

META REFLECTIONS

2017

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From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #1
January 2, 2017
Basic NLP Concepts #7

POSITIVE INTENTIONS

The next basic NLP concepts deal with human nature and are stated in the following forms:

Every behavior is useful in some context.

Every behavior has a positive intention.

These basic statements about actions and activities provide a new, different, and better way to look at and understand human behaviors. The first statement frames behaviors as attempts to do something that is useful for the person and that *in some context* are useful. The question would then be, “Where would that behavior be useful?” Where would raising your voice and yelling be useful? Maybe when a child is out of reach and stepping into the street where a car is speeding by. Where would taking a human life be useful? Perhaps when your and your family is being attacked.

In this reframing, *context* becomes the issue, rather than the behavior. The basic concept here is that every action, every behavior that one can do— as a skill or competency— probably has some use somewhere. The usefulness of the behavior depends on context. The right or wrong, good or evil, of the behavior depends on the criteria that you use in a given context. It is right or wrong to what standard? It is good or evil in view of what objective?

This framing facilitates slowing down the judgment (evaluation) process so that we don’t outrightly condemn an action until we know the context. Only then can we apply the standards and criteria to a behavior to determine whether it is effective or ineffective, whether it serves us or those we are with. This is even true of “good” behavior. In some contexts, even good behavior could be bad. It could be bad for the situation and the persons.

From this we can now conclude that behavior is just behavior. Behaviors are just actions (gestures, speech, interactions, etc.) and understandings their value which relate to a context, standards (values), criteria, etc. this also frames behaviors as *effects* and even *symptoms* of context and state. They do not define a person. They are expressions of a person.

The second statement is more controversial. It frames behavior coming from a positive intention. This does not say that every *intention* driving the behavior is positive for those receiving the behavior. Not at all. Obviously, that is not so. What it does assert is that people don’t do things for the purpose of being hurtful, stupid, hateful, etc. When they do hurtful, stupid, hateful, etc. behavior, they are trying to do something that’s of a positive intention for them. I say “trying” because often— in spite of the intention— it does not have that effect.

Consider this NLP concept that *all behavior has a positive intention*. Now *intention* here refers to what the person is attempting to do, his purpose, agenda, and reason for doing whatever he is doing. To say that his intention is *positive* is to say that in taking action, he is *trying* to make his life better. He is *attempting* to solve a problem he is confronting in order to meet his needs and feel that he is succeeding.

Now is that true? Can we apply that to a range of human behaviors and check it out? As we do this, we have to remember another basic NLP concept: People operate from their mental maps about things, not from reality. “The map is not the territory.” What they think is real (their mental map) can be, and often is, very distorted, messed up, and wrong. Then, being cognitively wrong about something—their understanding of what something is, how it works, what they should do, what would solve a problem, etc. can be very fallacious.

Putting *intention* together now with *fallible mental maps* gives us an explanation of how people’s “positive intentions” can be so wrong and do so much damage. They intend well, but suffering from so many cognitive distortions, cognitive biases, and errors in their thinking—no wonder they do so many stupid, ridiculous, and hurtful things to themselves and others! They are not “evil” in themselves, but they certainly do “evil” things.

When someone criticizes or undermines another person, the actions may be bad and ugly, but maybe that’s the best choice of behavior that person has in his mental understanding of what to do. He’s trying to get control back in his life and all he knows to do is hit back, get revenge, or slander the other person’s reputation. When someone cheats, lies, steals, or even kills, perhaps that is the best he can do given his level of learning and level of skills. And if the person is *in a state of desperation*, suffering loss of self-respect, suffering the loss of loved ones, suffering the insecurity of being unsafe and unprotected, or suffering the basics of survival (lack of food, shelter, warmth, etc.)—then we really have a problem.

Behind every behavior is a positive intention does not validate bad behavior. Bad behavior is bad behavior. If someone’s behavior is immoral, unethical, or damaging, then we should say so, identify the standards we are using to make that evaluation, and invite the person to correct the behavior. Doing this means we are separating person and behavior. It means we are recognizing two levels: *the person* and *the behavior*. They are not the same. You, like me, are more than your behavior!

Behind every behavior is a positive intention does not validate, accept, or condone behavior that is hurtful and ugly. What it does is enable us to *approach the person* and deal with the person without personalizing the behavior and seeing them as “just their behavior.” Paradoxically, by separating person and behavior, we enable the person to more easily change the behavior. We can challenge the person to step up and produce higher quality behavior that more honorably reflects his or her best.

Behind every behavior is a positive intention also enables us to coach people to invent and create higher level positive behaviors. This happens all the time in Meta-Coaching. Someone presents a behavior that they want to change. Rather than shaming them, embarrassing them, or judging them for that behavior, we embrace it. A paradox. “Tell me, about that behavior, what were you trying

to do that was of value to you?” Once we get the answer, and it could be a very low-level positive intention, “I was trying to get back at him for what he did to me.” So we ask for the positive intention in that. “That was important? Why?” “Because what he did was not fair, I was trying to make things fair.” “And fairness is important to you? Why?” “Well, because we are all equal, we are all human beings and...” In Meta-Coaching, we encourage asking the “why is that important?” five to ten times. And often, in the process, it enables the person to begin to *create a hierarchy of values* that endows life with more meaningfulness.

When you interact with people, seek to discover *the positive intent* behind the behaviors that you may not like. Assume that it exists (or that the person can create it), and then pursue it in your conversation. The wonder of this approach is that even *if* it did not exist previously, as you ask about it, you invite that person to begin to create it.

For years I worked with the Department of Corrections here in the State of Colorado. In working with men who were coming out of the Federal Penitentiary, those who had "a criminal mind," this approach even worked with them. It offered them hope so that they could separate their “evil” deeds (criminal actions) from themselves as persons. Seeking their positive intention provided them a chance to believe in themselves— that they were not “bad to the bone.” That they were not genetically flawed persons, but they also could think of themselves with dignity and respect. They are more than their behaviors and can learn to do better— much better. Now how is this an inspiring message for the New Year!

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #2
January 9, 2017
Basic NLP Concepts #8

COMMUNICATING WITH NLP

NLP most essentially is “a communication model.” This is what lies at the heart of Neuro-Linguistic Programming. For anyone still trying to figure out a way to explain NLP, or to tell someone what *it is*, there is an easy answer. Simply say, “NLP is a communication model.”

What’s the evidence for this? Lots! For beginners, the first NLP model was *The Meta-Model of Language*. And the first two books were titled: *The Structure of Magic: A Book about Language and Therapy*. This underscores another basic NLP concept, a concept that has to do with communication. And in NLP, we have several of the NLP presuppositions that deal with communication.

You cannot not communicate.

The meaning of your communication is the response you get regardless of your intention.

When you communicate, there is no failure, only feedback (only responses).

The Language of Communication

A foundational idea about communication in NLP is that *the language of communication* involves not only words, but visual images, auditory sounds, kinesthetic sensations along with data from the other sensations. These are called “the representational systems” and language is called “the meta-representational system.” These were the first variables that the developers focused on, and because they were trying to figure out “the magic” in the language patterns of Perls and then Satir, they worked out the “linguistic distinctions” and the “questions” by which a person could enable a speaker to be more precise. Later they focused on the non-linguistic variables, what it typically mislabeled “body language.” (See *The Structure of Magic, Volumes I and II*)

You Cannot *Not* Communicate.

This statement highlights that when a person is in the presence of another person, even when he is not speaking, he is still communicating. That’s because even silence communicates. What you do *not* say, which is expected to be said, communicates. Communication involves the “messages” to each other and these consist of words, gestures, movements, all sorts of things. Even when you attempt to not send a message—that in itself is “a message.”

NLP realized from the beginning that a great portion of communication occurs via non-verbal channels. We communicate by both *what* we say and *how* we say something. You communicate via your tone, volume, facial expressions, breathing, posture, etc. These are *para*-messages along with the content of your words. Yet because they can be put in a meta-relationship to each other, when that happens, they become meta-messages. Saying, “I love you” sarcastically or with your fingers crossed can communicate the opposite in spite of the words.

Further, *where* we speak and communicate governs the meaning of our messages. If you say, "I love you!" will mean something different when said at home to a child or a parent, at a party to a friend, at a gathering of employees, on holiday to a lover, etc.

The meaning of your communication is the response you get, regardless of your intention.

This statement was the NLP premise that first captivated my attention and got me involved in NLP. When I first read it in the book, *Frogs into Princes* (1978), the statement stopped me in my tracks. For the longest time I sat silent at the table where I was reading. I was reflecting. From the outside, someone could have thought that I was asleep or in deep trance, but inside my mind was working a thousand-miles-an-hour going over all of the ramifications of that statement. And there are many.

Until I read that statement, I had not even questioned the common assumption that *meaning* is inside of words, that words *mean*, therefore any confusion about meaning probably is due to the person's lack of understanding, comprehension, intelligence, bias, etc.! My working assumption was that when you say words, you communicate the meaning that's inside the words. "I say what I mean and mean what I say, and if someone doesn't get it, they are not paying attention or are incompetent or something!"

But this statement, *The meaning of your communication is the response you get*, changed everything. It framed *meaning* as an interaction between two people concerning what someone *says* (and how he says it) with what the other person *hears* (and how one interprets the words). Suddenly I saw *communicating* as much more systemic, interactive, and relative. In fact, given this premise, then *I never know what I have communicated*. And I won't know until I check with the other person to find out what she heard, how he interpreted it, and what it meant to that other person.

The meaning of your communication is the response you get suddenly enabled me to understand the word "communication" itself. It is a *communion* that is shared and co-created (co-communion). No wonder people have such a hard time understanding each other and really getting each other. Talking is not the same thing as communicating. The exchange of information that occurs when two or more people are talking is most ideally a dialogue (the passing of meaning back-and-forth and *through* each other (*dia-* through; *logos-* meaning)).

Communication inevitably and inescapably involves a system of feedback responses from sender and receiver. The response I get from the other person tells me *the meaning* of my words and non-verbal expressions *to him*. The *meaning* communicated then does *not* depend solely with me, it is an interaction between saying and hearing. The effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of my communication *depends* on checking on what the other heard, adjusting my messages, checking again, and continuing until the feedback loops of message-sent and message-heard correspond.

All this is basic to NLP and makes NLP critically important in our everyday communications. Even if a person just takes this one piece, it would completely revolutionize her life. It would defuse "taking insult" from words. It would completely remake how we argue for our point of view. It would improve the quality of our communication ten-fold (1000% percent). It would make leaders more effectively,. It would stop all mis-communications.

Want more? See *The Structure of Magic* (1975, 1976), and *Communication Magic* (2001).

From: L. Michael Hall
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January 16, 2017
Basic NLP Concepts #10

FROM FAILURE TO FEEDBACK

In the last post on this subject, I mentioned that we have several of the NLP presuppositions that deal with communication. There I quoted three and addressed the first two. Let’s now look at that third one.

You cannot not communicate.

The meaning of your communication is the response you get regardless of your intention.

When you communicate, there is no failure, only feedback (only responses).

“There Is No Failure, Only Feedback.”

When it comes to the experience of failure, the great majority of people on Planet Earth *believe* in it. First, they believe there is such a thing. Next they believe it is a bad thing. They also believe they should avoid it at all costs. Worse of all, they believe they could become “a failure” if certain events occur. Talk about a sad and pathetic perspective!

For one who believes in failure, you can imagine how shocking it must be to hear this statement, *There is no failure, only feedback!*? I know that I experienced, at least, some degree of shock when I first heard it, but it has been so long ago and this statement is now so well integrated within me, that I can’t even recall a time when I didn’t believe it. How about you? What do you believe? Do you believe there is such a thing as “failure?” Do you believe that there are such experiences? Or do you believe that whatever happens, you can just as easily classify it under the category of “feedback?”

If you do still tend to think about “failure,” try on this *thought experiment*.

Suppose that you shifted your thinking so that there was no failure. What would happen if you began thinking and experiencing what otherwise might be called a “failure” as feedback of information? How would that affect your state, your emotions, your relationships, and your willingness to take risks?

There is no failure, only feedback is a reframe. This statement frames the meaning of an experience that did not turn out the way you wanted it to, or hoped that it would, not as a “failure,” but as “feedback information.” As such, it informs you about how to adjust what you did to see if you can get another response. If you took on this new frame, it would turn you into a ferocious learner and as someone with tremendous flexibility to adjust when something doesn’t work.

With this frame, now when you communicate with someone, and you do not get the response you wanted, you have your next step. What do you now do? *You alter your communication!* Given that what you did, did not work, you *try something different*. Simple as that. There’s no need for creating a big emotional state of disappointment or depression or anger or anything else. Use the

experience for learning instead. Use it to more quickly succeed.

There is no failure, only feedback, when well integrated into yourself, becomes an attitude. As a frame of meaning, it offers you a new mind-set that can generate one of the most productive set of attitudes that contributes to effective and successful living. It facilitates the set of attitudes of learning, adjustment, flexibility, resilience, and persistence. What a contrast to the old attitude of fear-of-failure and a demandingness that you only try what you know you can succeed at. With an attitude like that, you will live in a state of fear and apprehension and almost never try anything new.

The new attitude is that you can “invent solutions as you go.” You don’t have to have everything figured out ahead of time. You don’t have to live in a constant fear of failure. You don’t have to procrastinate on getting started because everything is not perfect. You can start today and experiment as you go. Accessing the set of attitudes of always learning, being flexible in adjusting, getting back up when you get knocked down (resilience), and persisting until you find the secret for succeeding, you keep at it.

Most people give up far too easily. They give up on projects, businesses, marriages, friendships, etc. because they take the information and communication about something not working as failure instead of as feedback. Thomas Edison had that set of attitudes and so kept experimenting in search of a filament for his light bulb. His frame of mind was not a thousand failures, but a thousand ways to *not* to make a light bulb. He did not treat each as a disappointment. He treated each as one more thing he could check off as not working. Now on to the next!

In the area of communication, *there is no failure, only feedback*, enables you to focus on the response that you did get as feedback. “So what does this tell me?” “What can I learn from this?” “Given this, what would be the next most intelligent thing to try?” And how much more creative and productive are these responses? Obviously, a lot!

If you are still not convinced, then let’s do a linguistic analysis of this scary word. What kind of a word is *failure*, linguistically? Linguists call it a nominalization. That means someone took an action word, a verb, and turned it into a noun by nominalizing or naming it. But it is a false-noun. There is no such *thing*, failure is *not* “a person, place, or thing,” it is just a name. Once we turn the false-noun back into a verb, we have “to fail,” or “fail” at. Now we can ask about the object:

What did you fail at? When did you fail at it? By what criteria are you making this evaluation? Anything stopping you from trying again? What have you learned that contributes to not succeeding?

Literally, there is no such *thing* as “failure.” That’s why you can’t see it, hear it, feel it, smell it, or taste it. It is not real in that sense. It is a word that describes a mental judgment. What there is that you can see and hear and maybe feel is a response from what you did. You cracked a joke, but no one laughed. You “failed” to get laughter. Was your timing off? What the joke not understood? Was the punch-line messed up? Was it a pun and people groaned instead of laugh? All of this gives back to you information (“feedback”) that you can use to get better at telling jokes. Well, you can get better *if you are open to the response you get, notice it, and use it for learning*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #4
January 23, 2017
Basic NLP Concepts #11

PERSON AND BEHAVIOR: Two Very Different Things

Here is another basic concept in NLP— *People are not their behaviors. Person and behavior are two very different things.* And given this distinction, then a person *is more* and *is different* from his or her behaviors. These words “person” and “behavior” describe two very different phenomena.

Without this distinction, we *confuse* a person with his behaviors and then use his behaviors to define him. Then, in our mind and our way of treating that person, “She *is* her behaviors.” As a non-thinking and self-blinding response, now we have a short-cut for classifying people. Instead of treating them with respect and honor for the wonder and mystery of who they are, we can quickly label them and put them in a box and not have to think very hard about them.

“Oh, he’s an alcoholic! Don’t ask him to take responsibility!”

“She’s a big mouth who can’t shut up, always gossiping and spreading rumors!”

“He’s the CEO and very wealthy so he must know what he’s doing.”

“She’s very charming and beautiful, she won a beauty contest some years ago.”

Defining people in terms of their behavior, confusing people with their behavior, labeling people as if one set of behaviors completely defines them, seeing people only in terms of what they do, thinking that behavior also necessarily corresponds to other qualities— these are ways in which we are not distinguishing person from behavior. And it can be a fatal mistake in relationships and in our general success in life.

Separating *person* from *behavior* in NLP enables us to frame and reframe. That’s because if we start with *framing people using their behaviors* then we are equating who a person is, her identity with certain actions that she produces at a certain time. And if that dismisses her or relegates her to some position so that we can easily ignore her, then we have engaged in some very inhuman and de-personalizing actions ourselves. We are not giving that person a chance. By recognizing the distinction, we have a new frame—this person is capable of a whole range of behaviors and whatever she does is only *one expression of her*. There are many, many more. She is much more than any one behavior, in fact, she is much more than even the sum of all her behaviors.

Given that “the meaning of your communication is the response you get” (another basic NLP idea), then some of the most important information you can get and pay attention to is a person’s behavior. “What kind of work does he do?” “What’s the quality of his behaviors in that realm?” To gather this kind of information simultaneously recognizes that he behaves but his behavior does *not* define him. It is one of his expressions. It may express his thinking, his values, style, state, context, and

many other things. But it does not *identify* who he really is.

By realizing that the particular behavior a person performs differs from that person's ultimate identity, you can then expect and hope that in another situation or another time that person may behave differently. So this distinction makes behavior *contextual*. The behavior is *relative to a context*. Put her in another context and she will probably behave differently, sometimes in a way that is drastically different.

We make a major mistake in our relationships whenever we equate a person's identity or worth with a particular behavior. *Behavior* is one thing. The *person* is another. Behavior is one way that we express ourselves and given that each of us have a full range of things that we say and do, we have a wide range of behaviors.

When you make this *person — behavior distinction* you give people (including you since you are a people!) a chance to change. They can grow, they can learn new things, they can develop new skills, they can put away childish things, they can make intentional changes in the way they express themselves.

We use this distinction in Neuro-Semantics to especially separate a person's worth from their social worth or behavior worth or the worth of one of their skills. A person's worth as a human being is of unconditional value. So we encourage absolute esteeming of the person as a person, as a valued and precious and loveable human being. Then we distinguish that from what the person can do. When a person can do something and do it competently, we call that *self-confidence*. That is the confidence to trust that you can *do* something. It has nothing to do with your human value. Behaviors are just that—behaviors. They come and go. Their value is dependent on the context and the quality of the behavior.

You as a human being, however, are far more valuable and precious than what you do. You are more than *a human doing*, you are *a human being*. Yet it is surprising how so many people (perhaps most) unknowingly confuse these two and therefore talk about their self-esteem being high or low. Either way, it's a sad commentary. Either way the person is evaluating self on what he can do or is doing, not on his *being*. Either way the problem is the failure to make this distinction.

Want a new year's resolution—Resolve to make this distinction. It will improve your relationship to yourself and then to others. It will free you from putting yourself in a box based on your behaviors. It will free you to try new things and when you do—to unleash potentials that you may not even know that you have.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #5
January 28, , 2017

WAS THE INAUGURAL SPEECH REALLY “DARK?”

If the speech was anything, it was the speech of a business man, not a politician. I say that because business people know that *business is all about problems ... and problem-solving*. Without a problem, there's no business. Entrepreneurs, in fact, look for problems; they get excited about problems. They know that a great problem is the lifeblood of creativity and innovation — and therefore of a great company.

But, of course, many in the media did not see it that way. They called the 16-minute inaugural speech “dark” and criticized him for highlighting the problems that we face as a nation. Some took offense when he used the word carnage:

“But for too many of our citizens, a different reality exists: Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and the crime and gangs and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. This American carnage stops right here and stops right now.”

And what he said that they could have (and should have) valued as inspirational, they ignored, like the very next line as well as some of the lines after that.

“We are one nation -- and their pain is our pain. Their dreams are our dreams; and their success will be our success. We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny. The oath of office I take today is an oath of allegiance to *all* Americans.”

“One by one, the factories shuttered and left our shores, with not even a thought about the millions upon millions of American workers left behind. The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed across the entire world. *But that is the past. And now we are looking only to the future.*”

“Do not let anyone tell you it cannot be done. No challenge can match the heart and fight and spirit of America. We will not fail. Our country will thrive and prosper again.”

“It is time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: *that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots...*”

Now there was another 16-minute speech at that same place many years before, a speech that was also “dark,” if by *dark* we mean that the author mentioned the problems that we face. That speech was made by Martin Luther King, Jr. It is known as the *I have a Dream* speech. This is what Adam Grant in his book, *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World* (2016) wrote:

“When we recall Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, epic speech, what stands out is a shining image

of a brighter future. Yet in his 16-minute oration, *it wasn't until the eleventh minute that he first mentioned his dream*. Before delivering hope for change, King stressed *the unacceptable conditions of the status quo*. In his introduction, he pronounced that, despite the promise of the Emancipation Proclamation, “one hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.” “Having established the fierce urgency of now through depicting the suffering that was, King turned to what could be: ‘But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.’ He devoted more than two thirds of the speech to these one-two punches, alternating between *what was* and *what could be* by expressing indignation at the present and hope about the future. According to sociologist Patricia Wasielewski, King articulates the crowd’s feelings of anger at existing inequities, strengthening their ‘resolve that the situation must be changed.’ The audience was only prepared to be moved by his dream of tomorrow after he had exposed the nightmare of today.” (p. 235)

The source of this came from the book, *Behind the Dream: The Making of the Speech that Transformed a Nation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Here’s what Dr. King said that was “dark.”

“But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.”

“In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” It is obvious today that *America has defaulted on this promissory note*, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a *bad check*, a check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.”

“I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest – quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.”

Now if that is “dark,” then after 11 minutes of it came 5 minutes that we remember as the vision—*the Dream*:

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’ I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of

former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

From the NLP perspective— we know that all of us are motivated by *away from aversions and dissatisfactions* **and simultaneously** *toward attractions, values, and hopes*. So when a speaker gives both— the problems to be solved and the hope of the solutions to be created, that speaker offers a propulsion system of the dual motivators. That’s what Martin Luther King Jr. did; and that’s what Donald J. Trump did. So does that make their speeches “dark” or “light?” Well, that brings up another meta-program: optimistic / pessimistic. How do you look at it? What do you put in your focal attention?

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #6
January 30, 2017
A Critical Review of the Movie

I’M NOT YOUR GURU, I JUST BEHAVE AS IF I AM

Here’s my bias as I begin this review: I like Anthony Robbins; I always have. From the first time I read *Unlimited Power*, I knew that he had a real gift of explaining difficult things. Then over the years, it became evident that he was a genius in marketing, branding, and entertaining. Even to this day, I would guess that Tony brings more people into the field of NLP than all of the rest of us combined. Years ago I had a front row seat as I saw how Richard Bandler treated Tony that caused Tony to stop saying the three letters, “NLP” in public. That’s should not have happened; Richard should have put an mantle of honor on Tony.

So what follows here is not a criticism of Tony personally. Instead it is a critique of his new movie and its unfortunate message. The title of the movie is, *I’m Not Your Guru*, and it is about Robbins and his work, especially the “Date with Destiny” program. Now to his credit, Tony begins the movie by saying that he is not a guru and doesn’t want to be. He also explains to the unknown interviewer that he does not have “the answer” to people’s dilemmas and that there are many paths. All of that is good and I congratulate him on saying:

“Who am I? I’m not your guru. Not here to fix you. You are not broken.”

But ... *and this is a big but*, in spite of those disclaimers, there are many things in the movie that say otherwise. In fact, there are several things that Robbins does that will, in effect, actually encourage people to think of him as a guru. That’s unfortunate. So unless Tony changes these things, people will continue thinking of him as a guru and he will have to continue dis-avowing that he is not a guru. To behave in these aspects —aspects that a guru would act— actually argues against all of one’s disclaimers to the contrary. In writing the following critical review of the movie, my objective is to use some critical thinking to offer some balance to Tony.

Now the movie is very well edited and produced. It is engaging and it is emotional. The voice over sections powerfully tie together some of the interview questions while showing Tony back stage or the thousands of people in the audience or the beautiful scenes in Florida. Overall, it is very well done. And much that Tony presents is good. But in terms of the title about *not being a guru*, the movie does not demonstrate that at all. In fact, I think the movie actually encourages people to think of him as a guru. I’m here using “guru” not in the Eastern sense of “teacher” or “master,” but in the sense of being a cult leader, someone so superior that people treat him as an enlightened being.

If you want to be a Guru —

If you want to be a guru, there are certain things that you would do that would elevate you in

people's thinking. Here are some of them:

1) Give No Credit

If you want to be a guru and give people the impression that *you are the source of all of your wisdom, insights, and "magic,"* then give no one an credit to anyone for your message. Quote no one. Mention none of your studies. And this is exactly what Tony Robbins does in the movie for nearly two full hours. In fact, when he encourage people to go out and "teach one," he refers to *his tools* and the tools that *he* has given them.

From the movie, no observer would have any idea that Tony learned what he learned from Richard Bandler, John Grinder, and Wyatt Woodsmall. No would know that his first book, *Unlimited Power* (1985) is essentially the NLP Practitioner course. For two hours, there is in fact not a single reference to NLP. It is *as if* he invented every process that he has learned and he is the source of all of that wisdom. Doing that is *not* the way to demonstrate that "I am not your guru." It is the opposite. Do that and people will quote you and you only. What else are they to think?

Yet within the movie itself are many things that come from NLP. In the opening scene, for example, Tony does *a pattern interrupt* when he interrupts a young man's pattern of hating himself and wanting to hit himself. Tony asked, "Why you hate yourself so much?" There's a moment of hesitation, then he does a humor interrupt, "Is it because of the red shoes?" He looks down at his shoes. "Those are fucking red shoes." The young man smiles. Tony warns, "Now be careful, you'll start to enjoy yourself." Other patterns within the movie that come from NLP are Change Personal History and Collapsing of Anchors. But in all of that, not a single word is uttered to give credit to NLP as the source.

2) Speak in Absolute and Global Terms

As a great entertainer with tremendous showmanship, Tony is bigger than life, his "show" is bigger than life, and he speaks about things in that kind of grandiose way. This both makes him effective and equally makes him ineffective. He speaks using extreme language statements. Who else would title a book, *Unlimited Power*? But power is limited. And no one but God has *unlimited* power! He calls upon people to be *totally* passionate. He speaks about his program, "The Ultimate Business Mastery" about adding massive pleasure, adding massive pain, engaging in massive action plan.

All this encourages people to think about him as bigger than life and about being cut from a different clothe than the rest of us. If you don't want to be viewed as a guru, sprinkle in some down-to-earth language. Quote your sources, temper your speech with tentative words, avoid absolute terms that polarize life into two categories.

By speaking in these over-simplistic ways, using over-exaggerated terms, and failing to speak with precision—he leaves the impression that he has absolute truth. On day five from the stage he poses the question, "Who has not had a breakthrough at this point?" Then he asks a rhetorical question, "How could you not have a breakthrough?" After letting the question sit in the air for a moment, he gives the answer. It was the theme of the day, "If you're in your head, your dead." So he announced, "You are in your head." Apparently there's no other possibility or alternative answer.

Speaking about the lack of precision, he also uses the F-word frequently and commented later that it is his way of breaking patterns and shaking people up by using outrageous words. He shouts from the stage, “I’m fucking unstoppable.”

The advice he gives sounds right, but the problem is that it is so general that it doesn’t take any context or constraints into account. When Sienna, a 19-year old girl, stands and says she has a problem with her diet, he asks a series of questions and eventually she says that she’s looking for love. Tony asks whether it was dad or mom that she didn’t get the love that she wanted. It was dad. He announces, “She loves him, she just hates it that she loves him so much.” A little later he announces, “As much as you hate what he does, he hates himself more.” Is he psychic? She nods, so he must be! Or maybe it is just over-generalized statements that could be true of anyone, of everyone. “What if you called him and blame him for all these things. ... You also need to blame him for all the good too. Give credit for what’s great about you.”

From the stage he talks about problems and announces, “Your biggest problem is that you think you shouldn’t have them!” He talks about the problems he had with his mother and that it made him “the man that I am proud to be today.” So that seals the deal: problems are good. Of course, what’s lacking is any precision about what kind of problems are we talking about.

3) *Be a Fantastic Faith Healer*

Watching this movie reminded me of many of the old televangelists of the 1970s and 1980s, Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, and others. Crowds in the thousands, loud gospel music, charismatic faith leader encountering a person who suffers desperately, commanding devils to flee, the person falling back, swooning, God be praised! Even the music in the movie reminded me of the music in those big events. And the movie ends with dimmed lights and Tony doing a hypnotic induction to the music of *Amazing Grace*. Is this “The Church of Tony?”

Tony did that at the beginning with Matyas, a suicidal young man from Berlin, and then later with Dawn, a young woman from Brazil who sold all of her furniture to come to the training as her last hope. On Day three he said, “Raise your hand if you’re really fucked up! Someone who is suicidal.” It was Dawn, the young 26-year old woman, who was still suffering from sexual traumas from having grown up in a cult.

But the problem with the movie is that the suicide issue is treated as if it is solved once and for all *by an experience with Tony*, and that’s it. Actually, I was surprised at these parts of the movie because for years problems with suicides have plagued Tony. Once in Germany three people who had attended his program committed suicide afterwards, it also happened in Australia and other places. The over-emotional and over-intense program (which used to go to two and three in the morning) put a real strain on people already wounded by life and frail in terms of their ego-strength.

Like faith healers, the movie presents dramatic and intense “confrontations” that Tony has with the people in the audience. He calls his “interventions” or “demonstrations.” His style is to go out and find someone in the audience and interact with them in a way that seems incredibly “personal” and yet it is only superficially so. No one could “coach” or do a therapy intervention in the way he talks and interacts with people. Well, unless you have 3,000 people watching you! Yet people respond

quickly and dramatically! Why? Probably because they are on stage with three thousand people watching! No wonder they are so responsive.

When he dealt with Dawn who raised her hand about thinking about suicide, afterwards he explained that the solution “just came through me.” He explained that his own difficult childhood set him up so his mission now is to save others from a horrible childhood.

4) Set Up Subtle Audience Response Rituals

To “work the crowd” Tony has several processes that are both exciting and at the same time subtly persuasive and maybe even manipulative. He repeatedly presents something and then asks, “Who agrees with me? ... Say *Yes!*” And with that comes a chorus of *yeses*. It sounds obvious and innocent. Yet it actually taps into some of the power of group dynamics. Just imagine hearing three-thousand people shouting “Yes!” Even if you didn’t say yes, you just heard a whole auditorium exploding with “Yes!” repeatedly, *that ritual will put you into a yes-set*. And the *yes-set* creates a subtle influence that predisposes a person to agree and value and to avoid thinking it through.

Similarly when he gets people saying “I.” “How many are for that? Say ‘I!’” “Who gets that? Say ‘I!’” “Who knows what I’m talking about? Say ‘I!’” The sound of “I” as a chorus in an auditorium echoing around encourages people to take ownership of it and personalize whatever was said or presented. Effective? Yes. Manipulative? I think we have to say yes to that as well.

5) Always Make Everything Positive and Upeat

The entire “I’m not your Guru” movie is *not* a documentary although from the beginning of the film *it seems to suggest that*. “This is the first time Robbins has allowed outside cameras to fully document the six-day event.” Yet the film asks no hard questions, and it doesn’t present any skepticism about anything. While there’s no indication what the Joe Berlinger Film is, it strikes me as a video production company that Tony hired to create the “Date with Destiny” Video to sell the program. In the end, everything is positive and upbeat. There’s no failures, no downside, no “let the buyer beware.” There are no constraints or concerns presented. This is good if you want to be a guru. It is counter-productive if you do not want to be a guru.

After challenging one young woman about whether she is getting what she wants from the relationship. She shook her head no. He then ask her in front of the thousands to get her boyfriend on the phone. When she let him know her dissatisfaction; the call did not end well. He hung up on her. In a voice-over, the interviewer asked Tony, “Are you ever concerned about giving the wrong piece of advice?” He says that he watches their body and what their body “tells him is right.” “It’s true because her whole nervous system responds.” “I’m looking for what’s real.” In this, he answers the question, not directly but indirectly: “I never give wrong advice.”! At the end of the film in the credits, however, we learn Hali and her boyfriend have decided to stay together.

Conclusion

The movie *I Am Not Your Guru* is a very entertaining film, well-crafted, and highlights the “Date with Destiny” seminar. It will probably be great as a promotion for selling that seminar. It is also a self-promotional marketing film and not a documentary movie and not from an objective third-party perspective.

Most importantly, in terms of the title, it does not demonstrate that Tony Robbins does not want to be your guru. In fact, due to the things mentioned, what it shows is precisely what would be recommended to a person who wants to be seen as a guru. Now if Tony Robbins is serious about *not* being seen as a guru, here's what I recommend that he do.

- Quote sources, give credit to NLP for the original source of his skills. Invite people to read or consult sources outside of himself.
- Temper his language patterns by using more precise language.
- Present cautions to the audience and to the people he works with letting them know that he is not a psychologist, does not have therapeutic training, and that if they are suicidal they should seek professional assistance.
- Temper his use of the reverberating “Yeses!” and “Say ‘I’” that he uses.
- Present some non-dramatic conversations and/or interventions so to convey the idea that change doesn't require big dramatic instantaneous transformations.
- Co-train with other people on his staff so that it is not all about him.

By L. Michael Hall, Ph.D., www.neurosemantics.com. meta@acsol.net

When you share this post, include credits: Posted on the Neuro-Semantic Weekly Newsletter, “Neurons,” a free newsletter on www.neurosemantics.com.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #7
Feb. 6, 2017
Basic NLP Concepts #12

RESISTANCE— THE LACK OF RAPPORT

When it comes to communication, leadership, management, even parenting—it is most common, and very easy, to blame the other person when there is resistance. “He’s a very resistant person!” “She just doesn’t take feedback well.” We might even say that it is human nature to think that where there is resistance, there is a stubborn, strong-willed, resistant person. And it seems all the easier to jump to this conclusion especially if what you are presenting seems *to you* to be reasonable.

But NLP takes a different stance about this. The basic NLP concept about resistance is the presupposition— *Resistance is the lack of rapport*.

Do you find that shocking? Then let’s take the shock out of it in the following way. Think of *resistance* as feedback about the way *you* are relating to the other person. That is, just as “the meaning of your communication is the result that you get” (the NLP concept we explored in #8), when you get *resistance*, it makes sense—to the other person. That person is *resisting* whatever you are saying or imposing or expecting. The resistance speaks to *what* you are saying and perhaps *how* you are saying it.

