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# Team Bonding

## The Tribal Lesson

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## Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide the detail to allow any motivated person to deliver the event described here, along with enough explanation of each activity to allow professional training organisations to assess the merit of the event. Experience shows that the event is best delivered by the combination of a lead person – driving the overall schedule with a working knowledge of the practical application of all the disciplines here – along with experts in the individual disciplines, so it requires the experts described in the section [People](#).

## Summary

This is a method of building and embedding strong bonds within a team, leaving individuals with the ability to re-establish these bonds quickly in new teams, through a carefully orchestrated fusion of Fencing and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), to evoke and anchor feelings of the state associated with fighting for the tribe, and then accessing the anchor to demonstrate both the power and the effectiveness of the NLP technique.

## Overview

The session is structured and managed to drive the event briskly through the following stages:

- Session Introduction – 20 minutes. This informs the participants about what they will get from the event by a presentation from the sponsor, followed by a brief statement by all attendees of what they hope to get from this. After this, the trainers present their background to define the credibility of who is delivering it, with an outline of their roles, while starting to get them into the right frame of mind to operate as a team and identify with their tribe.
- Learning to Fence – 25 minutes. This gets the participants physically ready for the event with activity in a non-threatening atmosphere, while also starting to assess the capabilities of each relative to the others, in order to build balanced teams (using plastic kit).
- Games – 15 minutes. This gets the participants started to apply basic fencing in teams, using plastic kit in games: Line Battle, Capture the Flag, and Last Team Standing.
- Anchoring – 20 minutes. This is when the NLP Practitioners introduce the concept of Anchoring, using the experience participants have just been through with the games, and focussed on the positive states where they have a strong sense of mutual dependence on their team.
- First match – 1 hour 40 minutes. This is when the participants start to learn a limited repertoire of very specific and simple fencing actions using metal kit, making it feasible for novices to become proficient in these actions in a short time. They also start to feel a degree of threat and internal conflict, and have the opportunity to help the others in their team. The match puts the participants directly into a personal combat situation alongside their teammates, with the structure of the match forcing each to depend on the others for the team as a whole to succeed. For trained Fencers, the context of a team match always creates extreme emotional states – the design of this match allows novices to experience the same extremes. Typically, the moment each person becomes acutely aware of the “fight or flight” instinct and the need to fight for the team is the first time they step on the piste



and face an opponent with metal kit. During the match, the NLP Practitioners help the participants to anchor the positive team-player state.

- Lunch break – 30 minutes
- Anchoring – 30 minutes. This is to recap on the topic, answer any questions, and ensure the participants are building the anchors.
- Second match – 1 hour 5 minutes. At this stage, the team composition is changed in a way which creates new conflicts. The participants are taken through the experience of accessing the anchors, to bring them back to the state of mutual dependence – except now with a new team, against a new opponent. They are then immersed in the combat situation, and experience the effect of changing negative states and applying the positive state while in a new tribe, bringing to life the effectiveness of anchoring.
- Conclusion – 55 minutes. This stage recaps to the participants what they have been through, reminding them of the anchors, the triggers and the effect they had on their teamwork, directing them to take the opportunity to apply this as soon as they return to the workplace. For those interested in learning more about Fencing there is a final demonstration with 2 competitive Fencers staging a bout.

These are described in more detail in the following sections.

## People

The session requires the following roles, some of which may be filled by the same person with training in the required disciplines:

**Sponsor:** the person who has arranged the training

**Host/Lead MC:** the person in charge of the overall event who will lead everyone through the day

**Coach:** a qualified fencing coach, registered with the National Governing Body, and having the required First Aid qualifications. Normally 2 are required for any session (more if a larger session).

**Referee:** a Fencing referee recognised by all coaching staff as qualified for this session

**NLP Practitioner:** Preferably one per team, but on occasions one per session – a qualified NLP Practitioner.

## Session Introduction

The host will ensure everyone is ready, and then take the lead with a two-stage introduction. The first is a presentation by the sponsor describing the overall event. The second is a brief talk covering 5 points:

1. The nature and outcome of the event – this is about team bonding, where the individuals participate in this structured activity in order to discover their own ability to bond with others to make up a team, learn how to control the access to this ability, and learn how to apply it very rapidly into a new team situation.



