

# Beyond Boundaries: A Journey Through Life Transformation. An Interview with Mr. Leo Hackl and Summary

**Interviewee: Leo Hackl**

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## Abstract

This article encapsulates an in-depth interview with Leo Hackl, a distinguished psychotherapist from Zurich, Switzerland. With over twenty years of experience, Hackl's unique therapeutic approach blends psychotherapy, life coaching, and hypnosis to address a wide range of psychological challenges. The interview explores Hackl's journey, from architecture to sports coaching, and ultimately to psychotherapy, highlighting pivotal life experiences that shaped his career trajectory. Additionally, the discussion delves into societal influences on mental health, the importance of genuine passions in life, and the efficacy of hypnosis therapy in addressing trauma and behavioural patterns. Hackl's insights offer a refreshing perspective on mental health care, emphasizing authenticity, resilience, and personal growth.

**Keywords:** psychotherapy, hypnosis therapy, systemic hypnotherapy, mental health, personal growth, therapeutic approach

## 1 Introduction

In early 2024, the Singularity Academy interviewed Mr Leo Hackl, a distinguished psychotherapist from Zurich, Switzerland, who brings over twenty years of dedicated experience to the realm of psychological counselling. Mr Hackl, with his unique psychotherapy practice, is adept at leading individuals through a myriad of life's complexities, ranging from altering detrimental behaviour patterns and steering through life's uncertainties to effectively managing trauma, anxiety, and depression. This article aims to distil the essence of our insightful conversa-

tion with Mr Hackl, providing you with a comprehensive summary of the interview that sheds light on his profound expertise and therapeutic approach.

## 2 Life Journey and Suggestions

*Question 1: Could you share a brief overview of your life journey and introduce yourself?*

I grew up as an only child near Zurich, attended high school there and graduated from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) with a degree in architec-

ture. I started my career as an architect, influenced by my father's persuasive invitation to join his gardening business. He would have loved me to continue running it, which I didn't want to do, but did anyway. However, I suffered in the construction environment. The way people treated me, and the language spoken there didn't suit me at all. I was in the wrong place and therefore very unhappy. Seeking a change, I turned to my early love for sports and enrolled in the Swiss Federal Sports School at Magglingen to become a coach. During my time as a coach, I frequently delved into discussions about psychology. This exploration prompted an unexpected offer to lead the psychology department. I declined, due to my lack of formal education in the field. Nevertheless, this encounter led me to pursue formal education in the discipline and create my therapeutic approach. My long-term therapy was so painful which led me to specialize in short-term systemic hypnotherapy.

*Question 2: Could you share a pivotal life experience that, despite initially being undesired, later became a crucial asset in shaping your current life?*

Running my father's company left me profoundly unhappy and overwhelmed with stress. As the boss, I bore the burden of handling difficult situations while the rewards went to the employees. There were moments when I felt like hurling my phone out of the window due to the immense pressure. Eventually, the stress took a toll on my health, culminating in a heart attack that made me start to change something. I took a year-long break from the company, resulting in significant financial losses and the dissolution of my marriage. Desperate to rebuild my life, I experimented with eight professions, but none seemed to fit. It felt as though fate had shut every door except one – my previous experience in psychology resurfaced with unexpected inquiries from former clients. Recognizing this as a sign of destiny, I reopened my psychology practice. From that point onward, I resolved to heed the signs and follow the path that destiny laid out for me. Embracing my true calling brought immense fulfilment, and I've since dedicated myself wholeheartedly to helping others. It's a journey I've fully embraced, finding profound joy and satisfaction in serving others and aligning myself with my true purpose. I've learned that life continually presents us with signs, yet too often

we overlook them. It's through life's lessons that we learn the importance of paying attention to these signs and acting upon them when necessary.