The power of this basic concept is that *it puts you in control of the situation with something that you can now do to make things better*. If resistance is the lack of rapport, then work on connecting with the person, on getting rapport, and on making it safe or safer to interact with you. To frame the resistance as solely and entirely as a problem of the other person takes any chance of change out of your hands.

Now normally we read resistance as something that’s bad. “It’s bad that someone resists.” We often read it as failure or difficulty and throw up our hands in resignation. We give up on the person. We assume that the other person cannot be influenced. Yet these are premature evaluations. Further, they lead to unuseful responses. We then view resistance as a trigger for feeling bad and then fail to develop the skills necessary to effectively work with the resistance. Frame it in this way, then that’s the results.

NLP reframes all of that. When you reframe resistance as the lack of rapport shifts responsibility back to us. Now it is a function of *how we handle things and relate to the person*. This frame empowers you to re-establish rapport even with the grouchy, the grumpy, the out-of-sorts, and the hurting person. It enables you to continue communicating even in the face of anger and sarcasm without taking it personal. It keeps you matching the person’s internal reality and finding the words that correspond to what’s happening inside the other person.

With this concept, you focus on rapport building rather than on resistance as the problem. It focuses your attention on what you are doing that's connecting or disconnecting with the person. Rapport also reminds us that before agreement comes understanding and that when a person does not feel understood, they will naturally resist our influence. Here's some good news. Focusing on *understanding* does not require that you agree, only that you take the time to step into "second perceptual position" and see things from the other person's point of view. When you can do that accurately, you can then speak about the other person's point of view with as much precision and quality as the person himself. And when you do that, you match the person's internal awareness thereby enabling him to feel heard.

That can be absolutely magical. That's partly because when a person feels *heard*, she does not have to repeat herself. In fact, when she hears her point expressed accurately and fully by you, she will tend to relax. Then all of the motivation to keep speaking in order to be heard diminishes. Your acknowledgment and summary lets her know that you have heard her. To follow that up, you can further ask, "Have I missed anything? Do I have that right? That's your point?"

Even if you can't win the other's mind to the point where he agrees with you, you have given the other person a great gift —understanding. And if there's anything that we all want, it is understanding. Feeling understood and feeling heard are great gifts and can be powerfully healing when there are differences and conflict. It is foundational for collaboration.

Once you frame resistance as signifying the lack of rapport, that frame focuses your attention on the relationship between you and the person resisting you. It eliminates blame and replaces blame with curiosity. Now you can focus on *what* the person is resisting and *why*. It frequently is not what you think it is. Do that and you'll re-establish rapport.

What a great NLP concept— *resistance is the lack of rapport*. Now obviously, this is not absolute. As with all of these basic concepts, there are exceptions. But exceptions do not invalidate the basic principle. That's what these concepts are—basic guidelines for living, communicating, getting along, etc. Sure, resistance can arise from other sources. That's not the point of this basic NLP guideline. The purpose of this guideline is to direct our attention first to ourselves. And that also is one of our central themes in Neuro-Semantics— apply to self.

Want more? Check our *User's Manual of the Brain, Volumes I and II* (the basic practitioner and master practitioner courses). Get the newest book — *Get Real: Unleashing Your Authenticity*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #8
February 13 , 2017
Basic NLP Concepts #13

IT’S ALL ABOUT CHOICE

Central to everything we do in NLP is to increase choice. You can find this statement repeatedly in the early NLP literature. The things that we do in communication and in interventions are all done to give a person a greater range of choice. Choice is indeed one of the key values within this discipline. Statements about choice from the original NLP books include:

The person in a system who has the most flexibility has the most influence (control).

Everything we do is to increase choice.

A person with one choice is a robot, a person with two is on the horns of a dilemma, only when a person has three or more choices is a person truly free to choose.

People make the best choices that are available to them.

With choice, a person will feel resourceful and able to make positive changes in life. With choice comes a sense of ownership, responsibility and that leads to a sense of self-determination. With choice also comes a basic joy of life as you feel yourself as a free agent and in charge of the meanings that you attribute to things.

Conversely, without choice a person will feel constrained, limited, and unresourceful. Without choice—a person will feel less human and less able to live fully human with a sense of will and will power. Without choice a person is likely to be easily agitated, irritated, frustrated, grumpy, unhappy, and angry. It’s just not a good place for a human being to be.

Without choice a person will typically feel stuck in a problem. He will more than likely feel that he is living as the "effect" of some "cause," rather than the cause of his life and what he does. Generally taking choice away from a person will break rapport and put her in an oppositional state. To truly empower someone involves putting her “at cause” — responsible for what she thinks, feels, chooses, and does.

Similar to the NLP basic concept that people have positive intentions (#7), this NLP concept assumes and operates from the idea that people make the best choices which are open to them at any given time. When someone makes a choice that seems irrational, stupid, hurtful, destructive, etc., we assume that it was probably the best choice available. The person didn’t know anything better to do and/or was operating from some limiting, or even false, maps.

What we normally do, when we don’t operate from this concept, is get frustrated and angry with the person for her choices. We do that because we don’t understand his choices. We scratch our heads, "Doesn't she know better? What's wrong with him?" The person probably does not know better. It was the best choice in her model of the world. Nothing better was available in that model. Conversely, starting from this basic concept that people make the best choices available

to them enables a more compassion and even forgiving approach. It fosters kindness, optimism, and hope.

Isn't this true of you when you make some choice that you later look back on with regret and even disbelief? "What was I thinking?" You acted in a manner that you now regret. If you had a better choice for handling things back then, wouldn't you have opted for that? Of course! Who knowingly makes a choice that he knows good and well will be to his detriment? When a person makes a stupid or destructive choice, somehow she thinks it will make things better. Realizing this about ourselves enables us to treat others with more kindness about this human fallibility.

Choice leads to responsibility. It is out of the context of having options to choose from that the sense of responsibility arises. This leads to another central focus of NLP— putting people at cause and enabling them to become response-able in their lives. It was Fritz Perls who frequently spoke about responsibility as *response-ability*, focusing on the two words and their meanings.

When you have choice, and know that you have choice, then you can't blame others or circumstances for your responses. Sure others and circumstances can challenge you in your choices, yet whatever you choose is exactly that—your choice. And strange enough, by accepting your responses as your choices, you empower yourself to take charge of your life and make changes by your choice.

In NLP this leads to the idea that every experience is not only a skill, but also a choice. If I get discouraged and feel like giving up— that's a skill that has an internal structure and a choice. Recognizing how I choose to think and feel that way enables me to discover my discouragement strategy as well as the choices that inform it. Paradoxically, that gives me leverage points for change— if I so choose to use them.

What are you experiencing that you may not like experiencing? After you identify it, explore how your choices have contributed to creating it. After all, every thought you entertain about it is a choice— no one is forcing you to think that thought. So also with every emotional and behavioral response— no one is forcing you to so feel or act.

You have choice. You have choice at the level of your thoughts (what and how you represent things), your emotions, and your actions. Knowing that, however is not enough, now you need to take ownership of your choices and manage them so that you take control of your life. Now isn't that a great NLP concept?

Neuro-Semantic News — Trainers' Training in Brazil this July!

- Once a year we conduct *Trainers' Training* (NSTT) and this year it will be in Brazil. The dates: July 22 through August 5. Contact Dr. Jairo or Maira for information. Look for a promotional ad about this tomorrow. In 2018 we will be back in Australia.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #9
February 20, 2017
The Heart of Neuro-Semantics #1

MEANING AND MEANINGFULNESS

If you ask, what is Neuro-Semantics about? The most direct answer and the most literal is to focus on the words themselves. In that case, Neuro-Semantics is about *meaning in your body*.

Neuro- refers to the neurology of your body, your physiology and all that goes on in your brain and nervous systems.

Semantics refers to meaning—how it is constructed, what it is comprised of, how it works, etc.

What meaning is in your body? When you “make sense” of things in your world (*meaning1*), this understanding gets into your body to create your “programs” for functioning. This then serves as our “instincts” since we human beings do not have instincts in the same way that animals do. They have *information coded into their genes* and so just naturally know what things are, how to operate, who to eat, who eats them, etc. We do not have that. For *information*, we have to search it out, learn it, and incorporate it.

When we learn and incorporate understanding into our neurology, that understanding becomes our *meanings* which then inform and govern how we think, feel, speak, act, relate, etc. The meanings that we learn then drive our performances. These *performances* range from all of the things that you externally do, your responses to the world around you and to other people. It also includes your internal responses.

Now about meaning, there are two words which sound the same and yet refer to two very different phenomenon—*meaning* and *meaningfulness*. Because they sound similar, it is easy to confuse them and treat them as if they are the same. They are not. To many, this distinction is not obvious.

Meaning1 refers to mind, comprehension, understanding. This refers to *making sense of something intellectually*. It refers to something being “logical,” reasonable, and rational, that is, we have reasons by which we consider something legitimate.

Meaning2 (or *meaningfulness*) refers to values and significance. This refers to what is *personally significant and valuable*. Something can have meaning, but not be important. To convey its importance, we mention values and/or tell a story.

When effectively coordinated, reasonable meaning and felt meaningfulness combine to create a powerful internal influence. Combining these two—meaning and meaningfulness—gives us two critical variables for making our communications persuasive. To do that, be sure your communications make sense (have meaning) and offer something significant (have meaningfulness).

One way we often refer to these two facets is in terms of reason and emotion. But there's a problem with this, namely, "reason" and "emotion" sound like two independent things. They are not. They are part of a single system. The mind-body-emotion system is a singular system that we cannot actually divide and treat as dichotomous. Yet we can only do that in language. We can *talk about* each separately. But "mind" and "emotion" are intricately related as they are part of the same system. Where there is thought, there is feeling. Where there is feeling, there is thought. Given this, effective communicators fully utilize this "dynamic duo" as a whole.

With these the two aspects of "meaning," we start with **meaning** and then go to **meaningfulness**.

- 1) Meaning as facts, information, understanding, knowledge.
- 2) Meaningfulness, full-of-meaning, as significance, emotions, value.

What and So What?

In Neuro-Semantics we explore the construction of meaning in multiple ways. We look at *kinds* of meaning from representational meaning, cinematic meaning, associative meaning, metaphorical meaning, and so on. We also look at *the number of meanings*, from one-valued meaning, to two-valued semantics, to multiple and to infinite-valued semantics (this comes from Korzybski). Another aspect is the *quality* of meaning: from futility, to trivial, to conventional, to unique, to legacy or spiritual (all of this is in the book, *Neuro-Semantics*, 2012). One of the short-cuts that we have provided in recent years is to look at meaning in terms of four questions:

- 1) What is it? The selection and identification of something. What do you call it?
- 2) How does it work? Causational meaning, how it functions, what does it do?
- 3) What is its significance? Its meaningfulness, value, importance?
- 4) What's your intention with it? Intentional meaning, what's your purpose with it?

There are more, but we start here for the purpose of understanding *what* a person has constructed (selected and identified). With that we want to know what he understands and comprehends in terms of its function and operations, X causes or makes what Y? Then when a person so maps out the world using these meaning constructs, we will want to know its significance to her, what importance does she give to it (how she semantically loads it with meaning) and the intentions she then develops about it that guides her actions.

All of this starts with the construct of meaning. But that alone is not sufficient. That's just understanding, even knowledge. We then want to know what the person values about it so that we begin to understand how that meaning will move, motivate, influence, mobilize emotions, and guide behavior. Meaning gives substance, meaningfulness gives pizzazz. Meaningfulness activates the person's energy system as it answers the questions: "So what? Why is it important? What difference does it make?"

What is Neuro-Semantics? It is a process for exploring both what you know and the feelings that then activate your responses. And, it all makes sense. Even the craziest behaviors make sense when seen in terms of the person's "model of the world," i.e., semantic constructions. Then, knowing that, we know how to begin to change things so that emotions, behavior, and performances transform for the better. That's why we say—this is to your *highest meanings and your best performances*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #10
February 28, 2017
The Big Idea in Neuro-Semantics #2

DISTINGUISHING MEANING AND MEANINGFULNESS

“The meaning of life is meaning: whatever it is, wherever it comes from, a unified purpose is what gives meaning to life. “It is not enough to find a purpose that unifies one’s goals; one must also carry through and meet its challenges. The purpose must result in strivings; intent has to be translated into action.” (*Flow*, 217)

The confusion between these two words, *meaning* and *meaningfulness*, arises from language. They sound the same. Yet in one we are constructing meaning to make sense of things and in the other we are enriching something with meaning to make meaningful. These are two different experiences. The first is about *invention of meaning*, the second is about *the richness of experience*. We use the word *meaning* for the first and *meaningfulness* for the second. With each kind of meaning that you make, a different skill set is required.

Last week I introduced the terminology of meaning¹ and meaning² in distinguishing these two kinds meaning and these two kinds of subjective experiences. While this is not made specific in this language in the book, *Neuro-Semantics* (2012), it is implied throughout the book. Now it is time to make this distinction explicit and show the benefits that you can derive from the distinction.

First, the Construction of Meaning — Meaning as Making Sense

Structurally we human beings are designed so that we have to “make sense” of things. Our sensory senses do not give us sufficient information. We can see and hear and smell and taste and feel without knowing much about *what* we are seeing or hearing, etc. That’s because the knowledge and understanding of what something is and how it works is not given in our nature. Consequently, we have to “make sense” to have a basic knowledgeable understanding of something.

The purpose of this meaning¹ (making sense) is in order to survive— to cope with the demands, needs, and challenges of life. We construct meaning¹ in order to rationally understand the world and to be able to deal with it. You need to know what your internal biological drives mean and how to gratify them in order to preserve your body and to establish health and well-being.

That’s because without “instincts” like animals have information-context instincts—we humans do not know what the urges and the drives mean. We feel and urge and we ask, “What do I need?” Maslow offered his Hierarchy of Needs to answer that question and sorted out the human needs in five categories: survival, safety and security (stabilization), the social needs of

love and affection, bonding, the self needs for feeling important, and the self-actualization needs. So our first learnings involves making sense of these drives, learning how to cope with them, and creating an overall understanding of how they influence our personality and motivation.

More abstractly “*making sense*” refers to *constructing* a set of meanings about things so that you *understand* what a thing is and how it works. When you understanding that, you have some basic *knowledge*. Understanding begins with learning *what* something is and *how* it works. Yet this is just the beginning. There is so much more. In Neuro-Semantics, we have expanded this by detailing many of the constructions that we have to build in order to “make sense” of something.

- 1) Identification of what a thing is. What is it? What do you call it?
- 2) Understanding categorization. How do you classify it?
- 3) Understanding how a thing works or functions. How does it work? What X causes Y?
- 4) Understanding consequences. What does it lead to? What effects or results?
- 5) Understanding norms. What rules regulate it? What heuristics?
- 6) Understanding the system. What are the variables and their relationships? What additional systems is this system inside? How does the system cohere (fit together)?
- 7) Understanding human purpose and motivation. Given this, what’s your intention?
- 8) Understanding the significance or importance of the thing. What is the significance of Z? How important is it? What is the value?

Meaning ¹		
1) Identification.	What is it?	Is
2) Understanding its functions.	How does it work?	Causes / Creates
3) Understanding its significance.	What is its significance?	Gives
4) Understanding purpose.	What’s your intention?	Will
5) Understanding consequences.	What does it lead to?	Effects
6) Understanding norms.	What rules regulate it?	Rules
7) Understanding categorization.	How do you classify it?	Category
8) Understanding the system.	What variables and relationships?	Network

Meaning¹ as “making sense” of things is the human activity of developing a full *understanding* of something. This, in turn, develops *knowledge* — a systematic mapping so that you can relate one thing to another.

Understanding is the basic learning that generates the knowledge then that makes up a field or a domain. When you learn a field you create a map, a model, a paradigm that enables us to fit all of the diverse information into a structured way of understanding. We thereby create an ordered structure out of the chaos.

1) Identification. What is it?

We first gather information about the variables that make up the facts of the case. This involves a selection of facts that can be put together into some form. Here we establish time-space coordinates, where, when, with whom. Here also we begin to classify the information as we give it a name and call it something. This is linguistic meaning. This enables us to begin to create some beginning boundaries, “It is X ... it is not-Y.” “It does not mean...”

2) Understanding categorization: How do you classify it?

This is classification meaning and refers to what categories are used to understand X.

3) Understanding its functions: How does it work?

Next we begin to look at the processes and functions of the thing. How does it work. What does it do? This is causal meaning— what causes what? How does X operate or how can you operate X to achieve some goal?

4) Understanding consequences: What does it lead to?

This is consequential meaning and requires the ability to think consequentially about what will happen over time when a thing continues to operate.

5) Understanding norms: What rules regulate it?

This is structured meaning about what is permitted (allowed) and what is prohibited (forbidden, tabooed). What must I do? What do I have to do with X?

6) Understanding the system: What variables and relationships?

This is system meaning. It refers to the entire network of variables and components

7) Understanding its significance: What is its significance?

By identifying what a thing is and how it works, we then attribute value or significance to it. This is significance meaning, the meaning of value.

8) Understanding purpose: What’s your intention?

This is intentional meaning. “What I mean to do is...”

Making it Personal

How are you at making sense of things? This is important since life can be confusing. Things can be vague and ambiguous and we can wonder what this really is, how does it make sense, how should I understand it? Next is meaningfulness, the second use of “meaning.” Look for it next week.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #11
March 6, 2017
The Big Idea in Neuro-Semantics #3

RISING UP TO MEANINGFULNESS

“The meaning of life is meaning: whatever it is, wherever it comes from, a unified purpose is what gives meaning to life. “It is not enough to find a purpose that unifies one’s goals; one must also carry through and meet its challenges. The purpose must result in strivings; intent has to be translated into action.” (Flow, 217)

We start with meaning as in “making sense” of things, but it does not end there. In fact you could be highly intelligent and able to “make sense” of a lot of things, and yet simultaneously be unable to experience life and the wondrous daily mysteries of it as *meaningful*. That’s an entirely different kind of subjective and one that requires a different skill set. Here also is a distinction in Neuro-Semantics that differs from NLP. NLP focused almost exclusively on meaning¹ —the making of meaning in the sense of making sense of things. In Neuro-Semantics we include a strong emphasis on meaning¹ and then we move to meaning² —the making of meaning in the sense of create sacred meanings about things.

Meaning² as Meaningfulness.

Once there is a structure of meaning, it can be meaningful or meaningless or anywhere in between. This aspect of meaning speaks about the *quality* of the meaning and refers to the *significance given to the meaning*. Meaning² refers to the quality of the experience. When something is loaded with meaning— given lots of value and significance— we enter into it wholeheartedly so we are totally engaged.

“An experience is *meaningful* when it is related positively to a person’s goals. Life has meaning when we have a purpose that justifies our strivings, and when experience is ordered.” (Flow, p. 244)

Meaning² refers to *the quality* of the experience. When something is *loaded with meaning* — given lots of value and significance, we enter into it wholeheartedly so we are totally engaged. Once we “make sense” of something, our concern shifts to asking, Is it meaningful? Is that all there is? The purpose of endowing life with significance goes beyond survival now it deals with the quality of life. Now we focus on thriving as human beings, to living with purpose.

Living with purpose means to really live, to take charge of the quality of your life. Here what we fear is not hunger or thirst, not homelessness or losing a job. Here we fear and seek to avoid despair, futility, passivity, being a victim, being miserable.

When we find life meaningful (i.e., meaning²), we develop an intention or purpose to do one or more of the following:

- Improve the quality of life and experience, to humanize life.
- Enjoy immediate experience, appreciate, take pleasure in life, cheerful.
- Sacralize, value, and create harmony of mind.
- Choose ownership, responsibility, “I choose” my action as my response.
- Be resilient, to respond with courage, and perseverance.
- Challenge, choose significant goals, not trivial ones that stagnate our development.
- Purpose, set a reason to be, connect things to overall vision.
- Turn into a flow experience, look for challenges, translate threats into enjoyable challenges to use one’s skills.

If this language sounds “spiritual,” that’s because it is. To speaks to *the human spirit* more than to the mind. Meaning¹ speaks to the mind, to what is rational as it builds up a solid understanding about what things are and how they work. But that does not speak to *the heart*. It does not inspire people to live at their best, to extend themselves, to open their eyes and develop a “continued freshness of appreciation.” That phrase comes from Maslow which he used for the subjects of his self-actualization studies. He said that at the height of living a self-actualizing life is having a “continued freshness of appreciation.”

Meaning¹ — here once you understand what things are and how they work, you set goals and use your intentionality to set your direction. Here you “make sense” of things by connecting events in a causal way to create coherent patterns in life. Here you create order and you order experience around some theme, this brings a sense of structure and coherence in your mind and actions.

Meaning² — here you do not just establish goals, but you look further and set final purposes, the overall significance of your life. What are the long-term consequences of your goal? Without this you probably will not persist. You will give up when things get tough. Here you gain a sense of your life’s mission. Here you identify what you are about, what makes your life count, and the legacy that you’ll leave.

Meaning¹
“Make Sense” of things

The good life — level 1
Orders life
Gives structure
Deals with Form
Goal: Understanding
Rules for action
Coherent patterns
Attentional focus: immed. goal
To live, survive, get along
Biological survival
Ideas that matter for coping
Quantity: facts
Study external factors
Health, economics culture
Status, relationships
Talents, skills, competence
Operations of the mind
Focusing to order things

Meaning²
Create Meaningfulness

The good life – level 2
Enriches life
Gives purpose
Deals with Values
Goal: Significance
Flow as peak experience
The importance & mission of life
Intentional focus: purpose
To live fully and abundantly, to be your best
Aliveness of spirit and heart
Ideas that matter for thriving, flourishing
Quality: experience
Study internal factors
Consciousness, mind, emotion,
Meaning, community
Love, joy, appreciation
Operations of the spirit (significance, value)
Alignment to create harmony values.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #12
March 13, 2017

SELF AND OTHER IN MOVING UP TO SELF-ACTUALIZATION

You know about the hierarchy of needs. You’ve seen the pyramid that is typically used to represent the levels of human needs and you may have become acquainted with the two different kinds of motivations within this hierarchy of human drives: the D- and the B-needs. The D-needs are those driven by the mechanism of *deficiency*. The B-needs are driven by the mechanism of *abundance*, that is, to *be* without an instrumental purpose.

This was how Abraham Maslow mapped out the area of human “motivation and personality” in his classic book by that title. The first four levels of needs are hierarchical in that the lower needs are more predominant and powerful (prepotent) than the higher needs and that as a person gratifies the lower needs, this gives rise to the emergence of the higher needs.

Because deficiency drives the lower needs, they arise from lack and scarcity. Then when gratified, they go away. They cease to drive. Their motivation ceases and so we no longer experience their urges to act. Maslow called the first four levels *the basic needs* and noted several things about them.

First, the higher intelligent animals have these needs. The social animals need love and affection, bonding, connection, and belonging and with that they need to know that they are important and valuable in their community. These are *not uniquely human* needs, they are animal needs! And, as Maslow said, “Be a good animal. Have good healthy appetites for these needs.”

Second, the lower or basic human needs which are biological and which we share with the animals describes “the jungle.” In these levels of needs, we are seeking primarily to *get*. We need. Whether it is the survival needs, safety needs, social needs, or self needs— these are basic to physical and psychological well-being.

When we move to the higher needs, these are *being* needs— we need these, not for any particular purpose. They are not instrumental like the lower needs. We need them simply to *be* and to express our humanity. And it is these needs that bring out our humanity so that we begin to become what we are designed to be. It brings out our highest meanings and values and it leads us to our best performances. Here we become real— authentic human beings. This realm is about *giving*, not getting. It is your gift and expression to humanity.

Self-Actualization Assessment Scale

Developed by Dr L.Michael Hall &
Tim Goodenough

Meta Needs

- Meaningfulness needs: an ultimate sense of significance
- Wisdom needs: multiple and rich perspectives
- Justice needs: to make things right, fair, equal
- Cognitive needs: to know, understand, learn
- Contribution needs: to make a difference
- Conative needs: to choose your unique way of life
- Love needs: to care and extend yourself to others
- Truth needs: to know what is true, real, and authentic
- Aesthetic needs: to see, enjoy, and create beauty
- Expressive needs: to be and express your best self

Self

- Importance of your voice and opinion
- Honor and Dignity from colleagues
- Sense of Respect for Achievements
- Sense of Human dignity / Value as Person
- Sense of Power to Achieve

Social

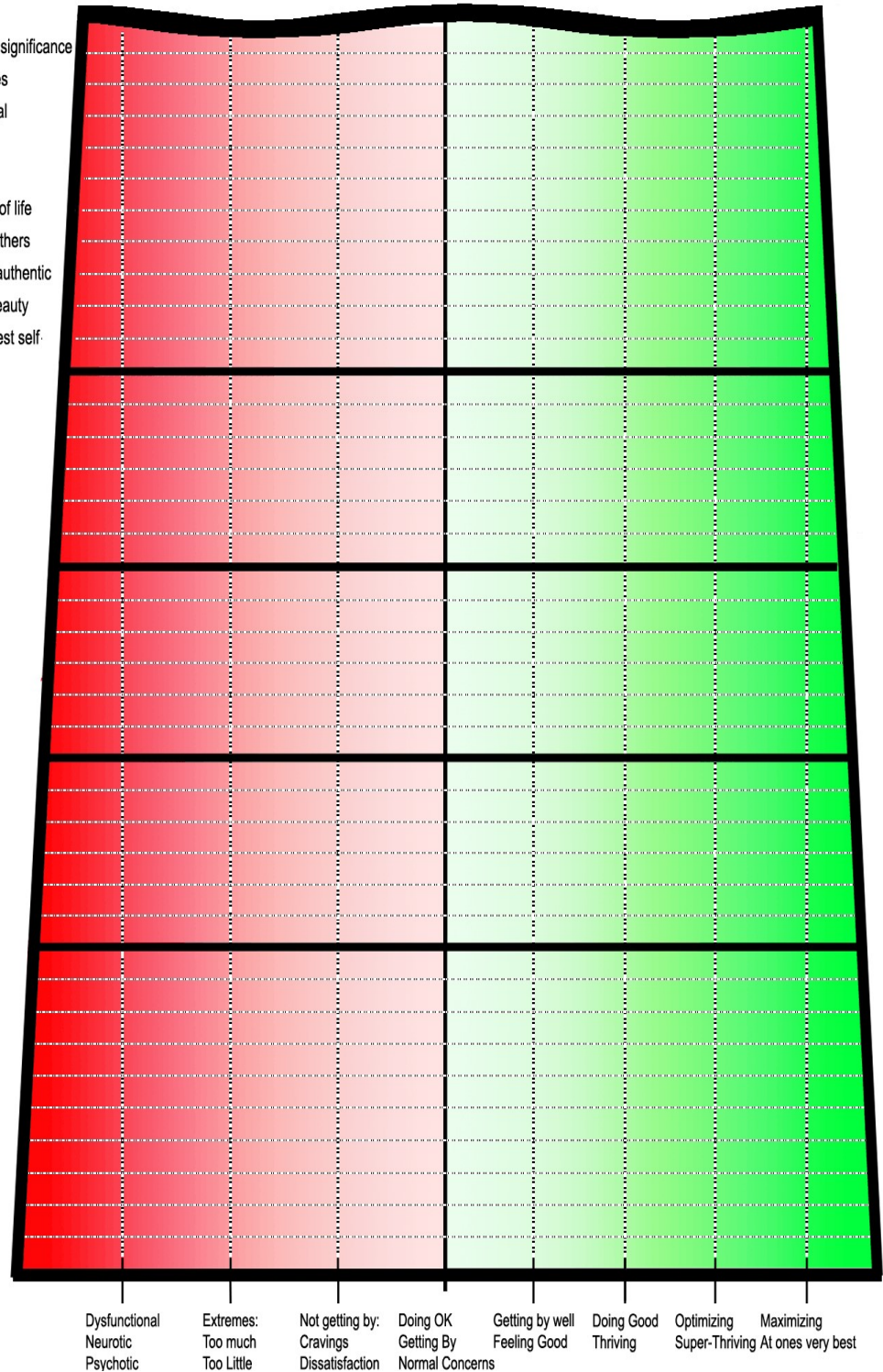
- Group Acceptance / Connection
- Bonding with Partner / Lover (intimacy)
- Bonding with Significant People
- Love / Affection
- Social connection: Friends / companions

Safety

- Sense of Control: Personal Power/ efficacy
- Sense of Order / Structure
- Stability in Life
- Career / Job Safety
- Physical / Personal Safety

Survival

- Money
- Sex
- Exercise
- Vitality
- Health
- Relaxation
- Weight Management
- Food
- Sleep



The diagram included here, **The Self-Actualization Assessment Scale** gives you an overview of the specific human needs at the five levels. (See the diagram.)

An interesting perspective starts with the basic, lower, and deficiency needs focusing on *getting* and the higher, *being*, and abundance needs focused on *giving*. About living a self-actualizing life, this says that as you move upward into the truly human needs— you live a life of contribution, giving, and making a difference. Your life is no longer solely about yourself. It is about others.

When you start meeting your needs, your focus is on you— surviving, stabilizing, belonging, validating your value and then you move to focusing on others— the expression of your gifts and potentials. And yet, it is not quite that simple. There's another complexity. Actually the shift from *self* to *other* oscillates as you move up the hierarchy of needs. That is, there is a dialectic tension, first of differentiation of your self and the of integration with others.

It begins with a focus on you— on your self surviving. Here others take care of you. They feed, clothe, nurse, care, love, protect, etc. In this period, we differentiate ourselves and now we enter into the social area where we need to belong and to be loved and cared for. Now the focus shifts to others— how to get along, how to understand others, how to relate. Once we figure out how to gratify this human need, the focus oscillates again from other to self. Now we ask, “Am I important? Do I count?” This is the human need for value and worth. Upon gratification of this need, the focus oscillates again, from self to others and to the self-actualization needs.

Self—> Other —> Self —> Other. And because these needs are never “once and forever” gratified, but keep re-emerging as we develop over the life span, we are forever shifting back and forth. *Self* is your base; *other* is the target of your love. It is not all about you. Yet it involves you. So similar to the safety announcements on flights— first you, “Put on your oxygen mask first, then help those around you with theirs.” Self-actualization is *through* you, never *about* you.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #13
March 20, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #1

THE NEURO-SEMANTIC MATRIX MODEL

The night when first of the three movies in the series, *The Matrix*, was released in 1999 in New York City, I received a dozen emails. Without exception, each person who wrote to me, and most were from New York City, wanted to know what influence I had on the movie. Sadly, the answer is none. Two of the persons who emailed me thought I was being coy or something, and kept asking, “Come on, you can tell me, I will keep it secret.” But the truth is that I had no influence whatsoever on the movie and all I could say was, “I wish!”

Of course, you might wonder, “Why would anyone think that in the first place?” The reason is that for two years I had been running a training called “Frame Games” and earlier that year had published the book, *Frame Games* (1999). Later I retitled that book, *Winning the Inner Game* (2007). What I did in that book, and in the training, was to highlight the basic NLP idea that “we do not operate on the world directly, but through our mental maps about the world.” This idea originated from Alfred Korzybski in his classic work, *Science and Sanity* (1933) which established the neurological basis for this idea.

If we do not deal with “the world” (the territory) directly, but through a simulation (a map), then we do not know what is *really* “out there,” we only know it through “the transforms” created by our nervous systems and sense-receptors like our eyes that translate the electro-magnetic energy vibrations into what we *experience* as sight, sound, sensation, smells, etc. As a model of Cognitive Psychology, NLP provides a user-friendly way to use this for communicating, relating, developing, managing, leading, etc. How? By treating all of our mental maps as *a human construct* which is only as good as it has some correspondence with the territory and can be used to move around in and navigate the territory.

If your thoughts-and-emotions and how you “sense” things, and “make sense” of things is *a human construct*, then it is not ultimately “real,” but a simulation and is valid and useful to the extent that it enables you to function effectively. The test of any human map about things then is its *usefulness*, not its truthfulness.

What does any of this have to do with the movie, *The Matrix*? What does any of this have to do with *The Matrix Model* that we use in Neuro-Semantics to think and work systemically? Everything. To explain, let’s define the word “matrix.” It literally means “womb.” And A womb is a place where something is given birth. If you use X and Y axes, you can give birth to any one of a thousand concepts. If X stands for time and Y stands for distance, you can now give birth to the concept of

miles-per-hour or kilometers-per-hour. Add Z axes and you can create a three-dimensional space that can give birth to even more complex concepts and define *relationships* between the variables that you use to understand something.

The Matrix movie used the “womb” idea for where the humans were born. In the world after the war between the Machines and the Humans, because the Machines won that war (don’t you hate that!), they now “grew” humans in egg-like shells and pumped information into their spinal chord and nervous system so that they would give off lots of energy to run the Machine World. In this way, “the Matrix” was the false world of 1999 that was “pulled down over the eyes of the humans to deceive them from the truth.” The truth? They were slaves living in a pseudo-world and they needed to “wake up” to discover this reality. Thus enter Morpheus as the coach facilitator who invites Neo to take the red pill and wake up.

The Matrix Model, while it was developed entirely apart from the movie, describes *the human constructions that we invent in our mind* about the world as the place where we give birth to (“womb”) our “sense of reality.” Our *constructions* map out how we perceive the world and it is comprised of our “sensory-based” sights, sounds, sensations, etc. as well as our made-up “sense,” how we “make sense” of things with words and language. And, as with the movie, we also were born in a Matrix. We call it family, culture, society, meanings, language, etc. Our *humanity* is given birth because information was pumped into us via experience, language, culture, school, religion, government, etc. And as with the movie, we also need to wake up!

In 1997, I began saying in an off-handed way, “I never leave home without my meanings, I take them everywhere I go.” At some point, I made the same comment about my states, “I never leave home without my states.” And later I used the same format to describe my self. When asked, “How many things do you not leave home without?” I said to Bob, “Seven things.” He wanted to know what and because I was just fooling around and playing rather than being serious, I said, “Wouldn’t you like to know!” That gave birth to the idea of “the seven matrices in the Matrix Model” in 2002. Actually, it turned out to be eight sub-matrices. But I put “Seven” on the title of the first book on the Matrix Model. When asked why, I said, “Obviously, because *seven* is a sexier number than *eight*.” More humor that some didn’t enjoy. :)

Where did the eight sub-matrices come from? Several sources. NLP, Developmental Psychology, Systems, and Phenomenology. From NLP came the three *process matrices*: State, Meaning, and Intention. From Developmental Psychology came the five *content matrices*: Self, Power, Others, Time, and World. From Phenomenology came Meaning, Intention, Self, Others, and Time. And from Systems came the *relationships between all of these variables*.

