

BEING ALL THERE

The Structure of the Genius or Flow State

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- C What do you mean by “genius” in Neuro-Semantics?
- C Can we meta-state “genius” into our experience?
- C How does that work?

I’m often asked about what we mean by “genius” in Neuro-Semantics and how the meta-stating of the elements or prerequisites of genius builds up the genius state. These questions arise in part from the book *The Secrets of Personal Mastery* (1999) and from the ongoing trainings that Neuro-Semantic trainers present around the world in *Accessing Personal Genius* (APG) as well as in *Living Personal Genius* and in the *Stroke of Genius* series.

The short answer that I typically give is this:

The genius state is a state in which you are totally and completely present to something, so present in fact, that the world goes away, time goes away, self goes away, everything vanishes and you are present with one thing—you are completely engaged and absorbed with one thing which totally captivates your attention. This is a state of flow. It is an altered state of focus. And it’s a great state because all of your resources are completely available to you. This is the state that world-class athletes access when they speak about being “in the zone.” This is the state that lovers access when they are spell-bound by each other and lost in the moment. This is the state that young mothers and fathers experience with a new baby. This is what we call a state of transcendence, mystery, loving, and beingness.

What we have in the Neuro-Semantic trainings is what we call *the genius pattern*. It is a pattern that I modeled, or more accurately *remodeled*, from Grinder and DeLozier. They had come up with a pattern for accessing personal genius which they published in their book *Turtles all the Way Down* (1987). What impressed me in that work was their use of Bateson’s “logical levels” to create a structure for stopping the double-tracking, and to set a frame or series of frames for getting lost in a state of engagement.¹ Since *Meta-States* is a model about working with such “logical levels” of the mind, I used it to remodel the convoluted processes that I found in *Turtles*.

What are the *prerequisites* of personal genius? Among those mentioned by Grinder and DeLozier as well as by Robert Dilts in his series of books, *Strategies of Genius*, we have these foundational

qualities or variables:

- C An intense focus or concentration, the state of “flow”
- C Single tracking or first-level attention focus
- C Multiple perspectives that gives one “wisdom” of the whole
- C An engagement or commitment state about something of interest
- C Clean state accessing and impeccable state shifting in and out of the genius state
- C Crystal clarity of purpose and direction
- C A flow state of optimum challenge and competency
- C Congruency and personal alignment with values and beliefs
- C Empowering decisions for the clarity of the focus state
- C A sense of delight, joy, fun, and happiness in the state
- C An engagement that creates a joyful learning state
- C A flexibility of consciousness to take multiple perspectives
- C Proactively involved in an active way in the engagement
- C Socially involved and connected with others as collaborators or colleagues
- C Detailing the specifics from a meta-position, meta-detailing

Yet while I started my journey to model the genius state from the developers of NLP, the idea of this state of total focus and engagement goes back to an earlier time, prior to NLP. It goes back to Abraham Maslow who began studying the most remarkable people, the *self-actualizing* people because he wanted to understand *peak experiences*. These words in italics were the terms for “genius” state in the late 1940s and 1950s onward into the 1970s.

The Human Potential of Actualizing the Self for Peak Experiences

For Abraham Maslow it all began when he encountered two very wonderful and remarkable human beings. In *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1969) he tells the story of meeting Ruth Benedict and Max Wertheimer when he moved to New York City after he had finished his doctorate.

“They were most remarkable human beings. My training in psychology equipped me not at all for understanding them. It was as if they were not quite people but something more than people.”

With an insatiable curiosity, he then began to seek to understand “why these two people were so different from the run-of-the-mill people in world.” He took notes on each of them. He sought to identify their patterns. He “tried to figure them out” and as he did he was able to describe a syndrome—the kind of pattern that seemed to fit all such people, people that were self-actualizing people (p. 41). That’s how it started, the search for *self-actualizing people*, for *peak experiences*, and for the structure and pattern of *actualizing human potential*.

It was in this very process that Maslow came up with his hierarchy of human needs and motivations, one of the only models that arose in the Human Potential Movement. That hierarchy has entered into the common language and knowledge of most educated people today. But what is not so well known is that Maslow separated *the lower needs* (i.e., survival, security and safety, love and affection, self-esteem and self-regard) from *the higher needs* (i.e., self-actualization, beauty, justice, order, knowledge, wisdom, etc.). He called the first set of needs, the *deficiency* needs (D-needs)

and the higher needs, *growth* or *being* needs (B-needs).

Maslow also called the needs or values of the *Being* level—*meta-needs* and *meta-motivation* needs.

