

IMPROVED TONALITY AND STYLE ON THE  
TENOR SAXOPHONE

N.L.P. MODELLING PROJECT  
FOR JOHN SEYMOUR ASSOCIATES  
PRACTITIONER TRAINING

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## Abstract

In this project I aim to identify the difference that makes the difference amongst saxophonists, specifically in relation to tonality. I do not intend to focus on technical ability, but instead, on the sometimes illusive quality of tone and style that some saxophonists display.

I hope to isolate the essential elements which are critical to attain and maintain the skill.

## Methodology

I identified two models. One who was good at the skills I desired, and one who was excellent at the skills.

I interviewed both separately using [T.O.T.E. elicitation](#) questions. I encouraged my models to explore fully what happened within and without them before, during, and after they engaged in the behaviour I was modelling. Utilising feature detection, pattern recognition, and S.C.O.R.E. I concentrated on noticing qualities and characteristics that seemed to be critical to the skills I was modelling.

When observing my models actually playing their instrument I was watching particularly for changes in physiology, body posture and body tension. I was also interested in state, and any features I could detect which the models had not mentioned during the interview stage.

In order to facilitate a useful modelling state in myself I decided to tape the interviews so that I did not have to focus on pure content at

this stage. I switched on my peripheral vision and fine tuned my senses. Set my right brain on "receive" , state in "curious" and started to play. Bearing in mind that what you enjoy you do well and what you do well you enjoy, and so on and so on.

## Results

### MODEL NUMBER ONE

The model of excellence was model number one. This model displayed a very positive belief in self, in his ability to play saxophone and in his approach to life in general. These beliefs seemed to be the same in many contexts, not just when playing saxophone.

The beliefs were

- playing saxophone is easy
- I can do anything I set my mind to
- playing saxophone is fun
- it's fun to play music with others
- it is more important to have fun playing music than to be technically "good"

His basic philosophy seems to be, life is fun, don't take it too seriously, you can do anything you want to, and you will as long as you enjoy it.

Another feature which seemed to be important was the cognitive strategies used. A reliance on humour emerged, and subsequently ran through every other feature. He sees the comic or irreverent side of any potential problems. Thus making them seem smaller, or

non-existent. Primary representational system is auditory, secondary is kinaesthetic. When playing saxophone there is no internal visual modality at all. His motivational strategy is interesting in that he hears what he wants to play Aic (if he is composing the music). He then plays it using AE as feedback, if it is not how he thinks it should be, he will feel it in the stomach, (a tension) k', if it is o.k. he will feel it behind his eyes, (a glow) k'. However, throughout the whole activity he will be splitting his internal auditory sense between Aic replaying and refining the melody, and A'° telling him, (in his own voice), to play the tune in different ways, until it sounds as he wants it.

An habitual strategy he uses is to whistle. As the melodies come into his head he externalises them through this process. Constantly refining and improving the melody by whistling, until he can play it on his saxophone.

His physiology is relaxed, with an even skin colour. He uses symmetrical gestures and flowing movements when talking. When playing the saxophone there is more tension in the body and movements become jerky, with the exception of the fingers which remained relaxed and fluid. His emotional state when playing is one of anticipation and curiosity changing to exhilaration when his outcome of playing what's in his head is achieved.

He believes that the instrument is an extension of his face, almost like an elephant's trunk. There is a kinaesthetic link from behind his eyes through the instrument to the fingers.

If he replicates the tone and melody he has in his head (Aic) through the saxophone he gets a glow behind the eyes K'. In order to get the "tone" the way he "feels" it should be he focuses his internal attention on his stomach and throat. He then seems to link

kinaesthetic and auditory modalities and constructs what he needs then transmits this to his mouth. E.g. -  $K_{ic} + A_{ic} = K_{eAe}$ .

If he can not achieve his goal he feels it in his abdomen K'. His motivation strategy will then be to start again, and do the same process, he does not do anything different. His belief in self is important here, as is his humour. He will access previous memories of success to continually motivate himself. He has sub-consciously anchored the relevant positive experiences and can recall these when needed. His meta programme is towards the positive.

In this learning/creative state he is very focused with little awareness of external environment, almost demon state, and very much first position. However, when actually playing or performing the finished piece his awareness is predominantly external, moving between first and second perceptual positions. He relies almost exclusively on his own feedback for evidence of outcome achievement. Although he does listen to others, if he had negative feedback from an external source he would completely discount it if his own [T.O.T.E. indicated](#) he had achieved his desired outcome.

## MODEL NUMBER TWO

Model number two was not too dissimilar from my first model, therefore I will cover what I believe to be the significant differences. The beliefs held by model number two were not as positive. He held a limiting belief that he could not reproduce the results he wanted all the time. His strategy was to be more serious in approach, believing some aspects of his activity (playing with a band) to be more of a chore at times.

His awareness was more internal when actually playing or performing music and there was more reliance on external feedback, if this was negative it would affect state. There did not seem to be an anchored positive experience, as with model number one, and when stuck, the meta programme he ran was to move away from perceived problem.

Interestingly, both models accessed the same representational systems and used similar strategies to elicit new melodies (on sax). i.e. Aic AE K'. The difference here was that model number two did not whistle the melody constantly to refine, he went straight to saxophone.

In terms of the unified field, model number two operated predominantly in first position in the present and at the logical level of capability. Model number one operated in first and second position, in the past and present and at the logical level of beliefs, and identity. This difference seems to be critical in achieving desired outcome.

One final difference which seems important is the aspirations of the two models. Model one has very specific outcomes. Although not N.L.P. trained, he future paces to a time when he has achieved the melody, tone or style technique he desires, and collects the evidence so that he knows when he has succeeded. He then has Aic which he anchors. He thinks small chunk until outcome achieved.

Model number two has vague outcomes, he is very enthusiastic about progressing and improving his saxophone skills, but does not have any evidence to let him know when he will have achieved his outcome. Therefore, the goal is never ending. He does not chunk down, he thinks big chunk.

## SUMMARY

In summary, to achieve an improved tone and style/technique on the saxophone I felt that I had to adopt the following model:

- believe I could do it, tell myself I can do it.
- believe it would be fun.
- relax my body and mouth.
- develop a link between the feeling behind my eyes (like a glow) the tension in my abdomen, and the melody I can hear in my mind, then transmit this to my mouth and tongue.
- define my immediate goal, be very specific, then imagine how I will know when I have achieved my goal, what I will hear, feel, see etc.
- see or hear the funny side of things.
- filter out external stimuli, except the sound of saxophone.
- value my own feedback above that of others.
- adopt an air of anticipation and curiosity.
- whistle more often, particularly when melodies come into my head.
- tell myself inside my head in my own voice to play the melody in different ways until it fits with how I hear the melody in my own head.

When I modelled this strategy, the most important aspect to me was the belief that I could do it. I felt very sure about my ability, I knew that my confidence and motivation would not be affected by negative feedback from others.

The other thing that struck me was the sense of fun and enjoyment that developed within me. I knew that I would have fun achieving my outcome.