

## AN NLP EXERCISE FROM MICHAEL COLGRASS' FIRST BOOK

The following is an excerpt from Michael Colgrass' book *My Lessons With Kumi - How I Learned To Perform With Confidence In Life And Work*. This book has many NLP exercises built into the story, with a manual at the end of each chapter explaining each exercise. This excerpt is from Chapter 3, called "Jack Nicholson On The Rocks - Create a whole gang of coaches." In this section, Kumi, the teacher, is showing Nick, a computer programmer from New York, an exercise on how to coach himself to gain objectivity in personal and public performance situations.

Kumi walked over to the big rock and stood there. "Here I am, addressing an audience" he said, gesticulating like he was talking to a large group. "Ladies and gentlemen, how are you today, I'm fine, blah, blah, blah' whatever you say in these talks."

I had to smile at his imitation of me giving a speech.

"Now I wonder how I look and how my voice sounds when I'm giving this speech. So I step over here." He walked over to the second rock. "From here I look back at rock one, where I'm talking. At this second rock, I am now the world's greatest coach, whoever I want to be. As the coach, I watch and listen critically to me speaking over there, and make my suggestions." Then he walked back to the first rock. "Now I am the speaker again and I try out what my coach advised." He mimicked a person moving and speaking with conspicuously improved control.

"You mean, you do all that yourself, go back and forth between being the speaker and the coach?"

"Right."

"Well, if that were possible I wouldn't need a live coach. I wouldn't need you, for example."

"After I've shown you something once you shouldn't need me. But later on, when you're working on your own, you may wish that your coach was present so you could ask questions and fine-tune your work. That's what this exercise does for you. However, sometimes you can coach yourself on something for the very first time just using your imagination."

"How?"

"I'll show you in a minute." He looked at the small rock. "Now I'm going to add a third position. I wonder what the audience thinks about my speech, so I go over here." He walked over to the small rock and assumed a stance of indifference. "Here I'm the man who just walked in off the street. As this observer, I may not know you or care about the subject you're talking about. I see you standing over there, giving a speech. How do you sound and look to me? By standing at this little rock you know how the listener is observing you, because, when standing here, you are him."

Then Kumi returned to the large rock. "Now you make any changes you think you need to keep this viewer's attention, turning to your coach for help when necessary." He glanced at the medium rock. "You go back and forth between all three rocks until you have seen this

performance from everyone's perspective and are satisfied that you have fixed whatever needs fixing."

He stepped away and gestured for me to do it. I thought for a moment and then walked over to the large rock and stood there, remembering my talk at the class reunion. I could hear my voice in my head.

"So when I graduated from college I thought I had it made. I got a good job, good salary, met the woman of my dreams, we got married and had a son. I had no idea that halfway into my career I'd be out of a job. So what did I learn from that? I'm not a philosopher, but that experience taught me that there is no real security in life, except inside yourself."

Kumi gave me a few minutes to establish this position. Reviewing my speech brought back the feelings I had when speaking that night. Kumi gestured toward the second rock and I stepped over and looked back at the first rock. I saw myself there with my suit and tie in front of the microphone, and the white tablecloth over the long table. I looked at Kumi.

"So choose the coach you want."

I was beginning to feel tired. I felt a little silly walking between rocks out in the wilderness and playing games with imaginary coaches. "I frankly don't see how this is going to change anything, Kumi."

"I believe you."

I didn't know how to answer that one, so I decided to just go through the exercise quickly and be done with it. Then I thought of my favorite actor, Jack Nicholson. What would he say about my talk? I like the easy-going, jocular manner he always seems to have. I took a chance that I might look silly and pretended I was him talking to me. "Aw, c'mon, Nick, for godsake let go and enjoy yourself." I even sounded like him! Acting as Nicholson I walked over to the first rock - to the imaginary me - and smoothed out my shoulders, which looked tense. "And smile a little bit, you're greeting your friends, having a good time."

I was really getting into it now as I walked back to the second rock, chewing imaginary gum and assuming Nicholson's jaunty gait. "Now, try it again, kid," I said, addressing me at the big rock in his offhand way. Now I saw myself speaking differently, with more of a casual manner. I nodded and returned to the first rock and, becoming me again, did what I'd just watched myself do. As myself, I let go of my shoulders, which I had been hunching without realizing it, and found myself speaking in a slightly deeper voice. It felt better.

"I call this a hologram," Kumi said, "because it's a mental image you can create and then step in and out of, correcting it as you go, making it any way you like. Kind of like a movie-maker editing a film."

## NICK'S NOTES

Nick makes notes on his work with Kumi at the end of each chapter. These notes become a handbook for the reader as well as for Nick.

### *Switching Positions*

K. showed me how to place three pieces of paper on the floor (since most people don't have rocks in their house) that represent the Performer, the Coach and the Observer and mark them 1, 2 and 3.

Self-1: The Performer. I step into this first position and rehearse my performance or other special upcoming situation.

Self-2: The Coach. Think of the person I would most like to have coach me for this event. See him or her standing at second position. Step out of self-1 into self-2 and become this coach, and watch and listen to self-1 performing. Tell self-1 what changes I'd like to see and hear. When satisfied, step back into self-1 and apply this new advice. Shift between self-1 and self-2 as needed until I'm satisfied with my performance.

Self-3: The Observer. Step into self-3 and watch and listen to self-1 from this position as the disinterested observer. Tell self-1 what I'd like to see and hear. When finished advising as self-3, step back into self-1 and apply the observer's feedback. Move between self-1, 2 and 3 until I'm satisfied with the result from all three perspectives.

### *Applications*

K. says that good negotiators are fascinating to watch, because they will switch positions in the heat of battle and gain objectivity in complex situations. Resourceful business leaders are also an example of the Hologram in action, conducting board meetings with an understanding of divergent viewpoints. He also points out that a really good salesperson is not someone who makes fast sales, but rather a person who sees things from the buyer's standpoint, looking beyond the moment to a continuing business relationship. (My problem is that I keep looking at the past. I'm like someone driving a car while looking in the rear view mirror.)

When preparing for oral exams, job interviews or auditions, K says the Hologram allows a person to take the position of the examiner. It helps to have been an auditioner or jurist or employer in order to see yourself from their standpoint and know what they're looking for. Learning any new skill - a musical instrument, tennis, a new computer program - will be easier when I have my own internal teacher to work with between lessons. Anytime I'm about to step into a challenging personal or professional situation K. says I should ask myself, "What positions in the Hologram would help me with this?" (Reviewing my argument with Marion just before leaving New York, it was obvious to me that I had never left first position. Taking her position in that discussion now, I'm beginning to see what she was talking about and how she must have felt.)