

My Modelling Project

For some time now I have been really concerned about presenting in front of large groups. I am happy to talk to people, informally and on a one-to-one basis, to tell stories, to entertain, and to crack jokes. However, get more than 10 people in a room and make it a little more formal (say an NLP training) and I fall to pieces. I feel sick, I sweat (nice!) and I can't stop self-talking. There is an incessant little voice in my head that repeats back exactly what I'm planning to say. Over and over again. Each time it repeats I feel more nervous, until it gets to point when I feel I may actually be sick or die. Seriously, I know this may seem extreme, but Hayley (My fiancé) used clean questions, to explore my fear of presenting. After getting down to the deeper structure, I realised that I had a belief that presenting equalled death. I feel a bit silly writing this, but by making myself laugh at it, I can start to deal with it. My modelling project is a perfect opportunity to find a better strategy for presenting.

Well, now seems like the perfect time to deal with this! For me, if I could get only one thing out of the course in India, it would be to leave and to feel comfortable presenting. I think as well there is added pressure in my eyes, because I don't want to let other people down who are counting on me to be an amazing presenter.

So my real mission, over the next few weeks and months.....

To become an amazing presenter

Before I do this, I needed to try and figure out exactly what this means to me. When I first started this project, I felt I knew for sure. To be an amazing presenter, I needed to get into a hyper active and larger-than-life state. If I could do this, I would be great!

I think back to my NLP practitioner course and I remember what I was like before my metaphor. I was a wreck!! I felt sick to the stomach, hot in the face, I kept going over exactly what I was going to say, how I was going to open, so much so, that I couldn't sleep the night before. I kept building up the presentation in my head, making it bigger than what it was, until eventually it had metamorphosed into this monstrous thing. I then began to question my ability. How could I ever be a successful NLP trainer if I turned into a wreck every time I had to speak in front of people? I decided I had to deal with it.

So, I had a firm belief that I needed to become someone else in order to present well. So I got myself fired up, pumped up and out I went to give my performance. It all went well in the end, and once it was done a sense of relief washed over me. But how could I avoid this in the future and what could I do differently?

Again in India, this pattern of anxiety, stress and fear re-emerged when I had to do a presentation with Spencer. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat and felt sick to the

stomach. What kind of NLP trainer would I be if I couldn't even manage my own state?

Therefore, my IT presented itself in its hideous form. If I could master this 'IT' my life would dramatically improve. My IT was therefore to be an excellent presenter whilst being myself! How amazing it would be to achieve this!

My Models of Excellence

There are lots of people who are excellent trainers. However, I was particularly interested in modelling those who were able to deliver training whilst keeping true to themselves:

- Hayley Williams
- Barbara Boulton (My Line Manager)
- Toby McCartney

I chose each of these people as I saw something different in each one of them that I could model. For me, it was like taking the 'choice cuts of meat' and having the best stew! Yummy!

Hayley Williams

I see Hayley week in, week out teaching dance, giving herself to her classes. Yet, she is completely at ease and herself up there. Making people feel relaxed, having little jokes and making the whole process fun. The way Hayley is at complete ease, is something I want to learn more about.

Barbara Boulton

Barbara absolutely loves training. She really gets a buzz out of it and she is always her normal, jokey, lively self whilst doing it. When I modelled her I found it quite surprising that she takes so much enjoyment from presenting! Something definitely worth modelling!

Toby McCartney

Toby trained me up to be an NLP Practitioner and I have always loved his training style. It's relaxed and approachable, yet authoritative. I always feel he is being himself, yet there is an air of professionalism which gives whatever he says more power. This would be wonderful to model!

Time Out – Reflecting on my choices

Having just written out the qualities my models of excellence bring to training, I realise what I feel is important when training people. The idea that the audience should enjoy it and have fun is key. I couldn't think of anything worse than people sitting there, listening to me and trying not to fall asleep or finding all that I say boring. I want people to love the training I deliver. So this will be built into my goals for my IT.

