

Jaap Hollander



*Provocative*  
coaching

making things better  
by making them worse

**Jaap Hollander**



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coaching,***

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# Introduction

## Making things better by making them worse

This is a book about Provocative Coaching and Provocative Therapy: challenging people in order to help them. It explains in detail how to do Provocative Coaching and the psychological mechanisms through which the provocative style works. Maybe you are a coach or a therapist? Could this be a useful new instrument for your toolbox? It would be great to chuckle when you are thinking back over your sessions, wouldn't it? Humour is an important aspect of Provocative Coaching. Also, you may currently have some clients who don't improve, no matter how hard you try. With Provocative Coaching you might be able to help them too. Some of them at least. Or maybe you are just an interested layperson who wants to learn about people. You might be a teacher or a manager or a consultant. Never mind, you are welcome to participate. At minimum you are in for a few good laughs. About halfway through Chapter 2, there is the following conversation:

**Coach** (*touching client's shoulder*): So, tell me, what's the problem?

**Client**: I have become a total monomaniac ... I do *one* thing only. Well, maybe a few other little things, but mostly I do only one thing.

**Coach**: And we all know what *that* is, don't we?

**Client** (*chuckling*): You do?

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**Coach:** Yes, but I don't want to embarrass you with sexual disclosures.

**Client** (*laughing*): But the thing is, I have become so good at being a monomaniac, that I can't do anything else any more. Let me give you an example. I used to be involved in playing classical flute music a lot. But that has totally fallen out of my life ...

**Coach:** Your *flute* has fallen off! (*Laughter from the group, client slaps coach's knee*)

**Client:** Yeah, you could say that! What you are suggesting, that might be quite true!

**Coach:** Okay, so you are focusing on one thing only, and all the other things disappear. And what *is* that one single thing?

**Client:** Yeah, well, that's my work ... my working life ... a lot of different kinds of work, that's true, so there is *some* variation ...

**Coach:** Sure, within this monomania (*with his hand gestures coach is indicating a small space of about one cubic decimetre*), within this tiny space there is *some* variation ... Okay, but why is that a *problem*? Isn't it just a matter of enjoying your work? Doing what you like doing *most*? What's *wrong* with that? Forget about all these stupid little things like art, or personal development, or sex, or relationships, or the future of mankind and what have you ... *Work*, that's what counts! I understand. So why is that a *problem*? You are focusing on what you are most suited for – work.

**Client:** No, no, *no*, you've got to see, *no* ... that is one of the things with being a monomaniac, you're focused so much on one thing ... that is the *reason*

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why you enjoy that most, and that is precisely the *problem!* And then ...

**Coach** (*interrupting him*): But doesn't that make life a lot *simpler*?

**Client**: Yes, *no, no*, sure (*sarcastically*), that's true, it's very *simple*. When people come to me with plans that do not relate to my work, you know, I just say no, no, no, I don't have *time* for that!

**Coach**: *Right!* Good for you! So when people say they want to visit you, you go *no, no, no, no!* (*Coach is making broad defensive movements with his arms*) *Don't* visit me! I have *work* to do! Go away. Don't waste my time!

**Client**: Yeah ... just about.

**Coach**: But I still don't see what the *problem* is. You're doing what you *enjoy* doing. You're doing what *feels* good to you. Your life is *simple*. So what's the *problem*?

**Client**: Yeah, no, *no* ... well ... yeah, I'm doing my thing ...

**Coach**: And isn't that what everybody wants? To do their thing?

**Client** (*shading his eyes with his hand, turning inside*): *No* ... dammit, the *problem* is ... Okay, so I'm sitting behind my desk, and I'm thinking: I'm going to post a note at the musical conservatory to find a flute student as a musical partner ... And then I do write the note, but I never put it up on the board. Because I know the only way to play the flute well is to do it in a monomaniac way, and spend lots and lots of time on it.

**Coach**: So, in a moment of acute insanity, you let go of this wonderful state of total work obsession. But,



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lucky for you, you returned to your senses just in time! Common sense won, and you forgot these crazy plans like having a hobby and everything. And isn't that *beautiful*? That you have a healthy common sense that protects you from crazy actions like that?

**Client** (*staring into space*): You know, the strange thing is, when you say it, it sounds crazy (*making a lunatic gesture with his hand*). But that's exactly the kind of reasoning that I do myself, these days!

**Coach**: And think about the *money*!

**Client**: What?

**Coach**: What kind of work do you do?

**Client**: I do therapy and I write books.

**Coach**: Okay, so all these hours you could be writing books or could be seeing clients ... You could be making *money*!

