

The Dolphin Approach to Achievement

The Strategy of the Dolphin takes an apparently simple aquatic metaphor and applies it to the world of business as it was in 1989. This simple metaphor, though, is merely a gateway into a more complex theory of how human performance develops and how that affects our interactions. From the world of carp, sharks and dolphins we are projected into a spiral that seeks to explain our drive to self-actualise and our ability to envision the future. As with many metaphors, Andy Coote contends, the simple soon leads to more complex ideas.



In their 1989 book, *The Strategy of the Dolphin*, Dudley Lynch and Paul L Kordis introduce us to two basic strategies, the Carp and the Shark. Neither strategy is ideal, they contend. Carp tend to gather together ineffectually until sharks arrive and eat them. So maybe, becoming a shark is the right strategy? Actually, there are drawbacks to being a shark, too. Dolphins choose the best of each strategy for the circumstances and by doing so can resist and outthink sharks just as dolphins in the marine environment have been known to ‘see off’ sharks. (see Box for ‘Testimonials’ of each type).

You might be excused for thinking that an out of print book written 20 years ago and with such a simple premise would be irrelevant in the early 21st century. Yet it is still talked about today and the basic ideas have been taken forward in a set of resources and tools for maximising the way we use our brains.

The book was aimed at business people working in big corporations with the intention of teaching them “an entirely different set of skills – the skills necessary in an era of unprecedented and revolutionary organisational change.” That change has continued until, in the early 21st century, we are seeing far more emphasis on entrepreneurship and smaller business.

Alan Rae of Howtodobusiness.com works with entrepreneurs and small businesses. “The metaphor is useful for recognising the behaviour

patterns of people you are dealing with. If they are self-oriented and focused on results then they are probably sharks. Carp are more group oriented and interested in working together. They are often found in religious or family oriented occupations, in areas dedicated to service and in the caring professions. Their motto is ‘unless we all win, we all lose’.”

Rae suggests that both these approaches have their limits. “Sharks often suffer from burnout and can become isolated. Carp can be ineffective and often don’t make things stick. Dolphins use both sides of their personality and both sides of their brain. The left side of the brain is oriented towards results and organisation and the right side towards patterns and relationships.” Maybe we need dolphins more now than we ever did. Especially as “they are interested expressing the self but not at the expense of everybody else around them.”

Michael Mallows has views about the relevance that it might have for those of us involved with NLP. “I like the metaphor. It is easy enough for almost anyone to grasp. I also like the fact the metaphor allows the energy field of water to be involved. You can map the Strategy of the Dolphin onto the Drama Triangle of Transactional Analysis (TA) and on to NLP meta programs within which I also call fundamental filters.”

The categories, whilst simple, do encompass the types of people that we meet in business and in life. We all know sharks and carp and we also know, and may fondly believe that we are, dolphins. As there were in

Dolphins choose the best of each strategy for the circumstances



Teaching them “an entirely different set of skills – the skills necessary in an era of unprecedented and revolutionary organisational change”

1989, there are also many Pseudo Enlightened Carps (PECS) around, too – looking for a greater force to provide abundance. I’m sure you’ve seen the messages that circulate offering a big something for virtually nothing. Mallows suggests that there may be PECS amongst NLP Practitioners and Master Practitioners. “I sometimes hear NLP trained people telling others ‘I’ve got no responsibility for what you feel’. If they fail to recognise that they are in a relationship and therefore that they are having an effect on the feelings of the other person, I would call this pseudo enlightened behaviour.”

Michael Mallows talked to me about how the metaphor might map to NLP approaches. “Sharks seem to be running metaprograms based on similarity or either/or (rather than both/and) choices. Their well formed outcomes are based on preserving status quo and though their strategies will differ, of course, they would seem to be out to ‘win’ at the expense of others. Carp are more likely to be operating away from or similarity programs and their strategies are likely to be based on self-sacrificing (give in or get out). Pseudo Enlightened Carp have more flexibility, a broader perspective and are probably good at calibrating and rapport building. The dolphin will use a variety of meta programs more flexibly - toward and away from, Both/and, Self and others, included. They have great rapport building skills.

Underlying the metaphor is the concept of ‘waves’ of human and economic development tied into the Graves Spiral. Dr Clare W Graves was a contemporary of Abraham Maslow and developed a spiral of human development. It has been developed further by Don Beck and

BASIC TYPES

Carp

“I am a carp and I believe in scarcity. Because of this belief, I don’t expect ever to do or have enough. So if I can’t escape from learning and responsibility by staying away from it, I usually sacrifice myself.”

Shark

“I am a shark and I believe in scarcity. Because of this belief, I intend to get as much as I can no matter what. First, I try to lick them, and if I don’t succeed, I try to join them.”

Dolphin

“I am a dolphin, and I believe in potential scarcity and potential abundance. Since I believe that we can have either – that it is our choice – and that we can learn to leverage what we have and utilise our resources elegantly, I make flexibility and doing more with less the cornerstones of how I create my world.”

Pseudo-enlightened Carp ‘Pec’

“I am a PEC, and I believe in a universe of absolute abundance. Therefore I believe in no true evil and no true losers – it’s just a matter of time before everyone wins. Because my primary need is healing, I’m not comfortable with retaliation or escape, so I simply can’t demonstrate love with power. This makes me impotent and my impotence makes me angry, but since maintaining an image of spirituality is important to me, I express my anger covertly. I believe that all we really need to do in life is learn to let go, to flow, to let ourselves be a channel for a greater force, and this is how I justify my essence.”

