

Caroline Beaton Choosing To Be Me

The Beginning

“Here is Edmund Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think about it.” *Winnie the Pooh*

I, like everyone, have often asked myself the question: “Who am I?”. One of the reasons I was originally curious about NLP was that I thought it might help me to answer that question more fully for myself. When I first came across the logical levels, I felt quite sure of myself at the ‘Identity’ level: I have a career, I support my children, am unmarried, have my own house. So I know all about being independent.

Or do I?

I may have all the trappings of an independent woman, but my ‘it’ is about making choices and decisions on the basis of being truly independent. And the first of these choices, at the core of my modeling project, is *choosing to be me*.

Put that simply it sounds quite dry, and quite big chunk. I didn’t have the answers to how to animate ‘it’ when I started modeling, but by the end of my interviews my ‘it’ was alive and shining bright.

With my ‘it’ I want to get to a state where not knowing is OK. A state where trusting myself and the outcome is what matters; a state of knowing how to look after myself and to live with myself; a state of self-reliance, with self-maintaining goals; a state where I don’t need to run away from myself any more - where my sense of self is rooted deep inside me; where ‘me’ is quite simply enough.

And how will having ‘it’ affect my work, my home – my life? Read on and you will see...

My exemplars

My ‘it’ didn’t start out as *choosing to be me*. It began as something to do with my self-confidence and sense of identity – not unconnected with independence but not the same either. And I when I thought about how to chunk that down, I thought about the ability to give and receive honest feedback (an outcome that has been with me since the NLP Introductory Module in ’03). During Module 2 of

the Master Practitioner, it became clear who a perfect exemplar of giving feedback could be:

Nigel Johnson

Nigel has assisted on all the NLP Programmes I have attended so I have had plenty of opportunity both to observe and to work with him. I myself have received some open and challenging feedback from Nigel and I have also witnessed him giving it to others. A specific situation in which Nigel gave feedback within the group was of particular interest to me.

So I modeled Nigel in an interview that lasted around 90' and it was my first experience of live modeling – away from the safety of Bix. I taped the interview (see extracts below) and during it a clear model shone through.

I asked Nigel to think of a recent time when he had given feedback. He thought of one that had happened earlier that week, in addition to the one that I had picked up on at Bix. He started by talking about the Bix feedback. He described what he saw in the person he gave feedback to as “attacks” and having observed many of these “attacks” over a relatively long period of time, he thought “Why should I keep being warm and gentle?”. He describes this as a “selfish reaction”. He gets a sense of “risk” and of the growing fact that he is prepared to take that “risk”.

He is aware of having “filtered his feelings” because of not wanting to take the “risk” and finally of “forgetting all that because I’m right in it...Even if there’s pain and tears I’m going to give it...I have reached a point of no return.”

He checks that his own intentions are positive and chooses to believe that the recipient of the feedback’s are positive too. He develops his own opinions internally but also talks to others in order to check that the information he is gathering is correct. “I’m unlikely to react with a huge piece of feedback without sharing it with somebody”.

He watches, and learns, and assesses how ready she is to take his feedback. “I need to find a way in.” He then describes a point at which Sue was in the process of giving feedback to this person and from what he observed in that person’s face: “I knew that was my way in”.

I asked him to tell me about that moment. He sits forward in his seat. His eyes light up. He is excited and associated. His legs are tucked back under the chair. His hands are clasped in his lap. He has shifted into a different gear.

“It’s a huge adrenalin buzz. I’ve made a decision and I’m confident that I’m right. I not sure how I’m going to say it or how it’s going to come out. It’s all about timing.

The adrenalin is all through me. After a period of time that I sense (*points to his head*) is long enough I know it is time. I have no recollection of what is being said at that point. I have a sense (*points in front of his head*) that the waiting has gone on for far too long.”

I ask “Anything else?”

“Yes. Moving forward on my chair puts me into this space.” (*He points in front of his head again.*)

He then creates the metaphor of a plane, navigating the skies and crucially knowing that at some point it is going to land. He describes the point of knowing he is going to give the feedback, with the adrenalin pumping, as: “I’m coming in to land – I’m on the approach now”. He needs to know where he’s going, more than what he’s going to say – “Where’s the stand?” is the key question in his mind. The stand is a metaphor for his outcome. There is a relationship between the stand and finding a way in. In this case he can see in her face that she is open to receiving his feedback. That is his way in. Then he says “It’s like having left Kennedy airport and knowing that I’m going to need to land at some point.” Visual references are important to him too – “I need to see the person clearly”.

“And when you land successfully?”, I ask. “People are drawn to me”, he says, “When I’m unsuccessful, people hate me.”