*Question 3: Given your expertise as a sports coach, could you share some advice on how young individuals can navigate and manage the pressures they face in their pursuits?*

Today, I would advise people not to play their favourite sport for the sake of trophies or good earnings or anything else, but for its own sake – for the love of the sport or something related to it. For the joy of it. The primary source of pressure often stems from our perspectives and thoughts. It's not the external circumstances themselves that cause suffering, but rather how we interpret and react to them. Managing these thoughts can be challenging since they arise seemingly out of nowhere and can't be easily controlled. However, it's crucial to recognize that our minds can only focus on one thing at a time. While some may claim to multitask, it's more akin to time-sharing than true multitasking. To cope with pressure, individuals can benefit from redirecting their focus onto a single object of concentration. A highly effective focal point is their genuine passion for the sport they engage in. Instead of fixating solely on winning medals or external achievements, they should reflect on the aspects they truly cherish about their sport—the camaraderie, the sense of accomplishment from training sessions, or the joy of success. Recalling moments of triumph can bolster confidence and serve as a reminder of one's capabilities. While each person's experience and coping mechanisms may vary, I recommend this approach as a starting point: focus on what you love about your pursuit and draw strength from your past achievements.

### **3 The Influence of Family and Society on Education and Mental Health**

*Question 1: The pursuit of joy over money and fame is increasingly challenging since the world is heavily influenced by social media. Do you believe that this has contributed to the rising mental health struggles?*

I don't believe that mental health problems have increased in recent years. People are allowed to talk about them now and no longer need to hide them. People are also less hard on themselves and instead of gritting their teeth, they talk about it. The causes change. Survival and having enough to eat is less of a problem in our affluent society than it used to be, but isolation from nature and fellow human beings as a result of the digital lifestyle is.

I believe that social media has a detrimental effect. Regularly consuming social media content can be harmful to one's mental well-being. The younger generation often communicates through social media platforms, and the notion that they are isolated and disconnected from real-life interactions isn't entirely accurate. Social media serves as an alternative avenue for socializing and connecting with others, offering its own set of benefits. However, young individuals need to approach social media with caution. It's challenging to discern between what's genuine and what's fabricated, especially with the advancements in artificial intelligence. I've adopted a cautious approach and have refrained from placing too much trust in social media content. Trust should be placed judiciously, as not everything encountered online is reliable or genuine. The prevalence of misinformation is alarming, and it's crucial to remain vigilant and sceptical about the authenticity of what we encounter online.

*Question 2: Continuing with the young kids, which characteristics, skills or experiences do you believe are beneficial for them to cultivate, to enrich their lifestyles? (Instead of consuming social media.)*

Indeed, parents and adults should lead by example and demonstrate that happiness can be found outside of the consumer-driven culture prevalent today. However, it's important to acknowledge that each generation must navigate their path and learn from their own experiences. What worked for one generation may not necessarily apply to the next. Experience is invaluable, but it comes with its costs and lessons. As adults, we must accept and respect the journey of our children, recognizing that their experiences will shape their perspectives and choices in unique ways. Parents should encourage their children's curiosity, thirst for knowledge and courage to

go new ways. I came across the story of a billionaire. His father had a unique approach to discipline, instead of reacting with anger or shouting, he calmly and gently advised him. Surprisingly, this approach left a much deeper impression on him than if he had been scolded harshly. It's a powerful reminder that sometimes, a calm and friendly demeanour can be more effective in guiding someone toward positive behaviour than harsh criticism.

*Question 3: How do you perceive the education system and the role of higher education in shaping individuals' knowledge and skills and preparing them for the real world?*

Education alone is not enough. Questioning the knowledge imparted and ultimately life experience is the more important part. Both are part of it, as is "falling flat on your face" when applying theoretical knowledge. Get up and carry on!

