



## COACHES OF THE MATRIX

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

If *coaching* is about unleashing potential (which it is), and a *coach* is the facilitator of the unleashing (which he or she is), then there are several very effective and powerful *coaches* in trilogy movies on *The Matrix*. This shouldn't be any surprise. After all, the movies center around Thomas Anderson, alias Neo, who is seeking to discover if he is "the one," what that means, and how to unleash that reality so that he can master the Matrix and save the last human city, Zion.

To this end, Morpheus plays mentor to Neo, so does Trinity, so does the boy potential. Each of these, and several others, coach Neo to enable him to *unleash his potentials*. And yet it is the Oracle who truly is Neo's personal or executive coach. So given that, would you like to see some matrix coaching? Good. Then here we go.

### **Morpheus, Mentor and Coach**

Coaching today is mostly experienced in a very special kind of "getting to the heart of things" kind of conversation. As a dialogue, coaching is a conversation that speaks the truth no matter how difficult. It is a dialogue that probes and explores. And it is uniquely a dialogue driven by questions that activate untapped capacities. From this perspective, the first dialogue between Morpheus and Neo in their first meeting sounds very much like a coaching session. Neo has, in fact, come to meet Morpheus because "it is the question that drives us" as Trinity had noted in the nightclub. Neo responded, "What is the Matrix?"

*Morpheus:* "Let me tell you why you are here. You have come because you know something. What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your whole life, felt that something is wrong with the world. You don't know what, but it's there like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that brought you to me. You know what I'm talking about?"

*Neo:* The Matrix?

"Do you want to know what it is?"

"Yes."

“The Matrix is everywhere, it’s all around us . . . It is the world that has been pulled down over your eyes to blind you from the truth.”

“The truth?”

“That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, kept inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste, or touch. A prison for your mind.” (Wachowski, 2000, p. 300)

This was the first conversation between Neo and Morpheus in the movie. Wonderful science fiction if you love sci-fi movies, and yet strangely familiar to everyday life also, isn’t it? Why is that? I think it reminds us so much of our everyday lives because *we also live in a Matrix*. We live in a different matrix though, one of our own making, one made up of mental and emotional frames that define reality for us. What we have long called our “model of the world” in NLP is a matrix—a *matrix of frames within frames* about all kinds of things. It’s a matrix of belief frames, value frames, understanding frames, frames of decisions, intentions, memories, imaginations, etc.

*Morpheus*: “It seems you’re feeling a bit like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit hole. You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees because he is expecting to wake up. You know that something is wrong with the world. You can’t explain it, but you feel it, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad.”

*Neo*: “The Matrix?”

*Morpheus*: “Yes, the Matrix. The world has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.”

*Neo*: “What truth?”

*Morpheus*: “That you were born into slavery, into a prison that you cannot see or smell . . . A prison of the mind . . . Unfortunately, no one can tell you what the Matrix is; you have to see it for yourself.”

Again, that’s very true to the NLP model. The maps that we offer are at best *only maps*, and “the map is not the territory.” The experience to which any map points always and inescapably differs from the map. That’s why *experience* and *experiential learning* is so important. And that’s why ultimately no one can learn NLP from a book, a journal, not even a video-tape. It’s experiential. It’s an experience we have in relationship with others.

In his invitation for Neo to see the Matrix for himself, since “no one can tell you what it is,” Morpheus presented two pills. He held them in his hands, a blue one and a red one.

*Morpheus*: “Take the Blue Pill,” he said, and “you will wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. Take the red pill and you stay in Wonder Land, and I’ll show you how deep the Rabbit Hole goes.”

What is the matrix? Neo discovered it first by taking the red pill and exiting the Matrix. He later discovered more about it as he re-entered a matrix *construct* (the white room or space) to learn about such matrices and how to master them. Morpheus explained that the Matrix is “a neural-interactive simulation,” a dreamworld. In the original screenplay, the following lines were part of what

Morpheus told Neo about the Matrix.