The *process* matrices summarize what General Semantics and NLP offer. Inside of State, Meaning, and Intention is the Meta-Model, Strategies, “Sub-Modalities” (Meta-Modalities or cinematic features), the Meta-Programs, and Meta-States. These three processes *create our mental construct* of reality— our mental maps by which we perceive, experience, emote, and make sense of things. Change these and your world changes.

The *content* matrices summarize Phenomenology and Developmental Psychology and represents the

part of the Matrix Model that I would not have consciously designed given the premise of NLP that content is far less important than process. Yet in this instance, *content does count*. And the content that mostly counts is the content that makes up your maps about your Self. That gives us the five content matrices about *Self*— Your self-esteem (value of self), your self-confidence (abilities and skills in what you can *do*), your social self (who you are in relationship to others, your moral and ethical self in how you treat others), your temporal self (your experience of yourself in time, sense of mortality), and your roles (you as you play various roles in various domains of life, status, image, etc.).

With all of that, The Matrix Model of Neuro-Semantics has three axes: Meaning (state, intention and meaning), Performance (state, power, others, time, world), and Self (self, power, others, time, and world).

Summary of the Matrix Model

The Process Matrices:

State
Meaning
Intention

The Content Matrices

Self
Power
Others
Time
World

The Grounding Matrix

State

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #14
March 27, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #2

THE HOLOGRAM OF THE MATRIX MODEL

The whole of your inner world, *the inner construct of your Matrix*, where you play your unique inner game is contained in *the State Matrix*. It is all there, but you do have to have trained eyes and ears to see and hear it. Otherwise it is invisible to you and you will see nothing. Like a hologram, if you know how to “read” it, the state matrix not only grounds it in reality, but it also has within it the whole—the whole of the Matrix. For this reason, we begin with *the state matrix*.

As a holistic term the word “state” refers to the human system, that is, to the mind-body-emotion system. It refers to a person’s *state of mind* as well as one’s *state of body* and *state of emotion*. In everyday talk we separate these terms as if they refer to different things while in truth they refer to a singular system, the human system which is made up of mind, body, and emotion. Separating them occurs in language, not in reality. That’s because where there is mind there is body and emotion. Where there is emotion there is mind and body. Where there is body there is mind and emotion.

This gives you three ways into the human system. You can use the royal road of mind, body, and/or emotion to get into a person’s inner world. Actually this offers you a very wide-range of questions and areas for exploring if you want to understand a person on that person’s terms. Consider.

The State of Mind. What are you thinking about right now? What stream of thoughts are coming by your awareness? What are you attending to? And if you are selecting X to focus on, how are you representing that? If I were to peak into the theater of your mind and see what you are seeing, what’s playing on the screen? Are you representing it as close or far, bright or dim, big or small, etc.? what are the cinematic features that you are using as you process that information?

All of those questions are primary state questions. We can now step back one level and ask many, many more questions to find out what’s in the back of the mind. Given that you are thinking about X, what do you believe about that? What is the evidence that leads you to believe that? What is your understanding about that? What memories come to mind? What can you anticipate as you imagine taking that idea into your future? These are first-level meta-questions and only begin to explore this area. In the book, *Neuro-Semantics*, there is a list of 102 meta-questions at multiple levels.

The State of Body. What you might not immediately think of your head and brain as part of your body, they certainly are. They are made up of cells and nerve pathways and the neuro-chemistry that determines which of many areas of the brain are processing information at multiple levels. And from there, messages are sent to the rest of your body influencing all of the various nervous systems —

autonomic nervous system, immune nervous system, sympathetic nervous system, etc. The state of your body is highly influenced by what you eat and drink, your sleep, your exercise, your health, etc. It is within your body— your neurology, your physiology— that you think and feel. A simple head cold can at times drastically affect the quality of your thinking and emoting.

Further, how you use your body will influence both thinking and emoting. Your gestures, your movements, your posture, how you hold yourself, and much more. All of these facets of your body can powerfully affect your human system.

The State of Emotion. Then there are your kinesthetic sensations, both internal and external, which give you the ability to “feel” (sense) things and when you add a cognition to them, you have an “emotion.” These energy impulses *move* you, create *motion* within you, motion to move *out* from where you are, hence *e-motion* (originally spelled, ex-motion). An emotion is an urge to move, to act, to do something. In the so-called “positive” emotions we move out to keep doing what we are doing, it is the “go” system. In the so-called “negative” emotions, we move out to stop— to “Stop, Look, Listen, and Change” because something is not working and/or because something is dangerous before us.

This is NLP 101. It is one of the really valuable aspects of the NLP Communication Model because with this we can now do what is popularly known as *Emotional Intelligence*. Long before that became the popular term for it, we called it *State Management*.

- *State Awareness* (emotional awareness) is the beginning place. What state are you in? How much of that state are you experiencing? After all, it is an energy field driven by your metabolism. How pure or mixed is that state?
- *State or Emotional Monitoring.* When does it go up or down? With whom? What triggers it? Is the trigger an external stimulus or an internal one? When is your state at its best? When is it at its worse. How do you influence it? How do you generate this state via your thoughts and beliefs?
- *State or Emotional Regulation.* Now that you know what it is and a little bit about how it works, what can you do to turn it up or turn it down at will? What factors gives you more management over the state? What beliefs, understandings, decisions, permissions, etc. empower you to regulate it to serve your well-being? What state interrupts (pattern interrupts) do you prefer to use so that you can manage your states better?
- *State or Emotional Relating.* With whom do you want to access a particular state and offer that to the person? How easily can you access care, compassion, love, patience, thoughtfulness, calmness, etc.? What are your best states for rapport building, connecting, communicating, relating, negotiating, etc.?

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #15
April 3, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #3

MEANING-MAKING AND THE MATRIX MODEL

Within the systems model known as *The Matrix Model*, the grounding sub-matrix is the *state* matrix (the subject of Neurons #14). If you ask, “Where does state come from?” the answer takes us to the most important of all of the sub-matrices, the meaning matrix. It is here that you and I create meaning. We create it— that is, invent it, construct it, call it into being— because apart from our brain and nervous systems (our neurology), *meaning does not exist*.

Strange as this seems, this fact is the dominating fact in human experience and one of the most shocking facts when people first hear it. In fact, many people who tend to do concrete thinking will not, and perhaps even cannot, believe this. They think there is such a thing as meaning. They have lived in a world where people treat meaning as real and solid and factual, and so it seems stunningly ridiculous when they first hear a Neuro-Semanticist say, “There is no such thing as meaning.” At first they cannot believe their ears. “Of course, there is.” “How can there be no meaning? That’s stupid. I know what things mean!”

Yet *meaning* does not exist outside of, or apart from, the human meaning-making capacity. It does not exist externally as a self-contained thing or entity. That’s why you’ve never walked down a sidewalk and stepped into a puddle of meaning. You have never opened the refrigerator to find some left-over meanings. Meaning is not that kind of thing. In fact, it is not *a thing* at all. It is a process of the mind— how you and I look at something. It is the interpretation that we give to things, events, people, experiences, etc.

How do we do that? Ah, now there’s a mystery if there ever was one! We don’t know. Read the 830 pages of *Science and Sanity* and let Alfred Korzybski share his knowledge about how you and I encounter the energy-manifestations of the world and then “abstract” from that to create what we call our “senses” (sights, sounds, sensations, smells, tastes, etc.) of what exists “out there.” Even the latest updates from the Neuro-Sciences does not explain *how* we construct our “sense of meaning” from the world. Korzybski used the map–territory metaphor to describe it. The co-founders of NLP used the word simulation— that we construct a simulation in our mind. And phenomenologically, it does *seem* that we have in our “mind” (another mystery upon this mystery) a central processing place, a movie screen where we entertain pictures, sounds, sensations, smells, tastes, etc.

Yet we do not. It *seems* that way, but it is not that way. Yet we *use it* and that is how we have *consciousness* of things. It is *as if* we have a mental map or model in our minds that we use to navigate the events, objects, and happenings out there in the world. So, without solving these

mysteries, we begin working with the *constructs* that we invent. These are our *meanings* simply because this is what we “hold in mind” (the literal definition of meaning) and from these meanings we move through the world of things, objects, people, and activities. Generally speaking, when we have a mental map that enables us to navigate work, relationships, wealth creation, leadership, friendship, and a thousand other objectives—if it works, gets us our outcomes—then we keep using it. If it doesn’t, then we use the feedback of what did not work to keep updating our mental models until we construct one that works, at least for the present time.

In Neuro-Semantics, the Meaning matrix is central because by it we create all of the other sub-matrices within the Matrix. This is also the realm of NLP. Here we use the NLP Communication model to understand the first ways we construct meaning— via pictures, sounds, sensations, words, etc. to construct *representational meaning*. Here also we use the Meta-Model of Language to understand *linguistic meaning*. We use the Meta-States model for understanding all of the *meta-levels of meaning* (beliefs, values, understandings, identity, permission, etc.) and we use the Meta-Programs model for understanding *perceptual meaning*.

A short and easy way to begin exploring meaning is to ask the four construct questions. These enable us to figure out various aspects of meaning that someone presents to us (See *Neurons #9*).

What is it?	Reference that you are selecting, linguistic meaning, name, identity.
How does it work?	Causation meaning, what causes what? How does it function?
What is its significance?	Evaluative meaning, what value does it provide?
What is your intention?	Intentional meaning, what is your purpose, agenda, or motive?

There are many, many more construct questions that you can ask, but these are fundamental as they show the beginning of a person’s construct of meaning. That nothing inherently *means* anything, things can have dozens upon dozens of meanings. And they do. Open any dictionary and one of the amazing things about it is that the smaller and simpler the word, the more meanings it has accumulated over the years. There’s a reason for that, *words do not mean, people mean*. A word, as a symbol, is just that— a written set of letters or symbols or some sounds said in the air— it is the person writing or speaking the words that has some *meaning* to convey. The person uses the symbol to try to convey his or her meaning.

Given that, now you can more fully appreciate the NLP Communication Guideline: “The *meaning* of your communication is not what you intend, it is the response you get.” In other words, the *meaning* that the person hearing your words gives to the words. That’s what your words *mean* to that person. If you keep using the same words, you will create the same mis-communication. If you want to get your meaning and understanding over to the other, use some different words.

Meaning, while seemingly simple, is actually a complex process. That’s why there’s a whole discipline of training required to effectively *communicate meaning, construct life-changing meanings for your life, reframe unresourceful meanings*, etc. That’s why the ability of a Meta-Coach or Trainer or Neuro-Semanticist to detect meaning and facilitate updating meanings is a special skill that requires study and practice. That’s why we use the Matrix Model for all of this.



The Matrix Model

You, like all of us, were born in a Matrix. You didn't create that Matrix, but you were embedded in it and shaped it. Now many years later, are you ready to Wake Up in the Matrix? Would you like to master your Matrix so that it enhances your life and enables you to achieve your highest vision and values in your best performance?

The Matrix Model is the premier systems model of Neuro-Semantics and enables you to address the essential human questions about identity (who am I?), competence (what can I do?), direction (what should I do?), meaning (what's the meaning of my life?), etc.

The Matrix Model focuses on how we create and hold our frames of mind which make us a meaning-making person. It enables us to follow a person's journey through his system and model the structure of his experience. If you're ready to take the next step and train yourself to become the master of your own Matrix, this book is for you.

"This is the most revolutionary model since NP and Meta-States. The book explains all of NP and Neuro-Semantics and is very practical and useful. The Matrix Model gives you a blueprint for resolving problems and achieving NP and Neuro-Semantic patterns. There is nothing like this anywhere in NP literature."
Dr. Joe S. Bantam

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THE MATRIX MODEL

The Matrix Model

The Premier
Systems Model of
Neuro-Semantics

L. Michael Hall Ph.D.

From: L. Michael Hall
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April 10, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #4

INTENTIONALITY AND THE MATRIX MODEL

If *meaning* is what you and I construct as we process information and “hold an idea” in mind, one of the additional mysteries and wonders of human meaning-making is that behind every meaning is an intention. *Intending* to do something is both another aspect of meaning as well as another hidden aspect of consciousness. In fact, we often use these two words, meaning and intention, as synonyms. We say, “What do you *mean* by doing that?” when we are actually asking, “What’s your *intention* in doing that?”

In Neuro-Semantics, one of the ways that we work with *intention* is to contrast it to *attention*. That’s because these are two aspects of consciousness. To be consciously aware is to have something *on your mind* (your attentions) and to have something *in the back of your mind about it* (your intentions). One is what you are mostly aware of. It is your focus. Your attention *goes out* to some object in the world and that’s what you focus on. When you do that, we say that you are concentrating. You are centering your attention on one thing. How are your concentration powers? Your ability to focus your attention?

To bring this up is to bring up a subject that is mis-named, Attention Deficit. Typically, when a child or adult is diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD, or ADHD, the H for hyperactive), the suggestion is that the person *cannot* focus or concentrate. In the few cases where this is actually true (only about 4% of those diagnosed) there is a lesion in the brain or a disturbance of brain chemistry. The great majority of the time, the deficit is caused by the person not caring about the object of attention that he needs to attend to. He doesn’t want to do mathematics. She doesn’t care about the grammar lesson.

Most of the time the problem is not at the level of *attention*. In fact, when you talk with the person the problem is that there are too many attentions. He doesn’t focus because his attention keeps shifting and changing from all of the things distracting him. He doesn’t have a *deficit* of attention, but an *over-abundance* of attentions. The real problem is at the level of *intention*— he does not *want* to focus on that particular item. She doesn’t care about it. Neither of them have any intention, interest, purpose, or motive to do so. The problem is actually *Intention Deficit Disorder*.

Your intention is that area of your mind where you set the *meaning* of your purpose. Start with a wish, “I wish I could...” then develop it into a want, “I want to be able to...” From there cultivate a greater understanding about it so that you really, *really* want it. Now you are setting an intention, a goal, a purpose, a direction, a focus. “I want to become a tennis pro.” “I want to get to the

Olympics in 2020.” “I intend to start my own Coaching business.”

Now in NLP we often say that “energy goes where attention goes.” In Neuro-Semantics our focus on intentionality has led us to add another line. “Energy goes where attention goes *as directed by intention*.” That’s because there is greater power in intention than in attention. Accordingly, we developed the Intentionality Pattern as a way to find, discover, and/or create higher and higher intentions. By doing that, you can then take an intentional stance in life about what you value and consider highly significant. From there, you can begin to *align your attentions to your higher intentions*. Do that and you will become a man or woman *on purpose*.

Now you are not merely creating accurate and precise *meanings*, you are developing a much higher level—*meaningfulness*. This enriches your meanings so that they are rich, exciting, and inspirational.

Intentionality is also one of the key ingredients in the flow state. In Neuro-Semantics we call the flow experience “the genius state” and see intentionality as one of the prerequisites for being able to access that state. With a focused intentionality, you can now turn that flow experience on and off at your will. Ah, “will” that’s the old word for what we’re talking about. Rollo May noted this in his book, *Love and Will* (1969). So today, when we *align* attention to intention, that generates a gestalt state that we call “will” or “will power.” After all, what is will power but the ability to get yourself to do what you say you want to do and do it when you want to do it?

That’s it, isn’t it? And how valuable is that? This is not the old Victorian “will power” of forcing or making yourself do what you don’t want to do. That’s no fun. And, you don’t have to develop “will power” in that way. Rather, by establishing your intentions, and then your intentions-of-your-intentions by meta-stating yourself up through the levels of intentions, you can step into some of your higher states (meta-states) and then *align your attentions to your intentions*. Do that and then you can get yourself to do what you want to do—you’ll establish a never-ending motivation.

You will then have a vision that will drive you forward and create a robust motivation. Ah, “motivation,” another big bugaboo in today’s world. People are always complaining about this, “I just don’t have any motivation.” “He has a motivation problem, he just doesn’t feel like doing that.” “We have a motivation problem in that department.” The good news is that all of that is non-sense, unuseful framing, and a cognitive fallacy. With us humans there is no such thing as lack of motivation, what we have is *a lack of intentionality*. We lack vision, direction, and purpose—the key aspects of intention.

There is much, much more to say about the Intention matrix, and I have said much more in various places. See *The Matrix Model* (2016) or see chapter 12, “Unleashing Your Intentional Self” in *Get Real* (2016).

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #17
April 17, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #5

SELF AND THE MATRIX MODEL

Given the de-emphasis on *content* in NLP and the focus on *structure and process*, if I had designed the Matrix Model abstractly or conceptually, I would never have even thought about including the five *content* matrices within the model. It would never have occurred to me to do that. Yet I did. And I did so because there is *one content* which is extremely close to how you process information and create meaning. There is also *one content* that “you never leave home without.” You take that content everywhere you go and, in fact, you *see the world through that content*.

What is that content? It is the content of your *self*. Developmentally, the first thing you invent and the first meanings that you construct involve you as a person— Who am I? What is my value? Am I valued? Am I loveable? Do I have worth? What can I do? Who will be my friend? Do I count? As you and I enter the world, these are the first questions we seek to answer. And fortunately, Developmental Psychology has a lot to say about this as does Phenomenology. Accordingly, in the Matrix Model *we have five aspects of self*—aspects that function very much the way any perceptual filter or meta-program functions, we interpret the world through the content of the meanings, intentions, and states that we have created about Self.

For short memorable terms, we have designated *The Content Matrices* in terms of five key aspects of the self—

- **Self** is you as a person, as a living human being, your *being*— your worth, value, significance, loveability, etc. In terms of being human, *Self* is your construct of your *self-esteem*.
- **Power** is you in terms of what you do, your behavior, your skills, competencies, talents, and achievements. Normally we speak about this as your *self-confidence*— your trust in yourself that you can do something. Here also is *self-efficacy*, your sense of *responsibility*, taking initiative, and being proactive.
- **Others** is you in terms of your relationships, your *social self*— who you are as you connect, relate, and get along with others. This is you as a friend, lover, parent, student, teacher, and other key social roles in life. It shows up as your social panorama.
- **Time** is you as a *temporal being*. You live in *time* and *time* defines your sense of mortality. Once you construct this aspect of life, you begin to live in the three time zones and to spend thought and energy to each. As a temporal self you have a relationship to time and define yourself in terms of your age and your stage of life.
- **World** is you in all of the roles that you play in the many domains or dimensions of life. In any domain or world where you spend much time, you also tend to play various roles which

define who you are in that area. Your *role self* entails your status, position, titles, etc. And just as others see you in terms of that role, you also define yourself in terms of it.

All of this describes you— *you* in five dimensions, experiences, or aspects which, in turn, provides a rich description (and definition) of who you are. Who are you? To answer, you will talk about these five aspects of your life. *Who you are also determines what you perceive in the world and how you interpret things* (the meaning matrix). That's because as it has often been said— You see the world, not as it is, but through who you are.

To be more specific, you see the world through the lens of your personal sense of worth and value (Self, self-esteem), the more conditional and lower your self-esteem, the more you see the world as threatening and overwhelming. You see the world through the lens of your personal powers as you wonder about whether you can handle various tasks or roles or challenges. The weaker your sense of your fundamental powers, the more you see the world as threatening and over-powering. The less your sense of control over yourself and in owning your powers, the more you feel a victim in the world rather than a victor.

You see the world through the lens of your social self— your social skills, your ability to connect, your sense of being valuable to others, your social emotions, and your competencies to handle a wide range of social experiences from gaining rapport, sharing humor, conversing, negotiating, selling, to supporting, inspiring, etc. The weaker or less enhancing your social self, the more frightening the social world will seem and the less able to handle the things required to make friends.

You see the world through the lens of your temporal self— your sense of your own beginnings, current experiences, and anticipated experiences. As a temporal self you can hold in mind events that have happened and use them to define yourself and operate from the states that you once experienced just as you can anticipate future events that will happen and use them to determine what and how you think and feel today. As a temporal self you can live in the past or in the future.

Finally, you can see the world through the lens of your role self— the roles that you have learned to play, the titles or statuses that you have attained, and you can so identify yourself in terms of those roles that to lose a role could trigger an “identity” crisis. Your role self may overlap with some of your social self, or not. Over-identifying with any role tends to make you as a person less flexible, less able to adjust to new situations, and less authentic since your role tends to become your persona.

You, who you are, and how you understand your person, what you can do, your relationships, your experience with events over time, and the roles that you play in life, *operate as a very powerful and determining meaning-making lens*. This is why there are times that you cannot understand something until *you* change. This is also why that sometimes when you change, the whole world that you know changes.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #18
April 24, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #6

THE SELF MATRIX And Your Unconditional Value

Do you deserve to be here? Do you deserve the things you have, your opportunities, your friends, your place in life, your loved ones? Strange questions. Yet people commonly ask themselves these questions. They wonder about whether they have a right to exist, to live, to love, to act on their goals, etc. These are ontological questions—questions of *being*. There are more. Who am I? What is my nature? What is life about?

In terms of meaning-making, the answer to all of these questions build up the construct of your *self-image and self-esteem*. Now “normally,” if you had parents who graduated from Parenting 101 and got certified that they were mature enough and skilled enough to parent, then these questions were answered in a healthy and robust way in how you were parented. That is, as they loved and cared for you, as they nurtured and gratified your needs in an age-appropriate way, you built a healthy mental map about yourself:

“I am loved and valued. I count. I am important. I am respected and have the right to be here, and have the challenge to be my best self.”

You value yourself as a human being *because you are a human being*. There are no conditions, no “ifs, but, or whens...” You *are* a human being and that makes you innately significant and important. Consequently, you don’t have to prove anything. You don’t have to meet any conditions to be acceptable, loved, respected, etc. *You have already met every condition that’s required—you are human*. We call this “self-esteem.”

Yet many have some very limiting and unuseful beliefs about self-esteem. Commonly, we talk about one’s self-esteem being *high or low*. But either way, that would make it conditional. And if conditional, then we have to ask—What is your self-esteem conditioned upon? Do you have to be so smart, so fast, so strong, so pretty, so rich, or what? “Esteem” speaks about estimating the value of something, rating the worth of something. And if you rate your human worth on anything external like wealth, position, status, job, etc., then it is *conditional* and then you ask those ontological questions—“Am I good enough yet? Do enough people like me so that I’m okay?”

Carl Rogers urged that we treat each other with *unconditional* positive regard. No conditions! You are important because you are human. The Jewish, Christian, and Islam faiths begin from the idea that we are all “made in the image and likeness of God.” Again, no conditions. You are born valuable. You don’t have to prove anything, reach any conditions. You are free to become your best self. You are free to express the potentials and possibilities that are clamoring inside.

Now for those who did not get to construct this kind of healthy self-image and self-esteem from the beginning, the next question is, “How do you esteem yourself as unconditionally valuable as a human being?” And the answer is? The answer is that *you simply assert it*. You *declare* just as healthy parenting would declare it and then you *act* that way. Act with dignity, respect, and innate worth. In Neuro-Semantics we have developed a pattern for this as we access three states—acceptance, appreciation, and then awe (unconditional value). We then apply acceptance and appreciation to our *doing self* and then we apply awe to our *being self*. This meta-stating process means that we put our *being self* inside of the frame of “unconditional value” and feel a state of awe about oneself.

For many, doing that is very weird and strange and uncomfortable. They are not used to thinking this way or feeling this way about themselves. That’s okay. Everything takes some getting used to. This will require repeating the process until it begins to feel familiar and comfortable. If there’s objections in the back of someone’s mind and they are asking themselves, “But is it right?” “Is it okay?” “Won’t I become selfish or self-centered?” These are to be expected. It speaks about the world that they have grown up in—one that did not respect their innate sacredness as a human being. It speaks about the limiting beliefs that their parents operated from. Again, repetition is the key. Keep doing it. Keep repeating *the unconditional value assertion*. Just keep asserting this new frame until it becomes your frame of mind.

Without centering yourself with the dignity assertion that establishes your unconditional self-esteem, your intention in life will always be to prove yourself. And with that as the purpose in the back of your mind, then whatever you do will have an ulterior motive. Then you will tend to use situations and people to be okay, to be a somebody. Conversely, the healthy alternative is to start from the frame that *your worth is a given*. Then, having nothing to prove, you are free to express every potential that is within you to express.

This is the foundation for being centered, for taking criticism positively, for treating mistakes as a context for learning, for staying open and defenseless when blackmailed or threatened in some way, and for much more. And now you know why we start here on Day One of APG (Accessing Personal Genius).

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #19
April 29, 2017

“AND THE AWARD GOES TO . . .”

The Award Dinner and Ceremony that has been planned for a year was conducted tonight at the ANLP Conference here in London and everything was amazing, delightful, magical, and awesome until the very end. Karen Moxom and her team did a fabulous job!! What should have been the crescendo to a marvelous evening suddenly ended in a thud. Several said that they felt as if they were having a heart-attack; others were just stunned and disappointed. What should have been a rousing round of applause ... was deafening by its *silence*. A few clapped out of being polite. I did not.

So to end the night on a higher note, a more inspirational note, **here is “Take Two”** ... And I am appointing myself to speak for two or three dozen people that I actually spoke to, as well as for the larger world-wide community of NLP that I am very familiar with. Visiting 20 to 25 countries a year in my own promotion of NLP and Neuro-Semantics— my voice about this matter is not without some authority. So here goes.

**“And the Lifetime Contribution Award goes to ... [drum rolls] ...
Frank Pucelik and Robert Dilts.”**

In terms of *lifetime contribution*, they absolutely deserve it! After all, of all of the nominees, they among us were the only two of whom it can be said that they have spent their entire *lifetime contributing to NLP*. The rest of us who were nominated have spent much less time—three decades, yes, but not the full forty-plus years since the beginning. But Frank Pucelik, as a co-developer of NLP has, and so has Robert Dilts who was the first person to write NLP books that people could read.

But there’s more. Both Frank and Robert are members of the NLP Leadership Summit—as was every other nominee except one. Both collaborate across the “party” lines in NLP and support people without their ego getting in the way, not so for the one who got the award. Both also live with integrity, not so for the one who got the award.

The award— based *solely* (and this was the big mistake of the NLP Conference Committee, I’m giving this feedback as straight as I can) *based on votes, on popularity*. Mistake! There was no criteria.

No criteria of being ethical(!), no criteria of being a collaborative contributor, no criteria of being acceptable to the NLP Leadership Summit, and I could go on and on. Oh, yes, no criteria of doing “quality” NLP, meaning, no short like five-day practitioners. Given it was all based on polling, apparently the so-called “winner” put a link on his website and promoted on his egroups so he would get the votes. So, it was political!

This is not right and so I will speak out about this. The point is that *Tad James should not have gotten the award!* He does not deserve it at all. Giving it to him was a *big mistake*, he has a checker background ethically and morally, he does not participate in any “NLP” except his own little division. He operates from scarcity (just ask me stories of my own experience with him), he does not represent the quality of trainings or person that we want for NLP. Shall I go on? You who know me, know that I never speak ill of someone publically. I’m making an exception this one time because of the public mistake made tonight.

Yes, I hope it will be a learning for the ANLP Association and the committee members. We all make our share of mistakes. What separates those who learn from those who don’t, is that when we do— *we say so* and seek to set it right. This is my feeble attempt to set it right.

So, on behalf of all the offended people, and on behalf of the larger world-wide community of NLP that I know and live among ---- I grant Frank Pucelik and Robert Dilts — the lifetime contribution to NLP award.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #20
May 1, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #7

THE POWER MATRIX

And the Foundation of all Your Skills

Are you in charge of you? Do you have the power to take charge of your innate powers and of your choices as you move through life? Human beings need power—the power to take control of themselves. The term *power* literally, and simply, means “the ability to do” something. The word *power* speaks about both the resources and the ability which is required to *do* things— to take effective action in the world. So if *power* literally means, “to do,” then there’s nothing inherently negative about the idea of power even though many have connected negative beliefs to power.

Further and most delightfully, you like every other person in the world, come with four innate powers—four responses that you and only you can make. Did you know that? One of the challenges in communicating this is that what follows will sound so simple, so obvious, and so non-consequential, that you will be tempted to dismiss it. Are you ready? The four innate powers that you have are the powers to think, to feel, to speak, and to act. Simple, right?

Yes on the surface, yet there’s a depth to this fact that eludes most people. The depth? These four innate powers establish *the foundation for all of your skills*, and for that matter, all of the skills that are available on Planet Earth. These four powers describe how you are able to turn a talent into an actual competency. There is not a skill in this world that is not made out of the stuff of these four powers. Both the simplest skills that you can learn in a matter of minutes and the most advanced skills that take decades to develop are comprised of these four innate responses. Isn’t that amazing? Given that, what new skills are you planning to develop this year?

Further, each one of these responses is a rich and complex response. *Your mental responses or powers* range from representing ideas, framing, believing, understanding, deciding, identifying, imaging, remembering and that’s a short list. *Your emotional powers* are just as extensive and speak about your ability to translate thought into somatic experiences— otherwise known as emotions. These are your two private or internal responses— powers that are yours and that no one can take from you. They are yours; you generate them.

Your verbal responses or powers are not just that you can speak, but that you can use words in dozens and dozens of ways to achieve a wide range of outcomes. You can assert, you can ask, you can bless, curse, use words to sell, negotiate, connect, disconnect, hypothesize, etc. *Your action responses or powers* refer to all of the things that you can physically do as you move, act, gesture, etc. to make real your ideas and outcomes.

Given that each person has these four powers and that it is theirs to develop and to use—and that nobody can take these from you—how could any human act like a victim? How could any person

feel powerless, out-of-control, controlled, irresponsible, passive, etc.? The answer is paradoxical. At some level the person has given his powers away by powerfully *thinking and emoting and speaking and acting* in ways to deny his powers. Every “victim” has exercised his power to give away his power to some trigger. Sometimes being a victim is a very powerful response.

Another reason is that the person probably has failed to *recognize* and *own* his powers. That’s why on Day One of APG, the very first pattern that we do is the Power Zone Pattern which is designed to enable a person to begin to recognize her powers and to own them. We first meta-state our everyday states with *awareness* of the powers. Then we meta-state *ownership* of that state. And then we often meta-state *fallibility* to that ownership-of-power state because, contrary to the title of Robin’s book, *Unlimited Power*, we humans do not have unlimited power. All of our powers are limited, they are *fallible*, that is, they are “liable to error.”

When it comes to power, Martin Seligman mapped out a critical distinction many years ago in his studies of *learned pessimism* and *learned optimism*. He and his research assistants discovered that they could get all sorts of animals, from frogs to dogs, to *learn* to be a victim—to *learn* as it were, “I’m the problem, there’s no hope of change, and it will last forever.” They set up experimental situation where the thing learned was that “nothing I can do” can make any difference. The pain, the distress, the undesirable environment will not alter no matter what I do. Once learned, then the animal would just lie down and take it.

Later the research team learned that they could change things for these animals. By dragging the dog off of the electrified grid, the dog could *learn* “optimism,” that is, “there is something that can change things.” “I can change things.” “I am not a victim.” And what’s even more fascinating is that once the animals had “learned optimism,” they could not be re-taught “learned pessimism.”

This means that once a person *learns* awareness of her innate powers and that she can always *do* something, then she makes a meta-level learning. “I am not a victim anymore than I believe I am.” “No one can *make* me feel anything, whatever I feel is what I generate through my thinking, believing, expecting, etc.”

The Power Matrix also contains all your beliefs (meanings) about what you *can* and *cannot* do. Within it are your intentions—what you’re trying to achieve as you take action to do the things you do. Within this matrix also are many other key experiences: self-confidence, self-efficacy, ego-strength, proactivity (taking the initiative), etc.

You are a doer—there’s something within all of us that keeps urging us to be creativity engaged in things—wanting to do our best, wanting to make a difference. This aspect of the self-actualization drive generates our general restlessness and sometimes initiates our dissatisfaction with the way things are. What do you want to achieve? How many things do you want to achieve? How well do you tap into your response-able powers and take the initiative? These questions all relate to the power matrix.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #21
May 8, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #8

THE OTHERS MATRIX

You become Real in Relation to Others

You are not only a human *being*, one with identity and value, nor are you only a *doer*, a person who takes action and develops skills, *you are also a social being*. The sub-matrix of Self addresses your sense of value and worth (Self, self-esteem). The sub-matrix of Power addresses your competencies, talents, skills, abilities to develop skills (Power, self-confidence). This next sub-matrix of Others addresses your *social self*—your relationships to others, your social skills, your social understandings and beliefs, your social panorama and much more.

As many people confuse self-esteem and self-confidence, so *many also confuse their social worth with their personal worth*. They confuse their social and emotional intelligence, the condition of their relationships with their self-esteem. This is especially true for people who grow up in group-oriented cultures (collectivism in contrast to individualist cultures). Because of this, they will tend to define themselves in terms of their group so that their personal value will depend on their social value. Yet these are two very different concepts.

That you and I are *social beings*, and that we are inevitably and inescapable *social* in our nature, leads to many consequences. One is that most of our emotions are *social emotions*. Think about all of the emotions that are *relational emotions*—love, hate, care, compassion, indifference, dislike, trust, distrust, kindness, meanness, frustration, affection, and the list goes on and on. Another consequence is that nearly all of our activities as human beings are *social* activities—connection, betrayal, friendship, affiliation, competition, collaboration, involvement, being included, being excluded, trusting, distrusting, open, closed, etc. Isn't that amazing?

As social beings we also organize ourselves in our cultures so that there are another whole set of interactions that govern our lives—communication, persuasion, influence, management, leadership, politics, power relations, patronizing, democracy, equality, bureaucracy, socialism, etc. It is here that your *social worth*—your value in a given culture, context, environment whether your ethnic culture, religious culture, business culture, educational culture, etc.—can be so easily confused with your worth as a person. Do you confuse the two? Are you ready to distinguish them?

Your social worth grows out of the Power matrix—what you can and/or cannot do that contributes or does not contribute to the group determines the relative value you have in that social context. Additionally, it rises and falls with circumstances and phases in your life span.

The Others matrix focuses on *you as a social being*. Here your emotional and social intelligence is

one of the central keys for being effective and successful in relationships. Here social knowledge is critical for the good life—knowing how to connect to people, how to be the kind of person that others enjoy being around, how to be compassionate and caring, how to be firm and independent, how to extend yourself for the well-being of others, how to create healthy boundaries, how to live a moral life in relationship to others, how to cooperate and even collaborate with others, etc.

NLP inevitably addresses a lot in this area since it is itself a Communication Model— and one of the first discoveries was the structure of rapport. The discovery was made from Virginia Satir and expressed in the statement that “people like people who are like them.” So making ourselves like them, that is *matching* their words, values, beliefs, ways of operating, etc. generates the sense of being in rapport (connection, bonding) with others.

