

## HOW TO KILL A MOVEMENT

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In the 1970s Esalen was the Mecca of the Human Potential Movement along with more than 200 “Growth Centers” across the United States. In addition to that, there were countless other growth centers around the world which sprang from the “Third Force in Psychology,” Maslow and Rogers’ positive psychology. But look around today. Where is the Human Potential Movement? Where is the Third Force? Where are those growth centers? What happened to it?

Sadly, the answer is that they are gone. Vanished. Poof! Today the Human Potential Movement no longer exists. So, what happened to it? Where did it go? What brought it to an end?<sup>1</sup>

### Why?

I have been asking myself and many others these questions in my ongoing research into the Human Potential Movement. Why? Well, I have several reasons. First, I began the research while working on the specific kind of psychology unique for the context of coaching. As Michelle Duval and I identified what *coaching* is, we began looking for the very best models that would provide a map and guidance for a coach.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, since coaching is not for remedial change, therapy models will not do. Coaching is not about remedial, but generative change. So what other psychological models are there for detailing generative change of psychologically healthy people? That’s when I went back to the literature of Maslow and Rogers looking for the models that they created for self-actualization. Yet in that exploration I was genuinely shocked.

As developers of *the bright side of human nature*, and the first to truly launch out in this direction, their developments were truly pioneering. Consequently, they spent much of their time (if not most of it), arguing for the need to study healthy humans and to distinguish their work from psychotherapy. Consequently they did very little in terms of model-making, one of the requirements for a movement. And, not wanting to alienated the first two forces of psychology, Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism, they spent a lot of their time showing how their work integrates the previous schools while simultaneously taking things to a new level.

Then, also because Maslow died so early (at 62) and Rogers applied his work exclusively to therapy (Client-Centered Therapy), they left no actual “model” of self-actualization psychology.

This was the shock I experienced—there is no fully developed Self-Actualization model! Maslow created his Hierarchy of Needs diagram as a model of human needs/values which illustrated his revolutionary distinction between lower and higher needs, but that diagram of the levels of needs does *not* present a model about self-actualization psychology.

So I made that my first task. I would create a model to make *the process* of self-actualization explicit. Rereading the literature from that period of time (1960s through the 1980s), I gleaned what I could from Maslow, Rogers, Assagioli, May, Brughental, Shostrom, and others of the *Human Potential Movement*. Then using the modeling tools of NLP and Neuro-Semantics, I began creating various models to describe *the subjective experience of actualizing one's potentials*. To date this has resulted in several models and patterns: the Self-Actualization Matrix, the Self-Actualization Quadrants, the Neuro-Semantics of Self-Actualization, and the new workshop highlighting the drama of self-actualization in three-acts, *the Construct, the Crucible, and the Zone*.

### **The Movement**

So that's the *why*. Now for the movement itself. *How* could such a dynamic, exciting, paradigm changing movement that exploded on the scene in the 1960s, and that spread around the world in just a few years, disappear? What explains that?

As an overview, the movement petered out and disappeared because of the confluence of many factors — the loss of leadership, the lack of a clear explicit model, the lack of practical processes (techniques) to facilitate self-actualization, too much vagueness in the concepts, Maslow's introduction of the Fourth Force (transpersonal psychology), the fragmentation of the movement into a hundred sub-groups, the lack of legitimizing research, the introduction of "spirituality," the unrelenting criticism and judgment by scholars, and the superficial practice of many of the practitioners.

To explicate all of that, and to give plenty of examples and quotations about it would take a couple of chapters (which I have written in a book to be published in 2008, *Self-Actualization Psychology*).<sup>2</sup>

### **Learnings**

Yet there's something else that I think is even more important. Namely, what we can learn today about the birth and growth of a movement? Obviously, if an exciting and paradigm-shifting movement as *the Human Potential Movement*, if that could just fade away, and only after a few decades just disappear, we should not assume that the vitality of an idea alone is sufficient to sustain a movement. So what can we learn from the disappearance of the Human Potential Movement?