Source – The Strategy of the Dolphin, Dudley Lynch and Paul L Kordis (Hutchinson Business Books, 1989)

Christopher Cowan into Spiral Dynamics (SD). Lynch and Kordis acknowledge the support of Beck and Cowan in developing their own take on the spiral – a set of 7 ‘worldviews’ from Subsistence at level 1 to Choice-Seeker at level 7 and the possibility of further worldviews beyond that. (see Box – worldviews)

Rae comments, “I like Dudley Lynch’s approach (to the Graves Spiral) because it gives small business owners a working model to understand customer behaviour in a way that is rich in information that is easy enough to understand. We all operate from two or three behaviour patterns within the spiral and these are the default positions we adopt when we are not concentrating on our behaviours. It’s important to know how people we are dealing with behave so that we can talk to them and work with them in a way that is effective.”

Mallows agrees, “I see elements of explanation as to why people defend their own positions and ways of helping people to move away from those positions.” Both Mallows and Rae agree that part of the benefit also comes from knowing your own default positions. As Mallows sees it, “Most people are not self-aware and can’t self manage. Instead they find themselves self-medicating with alcohol and drugs. Knowing yourself better can lead to better relationships with others.”

Lynch and Kordis also explore the concept of what George Bush snr famously called ‘the vision thing’ and link that to the Worldviews. The further up the spiral a person has moved, the further ahead they tend to be able to see. They also suggest approaches to outcome development – “if you could envision things any way you want it – how would you →

Dolphins use both sides of their personality and both sides of their brain



→ have it?” – that have similarities to Well Formed Outcomes and the use of Timelines. – “You can take people on a walk into the future by coaxing them into the next ‘time horizon’” they say in the book. Rae adds a small caveat, “The CEO of a large company can take a view 20 to 30 years ahead whereas the MD of a smaller business may only be able to see two to three years ahead and maybe plan up to five. It is also a matter of scale and, in some small businesses, people don’t want to grow and are happy to stay where they are.”

As well as examining the differences between left and right brain approaches, Lynch and Kordis also suggest that front and rear brain preferences are also possible, an approach which appears to be part science, part metaphor. They use this to create a framework of four sectors over which they can map an individual’s preferences using a survey tool. Rae explains, “Using the Mindmaker tool, you can begin to see the behaviours and tendencies of each of the categories of people and how they will react to each other. The output of the tool also gives good pointers as to which skills and abilities to develop. These are models which help you discover and classify behaviour and give you some predictive value as to how people work together.”

Mallows also finds this approach useful, “The idea of the brain maps makes perfect sense to me. The idea that the frontal lobes represent looking forward into the future and the rear lobes of the brain are looking back towards childhood and history makes sense entirely.”

Copies of the book can be found, though they are rarer these days. My copy came from an Ebay shop and Michael Mallows found his in a Library sell off of withdrawn books. Dudley Lynch has a web presence called ‘Brain Me Up’ which contains a number of resources including Mindmaker and his blog. There are other books by Dudley Lynch which I have not, as yet, read. Wikipedia has a good entry for the Strategy of the Dolphin and for more reading about Clare Graves and his Spiral approach to human development.

The Strategy of the Dolphin is a product of its time and some of the more detailed ideas are now in need of an update. The metaphor, the Graves Spiral and the Brain mapping elements, however, still have applicability to current client work and would be an interesting and useful addition to a practitioners toolkit. As Mallows says, “I find that all of these types of models whether they be TA or NLP or other forms of therapeutic approach are simply ways of talking about what people do and can be very useful as a way of exploring and developing behaviours.” ●

Worldviews

In the second half of the book, Lynch and Kordis introduce “The Pool,” a model of seven steps in human development. Directly referencing the work of the late Dr. Clare W. Graves, an American psychologist who studied the evolution of thinking skills and emotional and spiritual maturity, “The Pool” also incorporate the ideas of brain function by right-left and front-back brain concepts, linking these responses and behaviours to evolution of the human mind levels.

The stages of evolution in “The Pool” are as follows:

Worldview 1: Existence.

Lynch and Kordis barely describe this level, saying it is seldom encountered in the adult world, except in the mentally ill or senile.

Worldview 2: The Kinsperson

Lives sacrificially for the good of the family, tribe, clan, or group to gain security

Worldview 3: The Loner,

Lives expressively for personal gratification and seeks personal mastery, as well as power and dominance over others.

Worldview 4: The Loyalist,

Lives sacrificially within clearly defined rules and expectations to obtain stability and confirmation of existing beliefs

Worldview 5: The Achiever,

Lives expressively for return on personal investments and to gain advancement of wealth and status

Worldview 6: The Involver,

Lives sacrificially for helping and participatory situations to gain personal and group learning and growth.

Worldview 7: The Choice-Seeker,

Lives expressively and experientially for high levels of freedom and personal choice, seeking stimulation and opportunities to enhance survival and quality of life for self and others.

Each world view is a natural evolution from the previous one, as the previous strategy fails to meet some essential human need. All represent a right or left-brain focus, evolving from basic self-preservation to expansive action on the world. An example of such a transition is the movement of an alcoholic (Loner) to Alcoholics Anonymous (Loyalist), because the Loner state offers no stability or building of sustaining life equity.

Adapted from Wikipedia entry ‘The Strategy of the Dolphin’ and from The Strategy of the Dolphin, Dudley Lynch and Paul L Kordis (Hutchinson Business Books, 1989)

Alan Rae specialises small company marketing. He has incorporated Dudley Lynch’s BrainMap and Graves Spiral tools into his marketing training courses and acts as distributor for these tools in the UK. More at www.howtodobusiness.co.uk

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