

Patient Empowering

Robert Dilts on Healthcoaching, interviewed by Lucy Platvoet, 17 okt.2013

LP: How would you explain HC to a physician/ General Practitioner?

Robert Dilts: I would say HC is an integrated part of healthcare, it is not an alternative. There has been a big shift from thinking it is an alternative to medicine. But actually our whole approach is to have it be in compliment and integration with medical practice. NLP's area and expertise is on helping to activate and engage a patients inner resources towards their own health and healing. One simple way to say it: traditional medicine can help heal from the outside, and NLP then helps to compliment that by bringing resources from the inside.

Placebo studies say, if somebody takes a placebo, and believes in it, he can under certain circumstances have very dramatic results. In NLP we believe that there is some level of that possible for every person by being able to activate the patients participation in their own healing process. NLP can be a partner with the doctors.

One of the projects that I have done is for the National Health Group of Singapore, one of the major groups in the country. 5 Years ago I trained a group of doctors, nurses and social workers. They trained others so that all the people in this group learned these tools.

There were two basic parts, one was communication and relationship skills and the second part was patient empowerment tools. They realized that half of their patients was much improved because of the patients participation. If by example diabetes patients do not change their behavior, they are basically swimming against the current. NLP helps to empower the patient to do what they can, and work together as a partner with the doctor.

LP: And how would you explain HC to a person with health issues, who does not know about HC?

RD: I would say to a patient: "You can make a difference in your healing process". NLP is all about modeling people who have done something remarkable or exceptional and teaching it to other people. So also about modeling others, who have been able to have the best possible health outcome. NLP has simple techniques, tools and practices that help you to be able to work together with our doctor to transform.

And I would tell that there are medical tools and there are NLP tools, psychological tools to help you in some cases connect to your resources and in other cases to use your own inner capabilities and inner power.

When people are ill, there are the three major challenges: helpless, hopeless and worthless. " I cannot do anything, I am a victim, I am worthless I don't deserve it". NLP can help people to become optimistic, confident and have a greater sense of self value.

My wife Deborah just last year, was going through breast cancer, a whole process. We were not rejecting the doctors and she went to her treatments. It was very clear that

she was not going to be a victim and just only do that. The interesting thing of NLP is that it helps you to use ALL of the resources, not just NLP.

Debra for example changed her diet, and NLP helped her to change her diet. And she did acupuncture and NLP helped to enhance it. She did meditation, hypnoses, many things all together in a whole holistic approach where everything is working together. And the results of that combination were very effective. Because the tumor was 28 mm. and they thought they had to take her whole breast. By doing this approach she was able to shrink the tumor from 28 to 8 mm. And then they could just take the tumor. It saved her breast. So I am very convinced.

NLP can work miracles but does not have to work miracles. NLP helps to get the most out of whatever you decide to do.

LP: I always say that our body has the natural power to recover, it does that all the time. And when it doesn't it has a good reason for it. And with NLP you can find the reason and unblock what stops the natural recovering.

RD: I agree. We can see that the body has that natural process because of like the placebo effect and other things. There is a lot of proof that the body will heal itself and it doesn't sometimes, like in case of the cancer. I like the way you said, that by understanding that reason we can unblock that.

LP: NLP has gone through different stages, the generations of NLP. And I know long ago you worked with your mother. Now that you work with Deborah – do you?

RD: "Yes of course I do, yes, we are very much partners "-

LP: Is there a difference in the way you worked with your mother and the way you do with Deborah?

There is a difference. One part of it is that in Deborah's case I am her husband and her life partner, and in my mother's case I was her child. When you are working with people you are close to, there is sometimes a kind of trap. You can think out of desperation: "I should help, it is my responsibility, it's my fault".

Actually the very first thing you have to be able to do if you want to help people, is to think "It is not my responsibility, it's not my fault" and "I cannot be doing it for my own benefit". If I am doing it because I feel I should, or because am afraid that something will happen, that is not helpful. To be in help, the first thing is: you need to do work for yourself, you need to check that "I can actually be calm, comfortable and it has to be o.k. with me whatever happens and whatever decision my partner, my mother, client makes."

For me a big difference is that I know that territory now so well. In my mother's case it was for me the first time and the cancer was much more advanced. And the doctors said: "We can't treat it, it is too advanced". They could not help her medically. It was like a lost cause.