2. What the event is tapping into – people will be in what amounts to a tribal group, where they will get a sense of, and move into a state of, feeling mutual dependence on their team-mates. Once the action starts, participants will find themselves wanting to help their team-mates, and when each one is in action, they will be fighting for their tribe, leading on to the 3<sup>rd</sup> point:
3. There are corporate hospitality events and introductions to fencing which are run using plastic kit designed for extreme safety. These will be used during the warm-up part of this event – however, the rest is using real metal weapons with Olympic-standard protective kit, which is more resilient than Kevlar. The first part of the fencing training will focus on safety, and it is important to pay careful attention. The sport is safe because of the attention paid to this, but people need to understand that blades can break, and a broken blade is almost the same as a duelling rapier.
4. The people running the event and their roles – there is an overall lead, referees for each match, a fully trained and qualified Fencing Coach for each team, and a certified NLP Practitioner for each team. There may also be observers who are attending for training purposes. On small events, the overall lead may also take on the role of referee.
5. The event will move at pace. The lead will call out when it's time to move on, and participants need to keep up. The purpose of this is to maintain a sense of urgency, while motivating participants to rely on each other – no one person will have the time to get everything right alone.

## Learning to Fence

This is a standard physical warm up sequence for Fencing, leading into practising basic Fencing movement – step forward and back, straightening the arm, lunging, recovering from the lunge. This will ease the participants into the physical activity necessary for Fencing, while also starting to create the sense of “fight or flight” associated with combat situations. Coaches may start to rank the participants at this stage, to get an initial seeding order.

## Games

The next stage is a series of 3 games, starting with a line battle<sup>1</sup> of all participants using plastic kit. There are three purposes to this:

1. To get the participants used to the idea of attacking, defending and hitting, without undue concern for safety
2. To promote a sense of fun and enjoyment, to sharpen the contrast in feeling when later using metal weapons and protective kit
3. To make the participants aware of how a Coach can use the plastic kit if they want to follow up subsequently and encourage – for example – their children to get started.

The lead will explain that – during the line battle – the Coaches will monitor the pace. If people are not being hit quickly enough, they will start tapping on shoulders. They will select the individuals by

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<sup>1</sup> Participants are divided into two groups facing each other across a line, then fence – anyone can hit anyone else on the other side of the line



picking those who seem most reluctant to join in, or least aggressive. This is the signal for that person to drop out as if hit. The line battle also creates the initial sense of fighting for the tribe. The anchoring process starts at this point, with the NLP Practitioners noting examples of behaviour.

On completion, the lead will guide everyone on the format of a team match (detailed in Appendix A – Accumulator Relay Match Format on page 11), communicating two key points:

1. The score is cumulative – each person picks up from where the last left off, and fights to get the overall team score up to a new target.
2. Each bout has a time limit – when reached, those who are competing must stop, regardless of the score, and hand on to the next pair.

The Coach concludes this stage by explaining what comes next – they will be kitted out in full Olympic-standard protective clothing, and equipped with metal weapons, they will be connected to electronic scoring apparatus as used in regular Fencing Competitions, to allow the hits by each person to be registered, and they will have a Referee who will apply the Rules of Fencing to their match.

## Basic Fencing

### Preparation of the Tribe

Participants are split into teams of 3, 4, 5 or 6 depending on the number of participants and the strategy for the day (see Appendix C – Numbers of Participants on page 13), with each team assigned a trained Fencing Coach and an NLP Practitioner.

### Fighting for the Tribe

The Fencing Coach will start off with a brief explanation of the history covering the 3 weapons in use in the sport today, their historical development from swords used in warfare and duelling, and the traditional use of Foil as a training weapon<sup>2</sup>.