**Client**: Yeah, exactly, that's what I'm thinking too ... I'm not crazy! It's a total waste of time!

**Coach**: You have to be really careful with this, you know. You start with one hobby, but then one thing leads to another. And pretty soon another hobby is added, and another one and another one. And before you know it, you are doing hobbies all the time and you can hardly get any work done any more. At first it's only playing the flute, but then you go: 'I want to take up sailing, because that's what I used to do too. And I should go to the pub more often, and play cards, because that's what I used to do. And going out to see movies, and going to the theatre, and to restaurants, and theatre festivals, and cross-country trips.' Before you know it, you are totally absorbed with all these stupid hobbies, and even if you would *like* to do some

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work, it's *impossible*. Your hobbies have taken over your life like a virus or a fungus or whatever and they have completely destroyed your productivity! You can't work any more because you have to play the flute, you have to go to the club, you have to go sail your boat ... And what is that going to do for your wife and for your children?

**Client:** What do you mean?

**Coach:** Your children are *depending* on you. They are thinking: dad is going to work his ass off for at least another thirty years. And then we will get a great inheritance. He will leave us lots of money! And while you are getting more and more addicted to those horrible hobbies, your children will think: our inheritance is going down the drain! Dammit, there goes another 1,000 euros! Your children are *crying* when you are playing the flute! (*With horror in his voice*) 'My God, he is playing the flute with *my* money!' (*Client is collapsing with laughter, he can't speak*)

(*Coach continues accusingly, pointing with his finger, still enacting the children*) 'And there he is, my *own* father, throwing away *my* money with that stupid flute of his! *Pissing* away my money!' They see their apartments shrinking, their vacation houses going up in smoke ... And how are they going to respond? 'Hi, son, are you coming home this weekend?' 'Well, dad, have you been playing the flute a lot, lately?' You know what I mean. Your children need you to work *more*, not less. They are counting on you. So I absolutely advise against any hobbies!

**Client:** But I *will* find a way!

## What is going on here?

This may seem like quite an unusual way of behaving for a professional coach or therapist. This coach is certainly not exhibiting the customary professional distance. He does not even seem to understand that he should not impose his personal opinions on the client. And why doesn't he accept the problem the client expresses? If the client experiences something as a problem, then by definition it *is* a problem, isn't it? Who could ever know better what the problem is than the client themselves? And what about the golden rule that the client ought to speak at least twice as much as the coach? In this conversation the coach was talking more than the client. There were even a few moments where the coach interrupted the client, also something coaches and therapists are usually taught not to do.

## Welcome to Wrocław

Our story starts in Wrocław (pronounced: vroch-whav), a city in the southwest of Poland. There was disastrous fighting in Wrocław during the Second World War, which left much of the city in ruins. Today it has been restored and snow is melting on the sidewalks and the windowsills. Picture a slightly derelict engineering school in a cobblestone street. It has yellowish walls and a section of glass bricks, many of them cracked. In the hallway an old woman in a headscarf takes your coat and gives you a worn copper token. You enter a conference room where about forty coaches and therapists are gathered, chatting quietly amongst themselves.<sup>1</sup> Packed tightly in the small room, they

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<sup>1</sup> The text in this book is taken in most part from the seminar in Wrocław. To this, some demonstrations and questions have been added from other trainings which Jaap Hollander taught in Russia and in his home country Holland. In many places the text has been condensed, expanded or edited for clarity and thoroughness. The resulting text is presented as a single workshop because this format is – in the opinion of the author – livelier and easier

have come from all over Poland to learn about Provocative Coaching. A psychologist from Holland, Jaap Hollander, will be teaching a three-day seminar. There is an atmosphere of curiosity and expectation.

## **Provocative Coaching offers new possibilities**

Why are these people attending this seminar? Provocative Coaching offers possibilities that are not found in any 'traditional' type of coaching or therapy. Yet, even though it differs greatly from the usual approaches, it harnesses forces that most people will intuitively recognize as powerful. To illustrate this, I would like to invite you to think back to a certain moment in your life history. Specifically, a moment when you had a strong wish to do something, and someone – someone who was important to you – said something like: 'That will be too difficult for you'. Or maybe this person said: 'You are too old for that' or 'You are too young'. Or they might have used that curious, North-American expression: 'It just isn't *you*.' Can you remember a moment like that? You had a strong wish to do something and someone important said you couldn't do it. What was your psychological response? What did you think and feel? Most likely, you were thinking something like: 'You think I cannot do that? We will *see* about that! I will *show* you what I can do!' And that response resulted in an even greater determination on your part. Provocative work utilizes this type of response.

Provocative Coaching is related to 'paradoxical intention' and 'reverse psychology'. The coach encourages the client to do their problem *more* rather than less. This is expressed concisely in the provocative adage: '*Do* some more of that, *think* some more of that, *feel* some more of that!' The classical approaches to coaching and therapy convey messages

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to read than a formal text.