So it was not like working against the doctors, and less about working in partnership with the doctors. More about finding another way. It was a remarkable recovery.

In Deborah's case we knew more clearly what steps and what to check for. Which doesn't mean that it is easy. There are still many unexpected things. You still have to

deal with natural anxieties, natural fears and concerns. But for me with Deborah - because I know that territory in myself and also with others - it was a much smoother journey, a lot easier to feel a sense of confidence and knowledge you are going in the right direction.

LP: What are the most important steps a coach has to take when healthcoaching with someone who is near to the heart?

RD: What I learned by working with my mother was, how to see my mother more like a client and how to feel towards my clients like my mother. I could feel closer in my heart towards my clients, and I could also be able to have that sense of a bit of distance with my mother - in a positive way. So I wasn't so attached.

When I am with a client it is obvious that I am doing this to serve my client, not myself. The closer you get to somebody it becomes a bit more a grey area. What I think you need to look for is a state, type of inner congruence and looking at your motives.

LP: Does this also have to do with the field?

RD: Yes, I think that there is an issue with the field and this also relates with rapport. This question of field and rapport is very important. If my resourcefulness resonates with their resourcefulness, there is a positive field. But if my confusion or anxiety resonates with their anxiety, then you are kind of exaggerating that.

Technique is important and process is important, but maybe more important in Healthcoaching is that quality of the field.

NLP can really help doctors and patients to increase and improve that. One of the major factors that influences the effectiveness of a placebo, is the quality of rapport of who is giving the placebo. So a positive field can greatly enhance healing of all types. You have to be able to be clear and congruent and clean.

LP: What is gained in Healthcoaching between you worked with your mother and the working wit Debora?

RD: One of the contributions of all NLP is the idea of modeling. By finding what works you can begin to put it into a step-by-step-process, you can begin to identify these differences that make the difference. So also for Healthcoaching. In the beginning of any type of coaching you making it up as you go. By working together you find your way. Once you found the way you know the landmarks. You know to end. The next time you can make it smoother and easier. You begin to know what are the issues, so that you can plan and predict what kind of things can emerge.

In Healthcoaching we are always learning. So like any type of coaching the coach does not have to be the best player. The coach does not even have to be an expert in that area. So with NLP Healthcoaching you don't have to be an expert in allergies, or in cancer. Where you are an expert at, is how to help people be their best, and give their best, and stay resourceful in challenging times.

In Healthcoaching we have been able to find the key skills that a coach needs to help somebody. When I started with my mother I did not know, we just do it. And with Deborah, I know what to do and I know what to expect even though unexpected things happen. There is much more clarity. It's more enriched, elaborated.

What we offer in the Health Certification Training (HCT) is to help people develop the knowhow and skills and also these patient empowerment tools. What you ultimately want as a coach, is for the client to be able to learn these tools to use, whether it is diabetes or a broken leg or something.

LP: And are there new techniques coming up?

The whole idea about modeling is that there is always something new developing and even the old techniques become updated and improved and simplified.

NLP develops out of a different kind of research than medicine. Since NLP is about modeling it is more like what you call as best practice. You are constantly finding what works.

In traditional research like with chemotherapy you give the same doses of chemotherapy to a whole bunch of different people and you see what is the statistical percentage. In NLP coaching you treat each person as an unique person and you are adapting to the individual need of that person. Both of these approaches are important.

LP: So modeling is important for the development of NLP. Go to your colleagues and look what do they do to reach success. In my experience that does not happen that often. In my opinion there could be much more modeling in HC.

RD: Yes there could be much more about modeling. This is one of the things we wanted also to incorporate in the HCT. Like in business they call it best practices. Every time you do something, share it with others so you are able to improve. Intervision groups are a good way to share the best practices in a kind of co-modelling.

LP: in our good intervisiongroup we don't do it that profoundly.

RD: Modeling might be too intimidating for some people, they think it is an extra thing to do. Really, if we just pay attention, if we just share like in intervision we begin to see. The main question is: what is the difference that makes the difference? What can we do to make that difference and how can we do that in a more clear and concrete way?

LP: You say NLP works with the individual person to see what he needs to heal. How does that relate to the Evidence Based Practices of the western medicine?