Lucas Dirks extended this through creating and articulating the Social Panorama Model. Based on the fact that we internally represent things using sensory-based information (what we see, hear, feel, etc.), he noted that we often *externalize* our internal mental maps about people in the way we gesture and the language we use. We imagine someone we feel close to by internally seeing them as close to us. We talk about others as far away at some distance and that corresponds to the way we represent them inside our mind— they are at a distance.

Then there is your self-image, which is primarily your social image. You create your self-image mostly from how you see yourself reflected in the eyes of those around you. Your social sense of self then creates, at least in part, your self-image.

The relationship between *you as a human being* (Self) and *you as a social being in relationship with others* (Others) plays a role in so many aspects of our lives. Self and Others governs where you put your attention when you are in a group (the attention meta-program), it influences where you locate the concept of authority (the authority meta-program), and it also influences both your sense of morality (how you treat other people) and your sense of responsibility (where you draw the responsibility for and responsibility to line).

As a human being, the social dimension of your life critically influences so many aspects of the life that you live. It is through others that we become human as we are socialized to be able to live in community with others. It is through others that we engage in business which is essentially working with and through others. It is through others and with others that we experience the richest aspects of life. It is in relation to others that we want to make a difference and leave a legacy. It is in relation to others that we communicate and relate. It is in relation to others that you strive to be a real person, authentic.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #22
May 15, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #9

THE TIME MATRIX

You— A Temporal Being Living in Time

In the Matrix Model, we have distinguished *five aspects of self*, time is one such aspect. As a review, we first have your value or worth (i.e., self-esteem) and identity, these are in the Self matrix. *Your* power, skills, abilities, assets, liabilities, etc. are in the Power matrix (self-confidence). *Your* relationship to others is *your social self* which includes social intelligence, social skills, and social activities, these are all in the Others matrix. Then, in the Time matrix we have you as a *temporal being*. You live in time, you represent time, you relate to time, you operate in time.

In a similar way to how you represent “people” in the Others matrix and put them in various places around you (your Social Panorama), you do the same with the concept of “time.” This was noted early in NLP by Richard Bandler and gave birth to a sub-model, Time-Lines. Yet as a concept, “time” does not exist. If it did, what would it look like, sound like, feel like, smell like, or taste like? It is not a *thing*. It does not exist “out there” in the world as an entity. It is a *concept* which you construct in your mind. But about what? What does it refer to?

It refers to events, activities, and experiences. On the outside what exists are *events*. When the earth spins so that it faces the sun and then faces away from it, we compare two events, the planet as it spins and revolves in relationship to the sun. In this way we call into existence such ideas as “day” and “night.” When you *hold in mind* some event and then compare it with similar events that have occurred, or that could occur, and/or when you compare it against different kinds of events, you generate the concept of *time*. It is that simple and yet, simultaneously, it is that profound.

Actually the only “time” that exists is now. Yet by conceptualizing events, we are able to construct many more time-concepts and these concepts, in turn, influence your sense of self. As all of this occurs in the *Time* matrix, it powerfully influences your *temporal self*. It makes you a *temporal being*— you live *in time* because you, as an event, keep changing. We call it “growing up.” Your social worth rises and falls with the circumstances and phases in your life span as you get older. Further, what you looked like when you were born, or at 1 or at 10 or 20 or at any other “age” (measured by the number of revolutions the planet has made around the sun), significantly influences how you experience yourself. You, as an event, live in time and keep changing and evolving.

Living in time and being a *temporal being* also means that you have a sense of beginning and ending. This creates an awareness of your mortality, that you are a mortal human being— you

will die. Knowing this and living in the face of this time element, facilitates living more purposefully and valuing every minute as precious. Now is your time.

Time Meta-Programs

The first NLP distinction about time was with regard to your orientation to *the time zones* (past, present, and future) and where you focus your attention. Where do you mostly live? Is it in the past, the present, or the future? Those who experience time as a primary state are “in” time which is why they hardly notice it. They are in the eternal moment. Those who experience time more as a meta-state (called “through time” in NLP) are actually “outside” of time and from there they can more easily see it and recognize what “time” it is (i.e., how much daylight is left).

This gives us two primary ways of experiencing time and therefore two different kinds of “time-lines.” People in *primary state time* (“in time”) tend to get lost in time and experience life randomly or all at once. People in *meta-state time* (“through time”) operate more sequentially, in a step-by-step fashion. If you carefully watch and listen to people, you can see and recognize how a person is operating, inside or outside of the person’s representations.

“Time” as your comparing of events is a meta-cognitive awareness. When you are not *aware* of it, you are in an event and unaware of other events. You are *in-time*, lost in time and experiencing an eternal now. This powerfully enriches a great many experiences: love making, being totally present with a friend, or engaged in a project. It can also frustrate one outside the event who wait for you to get to the next event!

If you “live” a lot or most of your time in the past and reference the past, you may have a thinking style that we could call precedent thinking. When you consider problems, solutions, outcomes, or whatever, your frame of reference is the past or even more limiting your past. Everything is processed according to what has happened leaving no room for new possibilities. If you “live” a lot or most of your time in the future, your thinking style would probably be possibility thinking. While this usually makes you optimistic and hopeful, it can also blind you to constraints so that you are unrealistic.

When you are comfortably and pleasurably *aware* of time, you can plan, sequence events, and operate efficiently in the modern world. Of course, this can drive loved ones and friends crazy if you’re on holiday or needing to be totally present.

Time Beliefs

Given the Time matrix and how it defines you as a person, your meanings and/or beliefs about this concept of *time* can powerfully influence many of your emotions as well as your skills. If you believe that *time* is your enemy, you will develop a bad relationship with it. You will probably think that you don’t have enough time, and might then feel time as “pressure.” If you believe time is your friend, you will probably experience it as a positive experience to embrace.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #23
May 22, 2017
The Matrix Model Series #10

THE WORLD MATRIX

The final content matrix in the Matrix Model, one of the five content matrices about *Self* is the World matrix. I put this together to refer to any of the thousands upon thousands “universes of meaning” (e.g., domain, field, or area) of human experience. And there are multiple thousands. And in each area that you have traveled and explored, you have developed your own mental maps about it as well as you have developed particular skills so that you can live and operate within it. Each “world” is a domain, a field, an area, a dimension, an industry. It is a place where one can create a human domain for thinking, feeling, acting, living, etc.

When I grew up the world matrices that I soon became aware of was the world of Mathematics (my dad was a mathematics teacher), the world of Indiana University (that was the dominate factor in Bloomington Indiana), the world of business, ministry, medicine (hospital, doctors), dentists, and so on. Later I discovered the world of psychotherapy, then the world of NLP, Coaching, publishing, etc. What worlds did you first encounter in your adventure of life?

Now in each world or domain, if you enter it and stay there for awhile, you will probably find that you have some role to play. So whereas we have already covered self-esteem and value (*Self*), self-confidence (*Power*), social self (*Others*), and temporal self (*Time*), this is the place where you experience and know yourself in terms of your *roles*. Who are you in this particular world? What position or status do you have? What position do you want? What identity is required in that domain? What roles, rules, understandings, and so on?

It is in the World matrix that you and I develop our identity via *the roles* that we play. This becomes, to some extent, one of your *role identities*. The roles that you play, and the possible identities that arise from those roles, depend on how much you may identify with any given role. In the domain of family, you may be Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, etc. In the domain of work, you may be Employee, Supervisor, Manager, Leader, etc. Your status, standing, position, earned or attributed ranking, etc. establishes another aspect of your *self*.

As the contexts in which we operate, any given World that you live and operate also becomes part of your internal environment, the internal frames-of-reference that you use to make meaning of things. That’s why, given the roles you play in life, you— like all of us—tend to make meaning of things through the filter and assumptions of your roles. That’s why a business person will see and interpret things through economics, markets, sales, bottom lines, etc. in contrast to someone in the public sector who would see and interpret things through community, environment, politics, etc.

When you meet someone new and are asked, “Who are you?” or, “What do you do?” We almost always defer to our World matrix identity. We tell about the roles we play, the positions we hold, that title or status, etc.

The World matrix also directs you to identify the market or markets that you work in. What World does your business operate in and what worlds does it interact with? What services does your business offer in that area? And given that, what is distinctive and unique about you and what you do that makes it viable as a commodity? When you identify that, you have your unique selling proposition (USP). In addition to your knowledge about your own products, services, customers, etc., what do you know about your competitors— those who serve in the same area?

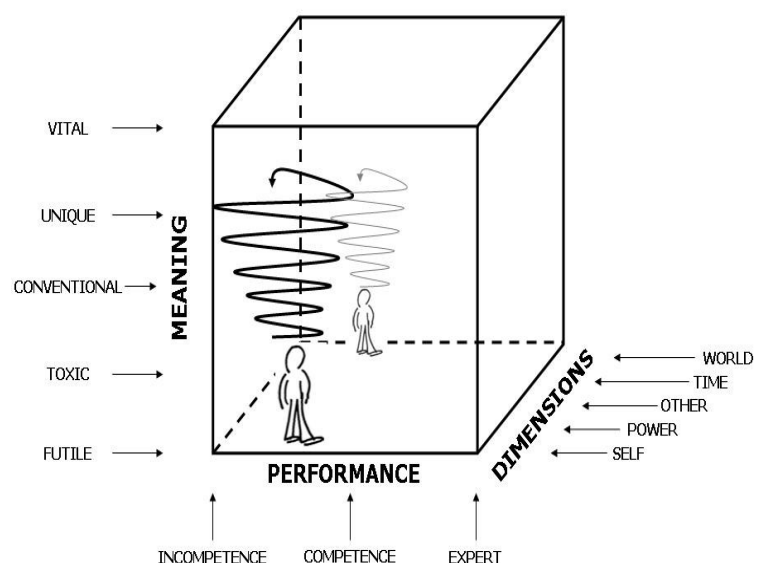
Every industry further requires its own unique business and management processes, that of developing, presenting, contracting, negotiating, building a HR department, finances, etc. Each further requires and involves its own critical knowledge and skills which enable you to operate effectively in that world. In that domain, do you need insurance? Do you need to have a professional membership in that industry? What are the professional associations that influence this field?

Every World also has a history and a future. How did it get started? Who were the key thinkers and developers? What has happened over the years or even centuries (if it has been around for centuries)? What is happening now? Is it a growth industry, stable one, or a declining industry? What are trends of the field you are in? Where is it going? Are you staying up with it? Are you reading the journals and books being produced?

Given the field you are in, what do you charge for your products and services? How do you go about setting the prices? What criteria do you use? What do others in this field charge for their products and services? What are the risks in this field? What are the opportunities in terms of new possibilities and untapped markets?

Putting it Altogether

The eight distinctions of the Matrix Model give us eight categories to start sorting out the complexity of a human being. The Meaning matrix is the variable that creates our inner reality, the Intention matrix sets the direction, and the State registers it in emotion and behavior. The five content matrices define the person in terms of value, competencies, relationships, time, and domain.



From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #24
May 29, 2017
*Thinking Aloud About How We
Market and Sell NLP*

SELLING NLP & ITS EVOLUTION

Who Bought, Why, and the Next Big Thing

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

I “bought” NLP in 1986. After I learned it, and eventually became a trainer, I began “selling” NLP along with many thousands. I bought it as a therapeutic innovation and that’s how I first sold it. Then, over the years, things changed. Today I mostly sell it to business people—to leaders, managers, coaches, and consultants. Now when it comes to innovations, there is a simple model for this. It describes *who* buys, *when*, and *why*. It’s a model that’s been around for several decades and one that I’m sure you are familiar with, a model with stages: pioneers, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Everett M. Rogers created this in his book, *Diffusion of Innovations* (1962).

The pioneers of course, created something new. They innovated a new product, service, information, practice, or experience. They translated a creative idea into something that added value to others.

The early adopters, who like and want change and who seek change, are the first to get onboard. They buy for the new values that are offered, the novelty, the functionality and the status of going first which the innovation offers. They are risk takers. They don’t mind the inconvenience, the expense, or the bugs that have to be worked out. They like being first.

Once a product (product, information, service, or practice) is proven enough to be reliable, then *the early majority* start to buy. The early majority buy not only for functionality of what the innovation offers, but also for *reliability*. They also like what’s new and different, but they wait until the bugs have been worked out of the innovation. They buy for reliability. They are more cautious than the early adopters. When the early majority begin to buy, this makes the innovation acceptable, even popular.

Eventually there are many more entrants into the field or industry to compete with the originator or first innovator. What results is that the innovation becomes much more convenient. This attracts *the late majority*. They buy for *convenience*. They need assurance that the product or service works and while they also buy for its functionality and reliability, they won’t deal with the inconveniences that occur which the first two groups tolerate.

Finally, *the laggards* come in, they buy almost exclusively for price. Now the innovation has become a commodity, is much more available, and so with all the competition, the price drops.

With this overview of the buying populations and the values and cognitive filters of people and their buying focus, let's look at the evolution of how and why people bought NLP over the years. Who were the early adopters, the early majority, late majority, etc. and over what period of time? Given this basic format, let's use it as a lens for understanding NLP— how it has been sold, who bought it, and what the future holds.

The Innovators and Early Adopters of NLP

When NLP appeared in 1975 with the publication of the first book, *The Structure of Magic* and then the other early NLP books (1975– 1980), what did NLP offer that was new or innovative? What was its *functionality*? The first book reveals the answer in the sub-title: *A Book about Communication and Change*.

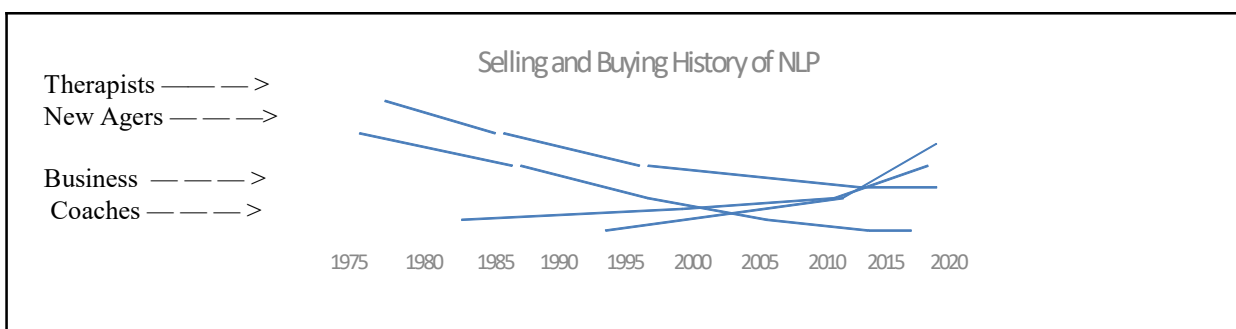
Taking the communication competencies found in Perls, Satir, and Erickson, NLP offered a highly focused way to think about communication—the linguistic and non-linguistic variables that make up how we invent and share meaning, and how that creates change. This was new. Using the human senses as the foundation for a linguistic theory and practice was new to the field of psychotherapy as Bateson noted in his Preface to *The Structure of Magic*. It also provided a new functionality in several surprising ways. What they offered provided a radical departure from how therapists operated—a paradigm shift in the field of therapy. NLP shifted the focus *from content to structure*. The reason it went first to *therapy* was because the persons they modeled were psychotherapists.

Picking up on the idea that both Korzybski and Perls explicitly promoted, they gave a practical way of using *structure*, rather than the content, to facilitate change. Korzybski said that what we know lies solely in structure and Perls argued against asking *why* in favor of asking *how*. *Why* evokes history; *how* evokes process. For therapists this was a paradigm shift. NLP came as a meta-discipline about the *processes and structure* existing behind and above the specific content of a person's story. Functionally this increased the speed of therapy as it got to the heart of things more quickly. This focus went to the essence of things (structure) rather than the details of the content story. Those most interested in this, the early adopters, were psychotherapists, mental health workers, sociologists, psychologists, etc.

How many of those first into NLP were therapists? My guess (and that's all it is, a guess judging from the trainings and trainers I'm familiar with around the world) is 65% or more, then over the years it slowly dropped to about 15% where it is today

Therapists were not the only early adopters, there were others. These mostly included people in sales and people from the New Age movement. "New Age" people, in part, because Perls, Satir, Bateson, etc. were second-generation leaders in the Human Potential Movement and all three, for a time lived, and worked at Esalen, which was the "headquarters" for the humanistic movement in the 1960s. People there were trying everything imaginable from drugs, nudity, channeling the dead, etc. Sales people also were some of the first adopters because they found in NLP a communication model that they could use to help people change their minds and buy their products. If early adopters came in because of a new functionality that NLP offered.

Of those who came in at first, my guess is that New Age people were 20%, sales people were 10%, and all others were 5%.



The Early Majority

As NLP then became popular in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the early majority began buying. For example, NLP hit *Psychology Today* in 1979 in an article by none other than Daniel Goleman, "The People who Read People." Perhaps it was the word "magic" that they used that made it catch on so quickly. And what were they buying? They were buying was the promise of fast change ("the ten minute phobia cure"), the "magic" of language, "the incantations of growth," how to use language hypnotically (Ericksonian hypnosis), and the idea of generative change (in addition to remedial change). As NLP spread, as more people were trained in it and more were training it, *the reliability* drew the early majority into it as people wanted this new content.

In the 1980s—my guess is that 40% were therapists, 20% were sales people, 20% for New Age people, 10% Business people, and all others made up the other 10%.

The Late Majority

The late majority started to come in sometime in the mid-1980s. Robins' best selling book, *Unlimited Power* (1985) gave NLP a highly visibility and public platform as he took it to television and large seminars. As NLP was spreading around the world and into many countries, learning it was now becoming more convenient. No longer did you have to fly to Santa Cruz, California to learn it. It was increasingly available at training centers in major cities. NLP was now beginning to be applied to business—to consulting, to creating wealth, to managing a company, etc. Later, in 1992 when the field of Coaching was created by Thomas Leonard, NLP writers and trainers began applying NLP to Coaching—the first programs were launched in 1998 by Dilts, McDermott, O'Connor, and in 2002 by Hall.

Therapists (30%), sales people (15%), New Agers (15%), Business (30%), Coaches (15%) and all others (5%).

The NLP Innovations

What was new in NLP? What did NLP innovate? The first answer is *the NLP Content*. Coming from the second-generation of leaders in the Human Potential Movement, NLP offered a *robust Communication Model to facilitate generative change*. This was the kind of change that is connected to unleashing new potentials. The content was first of all the Communication Model itself—the Meta-Model of Language, the Strategy Model for tracking the structure of an experience so one could model it, the Sub-Modality Model, then Meta-Programs for how people perceive. In 1994, I extended this with a recursive, self-reflexive systemic model of

communication (e.g., the Meta-States Model). In addition, there were the practical applications called “patterns.” Structured ways to “run your own brain” to achieve a particular outcome. Patterns made the concepts immediately experiential.

All of this makes up what we today call “Neuro-Linguistic Programming”—NLP. It is not a psychology, yet it deals with human functioning. It is not a therapy (or psychotherapy), yet it has immediately therapeutic applications. It is not sales, hypnosis, self-development, etc. although it has applications for all of these domains.

Instead, *NLP is a meta-discipline about the structure of experience*. That’s why it can be applied to all things human. This meta-discipline relates to how we humans *construct our mental maps about reality and use them to operate in the world*.

Looking back on that from today’s perspective, we recognize all of that was *the NLP Content*. In the 1970s, 1980s and much of the 1990s, about the only way you could get this content was to attend an NLP training. At first there was only the “Practitioner” content, later the “Master Practitioner” course was designed. Then things changed. From the meager selection of 10 books in the 1970s, the number of books grew to 20 or 30 in the 1980s, and then exploded in the 1990s to hundreds.¹ So did videos, DVDs, manuals, the Internet, on-line trainings, correspondence trainings, etc. By 2000 this changed *the value of the NLP content*. These disruptive technologies brought about big changes. No longer did a person have to attend Practitioner to learn NLP—the content information was everywhere.

Commoditized!

In business innovation terms, *NLP had become a commodity*. The content of what once was unique which had differentiated NLP from everything else had been commoditized. Not only was the content now available for the price of a book or DVD series, you could find it in books and trainings outside of the field of NLP—in management, leadership, self-development, etc.

What then resulted for the field of NLP is what has happened to many, many other fields. Once a unique offering is commoditized, its value is reduced. Now, selling “NLP Training” became less valued, less valuable. People could get the information without attending a live training. Now they could also observe—see and hear a skilled NLP trainer demonstrate the structural knowledge on videos and, in some instances of on-line trainings, even write-in questions.

Now the problem with any product being turned into a commodity is that its value is reduced so it begins to be sold solely on *price, price, price*. So in the late 1990s, and into the twenty-first century, more and more people were reducing not only the price, but the training itself. The Practitioner course went from 21 days to 15 to 10 to 7. With the *content* available, trainings could be streamlined to focus on the personal experience and integration.²

Unscrupulous trainers, however, took advantage of this. Going for volume over quality, they reduced the time to 5 days, 3, and even one day. Some offered “NLP Correspondence courses” and on-line trainings as a way to attain a NLP Certification as a “Practitioner” or “Master Practitioner.” That reduced its value and made Certificates less and less meaningful. It no longer provided any assurance that the person understood NLP let alone was able to perform the

required skills to perform the models or patterns. You can imagine the distress many NLP Trainers felt about this since what they had to offer was being reduced in price.

So All of NLP is now a Commodity?

While the content information of the Communication Model has been commoditized, is there any part of NLP which has not been commoditized? Yes, I think so. If the content of NLP is no longer new, fresh, and innovative, what does that leave? If the content can be obtained in multiple ways apart from a live training, where does that leave the field? Undoubtedly there will always be some who want to become a NLP Practitioner and Master Practitioner, yet because the content has been commoditized, NLP has shifted from being a growth industry.

Since *the NLP content* is now everywhere— in books, training manuals, videos, DVDs, the Internet, on-line training, etc., the basic content alone no longer offers a unique product. The innovations of NLP's functionality, reliability, and convenience which once was so innovative is no longer in high demand. What then can we offer beyond the foundational content?

Yet has all of the content been turned into a commodity? I think not. Some of the more newly developed aspects of NLP, especially the niched specialties is still new and unique. For example, consider *the niching opportunities of NLP content* that several trainers have developed:

- Shelle Rose Charvet developed a specialized niche with Meta-Programs in her LAB Profile work, extending the use of the Profile for customer service, hiring, etc.
- Lucas Derks developed the Social Panorama model and has developed many new applications for relationships, groups, families, etc.
- I developed a niche speciality with Meta-States as a way to model reflexivity. This has led to new applications in long-term experiences such as leadership, wealth creation, health, self-actualization, etc. This led to other models: the Matrix Model, Axes of Change, etc.
- Ian McDermott has been developing a niche for NLP and the Neuro-Sciences.
- James Lawley and Penny Thompkins modeled David Grove and created Clean Language and Symbolic Modeling.
- As already mentioned, several have developed the Coaching niche with NLP.

And there are many other niching opportunities for creative individuals who could apply NLP to specific areas such as health, fitness, sports, etc. Doing this still leads to new patterns and even new models within NLP as we have done in Neuro-Semantics (e.g., Axes of Change, Meta-States, Matrix Model, etc.).

The Next-Level Innovations

Beyond niching some NLP content and/or expanding other aspects of NLP content, what else is there? Actually, what's still available is *the most important* and *the most intangible*.

Paradoxically, what is left has been inherent in NLP since the beginning. The problem is that it is the most difficult to communicate and to deliver.

Experience, relationship, customized attention, adult learning, in-time learning, creativity and innovation, change methodology, critical thinking skills, etc.

Relationship and Experience

When NLP began, most of the trainers were pretty “solid,” because they did 20 and 30 days for each of the levels (Practitioner, Master Practitioner, Trainer).³ What mattered most was not who did the training, but the *content of the communication model*. Now things have changed. Today, with many trainers so inadequately trained, without a thorough understanding of NLP, the *person* training is today critically important. That’s because today, you are “buying” a relationship with the trainer and for the experience he or she gives you.

This explains the value of getting a quality experience of NLP with the trainer and the importance of the trainer *walking the talk*. This makes *congruency* far more important than ever before. Today what trainers offer is a customized approach to learning and a quality experience in a social context, *customized supervision* with the application of a pattern and/or the development of a skill. This, by the way, is one of the central reasons that the coaching methodology has become so popular. The combination of training and coaching gives people customized attention, ongoing follow-up, and feedback until their outcome is achieved and sustained.

Attitude

Within the relationship and experience comes *the NLP attitude or spirit* which is a prerequisite to effectively using NLP and which is more valuable than the NLP content.⁴ Normally this attitude slowly emerges over time when a person is immersed in NLP methodology (which was the value of long trainings). But far too often, the content is over-emphasized above the attitude. The attitude is mostly captured by what’s called “the NLP Presuppositions.” Typically these are taught as content, content to be memorized, and many trainers do not know how to integrate them as their attitude. This is especially true for NLP trainers who do not know the Meta-States Model given that the structure of an “attitude” is a meta-level (or meta-state) process.⁵

The value of integrating the attitude of NLP is that *it is the spirit that makes the models come alive*. Without it, the models are often impotent to effect change, let alone transformation. This is especially true for anyone who wants to use NLP to model experiences. Effectiveness comes from the spirit of wonder, learning, no failure, etc. So whether you want to find out how something dysfunctional works (and mess it up) or how something that is extremely excellent works (and how to replicate it), you need the attitude.

Competency Integration

While the *content of the NLP communication models* are pretty well known and oftentimes plagiarized and/or integrated into many other domains, one unique economic value is *the ability to think, do, and apply NLP*. This experience *cannot* be learned from a book. It is learned in experience and is best learned via mentoring, coaching, and internship. As a highly experiential model, NLP began in the small groups that originated the discoveries (1972-1975). That’s why NLP is best *learned and experienced with other people*.

If “the meaning of your communication is the response you get” then the functional give-and-take of feedback person-to-person will always be critical for learning *how to practice and deeply live the NLP attitude*. That requires minimally two persons and a context of *experimenting to*

find what works and what does not. That also requires a special attitude, namely, “there is no failure, only feedback.” There’s experimenting and reflecting which leads to insight. When someone creates that kind of *space*, whether for one person at a time like individual coaching or in a group, then we create a healthy *learning* environment. And how much is that worth?

Just in Time Learning

Ah, learning! With the speed of change and the acceleration of change, there is less and less time in organizations to send adult employees back to University. They need adults *learning on the job in real time*. This has led to the growth of the field of coaching. Yet for that to happen, leaders of organizations are discovering that they have to create the business culture so that the organization itself becomes (and stays) a *learning organization*.⁶ Today we know that the company that learns the fastest and innovates the fastest will be the organization that dominates its industry. This requires a change that most companies are still not ready for— becoming a place where *learning, group learning, team spirit, critical thinking, creativity, etc.*— where collaboration is given a primary role. These are the experience and transformations that we can sell and will continue to sell in the future.

What’s needed today is not just the learning of content, but *learning how to learn— meta-learning*. When people know their best learning strategy, learning state, and know how to learn then *learning* itself becomes a tremendous valuable resource for that person and that company. The challenge for those in positions of managing and leading is how to create a learning culture so that people discover the joy of learning together as a team.

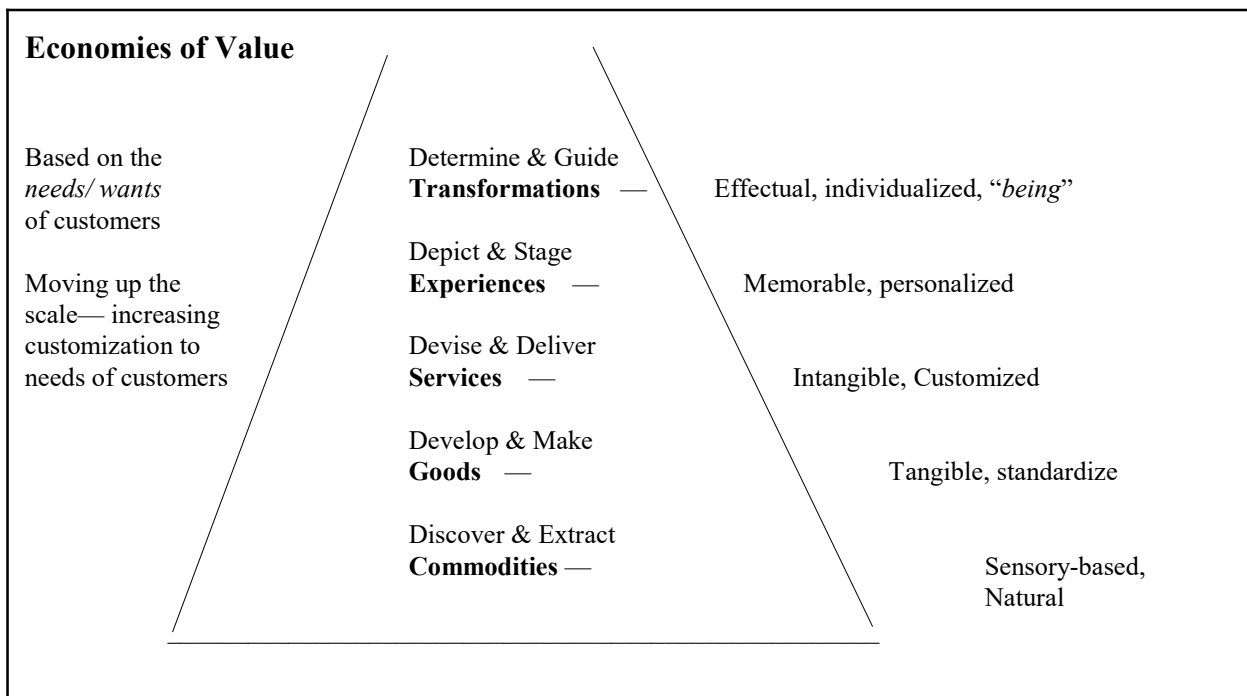
With the speed of change, the overwhelming amount of material threatens to drown us each day. The need to think clearly, critically, and precisely now becomes all the more important. This is true for people at all positions and levels in organizations. Those who do will be the leaders and the entrepreneurs of the future.

Over the twentieth century, organizations learned how to measure things. Beginning in the 1970s manufacturers started benchmarking what they were doing on the assembly lines and looking for best practices. The idea was that if they could measure something, they could manage it. So benchmarking the tangible aspects of a job led to Lean Manufacturing, to Sigma Six, and to many approaches for keeping a scorecard on a company’s activities. But what has been very difficult to “measure” have been the intangibles— leadership, learning, listening, supporting, respect, charisma, persuasion, etc.

Today most companies are still measuring either the wrong thing or measuring something that is actually irrelevant to the company’s well-being and productivity. This opens up a whole new dimension for the field of NLP. In Neuro-Semantics we began the process of benchmarking intangibles in 2002 when the need to measure the competencies of professional Coaches arose. Since then we have benchmarked over 100 experiences.⁷ There are other content still worth of providing, modeling excellence, critical thinking⁸, and so on.

Forecasting the Future

Many years ago, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore write about the new emerging economy beyond commodities. In their book, *The Experience Economy: Work is Therapy and Every Business a Stage* (1999), they argued that when the offerings of any industry become a commodity, the next economic development would be the creation of *experiences*. Actually, they mapped out five economic offerings and therefore five economies of value: commodities, goods, services, experiences, and transformations. We can view these as a pyramid that moves from the most basic and fundamental to the most transcendent.



NLP began as a *service*. It was an intangible, educational, skill-development, personal development service. Eventually those who created products (manuals, books, CDs, training centers, etc.) developed and made *goods* that were tangible. Those who were really good at doing more than providing a service, provided a memorable *experience*. The economic value here was the personalized memory. Pine and Gilmore differentiate an experience from a service.

“When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf. But when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages—as in a theatrical play—to engage him in a personal way. ... Staging experiences is *not* about entertaining customers, it is about *engaging* them.” (1999, p. 2, 30)

This next step in economic development gives a provider a way to transcend commoditization. And yet, sadly, even experiences can be turned into a commodity.

“Consumers today crave experience, and the surest route to give them that sensation is through individualization like they used to receive from the corner butcher or baker. ... [But the] second time you experience it, it will be marginally less enjoyable than the first time, the third time less

and so on until the experience doesn't engage you very much. Welcome to the commoditization of experiences as expressed in the statement, 'Been there, done that.' ” (p. 70, 164)

The solution? *Move to transformation* which in terms of economic value and nature are as distinct from experiences as experiences are from services.

“When you customize an experience to make it just right for an individual—providing exactly what he needs right now—you cannot help *changing* that individual. When you customize an experience, you automatically turn it into a *transformation*. Buyers of transformation seek to be guided toward some specific aim or purpose, and transformations must elicit that intended effect. Such buyers are *aspirants*—*they aspire* to be someone or some thing different. Without a change in attitude, performance, characteristics, or some other fundamental dimension, no transformation occurs.” (p. 165, 172)

The fascinating thing about transformations is that *the customer becomes the product*. That is, what you offer to the person is the person him or herself changing and *becoming new and different*. Pine and Gilmore describe the economic difference between the levels in this way:

- If you charge for *stuff*, you are in the *commodity* business.
- If you charge for *tangible things*, you are in the *goods* business.
- If you charge for *the activities you execute*, you are in the *service* business.
- If you charge for *time customers spend with you*, then you are in the *experience* business.
- If you charge for *the demonstrated outcome the customer achieves*, then you are in the *transformation* business. (p. 194)

If a fitness center moved to *the transformation economy* they would not charge for the use of the machines in the gym, but for a fitness goal, say lose 30 pounds or bench press 250 pounds. In this they would be helping people turn their intentions into actions. If consultants moved to this economy, they would not charge for producing reports, but for staying and working with the client to get the results that are desired.

Peeking into the Future

The robust NLP Communication Model that facilitates change (both remedial and generative change) was a paradigm shift in 1975. It shifted the emphasis in both communication and change from content to structure with the result of increased speed, efficiency, and productivity of results. But over the past 40-plus years of NLP, *most of the content of NLP has become a commodity*. Yet not everything has been commoditized. Among the things that have not been turned into a commodity is the relational experience of integration, the spirit of learning, and the ability to actually develop the required competencies, in a word, *transformation*. And that, I see, as the future of NLP.

Because the new *transformation economy*, as well as *the experience economy*, seems to be what offers still an open future for NLP, that's explains our focus in Neuro-Semantics— not only the exercise of taking NLP to a higher level professionally and ethically— to be more congruent, collaborative, and professional, but to also focus on *the experiential nature* of this model. In recent years, Neuro-Semantics has come up with two powerful change/ transformation models (The Axes of Change, the Crucible). We have identified the Trust Spiral for groups and teams, a Leadership Axes, and much more.

Author: L. Michael Hall, Ph.D., best selling author, visionary leader in NLP and Neuro-Semantics, see www.neurosemantics.com.