Hayley Williams – The Interview

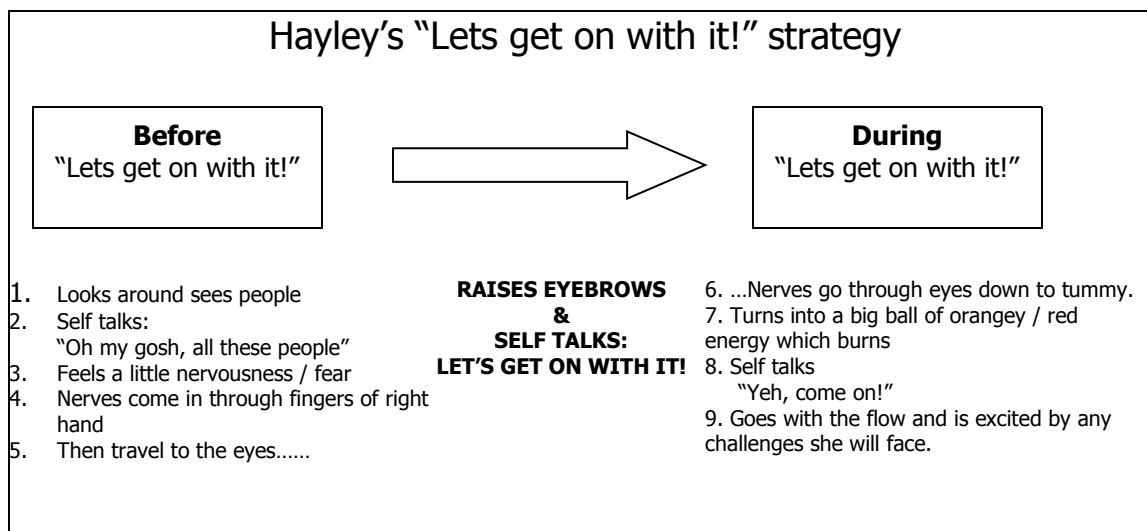
I specifically wanted to understand what it was like for Hayley when she was teaching dance, so I asked her to go back to a time when she was last teaching.

She explained that she was aware of everyone in the room, but not individuals, just groups of people. Her physiology started to shift a little, she was sitting up a little straighter and there was a “glint” in her eye. Hayley then went on to say that maybe she wasn’t aware of everyone, but she knew where the perimeter of the room was, where people started and ended, the space they were occupying. Her position, she explained, was vital, she had to be at the front of the class in the centre, as she believed that was the best place for people to learn from her (if they couldn’t see her, they couldn’t learn from her!).

Hayley described herself as “Very focussed”, “Very Sure” and she had a kind of “Let’s get on with it!” attitude. I asked her what “Very Sure” was like to her? She told me that it was like “definite, assertive and confident”. At this point Hayley’s voice had changed a little. It was a little louder, more authoritative. She then went on to say that it was important to her, that there was a mix of authority and fun. I asked her how this balance was achieved? Hayley stated:

“I’m not always authoritative, just when I need to be. But in these moments I balance it with fun and silliness. This may be just by smiling, it may be hand movements, or it may be moving around and not just standing there. It’s like a ‘Woohoo!’ kind of thing. My goal is to put everyone at ease and to impart knowledge to them in a way that people can take on board. It’s me up there, but it’s also like acting a role. I am what I have to be in order to help them learn.”

By this point, Hayley’s physiology had changed dramatically. She was sitting upright, her eyes were lit up, she was looking up into visual, seeing pictures of the class in her mind and hearing the music. I then went on to examine the “Let’s get on with it” she had previously mentioned. She explained that just before she entered this state, she felt a little nervous, then somehow this “nervous” state changed. I wanted to get specific about how this happened.



It was interesting for Hayley as she never realised she did these things. The raising of the eyebrows was particularly amusing for her, as it became apparent that this was a key part of the process. It triggered a release of the nervous energy and initiated the "Lets get on with it!".

Hayley has a firm belief that the people she is training want to listen to her and will think all that she says is interesting, otherwise why would they be there? This is an amazing belief to have and I am definitely adding this into my own model.

My experience and learning from the interview...

After speaking with Hayley, I am excited to try some of the new strategies. I particularly like the "Let's get on with it!" attitude, as I find it quite amusing! I can also really see this working for me. The fact that it makes me smile means it relaxes me and puts me in a better state to start with. Another important learning is that I can be myself and someone else at the same time. Hayley places her trainer hat on and also wears her "Hayley Hat". She is still herself with a little extra authority. She is also flexible enough to be whatever she needs to be, to best facilitate learning. This flexibility is also something I will take on when formulating my own model.

Hayley's Strategy:

1. See the group, notice perimeter – where people start and finish.
2. Slight nervous feeling moves to Big ball of energy (this happens by eyebrow lift and "Lets get on with it!")
3. Very focussed, very sure attitude
4. Balance out authority with fun (Movement, voice)
5. Be what you have to be to facilitate learning.

