

AGENTS OF CHANGE

NLP training at Newham College
Geoff Crook talks with Caitlin Collins

It's a tradition: the oldies have been complaining about the younger generation at least since Roman times. Nowadays newspapers of all political shades know that lurid depictions of the delinquency of the younger element, preferably illustrated by CCTV photos of sinister-looking hoodies, sell papers. Impressionable readers could be forgiven for believing that the streets of Britain's cities are as hazardous as the frontier towns of the Wild West.

Geoff Crook is keen not only to challenge this popular misperception of our youngsters, but also to do his part in helping young people to channel their energies in constructive ways. As Executive Director of the Business, Health and Cultural Studies faculty of Newham College of Further Education in North-East London, and with a background in sociology, social psychology and philosophy, he's well-placed to make a difference.

'People say that the Universe exists in Newham,' says Geoff; 'Something like 72 different languages are spoken in the community.' The college is huge, with 15,000 adult students, of whom 4500 are aged 16 – 18. Geoff has a management team of ten people in his faculty and has been using NLP based training to increase their effectiveness, with excellent results.

'We could do any amount of conventional briefings and reports, but with limited benefits in terms of improving personal effectiveness,' Geoff explains. 'We're fortunate in that Newham College has a proven track record of taking innovative

approaches and actively encourages new ideas. Also, since we have six terms a year, each of six weeks followed by a seventh week set aside for learning-review and assessment, we can get the whole team to be present for regular training sessions in those assessment weeks. We brought in Ralph Watson of Dynamic Communication to take us through a customised management training program based on NLP principles.



OUR MISSION

- To inspire and empower all staff to put learners first

OUR BELIEFS

- We are the best
- We believe in people
- We believe in ourselves and each other

Our key issue was to identify what each person needed to be doing to enable not only himself or herself, but also the other team-members, to work most effectively – and then train them in the skills and resources they needed to do that.'

A Management Manifesto

As part of their training, the team began exploring their values and beliefs and out of these exercises a manifesto evolved. 'We literally nailed it to the wall!' says Geoff. 'The manifesto sets out our mission, identity, values, beliefs, qualities, and behaviour. It's a public declaration, a way to make ourselves accountable and a means of measuring our performance. But while the manifesto is a useful statement of our intentions, the real outcomes of the training are apparent in the increased effectiveness of every member of our team.'

Measuring the Changes

Geoff cites examples of measurable improvements. 'Performance reviews can be tough for people,' he explains. 'And their feeling under pressure can lead to their not being upfront. We've noticed that since the training people are better able to acknowledge where they've been experiencing difficulties. It's become safer for people to share their concerns or to raise disagreements, and we've all become much better at giving constructive feedback. We've become more solution-focused. A blame culture is useless – it just drives people into fear and anxiety, which of course reduces their

OUR VALUES

OUR VALUES

- **Equity** – fairness to staff and students
- **Professionalism** – high standards
- **Integrity** – trustworthy
- **Transformation** – agents of change
- **Determination** – no compromise

OUR BEHAVIOUR

We will:

- **Respect others**
- **Act with integrity**
- **Put learners first**
- **Challenge poor standards**
- **Support others / each other**
- **Take responsibility**
- **Learn from mistakes**
- **Self-evaluate performance regularly**

OUR QUALITIES

- **Tenacity**
- **Intelligence**
- **Focus**
- **Professionalism**
- **Dedication**
- **Hard working**
- **Supportive**
- **Knowledgeable**
- **Adaptable and versatile**
- **Approachable**
- **Innovative**
- **Successful**

OUR IDENTITY

- **A dedicated, decisive and dynamic team**

effectiveness.'

Describing how the team are encouraged to get about and talk with staff and students, Geoff mentions how several individuals have become more self-sufficient and better able to take care of issues such as staff absenteeism; as they've gained the skills and resources they needed, so their confidence in their ability to manage has grown.

**Follow-up and future**

Due to the success of the NLP training program, Newham College are continuing with the training. 'We're about to start a follow-up series, and the Human Resources people, having seen how well our team are doing, are going to take part too,' says Geoff. 'We're also looking for opportunities to offer NLP training to the staff, but rather than offering a formal program we're planning to integrate it with our regular meetings. We're also taking NLP-based programs out to the students: Mark Walcott, of Mind and Body Consultants, has been offering courses in 'Power Thinking' for 16 – 18 year olds and we'll be extending this next year.'

Geoff, Ralph and Mark have further plans for the future. Newham is one of five Olympic boroughs so there's a lot of regeneration and development going on, and, as Geoff puts it: 'Regeneration is not just about buildings – it's about people. We're hoping to start offering community-based programs for young people, youth workers, and the voluntary sector, in line with current Government agendas on enhancing respect and citizenship in the community.'

That really is the key thing: taking the benefits out, via the students in the classroom, into their lives, and on into the

wider community. 'We're already doing this by raising the aspirations of young people. We can help them to improve their confidence and their employability. We've been getting some great guest speakers in, such as from the banking world and also the music industry – we've had some international stars speaking here. They're great role models, and not just in terms of inspiration but also in offering practical advice about what you have to do to work for success.'

As Geoff says: 'There are other knock-on effects of changing people's lives, for example their friends are now wanting to come to Newham College too! Contrary to what the popular media would have us believe, most youngsters are not hoodies! Young people want to do well, they want to get good jobs, have good family lives. If we can help them to develop their own integrity and the determination to find ways to realise their aspirations, then we're making a difference.' ●

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