Footnotes:

1. Joseph Yeager in his 1985 book, *Thinking about Thinking with NLP* mentioned that there were now a whopping 24 books that were now available on NLP, 1985 (page 5).
2. Much of this was legitimate as a person could now read and watch videos and learn much of NLP prior to the experiential training component.
3. For example, my 1989 Master Practitioner was 24 days, 9 am to 9 pm, and cost \$3,000 USD back then.
4. See, *The Spirit of NLP* (1996). What mostly impressed me about NLP at the beginning of my journey was the spirit or attitude that was inherent in the model. I wrote about this in the book, *The Spirit of NLP*, about the 1989 Master Practitioner training with Richard Bandler to convey that “spirit.”
5. See *Meta-States: Mastering the Higher Levels of Your Mind* (2012 third edition).
6. See Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (1990).
7. See *Benchmarking Intangibles: The Art of Measuring the Unquantifiable* (2011)..
8. See the training manual, *The Neuro-Semantics of Critical Thinking*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #25
June 5, 2017

A WEEK OF EXCUSES

"The basis of moral and intellectual growth is the capacity to criticize oneself."
J. Samuel Bois, *The Art of Awareness*

On Saturday, at the end of the week, I heard a commentator summarize the week of news by saying, "This has been a week of excuses." He then talked about the interviews that Hillary Clinton did and her long list of all of the things that caused her to lose the election. Then he talked about the news of the previous two days about Kathy Griffin and her over-the-line behavior of holding a bloody head of the president as if she was an ISIS terrorist who had just beheaded President Trump.

Regarding the Clinton interviews, she did begin with the right words, "I take full responsibility for everything I said and did." But then she went on to blame just about everyone and everything for the loss. She blamed Trump, Comey, the Russians, wiki leaks, the FBI, etc., she even blamed the Democratic party who she said gave her "nothing." At that point the commentator read off a list of 60 things that she has blamed that caused the loss of the election—and what was not on that list was her own actions and lack of actions, some of which were highly questionable, some possible criminal actions.

With Griffin, after her stunt, and the almost universal disgust and disagreement with what she did, and then some consequences in terms of losing sponsors, she then blamed people for not getting her humor, Trump for "breaking" her, a "group of old white men" for destroying her. Somehow she seemed to forget that she started it all and that there are consequences to actions.

All of that got me thinking about this all-too-human experience that we all know, and know all-too-well, that of excuse making, blaming, and playing the victim. Generally, we think of that way of thinking and feeling as the cognitive distortions that are characteristic of small children. Many decades ago psychologists Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck identified the basic *cognitive distortions* including blaming, exaggerating, awfulizing, personalizing, etc. as inevitable thinking patterns that we go through as we grow up and distortions that we *grow out of when we mature as adults*.

Given that, why then do so many adults blame, accuse, make excuses, shift responsibility, refuse to accept consequences of their actions, and play the victim? There are several answers to this. One is that we regress. Put almost any person under enough stress and pressure, and almost everyone *regresses to more childish and primitive responses*. That's why these behaviors occur when things are not going well. They occur when a person experiences the distress of a failure, a public embarrassment, financial loss, and threats to one's reputation.

In those kinds of situations, it is common for a person to regress. And in the regressing, the childish in thinking and feelings come out. What's needed in such moments is both recognition and compassion from others and from oneself, the ability to reduce the stress by recognizing the cognitive distortions and not acting on them or expressing them. But as we all know, that's easier said than done. Catching oneself in cognitive distortions requires a meta-level awareness and that is developed in calm times when a person takes the time and effort to learn more adult thinking patterns. That's actually one of the great benefits of the NLP Meta-Model of Language—the essential Communication Model and the Meta-States Model—for develop self-reflexive awareness.

Not only do we humans *regress under pressure*, but *many have not learned how to be healthily responsible*. To this day, because so many people confuse “blame” with “responsibility,” they are internally driven to avoid being held responsible. That's why they cover-up and lie. For them, it feels as if they are being blamed. And since no one wants to be blamed, when they make that confusion, they refuse to be held responsible in a healthy way.

The truth is that *fully accepting one's response-abilities is an act of strength*. It shows personal power and congruency. It is also the foundation for change, personal development, and self-actualization. Failing to own one's *ability to response* puts one in a victim's role—as if you have no power or control or choice. But that's a lie. We always have the power to respond to life's events from our values, goals, and meanings.

Sometimes people blame, accuse, counter-attack, etc. because it is the only coping mechanism they have. They don't know what else to do and feeling distressed and unable to look at their own behaviors and/or to face the consequences of their actions—the best thing they know to do is to either play the victim of “poor me” or counter-attack. The amazing thing is to see this in celebrities and people who have all of the advantages that most people are striving for—money, popularity, influence, name-recognition, opportunities, signs of wealth, etc.

What we need is a week of taking responsibility. What we need are grown up men and women who care more about truth than their reputations, more about learning than maintaining a persona of being right, more about authenticity than pretending to be something more than human.

“Every act of taking responsibility is a great step toward self-actualization.”

Abraham Maslow

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #26
June 12, 2017

THE BIG “WHY” OF NEURO-SEMANTICS

In preparing for my next project I recently re-read Simon Sinek’s *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, 2009. While it is a business book and a book on leadership, more than that it is a book that fits with what we do in Neuro-Semantics about *intentionality*. Using the “why is that important” question, and holding each answer and then asking it repeatedly, we move a person to find or to create his or her big why. Doing that simultaneously enables a person to discover and activate one’s highest values.

In the book, *Start with Why*, Sinek compares three questions to the three functions in an organization. Taking *why*, *how*, and *what*, he argues that the “why” question functions as the CEO of a company, the “how” question is the domain for the executive managers, and the “what” question is how a company manifests its purpose or why. He calls this the Golden Circle and draws three concentric circles putting why in the middle, then how, then what. He then writes:

“It starts with clarity. You have to know *why* you do *what* you do.” (p. 65)

“Knowing *why* is essential for lasting success...” (p. 47)

What is our *why*? Do you know? **Neuro-Semantics began with a significant and a big *why*.** Today you will find it in our Vision and Mission statement. Do you know that statement by heart? Do you know how the *why* has developed and evolved over the years?

What was *the why* when we began Neuro-Semantics in 1994? It was to “take NLP to a higher level of quality professionally and ethically.” Our big *why* at that time was due to the negative PR that some had been creating for the field of NLP. Feeling excited about the power of the communication model and of the many tools for effectively facilitating life-changing transformations—our *why* was to *apply to ourselves* and to *live* what we were training before offering it to others. We wanted to be living examples and respectful in a non-manipulative way. We wanted to *be* the change that the models enabled us to practice. Our *why* also had to do with collaboration—believing that we can do more together than alone or apart, and believing that we live in a world of abundance, not scarcity, our vision was to create an international society of men and women practicing NLP. That was our *why* in the 1990s and into the 2000s.

Then in 2005 I discovered something that I never knew, something that *not a single article or book on NLP had ever mentioned*. Namely, NLP grew out of the Human Potential Movement. It grew out of the work of Maslow and Rogers, the people at Esalen, and that the persons modeled—primarily Perls and Satir, along with Bateson, were second-generation leaders of the Human Potential Movement and that they lived and worked together at Esalen. Amazing! I took my training with Richard Bandler and then worked with him for four years. He had asked me to write three books for him and to work to re-establish the Society of NLP, and yet for all of that, I never knew that history.

That changed everything. Now we had *an even bigger Why*. What we are about in NLP and Neuro-Semantics is not merely facilitating precise and accurate communication, or self-development, or enabling people to change, **we are also about *unleashing the hidden potentials within people***. Human beings have a higher nature—they are driven from within by a self-actualizing drive to be their best selves, to be responsible, to contribute, to make a difference in the world, etc. This is true for individuals, for families, companies, organizations, for nations, for the whole human race. That's our higher purpose in Neuro-Semantics.

This goes back to Maslow's original idea of the bright-side of human nature, that psychology and philosophy had mostly "sold human nature short," and that there is a higher nature within us. This is *the bigger Why* that re-sets the context for the self-development programs, for enriching communication, for helping people make the changes that they want.

"*Why* must come first. The *why* provides the context for everything else." (Sinek, p. 70)

Today our *why* in Neuro-Semantics is not only that people can change, but that as people change so do families, and as individuals and families change, businesses also transform, and with those changes, the world itself is made a better place. That's our vision— *changing people one conversation at a time, changing the world via one person at a time*.

We begin by first helping people understand the meaning of the things and events and activities of life so that they can cope well and then master the challenges of work and love. From there, we then work to enable people to create rich and great meanings so that it not only "makes sense" (meaning¹) but that it gives them a reason-to-live, that it blesses their lives with meaningfulness (meaning²).

Why do we do what we do in Neuro-Semantics? So that people have and live *inspirational lives*. Whether it is coaching, training, consulting, or therapy, what we do begins with people "making sense" of things so that they are well-functioning as people in their friendships, relationships, parenting, making a living from a job that fits for them, etc. When they get to this point—they are surviving and beginning to thrive. But we want more for them. We want more for ourselves. We want people to thrive at the highest level possible. We want them to be *fully-functioning*, to use Carl Roger's phrase, and not just well-functioning. Sinek again:

"Knowing your *why* is not the only way to be successful, but it is the only way to maintain a lasting success and have a greater blend of innovation and flexibility. When a *why* goes fuzzy, it becomes much more difficult to maintain the growth, loyalty, and inspiration that helped drive the original success." (Sinek, p. 50)

The danger for any person and any community is *letting the why go fuzzy*. To avoid this we have to keep refreshing our way (hence this article). It is also to keep relating *what* we do and *how* you do it with our *why*. When we do that, then *why* truly becomes an inside-out process.

"Great leaders ... inspire people to act. Those who are able to inspire give people a sense of purpose or belonging that has little to do with any external incentive or benefit to be gained." (p. 6)

"When most organizations or people think, act, or communicate they do so from the outside in, from **what** to **why** ... but not the inspired companies or leaders. [They] think, and act, and communicate from the inside out." (Sinek, p. 39)

From *why* comes the *what*— what do you do, and after that the *how*— how do you do that?

“A *why* is just a belief. That’s all it is. *How*s are the actions you take to realize that belief. And *whats* are the results of those actions.” (Sinek, p. 67)

From our *why of inspiring people to get real, to unleash their highest potentials, to change the world* our *how* is through Neuro-Semantic Trainings and workshops, Meta-Coaching, Business consulting, Leadership Development, and Therapeutic Change.

“When we are inspired, the decisions we make have more to do with who we are and less to do with the companies or the products we’re buying.” (Sinek, p. 74)

Here’s to the big *why* of Neuro-Semantics. May that *why* keep you inspired and motivated in doing *what* you do and inform you in *how* you do what you do. And if this *big why* is new to you— come and join us.

Trainers Training (NSTT) will occur in 5 weeks in Rio de Janeiro Brazil. If you are an NLP trainer who has been in the field 3 years and already training Prac., you can come for 50% off the door price.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #27
June 19, 2017
Creative & Critical Thinking #1

BLACK SWAN MODELING

Swans are white. At least that’s what we all thought before the discovery of Australia. “People in the Old World were convinced that *all* swans were white, an unassailable belief.” Why? Because it was completely confirmed by empirical evidence. Every single swan that had ever been seen had been white. Bingo. So *all* swans are white. Then the sighting of the first black swan— a single observation completely invalidated a general statement derived from thousands of years of sightings that had confirmed over and over and over again that swans were white.

This is the way Nassim Nicholas Taleb opened his book, *The Black Swan* (2007) to highlight a several cognitive biases. We have a bias to draw generalizations and then to confirm them. When we do this we close off our minds to other possibilities. We have a bias to predict the future based on our confirmation bias. We have a bias to think that what we know is all there is to know and to be over-confident in that knowledge. We have a bias to not question that we may not know something. And all of these biases add up to the fact that we, as human beings, are consistently being surprised and caught off-guard by outliers, the unsuspected, the Black Swans.

9/11 was an outlier Black Swan, so was the fall of the Soviet Union (1991), so was the more recent world-wide financial crisis (2008), so was the election of Donald Trump (2016). We also have a bias to concoct explanations after the fact that make it seem explainable and predictable so that we do not go forward thinking that it will happen again. Until it does. And it always does. Nassim Taleb writes:

“What is surprising is not the magnitude of our forecast errors, but our absence of awareness of it.” (p. xx)

“Contrary to social-science wisdom, almost no discovery, no technologies of note, came from design and planning— they were just Black Swans.” (p. xxi)

Taleb notes that we lack a particular meta-learning. We do not learn that we are not learning from this. We live in a world of uncertainty and unknowns. But we develop knowledge about what we know and what we think is certain. We hardly have a way to even talk or think about the unknown. A Catch-22! If we knew it, it would not be unknown. This is one weakness of knowledge he points to, and using a notion from G.L.S. Shackle, he calls it *unknowledge*.

In a chapter about “The Problem of Silent Evidence,” Taleb says that “silent evidence pervades everything connected to the notion of history.” By history he says this refers to “any succession of events seen with the effect of posteriority.” That is, we create “history” as we look back on things and concoct a historical theory yet we do so while avoiding “looking at the cemetery.” He says that this is not a problem with history as such, but a problem with the way we construct samples and gather evidence in every domain. It is a problem of a bias that we have, that is, a

systematic error that views what we're looking for more than what is there. And this rises from the confirmation bias: we have a bias to confirm, not to disconfirm (p. 102).

Along this line he asks about all of the talents and books of geniuses that were *not* preserved. What does that missing or silent evidence tell us? Talking about the thousands of manuscripts that are rejected by publishers, he asks about the hundreds of literary masterpieces that perish by rejection. How do we take into account all of the great manuscripts that were never published and that you never hear about?

The Danger of Model and Ignoring Missing Information

Suppose you were searching for the secret of wealth creation. Since this was one of my modeling projects in the early 1990s, I took special note of Taleb's words. "We look for traits of those who succeeded, but don't look at the cemetery of those with same traits that failed." (p. 105).

"Numerous studies of millionaires aimed at figuring out the skills required follow the following methodology. They take a population of hotshots, those with big titles and big jobs, and study their attributes. They look at what those big guns have in common: courage, risk taking, optimism, and so on, and infer that these traits, most notably risk taking, help you to become successful. You would also probably get the same impression if you read CEOs ghostwritten autobiographies or attended their presentations to fawning MBA students.

Now take a look at the cemetery. It is quite difficult to do so because people who fail do not seem to write memoirs, and, if they did, those business publishers I know would not even consider giving them the courtesy of a returned phone call. Readers would not pay \$26.95 for a story of failure, even if you convinced them that it had more useful tricks than a story of success. The entire notion of biography is grounded in the arbitrary ascription of a causal relation between specific traits and subsequent events. Now consider the cemetery. The graveyard of failed persons will be full of people who shared the following traits: courage, risk taking, optimism, et cetera. Just like the population of millionaires. There may be some differences in skills, but what truly separates the two is for the most part a single factor: luck. Plain luck." (pp. 105-106)

The mere presence of traits, characteristics, and even actions of those who succeeded at something may be like white swans. That's all we have seen—so far. Yes those factors do seem to contribute to the success. Yet for all we know, these same factors may also be present in those who did not succeed. There may also have been some other factor—a Black Swan factor—that we have not taken into consideration. Besides "luck," the small number bias, other factors could be involved. Therefore we need to ask, "What unknown factor/s have I not even considered?" "What variable could be unknown at this point that our modeling is not considering?"

Before the theory of germs arose, doctors never even considered that washing their hands between surgeries could have any affect on the mortality rate in the hospital. That was unheard of? How ridiculous! Today we know that germ theory was a key variable, yet it was unknown then. It was silent information that could not even be considered. When it was discovered and later confirmed, it was a Black Swan event. No one expect it and it too the Medical community by surprise.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #28
June 26, 2017
Creative & Critical Thinking #2

PATTERNS: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

Your brain essentially operates as a pattern-detection machine. To make sense of the world, you look for, and you create, patterns. It's what the brain does. And it is very efficient in this skill of pattern-detection and pattern-creation. That's why a child who grows up in a home where two or three different languages are spoken—somehow—sorts them out and eventually learns to speak two or three different languages. Amazing!

Actually, your brain and my brain is much better at *pattern creation* than it is at pattern detection. That's why we are all inevitably by nature born creative. Because of the amount of information that we encounter, we have to order it, organize it, and structure it so that we're not overwhelmed and can function. That's why we are so quick to "jump to conclusions" and construct a pattern even when there's no pattern or when we really do not have enough information to legitimately say that a given activity is a pattern. As children we were so very quick to *jump to conclusions*.

We are also very quick to over-generalize, to mind-read, to label, etc. These distinctions of the NLP Meta-Model of Language reveal that deep within us is an essential tendency to engage in *pattern-creation*. These cognitive distortions tell the story of our cognitive development—the mental-emotional stages that we go through as we develop into mature adults. This is good, this is bad, and this is ugly.

It is good because by detecting and creating patterns, we create knowledge and science. The key, of course, is first to *detect* patterns which requires the ability to delay pattern-creation. It requires that we slow down our naming of things, categorizing (classifying), and judging so that we gather sufficient information and truly detect the way an experience works over time consistently. Otherwise we may be jumping the gun and calling something a pattern that is not actually a patterned way that something operates.

It is good because now we can detect *the structure (or structuring)* of things and discover how things work and how we can put them to good use. When we do this with people, we can figure out how human nature works, the actual patterns that explain what people are doing and why they are doing what they're doing. When we do this with business, we can figure out how the market works, how to determine what products or services are needed, when, by whom, etc. When we do this about wealth, we can figure out what wealth truly is, how it works, how to become wealthy, etc. So also with health, vitality, fitness, relationships, parenting, loving, leading, and a thousand other activities.

It is bad to the extent that we are creating non-existing patterns and treating them as *real* and reacting to them as solid or inevitable. This is what happens if we do not grow out of the childish thinking patterns (the cognitive distortions), test them with the Meta-Model questions, and learn more adult critical thinking skills. What's bad about this is that we create all sorts of unnecessary misery for ourselves and others when we mind-read, over-generalize, personalize, awfulize, label, etc. Years ago Albert Ellis, one of the leading psychologists who identified the cognitive distortions, along with Aaron Beck, wrote a book with the title— *How to Make Yourself Miserable— I mean Really Miserable!* It was a book about the misery that results from the cognitive distortions.

That is a miserable way to live. And that explains part of the transformative power of the Meta-Model— by challenging the ill-formed structure of our thinking-emoting, the Meta-Model questions enables us, as adults, to keep updating our mental maps which allows our thinking-and-emoting to grow up and become more mature. In terms of attaining to truly creative and critical thinking, it is a great tool.

But things go from bad to ugly when you do not effectively manage your pattern detection and creation skills. Consider this. What happens when you find a pattern? What happens when you detect a pattern and/or create a pattern? This is where things can get ugly. *You stop thinking.* You now use the pattern for “understanding” and “knowing” what things are and now you *just react from your pattern.*

Wow! If that's the case, you better be sure that you have accurately detected and/or created a useful pattern. If not, you are really setting yourself up for not being able to navigate life very effectively and you may have established a pattern that is self-destructive, counter-productive, and dysfunctional for you and others.

Because *patterns control attention*, your attention is a function of the patterns that you have learned and created and detected over the years of your life. How well are they working? How productive are you? How effective in the domains of life wherein you want to succeed? The problems that you have are never “personal” problems, *you* are just fine as a human being. You are unconditionally valuable as a person. The problem is always the frame— the pattern.

Now you know why we say that over and over and over in Neuro-Semantics.

The person is never the problem; the problem is always the frame— the pattern.

Keep map and territory separate:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7AXskSxxMk>

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 “Neurons” #29
July 3, 2017

TRUE VULNERABILITY

Be Proud, Not Ashamed of Your Humanity

In writing about authenticity in the most recent Neuro-Semantic book, *Get Real: Unleashing Authenticity* (2016), I came across the work of Brené Brown and her work on vulnerability and shame. In fact, over the past few years, several people had recommended that I look into her work. Yet when I did, I found that I had a problem with the way she used the word “shame.”

What’s the relationship between being an open and vulnerable person and shame?
Are they not opposites?

In a recent copy of *Psychotherapy Networker*, there were a couple articles about her and several quotes from her book. Here is one that certainly relates to authenticity:

“To inhabit the vulnerability that’s truly the lot of all humans is the key to living authentically ... this is the choice to show up and be real ... the choice is to be honest ... the choice is to let our true selves be seen.” (Psychotherapy Networker, p.21, from *Rising Strong*).

I liked that. Well stated. But then a problem—as she talked about *shame*, she claimed that you had to own your shame in order to be authentic, and that vulnerability involves shame. What?! That didn’t make sense to me. Why would vulnerability inherently involve shame? I didn’t get it. After all, shame (as with embarrassment) is a social emotion and refers to breaking a social rule. For shame or embarrassment to arise, you first have to have a social norm and then you have to violate it. That’s when I realized what Brown was doing with her use of the term “shame,” and how it differed from the way it is normally used.

What was she doing? She was not talking about actual and real shame, but *false shame*. Now her examples made sense—people quote social actions (with one other person, a group, or groups of people), many, if not most, are common human experiences. Yet some people create rules and norms so that it is “shameful” to be a real live human being. She talks about the shame of asking for help, of feeling lonely and wanting to be with others, of asking for sex from one’s mate, from making a mistake of understanding, judgment, language, or behavior.

Of course! If you have an impossible standard by which you measure your humanity or the humanity of another, something like, “You must be perfect,” “You must not make a mistake,” “You must do what is right (all the time, according to my judgments),” “I must not feel embarrassed,” and on and on—then you set the stage for feeling *false shame*! You will certainly feel ashamed, but is it legitimate? The problem here is *not* the fact, but the meaning. Someone is giving negative and unuseful *meanings* to being a *real* human being. That’s *false* shame.

True shame is the experience of violating a legitimate social norm. And for all of us—it

happens. It's part of growing up and learning how to be a member of any family or group. The "shame" in those instances is a small emotion of self-awareness that we have made a mistake or done something wrong in the eyes of the group. That's all. It is a bit stronger than embarrassment. To feel embarrassed is to be self-conscious that you are doing something that may bring another person's disapproval or judgment. That's why you never experience embarrassment by yourself. Run around naked in your house ... and there's no embarrassment. But catch the eye of someone glancing at you and, bingo! Embarrassment. Find yourself with a body part exposed to the eyes of several people and you might feel something stronger than embarrassment, shame. You now feel ashamed of yourself because you have violated a social convention. That's actual shame. It is a social reality.

What is it to be authentic and what is it to be vulnerable? To be authentic is to be *an open and vulnerable human being*. The idea of *vulnerability* is the idea of being open to human condition of fallibility and mortality. Fallibility, as "liable to err," means that in all aspects that are human—we make mistakes. It is not that we could, but we do. We are fallible and liable to err mentally, emotionally, linguistically, verbally, behaviorally, relationally, etc. That's why to allow yourself to be *vulnerable* requires "the courage to show up and be seen, even if it means risking failure, hurt, shame, and possibly heartbreak.

Fallibility means that you are not "flawless." Your brain is not perfect information-processing machines, you make mistakes. Some are perceptual mistakes, some are auditory—we mis-hear. We suffer from visual illusions. We misunderstand things. We lack critical knowledge. We don't always reason logically. In all these ways, we experience various limitations. It is called "being human," and there is no shame in that! That is your glory.

But, if you grew up in dysfunctional family, in a society who held and promoted limiting beliefs (cognitive distortions, myths, mis-beliefs, false facts, etc.) about being human—then no wonder you turn "being human" into something shameful! The fact that you struggle to understand, to get things right, and to catch and correct errors is just being human. We all stumble over many things in the effort to understand what is right to think and do. We get into negative emotional states—we feel stress, angry, fearful, upset, etc. We get grumpy and grouchy and these states of misery affect the accuracy of our thinking. Welcome to the human race!

Fallibility extends to our bodies because we are also mortal. Because you are not immortal—you suffer all sorts of things in your body—physical weakness, illness. You eat foods that are toxic, you fall and hurt yourself in accidents, diseases may even be built into your genetic code. So you often struggle to cope with life's demands as you attempt to learn, understand, and do things in ways that will enable you to succeed in reaching your goals.

Combining fallibility and mortality, you also suffer insecurity and uncertainty about a great many things. You are not able to predict what's going to happen, how long you will be alive, what you can anticipate in business or in your personal life. Insecurity is built into the very fabric of life. This means that discomfort, struggle, pain, uncertain, etc. are to be expected.

So being *vulnerable* first and foremost means acknowledging these conditions. Yet many do not!

They attempt to deny and eliminate them. They want to be perfect—flawless in what they know, without flaw in what they speak and do, secure in anticipating anything and everything that could occur, and immortal! These “perfectionists” fight against the facts of life as it is on planet earth. Then by unrealistically wanting what is not to be, they put themselves at odds with reality.

Authentic vulnerability starts with acknowledgment—acceptance and recognition of life as it is. By embracing it, you can focus on learning, developing, growing, and improving. By authentically embracing your vulnerability, you take things on as a challenge for developing, you can courageously face the facts and focus on how to identify and unleash potentials and improve the quality of your families, businesses, societies, and countries.

There’s nothing shameful about this. Quite the opposite. When you step up to become authentically vulnerable, you can take pride in being a mortal and vulnerable human being. There’s nothing bad, humiliating, embarrassing, or wrong about this. If you access those states about vulnerability, you have created the problem. It’s your interpretation that creates this pseudo-problem.

You are probably expecting flawless perfection, ease, and constant success. Expect that and you can feel bad, embarrassed, and ashamed when you discover that you are, in fact, a fallible and mortal human being! What some people call “shame” is actually *normal* human experiences— noticing when you are unsure, feeling weak, feeling inadequate, etc.

Because embarrassment and shame are social emotions, they arise when you have set a social norm and then use it to measure your humanity. Embarrassment and shame, at most, indicate a social norm has been violated. Now you can speak the truth to yourself and others without shame. You can acknowledge what is as part of the human condition.

“I’m going through a divorce right now”

“My son is in rehabilitation.”

“My uncle committed suicide.”

What then happens to the fear that others will think that you don’t have your stuff together? What do you have to be ashamed of? Or, what are you not proud of? The challenge before you is to get real about these facets of the human experience, to get real about being a fallible and mortal human being.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #30
July 10, 2017

NLP: WHAT IS IT— REALLY?

Morpheus asked Neo when they first met, “Do you want to know what *it is*?” Neo answered with a question, “What is the Matrix?” The question here is, “What is NLP?” Now some NLP people seem to have a challenge about defining and describing what it is. I suppose that’s because as a meta-discipline, it can be applied to so many things. And yet, what it can be applied to is *not* the same thing as what it *is*. *Identity* is not the same thing as *applicaiton*.

In terms of defining NLP, it is *a communication model*. How do I know that? Well, look at the title of the original books. The two volumes of *The Structure of Magic* is titled, *A Book about Communication and Change*. And in those two volumes, the authors present “A Meta-Model of Language in Therapy.” Next, look at all of the communication models of NLP—

- The list of 12 linguistic distinctions (from Transformational Grammar) and questions to enable a person get a fuller and deeper representation of the person’s experience is the Meta-Model.
- The list of the sensory representation systems and their distinctions that comprise the language of the mind.
- The list of non-linguistic processes (calibrating, pacing, etc.) for communicating.
- The list of meta-program distinctions of perceptual filters.
- The list of state or trance inducing linguistic and non-linguistic forms.

It’s a Communication Model! And the original design was to look at how the expert communicators in therapy (Perls, Satir, Erickson) communicated that resulted in effective therapeutic change. Later, others were modeled for communication expertise in business, medicine, leadership, etc. The originators also used and quoted the Satir Categories of Communication, they started with the linguistic formulations from Transformational Grammar and a little bit from General Semantics.

In April when I was in London for the NLP Conference, we conducted a short meeting for the NLP Leadership Summit and at the heart of the conversation this year was membership as well as what is accepted as “Neuro-Linguistic Programming.” One person suggested several new age techniques around “energy.” That’s when co-founder Frank Pucelik spoke up to correct that misunderstanding.

“I remember what we did at the beginning and a lot of it was surely *not* NLP. We studied these things (new age techniques and things from Esalen) to try to find interesting patterns, to increase our observation skills, or to find out if there was any truth claims in these strange systems, and sometimes just for fun to see if we could do them. We studied many things including but not limited to, Psychodrama, Re-

evaluation Co-counseling, Art therapy, stage hypnosis, Castaneda (Don Juan, etc.), Bio Feedback, Sensory Deprivation (Isolation tanks), Massage Therapy, Reading Auras, Gestalt, TA (Transactional Analysis), Rogerian Therapy, Earth Coincidence Control Office (John Lilly), Dolphin Communication Patterns (Bateson) , Encounter Group Processes, Sensitivity T-Groups, Past Lives, Occult Belief Systems, Pavlov, and many more. But we never considered any of these systems to be NLP. We based NLP on all the processes that are known to be NLP/Meta today. The Meta-Model, Rep. Systems, Systematic Use of Negations, Calibrations, Major Beliefs, Anchoring, Pacing and Leading, The Milton Model, Satirs' Conjoint Family Systems, Brain Hemisphere Functions, and the rest."

Those were "the wild days of NLP" and in those wild days, while the founders explored lots of things, that in itself did *not* turn those things into NLP. Later Robert Dilts along with the originators put together the first Volume of NLP and sub-titled the book, *The Study of the Structure of Subjective Experience* (1980). That's because *the elements of communication* (linguistics, sensory systems, non-linguistic responses, etc.) are simultaneously the components of experience. And if they are the components of experience— then we can use the very tools of communication to *model the structure of any and every experience*. That's why NLP, as a Communication Model, grew and expanded by the process of modeling.

Isn't that fantastic!? *The components of experience— then we can use the very tools of communication to model the structure of any and every experience*. Did you catch the connection? The variables by which communication works (an experience) are the very variables (structure) of all experiences. That's why and how the NLP model gives us the tools for modeling the structure (form, patterning) of experiences.

I was not explicit aware of this when I first learned NLP. It wasn't until 1996 that I explicitly woke up to this connection between *communication and modeling* when Richard Bandler asked me to write a book on the 25-history of the Meta-Model. And I did. The book (first titled, *The Secret of Magic*, 1997, and later re-titled, *Communication Magic*, 2001) was published by Crown House Publications. Prior to that (1992) I had added nine additional distinctions to the Meta-Model from Korzybski's General Semantics. And that list was then published in NLP Journals around the world and was incorporated in the second edition of *Magic Demystified* written by Bryon Lewis (and Frank Pucelik).

What is it? *Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a Communication Model*. It describes how we are patterned (programmed) in and by the communication processes within neurology and linguistics. And yes, it can be *applied* to anything "human," especially any and every human experience. But it is *not* everything. It is *not* therapy, counseling, psychology, or hypnosis—even though it arose from those disciplines. It is *not* persuasion, sales, management, leadership, or even coaching. Although obviously as a communication model, it will have lots of practical usefulness in these fields. *Nor* is NLP any of the many kinds of sci-fi "energy" programs that are touted under the name of NLP.

From: L. Michael Hall
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July 17, 2017

THE ART OF MANAGING YOUR ATTENTION

Your attention is under attack! If you haven't noticed recently, there are many things attacking your attention every day. It is under attack by all of the thousands of things that are competing for your attention— from the demands of home and work, from the request of friends, family, children, colleagues, from the intrusion of social media, your iphone, the media, etc. It is not only the volume of incoming information, but the velocity of the amount of decisions that you have to make— nearly moment by moment— that makes information overload and decision fatigue significant factors in today's world. What's a human to do?

In the Neuro-Semantic pattern of *Intentionality*, we utilize the dual-factor of your consciousness. Beginning with *what is on your mind* (attention) we ask, "Where or when do you find it hard to focus and to hold your concentration?" Then, assuming that there is a positive intention behind that attention, we move to *what's in the back of your mind* (your intentions). We do that by checking to see if what you are trying to focus on is really important. "Is it important?" If the answer is yes, then we explore the *value*. "Why is that important to you?" This open-ended question evokes values.

But we do not stop there. Whatever answer is given, we repeat that answer and ask the two questions about it— Is it important? Why is it important. In fact, we repeat the process of checking the importance and asking "Why is it important?" five to ten times. Doing this invites a person to move up the levels of her intentionality to find (or to create) her highest and biggest and boldest *intentionality*. Then, because that is a state, we invite the person into the state, amplify it and then use a basic meta-stating process so the person can *align* her attentions to her intentions.

Without doing this, the person will otherwise probably be torn between *attention and intention*. The person may have plenty of positive intentions, but unable to focus on them, concentrate, because a multitude of attentions keep arising and distracting. Do you know that one? Yet the very quality of your life is the quality of this integration of you intentions-and-attentions. That is, if you live *attentionally*, then any and every thing that can get your attention will push you here and there as if you were a ping-pong ball in the vortex of life's winds and waves. You will be tossed to and fro and easily lose focus and be unable to live intentionally. Sound familiar? It is not a very healthy or human way to live.

Now we have a problem. *Attentional living*, driven by whatever bright sight, loud sound, compelling sensation, etc. grabs your attention, *is victim-living*. You live as a victim of all of the

triggers and stimuli around you. Instead of being a person who manages and directs your attention, your attention controls you and all of the environmental stimuli controls your attention. That's the way animals live— attentionally.

To be fully human and to be fully alive with the vitality and vigor of a self-actualizing human you need to live *intentionally*. Then you can align your attentions to do service for your highest intentions— that is, the things truly important to you, namely, your values. Do that and you begin to become the architect of your future, the manager of your self, the leader of your self.

When you do that, you have found the cure for *urgency addiction*. Steven Covey described this in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* using the quadrants based on the two axes: important and urgent. All too often, what's urgent and demanding is not important at all. And sadly, what's really important is not urgent— it does not feel urgent. And because it does not create a sense of demand in our minds, we don't feel compelled to do them. Yes living in the urgent quadrant keeps you busy— but that's just the thing. Is the purpose of your life to be busy? I think not.

Isn't the purpose of life to live with meaning and importance —to do what's valuable and significant? That brings us back to *intentionality*. This resurfaces in your everyday experience of *attention*. How many things are you trying to attend to everyday?

Are your *attentions* under your control?

How well can you concentrate your focus on a single thing with a laser-beam focus?

How well can you turn it on and off at your command?

How well can you step into a focused state and be fully present in your daily engagements?

