



My cornet: A Willson Celebration and a really difficult piece!

# Carry on Regardless

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## Introduction

Have you ever wondered how performers bring their “A” game every time?

How they overcome mistakes and slip ups to continue to capture the emotions of the audience?

The idea for this project came from the word “consistency”.

### Consistency-

The quality of always behaving in the same way

How do top performers consistently give excellent performances? During the NLP programme the word “consistency” resonated with me, in a way that made me curious as to how I can be consistent in my playing, (What we do in one area we do in others, so how can I build consistency in other areas of my life?) That curiosity has led me to identify exemplars who regularly perform brilliantly, to model their excellence, to find out how they perform consistently.

This is, I recognise, pretty “Big Chunk. What is “It” that happens for top performers to have consistency of performance? As I started on writing up this project I realised that there are three things I was modelling

1. What happens with performers to enable them to bring that “A” game
2. What happens when a mistake occurs
3. How to receive feedback

For some context, I am a member of two brass bands. I am the principal cornet in both of them, which is the equivalent of the lead violinist in an orchestra. This also means I get to play lots of solos, and this is where my “It” comes in. What model can I follow to ensure my performance is consistently of the standard I know I can play it to?

One of the bands is a contesting band, the other is non contesting. (For a description of the difference please see Appendix as that provides more context).

Most performances I find myself able to play effectively and, so the feedback says, “move people to tears”... (in a good way!). And then there are some occasions when I find myself crippled by nerves and panic about the smallest of things and as a result the performance suffers.

It is a fact that anyone can play the notes – albeit with some it may be slowly, painfully or noisily. Great music performances tap into the musicality and draw out emotions in the audience. Great actors help the audience believe that they are that character, immersed totally into the present. How do they do that? How do they remain present in the performance if there is a mistake or slip? How can they transport their audience in their emotions, time and space!

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## Outcomes – how will you know when you have achieved this

- Every performance is as good as it can be based on previous experience
- You believe that you have “done enough”
- You are associated with the performance and totally present throughout.
- You know you can trust the process regardless of any mistakes.
- You will be able to carry when mistakes occur without worrying about that mistake
- You have self-belief that the performance will be good
- You are able to accept feedback and choose to learn from it.

I met with four exemplars on Zoom. Two are actors, (Victoria Pritchard and Kevin Cherry) two are top flight Brass Banders (Chris Turner, Mark Phillips). The modelling from these meetings are in the Appendix . They were all fabulous and generous with their time.