The first lesson is about safety, re-emphasising that the sport is safe following the introduction of rules on safety and required protective kit, but if these rules are not followed and the kit is not used properly, it is not safe. This should be stressed enough to trigger a sense of real danger, without causing undue panic.

### Fencing Protocol

The Coach will give a short explanation about the rules of priority in Foil, to make clear that only one hit will count if both sides register a hit – that is, the attacking action gives priority and must be parried before priority switches to the opponent. If the opponent successfully parries, this gives priority to the riposte that follows the parry.

### Fencing Actions

Each member of the team learns to straighten the arm to hit from en garde in sixte, and a simple parry of quarte and straight riposte. Each then learns a different set of two actions, taught in the

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the weapon used in this event is Foil.



following sequence, while being advised the other team are learning exactly the same (if there are 4<sup>th</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> members, they will select which of these to learn, and then become the substitute for the person who first learned it):

1. Feint in quarte then disengage and attack to hit in sixte; beat in quarte, straight attack
2. parry counter-sixte, straight riposte; parry octave, straight riposte
3. straight attack low – drop from sixte to attack in octave; parry counter-sixte, straight riposte

The above are designed to create internal conflict within the individuals, resulting in strong emotional states as the conflicts reach resolution. For example:

- The first and third are learning an attack they do not know how to parry. The third learns a parry for an attack they have not learned, but is also the parry that blocks the first person's attack. Knowing that someone in the other team is being taught exactly the same, they will have conflicting views on whether to start with an attack, or wait and parry – and also whether to try to copy their team-mates' actions. They also will be conscious that there is a time limit during the bout, so if they wait when the score is against them, they risk letting down their team.
- The second person is learning the parries that will be effective against both the other two, but is not learning any attack, so can only wait to parry, or try to copy a team-mate's action. This person will also be conscious of the time limit, so if the score is against, will become acutely aware of letting their team down. In addition, this person will realise it will be a challenging bout when facing the counterpart in the other team who has also trained in two parries.

## Match Preparation

The Coach will not teach anything more, but will answer questions. There are no limits on what team members can ask and show each other, but it's up to them to take the initiative, so the Coach and the NLP Practitioner will encourage them to discuss with each other what they've learned. So – for example – if the first person asks how they can defend against a straight disengage, the response is to ask if any of the other two have learned something that would work. If the second person asks if quarte would work, the answer is yes.

Finally, the Coach will explain the match format and the order they would fight in, in particular, the significance of the team order on the last 3 bouts. This includes explaining to the team that having a great fencer on their team doesn't guarantee the team will win – but all the people having the right attitude and looking out for what would help their team-mates gives them the best chance. In particular, the Coach will highlight that advice that helps a team-mate to score a hit will result in the team getting double points for that hit, while negative behaviour (see Appendix D – Negative Behaviour on page 14) that causes a team-mate to get hit will result in the other team getting double points for that hit. The team agree on their order, and the strategy they will adopt (e.g. stick to their own parries and attacks, or trying to use each others).

## Timing

Approximate time allowed for these are as follows (more precise timing is given in Appendix F – Schedule of Activities on page 16):



- 5 minutes for the initial outline of achievements plus the basics of coming en garde, stepping and lunging to hit.
- 5 minutes per person learning their own set of parries and attacks (total 15 minutes for a team of 3, 20 minutes for a team of 4)
- 2 minutes per bout for each team member to have a practice fight to 3 hits against each other (total 8 minutes allowing for switching fencers, 11 minutes for a team of 4 – the 4<sup>th</sup> person will only Fence against the two who learned a different set of actions)
- 5 minutes question and answer and team discussion
- 4 minutes explaining the match format and picking the team order

The person leading the session will call out when each must move on to the next of the above stages.

## First match

The lead for the session will keep activity moving along briskly by calling out to keep to the timings shown in Appendix F – Schedule of Activities on page 16.

The match is run to the relay format with 3 hits, up to a maximum total of 27 hits to win, with timing of individual bouts to be 2 minutes (see Appendix A – Accumulator Relay Match Format). The NLP Practitioner will hand the totem at the start to the person due to go second, who will hold on to it during the first bout, then hand on to the person due to go on next, and so on, ensuring that someone holds it all the way through the match.