“These B-Values behave like needs. I have called them *meta-needs*. Their deprivation breeds certain kinds of pathologies which have not yet been adequately described but which I call *meta-pathologies*—the sicknesses of the soul which come, for example, from living among liars all the time and not trusting anyone. . . . B-Values are the meaning of life for most people, but many people don’t even recognize that they have these meta-needs. (p. 43)

“If you deliberately plan to be less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you’ll be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life. You will be evading your own capacities, your own possibilities.” (p. 35)

If we are made—biologically and psychologically—for greatness, then what holds us back? What blocks us? What prevents us from *actualizing* all of our potentials and experiencing the best that’s possible?

Maslow said that it is that it is because we not only fear our failures, but *we fear our own greatness*. We run away from our own best talents.

“We fear our highest possibilities. We are generally afraid to become that which we can glimpse in our most perfect moments, under the most perfect conditions, under conditions of greatest courage. We enjoy and even thrill to the godlike possibilities we see in ourselves in such peak moments. And yet we simultaneously shiver with weakness, awe, and fear before these very same possibilities.” (p. 34)

Along the same line, he asked why are our peak experiences ordinarily transient and brief? And answered it that “We are just not strong enough to endure more!” (37).

The Self-Actualizing Genius State

What does a person actually *do* or *experience* when he or she self-actualizes? Maslow identified eight things that we could add to our list of prerequisites for the “genius” state. In fact, because some of the following quotations wonderfully describe the genius state, I’ll start with those and then back up to identify Maslow’s eight steps or facets for self-actualizing.

The *genius* state is a creative state of *being totally present*. And as this happens, one’s Matrix of frames vanishes from awareness.

“The puzzle that I’m now trying to unravel is suggested by the observation that the creative person, in the inspirational phase of the creative furor, loses his past and his future and lives on in the moment. *He is all there, totally immersed, fascinated and absorbed in the present, in the current situation, in the here-now, with the matter-in-hand.*” [Italics added]

“This ability to become ‘lost in the present’ seems to be a *sine qua non* for creativeness of any kind. But also certain *prerequisites* of creativeness—in whatever realm—somehow have something to do with this ability to become timeless, selfless, outside of space, of

society, of history.” (59)

“[Self-actualization] is always described as a loss of self or of ego, or sometimes as a transcendence of self. There is a fusion with the reality being observed (with the matter-in-hand), a oneness where there was a twoness, an integration of some sort of self with the non-self. . . . Little wonder that this shaking experience has so often been considered to be superhuman, supernatural, so much greater and grander than anything conceivable as human that it could only be attributed to trans-human sources.”

“One main characteristic of the peak experience is just this total fascination with the matter-in-hand, this getting lost in the present, this detachment from time and place. And it seems to me now that much of what we have learned from the study of these peak experiences can be transferred quite directly to the enriched understanding of the here-now experience, of the creative attitude.” (60)

1) *Focus and absolute absorption.*

“Self-actualization means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption. It means experiencing without the self-consciousness of the adolescent. At this moment of experiencing, the person is wholly and fully human.” (44)

At such moments of absorption something else happens, something that actually facilitates the healing that we usually attribute to therapy. What? We forget our poses, defenses, shyness and simply “go for it.” The insight that Maslow discovered from this is incredible, “Absorption casts out fear.”

2) *Choosing growth in small acts.*

If we think about life as a process of choices, as choices between progression and regression, between defense and growth, then—

“Self-actualization is an ongoing process; it means making each of the many single choices about whether to lie or to be honest, whether to steal or not to steal, and it means to make each of these choices as a growth choice.”

In Neuro-Semantics, we speak about meta-stating ourselves to a place above and beyond any and every experience until we *step back* from ourselves. It is at that point we have moved to *the choice point*. Whether we are running a quality control on our frames, an ecology check on the inter-relationships of ourselves holistically, or stepping up to our executive mind to create a pathway for our future, we are at the place of choice.

3) *Discovering your own true likes and dislikes.*

Self-actualization also involves discovering our inner self and letting that highest self emerge. How does this occur? We do this, in part, as we learn to listen to our own inner voice and not only to the voice of family, culture, tradition, authority, etc. When tasting wine we look not at the label or what others think, but savor the wine on our tongue and look to “the Supreme Court” inside ourselves to see if *we* like it or not. “Do I like this?” “Do I

dislike this?” “What do I think and feel?” This describes the growth from positing authority and evaluation externally and bringing it inside and owning it for ourselves.

4) *Taking responsibility for oneself and one's life.*

The process of actualizing by looking within ourselves for answers implies taking responsibility. This “is in itself a great step toward actualization . . . Each time one takes responsibility, this is an actualizing of the self.”

“We have talked of experiencing without self-awareness, of making the growth choice rather than the fear choice, of listening to the impulse voices, and of being honest and taking responsibility. All these are steps toward self-actualization, and all of them guarantee better life choices.” (45)

In Meta-State training we begin here by accessing our innate *powers* for *responding* to the world, then bringing awareness, acceptance, and ownership to those response-powers. Doing this creates the gestalt of *responsibility*—a step toward self-actualization.

