

# Lessons from the World of Ocean Activism



By Lizzi Larbaestier



**I**n this third article in the series I am going to focus on some lessons we as coaches and NLP Professionals can draw from the world of ocean activism.

## Chunk size and empowerment

When we hear terms like 'tackling the climate crisis' and reference to 'reducing CO2 emissions', some people will find it really simple to translate this into hundreds of tangible actions they can take. Some, on the other hand, will not. As coaches, we know that chunking up to our big picture aspiration can often inspire our creativity and bring purpose to our actions. So how is it that asking for climate action is so often met with inertia?

For me, I sense we could hypothesize the chunk size is too big, too nebulous, too vast and too poorly understood. Our linear economy, for instance, often makes no direct links to the climate. Imagine buying products where the carbon used to create the product was more overt – an extension of an energy rating, if you like. Imagine shopping online and being really clear of the footprint the shipping would create... how many decisions would differ with greater clarity?

Of course, this is a massive chunk down, but in a data-driven world where we measure our heart rates, steps taken, calories burned etc., we are nowhere near aware enough of our day-to-day planetary impact. It is this lack of awareness (amongst other things) that I believe leads to not knowing where to start. Being carbon-considerate is for many not something that factors highly within our psyche. There are various online calculators we can play with to roughly estimate how carbon efficient we are, but our day-to-day lifestyles and purchasing habits can dramatically influence our impact.

Chunking down (a little) helps enable action. We have seen this in the various Single Use Plastic (SUP) reduction campaigns. It's a simple request that people can act upon; it encourages people to ask questions, look more consciously at the redundant packaging they are inviting into their lives and campaign for

**Lack of awareness leads to not knowing where to start.**

policy change. These campaigns work predominantly at the level of behavioural change and yet without more of the 'why', many people can remain eco-illiterate, falling back into bad habits or making changes that are poorly researched and have wider implications negating their positive intentions.

Essentially, SUP campaigns are a 'gateway conversation' to encourage us to question and act upon addressing our collective use of fossil fuels. Single use ANYTHING – not only plastic – has a high cost to the planet and with a more developed level of inquiry we can promote a circular economy. So it seems a chunk back up (a little) is required to encourage more informed choices and enable people to translate how their actions impact the wider cause.

So, the lesson for us as coaches, no matter what the topic, lies less in chunking up, or down, but more in:

- noticing how the chunk size impacts empowerment to take action, and

- navigating **'the space between'** chunks... ensuring the connections are made between chunk sizes, thus reducing overwhelm and inviting cogency to ensure the actions taken are truly progressive.

Have a go yourself. Make a list of three new things you could do (or stop doing) this week that you believe would reduce your footprint:

- Play with chunking up and down from each of these actions and notice how many questions arise for you. Where is the edge of your awareness?
- Really explore how each of the chunk sizes relate to one another.
- What is the ripple effect of each action?
- And, once informed, of course, take action on your list.

### Motivation direction and tenacity

As a blue health coach™ and behavioural modeller, and someone with a passion for marine conservation, I am fascinated particularly by the way that marine-related environmental campaigns have changed over the years.

For many years, when it came to engaging people to take action to protect the ocean the focus was on communicating visually and through statistics demonstrating 'how bad things are'. Igniting fear, guilt and shame as an awakening of sorts, the result was short term remedial action. And yet, when the scale of the task at hand is vast and complex, this motivation strategy simply does not have the longevity required.

Think about how you respond to being cajoled in this way. Assuming the cause is one you care about, it is likely that your state changes – perhaps into a space of fight / flight. Of course, outrage and upset do indeed create an upwelling of energy. Some will flee because the task is too big; others will dive in, tunnel-visioned, often taking action without real thought. In fixing one problem we create others through a lack of coherent decision making. We become disconnected and often competitive, failing to notice the links and connections between different aspects of an ecosystem. Eventually our energy is not sustainable and we burn

out... or we resolve the current challenge (for now).

And this approach is not solely the domain of environmentalism. We can see this pattern play out in many ways, as our coaching clients share their stories of social dynamics and with modal operators of necessity galore.

### Love as a motivator

So let's compare this to the new approach emerging in the world of ocean conservation – one that balances the towards and away, acknowledging the benefit of bringing LOVE into the equation.

"People protect what they love – but we cannot love what we do not know" is paraphrased from Jacques Cousteau, an ocean explorer who aimed to bring the magic and secrets of the underwater world to the mass public.

