book that describes those skills, and more importantly in a way that puts them in context of project management. This book provides practical and easy to follow guidance on how to apply NLP techniques to a Project Manager's every day work. I recommend every Project Manager reads this book (in*

addition to PRINCE2!)

6. In the book you use quite apt proverbs or quotes to illustrate your points. If you could pick one that perfectly encapsulates the essence of the book, which one would you choose?

Although most people want to focus on managing others, to be effective we have to start by managing ourselves, which requires self awareness and flexibility in behaviour. Hence, if I had to pick one quote from the book it would be:

*'He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened'* by the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu.

7. You also speak regularly on this subject, do you have any events planned in the near future?

As APM's board champion for best practice groups, I have been speaking on a range of topics in project management and IT enabled change to one forum or another most months for many years.

With regards to this book, I am in the middle of a UK promotional tour, with talks from Scotland to Jersey and Wales to the East of England. You can see a full list of dates, synopses and reviews on the associated website [www.nlp4pm.com](http://www.nlp4pm.com). I have also started to deliver in-house training and public 1, 3 and 5 day competence-based training courses.

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