Barbara Boulton – The Interview

Barbara is sat forward, attentive and ready to answer my questions as best she can. She has an eager to please attitude which I often see in her trainings. She also has a storey-teller approach to training, weaving in little tales which makes you feel like you are sitting round a camp fire.

I asked Barbara to imagine herself in a training situation, she closes her eyes and I can see her associating back into a different time. She then opens them and they look a little teary. She says that before she goes out to present there is a real mix of emotions as she works in the drugs field and there are millions of pounds of funding at stake if people don't listen and act on what she says. Barbara explains how she experiences fear, sympathy and excitement all before she trains. I find it interesting that someone as competent as Barbara can also experience such emotions. It makes me believe that if this is a natural part of her experience, that I too may be able to turn around my emotions and perform as well as she does.

I ask Barbara how she copes with such hostile people and how she manages to turn her emotions around. She tells me that she sincerely believes that they are all doing the best they can with what they have at that moment (Barbara has done her NLP practitioner course). This makes me question what presuppositions I have in place before I go onto present.

The process:

Just prior to Barbara starting to train, she takes the fear and the sympathy for her audience, and pushes it back behind her, physically she must shrug the fear off. It is then no longer a consideration and she can get on with presenting. She also knows that she must bounce off any stress that they fire at her and as she starts to present she goes into what she calls a "funny" state. She couldn't quite describe in words what this state was. Her hands moved into her chest and again she gets a look in her eye; she looks as though she may cry. It is important to note that Barbara explains that these tears are not tears of sadness but expressed as tears of passion.

Sympathy with authority

Barbara then goes on to explain that she answers questions with sympathy but authority. Her voice tone changes to be a little sterner and she firmly believes in what she is communicating. Barbara holds a solid belief that her teaching will improve lives and make things better for those she is training. She goes on to state passionately that she truly believes in her job and wants to make a real difference. Again at this point she seems to get a little choked up. I point out that her eyes look a little defocused and watery, does she realise this? She acknowledges my comments and goes on to recount the story of a six year old girl who was sold to a sex ring in Northern Ireland. Barbara met the girl, 20 years later, dying of HIV, a shell of a human being. The mother had committed suicide some years earlier out of guilt for selling her daughter. This experience had stayed with Barbara and instilled a real passion that she was making a difference in her job. By training these people effectively, they would get their jobs done, which would mean they would get more funding, and people like the girl's mother would never be in a position where they were forced to sell their own flesh and blood.

Passion is Key!

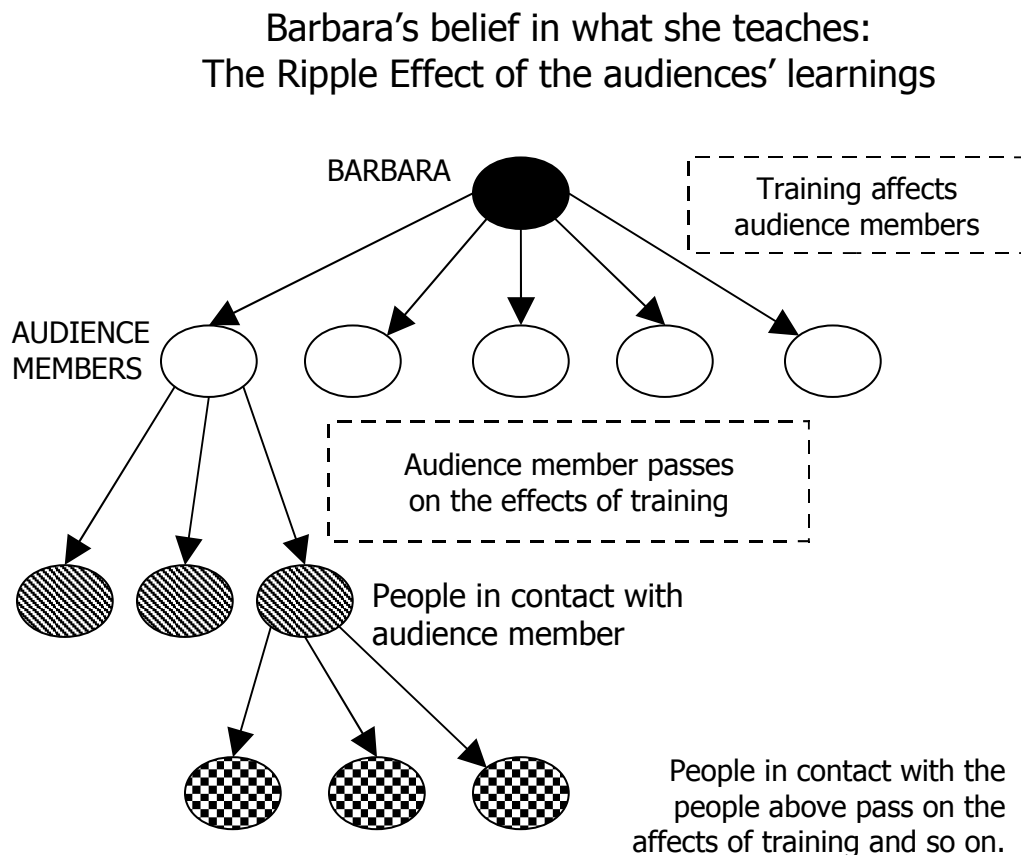
This passion was a key driver in what made Barbara an excellent presenter. She went on to explain that it was the belief that she could help people that drove her on in her work. For Barbara, this belief was like "just knowing" that what she was saying would make a difference. This belief was a solid, round, hard essence in her stomach. Just like as true as the sun coming up tomorrow. She explained how she just felt it in her bones. Barbara held the belief that what she was teaching would benefit her audience and that they would really gain from what she was offering.

