

How do I choose an NLP Trainer that's right for me?

There are two questions that I hear constantly:

1. "What is this stuff called NLP?"
2. "How do I choose an NLP Trainer to learn with?"

In this article, I'm proposing to deal with the second of the two – choosing an NLP Trainer. My aim here is to approach this objectively and openly. In doing so, I will ask a number of questions so that the reader, in researching for a suitable NLP Trainer, may use their own answers as a guide.

Outcome

The first question is, "What is your outcome in learning NLP?" In other words, what do you want to be able to do as a result of your learning? There can be a number of reasons that one seeks to learn NLP, including:

- For overall personal development
- To address specific areas of personal development – communication, awareness, beliefs etc
- Additional tools and skills for use in various areas of business – Leadership, sales, negotiating, training, HR etc
- Tools and skills for use in Coaching
- Tools and skills for use in therapy work
- As a start to a new career path – many go on to become certified NLP Trainers themselves

These are a few and I'm sure there are many more. So, if you are reading this because you are considering beginning the learning journey of NLP, then this is your first question to consider.

Is geography a factor?

Two easy questions:

1. Where do you live?
2. Can you/will you travel for the right experience?

Every day brings enquiries from people seeking to study NLP with me. It has to be said that some of them live in fairly remote areas – not just of the UK but of the world itself. Where you live may have a large impact on your choice of Trainer.

If the right Trainer for you is a distance from you, then are you willing or able to travel, bearing in mind that this brings its own challenges in terms of time and expense? I've had students travel from North East England to learn with me in South Wales because that's where I was at the time. I even recall one who travelled all the way from Japan to spend two weeks on my Trainer Training a couple of years ago.

If you are not willing to travel, or cannot for any reason, then you look to the Trainers available within your acceptable catchment area.

Which accrediting body is right for you?

The simple fact is that there are a number of different accrediting bodies around the world. Each has its own set of standards and some have a set content for their programmes. Each of these bodies will probably tell you that theirs is the "best", the "authentic" or the "highest standard". The plain truth is that most are there as membership organisations providing an income stream for their "Directors". What they can do is to provide you with evidence as to who your Trainer is aligned with and what standards they adhere to. In theory that gives you an indication of the quality of the Trainer.

The certificate is really just evidence of your graduation from a programme led by the Trainer whose signature appears on that certificate and accredited by the organisation whose logo is affixed thereon.

On a personal note, I am an Accredited Member of the Association for NLP (ANLP). This excellent membership association offers an inclusive attitude and the CPD policy for accreditation of Trainers means that you can be assured of a high quality learning experience.

What do these "titles" mean?

The NLP world has, in the main, adopted a structure to the levels of training and certification. Course lengths may vary but the title is generally the same and this brings its own level of confusion. The generally accepted learning progression is:

Diploma – this is generally a basic foundation skills programme, usually between two and four day's duration and offering the very basic skills. Anybody advertising themselves as having a "Dip NLP" means they have covered a basic introduction. This Diploma should not be confused with the Diploma awarded at Higher Education establishments.

Practitioner – this is the minimum serious level of certification. Course lengths may vary between 5 and 25 days and the content will vary a great deal. You will find many people advertising themselves as a "Practitioner of NLP". This means they have successfully graduated from a specific programme and does not, necessarily, vouch for the breadth or depth of skill. Again, it's down to who they trained with.

How far do you want to go?

Master Practitioner – the advanced level of NLP qualification. Here the skills are broader, the depth of knowledge is greater and there is a deeper understanding of the what, why and how of NLP. Again, course lengths may vary and so may the content.

Trainer – one who has successfully graduated from and “NLP Trainer Training” and is certified as competent to teach NLP. Look for the name of the Trainer on this one.

So how many days of training should you be looking to do?

The \$64000 question! Different accrediting bodies may advocate different course lengths. Some will tell you that more is better; others will offer you the “intensive fast track” experience. I see NLP “Practitioner” programmes ranging from five days to 25 days and all offered by seemingly reputable Trainers. Which is best? Three questions:

1. How much time have you got?
2. What do you want it for?
3. How broad a range do you want to study?

If your aim is to use NLP in a Coaching or Therapy setting, then you may be looking for a deeper experience with a broader skill set at the end of it. The number of days, in my experience, is often less important than the quality of the learning experience. Use the programme length as a guide only and seek to discover the specific course objectives, content and learning style.