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like: 'I believe in your potential' and 'You have a wealth of inner resources'. The provocative coach, however, verbally belittles the client as a person and expresses doubts about the propriety and the feasibility of their goals. And yet it is important to distinguish Provocative Coaching from simple, straightforward confrontation. In Provocative Coaching, these challenges are presented to the client with humour and *warmth*. Provocative Coaching is a psychological cocktail, consisting of cognitive assault mixed with a substantial quantity of emotional support and a generous dash of laughter. The creation and maintenance of this three-part mixture requires training and practice, hence the seminar reproduced in this book. Once mastered, Provocative Coaching can be surprisingly fast and effective. And, not unimportantly, it can be quite an enjoyable experience for the coach or the therapist. Preliminary research shows that coaches and therapists experience more happiness in their daily lives when they do provocative work. Does this mean that we should abandon our conventional methods? Certainly not. Provocative Coaching is an effective new option, not a replacement for the traditional approaches.

## Chapter 1

# He told him what he was really thinking

## From provocative intuition to provocative technique

**Jaap:** Not everybody is here yet, but it is past 10 o'clock, so what do you say, shall we get started?

**Audience:** Yes!

**Jaap:** These days, who knows when people will arrive ...

**Audience:** They've had their chance.

**Jaap:** Right! And we will welcome them when they arrive. It is a great honour to be here in Poland to teach you Provocative Coaching. For the next three days we'll be working quite intensively. My goal is to help you as best I can to understand Provocative Coaching and to integrate the provocative style into your coaching work.

About twenty-five years ago I met with a colleague who had just come back from the United States. He gave me a couple of audio cassettes. For our younger colleagues, audio cassettes are rectangular plastic boxes that contain a thin ribbon of magnetic tape. We used to put them in what was called a 'cassette recorder' and then you could play

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them like an MP3 file! (*Audience laughs*) And my colleague said: 'You have to listen to this! This is something *totally* new. They call it *Provocative Therapy*.' Oh? We'd never heard of that before. So we listened to the tape and we were flabbergasted. We were both, Anneke and I – oh, I haven't introduced Anneke to you yet. Sorry ... I forgot. This is Anneke, my beloved wife and co-director of our training institute in Holland (*Anneke smiles and waves*).

So we listened to the tape, and both being clinical psychologists – and living in the 1980s – we were used to being extremely friendly, positive and supportive towards our clients: 'You are okay, you are valuable, you are worthwhile, you can achieve your goals, I understand how you feel, I feel what you see' and so on. Well, these are still useful messages if you want to help someone change. The world would be a better place if people sent out those kinds of messages more often. These days in NLP we call it 'sponsoring'. It used to be called 'unconditional positive regard' in Rogerian psychotherapy: 'I accept you as you are and I see your potential'.

Anyway, we listened to the tape and this Provocative Therapy was indeed *completely* different. They were telling the client things like: 'There's no way you can achieve this, you're stupid, you'll never amount to anything'. Just the opposite of what we were used to. And, the strangest thing, the results were great. Clients changed. How was that *possible*? We were immediately intrigued. So eventually we invited Frank Farrelly, who is the person who thought up this whole approach, the originator of Provocative Therapy, to come to Holland and teach. This was twenty-three, twenty-four years ago. I remember Frank was teaching for us when our

son Florian was born, and he's twenty-three now. So for the next ten years we had Frank over every year and we were going: 'This is great! I wish I could do this ...' We did some of it, of course; it wasn't as if we never tried it out. But it was difficult to spontaneously reproduce what Frank did. Of course there was a structure underneath his work, but that structure was not explicit. That had to do with Frank's teaching style and with the way he was taught himself. He taught purely by example – 'teaching by osmosis' he calls it. He gave demonstrations and we watched in awe. And then he would explain what he had done. And that was it, as far as the didactics were concerned.

But at some point we said: 'Hey, we are NLP trainers, modelling is our expertise. So let's model Frank Farrelly.' In NLP, modelling means making exceptional human skills learnable. You start by identifying the behaviours, the thought processes, the beliefs and the emotional states of somebody who can do something really well. The next step is to put these processes into practice, to see if you can get the same results. If that works, you translate them into techniques that other people can learn. Basically, modelling is a way to make skills *transferable*. So we were thinking: 'Let's model Frank', and we did this for many years. We developed a coherent system of skills, behaviours and beliefs that can help you learn to do Provocative Coaching much more easily. I phrase that carefully when I say: 'You can learn it *more easily*'. I did not say you can learn it *without any effort at all*. It still takes a good amount of work and experience to get it right.