During the match, the Fencing coach will lead and encourage the off-piste members to support the one on-piste, in particular to get them to watch what the opponent is doing, and to call out any advice (e.g. “attack” or “wait”). Any advice which helps a team-mate to score a hit will result in double points for that hit – this will be indicated by the Coach holding up a Green card to show the Referee when a hit has been scored. Any negative comment that results in someone receiving a hit will receive double points – this will be indicated by the Coach holding up a Blue card. After each bout, the Coach will encourage the one coming off to share his immediate thoughts with team-mates on what went right or wrong, and all to guess what actions the opponent had been trained in. As part of this process, the Coach will bring out any moments of negativity, and discuss briefly with the NLP Practitioner, to decide whether or not this was a Blue card moment – if so, this will be shared with the Referee, who will then announce and adjust the score (this is limited to one post-bout Blue card per bout).

The Coach will also lead the team in a discussion of their strategy for how to handle the rest of the match. Without directly telling them, by questioning what went right and wrong, the discussion will guide them to consider things like teaching each other any appropriate attacks and parries (creating the conditions for more Green or Blue card moments). Finally, the Coach will monitor the performance of the individuals, to be able to determine at the end who was the strongest and who was the weakest in their team.

Meanwhile, the NLP Practitioner will maintain notes related to the score in the match (see Appendix B – Recording Form), including any memorable comments or actions at the time (with input from the





Fencing Coach via commentary on what is happening) plus any post-bout Blue card moments and ask the participants to comment briefly on their feelings and emotions at certain key points:

- when a winning hit was scored
- when time ran out
- when the lead switched round (from being ahead to being behind, and vice versa)
- when a piece of advice worked (either prompted beforehand, or called out) – a Green card moment
- when a negative comment caused a hit to be received – a Blue card moment

The NLP Practitioner will ask the participants about these in order to bring out the basic emotions they are feeling about their team.

### Timing

The schedule allows approximately 6 minutes for each bout, including the post-bout discussion.

### Anchoring

The NLP Practitioner will take each team member through their experience, to get them to understand the feelings that they experienced about supporting their team-mates, doing the best for the tribe and getting them to relive how they felt at the key points, reminding them that this comes from the sense of fighting for their tribe<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of this is to keep or bring them back to the state they were in when the feelings peaked, as well as bringing out the negative comments, the damage caused and how the behaviour can change, and can be re-directed into a positive state. The Fencing Coach will reinforce the positive aspects by reminding the individuals of what worked with a short synopsis of the bout. The NLP Practitioner will then help the individuals to anchor the sensations, feelings and behaviour associated with supporting and fighting for their tribe, and will get them to practise with an appropriate trigger (visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic to suit the individual and the context in which it will be used in future). For those who experienced negative feelings, the NLP Practitioner will take them through the process that moves them into a positive state.

### Second match

The second match requires switching the strongest participant from the winning team for the weakest participant from the losing team, without any explanation other than switching the teams round and with a corresponding exchange of armbands. The NLP Practitioner immediately tells the individuals to access their anchors to bond with their new team, with guidance from the NLP Practitioner to ensure this happens. The NLP Practitioner will also guide those who experienced negative feelings through a discussion of the new team-mates to identify any potential negatives about those individuals, and re-direct them into positive feelings. The Coach will encourage the team members to share positive information with each other, such as what they thought the others

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<sup>3</sup> Note that most participants get the strongest sensation when they first step onto the piste and face an opponent





were trained in and what the people in the opposing team are trained in. The new teams will then agree on strategy and team order.

The match then commences following the same approach as before, including note-taking.

## Conclusion

The NLP Practitioners will give final feedback to the individuals in the final teams, in particular to reinforce the sense of fighting for their tribe and to strengthen the anchors, allowing 5 minutes per person (15 minutes total for a team of 3, 20 minutes for a team of 4). In addition, they will explain how the participants can access this in the workplace (and elsewhere) whenever they are put into a team situation – regardless of whether it is short-term (such as when a team of specialists is called together as part of an Incident Management process, or brought into a Task Force) or long-term (such as a Departmental Restructure, or when the individuals are returning to their company to rejoin existing teams).