RD: It's not that NLP is not evidence based, we would say it is outcome based. And even in research it is: "if I try this, what is the result?" So it is a very pragmatic and let's call it empirical meaning, based on actual observation.

Because NLP realizes that each person is different, it does not mean that everybody is completely different. Some things will be the same. The processes that are helpful. We have to adapt those processes and maybe do a slightly different combination for this person. Even in medicine you will do different things given different stages of a symptom.

In NLP and maybe in any type of coaching, you don't put so much emphasis on the symptom and say: for this symptom you do this. You put the emphasis on the person. That is why we are saying NLP Healthcoaches don't have to be an expert in allergies. A cancer surgeon needs to be an expert in cancer. But a coaches job is not to be the expert. Their job is to empower the patient. Their expertise is in empowering the client or the patient to bring the best of themselves and their resources to the process.

That is not unquantifiable. You can measure it, but you cannot measure it in the same way you can give a bunch of people the same doses of a medicine and see what happens.

LP I read the book 'The clinical effectiveness of NLP'. It said that a common used psychological technique like cognitive therapy is not an Evidence Based Technique. They wrote about research in the clinical effects of specific NLP techniques on specific symptoms. NLP had good successes on PTSD.

RD: From a health perspective, this is a good example of an integrated approach: A woman from Denmark was a therapist and her husband was a doctor, who worked with people that had asthma. She took half of his patients. She didn't do any particular technique, she just did NLP with them, whatever they needed. So she wasn't like a clinical trial of this technique. And then they measured how much medicine they needed to take. And how far they can blow this balloon? How often do they have to go to the hospital? There was an extremely statistical significance that the half of the group that had NLP support, not a single technique, performed much better. They still got the same medical treatment, but integrated with NLP, it was clear that there was a much better result. (It's on my website either in the encyclopedia of NLP).

Asthma Management, a qualitative research study, H. Lund, in: The health attractor Journal, Vol. 1, no. 3 IASH March 1995. 30 Asthma-patients had regular medical treatments and NLP, compared with a control group of 16 people, who had just regular medical treatment. The used NLP-techniques varied dependant on the needs of the individual patient. They measured longcapacity and the amount of hospital visits. Both groups advanced. But the differences with the group who got also NLP were significant: instead of the normal annual decrease of 50 ml. long capacity, the NLP-group showed an increase of more or less 200 ml. The amount of hospital visits in the NLP-group was remarkable decreased, and also the amount of serous acute asthma-episodes. Even more, they reduced their intake of medicine to almost zero, as the amount of sleeping disorders related to asthma symptoms (the control group showed a decrease of 30%).

The true coaching style is not to do the same technique with everybody who has the same symptom. You don't try to be western medicine, you work with western medicine.

There was another man, Peter Schutz, who started the NLPT, NLP-Psychotherapy. He did some longitudinal research. He found that if people who had psychotherapy used certain NLP-skills, their rate of improvement was much better than if they didn't use.

LP: which question would you finally like to be asked by me?

RD: A kind of concluding question: what is it that HCT really provides? What does it really contribute to the process?

HCT gives us help to recognize how to be partners. Partner with the patient, but also partner to integrate and complement other treatments. It gives tools, exercises,

support. And a very key part of it is, there is a community where people can continue to share and grow and support each other. Some people say NLP is the study of success, but I think more it is the study of empowerment.

What I have received from NLP in my life is not just a bunch of techniques, it's a sense of empowerment, a sense that I know I can make a difference in myself and I can make a difference in others. That is more than just a knowing. The fact that there are steps you can take if somebody has an allergy is important. But it helps us that we can say: I know those steps AND I know how to adept them and to emphasize them for this particular person. My focus is on what does serve the client.

The other thing I would say is: NLP also gives the methodology: The SCORE model, that is a way of helping to organize for ANY kind of problem. It's a general approach to supporting people to understand the present state, the desired state, the symptom, the cause, the resource. Having that methodology gives you a way to work with anything and be helpful.

In some ways I think the best way for a coach to be is known as "a servant leader". A servant leader is a person whose job it is to make other peoples jobs easier. So my job is to make your job easier. So that's what HC is. It's my job to make your job of healing easier.