#### ***1) The critical role of a hands-on leadership***

The first problem was leadership. Maslow and Rogers were obviously the key *thought* leaders and perhaps visionary leaders, but neither of them had the personality or skill to lead the movement as *administrative* leaders. Maslow spent the majority of his life as a College Professor and while he had two dozen doctoral students that he mentored, his biographers noted

that he took such a *laissez faire* style in his approach that he never mentored any of them to step into his shoes and share the leadership.

Rogers suffered from the same kind of mind-set. So committed and focused to his idea of a *non-directive* style (Rogers created *non-directive* client-centered therapy), he didn't provide much direction. Part of his pioneering involved a non-directive approach which he also used in his teaching and leadership.

As a result, the *HPM (Human Potential Movement)* lacked pioneering leadership after Maslow's death in 1970. Those who were forceful and direct and who identified with the movement (Fritz Perls, William Schultz, George Leonard, Michael Murphy, Everett Shostrom, etc.) provided leadership in their individual areas, but not for the movement as a whole. Therefore after Maslow's death, no one was recognized as the next leader. This left the movement leaderless.

Yet for any movement to continue to grow and thrive and evolve, *it needs leadership*. It needs *hands-on practical leaders* who can make the ideas and models of the movement readily available by a large portion of the population. It needs leaders who have a specific vision about what they have, what they offer, and where they want to go. Without such leadership, a movement is not likely to survive. Actually, the same is true for any group, company, or organization.

## ***2) The critical role of an explicit and easy-to-grasp model***

I can write almost the same thing regarding the lack of a clear and explicit model. When I've asked knowledgeable people around the world, "What model is there of Self-Actualization?" most people think hard for a few minutes and then finally shrug their shoulders. "There is none." Or, if they mention the Hierarchy of Needs, then I ask, "*How* is that a model of self-actualization? What does that Hierarchy give me in terms of how I can actualize my potentials?" "How can I use it as a map to guide the unleashing of my potentials?" And with those questions we all shrug our shoulders in the realization that while it is a nice diagram of the levels of needs, and while it distinguishes higher from lower, it really is not a model of self-actualization. So while the Hierarchy shows that the self-actualization needs occurs at the top of the pyramid, after the gratifying of the lower needs, it provides no map or model of how to actualize.\*\*

Now contrast that to another model which arose in the same time frame of HPM, captivating the world and which is still around and in some places (e.g. England) actually thriving. I'm speaking about the Transactional Analysis (T.A.) Model. Here there was definitely some leadership, Eric Berne and Thomas Harris (*I'm Ok, You're Ok*) and there was definitely a clear model, the 3-ego states of Parent, Adult, and Child and the three circles on top of each other, and the lines showing the transactions as well as basic guidelines for using it. "Don't cross ego-states." "There are four life scripts, I'm Not Okay, You're Not Okay; I'm Okay, You're Not Okay; I'm Not Okay; You're Okay; I'm Okay, You're Okay." TA took the psychological and self-development world by storm with a simple visual-digital model that actually popularize of psychoanalysis. And if you ever actually read "*Games People Play*" by Berne it is loaded, absolutely loaded with psychoanalytic jargon and very abstract concepts. It's not an easy read at all. Yet it had an easy-to-grasp visual diagram with some easy-to-apply principles.

What were the processes that the Human Potential Movement used? It included a wide range of things from “encounter groups” for sensitivity training, the use of Gestalt double-chairs, yoga, meditation, hypnosis, message, hot tubs, primal scream, psychoactive drugs (LSD), and on and on. It incorporated a lot of things, and yet it lacked any larger unifying process. It had no singular process that everybody could use to specify how the actualization process worked. And working against this was Carl Rogers himself with his assumption about organic growth. Rogers believed that since growth was *organic*, it would just naturally occur. All we have to do is to remove the interferences to it. Other than that, there’s nothing to do.

What I learn from this is that for a movement or organization to continue to grow and thrive and evolve, it needs a practical way to communicate its ideas and models. It needs simple diagrams that can be literally *seen*, practical guidelines so that it can be *stated* in sound bites, and practical directive processes so that people can *do* something about the model. The more conceptual a model, the more a visual diagram is needed which can be easily replicated and used in some practical way.