Your answers to these questions speak about *the quality and the development of your intentionality*. And because intentionality is not a primary state, but a meta-state, it is a higher state from which you can direct your primary state of attention. Want to take control? Go higher— go to your higher state of intentionality.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #32
July 24, 2017

DANGER! YOU ARE BECOMING CERTAIN

It was Peter Senge in his classic work, *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) who wrote these bold and challenging words:

“Nothing undermines openness more surely than certainty. Once we feel as if we have ‘the answer,’ all motivation to question our thinking disappears.” (p. 281)

Wow! And given that *openness* is one of the very central components of creativity, and *questioning our own thinking* lies at the heart of mindfulness, reflexive thinking, and many other key leadership skills — *being certain endangers lots of important human assets*. This is not common knowledge and not obvious, and yet a very present danger to our well-being.

Yet, and here is the ironic paradox, we all want to know and to be certain. Don’t you? I certainly do. Generally this is our goal as human beings, we want to be certain about things. With certainty, we feel confident—another quality that most people highly value. So when it comes to aiming for the confidence of being certain, we have to be careful. Ginny Whitelaw in her book, *The Zen Leader*, wrote that the two words that encode certainty, “I know...” is one of the most *self-limiting* phrases (page 146).

- Okay, so do you still want to be certain?
- Do you want to close the door in your search for understanding and for knowing and be certain?
- Or are you good with staying open, to not knowing “for sure?”

Recently in working over the list of cognitive biases and cognitive fallacies, I summarized them in seven categories. The first category is the cognitive bias of *assuming understanding*. In so many things we all think that we know. And about the things that we don’t know, we assume that someone knows. Yet the truth is more than that in most things— no one has “the answer.” And every answer that we do have is at best an approximation and never the final answer.

When you therefore feel certain about something, which we all do from time to time, and tragically some people do all the time(!)— let that moment be a warning to begin questioning your certainty. Then every time you feel that you are right, that should set off the alarm system within. Instead of considering that a good thing, use it as a time to do a check. The seductive thing about being certain is that you experience it emotionally as “confidence.” Yet how many times that feeling tricked you?

Joseph Yeager in *Thinking about Thinking with NLP* (1985) wrote about the many times when we are seduced by the feeling of certainty. Commenting on that, he wrote—

“No doubt Hitler felt he was right when he thought up the ‘final solution.’ ... In the interpersonal sphere, people ‘feel’ they are entitled to opinions. Often that means they have the luxury of acting on phony facts without bothering to check them out.” (p. 91)

“The problem with the feeling of certainty is that it can be very deceiving. It is the basis for much prejudice ... prejudging something before the facts are in. ... When the seductiveness of the ‘certainty’ feeling guides your response, your brain is not being ‘user friendly,’ as Richard Bandler reminds us. As a result we have to learn how to tell good from bad information and the illogical ways we use our mental logic. Too bad for us that we don’t have an *instinct* for good quality information.” (p. 92)

Because the quality of the information we act upon is crucial, we need to do critical thinking. During previous times when people were certain and convinced of the rightness of their interpretations.

“They all had the courage of convictions. Since they operated on faith, they had no need to test their theory. That is one of the reasons that the dark ages lasted so long. The folks all believed they had reality all figured out and explained so they didn’t need to look for any other ways to consider the nature of things.” (1985, p. 93)

The bottom line? *Certainty can be dangerous* to your sanity, to your learning, to your growth as a person, to your effectiveness, and to your self-actualization. Most of the time it seduces you with good feelings so you stop thinking, questioning, checking and just go along with whatever.

Openness occurs between people when they are willing to suspend their own certainty in each other’s presence. When they do that, they can then share and let their thinking be influenced by each other. It is this willingness to be vulnerable to not knowing and not having the final answer enables us to have a real conversation. Here’s to being able to embrace uncertainty and to stay open to new information and perspectives that can expand our understanding and discoveries!

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #33
July 31, 2017

IF THERE'S A PROBLEM ... IT'S THE FRAME

For many years I had a “sprinkler man” by the name of Troy. I hired him to install a sprinkler system in the yards of some properties that I had. I also hired him for several years to turn the sprinkler systems on in the spring and then off in the late fall, that is to winterize them. Now Troy was in his mid-40s although he looked more as if he was in his late 50s or even 60s. Life had been hard for him— he dropped out of high school in the ninth grade, got into drugs and various forms of mischief, and for most of his life, he struggled just to keep his head above water, barely paying his bills.

Though he had very little education, Troy was smart and did have a degree of natural talent with mechanical things. He had learned how to fix things, how to work on cars and various machines and so when I met him I needed someone to work on my sprinkler systems and wanting to help him out, I hired him to do numerous things.

A few years back, he went through some heartbreaks in his personal life (got divorced), lost a lot of business, drank too much, spent some time in jail, etc. One day I called him to come and fix some broken pipes. He was really down that day, discouragement was carved on his face and I had never seen him like that. So I asked, “What’s going on? Why the long face?” We talked a bit, and by empathizing with him, he warmed up and then asked me something he had never asked in spite of years of working for me. “What do you do?”

Now I don’t think I have ever answered that question the same way twice. It’s as if I’m constantly trying to figure out *what do I do? And how do I even talk about it?* In that moment I said, “I empower people to live their highest meanings and take their performances to new levels of experience.” He then asked, “Oh, so you are a counselor?”

“No, no way! I am an *empowerer of people* so that they can unleash their potentials and live life more fully — fully alive and fully human.”

Of course, a lot of that was a tease, and Troy took it. “So *how* do you do that? I don’t understand, what do you mean *an empowerer of people?*” That was an opening and so I took it.

“I work with a special kind of psychology— a positive psychology about people that looks for their potentials and possibilities. This psychology starts from the idea that if there is a problem, the person is never the problem, the problem is the frames of mind or meanings that they give something. ... [pause] ... The person is never the problem, the frame is always the problem.”

Hearing that Troy seemed to relax. He took a deep breathe, seemed reflexive in thought, and then told me about being forced to counseling in the past, “but it never worked.”

“Hmmm. And what didn’t work about it?”

He said that they kept telling him things to do “which I already knew. But they never told me how to do any of those things. So it never worked.” After we talked a bit about frames, I got a copy of *Winning the Inner Game* and gave it to him. “Read this, I think it will help.”

Two days later the phone rang, it was Troy, “I’ve been reading your book and I have learned so much.” I asked about what he had learned. “I have been catching all kinds of frames in my mind that’s causing me to be down and discouraged.” I asked for specifics and he gave them and I congratulated him on his progress. A week later I met him at one of my rentals and he said he was up to Chapter 13 on “Covert Frames.” “Yesterday I started catching those sneaky frames that have been defeating me.” I asked, “Like what?”

“Like the idea that I have to tell people what they want to hear or they won’t give me work.”

I then asked, “How is that a sneaky self-defeating frame for you?”

“Well, it makes me afraid to speak up to them and especially to tell the truth; it makes me lie to them and I know that even while I’m lying I’m aware that I’m just a liar. Now I see that I am lying to get people to like me and give me a chance, but it makes me life as a mess.”

There was a long pause. I eventually said, “And?”

“I have been trying to change that frame to ‘People want the truth,’ just like you told me that you would prefer me to tell you when I can’t get to a job rather than tell you that I would and then not do it. And it is really strange, I think it is working!”

He was surprised that it was working. I asked him more about that and we had a really good talk. In fact, after that I never had the problem of him promising me to do something and him not coming through.

One of the great secrets to effective problem solving is realizing that “problems” do not actually exist. They are not external phenomenon. You can’t see one or hear one or smell one. You cannot weigh it. “Problems” do not exist in that realm. *They exist in the mind— as an interpretation or meaning of something.* That’s why the place to solve a problem is first in the mind. If there is a problem, the frame (of meaning) is the problem. That’s why clearly defining a problem solves 50 or more percent of problems! A problem clearly defined is half solved.

Troy began with the idea that

“I need to please people and get their approval. Otherwise they will disapprove of me and be unhappy and then I’ll lose their business.”

But that idea created problems for him. It led him to promising more than he could deliver on. So in over-promising he essentially lied to get business, to cover-up mistakes, to make up excuses, etc. All negative consequences of that idea. Negative symptoms. They are not the problem. The real problem was and is the frame.

The idea that solves all of those self-created problems is simply — “People want the truth even if they don’t like to hear it.” This idea as a frame of mind creates credibility and trust over time. solves the first problem.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #34
August 7, 2017

CREATIVELY EXPERIMENTING

Earlier this year I write a dozen posts on basic NLP concepts. While that series covered most, it did not include every concept. So, here's another basic NLP concept. It is not one of the formal NLP Presuppositions, yet it is one of the common statements that NLP Practitioners use in their work. And it is one that offers a basic guideline or heuristic for being more effective in communicating and being productive. Here it is:

If what you are doing is not working—do something different.

Now while it is a great idea and probably seems obvious, the fact is that most of us do not actually operate by this basic concept. Test yourself.

- “How often do you keep repeating some action or way of talking or way of thinking especially when it is not working and has not worked? Do you ever do that?”
- “How many times should I attempt to do something when it does not work before moving on and trying something else?”

Good questions. Obviously, if you think that you know something to do that has a good chance of working, you will want to give it *a good try*. You will want to *do it from your best state* when you are feeling good and *persist over a period of time* in a realistic way. After that, if you are still not getting the results you want and realistically expect— then try something else.

This is really crucial in communication. If you want a different response from another person, and the things you are doing are not getting the responses you want— *do something different*. The idea is that after you have demonstrated that something is not working, stop doing it. What many in NLP then quote is the Einstein quote: “Insanity is keep doing the same thing and hoping for a different result.” Another great quote of immense wisdom!

So what's the problem? Ah, a cognitive bias and a thinking fallacy that gets us all— *investment*. Once you have invested in something— it becomes harder and harder to give it up. Even investing in a way of thinking, way of feeling, way of talking, way of acting, way of relating— in each you are investing your mental and emotional energies, you are investing in what you think will work. So quitting, giving up, stopping — that's hard. Yet if something is not working and you keep doing it— you are now engaging in self-defeating behavior.

Another basic communication concept at work here is this: You are always getting a response. So look at it! Recognizing that you are always getting a response, and always will, then if it is not the desired response that you are hoping for, the most effective thing to do is *something different*. Say what you are saying in a different way, use your non-verbal expressions differently, use some different words, change the context, etc. If you want the same response, just repeat what you did.

Applying this to communication leads us to realize this: *You always succeed when you communicate because you always get a response.* How about that? You always succeed! The question now is— what are you successfully generating? Is that response which you are getting, the response you want? You never fail, and cannot fail simply because you always succeed in getting some response even if it is not a response that you want. This frame takes your communications and actions out of the realm of success or failure. It puts it into the realm of quality — is the response you are successfully getting the *quality* of response that you want? If not, change your response. When the response isn't the response you aimed for, take that situation as an opportunity to experiment. Try different things to find out what other responses you will receive.

And all of this takes us to the subject of *creativity*— creating a new a different response. After all, this is what creative people do— they experiment. They keep checking the results that they are getting and if it is not succeeding in getting the desired results, they experiment with what else they could do. How about you? Is that how you operate?

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #35
August 13, 2017

FIGHTING HITLER TODAY

You would think— well, at least I think(!)— that we would have learned the lesson of history with the disasters that Hitler brought about on this planet and the World War that followed that eventually stopped him. His ideas of white supremacy led him to think he had the right to terminate inferior races that led to all sorts of human evil to humans.

Question: What drove him into such sick thinking?

Answer: His own sick state of inferiority and his ugly “solution” by putting others down so he could lift himself up. See *Games Hitler Played* (Feb. 2000) which is on www.neurosemantics.com for an analysis of the frames that drove him and some of the historical factors that led to that disaster.

The tragedy over the weekend by the fanatical “white racists” (the neo-Nazis) in Charlottesville Virginia sadly indicates that the thought viruses that informed Hitler continues to feed hate and shameful prejudice. From a psychological perspective, I would guess that those who are attracted to that message but similarly struggle with low self-esteem and falsely think that they will help themselves by putting others down. An obviously toxic way of thinking!

True enough, the first amendment of the US Constitution gives them and others the right to speak whatever they want to speak even if it is wrong and stupid. We do not have “free speech” only when we are right. Even ignorant and uninformed people, even prejudiced people have the right for “free speech.” What free speech does not give is the right to do is to hurt, hit, or wound those who disagree. This is where protests is one thing, riots are another.

As it takes two to have a fight, I say this to the anti-protesters —*stay away*. While I agree with you about anyone who is racist and especially anyone who is a neo-Nazi — if there were no anti-protesters present at the protest, then the neo-Nazis protesters would have no one to fight with! Let them protest the removal of a statute. So what? Let them say whatever stupid things they want to say. Stay home and stop giving them energy and someone to fight.

Social movements and beliefs *grow* with there is resistance. *The resistance feeds it*. As long as the neo-Nazis do not have any “power” to actually do anything, the best way to fight them is to leave them alone! Treat the non-sense of their ideology as irrelevant and meaningless. When we fight a psychological error of stupidity, we give it energy. We treat it as real. Conversely, when we treat it in the same way we would treat someone’s idea of alien’s possessing human bodies —the idea gets little attention, little energy, and hopefully will pass.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #36
August 14, 2017

PERSUASION: THE CHALLENGE OF MODELING

Once you know that your mind moves out in a linear way, thinking one thing, then another, you can learn the basic NLP Strategy Model which is the foundation for NLP Modeling. In the field of NLP, this has led to modeling a good number of things that we *do in the moment*— get up in the morning, make a decision, spell accurately, buy a product, develop a strategy for eating healthily and moderately, exercise regularly, etc. But the Strategy Model does not work well for *activities that occur over time* or that involve layers of thought.

That's where knowing and understanding how to work with the other way your mind works becomes important. What is that other way that your mind works? We call it *self-reflexivity*— *your mind reflects back on itself*. And when it does, you create states-about-states, thoughts-about-thoughts, feelings-about-feelings, thoughts-about-feelings, feelings-about-thoughts, etc. This complexity of your mental-emotional functioning describes the systemic nature of consciousness and is modeled by the Meta-States Model.

One consequence that has resulted from the Meta-States Model is that we are now able to model the structure of experiences that are complex, that are layered by multiple frames of mind, that are systemic, and that result in gestalt states. A “gestalt” state is a *state* that is “more than and different from the sum of the parts.” As a systemic state it is an *emergent property*— one that arises due to the system that's created by the layered frames or states. Courage is such a gestalt state which is why the “parts” of courage and the gestalt of “*courage*” itself is not understood by adding up all of the parts. It is “more than” and “different from” the parts.

That brings me to *persuasion*. The state of *being persuasive* and being able to effectively *influence the minds and hearts of people* is not a simple primary state. Nor is it just one or two meta-states. It is a gestalt state— more than and different from the sum of the parts.

Given that, when I first began modeling persuasive people like Nelson Mandela, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., etc., I collected as many of the component “parts” or variables as I could. I then looked for *the relationships between these variables* and from there identified the basic strategies that make up the structure of what we call “persuasion.” This is the basic content of the book, *Inside-Out Persuasion*, as well as the training by the same title.

And there is more! There's a reason for more. That's because so much of what is called “persuasion” is actually manipulation. It is not healthy or respectful persuasion, it is deception, trickery, psychological maneuvers and techniques designed to get you to go along with someone

else's goals without any consideration that it is to your benefit. And *I did not want to model that!* My goal was to model healthy, respectful, win/win, authentic, and ethical persuasion. I did not want to model “outside in” persuasion —the tricks that manipulators use to get their own way. I wanted to model “inside-out” persuasion— where the persuasion comes from the character of the person.

No wonder modeling ethical persuasion is so challenging. It not only involves what you say and do (the external factors), it involves who you are and how you think and feel (the internal factors). It not only involves your psychology— your understandings about influencing the minds and hearts of people, the value of your product or service, the way to communicate in a way that is winsome. It also involves your identity and character— your intentions, openness, authenticity, compassion, win/win orientation — in a word, your *person*.

Why? Because the most effective persuaders persuade from their *person*— *who they are and the quality of their person*. That's why merely being in their presence influences. When they walk into a room, when they interact, when they speak, when they meet you — their very presence carries a force of persuasion. Sometimes we call that “charisma” which means *grace*. Now, how does that work? What's the structure of that?

The short answer to that is the persuasion is inside-out, it starts with the person him or herself being persuade and persuade-able. Ah, we are back to the basic Neuro-Semantic theme — first apply to self. That is, before you can truly be persuasive with others, you have to achieve *self-persuasion*. Check that one out— How skilled are you in persuading yourself about something? Is there anything that you know would be good for you, useful, effective, that would make your life better— and yet you are not “persuaded” to the point of actually *doing* it? If so, that's the place to start.

Here's another clue. What I found in my research and modeling was that “the structure of persuasion is very similar to the structure of high quality coaching.” (*Inside-Out Persuasion*, p. 35). The relational and communication skills of coaching are, at the same time, the skills for high quality persuasion.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #37
August 14, 2017

WHY I LIKE TO CHALLENGE PEOPLE

If there's one thing that I enjoy in training and coaching, it is challenging. During the past two weeks in Brazil while doing the Trainers' Training, David Murphy brought that to my attention several times as we co-trained. It also became a point of laughter at times someone announced that David was the nurturer and I the challenger. But, you may ask, "Why?" "Why do you like to challenge people?" Or you may ask, "Isn't challenging people kind of mean or even sadistic?"

Of course, it all depends on how we define the term "challenge." Recently on the Coaches egroup I distinguished five positive and different behaviors that go under the category of challenge. The primary one is —*inviting someone to stretch, to step up their game, to take on a challenge so that he or she can do more, think more, feel more, be more and give more.* Given this definition, here's my reasons why I like challenging people.

First and foremost, *I like challenging because so many people (maybe most people) play small.* They sell themselves short in terms of their potentials, of what they could do, what they could be. Instead of stretching to the next level in what they could experience or achieve, they develop a habit of going for the path of least resistance. It is easier. Yet it is a dangerous default program. Instead of striving and struggling to get the best out of themselves, they drift along without much passion or vision or a sense of mission in life.

Consequently, since they do not cultivate their life-energy, they experience little real vitality. That makes them a prime candidate for seeking external stimulus in the form of entertainment, shows, theater, movies, sit-coms, etc. their life energy comes from outside rather than from inside. They give in to passively drifting in life rather than taking the initiative and being proactive in developing a vital vision that infuses them with energy from the inside-out.

As a result they are not "fully alive, fully human," to use one of the terms for self-actualization. That's why I like challenging people. I love to see people *wake up to life and to love and to the liberation of vision.* I love watching people shake off the blinders of passivity and take charge of their life and begin to be a force for good in the world. I delight in watching someone start to play a larger game— one with more energy and care and commitment.

Second, *I love to see people access their "personal genius state."* That's what we in Neuro-Semantics call the flow state, the state of being in the zone, the optimal state wherein a person is truly alive and energized from the inside out. This is the engagement state of intense laser-beam focus. A person in that state is on purpose— engaged with a strong focus and fully present in whatever he or she is doing. Watching a person in that state is like watching an Olympic athlete

in action. The person is “all there,” fully present and not double-tracking.

And then, being totally engaged, the person is involved in an activity seeking to accomplish something that’s typically difficult and worthwhile. The challenge for them is to stretch to their next level and push their limits of capability. As a result, most people later reflect back and recognize that those are the best moments of life. Because I love to watch people in that state, I want to challenge them. I want to help them push through the barriers until they achieve that level of intensely focused consciousness.

Third, *when people step up in these ways and stretch forward—they expand their capabilities, they become more competent, more skilled, and more creative.* I like watching that! After all, it is creativity that changes the world. Is it any wonder then that I really, really enjoy doing the training on Creativity and Innovation?

Fourth, *inviting challenge gives people an opportunity to experience the joy of winning over difficulties.* There’s something that’s nearly magical about winning over difficulties. When we first face a difficult, it can seem overwhelming, impossible, and beyond us. Then we start learning, pushing, struggling, developing, and eventually, when we reach the end and overcome the difficulty—we get to the peak of the mountain, there’s a sense of having embraced a magnificent difficulty. This doesn’t occur with mediocre activities. It occurs when you set ambitious goals in your life and you seek a level of challenge just difficult enough to still be manageable. Then with that manageable difficulty you show what you are made of, you show your spirit.

You could have given up, you did not. It reminds me of the movie, “Cool Runnings,” in which Actor John Candy talks to a character by the name of Maurice, who is the commissioner regarding bob sledding team. Candy wants a team from Jamaca. And he will just not give up. He keeps asking and proposing. Finally the commissioner asks, “Do the words ‘give up’ mean anything to you?” Candy responds, “No! Not a thing.” May “giving up” mean *not a thing* to you!

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #38
August 17, 2017

WHEN HATERS AND HATERS OF HATERS MEET

Last Saturday in Charlettsville Virginia, minority groups who are known to *hate* (i.e., the KKK, the neo-Nazis, and various white supremacist groups) were involved with others to protest the removing of a Confederacy General from the Civil War era (1860-1865). As extremist groups, they tend to be ugly in their protests and to invite violence. Then others from the left who *hate* those who *hate* showed up to protest against their protest. If that sounds like a dangerous and explosive situation— you're right. It was!

Those who *hate* diversity and multi-culturalism were met by those who *hate* their hatred. And all of them seemed to personalize their hate so that they did not just hate the other side's ideas or beliefs, they *hated them*. Watching the riot scenes on TV — both groups were carrying bats, clubs, rocks, and some had guns (although apparently not fired), and both got into fist-fights as they pushed and shoved each other. This was not freedom of speech; this was violence. This is what happens when people do not distinguish person and behavior.

Then the media people began asking, “Who's right and who's wrong?” But this question from the media is far too simplistic a question. It creates as many problems as it solves. That's what either-or questions often do. Consider this from a meta-state perspective: those who were part of the anti-protest were *protesting the protest*; they were *hating the hate*. No wonder the two groups clashed! No wonder both sides were violent and ugly— both were involved in *hate* to such an extent that they were absolutely intolerant of each other. This is not the way a democracy or a civil society should work. It is a revival of medievalism.

In President Trump's first statement, he said there were problems on both sides—a fair statement. It was a reasonable and calm statement seeking to hold both sides responsible. But did the media see it that way? Of course not! For two days the unending media kept asking him to name the KKK and Neo-Nazis. So he did. Did that end things for the media? Of course not. They needed a sensationalize story and so they invented one. Given how President Obama jumped to conclusions at similar incidents and ended up making statements that turned out to be completely false, it was mature response for Trump to withhold judgment and wait for more data.

The Sources of the Problem

There are many. The problem goes, first of all, to *all of the people on both sides* who grabbed clubs and rocks and chemicals to spray and blow-torches and other weapons and went to a protest! Who does that? Who has time to do that kind of thing? Who has any desire to go mix it up with people with a different view and yell and scream at each other— with no one listening? Who considers that fun or a way to spend your weekend? Don't the protesters have a life?

The problem secondly, goes to the media— they want to highlight anything they can spin as sensational, they want simplistic answers, and most of all, they want to bash Trump (at least that's what they are constantly doing). How is it that with all of the violence of that went on—the only injuries that required hospitalization was what one person did, what the 20-year old who ran his car into the crowd killing one and wounding 19 others?

The problem also goes to the psychology of dogmatism in the protesters and the protesters-of-the-protesters. Personally I would guess that anyone attracted to those minority groups do so because of personal psychological problems of insecurity, low self-esteem, traumatized childhoods, meaninglessness, etc. Bringing *hate* to their own self-hate and protesting their right to protest isn't going to improve things. How could it? How much better to meta-state the *hate* with *kindness* or *love* or *understanding*, etc.?

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #39
August 21, 2017

CRITICAL THINKING FOR THE MEDIA

The media everywhere ought to be trained in critical thinking. That's my view. Why? Because there is so much that is the opposite of critical thinking in almost every broadcast of the news. In fact, every listener to the news and every receiver of the media ought also to be trained in critical thinking as well. Why? Because it is dangerous to one's mental and emotional health to do otherwise. You and I and every member of the media ought to be trained in critical thinking for our own basic sanity and well-being. That will reduce the likelihood of "fake news"—deceptions, dis-information, lies, propaganda, etc.

What is the opposite of critical thinking? What would you call it? Shall we call it "sloppy thinking," "imprecise thinking," "lazy thinking," "biased thinking," "cognitive distortion thinking?" An argument can be made, and has been made, by writers and thinkers in the field of critical thinking, for each of those. Whatever the term we use, it refers to a highly unuseful and ineffective way of thinking.

Now, to more fully understand what is the opposite, it is useful to recognize what *critical thinking* means. Generally, the term refers to—

- Thinking clearly, precisely, and without prejudice.
- "Disciplined thinking that's clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence."
- Real thinking that relies on thinking through the facts, evidence, ways of reasoning with an awareness of the cognitive biases, fallacies, and distortions.

Now here's a plug for basic NLP—*the NLP Meta-Model of Language* is a tremendous tool for critical thinking. Did you know that? It is. The 21 distinctions of the expanded Meta-Model gives you 21 linguistic distinctions to look for and discern so that you can then *ask critical thinking questions*. Did you know that? You didn't? Great, then you're in for a delightful surprise when you go back and re-study the Meta-Model!

Study the original Meta-Model by reading *The Structure of Magic* (1975).

Study the expanded Meta-Model by reading *Communication Magic* (2001).

What will you find in the Meta-Model that will enhance your ability to think clearly and precisely? You will discover key problems (called "ill-formed structures" or ill-formedness) to accurate thinking. You will discover some of the inherent problems in language that you need to be aware of so that you can avoid doing it yourself and know how to respond to those linguistic-semantic problems when others use it on you. What the Meta-Model offers is a set of questions and with them you can get to the underlying experience that the language is attempting to

describe. If they'll engage, it will help them to communicate more clearly.

The point? Language is not innocent. Language itself is loaded with all sorts of problems. As a set of linguistic maps, language mis-maps the territory of reality and thereby mis-directs our understandings and responses. If you don't know that— you will be an unconscious victim of those distorted maps and may be a victim of the person who use those crooked, unsane, and biased linguistic forms. After all, the language that you use creates and defines much of the “reality” that you live within.

Given all that, those involved in “the media” today seem to be almost completely clueless as to what they are doing and the confusion, mis-information, distortions, and problems that they are creating. I say “seem” clueless rather than make the judgment that they know what they are doing and are intentionally deceiving us. I don't know that and I hope that is not the case. What I do know is that they constantly violate the structure of well-formed sentences in their reports. If I make that judgment, I would be making a linguistic distortion and ill-formed structure called “mind-reading.” I would be assuming that I know their mind and “reading” their mind by announcing their intentions. That's one example of linguistic distortions and biases.

Once upon a time journalists learned the distinction between *description* and *evaluation*. But no longer. In almost every news report that I read or hear— the speakers are making no clear distinction between these. They through in *evaluations* constantly and do not seem to even know what they are doing. Some seem to be clueless about the difference.

What is that difference? *Descriptive language* uses empirical language of things that you can see, hear, sense, smell, etc. *Evaluative language* involves a person's interpretation about what the description *means* to them. Watch for it whenever there is a word or phrase that you cannot see or hear. When this happens— “the media” is no longer reporting the facts, they are propagandizing with their opinions and interpretations. They are “spinning” the news so that they can support their political point of view.

Because this is everywhere— on TV broadcasts, cable news, newspapers, social media, internet, etc. *what can we do about this?* We can begin by learning and using the Meta-Model in our own language use. This means learning to distinguish the linguistic distinctions that indicate an ill-formed structure and asking the Meta-Model question that cleans up that distortion, deletion, or over-generalization.

We can also call attention to the *un-critical thinking* that we see and hear in the media so that others begin to learn to distinguish true facts from the imposed conclusions that people put on those facts.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #40
August 28, 2017

AND THEN HE CRITICIZED THE MEDIA!

Wow! This past week when President Trump criticize the media in his rally in Phoenix and from the response of the media (generally), you would have thought that all of modern civilization was on the verge of plunging into hell or some other apocalyptic catastrophe. There was a storm of criticism from the media about him criticizing the media! This followed from having just completed writing about the media's need to engage in some critical thinking regarding the way that most are reporting these days (Neurons #39).

Interesting enough on Monday night President Trump addressed the nation about the war in Afghanistan and nearly everyone recognized the presidential tone and nature of that presentation. Then on Tuesday in the rally, simply because he turned his attention to the media and explained (actually giving details) about how some of them have been creating "fake news" distorting what he has actually said and one ... he "criticized" the "fake news." He also "criticized" them for not reporting the progress that he's already made. In his speech, he focused on repeating what he said specifically when he condemned racism and how much of the media distorted that. He said that he wanted to "expose their role in fomenting divisions" in the country and that for "the source of the division in our country, look no further than the fake news and crooked media." That's what was said.

How did the media respond to the criticism? Well, not very well! Did they engage in some fact-finding analysis or even better, acknowledge that some of the coverage has been biased? Of course not! I am in Manila in the Philippines and the only two stations I could get here is CNN and BCC and from their reporting I would have concluded that he lost his mind, went insane, became mentally unstable and the world now stands on the brink of destruction.

That's certainly the impression that they gave. CNN said that the rally was a "blistering rally" and that he *attacked* the media, and because of that, it was "*a dark day*" because the President "*threatened* the media." Then to explain why he would criticize them, they engaged in the highest level of mind-reading— "this speaks to a *personal vendetta*," "it suggests he's *unstable*," "*ranting* like this questions his fitness for the office," "he is *not mentally well*," "he was *angry, rude, unrestrained, unhinged*." They must have mentioned his anger dozens of times.

The next day CNN was reporting that his statements indicated "a total eclipse of the facts," that he "lied to the American people," that it was "devoid of wisdom. It had no sanity." "He has given oxygen to racism, he is starting a civil war in this country." Repeatedly they question his sanity, "this is not sane behavior." He is "a 71-year old man-baby." "He is not mentally well." He is the "bigot in chief." And why? Because he was "unrestrained," he was "lashing out." He was "committing fratricide."(!) It was because "the insult that went on and on. And it is only a

matter of time before someone gets hurt.”

Wow! Now if this kind of a response occurred between individuals, we would immediately recognize that the person reacting to the criticism certainly cannot take criticism, is overly-sensitive, and very defensive. It would be obvious also that the person isn’t even listening or considering the facts within the criticism. *The response is a particular bias*, we call it *ad hominen* which means “to the person or character.” That is, this cognitive fallacy is one where when you can’t, or do not, address the facts of the conversation, *you attack the person*. Instead of talking about the subject, you call the person names, you attack his character, intelligence, history, whatever.

What CNN did *not* report was that in “blaming both parties” President Trump also said this:
“No matter our color, creed, religion or political party, we are all Americans first.” He said “We condemn this egregious display of racism in the strongest possible terms.”
“Racism is evil and those who cause evil in its name are thugs, including the KKK, the white supremacists, etc.”

What’s Needed

What’s needed is being able to talk about the facts in a calm and neutral way, objectively considering things without imposing it with our interpretations. This is the foundation of science. It is the art of critical thinking. It is also the foundation of a healthy group, healthy communications, and democracy itself. If we can’t do that, if we color the facts with our views and interpretations, then we will not be able to communicate our different views and understandings.

What is needed is to *not* expect that everyone will agree with our views about psychology or philosophy or politics, but to desire and work so that we can *talk about our differences respectfully*. This includes talking about our assumptions, premises, beliefs, etc. What is needed is to make our communications respectful even if we strongly disagree. How I treat you as a person, as a human being, should not be dependent on you agreeing with my views.

What’s needed is the NLP Communication Model and guidelines. That would enable all of us to distinguish descriptive sensory-based language from interpretative evaluative language. That would enable us to receive and give behavioral feedback, to listen without interrupting, to summarize what we’ve heard and check it with the speaker, to ask questions more than telling. Obviously, because the media showed a hyper-sensitivity revealing their own humanity and need for a model to govern their behavior. I recommend learning NLP!

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #41
September 4, 2017

PERSUASION: MAKING IT REAL AND ETHICAL

This weekend (September 1-3) I delivered, for the very first time, the training from the *Inside-Out Persuasion* approach. This training has actually been many years in the making. While I finished the book earlier this year and it was published a few months ago, I actually began writing it in 2004. Then I stopped. I put the manuscript away. What stopped me was a the question. A question about the ethics of persuasion. “How can we teach and use persuasion processes and techniques in a human, humane, and ethical way?” And that question arises from a all-too-common fact of life: *Anything powerful can be powerfully misused.*

It was only when I studied and modeled *authenticity* that I was able to formulate persuasion in an essential ethical framework. That modeling led to the book and the training on that subject, *Get Real: Becoming Your Real Self* (2016). If you also are wondering, “Can I exercise intentional influence on others and do so in a way that’s respectful, truthful, honest, and honoring?” I discovered that the answer is “Yes!” If you are wondering, “Is it possible to become aware of people who are using influence techniques covertly and trying to get me to do something to my disadvantage?” and the answer to that is also “Yes!”

We can make persuasion real. How? By starting with yourself. First learn how to *influence* yourself. After all, if you cannot persuade yourself to do what you believe in, understand, value, and want— if you can’t influence yourself, whatever “influence” or “persuasion” that you attempt to apply to others is not going to be very effective or honest. So with regard to *self-persuasion*, how are you?

This highlights one of the ongoing themes in Neuro-Semantics — *apply to self* so that you can close the knowing–doing gap. That’s the gap between what you know and what you do. Understanding and knowing is about learning and discovering, doing is about implementation and execution. What could be the problem that you might have in actually performing what you know?

- Perhaps you have a lot of noise in your mind so that there’s a lot of chatter going on, lots of negative self-talk, lots of recordings of other people’s voices that you keep play over and over.
- Perhaps you have a fear-based mind and constantly run worrisome scenarios that make you anxious and fearful.
- Perhaps you have conflicting wants, hopes, fears, dreads, beliefs, etc. so that you feel torn apart and are incongruent when you try to go for one thing.
- Perhaps you are tortured by your past and can’t seem to get away from it, that it keeps coming up again and again.

Someone asked me in the training about what patterns he could use to deal with these things and enhance his self-persuasion. When I started thinking about that I heard myself say, “That’s what NLP Practitioner course is all about. It is about ‘running your own brain.’ It’s about taking charge of how you represent things, talk to yourself, manage your states, etc.” Then I said something I’ve never have said before or framed it is just this way before:

“*That* one skill ought to be the single most important skill that we check for competency regarding a Practitioner Certificate— ‘Can this person run his own brain?’ ‘Does she control her self-talk so that it is nurturing and supportive?’ ‘Does he know how to treat himself kindly and gently when he’s made a mistake?’ The certificate should only go to those who have applied NLP to themselves and who can now ‘run their own brains.’”

This actually fits with a quote from the book, *Using Your Brain for a Change* (1985). Steve Andreas edited this book from some of Richard Bandler’s training.

