

## Book Review: NLP Coaching, an evidence-based approach for coaches, leaders and individuals

Susie Linder-Pelz, 2010, "NLP Coaching, an evidence-based approach for coaches, leaders and individuals", Kogan-Page

This book addresses a subject that has considerable impact on people's lives. Many people spend their valuable savings on discovering NLP. Many more people would have been open to NLP if it had had greater credibility. So what is this book about and what is Susie Linder-Pelz trying to say? How does she deliver her message and where does the book not go?

I consider Susie Linder-Pelz's message, then how it is delivered through style of writing, structure and content. There are some areas where I feel additional material might have made a difference. I offer suggestions as to what else might be needed or useful. I also suggest who should read this book.

The core message is a response to Jonathan Passmore's 'thrown down gauntlet'; "*I would really like to see an NLP coaching book which grounds NLP techniques in evidence and which challenges some of the floss which NLP can have.*" (p6). In framing her response, Susie Linder-Pelz asks three sets of questions which are reflected through the structure of the book. The conclusion returns to these questions with specific answers. This closed loop gives the book an integrity and congruence which I found consistent through all levels of the content. The questions organise the book in a logical development path that can be read in a meaningful sequence or dipped into. The main parts of the book cover:

1. What is NLP in relation to coaching?
2. What is evidence based NLP coaching and how do the NLP principles fit with neuroscience, psychology and other coaching approaches?
3. What are recent developments in evidence based coaching and how can a research agenda be applied to best practice in NLP coaching?

The message of the book hits right at the heart of a fundamental weakness in the field of NLP, that of being taken more seriously by people who could influence its wider acceptance. This weakness of NLP appears to have evolved from perceptions of epistemology. NLP has used subjective assessment to validate sensory evidence rather than basing evidence on objectively verifiable theory. A wonder of NLP is that it has discovered so much apparent wisdom whilst free from such rigorous evidential constraints. Thus NLP, through its subjective responsiveness, left the rigour of scientific theory behind. Susie Linder-Pelz refers to the vigour of NLP compared to the rigour of objective evidence gathering. This vigour of the NLP field has meant that the 'floss', as Jonathan Passmore describes it, is difficult to differentiate. The cost to the field is a loss of credibility. This book is a practical foundation for re-connecting the vigour with the rigour.

The writing style of the book makes it easy and a pleasure to read. This surprised me, as the content of the book is deeply thought through. The language is concise and precise. Construction of arguments reveals academic style critical reasoning with some references to neuro-scientific terms and research method philosophy. Jargon is mostly avoided. Questions frame the purpose of what is said and link each chapter to the next so curiosity is piqued and transitions are easy to follow.

I like the use of unobtrusive numerical cross-references to the notes where bibliographic references offer further information. These numbers are numerous, so there is plenty of opportunity for follow up without making the text unreadable. Susie Linder-Pelz also includes

many anecdotes, quotes and examples from other authors which illustrate and enrich understanding.

It is a convincer for me to read an NLP book that does not confuse NLP with the many modelling outcomes. Distinctions are given which clearly define NLP, coaching, NLP coaching, and 'evidence based' NLP coaching.

I particularly like the approach used when describing the NLP coaching skills. Susie gives reports from different coaches, interspersed with client scenarios, for demonstrating skills used and outcomes achieved. For me, this aids understanding and deepens interest. There are no menus of NLP tools and no technical descriptions to follow step by step. Neither are there any exercises to practice, so this is not a book for someone who wishes to learn NLP. It is a book for someone who wishes to understand more about what NLP can give you, and what NLP practitioners can deliver through best practice.

There are some instances, where further explanation could have been useful. Perhaps the neuro-scientific terms used or research methods philosophy could have had more explanation, yet excellent books exist elsewhere covering these topics in depth. This book has one chapter considering philosophy of research methods. Brief explanations give context for subsequent discussions. I feel this is an area warranting a deeper discussion, as many who read the book may not have the necessary research experience and understanding. Philosophical thinking behind research methods is an important area for establishing research credibility.

The most valuable and thought provoking section of this book, for me, is chapter 7 where Susie Linder-Pelz considers theoretical origins, and the supporting neuro-scientific evidence. A systematic approach covers all the systemic principles underpinning NLP and provides a verifiable checklist of Susie's findings. A fascinating read.

Each of the chapters tackles challenging questions from Susie's initial list. It is a delight to have such a reasoned response, even where questions cannot yet be fully answered. Susie adds a list of potential research questions. This provides a useful guide for the focus and direction of future research.

The final part of the book looks at how evidence can be gathered and built on established theories for best practice. These later chapters inspired me just how much the NLP field could benefit from a dedicated relevant 'how to' guide on research methods. Susie raises the potential, with questions and possibilities.

Susie Linder-Pelz's book is a well researched and valuable contribution to the NLP field. It pulls together much other research in coaching and the bibliography alone is worth having. I felt that the questions asked are pertinent and require answers. It also raises the need for a more evidence based approach in 'how to' literature on NLP.

Susie pulls back from presenting a course text. I sense there is perhaps an opening here for a course text book, one with the questions that Susie raises yet with more technical detail. A book that is open to a wider audience, perhaps aimed at an audience learning NLP, or with less understanding of the scientific theory, and so appeal to the wider field of coaching.

Who then will benefit from reading this book? I feel that anyone engaged in professional coaching, or who uses NLP in professional practice, should read this book. The skills and principles of NLP Coaching are relevant to many styles of coaching. Susie does not limit her assessment to NLP. Whilst I would not recommend this book for learning NLP, reading this book does not require an expert knowledge of NLP. It is therefore also useful to those who might wish to assess the credibility of NLP. Thus, I feel Susie delivers her message and passes back the gauntlet to Jonathan Passmore most adequately.

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