### **3) *The critical role of an organizing attractor***

Perhaps the HPM would have succeeded even with weak leadership, a non-functional diagram, and the lack of any practical processes, but then Maslow himself sabotaged things. How did he do that? Toward the end of his life, Maslow became more and more intrigued by the transcendence of the meta-needs (meta-values) and so he moved more and more into the realm that we typically designate as the “spiritual” dimension. As a life-long avowed atheist, Maslow was looking for something along this line. So thinking that the Third Force was not sufficient, he created and launched the Fourth Force in Psychology, Transpersonal Psychology.

Consequently, as this de-emphasized the Third Force it was the HPM when it was still in its formative stages. The problem was that starting up something new de-emphasized the movement while still in its infancy and when it needed lots of attention. The movement wasn’t still in its wild and chaotic days and very much undeveloped. There was still no model of self-actualization psychology and the one person who was providing the primary leadership was onto something else.

Also, with transpersonal psychology, Maslow opened the door for all kinds of non-empirical and non-scientific things to come in. And those things had the effect of undermining the credibility of what he had begun thereby dispersing the focus. With Transpersonal Psychology came in all kinds of non-empirical and, for many, questionable new age beliefs from channeling, extra-sensory perception, eastern religious beliefs, etc. that diverted the energy of the original vision—which was still undeveloped. As a result, HPM was accused of mysticism by a many people, and so was dismissed.

All of this mis-directed the movement and, in fact, caused it to fractionalize into a hundred different groups and fractions. If there had been a self-organizing attractor in the movement, such as *self-actualization*, it was now gone. And without a singular thing (or person) attracting and organizing the movement, the movement lost even more momentum and direction.

What I have learned from all of this is *the importance of a clear and singular focus for a movement*, especially at the beginning. Today this is actually common sense regarding anything we want to brand. For *branding* to work, there has to be a singular focus at the heart of a business or movement that summarizes its unique theme.

#### **4) *The critical role of supportive scholarship***

But then again, even without sufficient leadership or models, the movement might have survived and continued if there had been a supportive community of scholars. But again, there was not. There could have been. Maslow did initiate the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (which continues to this day) and he did work in an academic setting and he was even in 1968 elected President of the American Psychological Association (APA). Yet in spite of all that, the HPM and Humanistic Psychology never became incorporated as a School of Psychology.

As part of my research, I have gone back and read a great many of the journals through the 1980s, I was amazed at how the editorship allowed or even encouraged writers to be so critical of Maslow and Rogers. Reading some of the articles, like “The Failure of Self-Actualization Theory: A Critique of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow” by Leonard Geller in 1982 (volume 22, number 2), I was stunned by the viciousness of the critiques and the level of misrepresentations. These so-called critiques undoubtedly worked like a cancer eating away at the life and vitality of the movement. For a new movement, that kind of critical competitiveness from within the ranks was disastrous.

By the mid-1980s, at Conferences of the Humanistic Psychologists, various writers and theoreticians were bewailing that the movement had failed and that there was not a single University with a department of Humanistic Psychology.

“Humanistic psychology was a great experiment, but it is basically a failed experiment in that there is no humanistic school of thought in psychology, no theory that would be recognized as a philosophy of science.” (Cunningham 1985, in Schulz, 1992, p. 18)

In 1982 M. Brewster Smith, another former president of the APA commented, “The 1980s find the humanistic psychology movement in decline.” He said it was time to take stock and “recapture the flag of humanism in psychology.” Prophetically, he wrote, “Now I claim that the movement is running out of steam . . .” And so it was. For Dr. Smith, a big part of the problem was the shift of focus to the transcendental and transpersonal. And yet that’s what the Journal mostly published in those years.

Having a critical and skeptical and negative disposition is actually one of the occupational hazards for anyone who earns an advanced university degree. With the ability to write “scholarly papers” of analysis also comes the ability to tear down and criticize things. And while there’s a place for that, it certainly is not in the early days of a movement. Scholars need to be able to control the negativity of their critical eye. They need to be able to turn it off when it’s important to provide support.