Finally, she would feel excitement and a buzz whilst on stage that started in her chest and then travelled out through her shoulders, making her stand taller. Barbara explained how this buzz was like a white light inside her, that spread out as she spoke to her audience.

Key Learnings

Barbara's approach to training was very different to Hayley's and I was surprised by the amount of passion she felt – so was she! She spoke often about the people she was training and I had to keep bringing her back to look internally at what was going on for her. Her key focus was the audience and the belief that what she was saying would truly help them and ultimately, anyone they came into contact with.

I thought about this for some time, and in my mind could recognise a real ripple effect taking place. I decided that the best way to articulate this effect was in a diagram. (please see below)



It surprised Barbara the amount of passion that came up and the tears. It had been a while since she had thought about her work with passion, she had just been plodding along. She explained how she started experiencing the excited buzz of presenting, even as we spoke. To the point where she wanted to go for a brisk walk to get rid of it! This highlighted the kind of energy that I needed to replicate, when I was planning to present. This was a kind of energy that really got you going. To help me understand this kind of energy, I thought about how excited I feel when I am going for a swim, just prior to swimming and how good I feel after.

Barbara told me that the next time she presents, she is going to get even more enjoyment from the process, now that she understands it better. "It is like you have rekindled my spirit in presenting" she laughed and told me.

Barbara was also a little shook up that perhaps she doesn't focus on herself as much as she should, instead always thinking of others, sometimes to the detriment of her own personal relationships. She made a pledge to start to look after herself more, to try to redress the balance between giving to others and taking a little back. In assisting Barbara to recognise this, I also gained some insight. I believe that in order to provide the audience with learnings, you need to be comfortable in your own skin. When you are in front of people you have to be an example of excellence, if I can master this fear of mine, I will be doing this every time I present.

Barbara's Strategy

1. Underlying belief in what she teaches will benefit (Solid, round, hard, in stomach)
2. Fear, Sympathy, excitement.
3. Shrug the fear and sympathy off (literally), push it back behind.
4. Sympathy and authority – voice tone, conviction when speaking.
5. Excitement / buzz feeling – start in chest, white light, spreads out as talks.
6. Stands taller as she talks.

Toby McCartney

I always find speaking and spending time with Toby a pleasure. He is so passionate and driven and this is definitely infectious! Toby's strategy for training was a real mixed bag of goodies! And I found that there was much I could learn and use in my own model – much of it felt like it would fit well with my map and would definitely work for me.

The Interview

I asked Toby to go back to a time when he last presented / trained a large group and to just go through what happened for him before, during and after. It became clear right from the start that he had very definite steps and processes in place. He started by explaining that he always had to "know his stuff". If Toby was presenting something new, he would always go through what he was going to say a few times just before he went out to present. Just to cement it in his mind. It seemed to me that this was the start of his pattern that had very definitely stages; this was stage one.