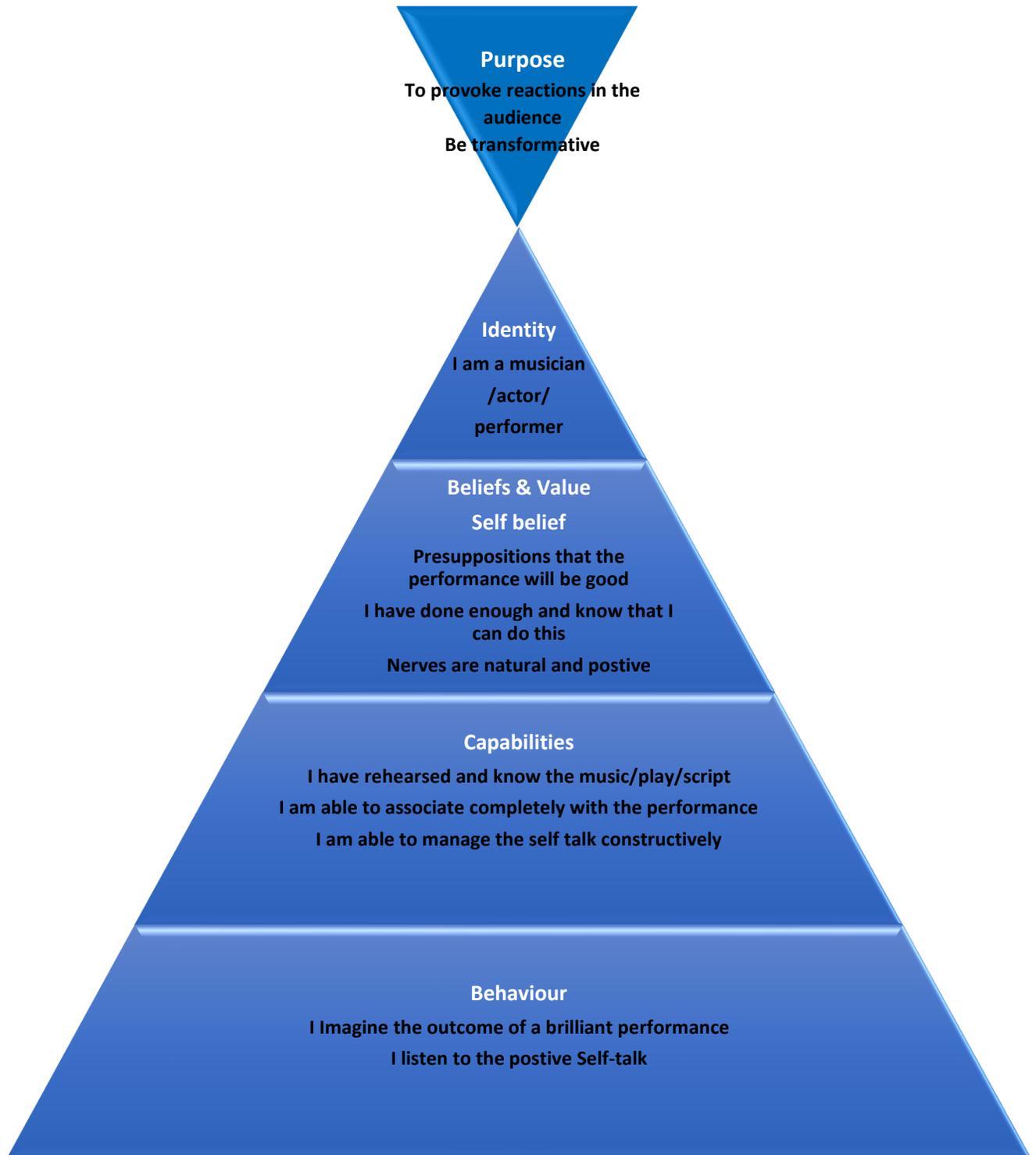
The similarities that emerge throughout the interviews are:

- They all had a clear outcome of a successful performance in their mind
- They disassociated from previous rehearsals and anything unrelated to the performance
- They completely associated themselves with the performance and their identity as a performer, remaining present even when there was a mistake. So much did they associate with the performance that for two of them they could not remember the performance or what they had done when they came off stage
- They all had a sense of Purpose. Their performance was transformative to the audience
- They trusted the process and no longer thought about the mechanics of the performance
- They used positive self-talk
- They trusted and believed that they had the support of their colleagues
- They used the relationship they had with the audience to give them focus
- They all knew themselves capable of playing the piece or performing the role.



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Common factors in the Neurological levels of Change



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## The Model

### Beliefs of Excellence in the model

- 🎵 The meaning of the communication is the effect
- 🎵 We have within us all the resources we ever need
- 🎵 There is no failure, only feedback
- 🎵 The person with the most flexibility in thinking and behaviour has the greatest influence
- 🎵 What we recognise in others mirrors the structures we hold within ourselves





## The Steps

### Coding

V-	Visual
A-	Auditory
K-	Kinaesthetic
I-	Internal
E-	External
C-	Construct (imagined)
R-	Remembered
D-	Digital (e.g. AID Self talk)