Nigel’s model for giving feedback is:

Knowledge gathering – V^e, K^i, A^{id}

Internal processing – A^{id}, K^i, V^{ir}

Knowledge checking – V^{ir}, A^{ir}

Sits forward on seat - K^e, A^{ic}

Reaching point of no return – K^i

He needs to see both the recipient and the outcome clearly - V^e, V^{ic}

His measure of success is mainly his feeling about what happens at the time (K^i) but also the feedback he gets (either at the time or later) from the recipient.

So what had Nigel learned from the modeling process with me? He described it as an “eye opener” and had learned things that he didn’t know about his model for giving feedback. When I played it back to him he agreed with it and said “Yes, I know there are points where I’ve got to land”. He wanted to go and test it with other clients to see if he always reacted like that.

So I came away with a great metaphor and a portable model for giving feedback. I was feeling pretty good about the progress of my ‘it’.

I had arranged to meet my next model one week later:

Mark Hampshire

I met Mark fifteen years ago when he and I both started working in television at The Children's Channel, and we have been friends ever since. I knew as soon as I thought about my 'it' that whatever 'it' was Mark would be a part of it. He is an exemplar of so many things. The big chunk I could model in Mark is 'being a true friend'. The words on paper don't begin to convey what that actually means. We have been through a lot together.

When I first met Mark, and for many years afterwards, he had a boyfriend Rob who in turn also became a close friend. Even though they split up some years ago, they remained soul-mates and we all stayed in touch. Rob had suffered from depression for many years and 18 months ago, having made two previous attempts, he succeeded in committing suicide. The way in which Mark has dealt with the aftermath of the suicide has been another representation of so many of his qualities and beliefs – and his true strength and ability to be himself.

But with all these qualities in evidence, what was the small chunk I could model in Mark? It was something around his beliefs and integrity – his willingness to be true to himself at all times. Mark is one of the few people in my life who I know will tell it how it really is – whether it's what I *want* to hear or not.

His feedback and advice has often been the catalyst for me to reach turning points at key times in my life. So how does he know and say what's true for him?

Again, I taped the interview and below are some extracts:

Mark's beliefs come through strongly almost immediately. When I describe why it is I want to interview him, he immediately talks about "honesty". He says: "I could guess what people really want to hear but that's not what it's all about."

I ask him to think of a recent time when he told someone something he thought they might not really want to hear, and he talks about his friend Alice. For some time she had been exhibiting behaviours that he didn't think were helping her, but: "I hadn't felt she was ready for useful and honest feedback". So he spent some time assessing the situation during his encounters with her over a period of weeks, and his opportunity for honest feedback presented itself during a recent telephone conversation.

"While she was talking, I was working out my response. I was listening to her and judging her. It was uncomfortable and I was getting irritated. I was rolling my eyes in the back of my head...I knew she was really vulnerable. Part of me wants not to give any advice – to stay neutral. But a bit of me is convinced."

As he talks, his face and neck flush with colour and his eyes brighten and get moist. His body language is out of alignment and he is clearly irritated and frustrated. As he describes the phone call, his eyes show signs of visual recall. They also go downwards, into emotion, at frequent intervals.

“The worst case scenario flashes through my mind but I need to overcome my sense of irritation. It’s like trying to be patient with a naughty child. It’s a trade-off thing – between being conciliatory or not being true to myself. But I can’t contradict what I believe. I remember how long it took to get back to normal last time when I didn’t say what I thought. That picture is still with me and it helps me remember what to do this time.”

Then he checks with himself that he is really thinking about her best interests, and that his intentions are positive. “I start by flattering her, by saying I can see what she means. I’m thinking about what will resonate most with her and I’m trying to use her language. I use her words and phrases and find the starting point in something that we can both agree on. At that point I am not being entirely truthful to her, but I am true to myself.”

He gives the feedback, and as the conversation progress: “Now we’re on common ground and I’m not feeling quite so irritated. I have found a way.”

Mark’s model elements in common with Nigel’s and looks like this:

Knowledge gathering/analysis – V^e , K^i , A^d

Emotion builds (K^i) and he has to overcome his frustration

Via internal processing (A^d , K^i , V^r) he reaches a point where he is not without doubt but where a *bit* of him is totally convinced (K^i)

He has a picture in his mind of how it has been before and how it will be now - V^r , V^{ic}

The feeling that he cannot contradict his beliefs is strong at this point (K^i)

He checks how ready his recipient is for the feedback – V^r , A^r

He reaches a point of no return (K^i)

It struck me, as with Nigel, how much Mark has the recipient of the feedback in mind – it is about them, not him. Although never having studied NLP, he uses many NLP techniques in his feedback – rapport, clean language and mirroring of words, intonation and body language.