*Question 4: What are some signs that family members or friends could observe, indicating that it might be time for someone to seek help? Sometimes, it's challenging to pinpoint the exact moment when a child's behaviour changes or a friend's situation worsens.*

This is a delicate situation. When someone seeks help, it's important to respond thoughtfully. If they directly ask for advice, it's appropriate to offer guidance. However, if they don't explicitly request advice, it's best to approach the conversation by positively asking questions. Avoiding direct criticism or pressure is key. By asking questions that prompt reflection, for example, "How did you manage when you were successful?" It's crucial to allow them time to process and develop their thoughts, so refrain from bombarding them with too many questions too quickly. Focus on eliciting positive memories or past successes to help them identify strategies that have worked for them in the past. This approach fosters a supportive environment where they can explore options and find their way forward. If you find yourself unable to assist, you can carefully suggest seeking support from a trained professional.

*Question 5: Carefully suggesting therapy can sometimes still backfire due to the stigma attached to*

*it, with therapy being perceived as a refuge for those labelled as unstable or flawed. How can you prevent this?*

The key lies in how you frame it. Seeking help is a courageous decision, demonstrating strength and a commitment to progress. Present it as a positive step towards growth and improvement, an opportunity to work with someone experienced in their specific challenges. Emphasize the positive aspects of seeking professional help. Professional help can serve as a valuable resource, helping to alleviate their journey toward self-improvement.

## 4 His Therapeutic Approach

*Question 1: Given your focus on fast and effective therapy, have you encountered challenges with individuals hesitant to open up?*

This is indeed quite rare. People tend to place their trust in me, perhaps because I've always upheld honesty and integrity in my interactions. For instance, I once found myself privy to a sensitive secret shared by someone who later became an enemy. Despite possessing potentially damaging information about them, I made a firm commitment to keep their secret. This unwavering principle is simply ingrained in me—I cannot bring myself to act otherwise. Perhaps it's this sense of integrity that resonates with others and prompts them to trust me so readily. Occasionally, however, there are individuals whose beliefs or ideas diverge significantly from my own. I recall an instance where someone expressed unconventional beliefs that Switzerland isn't a country but a company. Which I couldn't endorse. Sensing our fundamental differences, the person chose to discontinue our sessions, and I respected their decision. Fortunately, it's rare for such situations to arise.

*Question 2: Navigating Complex Cases: How do you deal with challenging cases?*

When faced with a challenging case, it's often because the solution isn't immediately apparent to me. In such instances, I continue to actively listen to the individual's concerns. I've learned that by attentively listening, solutions often reveal themselves. Sometimes, despite

my efforts, I may still be unsure about the appropriate approach. However, I remain confident that with persistent questioning and attentive listening, the right solution will emerge. Of course, I'm aware that I can't resolve every issue that comes my way. In cases where I realize that I lack the expertise or appropriate solutions, I'm forthright with the individual and suggest seeking assistance from another therapist who may be better suited to address their needs. Honesty and transparency are paramount to me, as I believe it's essential not to waste their time and resources. There have been instances where I've declined payment for my services, acknowledging that I couldn't provide the help they required.

*Question 3: Having undergone an extensive and challenging therapeutic journey, your focus is now on providing fast and effective help to others. How does your approach distinguish itself from traditional therapy, and what strategies enable you to achieve results within a few sessions?*

Today, we can no longer speak of "traditional" therapy. Brief therapy takes up a lot of space. My long-term therapy was so painful that I told myself I didn't want to do that to my clients. They've already suffered from it once; it doesn't need to happen again. My main training is therefore systemic hypnotherapy with a little-known approach that I learned from an experienced therapist and tailored to myself. Early childhood imprints, which form the basis of our worldview, represent our basic beliefs. This often leads to the repetition of destructive patterns of behaviour. The decisive factor for effective therapy is not knowledge but experiencing things differently. Hypnosis is an effective tool for this.