1. You are about to give a performance. Consider what your intention is for this performance? Is this intention adding to your sense of self? Consider the intention you wish to have for the audience. What do you wish to hear, see and feel from them? (AEC, VEC, KIC). What emotions are you wishing to invoke? (KEC) These intentions are the purpose of the performance. If there is no purpose reconsider your options to either develop the purpose or exit.
2. Consider the effect of the performance you wish to have on **yourself**. What do you wish to hear, see and feel? (AEC, VEC, KIC). Reflect on what you want to see or hear **from the audience** (AEC, VEC) This is your motivation.
3. You are The Performer. This is your "Identity". You know your part and have practiced it to perfection. Take a moment to reflect on the last great performance you did. What is there for you? Bring it into sharp focus (VER). Turn up the lights and make the image bright and colourful. What sounds are you hearing? (AER) Make your sound crisp and bright. What else are you noticing? How do you feel as you know it is good (KIR)? Where are you feeling it? Focus in onto that feeling wherever it is. Imprint this experience into your brain in full colour, sound and feeling. This "anchor" will help you to maintain your self belief.
4. As you stand in the wings listen to your positive self-talk. (AID). Hear the positive messages. Notice your body as you say, "I can do this". (AID, KI) Watch out for other positive signs. For example, are your shoulders back (K)? Are you standing taller? Is your breathing regular? Maintain the positive self -talk. You can do this. Whatever happens will be OK.
5. As you are about to start, become the performance (VI, KI) Embody the performance in this moment. Imagine the first note or word in your mind (AI,) Imagine the audience fading into the background, the colour fading to black and white, as you focus entirely on the performance. The sounds around you are disappearing into a gentle murmur. The performance is everything.
6. Perform exceptionally! Carry On Regardless.

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7. Listen carefully to any feedback Receive it graciously and gratefully. (AE) There is no failure only feedback and learning. (AID, KI, AE). The feedback is their perception. Ask questions to understand better. Take away that learning to consider how to make the next performance exceptional again.
  8. Do it all again next time!



### Does it work?

I first used the model during a music lesson. As I started to play negative thoughts trickled into my head about how I had not practiced, and the first two lines of music were not great. I took a deep breath, changed the self-talk to positive, reminded myself of the reasons I play and carried regardless.

As I associated with the music my playing improved so much that my teacher stopped me halfway to congratulate me on how well I was playing it. I found myself able to focus on the music and how I was playing it, rather than the notes I was playing. I was hearing the music! The negative self-talk was absent. I knew I could play the piece and I did...

The following week I was playing Last post on Remembrance Sunday. I had offered to play it. As I stood poised to play, I reflected on my purpose for doing it. It was because of the emotions that hearing the Last Post inspire in people; the memory of those who have given their lives and the connection between my playing and those listening. As I reflected, I knew that I owed it to that purpose to play exceptionally. I immersed myself in the notes and the emotions that brought the music to life. I hit every single note perfectly.

I also realise that this model can be used by me for any “performance”. For example, training, facilitating, having difficult conversations etc.

With this in mind I used it when I offered to run a session for my NLP cohort on my Top 10 tips for running virtual facilitation. The intention was to share the learning I have had over the last six or so months delivering and designing on line facilitated learning.

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The model worked well. I listened only to the positive self-talk saying, "I've got this". I did make mistakes and yet remain composed... they were incidental ... I was carrying on regardless. The self talk supported the association with the performance.

My self-talk remained positive throughout when I noticed it and I was able to accept feedback without protesting, deflecting or denying. It has provided me with great learning.

It WORKED FOR ME!

🎵 **If you are about to give a "performance" whether it be music, a presentation, a courageous conversation, anything... use this model and it will work for you too.** 🎵



### Teaching the model to others and the feedback from them

I went through the model with three people to see if it would work for others as it had for me. Two were from my NLP group so understand the NLP terms. One is a friend who regularly gives presentations to the Board. She found the terminology understandable and useable!

The model was adjusted to take into account the feedback from them, which resulted in simplifying the model as one of the steps was repetitive and took the user away from their positive state.

The feedback also made the words more neutral moving away from Playing the music which makes the model more relevant to any performance whether it is presentations, solos or acting.

Positive feedback included.