While this is happening, the Coaches will get ready for final matches on the piste, and be presented back to the participants as the chief warriors of their tribes, prior to a final match where the NLP Practitioner will encourage the participants to cheer for their tribe, as they watch their chief warrior fight. This will leave the participants on a high, and give them an insight into the full range of activity in modern foil fencing.

The wrap-up on the session is a brief recap of the objective of the event and confirmation that the objective was met, leaving them with the insert from their armbands to give the coat of arms from their final tribe as a memento of the event, with a final reminder – while passing out feedback forms and any contact cards from the specialists – that their attendance at this event included a year's membership of Scottish Fencing and that anyone who wants to learn more about the sport can contact their Coach, and those who want to learn more about NLP can contact their Practitioner.



## Appendix A – Accumulator Relay Match Format

Team members are numbered from 1 to 3 (first team) and 4-6 (second team). When there are four people in the team, the fourth member will substitute for the one who has trained in the same actions, after either their first or second bout. The match is fought as a relay of 9 bouts (so each member of the team fences every member of the opposing team). Each bout is fought until either the time limit (2 minutes active fencing) is reached, or one fencer takes the cumulative score up to the next multiple of 3. So the first bout completes either on the time limit, or when one fencer takes the score to 3 hits. The second bout completes either on the time limit, or when one fencer takes the team score up to 6 hits (and it may have started below 3 when this fencer came on). It continues in this sequence up to a maximum of 27 hits for the winning team. Note that if the time limit is reached, the scoring target still moves up by 3. The sequence of bouts is in the following order:

3-6

5-1

2-4

6-1

3-4

5-2

1-4

6-2

3-5

A common strategy is to allocate fencers 3 and 5 to the strongest members of their respective teams.



## Appendix B – Recording Form

Our Score	Their Score	Key event <sup>4</sup>	Comments/actions	Post-match notes/actions
0				
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				
22				
23				
24				
25				
26				
27				

<sup>4</sup> A - a winning hit was scored; B - time ran out; C - the lead switched round ; D – Green card; E – Blue card



## Appendix C – Numbers of Participants

Every team consists of 3, 4, 5 or 6 people – if more than 3 then 1 to 3 people are nominated before the match starts as the reserve for one other, and learns exactly the same actions as that person. The reserve comes on after either the first or second bout, so fences at least once and possibly twice – it is for the team to agree when. The event runs with one of two different strategies – either minimising the number of teams, or maximising the amount of fencing. The former means having up to 6 people in each team; the latter means aiming for 3 per team. The following outlines how to allocate to get 3 in most teams. For the whole event, if there is an even number of teams, they have their matches in parallel. If there is an odd number, the extra team will have a match against the strongest of the other teams during the First Match phase. The winner of that match will compete in the initial stage of the Second Match (after swapping strongest and weakest members), and the losing team will have a match against the strongest of the other teams during the Second Match phase. Note that it is possible to construct an event to have an even number of teams by assigning 2 or 3 reserves, which reduces complication and time, at the expense of less active fencing per person.

The minimum number of participants is 6 giving two teams of 3. 7 gives one team of 3 and one of 4, 8 gives two teams of 4, 9 gives three teams of 3, and so on. The number of teams in the event is calculated by the formula  $\text{Floor}\left(\frac{\text{Participants}+3}{4}\right)$  - where *Floor* is the function to round down to an integer, ignoring any fraction/remainder.