**So What?**

Having provided the *what* of some of the key factors that led to the demise of the Human Potential Movement, now the *so what*?

Many of these same forces have been at work in the field of NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming). Actually, NLP is one of the fragmented birthchilids of the HPM. Modeled directly from three key personalities, Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, and Gregory Bateson, NLP blossomed in the mid-1970s from two men who were interested in modeling the communication expertise in these people. As a result, it led to a new movement, a movement that exploded in southern California and is today in every nation of the world.

Yet similar to the fortunes of the HPM, NLP has suffered many of these same problems.

1) *Lack of leadership*: The developers were excellent as *thought* leaders, creating and inventing new ways of doing things, but miserable and pathetic in providing guidance for the moment. Bandler and Grinder never played that role for the movement that they launched. Actually, the situation is even worse. Not only did they fail to support the people who could have become leaders, they actually competed with them and ruthlessly criticized them (look at Bandler's treatment of Anthony Robbins, his ninety-million dollar lawsuit in America against the field, and Grinders writings against myself and Robert Dilts).

2) *Lack of a clear and explicit model*. While NLP took a much more direct approach and is very directive in enabling someone to "run his or her own brain," as well as offering lots of specific patterns for developing more resourcefulness, there is still not a singular model with a clear visual diagram for it. To provide some solution to this, see my book *MovieMind* as well as the *Frame Game* model (*Winning the Inner Game*).

3) *Lack of a clear specific attractor*. NLP began with a clear attractor as a communication model — the art of running your own brain so you can create resourceful states for self-management. But it lost that focus as the developers modeled hypnotic language so that NLP became increasingly associated with "manipulation" and working covertly with the unconscious mind. It could have been *mindfulness*, but then as Bandler and Grinder took off following after hypnosis, both have come to despise the conscious mind thinking it completely unfit to guide or direct anything. This, in my opinion, has contributed to undermine the movement.

4) *Lack of scholarly support*. On the positive side, NLP is very practical. Yet NLP has become so practical oriented that it distanced itself from academia, the developers criticized it severely, and so for years the movement ran off without sufficient concern for legitimizing the model in terms of research, academia, or degree programs. The longer this has continued, the worse has become the quality of the trainings and the competency of the practitioners overall. Similarly, there were many years in *NLP World* where it seemed that issue after issue was devoted to severely criticizing people and doing so in a very personal way similar to what happened in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*.

## Summary

Movements, as well as organizations and businesses, have been and can be killed. And it takes much more than a great idea to launch and sustain a viable movement. It takes a great idea plus effective leadership, a sense of direction, lots of people pulling together, a management of the community to maintain the focus, a collaborating of many others to add support to it, and a constant renewal of the vision and purpose.

What I've learned from this background of the demise of the HPM has been providing insight about what I've been doing with the Neuro-Semantics Movement. Then, to take the advice of Henry Ford, by learning from the past, we will not be doomed to repeat the past.

## Author:

*L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.* is the founder of Neuro-Semantics and developer of the models that currently define Neuro-Semantics including the Meta-States model, the Matrix model, the Self-Actualization Quadrants, and co-developer with Michelle Duval of the Axes of Change model and the Meta-Coach Training System. He co-founded the International Society of Neuro-Semantics with Bob Bodenhamer which now is governed by a leadership team.

## End Notes:

1. Esalen was recognized back in the 1970s and 80s as the center of the Human Potential Movement. As the years past, Esalen's vision statement became one of uniting Eastern and Western methodologies. This is still its focus.

2. This refers to the Meta-Coach Training System, for more about this see [www.meta-coaching.org](http://www.meta-coaching.org). There's a twelve-page color Brochure that you can download. Also the books, *Meta-Coaching Volume I and II, Coaching Change and Coaching Conversations*.

2. For the newest developments in Neuro-Semantics about Self-Actualization, see [www.self-actualizing.org](http://www.self-actualizing.org).

\*\* Maslow did create a second model that comes closer to identifying the *process* of self-actualizing. It reflects a similarity to Kurt Lewin's analysis of field forces model in that he spoke generally of the things that promote the growth of the person and those constraints that works against the growth of person.

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