*"I could feel my confidence growing as we went through the model. I could absolutely do it!"*

*"I was able to hold onto the anchor and stay in a really good place"*

*"I was holding on to what I wanted, not what I didn't!" "I walked forward with the belief that I have this and whatever happens will be OK"*

*"I can picture exactly what will be"*

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I also sent the model to my cornet teacher who went through it as he was about to play a difficult piece. He said,

*"I could feel my whole focus on the musicality and the emotions of the performance. Everything else faded away"*



### What this model has done for me

When I first heard we were to do a modelling project and realised that this didn't mean building Warwick Castle in matchsticks, immediately the image of me playing at the Ironbridge Festival of Brass popped into my head. I was playing a solo that I had played at a previous concert to great feedback. And yet on this occasion I was crippled by nerves. I had tried deep breathing to ensure oxygenation and tried to focus on the notes. As I played the first notes I was horrified to hear a warble, which clearly signified I was nervous.

As I reflected on that performance I realised several things:

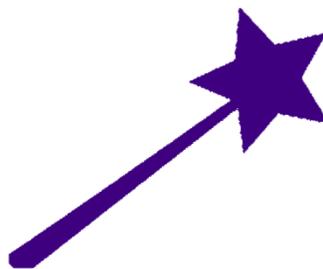
- 🎵 The audience was made up of Brass Band aficionados (Yes they do exist!) who knew the piece I was playing and would instantly tell if I had made a mistake and that was what was foremost in my mind.
- 🎵 And that previous statement showed how externally referenced I was! The more I felt "Judged" the more nervous I became. And the more the self-talk became negative.
- 🎵 I lacked self-belief and feared failure. That lack of self-belief and trust was holding me back in so many ways not just in when I performed with the band. The way you do one thing is often how you do everything!
- 🎵 For years I had hidden any talents if I didn't consider them to be exceptional, which had meant that I had not embraced who, or what I am. I had hidden or minimised to others my talents by deprecating any achievements I may have had. I had shrugged off compliments as "they are just saying that to be nice!" and had taken criticisms to heart as they reflect what I had been telling myself for years.
- 🎵 As Sue often says, "the way we do one thing, is the way we do everything." Going through the NLP programme I began to notice that I would say something and instantly say "that of course is my view and it may be wrong" or something similar. This is exactly what I have been doing to

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myself for a very long time. Even if I believed I was right, I was giving power to other people to doubt me.

**Since doing this project:**

- ♪ Undertaking this modelling project was initially to help me be more consistent in my playing regardless of the situation or context. It has turned into something far more than me as a cornet player. It has thrown light on how I am and will be in other areas of my life, including as a trainer, coach and facilitator. This model translates so well into any of the areas and Identities that I have.
- ♪ The model has enabled me to address the self-talk to ensure it is positive and embody the “performance” totally associating with it and the sense of Purpose that it is aligned to.
- ♪ My Values, My Identities and my Purpose have become clear. I had never thought of this before, so when someone asked me why I play in the band and ask for solos, the question generated reflections on the Neurological levels.
- ♪ My identity goes beyond being Annette and into being a cornet player, a trainer, a coach, a facilitator of learning. And the Purpose of those identities is to provide transformative experiences for others. By that I mean to tap into emotions either temporarily as in a musical performance, or in enabling a desire for change.
- ♪ It resonated with me when Sue Knight said that to be self-conscious is to be selfish. I can now accept my talents and share them with others consistently.
- ♪ I can now say “I am enough” and truly believe it.
  
- ♪ I have recognised that if I step up to who and what I am in order to align with that sense of Purpose.... that’s where the magic happens.



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## Appendix 1 What is a brass band!

There are two types of Brass band

A non-contesting band where the focus is on concerts and playing because you can

Contesting bands in the UK are divided into 5 sections, (a little like the football league) the Championship Section being the top, through First, second and third to the fourth section which is the last of the sections. Each year there are contests to determine which bands go up, which go down and which remain in the section. To progress up the sections the bands must be promoted through all the sections. They cannot go from fourth to Championship, again like football

I play in two bands, one non-contesting the other a contesting band in the third section.

