

The NLP Conference

reflecting a new maturity in NLP?

The Britannia International Hotel in London's Docklands was the venue on 12th, 13th and 14th November 2010 for the first NLP Conference 'under new management'. Andy Coote was there for all three days and found the event was better – and buzzier – than ever this year.

In February this year it was announced that Anglo American Books would be taking over the major task of organising the NLP Conference in London from Jo Hogg, who had organised it for the previous 25 years and had built it into a prestigious event that attracts major speakers from around the world.

David Bowman, MD of Anglo American, became a familiar figure during the three days of the Conference, making sure that the 2010 event was at least as good as previous years. As the final sessions began on Sunday afternoon, I caught up with him to get his assessment of this year's event and to talk about his biggest challenge for 2011. His objective, he told me was "to do what Jo Hogg did extremely well and to bring some extra pieces to the party that we could add with our contacts as publishers." He pronounced himself happy with the outcome. "The feedback I've had so far is that people felt cared for and appreciated and that there was a good atmosphere and buzz to the whole event." I can confirm that the feedback I received from speakers, exhibitors and delegates was equally positive.

The event began on Friday, with an all-day keynote session from Shelle Rose Charvet. It was my first experience of her presentation style though I've encountered her content in many places. She kept 170 delegates, a high proportion of them from major businesses, enthralled with her approach to managing the much more 'internally focused' customers of today and what she describes as 'customer outrage'. "To get people to go somewhere with you, you need to meet them where they are. You need to go to their bus stop. If the customer is angry, you need to get angry on their behalf"

In a new initiative, on the Friday in the same location, a parallel conference was taking place called 'Becoming a highly effective teacher with NLP'. David Bowman explained the origin of this all-day

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conference. "It has been based around two very successful books by Richard Churches and Roger Terry on NLP in teaching. We targeted about 100 delegates and have been highly delighted to have 150 turn up for the event." As I am (as yet) unable to master the skill of being in two places at the same time (anyone working on this?), I have to depend on feedback from those who did attend and that was universally positive. Many people felt involving NLP with education to be a positive way forward.

Saturday began with a morning session full of major presentations. Wyatt Woodsmall from INLPTA, Ian McDermott (ITS), Andrew Austin (Author of The Rainbow Machine) and Sue Knight (Author of NLP at Work) were all in action alongside sessions on healing from Arielle Essex and 'NLP and Neuroscience'. Some of the 400 delegates (including me) could have used Robbie Steinhouse's lunch time session, 'Brilliant Decision Making' much earlier to aid our choice making.

In a late addition to the programme, Frank Pucelik was also presenting in the morning session on Saturday. Frank, who now runs a successful business consultancy in the former Soviet Union (and works out of Odessa) also sponsors five treatment centres in the region supporting drug and alcohol abusers back into useful, addiction-free members of society. Frank, who was once described by John Grinder as the 'third man in NLP', was involved with Richard Bandler and John Grinder in the first 'Meta' work at UC Santa Cruz and has decided to return to the NLP community with a story to tell. He won many friends at the conference and an interview

with him will be carried in the Spring edition of Rapport. He will return to the UK with the NLP Academy in February, 2011.

In all there were 52 speaker sessions this year. David Bowman explained that they had 80 submissions and "some who had spoken in previous years were unable to get a slot. I wanted to make room for some speakers who were new to the conference such as Nick Kemp, Ian McGilchrist, David Hodgson and, of course, Frank Pucelik. Accommodating as many speakers as possible will be our biggest challenge for the 2011 conference."

The Grand Suite, scene of Shelle Rose Charvet's session on Friday became an exhibition hall, cloakroom, bookshop and refreshment room for Saturday and Sunday, providing a hub that brought delegates together between sessions. Exhibitors included (to those I've missed, apologies), International Speakers – Art Giser (Energetic NLP) and L. Michael Hall (Neuro Semantics); UK Training Schools – NLP Academy, Awaken, Lazarus Consultancy, PPD Learning, The Change Corporation; Representative bodies – The Professional Guild of NLP, ANLP and Service Providers like The Book Midwife (publishing), Smart Dreamers (Video) and Hypnoke (Audio Equipment).