*Morpheus:* “You’ve been living inside a dreamworld, Neo . . . your whole life has been spent inside the map, not the territory. This is the world as it exists today.” (Wachowski, 2000, p. 310)

How about that? I think someone has been reading Korzybski’s *Science and Sanity*. If you notice the tease, the invitation to explore, the use of metaphors, and the set-ups that invite response potential—these are *some of the tools of a coach*. As a coach we do not teach or train as if the client doesn’t know or lacks the resources for discovery. Assuming the client has all he or she needs to learn and to discover, the coach is more of a guide and facilitator.

Once free from the Matrix, Morpheus took Neo inside the construct and various programs for training. And yet inside of the training, there was coaching. While in the construct Kong Fu program, after Morpheus put Neo to the test, and knocked him down, he asked lots of questions:

*Morpheus:* “Why did I defeat you? Do you think my being faster or stronger, in this place, has anything to do with my muscles? Do you think that is air your breathing? Now stop trying to hit me and hit me.”

In the next round, Neo almost hit Morpheus, but he stopped himself from hitting him. As his fist stopped immediately in front of his face, he said, “I know what you’re doing.” Yet did he? Did he really? Whether he did or didn’t, Morpheus added a line that set the frame for what he was doing.

*Morpheus:* “I’m trying to free your mind.”

As a great coach and mentor, Morpheus knew that he could “only point to the door,” but that Neo would have to be the one who would walk through it and who would have to chose to walk through it. In the Jumping Program Morpheus coached Neo to “Free your mind of fear, doubt, and disbelief. Free your mind!” Upon saying that he then demonstrated jumping tall buildings at a single bound to give Neo a model for what’s possible.

### **Coaching by Other Potentials**

As Neo entered the home of the Oracle for his first visit with her, as he is invited in, he passes through her living room where there is a little boy. The boy was sitting on the floor holding a spoon. Yet this was not your average little boy. He had a shaven head and looked more like a miniature zen monk. In holding a spoon, the spoon swayed like a blade of grass. To this strange sight, Neo stared in astonishment. When the boy handed the spoon to him, it moved back to its spoon-like shape so it is perfectly straight. It was at that point that the boy became a coach to Neo.

*Boy:* “Do not try to bend the spoon. That is impossible. Instead, only try to realize the truth.”

*Neo:* “The truth?”

*Boy:* “That there is no spoon.”

*Neo* nodded and stared at the spoon. “There is no spoon.”

*Boy:* “Then you will see that it is not the spoon that bends. It is only yourself.”

I like that. “It is not the spoon that bends. It is only yourself.” The key to mastering our matrix

involves bending. It is, in fact, *our bending* in our responses to things that is the height of wisdom—not the bending of the things in our world and having to get the world to adapt to us, although that’s where we typically put most of our energy. This is our belief, “If only things were different!” Yet if mastery actually arises from our bending—bending our own thinking, processing, constructing, attributing, defining, labeling, evaluating, and frame, the things that truly creates and alters our inner world, then control comes through our change, our transformation.

When we are able to bend, to flexibly bend our frames and matrices of frames, to adapt to the ever-changing world of processes, we develop a flexibility that enables us to adapt. This makes us more effective, fluid, resourceful, and graceful. It enables us to engage the world with both inner and outer resources.

In NLP we have long known that when we reframe, it is not the outside world that changes. *It is we who change.* Reframing isn’t an outer resource that makes the world different. Reframing empowers us to move into a different matrix of frames and so we encounter what seems like a different world. It is through our transformational changing that we are empowered to truly influence the world we live in. Yet when we do, we then bent in a new way. We viewed whatever occurs outside of us as *not mine*. We regard actions and communications as something interesting about others. Suddenly, there is no “insult.” There is curiosity about the other’s “tension and stress.” Yet while the world doesn’t change, our experience of it does. In fact, it may seem that we are living in a very different world.

When we know that in the framed matrices of our mind, it is *we who bend*, we are empowered. It empowers us to bend and move with a new kind of flexibility. The world *as we experience it* is ultimately a matter of our constructs. Learning to frame and reframe gives us the flexibility and freedom to choose. Then, like Neo, we don’t have to dodge bullets or be faster than speeding bullets. Morpheus told Neo. “When you’re ready, you won’t have to.” Nor do we. We can simply make them irrelevant.