His measure of success is in his feelings (K^i) – he is not so irritated any more - and also in his language – he can be affectionate again.

When I asked him how the interview had been for him, he was surprised that so much had come out of it. He said “I have a feeling of “How can I get away with

it?” when I’m giving feedback to people.” I checked my model with him and he found it enlightening. “I thought it was just visual. When I remember things it’s all in my head – it’s all moving and it’s all visual. But you’re right – I’m driven by emotion too, and frustration. And I play out the imaginary conversations of what I will say in my head.”

So by the time I headed to Bix for the penultimate Module I had completed two interviews and was feeling pretty confident about ‘it’. Then two things happened.

The first was that I got involved in some feedback in front of the group and was given some honest feedback (by Nigel!) challenging me about for whose benefit it was and also about how I was giving it. Suddenly I doubted not only my model but also my ‘it’.

The second was when we completed an exercise to define/refine our ‘it’. I realised that the feedback I had been modeling was just *one* example of making choices. Was there sufficient evidence that these choices were the product of being truly independent? I wasn’t so sure.

So on leaving Bix that time I decided to think open; think big! Who were models of independence? Of making their own choices? Of freedom of spirit? I know: **Michael Palin**. He was someone else I had wanted to model ever since starting the Master Practitioner. I have long admired him in making his travel documentaries – his apparent fearlessness at entering the unknown; of leaving his comfort zone. But most importantly his ability to be himself rather than a social or cultural chameleon. How hard could it be to set up a meeting with him? I work in television, we broadcast his shows, I even know his sister-in-law. I decided it was fairer to contact him professionally rather than via a relative so I found his agent and publisher and sent letters to both. I also called his PA. The result? A firm thanks but no thanks. His commitment to other things would make it impossible for him to get involved. Even for a half hour interview? Even for a half hour interview.

I could model him via watching his shows, but still I wanted to find another live exemplar. Not wanting to leave the celebrity trail just yet, I had another idea. **Ewan McGregor** and his friend and fellow actor **Charley Boorman** had just completed a motorbike ride across the world. Surely they are exemplars of being truly independent in order to have achieved such a thing. I would write letters to their publicist and agent. Which I did... Two months later I received a letter, which politely gave me much the same answer as above.

So I decided to read their book – ‘Long Way Round: Chasing Shadows Across The World’ – with the aim of modeling them through their language, behaviour and experiences.

In doing this, I learned a couple of things. The first was that they weren't the perfect exemplars of my 'it' that I had assumed they would be. Rarely did their choices/decisions appear to be independent. Secondly, modeling from a book is not easy! To get down to the tiny chunk sizes that have been the key in my live modeling was a challenge, but some of the bigger chunks came through loud and clear. For one thing, they routinely made their way up and down the logical levels being influenced by, and experimenting with, everything from environment to spirituality on their journey.

Their story also inspired me in terms of getting on and doing what you really want to do (especially as both men are fathers of young children and could have seen that as a valid reason not to make the trip). "If someone can do it – anyone can do it."

I was also struck by the connections that they made with people from other countries and cultures, where non-verbal language was the only option; and also by the beauty of sometimes doing nothing. During their journey, they exhibit many of the beliefs of excellence – and the belief that "Behind every behaviour is an unconscious positive intention" is at the fore, when repeatedly their seemingly bad luck/adverse circumstances turns out to be what leads them to their most excellent experiences.

Ewan McGregor writes, just before reaching the Mongolian border, "...I no longer felt like a tourist or a traveller. The journey had become my life."

So where was I on my journey? Was I getting any closer to the shadows I was chasing?

I needed to find an exemplar who embodied what I was looking for and who was definitely accessible within the (increasingly limited!) timeframe. Then I thought about the delegates from the Master Practitioner programme before ours who Sue had invited to join us last time. When they had been with us there was one woman's story, of all the amazing stories we heard that day, that stood out to me:

Cheryl Sklan

Cheryl is a psychotherapist, in her 50's, and recently separated from her husband after 37 years of marriage. In writing up her 'it' she had entitled it: 'If I'm Not For Myself, Who Will Be For Me?' (Hillel Talmud).

What I had written down after she had spoken at Bix was: "What shone through from her words was having found true independence – of having become who she really wanted to be".