As well as having a stand at the show, ANLP Managing Director, Karen Moxom was speaking in a lunchtime session on the Saturday on the topic of Coalition NLP and setting out her thoughts on working together to make NLP more accessible and client-friendly.

The Grand Suite was also the venue for evening drinks and networking on the Saturday evening. The room was full of animation and conversation as delegates and speakers mingled and shared insights and experiences from the day. Again the buzz was significant. David Bowman explained that the venue management had contributed to that atmosphere, "They have been very flexible,



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very attentive. They suggested turning down the lighting and putting tea lights on the tables. The guys serving drinks all had big smiles and seemed to be enjoying what they were doing. That also helps.”

There was a quieter feel to the day on Sunday but that perception was, for once, not reality. There were plenty of people about, 320 delegates in fact, and plenty of variety for them to experience. There were 23 sessions on Sunday, finishing at 6pm, so no lazy Sunday for the NLP Community! Topics were once again varied and included boundaries, well formed outcomes, Thought Pattern Management, working with fear, New Code NLP, Shakespeare, learning organisations, business leadership and modelling.

People I spoke with during the conference were all positive about the event, with Lisa Wake, of Awaken Consulting commenting on how the conference “reflected a new maturity in the NLP Community”. Some of the sessions were enjoyed more than others but on balance, the overall feeling was that the two days had been a worthwhile investment of both time and money, not to mention the intellectual and emotional investment required in the sessions.

There were few downsides. The main problem, experienced by several of the delegates I spoke to, was the difficulty of finding the Hotel on foot from the Tube and by car. Docklands can be confusing, especially as the water limits the access between Canary

Wharf and the hotel. Once there, however, the organisation, refreshments (it was a good move to provide a sandwich lunch for all delegates) and the quality of the sessions made up for that.

Planning for the 2011 Conference will begin, according to David Bowman, “in about a week. We will be contacting the speakers for their feedback and then starting the process again.” Numbers of speakers and of delegates are not far from the maximum that can be accommodated comfortably. “We could perhaps have 50 more delegates before there is pressure for space in some of the rooms. We’ll also be looking at what we can do to make getting here easier – and staying in the hotel more attractive.”

The Education day will also happen again next year. “I can see that could grow into its own two day conference in time”, David told me. Apart from that, the conference will continue with much the same mix of therapy and business focus.

In my view, it will also retain its value as the place where you can meet people of like mind and discuss NLP and its related topics, in a relaxed atmosphere, and where you can learn something new (usually several somethings) and where you can also meet the big names in NLP and talk to them over drinks. The NLP Conference is truly a place where the NLP Community in the UK and beyond comes to connect, learn and grow. ■

Comments from participants

The Conference reflected the really amazing thought processes and a new maturity within the NLP Community. I liked having the neuroscience component of NLP present this year.

Lisa Wake - Awaken Consulting

I’m here more to connect with people. The main room has got a good buzz in it, the exhibitors are connecting with each other. People are very open and exploring ideas not just in the sessions but in the breaks. The conference is highly congruent with NLP, well organised, well structured and with a good mix of people.

Michael Carroll - NLP Academy

Variety is what brings me here. Shelle is an excellent presenter and had a very short time to cover so much territory. I will take things away and apply them.

Maria - Delegate

Interesting new approaches are useful in my job and my daily life. Some enhancement and a strong ‘how not to do it’ lesson as well.

Becky Maude - Delegate

I’m here to gain profile. The room has been very well laid out and a lot of people are passing my desk. Lunch was in this room (Grand Suite) so people had a reason to be here. It is great being around so many like-minded people.

Jeremy Lazarus - The Lazarus Consultancy