5) *Courageously learning to be oneself.*

To listen to our own voice and tastes takes courage. To be honest with ourselves and with others takes courage.

“Making an honest statement involves daring to be different, unpopular, non-conformist. . . . To be courageous rather than afraid is another version of the same thing.” (46)

This describes the part of self-actualizing that involves embracing change and challenge. The courage to be oneself is the courage to grow, to keep on learning, and to develop. We do this as we acknowledge our uniqueness and look within for what we have to give to the world.

6) *Expending effort in an ongoing process.*

Self-actualization is not only an end state, it is also the process of actualizing one's potentialities at any time, in any amount. It may mean going through an arduous and demanding period of preparation in order to realize one's possibilities. Self-actualization can consist of finger exercises at a piano keyboard. It's about seeking to be as first-rate as one can be. In this, the work and effort of discipline is part of self-actualizing.

7) *Setting up conditions that make peak experiences more likely.*

Because peak experiences are transient moments of self-actualization, they cannot be bought or guaranteed. What we can do is set up the conditions that make them more likely or eliminate the conditions that prevent them. Typically peak experiences are only transient moments of self-actualization. They are moments that we experience from time to time.

The first step in making these peak experiences more likely is learning to recognize them. Once we have done that, then to acknowledge and honor them. The problem is that often they are such “small” things, a glorious sunset, a human touch of compassion, an act of

thoughtfulness, a rush of emotion of joy in playing with a dog. And in the adult world of schedules and paychecks, it is so easy to discount these things.

Using the meta-state process of the genius pattern, we learn to identify *the internal conditions* that make these states more likely to occur and re-occur. We also learn how to step in and out of them at will. After all, it is just a state. And so as with any state, there is a dynamic structure that makes it happen. This is what Neuro-Semantics has contributed to flow—the ability to choose it.

8) *Opening oneself up to self-discovery and knowledge.*

As we open ourselves up to ourselves—to our innate powers, to our unique gifts and talents, to our right to be ourselves and to be unique, it takes courage to both identify our typical defenses and to give up these defenses. Yet that courage is the pathway to self-actualization. It is repression, rejection, judgment, fear, avoidance, etc. that holds us back and that blocks becoming fully all that we can become. Conversely, it is the willingness to risk and to discover our full humanity, however fallible it is, that enables us to step into authenticity, into being more fully an authentic self.

In revisiting these writings from Maslow, I am amazed that it is upon Maslow's shoulders and the Human Potential Movement that he, Carl Rogers, Rollo May and many, many others initiated that we stand on. Maslow described what we today call the *genius* state and he even identified so many of the prerequisites:

- C Giving up the past
- C Giving up the future
- C Recovering an innocence or guileless (the know-nothing state)
- C Narrowing of consciousness
- C Loss of ego, self-forgetfulness
- C Inhibiting force of consciousness
- C Fear disappears, "Absorption casts out fear." (64)
- C Strength and courage emerges. "Becoming more courageous makes it easier to let oneself be attracted by mystery, by the unfamiliar, by the novel, by the ambiguous and contradictory."
- C Acceptance, giving up criticism
- C Trust versus trying, controlling, striving.
- C Receptivity
- C Integration of one's full being
- C Permission to dip into primary process
- C Aesthetic perceiving
- C Spontaneity
- C Expressiveness of uniqueness
- C Fusion of the person and the world.

Summary

The *genius* state is at the same time so very special and yet so common. We were born for it and

naturally experienced it as children when we would get so lost in experiences. And what seemed to come to natural during childhood later becomes one of the most ecstatic and longed-for experiences in adulthood. As a state of engagement and absorption, the *genius* state becomes more and more demanding of us as we grow—demanding that we take the courage to let go of other things of importance (time, self, others, etc.) as we are “surprised by the joy” of the fascination that captures our attention and fits with our highest values and intentions.

What Maslow described as the peak experiences of self-actualizers and others later described as the flow state, we can now more precisely work with and predict. After all, when we can take charge of our own mind-body-emotion processes and access states and meta-states and build up the components and variables that make for a genius state, then we can access the state—stepping into it and out of it at will—at choice. We can also trust that it is our state, and that we can trust ourselves that we won’t lose it or have to wait for it to magically appear.

This reflects the next step in human development, the ability to protect and re-access a genius state at will. And that, of course, is what *Accessing Personal Genius* is all about.

End Notes:

1: While Grinder believed in and used “logical levels” in *Turtles*, he now seems to reject higher levels are “psychologically pervasive and impactful” as both myself and Robert Dilts have argued in many books. Because John Grinder invited me to respond to his questions about how Meta-States work and why “proliferate” them, I wrote several articles in response. You can read these on the website under “Logical Levels,” www.neurosemantics.com.