The next step for Toby, would be to have his circle of excellence anchored to a spot on the stage. His circle was filled with "relaxed confidence" and he knew once he stepped into it he would feel great. For the first five words or so, there was a little anticipation and a degree of excitement. He compared this to the feeling you get before playing a round of golf with a group of friends ("I'm a little competitive",

Toby admitted). For me that meant it was Ok to feel a little nervous, some nervous energy was good, and it also meant you were looking forward to proving yourself.

After the first five words were done, Toby then went into a completely relaxed state (you could see it on his face in the interview – he really did love training and presenting), he called it “owning the stage”. At this point he felt that no matter what happened, it would be fine. He used the following metaphor to describe it.

“It’s like a relaxed excitement. Like jumping out of a plane. The most frightening part is the first five seconds that you are free falling, then you think ‘well I’m done it now, I may as well enjoy it!’. Then you open your parachute and you’re floating down to Earth. Everything is silent and still, completely relaxed.”

Once the presentation is over (or in his words “After I have landed safely”), another type of excitement starts, in the pit of Toby’s stomach, and he knows it’s all gone well. He then wants to get out there and start asking people what they thought. This was strange for me. In the past I wanted to get the training done and get away! It was almost like I was scared to hear what people thought, like they would say “Gosh that was rubbish!”. So to implement this part of the strategy would definitely take some work. However, I will put this part in my final model because I want to be able to experience this (and I will experience it!).

It was really interesting speaking to Toby. This is obviously a strategy that he has perfected over time. He even has a little loop installed; if after five words he feels it isn’t going so well (i.e. the nervousness is still there) he reruns the strategy from his circle of excellence (see below for breakdown of strategy).

It was really interesting from my perspective to hear such a clearly defined strategy (I didn’t expect anything less from the “Perfect” man). Toby also stated that when he was much younger he didn’t feel as confident with presenting as he does now. His model obviously works and therefore will do wonders for mine!

Toby’s model

1. Know your stuff – go over what you are saying and have it fresh in your mind beforehand
2. Circle of excellence and spatial anchors
3. Little anticipation / nervousness, excitement
4. After five words – completely relaxed yet excited (like jumping out of an aeroplane)
 - a. If after five words - not going well, loopback to step 2
 - b. If anticipation disappears, go to step 5
5. Know you have done well – another type of excitement
6. Can’t wait to get responses, feels good, see what people thought
7. After: Feel like you have landed safely, if didn’t go well, rerun in head and work out where it went wrong.

Goals for the Project

I wanted to set some measurable goals for my modelling project.

- 1) For people to actively come back to me after a training and make positive comments on my style or what they learnt.
- 2) For my state before a training to be normal and not a nervous wreck.
- 3) For me to find pleasure and enjoyment in training others.
- 4) To strengthen my belief that what I have to offer in my trainings has worth – on a scale of 1-10 it is currently a 3, I want it to be a 10!

My Own Model

From speaking to all my models of excellence, I have realised that although some strategies they run share similar aspects, no two are alike! This is because each person has their own map of the world, they do things their own way. Understanding this is a key part of the modelling process. It is important to realise that what works so well for them, may not work so well for me. For this reason I examined their strategies, and tried on parts to see if they would fit me.

Step one in trying on their strategies, was to sit down, close my eyes, imagine myself in a training context and then run their strategy. I quickly found that some parts did feel alien and I know I would not be able to use that. I also discovered that my questioning technique improved over time and I didn't always ask exactly the right questions at the start! It's a good learning for me, as it just shows that to get good at something, you just have to go for it and start doing it! I was doing the best I could with the resources I had at the time. It is a good example of learning by experience.

After testing my model a few times, I have come up with a final model to help me develop my IT – to train as myself. It may seem a simple concept to train as myself, but it wasn't for me. I also see the potential issues, around borrowing someone else's strategy to help me train as myself. There is danger that I would simply mimic what they do and lose myself in the process. However, I feel I have only integrated parts of other people's models that feel right for me.

My Model

1. Prepare before hand – “know my stuff”
2. Before presenting say “What I have to say to people is of worth and has value!”
3. Belief that I am imparting knowledge that will have a ripple effect.
4. Lets get on with it – jump out of plane!
5. Feel excitement and little nervous energy – kind of a buzz!
6. Circle of excellence – for me relaxed confidence is perfect for presenting.
7. See the group – notice perimeter
8. Be sure, focussed – own the stage!
9. Make it fun! Balance fun and Authority – voice tone.
10. Be spontaneous to facilitate learning – be open to it!
11. Ask people what they thought, feel a new type of excitement at this.