We know that fascination and awe create pro-social activity and that becoming familiar with ocean spaces creates a relationship with the coast.

Consider too the likes of *Blue Planet 2* and the huge impact that series had, mobilizing large numbers of people to





▶ take notice and (importantly) to take tangible action in service of addressing climate change and protecting the ocean.

So what was the structure of *Blue Planet 2* in relation to LOVE?

- Well, for a start, David Attenborough is a much-loved presenter and his voice has gravitas.
- The narrative encouraged us to make connections with the marine life we saw; we felt very much 'a part of', not 'separate to' their world.
- We became emotionally invested in the lives of the creatures we saw and we were awed by many of the scenes.
- Our minds were alive with new knowledge about our ecosystem, and older knowledge was revived.
- The sadness and loss we felt, particularly for the whale calf, moved many to tears – a visceral expression of loss and empathy that comes from a place of love.

There was a balance between towards and away from motivation, for sure. Our fragile reality was presented, and yet cause and effect were enveloped within compassion. How could this not lead to action?

What does this teach us as coaches? Once again the magic is to be found in **'the space between'** towards AND away. There is a sweet spot to be found when we explore how our towards motivation and away from motivation relate to one another – a place that compels us to act from awareness and compassion. As NLP Professionals, we can of course utilise techniques such as parts negotiation to explore this.

Think about a large challenge relevant in one of your client's lives right now (it may well be climate change) and ask:

- How are they approaching this challenge at the moment?

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- What is the narrative they have created around this?
- How much are they 'a part of' versus 'separate to' this challenge?
- How emotionally invested are they in all aspects / players involved?
- What new awareness in this area is inspiring them? What questions do they still have?
- What role does love have in this area of their life?
- And, of course, as a coach take action upon your insight.



## Action requires alignment

*Blue Planet* is a great example of a series that enabled space for many to truly integrate at a deeper gut level where our role might be in making changes. Those familiar with *mBIT* will recognise that the language used above to describe the series brings our full distributed mind to the table. Sadly, often in the world of marine conservation and planet advocacy there can be a lack of deeper integration. There is a steep divide between those who talk about action and those who take action. Many will complain about the marine litter crisis; few will act. So if this is such an emotive topic, what is going on?

As a regional rep for Surfers Against Sewage, a Keep Britain Tidy ambassador and founder of a community group called Ghostnetbusters, who recover large-scale industrial ghost fishing net for recycling into the circular economy, I often receive emails of outrage from people who have seen the local beaches strewn with litter.

If we are to apply multiple braining to this:

- They have engaged their hearts to a certain extent – they care enough to get upset, after all.
- Their heads have thought a little about ways of addressing the immediate issue – yet they have not been particularly creative in finding solutions...
- But perhaps the least engaged part of them is their gut. They have indeed taken some action (a function of the gut) by pressing send on an email, yet they have not seen themselves as having a pivotal role to play.

This pattern is seen in conservation time and time again. The heart engages in an idea, some creativity is brought to the table, but there is a lack of stepping forward into the space of action. Of course, as coaches we know this lack of integration can occur in relation to any topic, not only environmental causes.

Here is perhaps where the lessons above come into play.



- Coaching conversations can create connections in **'the space between'** heart, head and gut, bringing an awareness of how active participation can help protect what they love.
- As coaches we can help our clients to see how small actions can contribute to a collective shift.
- Acknowledging how their motivation direction is influencing their energy, enthusiasm and resilience can enable us to ask powerful questions. The #2minutebeachclean movement has a lot to teach us. It is never about somebody doing everything but about everybody doing something. Recognising the meta message of this campaign can help us awaken our clients to a space of individual and collective empowerment. And so it appears we have come full circle to chunking – or at least looking beyond the chunks.

## So finally...

As NLP Professionals, we know language matters. Calling something a crisis – whether that is the climate crisis, ocean health crisis or marine litter crisis – intends (quite rightly) to invoke urgency. As we are aware, intention and impact are not always the same thing. 'Crisis' correctly conveys the sense of emergency in relation to these inter-related challenges; however, the word 'crisis' is often negatively weighted. We are indeed at a critical juncture where wisdom and action are both necessary and desirable. We need to rethink how we communicate our call to action if we are to create considered change at the pace required to restore planetary wellbeing.

Apathy, ambivalence, advocacy and activism – we can all sit within different domains in relation to different causes. Choose the one that sets your heart on fire, and remember: change only occurs with action. As my dear friend Wallace J Nicholls says, "The leaders are us." ■

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