

# MICHAEL COLGRASS INTERVIEW FOR STRATEGIE MAGAZINE

MILAN, February 2005

## WORKSHOP INTERVIEW

**SM** Your background is in music. How did you start giving personal development workshops?

**MC** In 1980, NLP developers Robert Dilts and David Gordon modeled me for creativity in a workshop in San Francisco. Dilts published a book showing the results of that modeling, called *Tools For Dreamers*. In 1983 John Grinder modeled me again for a week in Monterey. In the course of these contacts I developed an interest in NLP and became a trainer. Gradually I started to incorporate NLP and other techniques into my Creativity workshops, which I then called Excellence in Performance. NLP came about because co-founders John Grinder and Richard Bandler wanted to discover what goes right with someone who succeeds instead of what goes wrong when someone fails. They believed in modeling – picking people who were examples of success and extracting a teachable pattern from their behavior. This is really the performer's way of doing things so I felt right at home. In fact, I had been modeling people all my life and I here I was discovering a group of people making a study of the things I value most. So then I found myself with two professions – that of a composer writing symphonies and a trainer giving workshops in human development. The two things are not that different. A composer writes for performers and I was simply expanding the borders of what human performance can encompass.

**SM** What is your approach as a trainer?

**MC** I believe people have within them the knowledge I want to impart, but they may be unaware that they have it. So my job is to help them become aware of what they already know, to show them ways to discover this knowledge in themselves. This requires careful attention to each individual, because not everyone learns in the same way. I feel especially challenged by someone who seems to be *not getting it*, and like to custom-design a way for that individual to find in him/herself the understanding I know is there. My job is easier when I assume they already *know*, because then I don't really have to teach them, just open the door for them and encourage them to walk through it. My goal is to make myself unnecessary as soon as possible.

**SM** Who are these workshops for?

**MC** They are designed for anyone who performs a skill under pressure, with a deadline and often under observation. This would include all types of stage performers, public speakers, middle managers, salespeople, lawyers and politicians, and anyone whose work brings them into contact with the public. To my surprise however, many people outside this profile also seem to enjoy and learn from these workshops because the sessions are aimed at improving general human performance, like increasing confidence, dealing with stage fright, developing your memory, etc.

**SM** What do people learn in these sessions?

**MC** They learn how to visualize for one thing. Books and workshops on visualization have been around for a long time, but I find very few that teach people specific techniques on how to visualize and how to use it to their benefit. Although everyone visualizes by nature, many click

into another sensory mode when they try to visualize and that gets them off the track. Also I teach people how to use their bodies in order to communicate nonverbally, and give them easy ways to recall and utilize their past successes. And I show them linguistic techniques to help them think more clearly under pressure and to elicit a higher class of information from others. In general, participants learn how to tune what I call the human instrument, brain, body and spirit.

**SM** What exactly is an Excellence in Performance workshop?

**MC** These workshops teach techniques that improve human performance. Originally I called them Creativity Workshops, and included dance, music, mime and theater techniques for stage performers. Gradually I expanded these seminars to include people from other professions – salespeople, teachers, communicators, managers – because they expressed an interest in learning how to better improve their work performance.

**SM** What do you want to accomplish with the things you teach?

**MC** To help people perform at their best. I am a performer by nature, having been a professional musician since I was 12. I see everything we do in life as some form of performance. When we want to improve our performance, in business, in relationships, in social situations or with family and loved ones, we are really looking for ways to discover and utilize our resources, so we can do things better. One of the exercises I teach is called, “A New Now,” which frees you from your old ways and moves you into a new way of doing and thinking about things.

**SM** You wrote a book called *My Lessons With Kumi*. Who is Kumi and what is your book about?

**MC** Kumi is a fictitious character I created (me in disguise) who teaches the life skills to a man named Nick, who has lost his job, his marriage and his confidence. Step by step, we see how Nick regains his balance using, for example, many NLP principles, like anchoring, visualizing, triple position, the Meta Model, etc. I avoid the specialized NLP vocabulary, so the techniques can be more easily understood in the context of everyday life.

In an attempt to create a text that was something like a workshop, I made *My Lessons With Kumi* two books under one cover. The first is a narrative showing Nick, his girlfriend, his son and friends learning from Kumi. The second is Nick’s step-by-step notes on their sessions with Kumi, with simple exercises based on Kumi’s teachings that readers can easily understand and do themselves. Nick is a skeptic who questions Kumi every step of the way, making him prove the value of his teachings. In this way, I hope to anticipate and answer readers’ questions.

**SM** What do you actually do in your workshops?

**MC** Generally, I like a mix of professions. People learn new things by being in with professionals from other fields. My approach is to mix NLP with acting, mime, dance and performance preparation techniques I have devised from my background working with some of the best performers in the world. I teach exercises like how to walk on stage with confidence, how to control your emotions under pressure, how to tune your body before a high test situation, how to define and organize the parts of yourself that do your best work. And I like to show people how to move their bodies in a way that will help them communicate powerfully without words. I call these exercises things like, Crossing No Man's Land, Tuning the Human

Instrument, Taking Your Selves Out on a Date, Shopping Out your Stage Fright, Dancing Your Demon, etc.

**SM** Some people have criticized NLP, calling it manipulative and self-serving. What do you say to these people?

**MC** One of the problems with NLP is that it often attracts people who are not confident in their own powers and feel they need a weapon to give them power. NLP is that weapon for some. You will hear stories about how one person cleverly manipulated another person, and then sometimes see these techniques being taught in an NLP class to the delight of some overly ambitious participants. However, the wisest NLP students know that you cannot put a thought or a feeling in someone's head without that person's permission and cooperation. In other words, true manipulation is virtually impossible.

NLP was not designed to control people, but rather to understand them and to enrich their lives. NLP is a collection of models of people at their best, and of the best in people. Those high qualities and accomplishments of excellent people are what inspire us, and that is what we should pay attention to and remember, and what we should imitate in our behavior.

**SM** What might be the contribution of NLP to ethics?

**MC** NLP offers models of human excellence. Up until now we have modeled great people from the fields of business, psychology, sports and technology. Why not also create models of ethical behavior? We could study people known for their integrity, selflessness, and humility, and show how they are able to maintain these virtues in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds, and then teach these models in workshops and schools. How about analyzing the strength and character of a Nelson Mandela, or the tolerance and empathy of a Mother Teresa and teaching those qualities to a world that desperately needs to know how to get along better with itself?