BACK

TO THE TRUE NLP SOURCES

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Read any and every NLP book that includes anything about the sources of Neuro-Linguistic Programming and you will get the impression that it all began with John Grinder and Richard Bandler as they modeled Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, and Milton Erickson. Read the basic NLP Introductions and any book or article that attempts to credit original sources and it seemed to all begin in the early 1970s. I even wrote such in *User's Manual of the Brain Volumes I and II.*

But this isn't exactly accurate. After all, where did Fritz Perls and Virginia Satir come up with their ideas? And where did Richard and John get the idea of modeling expertise? Were they the first or was there someone who had been doing that for decades before they were even born? And what difference does any of this make?

The Difference This Makes
With regard the last question, "What difference does this make? So what?" The difference is actually a profound one. It is not only about the ethics of recognizing sources and acknowledging those who did the original pioneering, it is about recognizing the fuller understandings, models, and presuppositions of our current premises.

In this instance, Fritz Perls of Gestalt Therapy and Virginia Satir of Family Systems Therapy were key players in the Human Potential movement. Fritz was the very first "scholar in residence" at Esalen and Virginia was the very first "director of research and development" at Esalen. And Gregory Bateson was the last "scholar in residence" at Esalen. This is a virtual "Who's Who of NLP" —at Esalen and playing key roles in the Human Potential Movement.

As such they were the first adaptors of the new paradigm shift in psychology that Maslow launched in the 1940s and 1950s with his Third Force in Psychology, the Human Potential Movement. And what was that paradigm shift? Maslow was the very first psychologist to separate from "the dark side" of human nature to studying and exploring "the bright side" of human nature. He was the first to say, "We have studied sickness and sick people, let's now also study healthy people and the farther reaches of human nature." And so he did.

Maslow, in fact, began in the late 1930s his "Good Humans Study" by studying two amazing and

incredible people that all of the tools of psychology at that time (Behaviorism the first force and Pyschoanalysis the second force) could not explain. He studied Max Wertheimer of Gestalt Psychology and Ruth Benedict of Cultural Anthropology and as he identified some of their patterns, he thought that perhaps there was a similar pattern and maybe there were other people who exemplified that pattern. That's what launched his modeling of self-actualizers. During the next three decades he would interview, identify characteristics, and specific patterns in "peakers" (people regularly experiencing peak experiences) and actualizing their fullest potentials.

So long before Richard and John began finding the patterns and structure of excellence in Fritz and Virginia, Maslow had modeled hundreds upon hundreds of self-actualizers. He had specified characteristics and patterns in them, he had made extensive descriptions of them and he had detailed out the new positive psychology. And in that new psychology, he set forth that behind all behavior are positive intentions, that people are doing the best with what they knew, that people are holistic systems of mind-body-and emotion and that separating or dichotomizing such was artificial and limiting.

In other words, the ultimate source of the basic NLP presuppositions were the very premises of the Human Potential Movement. So the attitudes and beliefs of Perls and Satir were derived from the third force of psychology as led by Maslow and Rogers.

Standing on the Shoulders of those Standing on the Shoulders
If we acknowledge our sources and trace back the original source of the exciting ideas that still drive and invigorate NLP today, we move beyond the discoveries of Bandler and Grinder to Perls and Satir to Maslow and Rogers. In doing so, we then have a broader and more expansive perspective regarding the original developers. Then it is not just how to model out the specific techniques of Gestalt and Family Systems Therapies, it becomes about something much bigger.

What is NLP and what is it about? From our history lessons about the accidental modeling of Perls and then Satir, you would think that NLP is just a well-grounded and well-formed expression of the techniques of these magical communicators and how they were able to do *therapy* in such a powerful way. In fact, that's why NLP has been so wedded to *therapy* from the very beginning. After all, the first title of the Meta-Model was "the Meta-Model of Language in Therapy" (*The Structure of Magic, Volumes I and II,* 1975, 1976).

Yet NLP is not merely or even primarily about therapy. Behind the therapy content and focus and all the therapeutic techniques of NLP is modeling the communication excellence of Perls, Satir, and Erickson. With Erickson, NLP focused on hypnosis and some have run with that to such an extent that you might even get the impression that NLP is a new streamlined and elegant form of hypnotic language. But it is not. It is so much more than that.