A brass band has 25 players. The leader or the band is the Principal Cornet.

## Appendix 2

### The Exemplars

#### Meeting 1 -Christopher Turner

Chris Turner has played cornet with many of the top bands in the world including Black Dyke, the Cory Band, Brighouse & Rastrick and The Grimethorpe Band (best known for the film *Brassed Off*). He is now conductor of Llywdcoed Band who qualified for the Championship section finals for the first time ever in 2020. He has won all the major Brass Band trophies there are to win in the world! He is in great demand to support bands as a dep in competitions and has played in the Championship Finals at the Royal Albert Hall more times than he can remember.

He has also played trumpet for prestigious orchestras including The Halle, Liverpool Philharmonic and in New Zealand, the Auckland Philharmonic.

I am extremely lucky in that he also has a passion for teaching at all levels, from which I benefit. I have been having lessons from Chris for the last three years during which time my playing has improved exponentially.

He was more than willing to be modelled for my project. It was the interview that gave me the bulk of my model. This was unfortunately the one interview I didn't record.

I asked him to remember a time when he has come off stage knowing that he had done a good performance. He chose a time when he is 2<sup>nd</sup> man down (sits next to the Principal and supports them) with the Cory Band at the Royal Albert Hall. It is the British Open Championships and they are playing *Visions of Gerontius*. They are scheduled to play after Black Dyke (at that point World Champions).

I then asked him to take himself to the moment before the band goes on stage and asked the questions to model that moment. He is extremely nervous, which he feels in his chest, until he steps onto the stage and then "something" happens. This "something" is a feeling of certainty and positivity and is linked to the moment his foot touches the stage.

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## His Model

- He visualises the part and the end result. VIC, AIC
- He has self-belief in that he knows he can play the part and has done all the practice to make it good. He has all the resources he needs to play it. AID VIR, AIR
- He uses self-talk for example. "We are the best band" AID He feels 10 foot tall as a member of this band
- He knows the first note is the most important and hears it in his head, AIR
- When the first note goes well, the rest will.

## Chris' Filters

- Visual
- He thinks step by step
- He uses the smaller details
- Associated into that moment
- He uses un and looks for similarities
- He seeks external feedback

## His Beliefs

- We are the best
- Trust in the conductor explicitly
- He has all the resources he needs to play his part
- His band members support him whatever happens

## His Values

- Chris says playing in the band is more than a hobby, it is an essential part of his life
- He wants to do well for others as much as for himself.

Chris had another interview planned after this one. The journalist interviewing him next had sent some prepared questions and the interview had felt very stiff and formal He told me the following week that he had enjoyed the interview with me as it had given him the opportunity to remember a great occasion. The time had flown and he had some insights into what would help in the future too.

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## Meeting 2 – Mark Phillips

Mark Phillips became a member of the National Youth Orchestra and National Brass Band at 14, and at 15 the youngest ever principal horn player of the Gloucestershire Symphony Orchestra. He has played for many different brass bands during his career including Desford, a championship section band. He decided to turn his hand to conducting and has now conducted bands at all levels from 4<sup>th</sup> section to championship section.

He conducts both of the bands that I am currently a member of and has given me such support and encouragement along the way.

In the interview I ask him to remember a time when he had walked off stage knowing he had done a great performance. He chose a time when he was playing a notoriously difficult piece on the soprano cornet for a championship band as a guest.

I then ask to go back to a point which made the difference to his playing and ask “What is happening for you”?

He says he is a bag of nerves and terrified that he will split all the notes. All this he is feeling in his stomach which is wound tightly and in his chest. As he walks on stage the conductor talks to him and requests that he turn his chair out to the audience. This is out of Mark’s comfort zone as he prefers to turn it to the band so he cannot see the audience. He knows he can play the part as he had done so earlier at the rehearsal.