## 5 Demystifying Hypnosis

*Question 1: Hypnosis often faces misconceptions, with some viewing it as fake or fearing loss of control. Can you clarify how hypnosis therapy works and address common misconceptions, providing insight into its effectiveness and the level of control individuals maintain during the process?*

Clinical hypnosis and show hypnosis are two funda-

mentally different things. Today, there's a widespread fascination with hypnosis, often viewed through the lens of magic. However, clinical hypnosis isn't a standalone therapy – it's a complementary aid; it is a tool that can make an imaginary experience appear real and thereby change behaviour. Effective therapy aims to instigate tangible behavioural changes in individuals seeking help. Simply prescribing solutions doesn't suffice because the roots of problems often trace back to early childhood experiences when the brain is still in its formative stages. During this critical period, the mind isn't fully developed, and memories aren't solely stored in the brain but also in the body — a phenomenon extensively researched and termed "body memory." For example, you're engrossed in a task like cooking, momentarily forgetting what you needed, only to remember when you physically turn back to the item. This occurrence illustrates body memory in action. Similarly, dreams are vividly remembered at the moment but swiftly forgotten upon shifting positions, only to resurface upon returning to the previous sleeping position. These stored experiences, body memory, manifest as reflexes, lightning-fast responses occurring within milliseconds. Contrastingly, deliberate actions or decisions take longer, highlighting the brain's slower processing speed. Hence, individuals are often at the mercy of reflexes, unable to consciously override them. However, experiencing events differently can profoundly alter one's trajectory. This is where hypnosis comes into play —it facilitates the immersive re-experiencing of events, making them feel as real and immediate as they did initially.

Research into hypnosis reveals fascinating insights into its mechanisms. Brain scans conducted during hypnosis sessions demonstrate distinct neural activity patterns. For instance, when participants physically interact with an object, prompting them to feel its size, temperature, and form without visualizing it, specific brain regions light up. Conversely, when the object is removed and they are asked to imagine the same interaction, different brain regions become active, indicating a shift in perception. Under hypnosis, while in a trance, they are instructed to imagine the sensation once more to determine any changes in brain activity. Interestingly, there isn't a distinct third part of the brain activated during this process; rather, the initial area remains active, creating a sense of

reality akin to experiencing the sensation firsthand. Thus, hypnosis serves to enhance the experience, making it feel vivid and immediate.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the placebo effect inherent in hypnosis. Individuals come with varying expectations, often believing hypnosis can achieve miraculous results. While hypnosis cannot accomplish everything, it can indeed be effective in inducing a trance-like state where suggestions, such as quitting smoking, can take root. Many individuals successfully abstain from smoking after hypnosis sessions. However, it's also common for some to relapse after several months or a year.

*Question 2: As I understood, one can revisit past experiences during hypnosis and through your guidance, they can reframe these experiences, allowing them to be processed in a less traumatic manner than during the initial encounter. Correct?*

No. The experiences we encounter in the formative years of our lives are deeply embedded within us, influencing our reactions and perceptions of events that unfold before us. Notably, our responses are shaped not only by what happens but also by what should have happened but didn't —a concept that may initially sound perplexing but is quite straightforward to comprehend. Consider, for instance, depicted in a German comic strip: a towering father towering over his diminutive son, berating him with the hurtful phrase 'You're a bottle,' implying worthlessness. As the son grows up, he unwittingly mirrors his father's behaviour, perpetuating the cycle of verbal abuse. Despite harbouring an innate desire to break free from this destructive pattern, he finds himself unable to deviate from the script written by his upbringing. His reaction, however, undergoes a subtle evolution —he vows to prove his worthiness, striving to demonstrate that he is more than just a vessel devoid of significance. Through sheer determination and resilience, he transcends his circumstances, emerging as a formidable, accomplished individual. Deep within the father's heart, there exists a profound longing for his offspring to thrive —to lead fulfilling lives brimming with joy and success —a primal instinct shared by all living beings, rooted in the innate drive for species

preservation. Though he yearns to rewrite his narrative, to kneel and impart wisdom and encouragement rather than unleash hurtful words, he finds himself ensnared by the constraints of his past, unable to deviate from the familiar script of negativity. Yet, within the recesses of his psyche lies an untapped reservoir of potential—a dormant aspiration waiting to be awakened. Through the transformative power of hypnosis, one can revisit pivotal moments, such as the instance when the father uttered those crushing words and unlock the latent possibility of a different outcome. By breathing life into this alternate reality, one can effectively rewrite the script, instilling newfound understanding, compassion, and healing.