But now that we have these explicit provocative techniques, you can take a jump-start. It's a bit like learning to navigate in a new city. If you live in that



# About the author

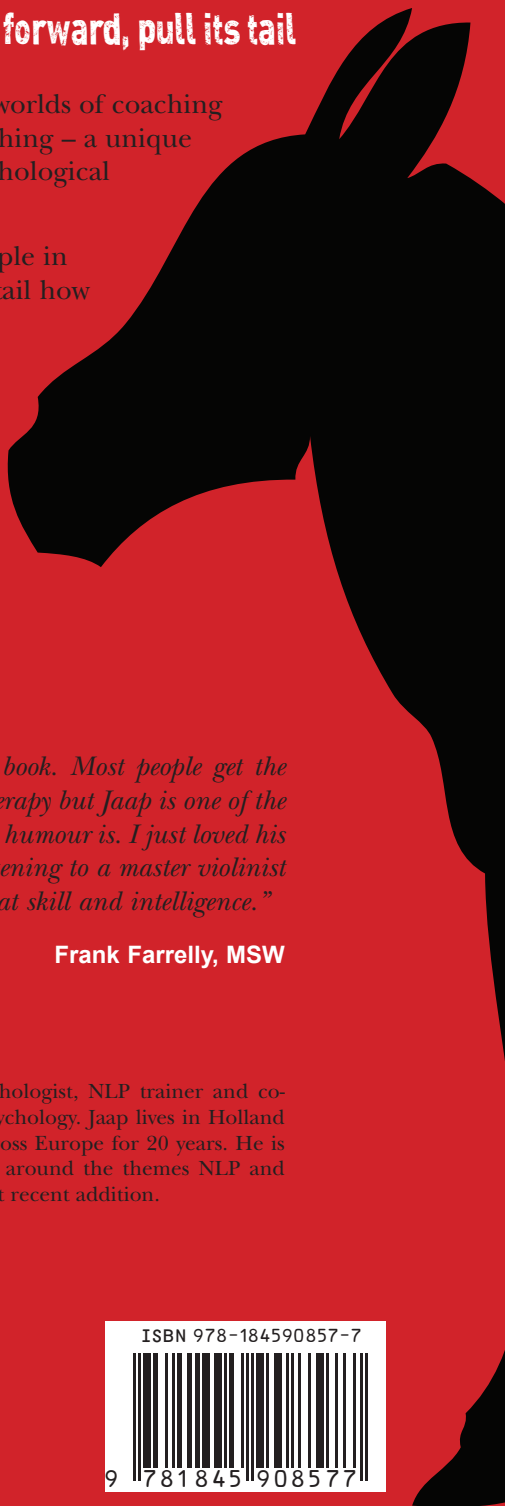
Jaap Hollander (b. 1952) lives in Nijmegen, Holland. He started his career as a clinical psychologist in a large mental hospital. From the mid-1980s on he specialized in hypnosis, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Provocative Therapy. Together with his wife and colleague, Anneke Meijer, he introduced NLP in the Netherlands in 1984 and founded the Institute for Eclectic Psychology (IEP). The IEP has trained more than 10.000 professionals, mostly in NLP and Provocative Coaching. Core IEP values are *development* and *reflection*. The IEP wants to contribute to a world where people take time to reflect upon themselves and to advance their inner potential, becoming more flexible in their work, more sensitive in their communication and stronger as persons.

Jaap Hollander has written nine books, amongst them *Essentials of NLP*, the Dutch standard text on NLP; *Trance and Magic*, about trance rituals in Brazil; and *Success Isn't Everything It's Made Out To Be*, about Provocative Coaching. He also developed 'MindSonar', a computer test for thinking styles; and the 'Nano Tech Power Deck', an NLP card game.

# If you want the donkey to move forward, pull its tail

A fresh wind is blowing through the worlds of coaching and psychotherapy: Provocative Coaching – a unique cocktail of humour, warmth and psychological provocation.

This is a book about challenging people in order to help them. It explains in detail how to coach provocatively and the psychological mechanisms through which the provocative style works. It may seem like quite an unusual way of behaving for a professional coach or therapist: humour, however is an important aspect of coaching. Provocative Coaching is related to ‘paradoxical intention’ and ‘reverse psychology’.



*“I am very much impressed with Jaap’s book. Most people get the confrontational aspect of Provocative Therapy but Jaap is one of the few who also understands how important humour is. I just loved his demonstrations in this book. It is like listening to a master violinist at work, playing the instrument with great skill and intelligence.”*

**Frank Farrelly, MSW**



**Dr Jaap Hollander** is a clinical psychologist, NLP trainer and co-founder of the Institute of Eclectic Psychology. Jaap lives in Holland and has been teaching psychology across Europe for 20 years. He is the author of ten books, all focusing around the themes NLP and psychotherapy, with this being his most recent addition.

Psychotherapy



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