

Going Coastal

a Blue Mind approach to NLP

By Lizzi Larbalestier

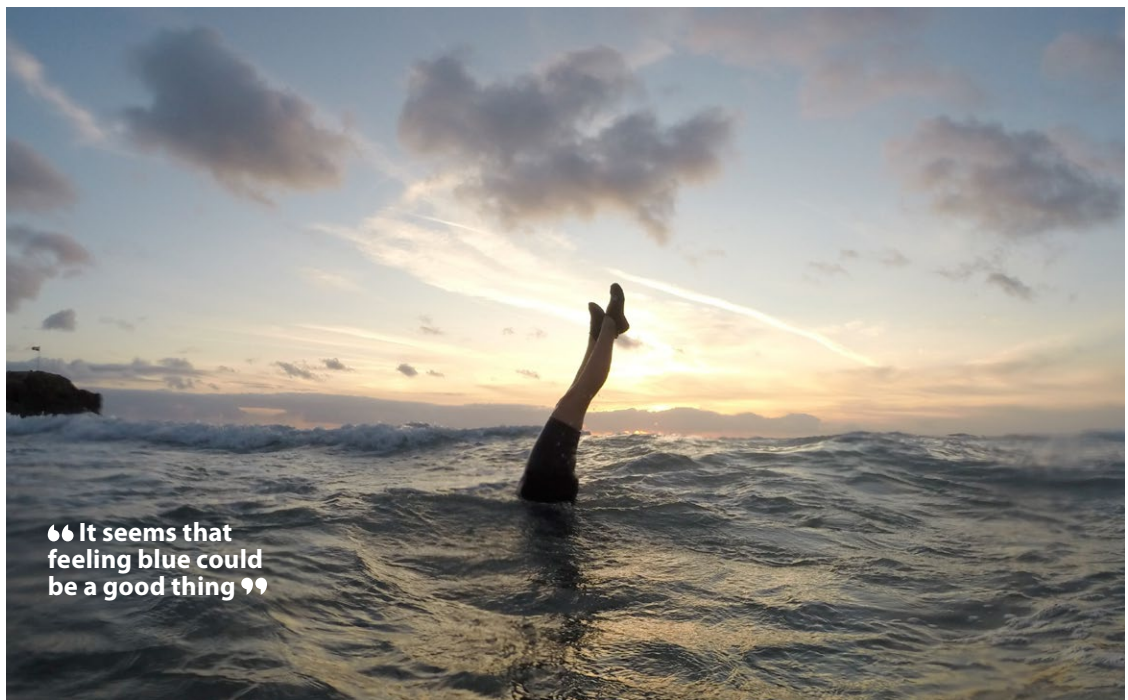
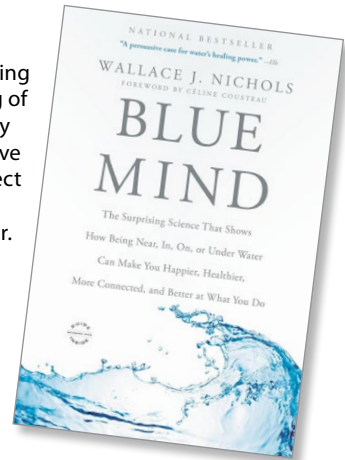
It seems that feeling blue could be a good thing. This article introduces you to Blue Mind inviting you to go deeper – exploring the positive impact that spending time in water centric locations can offer to your NLP practice.

Get your Blue Mind on

The last 10 years has seen a wave of environmental psychology research begin to discover and quantify the well-being benefits of spending time outdoors. As an occasional office alternative we all know getting out and about helps us feel better, but how and why exactly? The reasons are many and varied, with few of us specialising in change facilitation where the coast and countryside play specific, intentional and pivotal roles. Natural Green locations are often researched, yet the tide is shifting to include a quest to uncover Blue Health Capital.

As a coastal coach searching to extend my understanding of the science behind intuitively obvious seashore benefits, I've been lucky enough to connect with a number of mentors with similar passion for water. Not least of these is the marine biologist and author Wallace J Nichols ('J' as he likes to be known). I'd guess J would neither describe himself as a neuroscientist or psychologist, but he understands communication and is an exemplar of collaboration with an interest in applied neuroscience for ecological gain. In addition, he is a natural modeller (something close to all our hearts).

As you might imagine, many Blue Mind



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ideas translate to other natural and indeed urban environments and yet, living on a planet that is largely ocean, the presence of water can certainly add to our sense of place. We have all had some form of relationship with water, since before birth. In his book *Blue Mind*, J shares how developing a positive relationship with water can increase our sense of connection and fulfilment. He defines Blue Mind as ‘a mildly meditative state characterised by calm, peacefulness, unity and a sense of general happiness and satisfaction with life in the moment – that’s triggered when we’re in or near water’.