*Question 3: Could you respond to the level of control individuals maintain during the process and how it differs from stage hypnosis?*

It is not possible to give suggestions that the hypnotized person does not agree with. They would immediately come out of the trance into a normal waking state. In show hypnosis, participants often volunteer to be part of the performance and are usually already in a trance when they appear on stage. The so-called ‘hypnotist’ doesn’t have to hypnotize them; rather, he selects participants who are already responsive to suggestions. These volunteers are aware that when the ‘hypnotist’ snaps their fingers, they are expected to carry out certain actions, such as crawling on the floor. They comply because they have willingly agreed to participate. If the individuals don’t desire to carry out a suggestion, they simply won’t do it. By deceiving the audience, the ‘hypnotist’ makes it appear as if he has power over the hypnotized person, which is not true. He creates this illusion like a stage magician. Afterwards, participants often feel miserable. Show hypnosis is prohibited in numerous European countries due to potential negative consequences. If participants experience flashbacks, the stage hypnotist lacks formal psychological training, and can’t provide proper support. Fortunately, such occurrences are relatively rare. I know of an individual who previously conducted stage hypnosis and subsequently found themselves incarcerated.

## 6 Conclusion

Leo Hackl’s journey from architect to psychotherapist not only illustrates a remarkable career transformation but also serves as a testament to the power of self-reflection and the pursuit of one’s passions. His narrative challenges the linear career paths often expected in society, encouraging individuals to remain open to change and to prioritize personal fulfilment over societal norms or expectations. Moreover, Leo’s approach to therapy, particularly his emphasis on short-term systemic hypnotherapy, integrity, and the debunking of myths surrounding hypnosis, offers a refreshing perspective on mental health care. His insights into the importance of nurturing genuine passions and fostering curiosity, especially in children, resonate deeply in an age often dominated by technology and consumerism, these encourage us to question our paths and the societal pressures that shape them, advocating for a life lived with authenticity and a mindful approach to personal and professional growth.

## 7 Reflection by Interviewer

Lena: As the interviewer, I found the conversation with Mr. Hackl to be incredibly enlightening and thought-provoking. Our discussion covered a diverse range of topics, delving deep into his personal journey, professional expertise, societal influences, and therapeutic approach.

Mr. Hackl’s journey from architecture to sports coaching to psychology serves as a reminder that life often takes unexpected turns. It shows that our interests and passions can evolve, and it’s perfectly acceptable to pursue new paths that align with our true calling. His story inspires the notion that if we find ourselves discontented with our current circumstances, embracing change sooner rather than later can lead to greater fulfilment and potentially spare us from unnecessary hardships.

Additionally, our conversation shed light on the impact of social media on mental well-being. It underscores the importance of prioritizing joy and fulfilment over the pursuit of fame and wealth. It prompts us to question the authenticity of online content, recognizing that social

media frequently showcases a polished facade, obscuring the genuine emotions and struggles that influencers face.

As a young interviewer, I found Mr. Hackl's advice on parenting to be particularly valuable. It underscores the importance of breaking free from outdated parenting methods and setting a positive example for the next generation. By guiding them towards positive behaviour rather than resorting to harsh criticism, we can empower them to navigate their own unique experiences and learn from their mistakes.

Furthermore, Mr. Hackl's perspective on problem-solving is invaluable in today's fast-paced world, where it's easy to become overwhelmed and neglect our well-being. His emphasis on the importance of taking a step back, engaging in open discussion, and patiently exploring solutions offers a comforting reminder during times of uncertainty.

Finally, our discussion on hypnosis therapy offered intriguing insights into its mechanics and dispelled common misconceptions. Mr. Hackl's clarification that individuals retain control during the process and cannot be compelled to do anything against their will provides a reassuring understanding of this therapeutic approach.

(Assistant of the editor: Yiwen Jin)