### **The Oracle, Coach par excellence**

If Morpheus is a coach for Neo, there’s yet another person who is an even greater model as a coach. It is the Oracle. This is the person who apparently everybody goes to visit to discover their future, their gifts, their possibilities, their path, and their fate. “She knows everything?” Neo asked in the car when he first was on his way to see the Oracle. “She would say that she knows enough.” Morpheus replied. Later in the first movie and then again in *Matrix Revolutions*, Morpheus and Niobe say that the Oracle tells you what you need to hear. “It was for your ears only.”

When Neo arrives, he meets the Oracle in a 1950s kitchen where a grand motherly black woman is baking cookies. Not exactly what one might expect of an all-knowing *Oracle*. Not quite conventional for that role and the wisdom and intelligence she presents. And if she looked unconventional, her words and interactional style are even more so. Immediately, she comments to Neo.

*Oracle:* “You’re cuter than I thought. I see why she likes you”

*Neo:* “Who?”

*Oracle:* “Not too bright though.”

In this first encounter with the Oracle, there is a fierce but mystifying conversation. She challenges him by action and word about his concepts of fate, destiny, and free will, and in the process seeds many of the things that would come thereafter giving Neo time and experience to discover things for himself.

*Oracle:* “What do you think? You think you’re the One?” she asks.

When he says, “Honestly, I don’t know.” She points to the Latin words on her kitchen wall, “*Know thyself.*” Then she speaks about an inner knowing.

*Oracle:* “Being the One is just like being in love. Nobody can tell you you’re in love. You just know it. Through and through. Balls to bones.”

This suggestive encounter isn’t tied directly to her earlier off-handed comment about someone liking him, and yet it suggests that “knowing” this involves the same kind of knowing. She then takes to examining his jaw and looks at his palm. She then prods him about whether he thinks he’s the One.

*Oracle:* “I’m suppose to say, ‘HmMMMM.’ But you know what I’m going to

*Neo:* “I’m not the one.”

He says that as if asking and so with a tone of doubt and skepticism and yet questioning.

*Oracle:* “Sorry kid. You got the gift, but looks like you’re waiting for something.”

And he was. He was waiting . . . waiting to be convinced, waiting to believe, waiting for a miracle, waiting... Perhaps waiting for himself. He didn’t really know himself at all. Being the One, and knowing that you are *the One*, the only one who has the ability to master your Matrix, is both an exciting and frightening possibility. We hold back from that. It seems too much, too bold, too outrageous. We look for someone else to give us the key to our own inner Matrix. We want someone else to be responsible. But . . . *you have the gift.* And you may be waiting . . . or you may even now be learning the lessons and beginning to believe and to taking charge and walking the path of your own mastery.

### **Coaches of the Matrix**

These coaches of the matrix coached by *asking lots of questions* and by *posing lots of inquiries and explorations*. They invited Neo to discover what the Matrix is, who he is, and what he was capable of. Similarly, we coach best by asking questions, setting up puzzles, and teasing people with the possibilities awaiting their discovery. Questions, in fact, drive coaching because it gives us the power to activate another and to invite another to unleash potentials.

*Coaching* is truly a modality like no other modality. And while it has been around from the beginning of the human experience, we are only now truly appreciating the magic within it. Yet that magic can only be released when we truly believe and operate from the principle that the client is his or her own expert, has all that’s needed to tap into and release his or her potentials, and needs us for the fierce “getting to the heart of things” conversation.

**Summary**

- While coaching gets to the heart of things and involves fierce conversations that tell the truth when others pussy-foot around, coaching frequently does so by suggesting, hinting, and talking in proverbs. Why? Because coaching aims not so much at teaching, informing, or training, but calling forth from within so that the client discovers and owns.
- The magic of coaching via asking probing and searching questions is that it sends a person inward in such a way that it enables the person to unleash the talents and possibilities within which the person may not have even known about.

**Author:**

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D., researcher and modeler, is developer of several NLP and Neuro-Semantic models.

**References:**

See *The Matrix Model* (2003) and *Frame Games* (2000), these works presents the latest Neuro-Semantic model of all our frames within frames.