To illustrate with 17 participants:

$$\text{Number of teams} = \text{Floor}\left(\frac{17+3}{4}\right) = 5$$

With five teams:

Team A – 3 people; B – 3 people; C – 3 people; D – 4 people; E – 4 people

First Match: A vs B, A wins 27-20; C vs D, C wins 26-24; A is strongest team so A vs E, E wins 27-25

Strongest member of E swaps with weakest member of B; strongest of A swaps with weakest of C; strongest of C swaps with weakest of D.

with 15 participants:

$$\text{Number of teams} = \text{Floor}\left(\frac{15+3}{4}\right) = 4$$

With four teams:

Team A – 3 people; B – 4 people; C – 4 people; D – 4 people

First Match: A vs B, A wins 20-19; C vs D, C wins 27-24; C is strongest team overall

Strongest member of C swaps with weakest member of B; strongest of A swaps with weakest of D.



## Appendix D – Negative Behaviour

There are many types of negative behaviour, and this event is not attempting to eliminate all forms. It is focussed on the negative behaviour that can damage a team. This means the Coach and NLP Practitioner must apply their judgement and experience to decide what behaviour will be Blue carded. The key measure of this decision is that they must be able to explain what it was and identify how it can be eliminated. An example is criticism of an action taken – telling someone they are doing a parry the wrong way (or using the wrong parry) does not help them defend more effectively. If someone was hit because they didn't defend effectively, this results in an extra point for the other team. If the behaviour is not corrected, and the person who was criticised either makes the same mistake, or is hesitant about doing anything, and they get hit, this results in an extra point for the other team. Conversely, if the criticism is constructive – in this example, either showing them how to do the parry the right way, or which parry to use – then there would be no Blue card, and if the person scores with a riposte from this effective defensive action, it would result in a Green card. To generalise the example, one person saying “.....*don't*.....” is likely to merit a Blue card; saying “.....*do*.....” is likely to merit a Green card.



## Appendix E – Alternative Fencing Actions

If requested, the basic fencing stage can include a different set of Fencing actions. Being more complex it requires more time for teaching (an hour) and requires more time between bouts (a further hour in total) to allow team-mates to help each other. There are two advantages to this:

- It creates more opportunities for the individuals to get into more and stronger states while with their team, and this in turn makes for stronger anchoring while opening up the possibilities of more complex anchoring (integrating anchors and chaining anchors)
- This gives individuals a stronger foundation in Fencing, making it more likely that they would continue with the sport. This in turn would let them get involved in more team matches, where they can access the anchors and grow accustomed to using them.

Alternative actions are listed below, to be substituted for the section Fencing Actions on page 6.

Each member of the team learns to straighten the arm to hit from en garde in sixte. After this, each learns a different set of two attacks and two parries, taught in the following sequence, while being advised the other team are learning exactly the same (if there is a 4<sup>th</sup> member, this person will select which of these to learn, and then becomes the substitute for the person who first learned it):

1. Feint in sixte, straight disengage and attack to hit in quarte; parry quarte, straight riposte; classic one-two attack – disengage into quarte, disengage again to hit in sixte; parry octave, straight riposte
2. cutover high from sixte to hit in quarte; disengage from sixte to quarte, cutover low to hit in octave; parry octave then sixte/riposte high; parry quarte then counter-quarte/riposte with a bind
3. straight attack low – drop from sixte to attack in octave; parry octave, straight riposte; classic low-high attack – drop from sixte to feint in octave, then up to hit in sixte; parry quarte then counter-quarte/riposte with a bind

The above are designed to create internal conflict within the individuals:

- The first and third are learning the attack that will trigger the parry they learn, then the attack that will get around that parry, then a parry for an attack they haven't learned. Knowing that someone in the other team is being taught exactly the same, they will have conflicting views on what attack to start with – the one they can parry or the other one – and also how to defend against their counterparts.
- The third person may realise that the simple attack would be parried by the first person, so has to consider whether to start with the compound
- The first person will also realise that the second parry learned will be effective against the simple attack of the third, but not the compound, so will be uncertain on whether to use the parry, or to remain en garde in sixte.
- The second person is learning the parries that will be effective against both the other two, whether they do simple or compound attacks, but has more to learn, so will find it more difficult to help the others





## **Appendix F – Schedule of Activities**

The schedule will be issued prior to each session starting. Templates are available on the website.

