

Thinking Outside the Box

An interview with Timothy Daly.

We interviewed a multi-award winning writer about working with government and business executives in ASPI's new *Thinking Outside the Box* training scheme for emerging leaders:

ASPI: Timothy, we're delighted to speak to you this week about ASPI's new professional development program, *Thinking Outside the Box*, which you will be facilitating this year. Can you tell us a little about the program and why it is such a unique offering in the training program space?

Timothy Daly: People in government and business are telling me that they are starved of truly individual training. They go to a 'training' session, which involves sitting in a large room with 50 other people, watch a Power Point presentation, take notes and all that, but they have not been given a challenge that truly develops their thinking, their communication skills or their imagination. They are turned into human blotters designed to soak up lots of information and carry out, robotically. But what *Thinking Outside the Box* does is to develop the mental and imaginative 'muscles' using very practical techniques that can be applied to any professional task, industry or government sector.

ASPI: Timothy, as a playwright, creativity is obviously central to what you do; but why is creativity/creative flair so important to each participant in their day-to-day work?

Timothy: 'Creativity', in this context, means applying your brains, intellect and imagination to a task in a way that transforms both *you and the task*. You see, I've heard from a number of top people in Canberra that, privately, many top politicians and senior leaders are a little disappointed in the quality of the advice they are given. That means there is a problem in the thinking and expressive abilities of some executives. That's why *Thinking Outside the Box* works very hard on teaching lateral thinking and multiple viewpoint skills as well as training the ability to express them.

ASPI: What are some misconceptions you think people might have about the course?

Timothy: Let me be very clear here: *Thinking Outside the Box* is definitely not a 'creative writing' course, although we do work on improving your writing skills. It's also not a 'theatre games' day, despite my theatre background. But Life is a performance, and so is your day job. You have to perform well, if you want to reach a level commensurate with your talents. I've taught a range of groups all over the world, and I always push them towards excellence. It's designed to put talented people under pressure to speak, think and write as

brilliantly as possible. That means, if convincing others and talking persuasively is part of your job, this course is right for you. If motivating yourself and others to work better is part of your job, then *Thinking Outside the Box* is perfect for you.

ASPI: Timothy, the program was piloted late last year with a small group, and the plan is to run the program with small numbers throughout the year. Can you tell us why you prefer to deliver the training to smaller groups?

Timothy: You get more attention in a smaller group. You also get trained more intensively in a smaller group. You also get challenged more in a smaller group—but the people who came to the pilot course loved the individual attention and the way the course gently took them out of their comfort zone and gave them real skills they could use in their professional lives.

ASPI: Timothy, developing intellectual skills is often a focus of professional development programs, but it is less common to focus on an individual's imaginative, writing and speaking skills. How does this program build these skills?

Timothy: 'Imagination' seems a soft area of the human mind, but it's best developed by teaching people some 'hard' skills that can be used in many professional situations. So I teach them diction, better articulation, better clarification of their ideas, with lots of writing 'tricks' and techniques that make any report they might write, or talk they might give, a lot more persuasive and effective. We also do a lot of impromptu thinking, writing and speaking. We study their speech-giving style, and show them the structure of good speech-writing. This is a 'stand and deliver' course, where participants are constantly up on their feet, practising the techniques they are being shown.

ASPI: So, no 'human blotters' allowed?

Timothy: Absolutely not! But, jokes aside, speaking of memory, we actually do some memory-training during the course.

ASPI: Finally, what professional experience is recommended for attending this program?

Timothy: I'm most interested in energetic, ambitious people who want to move up the promotions ladder, and who want to improve their writing skills, speaking skills, thinking skills and all-round communicating skills. Enthusiastic people 'hungry' to learn and to succeed; these people make the best leaders and executives. That's who I want to work with.