He is furious with the conductor which translates into self-talk “I will show him”! And yet it is the act of moving the chair outwards to face the audience that made the difference to Mark and his future management of nerves and performance.

From this event he has developed a strategy for dealing with nerves which has worked for him

### His Model

- Reflect on previous skilled performances (AIR, VIR, KIR)
- Self talk (AID) “I know I can do this”, “I will do this” “I have the ability” “Sod it, Just do it” “I’ll show them what I can do”
- He channels his nerves and visualises them becoming smaller (VI, KI)
- He engages eye contact to one person in the audience and plays solely for them (VE) The rest of the audience are focused out (VE)
- He associates with the performance and that individual
- Self -talk and belief that people respect you more for continuing regardless of mistakes (AID)

### His Filters

- He hears and thinks in sounds
- He prefers the bigger picture
- He prefers to go with the flow
- He moves towards a solution rather than remaining with the problem
- He matches with others

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- He looks inward for feedback and is able to take external feedback objectively

#### His Beliefs

- I am good enough
- A mistake is not a failure
- He has all the resources he needs
- The meaning of communication is the effect
- Everyone makes the best of the situation they find themselves in

#### His Purpose

- To make people feel something when he plays or conducts

### Meeting 3- Victoria Pritchard

Victoria has worked extensively in theatre, television and film appearing in Bad Girls, Emmerdale, Holby City and Holoaks and the RSC to name a few! She remembers coming to the end of an 18 month run at the RSC and knowing that the audience had paid as much to get in on that day as they had at the beginning, so her performance should be as good.

I asked her to remember a time when she had come off stage believing she had done a great job. She talks about a play in which there are only two actors. I ask her to take herself to the beginning before she goes on stage and ask what is happening for her.

In this particular play she is in the wings in a wrap preparing to go on stage naked.

#### Victoria's Model

- Reflects on how she is feeling (KI)
- Focuses her vision to a beam of light (VE)
- Notices her breathing (KI, AI)
- She silences any negative voices (AI)
- Associates wholly with the role (KI)
- Disassociates herself with Victoria and the words, movements. That has all been done in rehearsal. The performance now is everything (AID)
- Self-talk "I am this role" (KI, AID)

#### Beliefs

- The audience see Victoria only when she takes her bow
- The cast will support her even if a mistake occurs. The audience will not know there was a mistake
- We have the capability to cope in any situation
- There is no failure only feedback and learning
- It does not matter if the audience doesn't like it

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→ She knows she has done a good job

#### Filters

- She hears and sees thoughts and memories
- She prefers to be different
- She goes with the flow once in the performance, having understood and learnt the process.  
She trusts the process
- Prefers the bigger picture
- Present

### Meeting 4 – Kevin Cherry

Kevin was the first person I interviewed and I recognise it was more focused on the content. He enjoyed the interview, although said I should stop processing things so much!

Kevin is an actor, improviser and stand up comedian who is very experienced in NLP. He also does voice overs and performs at large conferences.

I asked him to pick a moment when he came off stage feeling satisfied he had done a good job, then again asked him to go back to before going on stage. I ask “What is happening for you”?

He chose a situation when he was performing at a big conference of 3-400 people

#### His model

- Rehearsing the words out loud in his head (AI)
- Visually “Drop the baggage of words” on the floor (VI) Tangible by its absence
- Disassociate from Kevin Cherry. Associate totally with the performance (KI)
- “There is nothing” except the performance which he forgets as soon as he comes off stage
- Connects with the audience with words (AE VE)

#### His Purpose

- To leave people with questions

#### His Beliefs

- We have within us all the resources we need
- The meaning of communication is the effect
- Every person is unique
- There is no failure only feedback
- Everything is transitory

#### His Filters

- Bigger picture
- Being different
- Future focused (the present is always transitory!)

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→ Internally referenced. He is comfortable in that people may not like him

My learning from this meeting was to not assume that anything happened before the event. More useful to model may have been to ask him to choose a time which had led to the success at that event. Or to have explored the moment when he felt the success, to uncover what had led to it.