To give you an idea as to what you can get in the “market place”, I am a certified Member of the International NLP Trainers Association (INLPTA for short) and their Coordinator for Turkey. When I lead a Practitioner programme accredited by INLPTA the course length is sixteen days (which includes the four day Diploma that many Trainers offer separately). I am also an Accredited Trainer Member of the Association for NLP (ANLP) and their Ambassador to Turkey. Some of my programmes, particularly those designed specifically for business users, are of ten days duration. Is the quality any lower? Not one bit. Is there less content covered? Yes, of course. That’s because the focus is different.

How do you know you’ll like the Trainer?

Here I can make some simple suggestions:

Speak directly to the Trainer. Ask as many questions as you need to in order to formulate your own opinion as to their style of teaching, their attitude to quality and the content of their programmes. If you can’t have a direct conversation with the Trainer then perhaps you may wish to look elsewhere.

Seek out some references or testimonials from past students and, if possible, speak to them in person. This is not always possible. If it is, grab the chance.

Which is best – a big group or a small one?

The answer to this question really depends on several things:

How intensive an experience are you seeking? If you want to develop, build upon and practice new skills for business, coaching, therapy etc then a large auditorium with 200+ people in the audience may not deliver on your needs. However, not everybody is

comfortable with small intensive groups, particularly those who are slightly more introverted in their learning style. I once attended a weekend event where there were literally thousands in the audience. My friend, who has no knowledge or experience with NLP, found it an incredible buzz but admitted to coming away no wiser on the subject than when she arrived.

How big is big and how small is small? For some people a group of 300 is considered to be large, whilst others consider that "just right." I have worked with groups as small as six people and regularly lead Master Class programmes for such groups. The learning is intense and there is ample opportunity to explore, discuss, debate and practice.

Do you want direct contact with the Trainer throughout the programme? This is less likely to happen with large groups.

All in one go or over modules?

Some Trainers will offer you a programme broken down into weekend modules whilst others advocate the "intensive" approach. Which is best? Both offer advantages. I have taught, and attended, both and there are some great points in favour of each:

Extended learning over a number of weekends offers:

- Less time to be taken from work
- Time to integrate your new learning into your daily life
- Time to practice new skills between each module
- Time to reflect and prepare questions

Intensive learning in one block offers:

- A truly intensive change process at a personal level
- A chance to build very deep relationships with fellow participants
- The certification process may take up less time thus you can move up the programmes faster if you wish – Practitioner to Master Practitioner etc.

So, both offer benefits. It comes down to your preference and your available time. You may also find that the shorter courses are often in one block whilst the longer programmes are broken down into modules.

How much should you pay?

Course fees seem to vary a great deal. I've seen NLP Practitioner programmes on offer in the UK at almost £3000 and as little as £995. Expensive does not always mean best and cheap is not always a good investment.

Consider:

- Where is the venue? London venues are expensive and so impact on the fee
- What is the venue quality? West End hotels will raise the fees and the local village hall will probably mean a lower fee is possible
- Who is leading the programme? Sometimes you pay for the name.
- How large is the group? Sometimes larger groups mean lower fees – and not always

My own preference is to offer a good quality venue with an inclusive fee that covers all aspects of the experience from coffee on arrival right through to calling a taxi if you need one at the end of the day and that includes lunch, refreshments etc. My experience is that cheap training does not necessarily mean better value and that old chestnut "no frills training" is often just another way of saying "more profit for the Trainer."

The most important thing is to seek a Trainer and programme that will achieve your goals in learning NLP and provide you with a high quality, high value experience.

Food for thought

This brief document should have given you some food for thought. The decision is, of course, a personal one and I wish you well with it. One thing I am sure of is that, whatever your choice of Trainer, programme or group size, your learning journey is likely to be both fascinating and life changing. I wish you every joy and success with it.

For information on programmes offered by the Ralph Watson Partnership, visit our website at www.ralphwatson.com and check out our diary page. Please feel free to contact me in person if you are considering joining an NLP programme and have further questions. You can reach me by e-mail and the address is on the website. I'll be happy to help regardless of whether you intend to learn with me or not.