

# Lessons

## in the Power of Influence

Maybe it was inevitable that a teacher of high school children would have an interest in the dynamics of groups. When that teacher is the brother of one of the co-founders of NLP who was also influenced by Carl Rogers, that interest became a lifetime's understanding. Andy Cooté talks to Michael Grinder about Cats and Dogs and leaderless groups.

I saw Michael Grinder in action at last year's NLP Conference where he gave the Keynote speech on the first night. Appropriately for a night when the rain was torrential, his subject was 'Cats and Dogs'. In a packed, and slightly steamy, hall in Regent's College he demonstrated his own ability to work with groups. He had us first engaged and then involved. We'll return to the Cats and Dogs theme presently, but first I want to give some background on the man himself.

Michael was a high school teacher teaching the age group 15 to 18 for 17 years until 1983. In 1976 he met Carl Rogers, developer of person-centered approaches to counselling and psychotherapy. "It was the only time he went into public school to see if he could transfer his skills into that environment." The influence of Rogers was soon evident in Michael, "I became Rogerian and my voice pattern went up and down and I had the head nodding. I was highly approachable and got along fine with most people." But not all people were susceptible, "I found the Carl Rogers approach didn't work for 20% of my students and that puzzled me for a long time. Eventually it dawned on me that Carl only ever taught people who wanted to be there and that I needed to develop techniques or strategies to work with people who just didn't want to be there."

Carl Rogers, to me and maybe to many readers, is a name in the text books and a set of ideas. I ask about working with Rogers. "He created his own atmosphere which was not about learning from him but about learning from yourself. He was excellent at creating a safe atmosphere." Michael comments "I'm much more directive than he was. His concept of a leaderless group fascinated me in terms of where we all ended up – empowered, but the length of time it took wouldn't fit with the lifestyle I was in. So I tried to figure out how to arrive at empowerment without taking the length of time that he did. I had Carl Rogers acceptance, but not his patience. For my own sanity, I needed to have a different style."

Around the same time, through his brother John, he was becoming familiar with the early developments of NLP, still known as meta magic at that time. "John was developing NLP whilst I was still a teacher. He

invited me to watch him in the summertime when I was out of school and eventually invited me to become one of his eight or nine trainers for certification".

I wondered if being John Grinder's brother had been an issue as he developed his career. Did people have expectations of how he would be? "I suppose there is a certain notoriety to it but I've never experienced prejudice or skewed expectations. I'm able to be myself as well as John's brother."

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From his early work with Carl Rogers and John Grinder, Michael chose to specialise in how groups interact. His early experience of working with groups of high-school age kids clearly had an influence on this. There was also a gap in knowledge that interested him. "The limitation of most psychological models in my experience and I include in that Carl Rogers, transactional analysis and NLP, is that they focus on the individual and on one-to-one communication and not on how groups work. With a larger group, where involvement is involuntary, group dynamics moves things on from one-to-one communication. It moves from focusing on an internal model to focusing on the external model. Anthony Robbins does a great job of getting hundreds of people to access their internal states as part of a group but generally it doesn't happen that way".

Given his background, it is no surprise that he spends 65% of his time working with educators. Because of the value of his time most of that is in the training room with the educators themselves. "I'd much rather be in reality instead of the training room and I target to get into at least 100 classrooms in a year. I recently trained all of the teachers in one school and was able to follow up with them in the classroom. It was an interesting experience for me. It was like having created the song, discovering that other singers can also sing it. It's about trying not to do what is idiosyncratically me but what is truly transferable."

He emphasises the use of external skills in the classroom and sees a specific role for NLP. "The main benefit for me in being trained in NLP is that it sharpened my eyes and ears in terms of perception. I observed the external effects on others, for example, when a teacher does this thing, his



class will then do that thing and I was able to understand the patterns. I didn't get it to work in a group setting, particularly an involuntary group setting, and came to the conclusion that in such circumstances it is better to use your NLP skills on yourself to determine the external skills that you could use or ways of giving those NLP skills to others in the group."

Those patterns have been developed into a set of techniques to elicit the desired responses from the group – what Michael refers to as Pentimento\* and as 'the science and art of non verbal communication'. These techniques are taught around the globe in his Group Mastery programme. It is not, Michael asserts, an easy course but "the numbers attending as well as the number of people who finished the course are excellent. You need staying power to be certified and participants will certainly work their tails off". As well as 16 days of contact time over 10 months, students will also log in every week of the first 5 months, complete worksheets on the site and then send them through to Michael who provides professional feedback. For the final section of the course, the students will videotape themselves "to demonstrate their understanding of 50 out of 130 skills. They bring the videotape to the final session for assessment".

These external skills also apply in corporate environments. "When leaders no longer have face-to-face contact with the team, they can start representing them not as human beings but as the position. This is where the 'cats and dogs' work is useful. I work with people in senior positions who are responsible for large groups of possibly more than 50 and who may not be able to recognise the faces let alone have any real knowledge of the people, in order to ensure that they keep

the group together and motivated. This requires a level of cat within the leader and leaders must ensure that they don't get promoted past their level of catness". [See box for more]

Michael is very keen to understand the difference between permission and authority. "Permission involves a paradigm shift and some cultures

find that difficult to understand. In your article about Christina Hall (Rapport Summer 2007) she talks about rapport not being a single event but a continuous process – that, I believe, is permission".

Michael's new book *The Elusive Obvious* will be published shortly. I caught Michael between finalising that and heading out on the road for another tour.

Michael believes that "we are in love with the influence of power, when we really need to be in love with the power of influence". The

power template, he asserts, "is short-term, focuses on the issue level of the communication and is results-oriented. Whereas, influence is longer term, focuses on the relationship level of the communication and is more process-oriented".

Michael, himself, is the very model of the power of influence. ●

### Cats and dogs in corporate life?

Michael Grinder proposes that we all exhibit dog or cat tendencies and that understanding them and knowing the signs will lead to better group work and individual performance. Dogs are high accommodators and have low independence whilst cats are very much the opposite. The higher the level you reach in your job, the more cat is needed but a mixture of characteristics from both is desirable. At the NLP Conference in 2006, the whole room role-played being cats, dogs or an observer. It is impossible to summarise the concepts in a small box like this however, dogs treat others how they want to be treated (a stroke because they are selfless) and cats expect to be treated as they want to be treated (a stroke because they are WONDERFUL).

Graham Willson and Hazel Ann Lorkins of GLD Training will be exploring Cats and Dogs at this year's NLP Conference, 23rd –25th November 2007 at Regents College, London (<http://www.nlpconference.co.uk/>). They also deliver Michael's programmes and products in the UK. (<http://www.gldassociates.co.uk/>) Group Mastery in the UK is delivered by Michael Grinder with ITS and the next course begins in May 2008 - <http://www.itsnlp.com/groupmastery.htm/>

### \* Pentimento

Is a term borrowed from the art world and refers to the underlying foundation of a painting – effectively what lies beneath the surface to make up the painting we see. The pentimento of communication is made up of the four non-verbal ingredients: Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic and Breathing. Grinder recommends that these be learnt in all their combinations.