By going back to what Perls, Satir, and Bateson were doing at Esalen and their connection with the third force of psychology and the Human Potential Movement we expand our awareness even further. It is about enabling and empowering people to discover and activate their fullest potentials. It is about people not only "running their own brains," that's just a step toward something greater — about actualizing their full self, talents, and possibilities. That's why

becoming more and more resourceful has always been central to NLP.

And why? Why become more resourceful? What's the purpose or ultimate intention of doing that? Is it not to tap into one's ultimate talents, powers, and potentialities? This now explains something else, namely the comment that Dr. Kenneth Blanchard made in his Preface to Anthony Robbins' early NLP book, *Unlimited Power* (1987). The frames about personal resourcefulness within NLP are actually processes for unleashing potential to enable men and women to become all that they can become. That's why Blanchard wrote in his Preface that he thought NLP had "the capacity to be the definitive text in the human potential movement." (p. 12).

How about that? NLP as "the definitive text" for the Human Potential Movement! And why? Primarily because by the mid to late 1980s the Human Potential Movement as a cultural phenomenon was dying and was just about gone. This demise of the movement was being acknowledged, at that time, in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and other sources.

Today if you look around, it is completely gone. No one picked up the models and modeling and mantle of Maslow to carry on his work. As the movement splintered into a dozen and a hundred groups, it lost its power as a cultural force, even as the third force in psychology and eventually dissipated.

There's numerous reasons for this. I've written a chapter about half a dozen of the most dominant reasons given in a forthcoming book *Self-Actualization Psychology*. Yet perhaps one of the most powerful forces that led to this was the raw individualism of those finding their powers and their uniqueness and wanting to make a difference in the world. And so instead of continuing to develop, people got stuck at the stage of individualism (autonomy) and were not able to collaborate with others and create sufficient bonding relationships that allowed them to work together under the same banner of Human Potentials.

Back to the True Sources of NLP
In Maslow's day the early excitement of the Human Potential Movement was too wild to control and nudge to creating lasting structures. In his day also there was no field or profession that dealt exclusively with "psychologically healthy people." Yet Maslow imagined such dubbing it "psychogogy," as he attempted to describe a new profession, one dealing with healthy people and not those who need therapy. Today we call that profession "coaching."

As we move back to the ultimate sources of NLP we go beyond Richard and John, beyond Fritz and Virginia, beyond Milton and Gregory, and we end up at Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. And here we find a much, much more expansive frame— self-actualization, enabling people to tap into their ultimate potentials and make them real, enabling groups, businesses, organizations, and cultures to become self-actualizing cultures that support the development and ongoing growth of all people.

When we go back to the sources we also discover that why Maslow and Rogers led the first Human Potential Movement and launched it as they did, they were missing numerous things,

things that we now have a more thorough understanding about.

What were some of those things? One example is that in their day they assumed that human development was a growth so natural that it would just occur organically without much direction. Just remove the interferences to growth, and all would be fine. Rogers even named his approach "non-directive" therapy to emphasize that no techniques or processes were needed. Nearly forty years later we know better. Human growth in developing self-actualization doesn't happen like that. People do need some direction. This is where *patterns* like we have in NLP come in — directed processes by which we can guide the development process.

Another example is that in their day the beginning of the first Human Potential Movement was characterized by a wild chaotic search that include a great variety of things. They used encounter groups, body work, eastern meditations, gestalt, family systems, LSD, hot tubs, nudity, and the list goes on and on. They used body work, unconscious factors, meditation practices, and all sorts of things. Why? Those were the initial days of discovery, of exploring, of trying to find out the basic territory of the farther reaches of human potentials.

From the research I have done in Neuro-Semantic NLP, we now know that self-actualization is a function of two key variables: meaning and performance. Accordingly, this has led to the *Self-Actualization Quadrants* which enables us to profile where we are and what to do to facilitate the zone of self-actualization or being in the "flow" state. Astonishing enough, the Meaning—Performance axes correspond to twelve of the meta-programs thereby giving us even more distinctions from NLP about the self-actualizing processes.

Summary
Going back to the original sources is important for many reasons, not the least of which is to understand the impetuous, motivation, and larger frames that help us understand where we are today. In addition to giving respect and honor to the original pioneers, it helps us to understand our "family" history —the conceptual family that we belong to. And in doing that, instead of reinventing the wheel and the computer, we can stand on the shoulder of those giants and see farther into the unexplored territory.

NLP, as a child of the first Human Potential Movement, inherited as a legacy wonderful premises, tremendous models, and an exciting tool chest for enabling ourselves and others to tap into and actualize our human potentials. Now, on with the adventure!

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