So Sue gave me her details and when I e-mailed Cheryl she said she would be "honoured" for me to model her. When we spoke on the phone she said she

doubted she would be the right exemplar for me. I met her just before the last Module, and below are some extracts from our meeting:

Cheryl sat opposite me, her legs slightly apart, and her hands mainly resting by her side or on her thighs. She exhibited little physical movement but there was a dynamism in the brightness with which she looked at me – a kind of aura. She made and held eye contact much of the time and I found it hard to analyse her eye-accessing cues because of this steady contact. Sometimes she closed her eyes and looked down, and sometimes the intensity of the emotion she described beamed through her steady gaze. And from her language it became clear that she is driven largely by kinaesthetics, but also by the visual and the auditory. In fact her inner dialogues went on to become key to coding the model.

When Cheryl first separated from her husband, the last thing she wanted to do was to be alone. She told me:

“I used to say to my therapist “I can’t sit in my lounge and read because of the light. I can’t be in there.” She then went on to talk about the a specific light in her lounge that caused her so much concern at the time. We looked at it together as she described its effect on her.

Cheryl told me she had spent much of her life with the belief that “It’s much better to go out than to stay in”. Her mother had done the same. One turning point came at New Year’s Eve weekend, when she had been invited to a party by a friend. Suddenly she realised that she didn’t want to go. She realised that she was running a dialogue in her head with one voice telling her: “Go on, go, please her, she loves you” and the other voice telling her to: “Do what you want to do”. She thought about how it would be to go to the party – who would be there and what would happen. She thought about how she would feel once she got there and why she was going to go. She spent quite some time assessing the situation and made a decision to call her friend. Just before she made the decision, she had a feeling in her chest, and she knew beyond doubt that she didn’t need to go.

Coincidentally, right then the friend called. As she started the conversation again she had a feeling, in her chest, that told her she was not going to go to please her friend. And as she told her friend she would not be coming, she felt “liberated” – “warm and free”.

Afterwards the dialogue ran in her head again: “Had I told her I didn’t want to go for the right reason? Was it really to look after me? And then I thought about how I felt afterwards. And I knew. I knew by the feeling inside me.” (She taps her chest again.)

I asked her more about this feeling inside that helps her to know and she replied: “How do I know? Because *I’m* in there. I’m looking after myself. And it feels so good”.

Later she went on to say: “I’m intuitive, a communicator and someone people want to work with. I know how to make connections. But then the inner critic speaks out and I doubt myself. What I’ve learned to do is eclipse the negative voice.”

The WOW moment came when she talked about a group she is founding for single, middle-aged women. Here came the story of the “bright light” that she had been eclipsing almost all her life. She had learned to eclipse it as a child – stopping herself from fulfilling the potential of who she truly wanted to be. She gave some examples of how she had shaded this light recently. She realised, when doubting whether or not to set up this group, that this was a light that needed to shine - to be *her* light.

We go back to that moment and she literally lights up. She sits forward, her voice speeds up, her eyes are wet and sparkling. This light is in her chest, just above her chest bone, and she taps herself there as she talks – she tells me this is an anchor to allow her light to shine. She feels it deep within her – integral to who she is. “I’ve never really thought about it like this before. Yes, it’s all about the light.”

And to accompany her light is her inner dialogue – the voices of positive intent and inner criticism competing within her. “I recently did some voice dialogue work... and I learned that you can never get the critical inner voice to go away. But you can learn to drown it out by turning up the volume of the voice of positive intent.”

Again she is very clear about how she knows that she has made the right decision – in how she feels after having made it and in how brightly her light still shines.

Cheryl seems very clear about her sense of identity, she describes the aftermath of a marital separation as “deconstructing you” and making you “need to reconstruct yourself” from the ground up. She says she knew when she gave up smoking five months ago (something that she had taken up again on separation having not done it for twenty years) that she was who she wanted to be. And this comes across in how she speaks, moves, is. She is preoccupied with the higher level of spirituality and purpose.

Cheryl's model is:

Assessing an upcoming situation/decision – V^{ic} , A^{ic} , K^i

Emotion builds in her chest (K^i)

She is aware of conflicting voices in her head (A^{id})

Via internal processing (A^{id} , K^i , V^{ic}) she reaches a point where she knows what she will do

She uses her bright light in her chest to outshine the negative voice (V^{ic} , K^i , A^{id})

She thinks about how those affected by her decision will feel – A^{id} , V^{ic}

She reaches a point of no return (K^i)

So Cheryl's model is somewhat different to Nigel and Mark's – but by then I was modeling something quite different. But there are commonalities; they all follow the process of:

Filtering information V^{ic} , A^{ic} , K^i > Assessing the risk A^{id} , K^i , V^{ic} , V^{ir} > Feeling it K^i > Doing it K^i , V^e

And in all three cases it is emotions they feel that both confirm to them the decisions/actions they should take, and that give them the knowledge of success afterwards.

