

From Ordinary Teenagers to Extraordinary Young Adults

How NLP is playing its part in transforming youngsters

By Jeffrey Leiken MA

So many of the most accomplished, significant innovators and leaders in world history have fascinating and multifaceted life stories, often beyond the field in which they became famous. If there's one common denominator, it's that they didn't follow the paths their particular society prescribed – they made different choices.

Such people often possessed similar aspects of character, typically with extraordinary depth and adeptness. They had the resilience to bounce back from set-backs, the composure to handle criticism and pressure and the confidence to risk failure and rejection. They also possessed the instinct to make excellent decisions, ones that allowed them to know when to stop or when to keep going in spite of the challenges they faced.

Of course, there's no guarantee that anyone's kids will become the next Leonardo da Vinci, Churchill or Einstein or, more recently, Branson or Gates. However, if they can learn to rely on their innate capacity for resilience, composure, confidence and decision-making, they will own critical life skills to propel them towards fulfilling their unique potential for personal success in whatever they choose to do.

Unlike academic pursuits and the training of the intellect, which can emerge from a classroom, such life skills can only be learned and embodied by embracing experiences and being open to proper guidance. Most successful people say they learned what it takes to thrive in life through their real-life experiences and through the guidance and input of wise elders and mentors.

Too many kids in the modern world are not getting enough of either the experiences it takes to develop true depth of character, or the guidance to ensure these experiences will be of practical and valuable use in their lives.

The Hero's Path

Five years ago a unique programme was set up in London to address this gap. Created to offer real-life training to teenagers and young adults seeking to lead lives of true personal fulfilment, HeroPath is based on the MythoSelf® process created by NLP Trainer Joseph Riggio, and includes training in things as diverse as the potent interpersonal communication skills of NLP, the wisdom contained in classic mythology, and the somatic awareness taught by, among others, Moshe Feldenkreis.

The name 'HeroPath' comes from the pioneering work and wisdom

of Joseph Campbell and his model of the 'Hero's Journey'. Helping people to discover their own unique path and to unlock life's possibilities can re-ignite their inherent draw towards the flame of a meaningful life, rich with substance. It can inspire them to make a positive contribution despite the negativity – and even stupidity – of the world around them.

We live in a world that is dominated by science and rationality. There's a sense of magic and wonder inherent in early childhood that is usually sustained by truly successful people who lead seemingly magical lives, but too often that wonderment is crushed in modern youth by years of left-brain learning overload and endless messages that equate how much we make materially to our sense of value and worth as humans. The message is 'if it can't be touched, it doesn't exist' or, at least, 'it doesn't count for much.'

Yet the experience of the HeroPath trainers shows that most people still secretly yearn for some sign that in fact their dreams can come true, that doors will open to them if they follow the path of their heart, that true love exists... and not just in the imaginary world of the movies.

Why focus on teenagers?

Today's teens and young adults are coming of age in a world far more chaotic than the one in which we grew up. Remnants of 9/11, wars against invisible enemies and global economic collapse permeate the daily news. In addition, the average teenager now spends nearly six hours a day staring at screens. This equates to spending almost 20 years of their lives engaged with a machine rather than with the natural world. The long-term implications of this are deeply concerning in light of the abundant research on the effects of this sensory deprivation and technological addiction. How can anyone develop the capacity for true intimacy when their idea of intense emotion is ALL CAPS in a text message?

This age group is hungry for something more. They are less jaded by the corruption of the modern world and more willing to dive in and embrace the learning HeroPath offers. Their desire for confidence and a sense of internal control makes the heroic model compellingly attractive to them. They are yearning to connect with adults who can guide them to generate the calibre of results they want in their lives. Teenagers who have attended HeroPath workshops have consistently given positive



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Secondly, they learn how to recognise the subtle internal responses that help them to make excellent decisions. We begin by pointing out to them how many times in their lives their 'instinct' was warning them that something wasn't right and how often they've realised afterwards that they should have listened to this inner voice. We heighten their awareness so that, going forward, they will notice the 'yes' and 'no' responses in themselves and learn to

act more wisely.

feedback – even when they've started from the most cynical viewpoints – and consistently go on to make different choices and lead richer lives.

The role of NLP in HeroPath training

The meta-programs by which teenagers orientate themselves are critical to building the structure they need to lead truly extraordinary lives. HeroPath teaches them to 'Sort by Other', 'Internally Reference' and 'Move Towards' – which of course is almost the polar opposite of the way most teenagers operate!

While the HeroPath programme doesn't overtly teach NLP in the way it can be learned elsewhere, it utilises the tools and the lenses NLP provides. In this way, young people can be guided towards a potent, highly positively charged, internally generated position they can learn to maintain on their own.

The primary model of this programme is the MytoSelf® Process, which uses NLP as well as other methodologies. Here it's applied solely towards building life around what is working and based on the wisdom contained in the great teachings of our ancestors.

What do they learn?

Teenagers taking HeroPath workshops can expect results in three main areas.

Firstly, they learn how to manage their own state so that they can orientate towards positive possibilities, whatever is going on around them. Because so much of the model is somatic, this is not an intellectual or mental exercise but a physical one. When they learn how they do this in their own unique way, they can sustain it on their own.

act more wisely.

Lastly, they learn that their life matters and they must live it in a way that ensures it counts. Whatever obstacles they face, if they choose to orientate towards positive possibilities and associate with positive people, coupled with following the path of their heart, things will work out for them in ways they can barely imagine. In the end, it's only by living this way, even in the face of appearances to the contrary, that anyone ever makes their dreams come true. In the world we live in, we need all the believers and doers we can get.

A call to parents

It's our obligation as adults to assume the awesome responsibility of raising our children to adulthood. Doing this effectively means leading them from dependence to independence, from vulnerable and unprepared to capable and ready. It's up to us to ensure they become morally responsible, forward-thinking, skilled young adults. We need to ensure that their journey through childhood becomes their preparation not just to survive as adults, but to thrive.

Doing this successfully demands far more than pushing them to get good exam results. More than ever it's critical that we, as parents, go the extra mile to ensure our children are truly prepared for the realities of the world. In many ways, the hopes of our world depend on it. ●

To learn more about the HeroPath programmes, visit www.HeroPath.co.uk or contact Des Barry, who leads the HeroPath programmes in the UK, at HeroPath1@aol.com or on +44 (0)7768 277929.