Over-stimulated and overwhelmed

We have outsourced much of our learning to the internet and 24/7 access to our brain’s version of a cloud-based back-catalogue is for some a necessity for personal reassurance. An abundance of information often immediate and fleeting contributes to a state of restlessness. Chaotic attention patterns ripple into our communication habits creating social disconnection and even feelings of isolation. J would term this state of high alert ‘Red Mind’ and if prolonged the potential health impacts are significant.

Happily as NLP Professionals we recognise there are many approaches we can take to address these unsustainable lifestyle patterns. Science is beginning to prove that water-centric locations foster the emotional states and personal coherency required to begin to make wiser decisions. Trading in some Red Mind for a little Blue Mind is certainly something noteworthy.

Consider an average busy day at the office, how would momentarily ditching the technology for a 15-minute walk by a lake or river impact upon your ability to be present and think clearly? Continuing blue space research can give us clues to why environment matters and here are just three reasons to get your Blue Mind on!

1 Complexity, simplicity, predictability and fascination

Man-made environments can create cognition fatigue, whilst natural outdoor locations particularly water-centric ones with clean lines and larger expanses of similar and complimentary hues are restorative. Less sensory clutter to consciously filter enables



our minds to enter a less frenetic mode.

In addition to scene complexity; randomly shifting variables compete for ‘directed attention’ creating overstimulation, reducing focus and resulting in poor memory. Consider a fast moving, chaotic marketplace. Active interest in novelty requires an unsustainable amount of energy and so instead we become half present until everything becomes a dissociated blur of white noise.

Rather than zoning out, Blue Mind is a state of ‘involuntary attention’ where we can pay attention in a relaxed manner giving our conscious mind some down time. Waves breaking on a shore for example provide ideal balance between predictability and variety, this soft-fascination keeps us equably present in the moment.

2 Meaning + discovery

Whether through nature or nurture many of us are drawn to water and holidays, festivals and celebrations often involve being near or in water. New skills are gained, knowledge acquired and personal discoveries made during these shared experiences. Even solitary water-based pursuits such as fishing enable time for reflection and insight. We all know that when we spend time doing things that are meaningful the memories we create are richer and more vibrant; in essence we value and live our experiences more fully.

The positive associations we place upon blue spaces often invite freedom to explore and entrain a lightness of spirit together with a deeper sense of participation... Perfect for coaching and personal development!



➔ 3 Awe, connection, breath + energy

Vast spaces such as expansive seascapes and horizons evoke an embodied sense of awe. According to the research of Dr Paul Piff awe encourages empathy, gratitude and pro-social compassionate actions. When awed by nature, our internal chatter quiets and our state changes adding stillness, perspective and awareness of a relational quality. Water-centric locations often enable both solitude and connection, edges melt away, boundaries between our internal and external world become blurred and isolation dissolves into a sense of network and systemic awareness.

It is also possible that breathtaking scenery could directly impact our respiration and heart rate. The link between our breath pattern and the autonomic nervous system is well documented and many NLP professionals now incorporate approaches such as Yoga, Mindfulness and *mBraining* to access generative insights. Water-centric locations complement these methods through providing a natural and indirect potential route to encouraging improved respiratory function.

So dive in...

We have barely skimmed the surface, not even touching on the techniques that lend themselves to these watery locations, the fluidity of watery language and the vast array of metaphors offered by blue spaces. Through creating environments that promote Blue Mind we can enable our clients to think more coherently, connect more fully and act more responsibly for themselves, others and the planet. ■



Get your Blue Mind on

Envisage a previously visited and favourable natural outdoor environment. Choose one where water is present if not predominant – drift into the scene and fully mentally immerse yourself in this location experiencing and embodying a sense of connection with this place. Consider the meaning you attach to this memory and the anchors you have associated with this place, and take time to really notice your physiology, particularly your breathing.

This scene will likely have comprised open space, clean lines and simple colours, with slower, distinctly analogue movement patterns and minimal distraction. In addition, some basic evolutionary needs such as nourishment and shelter, a sense of safety and belonging were doubtlessly evident too.

Ask yourself:

- How creative, curious and adaptive is the 'you of that moment'?
- How would the 'you within that moment' respond to changes in circumstance?
- How does the scene you envisaged compare with an average day at the office in terms of:
 - Technology versus self-reliance
 - Time awareness – attention on the present
 - Red Mind versus Blue Mind potential.

Go deeper, read further, spend some time in Blue Space (in, near, on and under the water) and model the benefits for yourself.

Further reading

www.wallacejnichols.org.
www.ecehh.org.
<http://paulpiff.wix.com>.
www.mbraining.com.

Lizzi Larbalestier is a professional coach, NLP and *mBIT* Trainer specialising in marine-based change facilitation assisting senior executives to reconnect with awe in order to become less certainty reliant and more emotionally coherent: www.catalystnlp.co.uk. She is currently working with Exeter Medical School to commence studies into breath efficacy, affect and blue space, and welcomes enquiries for involvement in this research.