"Most people don't actively and deliberately use their own brains. Your brain is like a machine without an ‘off’ switch. If you don't give it something to do, it just runs on and on until it gets bored. If you put someone in a sensory deprivation tank where there's no external experience, he'll start generating internal experience. If your brain is sitting around without anything to do, it's going to start doing something, and it doesn't seem to care what it is. *You* may care, but *it* doesn't...

I want you to find out how you can learn to change your own experience, and get some control over what happens in your brain. Most people are prisoners of their own brains. It's as if they are chained to the last seat of the bus and someone else is driving. *I want you to learn how to drive your own bus.* If you don't give your brain a little direction, either it will just run randomly on its own, or other people will find ways to run it for you—and they may not always have your best interests in mind. Even if they do, they may get it wrong!" (pp. 7-8, italics added).

Self-Persuasion is the foundation for all good healthy and ethical persuasion. If you can’t persuade yourself to get yourself to do what you know you should be doing— *you are not ready to try to influence someone else!* First take care of home base. That’s what NLP Practitioner and what APG, the Introduction to Meta-States, is all about. So start there. When you achieve that then you will be ready for the other trainings we have in Neuro-Semantics on persuasion:

Mind-Lines: Lines for changing Minds —	<i>Persuasive Framing and Reframing</i>
Selling Genius: Selling with Integrity —	<i>Persuasive Selling Strategies</i>
Inside-Out Persuasion —	<i>Persuasively Impactful Conversations</i>

Self-persuasion enables you to make the influence you exert healthy because it is authentic. As you get real, as you first persuade yourself, then your persuasive message is congruent, comes from integrity, and invites others to also get real with you. There’s no covert messages, no deception, manipulation, or tricks. You are upfront, honest, and candid. Are you ready for some high level persuasion skills?

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #42
September 11, 2017

THE AMAZING PARADOX OF THE PERSUASION PROCESS

I put several amazing paradoxes in the book on persuasion, *Inside-Out Persuasion*, that was published earlier this year. And one of those amazing paradoxes concerns how the persuasion process actually works. It is paradoxical, surprising, unexpected, and most of all— completely opposite of how persuasion is usually described and how those who train it do so. Now in saying it is *paradoxical*, what this means when you discover it is that it will feel counter-intuitive and even contradictory. It may not even make sense when you first hear it. But if you give it a chance, the secrets will be revealed to you.

Now the *process of persuasion* goes to the field of communication and how we send messages back and forth as we seek to understand each other and as we seek to influence each other. It begins with seeking to influence each other's thinking and way-of-thinking. And inevitably when we do this, we cannot but help to influence each other. Influence is built into the very structure of communication. That's why "communion" lies at its heart and also the idea of "co-union." Communication entails far more than talking, it is the seeking to understand and that requires *trying on each other's thoughts*. Without that, there can be no understanding.

It starts there, and yet there's more. There's actually a lot more. Persuasion requires *dialogue*. Those who think it is about a pitch— a presentation, a sales spiel, etc., truly do not understand the process or the psychology behind influencing another's mind and emotions to evoke a response. People are seldom influenced by being told things. Lectures, sermons, instructions, etc.— these are not the most powerful influence processes. Much more powerful is dialogue. And that means the flowing *through* ("dia") each person the meanings and words ("logos") of each person. Unlike the monologues of telling, lecturing, selling, etc., dialogue involves two people trying on each other's ideas and believing that the best ideas will emerge from the encounter.

The process of persuasion also goes to another field—the field of change. In that field, the most fundamental premise or principle is a strange one, namely, "I can change no one, I can only change myself, yet when I change, those in relationship to me are influenced to change." I cannot change anyone else directly because I cannot directly *think thoughts for them or feel feelings in their body*. I can only influence them by speaking to them and inviting them to try on some thoughts. They may do that; they may not. That's within their control. It is their choice if they do so or not. So while I cannot directly and immediately change another person, I can invite a change— evoke, elicit, suggest, recommend, etc.

Now we are getting to the heart of the persuasion process— *only the person him or herself can change him or herself*. Only the person can take my invitations in any or all of its forms and

influence himself. Only the person can use my elicitations to persuade herself. So ultimately each individual person is the person, and the only person, who can persuade that person. In other words, *all persuasion is ultimately self-persuasion*. Amazing isn't it? Counter-intuitive also.

Most persuasion operates in a very different way. Most trainings and books on persuasion present it the persuasion strategy in this way:

Objective: I want you to do something, buy something, think something, believe something.

Motivation: I believe it is for your good. It will make your life better. Or at least I convince myself of that or tell myself that. That's the motivation I offer you. My motivation is that I want something from you so I use various techniques to get it from you.

Method: I set out to convince you, charm you, inspire you, scare you, etc. If I do these particular persuasive things, you will respond as I want you to response. I find your strings and pull them, you dance. I find your buttons and push them, you jump.

But that's manipulation, that's not persuasion. That's puppetry! True persuasion is an invitation via dialogue, it is an offer for an exchange of value, it is a dance of dialogue communication, a dance of discovery.

Consider this with regard to coaching and therapy. A client in both domains comes to a coach or a therapist and essentially is paying the professional to persuade him and influence him so that he can persuade himself to do what will make his life better. This is especially true for most coaching clients because they already know what they want but are not able to get themselves to embody it and make it real in their lives. They are essentially saying to the coach, "Influence me so I can influence myself to *do* what I *know*." The therapy client often is under the illusion that the therapist will somehow "make" her healthy. "Do something to me, influence me, persuade me. I need your influence." Only later does the person realize that they have to do it and the psychotherapist is there to guide and support them.

The bottom line is that, ultimately, all change is self-change and all persuasion is self-persuasion. This means that real persuasion is not something we do to another person. Rather it is a shared experience that occurs through dialogue. That makes it a conversation—a persuasive conversation that we co-create. Now you know the reason for the title of the training: *Persuasively Impactful Conversations*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #43
September 18, 2017

THE HARDEST PERSON YOU'LL EVER SEEK TO PERSUADE

Someone asked me recently about the newest Neuro-Semantic book, *Inside-Out Persuasion*, “Why did you write about *that*?” I asked, “You mean about the subject of persuasion?” “Yes, why persuasion? You already wrote *Mind-Lines: Lines for Changing Minds*, so why another book on persuasion?”

Now because the questioner was a Meta-Coach, I said “Because *I want you persuasive*. Then I added, “*And I want you to be persuasive in a respectful and ethical way.*” After all, that is a win for you and a win for me. As you enhance your skills of persuasion, you will be much more successful in getting clients, getting into organizations, and influencing the people that you need and want to influence. And that will open many doors of opportunity for you to make a difference for individuals, families, companies, etc. And that’s a win for me because your success is my success.

That immediately brought up another concern and the person’s second question, “You know I think I have a problem with persuading myself. There’s still some things that I know and believe in—things that I am still not doing.” My comment to that was, “Well, welcome to the club! You now know the hardest person of all to persuade!”

Strange? Well, let’s explore this idea. How are you at persuading yourself? How are you at getting yourself to do and follow-through on what you want to do? Ah, yes, the old *knowing–doing gap* again! We *know* what to do to improve our health, our fitness, our business, our relationships, our finances, our wealth creation, and on and on *and yet* how many of us also have a challenge in actually *doing* what we know we should do?

The principle here is this—if you can’t persuade yourself to do what you want to do—how will you be able to persuade others? How will you be able to positively influence those who you want to touch with the value that you can offer? In terms of persuasion, the first person to persuade then is you. So, how are you at that?

This also has other multiple applications and implications. One of the things that I found in modeling highly persuasive people is that the ultimate form of persuasion is character— and specifically being authentic. As examples of that, I wrote some brief descriptions of John F. Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Winston Churchill. And yes, while they all also were skillful in their language skills, elegant in communicating inspiring ideas, and inspirational— they were best at persuasion because they were authentic. They were totally convinced about what they were saying.

“All of these masters of persuasion also operated from a solid ethical character. While they had sweet words and elegant ways of speaking, the source of their influence was the character of their person— they lived in an inside-out persuasion. ... They persuaded by being an example of the meanings that they communicated.” (p. 17)

Here’s what I wrote in the Foreword of the book:

“... self-persuasion comes first and perhaps I the most challenging form of persuasion. Self-persuasion also comes before self-leadership because if I cannot lead myself or manage myself about what I’m not convinced of, I will not be able to influence others.” (p. 7)

Yes, the hardest person that you will ever attempt to persuade is probably *you*! This explains why it is easier to *intellectually know and understand something* and to make a decisive commitment to *act on* what you know. “Knowing” is easy compared to acting. At the point where you act—consequences occur. Now you could not succeed, or you could find out that you were wrong, or you could not do it well. Maybe you will discover that you are incompetent. So it is very human to procrastinate, to put off, to study more. Questions:

- Given all of that, how are you at truly *persuading* yourself?
- Do you know how to best *influence* your own thinking, feeling, deciding, and acting?
- Are you actually *persuaded* about what you “know” you should do?
- If you are, then are you now acting on that persuasion? Would you like to be?

Interesting enough, the very term “persuasion” has within it the idea of thoroughness, “to thoroughly urge” someone to do something. *Persuasion implies action and commitment*. When we say that we have persuaded someone or that we are persuaded about something, there’s no longer any doubts or questions. We are sold on something. The communication process has reached a conclusion. When you *persuade* someone about the value of coaching, you know that they are ready to sign up. When you *persuade* a manager or leader in an organization, you know that you are getting in.

An interesting exercise for yourself, or for someone you wish to influence, is to make a list of the things that you know but do not do. You can even do this with an organization. We have had trainers go into companies and, using the whiteboards or flip charts in the training room, start making a list of all of the things that they have learned from trainings that have not been transferred to the work place. With a list of things that you *know but do not do* — you can now ask the persuasion questions:

- Are you persuaded about the value of this idea?
- How persuaded are you? Gauge your level of persuasion from 0 to 10.
- What doubts or questions do you have about this thing that you know?
- What stops you from making a decisive commitment to act on it?
- What do you need to persuade you to take effective action on it?

Now you know why I called it, *inside-out persuasion*. That’s where it starts.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #44
September 25, 2017

ARE YOU PLEASED WITH YOUR PROGRAMMING?

Look at the things that you *do* today—the things that you do everyday in a regular and systematic way, the things that you can count on yourself to do. Look at getting up and dressed, having breakfast (or skipping breakfast), brushing your teeth, driving, etc. When you do, you are observing some of your *programs*. Yes, you call them *habits*. That's because you *habitually* do these things and do them in certain ways, and you can do them *without thinking*. It is as if you have a “brushing your teeth program” inside you. Now, what will trigger this program? Perhaps the time of the day will trigger it, perhaps walking into the bathroom, perhaps looking in the mirror and smiling.

A word about “programming.” The idea of *programming* entered into NLP at the same time when *computer programming* was beginning to reach popular consciousness. The communication theories of that day had been working for couple decades in conceptualizing how to program a machine so that it could process information and by the 1970s several programming languages had been developed and gigantic room-size computers had been built. It was *in that context* that the metaphor of “programming” came to be applied to human processing of information, hence the name Neuro-Linguistic Programming. In those days, it had nothing to do with brainwashing, and everything to do with *the code* for how to install a systematic and stabilized response.

Let's ask a series of questions about your habits, alias *programming*:

How did you program yourself to behave in this way?

How did you get yourself to do so in such a regular and dependable way?

Were you born with this program?

If you were not, then at what time did you develop it and how did it become so dependable, so regular, so systematic?

These questions explore is a very powerful resource that you have within you—within your neurology and in your mind-body system. As *a habit*, you don't have to even think about it. You just do it. It is as if you are on automatic and as if the habit has a life of its own. Think about this with your eating lunch habit, your morning coffee break habit, your looking over a desert menu after dinner habit, your smoking habit, and so on. Somehow you have *programmed* yourself to automatically do certain things and now you can efficiently do them without a lot of physical or cognitive effort.

Another question: When you look at the automatic actions that you engage in— does it bring out your best? If you consider some habits that are now unhealthy and unproductive for you, have you ever tried to change them? Did it work? Or did you revert to the old habit? Maybe you changed your mind about smoking and decided to stop smoking and you did ... for a little while, but then the

old habit re-emerged and you found yourself doing it again. Habits are powerful that way. They can seem to *programmed in* that they seem hard-wired, part of “who you are,” and your “second nature.”

Yet your own personal *programs* or *habits* are similar to those of a computer, *they are functions of a code*. That is, there’s a code that informs your mind-body system how to operate and how to function, in the face of a particular trigger. The trigger starts a sequence of activities so that somehow you just seem to “know” how to respond, and so you do. You get on a bike and your body just seems to know how to ride even if it has been years, or roller-skates, or a thousand other habitual patterns. They are part and parcel of your programming. You have a habit (program) of feeling afraid in elevators or even seeing snakes on TV. You have a habit (program) of biting your nails, of impulsively buying things, of cursing when someone cuts you off in traffic.

Now something this powerful could be powerfully used for the good if only you knew the code, could it not? What if you set up a program for reading regularly, studying, exercising, spending time with your loved ones, etc.?

Now here’s the thing— *the code to any habit is no longer in the front of your mind*. If it was, it would not be very deep or systematic and it could be more easily changed. No. The code involves what’s deep within, in the back of your mind, and has been created by your self-reflexive consciousness. That is, as you applied second thoughts and emotions to some first level thinking, you meta-stated the sequence of action with higher level frames, this deeply embeds the habit within you. In terms of persuasion, you now have a deep meta-level program (sequence of thoughts) that influence you systemically so that you do not have to consciously think about it.

So the code is a meta-state or meta-level code. It is made of beliefs, decisions, identities, permissions, understandings, etc. that essentially *locks the program in* so that you are not only free to *not* think about it, you may not be able to think about it. Several consequences fall out from this. One explains the difficulty of modeling an expert who is unconsciously competent— the program is automatic and outside-of-conscious awareness. Another is that in changing an undesirable habit, you have to get to the code in the back of the mind since those thoughts are the ones most deeply influencing you.

In terms of self-persuasion, if you want to truly learn to persuade the hardest person of all to persuade (yourself), you have to be able to climb the layers of your meaning-making to find the program. That’s what we do with the Matrix Model in Neuro-Semantics. And if you want to establish a new healthy habit as a new program for your effectiveness in a given area, you have to be able to *set* the required meta-levels so that you lock them in. That’s what we do with the Meta-States Model.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #45
October 2, 2017

IRONIES IN NLP HISTORY ABOUT MODELING

Here are several ironies in the history of NLP. The first irony of NLP is that it did **not** start as an attempt to *model excellence*. No, not at all. It started off as an inquiry about what Fritz Perls was doing with his language and patterning that enabled people to experience personal transformations. Another irony is that John Grinder was **not** involved in the inquiry. Frank Pucelik had been studying Gestalt Therapy in San Diego and Richard Bandler had been transcribing some of Fritz's audio and visual tapes for a book, and as Richard had begun mimicking Perls, they discovered something surprising, namely, they were getting the same kind of incredible transformations that Perls got. That raised the question, How was that possible?

That was 1972, four years before "Neuro-Linguistic Programming" came about. So what they called themselves and it at that time was "Meta." There was no "pure NLP" at that time. There was an interest in how could language patterns of untrained people be so powerful as to replicate what Perls had been able to do (by 1972, Perls had been dead for two years). So another irony— there was no direct modeling of Perls, no interviewing, no questioning, no "unconscious uptake of his patterns," only modeling his writings and tapes.

Yet in spite of those limitations, they did create a model of his language and behavioral patterns and together with Virginia Satir's languaging and behavioral patterns, they created the first NLP model—"the Meta-Model of Language in Therapy." That's what they called it in *The Structure of Magic* (1975). Later they dropped the "in Therapy" focus as they began to realize that the Communication Model that they had put together could be applied to anything human— since all human applications involve language and behavior. That's when they began to think in terms of modeling.

Once Grinder entered the picture, he introduced or brought in the leaders of the Cognitive Psychology Movement and their products. Having completed his doctorate in Transformational Grammar, that's what he first brought in, namely, Noam Chomsky's Transformational Grammar. And having worked in George Miller's Lab for a year, he brought that group of researchers and their TOTE Model, the Magic Number 7 plus-or-minus 2, etc. The irony, given that today two of the founders disparage the "conscious" mind, is that Chomsky and Miller's influence made NLP a derivative of Cognitive Psychology and the focus became to enable people to "run their own brains." That is, become conscious and *mindful* and take charge of their own lives. This was also the basis of the NLP Strategy Model for linear modeling and modeling short-term immediate subjective experiences like spelling, getting out of bed, motivation, decision, etc.

Ironically, even though the Strategy Model had a little "m" in it, it was extremely minor and

undeveloped for many years. Much later several began exploring the role of that “m” (the meta-level) phenomena, especially “beliefs” in modeling. Robert Dilts introduced five levels in his Neuro-Logical Levels. Then David Gordon with Graham Daws introduced the Experiential Array. Both models began to take meta-levels into consideration and with meta-levels, the beginning of systems thinking.

Yet it wasn’t until 1994 when I introduced the Meta-States Model to model the special kind of human consciousness—*self-reflexive consciousness*, that a completely fluid systems approach was added to modeling. Unlike the earlier models, Meta-States was not linear, it is non-linear and therefore systemic as it introduced emergent properties from the layering of states.

This now enables us to truly model systemic processes and long-term subjective experiences—experiences that emerge over many months even years. A linear approach is reductionistic. It essentially seeks to reduce a rich systemic experience to a series of individual strategies and to treat them as sequential activities. That would be one way to approach things, but it would probably not yield the quality of understanding needed to replicate a desired excellence.

What else is there to model? A whole range of things—in fact, every subjective human experience that is essentially systemic or long-term. For example, consider all of the health states or conditions and their opposites, especially the 90 auto-immune system diseases. The only one I’ve looked at in any depth has been lupus. And it is just one of scores and scores. So one modeling that would involve finding multiple people who have recovered from lupus, especially the fatal kind, kidney lupus and cerebral lupus, and finding both the damaging and the healing frames. That’s what some of us attempted to do a decade ago.

In the last two decades most of my modeling projects have focused on long-term experiences—leadership, wealth creation, productivity, persuasion, etc. Other modeling projects have combined long-term with systemic experiences—collaborative leadership, coaching mastery, etc. The fact is, almost all of the truly richest and deepest of subjective states have *not* been modeled and we do *not* yet have processes (called patterns) by which we can enable people to replicate the best that’s available, the best peak experiences, the best states of flow, the best loving states, the best healing states, etc.

This, in my opinion, is one of the open areas for exploration in the field of NLP. *There is so much more to discover!* Today we have so many of the required tools to engage in modeling human excellence and to go where no one has gone before.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #46
October 9, 2017

THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF UN-INSULT-ABILITY

When I first discovered the Meta-States Model, there were several patterns that I had been working with using the basic strategy model that I immediately re-modeled. I realized the impact of the discovery of self-reflexive consciousness in our higher, more complex, and systemic states. So this led to creating a dozen patterns very quickly.

In fact, the second book on Meta-States was a book devoted mostly to the dysfunctional states such as self-contempt, victimhood, reactivity, insult, resentment, and internal conflict. For each of these “dragon” states (unresourceful states that undermine a person’s self-actualization), I wrote a chapter. That’s why the book, *Dragon Slaying* (1995/ 2000) has the following chapters— Self-Esteeming (ch. 10), Resilience (ch. 11), Proactivity (ch. 12), Un-insult-Ability (ch. 13), Magnanimity and Forgiveness (ch. 14), and Serenity (ch. 15). Today many of the patterns for these states are the basic patterns we use in the Meta-State trainings, APG (Accessing Personal Genius) and LPG (Living Personal Genius).

What NLP provided about “taking criticism positively,” which was really good stuff, I took to a new level and called it — *Un-Insult-Ability*. The idea is that if you have the ability to *take insult* from things that people say and do, then the way you construct those negative meanings and how you integrate it into your neurology so that you feel bad really highlights your meaning-making powers and your neurological embodying powers. Given that, what if we reversed it? What if instead of *taking* insult, you *did not* take insult? Or even further, what if you developed your sense of self and your identify so that you become *un-insult-able*? Now would that be good?

Now being *un-insult-able* does not mean that you’re not paying attention, or cutting off feedback, or being hard hearted. It means that when you hear words, see gestures, experience some event—you treat that information as *information*. Then because *you do not bring it in and personalize it*, you keep it out there as information (stimuli) that you have to deal with as you would with any problem or challenge. And because you do not personalize it, you don’t feel threatened. And because you don’t feel threatened, you feel safe. You can now more calmly deal with that information. This reminds me of a quotation from Thomas Jefferson:

“Nothing gives a person so much advantage over another as to remain always cool and unruffled under all circumstances.”

That’s un-insult-able. Now the provocative act, by itself, cannot upset you. It cannot *make* you angry, frustrated, stressed, etc. Because you are not giving your power away to that stimuli, you can remain centered in your own value and operate from your best. And that’s because you know that

it is the view that you take of things (the meanings that you construct) that upset you. Now it is just a challenge. Just something to deal with.

To *take insult* from anything, *you* (and you only) have to *interpret* the word, the tone, the gesture, etc. as defining you. We call that “personalizing.” For children, this is natural and inevitable. Given their developmental stage, and their lack of ego-strength, and the lack of development of their frontal cortex— they inevitably interpret things in a personalizing way. We call that kind of thinking, ego-centric thinking. They think from “first person” — out of their own eyes, ears, skin, etc. Not until seven or eight will they even begin to be able to step out of first-person perspective and begin to learn to take second-person perceptive.

Well, that’s the situation with children. As an adult, you have the self-reflexivity to think-and-emote about your experiences (create meta-states) and one that you can create (if you want to) is *un-insult-ability*. It begins as you distinguish your *person* as a human being from what you *do* as a person. One is person, the other is behavior. You are more than and different from your behavior. One is your core, the other are your expressions.

From there, you can meta-state the understanding that “the map is not the territory.” Whatever someone says or does is just their “map” about things. As you move beyond the “word magic” of childhood, you can now explore what the person is attempting to communicate to you. You can stay calm and unruffled as you do that.

Today there are lots of adults (maybe most of them) who cannot hear something they disagree with without *taking insult*. And if someone calls them a name or insults them with some phrase— they are immediately enraged and ready to fight. Look at the protest rallies and how easily it is to get the young men ready to fight, throw stones, set cars on fire, etc. Look at the universities (at least in the US) where some college students are “hurt,” “traumatized” when a conservative speaker is invited to speak on campus. We call them “snowflakes” because they are ready to melt at the least bit of heat.

What they need is the richly complex state called *un-insult-ability*. Then they can not only stay calm and cool when in disagreement, they can also access empathy, care, seeking first to understand, etc. as they engage in a learning-conversation. This would probably be a good state for all of us. It’s a state that we present at Trainers’ Training every year. May you learn how to be compassionately un-insult-able!

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #47
October 16, 2017
Conversations #1

THE CONVERSATION THAT YOU CAN'T HAVE

Lots of conversations are easy and breezy, we chat away, gossiping a little here and there and seldom do we even remember much of what was said. Such are *light and shallow conversations*. Then there are the *serious conversations*—those that make a difference in life, that create turning points, asking someone to marry us, accepting a job offer, deciding to move to another city. Then there are the *difficult conversations*—those are the conversations that we really do not want to have, perhaps due to fear of hurting someone's feelings, evoking their wrath, being unable to handle what may come up, etc. Those we often put off and off and off hoping to never have them.

Then there is another category of conversations. They are the ones that go nowhere and that make us think that we simply live in a different universe than the other person. These *impossible conversations* arise due to the presuppositions that the other person begins with, the premises that they assume, and that they refuse to even consider as open for discussion. A current one that's occurring on the mainstream media these days concern a pseudo-subject in the first place, "racism." And yet by assuming that it exists, those who think this is the answer to every problem cannot even acknowledge the assumptions that they bring to the conversation.

Since we can't have a real conversation without defining our terms, let's do that. Let's start with the word "race" and "racism." We can't do critical thinking if we don't start with the unspoken and unrecognized assumptions. "Race" sounds like a thing, as if you could go out on the street and see "race." But it is not a thing. It is a mental category. Linguistically, it is a nominalization. That means it is a false noun. It sounds like a noun referring to a real "thing" that's out there, "a person, place, or thing." But it is not. I've often written about nominalizations since they create so much confusion. They arise when someone takes a verb and turns it into a noun. In doing so, they convert an active and dynamic process into a static "thing" which then, deceiving the mind, generates tremendous confusion.

"Race" as a nominalization contain a hidden verb. But what verb? The term implies that there are many "races." But are there? Ironically it turns out that there is only *one race—the human race*. There are no sub-species of humans. We are all made of the same blood and DNA which is why we can so easily intermarry. What we incorrectly call different races are just *different family groups within the human race*. If this doesn't immediately strike you as utterly silly—spend some time with this idea. Eventually I hope to put a big broad smile on your face when you realize that we have invented a whole category of non-existing phenomena by using a pseudo-word ("races").

Given that there are no *races*, only a singular human *race*, then the rest of the assumptions fall apart as well. For "racism" means "treating, relating, thinking, talking, acting, etc. to someone in terms of what one evaluates about his or her race." The *-ism* here someone treating or relating to another

person according to his evaluations about the other person's so-called "race?" Here's how incredibly crazy we become— we first invent an entirely false concept (race) and then treat some family groups superior and others. Then we think that a mysterious force, "racism," is the problem and so we try to cure it!

In the end, "racism" is an attitude that a person holds about others. A person views people as superior or inferior due solely to the criteria of family of origin or ethnicity. It is the childish game, "My family is better than yours!" "Racism" is an attitude that a person takes in reference to another person. Then generalizing that attitude, he can feel superior to a whole group of people.

What is *racism*? It is a way of thinking that leads to a way of acting. And it can lead to people taking advantage of a position so they create policies that incorporate prejudice against others. When some people do that, it does *not* mean that the whole society is "racist." It means that a prejudiced or racist person or people did that. To apply it to everyone is a misguided over-generalization. But some do that to create a gigantic monster to rail against. Now you can be prejudiced against everyone who disagrees with you and call them racist. Those who think the whole society suffers from "systemic racism" are usually blind to their own racism. But they feel self-righteous so it's hard for them to see their own projections.

This leads to the conversation that we then cannot have. Why? Because it is not on equal ground as colleagues. After all one side thinks of themselves not only as right, but absolutely right and above prejudice, while the other side is told that they are racist, blind, and unaware of their racism.

"If you say you are not racist, you are even more blind to the systemic racism of your culture than I thought. That means your racism is out-of-control and I'm wasting my time talking to you."

The irony is that such a statement is as prejudicial as the prejudice the person is objecting to! And it will never be changed that way. The change has to occur in each and every person who *thinks in prejudiced ways*. The change will be a change in understanding, beliefs, and attitudes. Change at that level will inevitably lead to change in any expression that favors one person over another due to family origin.

True enough, racism used to be incorporated in the laws of the US. But almost all of that has changed since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. That was the great contribution of the movement that Martin Luther King Jr. led. Are there still some individuals who harbor hateful attitudes toward others of this or that group? Sure. Are they the majority? No. The 2008 and 2012 showed that. If those elections demonstrated anything, it demonstrated that the US is *not* a racist society. How could the majority elect (two times) an African American as President if it was, across the board, racist? That's too vast an over-generalization in spite of today's media.

Having a *difficult conversation*, as the term suggests, is difficult. And all of us have times that we need to have that kind of conversation with others. It requires an open and listening state, a state for seeking first to understand and then to be understood. It requires empathy and clarity. It requires trying on another's thought rather than rejecting it outright. In other words, it requires focused learning of refined skills. That's why we begin with the NLP Communication Model and add the higher level skills of the Meta-States Model.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #48
October 23, 2017
Conversations #2

CONVERSATIONS

The Art of Trying to Have Them!

You would think ... okay, well, I would think ... that the simplest thing in the world would be a conversation. To talk! After all, we all engage in conversations every day. So I would think we should be pretty good at it. We've been doing it since we first learned to talk. But no. It is not simple and we are not good at it! It is actually *very difficult* and it is full of complications.

One Problem with Language: Assumptions

In his book, *Clues*, Steve de Shazer wrote, "The best way to design a failure is to establish a poor definition of the complaint" (*Clues*, 1988, p. 118). Similarly, a great way to create misunderstanding and to mess up communication is to *not* define your terms clearly. This is why in the Meta-Coaching system we always emphasize that when you begin a conversation, do not assume that the other person is using words the same way you are. You think you know what "leadership," "money," "discipline," "openness," "belief," etc. means. Don't assume that your meaning is the other persons's meaning. Do that and you can pretty well guarantee the lack of understanding.

While it is true that we have "a common language," and while it is true that we have a dictionary (or actually, many dictionaries) that we can consult, we also *each* have our own *history* and *learning* with words, so that we use different referents when we use words. My use of "authority figure," will have in common with you and most others some reference to someone who has some "authority" to do something. But beyond that, *what has been your experiences* with someone or many someones who you put into that category? What were your early experiences with mom and dad, teachers, a principle, a policeman, a judge, a boss, etc.?

Neither you nor I can fully define the term "authority figure" by reading a definition in a dictionary. I need to ask you about your *life experiences* with that term, the people that you have met in person, met in books, seen in movies, talked about with others, and the *connotations* that you have loaded into that phrase.

"How are you using the words 'authority figure?'"

If I don't ask, if I assume that your experiences are the same as mine, I am entering into a mine-field semantically ... not knowing at any given point where I might step onto a meaning, a memory, or a old connection that will explode and suddenly put you into a very unpleasant state. That's the way words are— they are *anchors* for previous experiences. And none of us have the same referent experiences. So our meanings are always going to be different.

In this vein, S.I. Hayakawa, (1941, *Language in Action*) said that “words infect us everyday.” Ah, *the infection* of words! Words are not neutral. Language is not innocent. There’s assumptive frames in the words we hear and the words that we use. But what assumptions? What is being presupposed by our words and language? *That is the question!* If someone asks, “Can we cure our words and our language of presuppositions?” The answer is short and simple: *No, we cannot.* You cannot not presuppose. Nor can I. There are assumptions and presuppositions in just about everything we say. The only solution is to be more mindful and conscious so that we expand our awareness as to what’s being implied. Then we can clean up our language, at least to some extent. We can make our assumptions as explicit as possible, say what we are presupposing, and ask others about their assumptions. That will also change the conversation for the better.

Another Language Problem: Unpredictability

Words are, by definition, unpredictable. In writing, you can predict more or less accurately what your general style and your language structure will do to your readers, but you can never predict what a given word will do to a given reader. Each reader will use his or her reference experiences to understand the words and so the same word will have many connotations to various readers.

Further, we have to remind ourselves: *Words don’t mean anything.* It is the reader or the hearer who attributes meanings to the words. Context will help to confine and define a word, but even then, it is the listener who constructs the meaning. The listener does that from the context, from the sentences within which they are embedded, from the paragraph, the book, the country, the time period, etc. Actually, reading itself is pretty much a miracle! After your eyes have seen the words, your mind assigns to these words a provisional meaning, “good only until further notice,” you construct a meaning.

Here then is a basic problematic fact about language— no word ever means *exactly* the same thing to two different people. Each word, term, and/or name means what it means *to you* depending on many variables. Your background of experience with the word inevitably gives it a twist and feel unique to you. And the more experience you have with that word, the richer and more complex the meanings that it has for you. In many ways, it is a wonder that any of us understand another! Given that no two persons live *exactly* the same life, not even twins, every word will mean something different. This is the unpredictability of words. And the dictionary is no arbitrator. It is just the record of how people have used and are using a word, generally.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #49
October 30, 2017
Conversations #3

THICK CONVERSATIONS A Challenge to Clarity

When I listen to some conversations, they seem and feel *thick*. It is not only difficult to have some conversations due to the assumptions that are built within them and the unpredictability of words (Neurons #47, #48), conversations can be difficult due to the density of words. Here is another language problem that makes conversations difficult, namely—the density of language.

This refers to the fact that some words and some phrases are exceptionally dense. The *density* or *compactness* within some words make it very difficult to unpack the meaning and to understand. Density arise from how words can carry a heavy load of ideas. That is, a lot of thoughts, a multitude of ideas, and multiple levels of meanings can be packed into a single word or phrase.

Horne Tooke (1832) discovered and wrote about this fact regarding language back in the nineteenth century. What he wrote about was the structural parts of language—the prepositions, conjunctions, prefixes, suffixes, etc. He noted that these parts of language, which once referred to full-fledged, ideas are whittled down to little symbols.

He said that over the centuries, through a continuous process of condensation and abbreviation, people cram more and more meaning into fewer and fewer words. What once took a whole sentence or a clause to express, came to be compressed it into a single word or phrase. He talked about language as “full of clever devices that make for more and more speed.” “A single participle or complex word can take the place of a cumbersome word-combination.” (p. 132). To illustrate, he used radioactivity as an example.

“Most of the long, complex words in modern prose are not labels for things in the world around us — like *radioactivity*— but condensed expressions of abstract ideas that can be expressed just as well in two or more shorter words.” (135)

Here’s a contemporary example, a statement that was issued from the Veterans Administration. While it sounds like legalese, it is a description to employees about their compensation. How clear are you about the message that someone is trying to communicate?

“The non-compensable evaluation heretofore assigned you for your service-connected disability is confirmed and continued.”

Now try to discern the meaning in that one! The trouble is that the thoughts are bunched together in tight little bundles like “non-compensable” or “service-connected.” Talk about dense and compact! Yes, lawyers tend to write that way, politicians talk that way, and so do people who think in general or global ways. Here are some things I’ve heard in coaching—

“I really want to achieve success in my assertiveness when I speak with my colleagues and confirm the union of our joint commitment.”

“Getting into the serenity of the present will give me more flow for a benevolence of connecting that I haven’t had in the past.”

If there is any language form that is dense it is nominalizations and when a person speaks with multiple nominalizations, the density of the sentences makes understanding and comprehension increasingly difficult.

“*Threats to my self-esteem have been destructive to my relationship and needs to be corrected.*”

The *italicized words* are nominalizations— verbs that have been reformulated into nouns. But they are pseudo-names. It is not really “a person, place, or thing.” It is a process and set of actions that are coded *as if* it were a *thing*. But it is not. The person is either threatening himself or receiving a threat from someone that he is interpreting as against his process of esteeming (appraising) himself of value and he is saying that this process is destroying how he relates to someone. That brings up lots of questions:

- Who or what is threatening? What is the threat? Is it legitimate or just words?
- How are you valuing yourself as a person? Are you doing this conditionally or unconditionally? What criteria are you using in this appraisal that you are making?
- When you hear the threat, how is that related to the valuing or dis-valuing yourself as having value? How are you using it to destroy how you relate?
- Who are you relating to? How are you relating? How does you’re accepting of the threat to destroy your value?