For me, the model feels as though it fits. Knowing my stuff has always been important to me, and I do take into account that at times not knowing can be good also. However, knowing my stuff helps me believe that what I have to teach has worth and value, in my map these two go hand in hand and fit well. They reinforce one another.

Presuppositions that I have in place:

Talking with my models of excellence highlighted what firm beliefs they all have in place.

- I have all the resources I need
- Flexibility is key! The more flexible the communication, the more successful a presenter I will be
- Spontaneously reacting to training situations provides a better chance of learning
- There is no failure only feedback
- Respecting other peoples maps!

A big challenge!

Getting feedback from audiences after a presentation was a real challenge! At first it felt very uncomfortable, but by the third big presentation, I felt much more confident in asking them what they thought. This stems from my lack of confidence in my own ability to present well, and instead of asking for feedback, in the past I have just buried my head in the sand. I realise now the only way to get better was to actively seek feedback. There is no failure – only feedback! And from the comments I got, the feedback was surprisingly encouraging! Asking for feedback got easier, as my belief in what I was teaching got stronger.

Feedback & Key Learnings

I have implemented my model with an amazing amount of success over the past few months. On 3 occasions I have had to speak to large groups of people. The first of which was 100 strong and the last 250! Before I would have been a wreck, but using my new strategy, I was able to stand up, speak confidently and really make a difference! It's completely shifted the way I look at things and has really got rid of so many worries that I had before the training in India. I'm generally so confident in everyday life and this was really holding me back, I'm glad to say that it isn't anymore! I think the biggest shock for me, was that I didn't have to become someone else to train well. I just needed to be me. I only used things that felt "right" from other people's models so I could keep the essence of myself. I now realise that I have all the resources in me and I truly believe that if you recognise something in others, you do have it in yourself. That has really stuck with me. It is freeing as it makes me think, "actually, if I see Toby is an amazing presenter, that means I am too!". Woohoo!

After my first big training session, I had a number of people come up and say thank you and that the session was excellent. Also, my manager stated she had seen a noticeable improvement in my presentation skills. This kind of blew me away, it was a real shock. I know it shouldn't have been, but to see it actually working is amazing. I remember smiling from cheek to cheek and thinking "Sue and Spencer will be really proud!".

My problems with state before the training have gone. I feel much more in control of the way I act. No more sickness, no more sweaty palms. This is due to the fact that *I actually enjoy training people now!* It is also due to the fact that I feel that people actually want to hear what I'm saying and I have something to say that's worth listening to! There is no feeling of dread accompanying a training session. It's just another thing I can do now!

Overall learnings from India & My project

The depth of knowledge I gained from India was vast, and to write down every learning would take another 20 pages! So, I'll only continue with a couple more of the big ones.

The first of these is that *inappropriate jokes can detract from what you are saying.* This has really stuck with me. I have now implemented a filter system between my brain and mouth:

1. I check if a joke is needed / necessary to lighten the mood.
2. Would the room learn anything from it?
3. Will it detract from what has been said before?
4. Will it devalue what I have to say?

There is still a time and a place for jokes, but there are ways of making learning fun without devaluing what I am teaching or myself. A very valuable lesson learned.

Be a shining Example!

Knowing how to act appropriately, also ties in with the fact that every second you are up in front of people, you are setting an example, with everything you do. You are a role model and it is your duty to act as such. This also stuck with me from my experiences in India. In order to earn the respect of the audience, you need to be professional and appropriate at all times.

This is probably my most important learning, and it's my take home message from India. If I don't lead by example, if I don't practice what I preach, then I feel like a hypocrite.

My Biggest learning

I have learnt so much over the past few months, more than I ever thought I would and am still continuing to learn! I know now that it's OK to be me. I have always had a real problem with being who I am. I always thought I should be more; be more of a leader, more of a man, more of a deeper thinker, more of everything. Now I realise, that it's OK to be me. I suppose my metaphor would be this: A good kitchen is run by the head chef, but he also needs his Sous chef, kitchen porter, dish washer, etc. There is a place for me. I suppose this clicked when I was watching Sue and Spencer on the training. Sue does what she does and Spencer does what he does. They both act as a support for each other and one wouldn't work so well without the other. I have always known that Hayley is the No.1 and I'm her No.2. I am her support structure. We need each other. And now, I'm fine with that! I'm happy to be her support structure. Like clockwork we tick along and get the job done. A wonderful team! I have found my place and I am truly at one with it.

Mike Hall