Despite this being about independent decision-making and choices, there is a quality of selflessness in all three of the exemplars. They learn to know what they really want to do, based on their beliefs and who they are. This is also influenced by their sense of purpose. But the other people involved are firmly in their minds and form an integral part of the decision-making process. To quote Nelson Mandela: **“And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.”**

I play back Cheryl's model to her, as I perceive it, and as part of her feedback she tells me:

“I've really enjoyed putting all the pieces together – it's all much clearer to me now. My light is shining bright – can't you see it?”

I was bowled over by my time with Cheryl, and thought about how I could integrate it into a model that felt congruent for me:

Logical Levels

ENVIRONMENT

Environment is important to me and I am very affected by it. I am concerned with aesthetics in people and in things. Sometimes I am so concerned with these outward signs that they come at the cost of not valuing what really matters.

Choosing to be me is a way of getting down through the more superficial levels and daring to lay my true self bare.

BEHAVIOUR

My behaviour in the past has at times been self-destructive. I have been so keen to ride the rollercoaster and get the adrenalin kicks, that I haven't always looked after myself. My 'it' isn't about choosing to get off the rollercoaster – but it is about learning how best to ride it. It is also about being open to letting other people in – and knowing how to do this appropriately.

CAPABILITIES

I have many capabilities and talents, yet I have sometimes been more preoccupied with worrying about what I don't know rather than celebrating that which I do. My increasing trust in myself tells me that sometimes it really is OK not to know. And I have a growing confidence in the fact that "We have within us all the resources we ever need". When I am put to the test, things work out.

BELIEFS & VALUES

I believe in doing the best that I can – for myself and for others. I believe there is a solution to every problem. I believe in hopes and in dreams. I believe in a future full of opportunities. I believe that we have choices and options. I believe that I can reach for the sky. I believe in looking, feeling and (sometimes being!) good. I believe in family. I believe in myself.

IDENTITY

I am a woman. I am a mother. I run my own business. I am a bright light. I am enough.

PURPOSE

To learn to shine my light, and to become a model of shining it. To care for my children and let them grow up - independent and proud of who they are. To be open to what life has to offer, and to the bright lights of others. To make a difference in any way I can.

Shining The Light

Now I am learning to create a state where my light shines strongly; when I achieve the state it feels like this:

I am not afraid to be alone. I give myself time and space to know myself. I accept that I am on a journey, where the destination is not just around the corner but I

know that I will reach it one day. I celebrate the good things I do and learn from my mistakes. I believe in myself and trust my intuition. I take care of myself so that I can take care of others and I am open to their lights shining brightly too. It is as if I have always had this light, but it has been rewired and shines more brightly and reliably than before.

I listen to myself, and my inner critic doesn't take control of my decisions. I amplify my voice of positive intent, bathing it in light and dazzling everything around it. The light is my head, in my heart and in my belly. I am warm and I am glowing. Everyone around me can see it and feel it. There is nothing to fear. And I hear a voice inside congratulating and loving me – for where I have been, for where I am, and for where I am going. And I know in my gut that I have made the right choice.

And now...

“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when adults are afraid of the light.” *Plato*

The metaphor of rollercoaster-riding has been with me through much of the last year. I have at worst struggled just being – being all the things that I am; being me. But at best, I have learned how to fly – soaring high in the sky, taking off and landing at will. I have had a feeling not only that I am on the rollercoaster, but that it is where I want to be. On the rollercoaster the wind is in my hair; I am alive; I can feel the butterflies. And for every stomach-churning descent, there is an exhilarating high. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Dolly Parton may have summed it up when she said: **“The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain.”** I have put up with the rain – I have even come to love feeling the rain on my skin. After all, rain makes things grow – brings them back to life. But now I have a choice as I stand in the rain. When the dark, grey clouds gather around me, I can shine my light. Because it is mine, and I can carry it with me, inside me, wherever I go.

Nelson Mandela: "The most difficult thing to change is not the world, but to change yourself."

Tom Brokaw: "It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference."

Kevin Welsh: "There'll be two dates on your tombstone, and your friends will read 'em. But all that's gonna matter is that little dash between 'em."

Anita Roddick: "To succeed you have to believe in something with such a passion that it becomes a reality."

Oscar Wilde: "A map that does not include Utopia is not even worth looking at."

Lewis Carole from "Through The Looking Glass": "Alice laughed, "There's no use trying," she said: "Once can't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen... "Why sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Professor Dumbledore to Harry Potter in Harry Potter & The Chamber of Secrets: "It is in our choices, Harry, that we show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."

George Elliott: "It is never too late to be what you might have been."