Density! Compactness. Some words and phrases are really loaded and have to be unloaded. In fact, the conversation cannot really continue unless we take time to unpack the meaning to actually understand what someone is saying.

Take the word “truth” for another example. Originally it meant, “that which is trowed.” And “to trow” meant to think, to believe firmly, to be thoroughly persuaded of. Implied within the term “truth” is the assumption that some person is thinking or believing something or thoroughly persuaded of. But what? What is the person thinking or believing? And who? Who is doing the thinking?

We have to unpack and that’s one of the functions of all conversations. We unpack from each other what the other person means by the words and gestures he is using.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #50
Nov. 7, 2017
Conversations #4

ACCUSATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

There are conversations, and then there are pseudo-conversations. They sound like conversations, but they are not. They are accusations. Someone is blaming someone or accusing someone of something and the point of the statements and questions (if there are any legitimate questions) is to make someone feel bad—ashamed, guilty, wrong, etc.

I became aware of this when I returned to the US the last week of October. That's because during that week, one of the dominant ongoing conversations in the news that week was that of sexual harassment. It occurred after the exposure of Harvey Weinstein and his inappropriate sexual behavior with many women over many years. By the time I returned home, the topic had gone viral and it was the topic of the news media and every talk radio program.

But the conversations about sexual harassment were not always helpful or even intelligent. Many were completely asinine. After all, it is one thing to actually assault someone and force them to have sexual relations, it is another to say words that someone may not want to hear. Yet some were confusing the two. Now from what I've read, Weinstein's sex scandal allegedly involved physical assaults on women, grabbing them, and blackmailing some by threatening to fire them if they didn't have sex with him. Obviously to do things like that is aggressive, disrespectful, and wrong on many accounts.

But everything labeled "sexual harassment" is not sexual harassment. It's easy to make the accusation, just use the label. But a word is not the territory. The label is not the reality. For example, I heard one interview on the radio with one supposed "expert" on sexual misbehavior. She talked about a "hostile environment" in work situations where men say such intrusive things as complimenting a woman on how she looks or what she's wearing. This was defined as "an aggressive sexual assault." For her, a compliment on looks is equal to being harassed and agree that no male should even mention how a female is dressed. It's off-limits.

She also mentioned one woman who had been sexually harassed to have sex with her boss over a ten year period. When she said that the interviewer asked not a single question, but commented, "That is terrible!" So let me see. A woman is somehow "forced" to go into some hotel room or private home or somewhere, take off her clothes and have sex with her boss month after month, year after year, and she has no responsibility in that, she is the victim, she is "sexually harassed." Apparently this is not a child or a minor, this is a grown woman. In fact, she has been employed in some job in a company. And she cannot say no? She cannot make a report? She cannot quit the job? She cannot move to another city?

When it comes to sexual misconduct, there's no question that touching someone without their

permission or “forcing” someone to have sex is wrong. But if we are talking about words, someone saying something to someone and trying to get that person to agree to having sex, then it is just *verbal behavior*. Nothing has actually happened, people are just talking. And words in and of themselves are harmless. The word “cat” cannot scratch you. The word “food” cannot nourish your body. The word “stupid” cannot make you stupid. They are just words. Symbols. *What you do with those words in your own head and in your mind-body system— that is the question.*

So, what do you do with words? Do you forget that they are just symbols making references to some thing, person, event, action, etc.? Or do you *identify* with the word and use it to induce yourself into some state that is not very resourceful for you? Do you *personalize* the word and use it against yourself, perhaps as a way to insult yourself? Do you take a moment to wonder, “How is this person using this word?” “Do I want to accept this word or will I let it stay out there as their word?”

How you use the word inside yourself determines your subsequence experience. That’s your responsibility. That’s my responsibility. If you want to use the uninformed, crude, and childish language of others to feel bad— go for it. I don’t know why you would want to do that. But that is your choice. Or, if you want to give up trying to control the words that come out of someone’s mouth (and mind, heart, and body), then you can stay okay, resourceful, even un-insult-able, if you so choose.

Many who think they are being “sexually harassed,” are unknowingly *harassing themselves with some words that they have heard*. They are vexing, worrying, and angering themselves with those words by playing them over and over in their heads which, of course, keeps accessing unpleasant states of anxiety, depression, and frustration. But in accusing the other person of “sexually harassing” them they are dis-empowering themselves and constructing a problem that they cannot solve. By giving up their own power to choose their thoughts and responses, they are empowering (in their mind) the other person. Not a wise choice if you ask me.

Any subsequent “conversation” between these people will actually be a pseudo-conversation. If one person says, “You make me feel bad when you talk suggestively about sexual things.” That person is giving all of her power away, “you *make me...*” If the other disagrees and tries to explain, “I’m just playing,” or “I’m trying to ask for a date,” or whatever, then he is admitting his incompetence in relating to her. That conversation will go nowhere.

With NLP we start by seeking first to understand the other person as we listen and then learn to relate by matching the person’s language patterns, values, and beliefs. We seek to understand the other *on the other’s terms*, not ours. That’s the way to begin any authentic conversation. To do otherwise is a sure formula for mis-understanding.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #51
Nov. 13, 2017
Conversations #5

POWER CONVERSATIONS

Like sex, money, and religion— *power* is both highly desired and greatly feared and even more, difficult to talk about. Yet we must. Power is everywhere in life, ever-present, and inescapable. But how can we have a decent conversation about it? That's a problem most of us have. And that problem is amplified by the fact that power is highly misunderstood, shrouded in mystery, and challenging to stay calm about in a conversation. In spite of all of this, we need to learn how to have an open, respectful, and thoughtful conversation about it.

At the simplest level of *power is capacity*— “the ability to do.” That's what the word means. Check any dictionary, power means “to do.” If you can *do* something, you have power. If you can read, you have the power to read. If you can speak, cook, drive a car, fix a computer— you have these powers. And if power is capacity, then your power can be small or great or somewhere in-between depending on the size of your capacity. Power can also grow and develop or it can weaken and diminish. It hardly ever stays the same. As a capacity, you could even measure it. After all, its expressions shows up in the real world of tangible things.

All of that speaks about power *individually*. It speaks about your assets and resources— these are aspects of power. As a capacity, power is a strength you have to do something and an energy you can expend in doing that thing. Further, it arises from your four innate powers— your ability to think, emote, speak, and act. These ways of responding gives you four dimensions of power— mental powers, emotional powers, linguistic powers, and behavioral powers. [I wrote an entire chapter on this in book, *The Matrix Model*.]

Then there is your *social* powers. This refers to your with others— your capacities for influencing other people— influencing their thoughts, emotions, speech, and actions. Interpersonally you have the power to some degree and, surprisingly, it depends on how well you serve others. Dacher Keltner, in *The Power Paradox* (2016), says that “Power is actually about making a difference in the world.” And you and I do that by stirring others in our social network by improving the greater good of the groups of people that we relate to. We make a difference in the world by seek “the greaer good.” All of this actually speaks to the inherent ethics of power, well, true power and not the false abreactions of power “over” others. Power is inherently *with* others.

“Enduring power hinges on doing simple things that are good for others.” (Keltner, p. 35)
“Power is the ability to stir others to collaborative action.” Hannah Arendt

Because power is part of every interaction due to our capacity to influence each other, power is a social dynamic and therefore you can find it in every group. Here's another strange factor about this kind of power —social power— is not inside the individual. So where is it? It is in the interaction itself. It is across the social network. Instead of thinking that power is grabbed by a person and

exercised over a group, Keltner says we should think of power as given or bestowed by the group on the person or persons who advances the greater good. Similar to how it is with persuasion and leadership— *power is first earned by the person and then given by the group*. That is, you earn power in the eyes and minds of others via enthusiasm, care, focus, openness, calmness, empathy, strength, kindness, and generosity. In turn a group rewards a person with esteem (reputation and status) and trust (position).

The social power of interpersonal relations not only involves influence and control, not only reputation and status, it also leads to power structures—who is given a position to make decisions and to allocate resources. We call this “politics” whether it is in the power structure of a home or an international corporation.

When you bring up the subject of power, you are inviting a conversation about relationships between people and capacities. Do we select individuals to *do* things based on their capacities? That would be smart and practical. Or do we select people based on who they know, what strings they can pull, how much money or influence they have, etc.? That’s the dark side of “playing politics.” That’s how to create a dysfunctional group or organization.

Giving position, status, reputation, responsibility, etc. to a person without the capacity is a sure-fire way to create a sick organization. Abraham Maslow once noted that we should give power to the persons who do not want it and do not need it. When a person *wants* it and worse, when a person *needs* it, that person is very likely to not handle it well. Then they are not focused exclusively *on the greater good or serving people*. Given that, how wise was Jesus to say that the person who would be “greatest” among you should be the person who serves others the best. And, he who would be great, let him be the servant of all. Wise words from a long time ago.

Like the psychology of money and the psychology of food, people can want power for the wrong reasons. Psycho-eating drives people to be either obese or suffer anorexia because of their semantically loading of food. Psycho-saving and psycho-spending also can suffer from trying to use money for things it cannot fulfill. The Beatles sang it: “Money can’t buy you love.” Psycho-powering is over-loading “power” and all of the expressions of power with meanings that it cannot fulfill. And that’s a conversation that we need to have with many people.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #52
Nov. 20, 2017
Conversations #6

THE ATTITUDE CONVERSATION

Do you ever talk about *attitude* with someone? Do you ever long to have a conversation about someone's attitude in order to help them develop a more positive or constructive attitude? If so, that's another one of those "difficult conversations" that we often need to have, but don't. Why not? Typically a lot of people quickly get very defensive if you talk about their attitude. It seems personal. It seems intimate. And it seems foreboding. To understand all of this, we have to understand what *an attitude* is, how we create our attitudes, and how we can update them or change them.

The dictionary indicates that what we mean by an attitude is that it is a disposition and position of mind, emotion, and body. Ah, so we're dealing with something that is systemic. At the mental and emotional level it is a disposition—an orientation of thinking and feeling. And at the same time it involves a physiological position. In other words, it shows up in the body. An attitude is a whole piece. It is an experience that we are simultaneously developing and creating by what we are thinking, feeling, and somatizing in our body. That tells us a bit about how we create an attitude.

For sake of understanding, let's pull these facets apart and talk about them. Then we can put them back together again as a systemic experience. It begins with *what you are thinking*. And in saying "thinking," this includes what you are representing, understanding, giving meaning to, semantically loading, valuing, etc. In the next Neurons, I'll describe the conversation itself.

If your attitude is determined, stubborn, or persistence—you are probably thinking that something (X) is important, right, the way it should be, what you should do, etc. Think in that way, and then you probably *feel* focused, excited, committed and that comes together as a determined or stubborn attitude. And with those thoughts and feelings, you probably tense your body, focus your eyes, make firm your voice and take on the physiology of determination.

If your attitude is one of hostility and aggression—you are probably thinking that something is wrong, violates your values, not the way things should go, hurtful, etc. Think in that way and you probably are strongly feeling frustrated, angry, upset, hurt, fear, etc. and with those thoughts and feelings, you are probably somatizing them in your body with a quickened heart-beat, stress that shows up as muscular tension, tension in your movements and throat, etc. Now you look and sound "hostile" or aggressive.

If your attitude is one of gratitude, joy, and appreciation—you are probably thinking that something is good, wonderful, delightful, the fulfillment of your values, pleasurable, etc. Think in those ways and you are probably feeling contented, happy, joyful, delighted, loving, thankful, etc. Send those thoughts and feelings to your body to feel and your physiology is

probably relaxed with some muscle tension that you call excited, you are smiling, eyes glistening, face relaxed and alert, body open to others, perhaps humming a song, and rhythmically moving to it.

An attitude grows out of your thinking and emoting about something which your body then actualizes and makes real in multiple expressions in your physiology. If this is your first time to think this, the *emotion* is new and fresh and you are just finding your way to express it. If you have been doing this for a long, long time, the emotion is by this time your basic *mood*. Your body knows it and is beginning to default to that emotional state. Now it is your mood. People know this about you, recognize it in you. And if you have done this for years— your body knows it so well, that it has become an *attitude*. Now it has dropped out of your awareness and you no longer are consciously thinking and emoting, it is now automatic in your body.

Thinking—Emoting —> Emotional State —> Attitude

An attitude then is a long-term habituated state that has been well-conditioned into the body as its automatic and systematic response to some regularity in life. It has also become unconscious in that how you create it and maintain it is now mostly outside-of-conscious awareness. Today you are no longer mindful of what you are doing or how. It is your neuro-linguistic *program* for responding to something.

That's what it is. We could say that every attitude that you have, you have *trained* yourself thoroughly and systematically to develop it at a moment's notice. That makes it a pretty high level skill. Now you are well-trained and thoroughly skilled in accessing a stubborn attitude by just the word "authority figure." You are highly skilled to access an attitude of joyfulness when you think about going dancing. From this perspective we could say that *your attitudes are highly developed skills!* Your depression, procrastination, obstinance, prejudice, hostility, etc. are highly developed skills.

The next question is whether your attitude does you good or diminishes you? Does it sabotage your best efforts to be successful? Does it get in your way of taking risks, learning, being more loving, etc.? This is the ecology question. The attitudes that we bring to a situation are often the wrong ones for that situation. Now we ought to change it if we want to enjoy life more or succeed in reaching an important objective.

This is where the attitude conversation comes in. Now you have to make conscious what has become unconscious, catch the process of how you create the program in your neurology and physiology, back up to the thinking that's created it, and do some reframing of the meanings that's driving the attitude. (More next week)

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #53
Nov. 27, 2017
Conversations #7

THE ATTITUDE CONVERSATION Part II

We now know what *an attitude is*— a grown-up and solidified emotion that became a mood and that now is a disposition which is so well integrated that it is registered in the body as posture. To achieve this level of integration, an attitude also involves a gestalt of several states. That is, it is not just the case of involving a single emotion, but multiple meta-levels that support it and sustain it. This results from the repetition and habituation process itself. As you— over time— experience and re-experience the same thinking and meaning-making that creates the first emotion, you begin to believe in it, identify with it, value it, etc. and all of these meta-stating processes thereby locks it in as part of who you are.

Knowing all of this, you can now begin the attitude conversation. But how do you begin? Begin by focusing on something empirical— a behavior that is giving the other person some problems. Then back up as you validate it as a skill— a skill that may no longer be serving the person very well.

“It seems that you’re struggling with X, is that right? If so, what’s your attitude about it?”

The subject could be about budgeting, planning, criticism, feedback, authority, exercise, challenge, or dozens and dozens of other things. Ask this because attitudes show up in relationship to some aspect of everyday life. If the person struggles with the question ask, “What’s your position on X?” “What do you think or feel about X?”

Next you will want to *flush out what’s behind the person’s thoughts*, so ask the basic meta-question: “If that’s true, then what do you think *about* that?” This question *holds* the first thought in place and invites the person to step back from his own thinking to look at his next highest level thoughts *about* that. Sometimes the conversation will have to repeat this process multiple times to get back to the governing thoughts (beliefs, understandings, decisions, prohibitions, identifications, etc.) which are behind it all. That’s the basic meta-question, there are many forms it can take:

“What do you *believe* about X?”

“What *decision* have you made about X?”

“What *understanding* do you have about X that informs your thinking?”

Unpacking a belief system in this way enables the conversation to become deep enough to get to the concepts driving the attitude. Then, once you have exposed the many factors within the attitude, you can run a series of *quality control* questions to help the person opt for a better choice. Ask testing questions like, “Does this serve you well?” “Does this enhance your life?” “Does this bring out your best?” Sometimes the mere exposure of the hidden factors that drive an attitude is sufficient to

change it.

The next level of awareness that's required to break a habitual attitude is becoming mindful in everyday life when and where and how the attitude gets evoked. Because it has dropped out of consciousness awareness, to change it requires making what is unconscious *conscious again*. One of the best ways to do that is to set up a plan for monitoring and recording the presence of the attitude. When and where does it show up? What evokes it? Who evokes it? A useful tool in doing this is keeping a daily journal about the subject. If it is an attitude about money, then keeping "a money journal" and recording every time you experience your *attitude about money*.

There's no choice without this level of mindfulness, so this is the first step. Once you become aware of the habitual thinking–feeling state, then you begin to create a space— a moment— where you can choose a new frame of mind.

"What would you prefer as your attitude about this?"

"To have that attitude, what would be one or more of the things that you would have to believe?"

As the person answers these questions, notice the states that the person accesses and experiences, or the states that are implied in the person's responses. Do that because, knowing that an attitude is a gestalt state, there will be several states within it and you will want to identify them. The end result of the gestalt is a frame of mind.

"What would be your desired frame of mind?"

"When you consider this attitude, who do you know who has the best and most productive attitude about X?"

"What do you guess is their frame of mind?"

Once you have this information, you are ready to do some meta-stating of your attitude. Start with the subject, for example, exercise. Then as you access and hold the primary state that you have regarding exercise, then access the first state that you want to bring to it. For example, perhaps *acceptance*. Bring *acceptance* to "exercise." Then *decision to be healthy*, then *joy of movement*, then *anticipation of more energy*, and so on. By this multiple meta-stating process, a gestalt will eventually result, that is, an emergent property will arise that is "more than and different from the sum of the parts." What attitude will result? It depends on lots of factors. In this case, perhaps *passionate commitment to exercise*.

Want to know more? Check out the 2012 book, *Meta-States: Mastering the Higher Levels of Mind*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #54
December 6, 2017

HOW WE TRAIN TRAINERS IN NEURO-SEMANTICS

You know that doctors have to go through both general training and then specialized training in order to become a medical doctor. So do lawyers, consultants, therapists, accountants, mediators, professors, and many, many others. It's one of the distinguishing experiences that anyone who wants to enter into a profession has to go through. In the field of Coaching this process is now developing as Universities and various Coach Trainer programs are working out what knowledge and core competencies are required to be a professional coach. In Neuro-Semantics, we have more than 15 years of experience in coach training and a full curriculum of the content for being a Licensed Meta-Coach.

Similarly, during the almost twenty years that we have been training trainers we have similarly developed the required content knowledge and core competencies. In fact, we still have the only NLP training program that's *based on specific behavioral presentation benchmarks* by which we can determine a person's skill level as a presenter and trainer.

Recently several have asked me about *how specifically do we go about training a person to become a skilled trainer*. As I explained the process and more questions arose, I realized that I had not written that information out as I have with the coaching process. So here goes.

Core Communication Skills

The most obvious competency of a trainer is that of being able to communicate clearly and precisely. That means two things. First, the trainer needs to know the content of his subject matter. She needs to know her stuff! And given that we're first and foremost training NLP Trainers, that means knowing the essential and foundational NLP Communication Model. While there's lots of people who still don't know what NLP is (an amazing admission of confusion if there ever was one!), it isn't rocket science to know that at its essence it is a *communication model*.

Further, while there are lots of books on NLP, Bob and I took time in the mid-1990s to put the content of NLP practitioner training and Master Practitioner training down in written form. You can find those in *User's Manual of the Brain, Vol. I & II*. And there's more. There is *Sourcebook of Magic, Vol. I*, *The Spirit of NLP*, *NLP Going Meta* (modeling), *Sub-Modalities Going Meta*, *Mind-Lines* (reframing), *Figuring Out People* (Meta-Programs), *Adventures in Time* (Time-Lines), *MovieMind* (representation systems), etc. To test one's knowledge of NLP, we have a 22-page exam that we send to every applicant and ask them to fill it out before they arrive.

After content, there is the ability to communicate it. And again, using the NLP model itself, this means *engaging* an audience, *creating rapport* with them, *setting frames* about the message, *framing*

the message in terms of why, what, how, and what if (the 4-mat template), *inducing state* in the audience, and effectively *using one's voice and semantic space* when on stage. These essential presentation skills which govern effective public speaking are the very skills that we have benchmarked.

Experiential Presentation Skills

There are many different kinds of *presentations*. There is the speech or lecture wherein a person prepares and delivers a presentation. That's what the short 18-minute TED talks are— talks. A keynote presentation is essentially a talk. The speaker does all of the speaking with maybe some icebreakers to engage the audience. While a lecture presentation is generally direct and serious, the keynote is partially entertainment.

Then there is the seminar—typically a speech that focuses on understanding a focused subject (e.g., selling, self-esteem, parenting, etc.). It may last from one hour to three days. In the seminar the speaker does all of the speaking with little bits of limited interaction with the audience. The seminar speaker will often use various energizers, ice-breakers, or focused questions with the audience which gets the audience involved to some extent.

The training presentation differs from the speech (keynote) and the seminar in that it intimately involves the audience. In fact, in a training we do not think of the people as “an audience,” but as participants—that's because in a training those attending are expected to be active learners as they participate in the process.

In terms of size, a speech, keynote or even a seminar may involve hundreds, even thousands of people. Trainings seldom involve hundreds. Because a training is designed to enable people to get hands-on-experience and supervision in learning a new skill, trainings tend to involve a dozen to 50 or 60 people. Above a dozen people, the trainer will need others to help him or her with the hands-on learning— hence an assist team. Generally speaking, a trainer can handle 30 or so people, but above that number really needs a co-trainer and a team that can intimately engage the participants.

Core Engagement Skills

Training is also unique in that a trainer has to truly *love and care about people*. Those who love making speeches, doing keynote presentations, and holding a seminar can (and often do) love the limelight. They love being on stage and being “the man” or “the woman.” This can lead to the dark side of the “guru” phenomenon when the person thinks that it's about him or her rather than the people and the value that people get from the experience.

Not so with training. Training requires *high intensity personal interaction*. Now there is, in trainings, a speech part as you introduce your subject, engage the minds of those present with the value of it and the reason why they should learn a particular skill. There is also a bit of being “on stage” when you demonstrate what you can do to show the skill so people can see it live and up-close. Yet mostly in training there is a lot of back-and-forth communication. This shows up in the question and answer times and in the practice time when participants get to try their own hand at the skill to see how well they can pull it off.

For these activities, *answering questions* and setting up *exercises* for a hands-on experience (a live human laboratory), the trainer has to be authentic, personal, available, and open to participants. Here the arrogance of thinking you are *a Somebody* because you are in the role of “trainer,” will trip you up. It’s not so much a show that the people want as it is an experience. They want an experience that will enable them to learn a new skill or enhance a competency.

In training, much more than in lectures and seminars, *it is entirely about the participant— and specifically the participants’ learning and developing*. Those who are not ready to “get their hands dirty,” that is, get involved and *do what’s required to learn*, are really not the best persons for a training. First let them be inspired by a lecture or seminar. Then when they are ready to *learn—to take an active and responsible role in their learning*— then let them come to the training.

Training for Training

Here’s what we do at NSTT. We divide the entire group into groups of 6 participants. This gives them a “home base” with a trainer as their team leader. Then each person in the group picks one of ten patterns that occur in the APG training. That becomes their pattern for the next 15 days. Over that time that will develop it, design it, and then present it over and over and over. Twelve times they will be on their feet in front of their team presenting sections of their pattern in 7 minute segments. After the first presentation, they will receive 7 minutes of feedback to the core competencies, and then they will do *Take Two*. They will present it again integrating the feedback about their framing, voice, semantic space, group rapport, framing, state induction, and content.

At first they will present *the opening of their presentation*. Next they will present *the first minutes when they present the ‘what’ and the ‘why.’* After that they will present *the ‘how’* and after that they will present *a demonstration*, next they will do a *question and answer presentation*, and finally they will present *the closing*. All of these repeated presentation is designed to do several things. First, enable the presenter to become thoroughly acquainted with one pattern. Second, learn how to keep him or herself *fresh*. For some this is a real challenge. They tend to get bored. “I’ve said that before.”

Ah, yes! Now we’re about to see how skilled you truly are as a trainer— can you keep yourself as fresh the 50th time or the 100th time as the first time? A good trainer can. And for a great trainer, his or her own curiosity, passion, and commitment to people make the challenge of staying fresh *no problem at all*.

Next, are the drills. From the first day, we have all of the trainers up on their feet presenting— mostly presenting whatever they just heard (which makes for a good way to review and test what people are hearing and learning). Yet that’s not the focus. The focus is on drilling some aspect of training— perhaps controlling nervous movement of their hands or their feet. Perhaps it is to use their voice in very strange and weird ways. Perhaps it is to present under very, very distracting conditions. Anyway, we have 4 or 5 drills every day, drills that are designed to expand one’s repertoire and to create great flexibility. This flexibility is then designed so that the presenters can maintain “presence of mind” under pressure.

Pushing the Training of Trainers Even Further

Not satisfied with this, we also have designed several other exercises and laboratory experiences for our trainers. Knowing that they will be going into Board Rooms to present, sell, and negotiate their training services, we have a presentation designed to train those skills. Knowing that trainers will sometimes need to “speak from the heart,” we have experiences to facilitate that. We have an evening in which we focus on “Your Worst Nightmare as a Trainer” preparing trainers to be able to handle situations that otherwise might distress them. We have an evening introducing how to prepare and deliver a keynote presentation.

Training is not just making a speech. It is so much more and as with any profession, for the highly skilled trainer, there are a multitude of skills to learn and practice. For example, there are the business skills. For that we do some one-hour Interviews with experienced trainers and do that for several days.

Now you know a lot about *how we go about training trainers in Neuro-Semantics*. And if you are interested, contact us.

- 2018 NSTT will be in Grand Junction Colorado
- July 1– 15, 2018 at Travelodge, 715 Horizon Drive, GJ. (970) 243-5080.
- For more information, contact: Dr. Michael Hall — drmichael@acsol.net

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #55
December 4, 2017
This Thing Called "Depression" #1

THIS THING CALLED "DEPRESSION"

We are now heading into the Christmas season and all of the holidays from Thanksgiving to New Years. For many this is the season to be jolly, however for others, *'tis the season to be depressed*. At least this has been one of the regular characteristics of the holiday seasons for many years in the US. Given that and given the large percentage of the population here and around the world that suffer from "depression," I thought this might be a good time to talk about this thing that we call "depression."

A first distinction is that *all depression is not the same*. There are actually many different experiences which are called "depression." In fact, the term is over-used and all too often is used in far too trivial contexts. So let's begin here.

First of all, *the term "depression" does not refer merely to feeling sad, disappointed, or discouraged*. It is far more than any one of those experiences, although it frequently (perhaps primarily arises from one of these states). The clinical term depression refers to a very abnormal state and one that is no longer just a mental state, but one involving one's body, emotions, neuro-chemistry, etc. And depression, unlike the healthy and useful emotions of feeling sad, disappointed, or discouraged, is an unhealthy and dangerous state.

Let's start with sadness. In the primary state of sadness, you register a sense of grief due to a recognition of loss. In fact, the emotions of grief and sadness help us deal with our sense of loss. So, if you have experienced a real loss—you have lost a loved one, a treasured position, a relationship, a project, your health, etc., then the grief enables you to come to terms with things and re-focus your energies. An actual loss means that something valuable and important is no longer present or available. So your mental and emotional *investments* (your ego-investments) in it are gone. How you defined yourself or even identified yourself in terms of that person, object, or position is also gone. And you feel the less for it. You may be asking yourself, "Who am I now?"

The grief and sadness enables you to register the loss and then to focus and reinvest your energies into something else. The emotional intensity of the sadness generally relates to *how important* the loss was to you. It gets your attention so you can release it, alter your ideas about it, change your expectations, and put your energies into something as a replacement.

Depression differs from loss in that you are now *de-pressing* yourself, your energies, your hopes, your dreams, your wants, etc. and as you *push these things down* you reduce your appetite, exercise, sleep, sexual desires, desires to work, to contribute. In a word, you are avoiding the challenge of

staying in the vitality of life. Depression is not merely being sad, it is more. Often it is a way to cope with sadness. It could be *being sad* about being sad, a meta-sadness that is now turning your energies *against* yourself. It could be *shaming* or *guilt-ing* yourself for some aspect of the loss. It could be that you are “turning your *anger* inward” against your *self*— that was Sigmund Freud’s analysis of depression. Or it could be a dozen other meta-state configurations.

There are actually many ways to generate a depression meta-state wherein you *press down* (“depress”) your energies, hopes, passions, resilience, and resources. In this all “depression” is not the same. There are many configuration— all of which is a misuse of your meta-responses to yourself.

Using the Matrix Model as a way to model personality, you can see how “depression” can show up in each of the dimensions of the Matrix. A person could feel *down* and *discouraged* in so many ways.

- In the Meaning Dimension where you make and experience positive meanings, you may be creating boredom, futility, emptiness, meaninglessness.
- In the Intention dimension that concerns your intentions, motivations, and agendas for living, you may be experiencing the loss of hope, direction and purpose.
- In the Self dimension, you may be experiencing you value as a person as conditional, inadequate, flawed, and worthless.
- In the Power dimension that involves your powers, skills, competencies, and resources, you may be experiencing your powers as weak, limited, controlled, and determined.
- In the Others dimension, you may be experiencing feeling unloved, rejected, unwanted, even despised relationally.
- In the Time dimension, you may be experiencing yourself as stuck in the past, fated by past events, impulsive in the moment, etc.
- In the World dimension, you may be experiencing a loss of an important role, status, or position.

Depression has been called “the common cold” of mental and emotional disorders. When a person truly becomes depressed, he depresses his energies, activities, hopes, sense of meaning, etc. No wonder *depression* is also one of the most dreaded states. As a very unpleasant state, it then feeds many other self-destructive behaviors.

In many of these cases, the problem is really not “depression.” People are using that term far too loosely. Instead of depression, many are suffering from discouragement, lack of motivation, a wide range of fears, anxiety, fatigue, burnout, and so on. They confuse their “down” feelings with depression. Many times the real problem is that they don’t have a big and exciting *challenge* in their lives. There’s not sufficient meaning and meaningfulness. It could also be that they are playing life too safe, too small, and/or too perfect. Or they could be expecting absolute success with no problems and they could be wanting it now without any effort.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #56
December 11, 2017
This Thing Called "Depression" #2

DEPRESSION: IT'S ABOUT THE THINKING

Given that a lot of things are called "depression," which are not clinically *depression* (Neurons #53), how can you tell? A good way to begin is to use the work of Dr. David D. Burns and his classic, *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* (1980). What Burns did in that book was to make exceptionally practical the theoretic work of Dr. Aaron T. Beck one of the founders of the cognitive psychotherapy. His thesis was simple:

"When you are depressed, you are *thinking* in an illogical, negative manner and you inadvertently act in a self-defeating way. Yet you can train yourself to straighten your twisted thought patterns."
(Burn, p. 3)

He also utilized the Beck Depression Inventory (page 20-21), a list of 21 items to help with a basic diagnosis. For decades this Cognitive Psychology approach has been the most successful approach regarding depression and anxiety. Immediately following the inventory is chapter 3, *You Feel the Way You Think*, and a list of 10 Cognitive Distortions. That's because the more cognitive distortions one uses in thinking to understand oneself, others, and the world, the more misery you create for yourself, and the more likely you are to create depression.

What are these cognitive distortions that are so destructive and that create the dysfunctional state of depression? The following distortions are all expressions of *uncritical* thinking:

All-or-Nothing thinking, over-generalization, negative mental filter, disqualifying the positive (discounting), jumping to conclusions (mind-reading), magnification and minimization (distortion), emotional reasoning, using "should" statements (demanding), labeling (confusing map and territory), and personalizing.

Once you have looked at the signs of depression, you can then use the NLP Communication Model and ask a lot of probing questions. Begin with modeling questions in order to explore the experience itself, what it entails, what the person is referring to, and how he is creating his experience.

- How do you know to call what you're feeling depression?
- How do you create this state? What is your internal strategy?
- What's playing on the theater of your mind— what images, sounds, sensations?
- What are the qualities of the cinematic features of this movie?
- What is the triggering event to which you are responding?
- When did the depression start? When is it worse? When is it better?
- What is it like on the inside to be or feel "depressed?"
- What are you *pushing down* in your experience of depression?

“Every bad feeling you have is the result of your distorted negative thinking, illogical pessimistic attitudes play the central role in the development and continuation of all your symptoms. Intense negative thinking always accompanies a depressive episode. ... The first major key to understanding your moods: your emotions result entirely from the way you *look* at things. It is an obvious neurological fact that before you can experience any event, you must process it with your mind and give it meaning. (Burns, 1980, p. 29).

“When you are depressed, you possess the remarkable ability to *believe*, and to get the people around you to believe, things which have no basis in reality. The Cognitive Distortions.” (p. 31-41).

These questions help us to understand *many of the variables* within the experience and how any given person creates and maintains a depressed state. Yet there’s more to it. Using the Meta-States Model, we ask additional questions—meta-questions—that allow us to explore the matrix of frames as meta-states that construct and hold the depression in place.

- What meanings are you giving to the triggering event that leads you to not only feel appropriately sad, but to *push down* your energies?
- Do you *like* feeling depressed?
- What are some of the *positive values* and benefits that you get from this experience?
- What does it *mean* to you that you’re experiencing depression?
- How do you feel or think about this state?
- What are the *thinking patterns* that drive or amplify or support this state?
- What do you believe about X to which you are responding with depression?

In the first case, NLP enables us to recognize that the depressive person is running a depressive movie and passively experiencing the movie as it drones on and on. In the second, Meta-States enables us to recognize the difference between sadness and depression. Sadness is a primary state emotion, a feeling of sadness, which when appropriate due to some loss, is healing and appropriate. But *sadness* about our *sadness* might create the more complex state of *depression*. Yet there are other configurations.

Anger at self for being *imperfect* might create *depression*. Freud said depression was “anger turned inward.”

Intolerance of disappointment might be another structure for feeling depressed.

Rejection of self for *failing* at a business, relationship, or whatever.

Now for the good news. Sadness is normal, if discouragement is normal, if other so-called “negative” emotions are normal, they are *just human emotions*. And if appropriate to the context and to one’s mental model, then they help us deal with reality, make adjustments, and get back on track. *Depression*, however, is not normal. It is a misuse of your powers—especially your cognitive and emotional powers and it solves nothing. And there’s good news about that. After all, if you created that experience, you can *uncreate* it. You can identify what you are doing to create it and learn a better way. You can meta-state things in a much more productive way:

Acceptance of being fallible and making mistakes.

Curiously learning about the mistakes and correcting them.

Forgiving yourself and *releasing the past* so you can resiliently move forward.

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #57
December 18, 2017
This Thing Called "Depression" #3

DEPRESSION AS PRESSING DOWN

Sometimes *a word* is highly informative and tells the story of all experience. This happens to be the case with "depression." People who suffer depression not only go through a disappointment, loss, frustration, etc., they also "de-press" their life's energies. They press-down their emotions, their hopes, expectations, inspiration, physical energies, determination, persistence, sexual desires, etc.

In fact, this pressing-down lies at the heart of the depression. That is, depression is revealed by the pressing-down, so that if and when a person stops *pressing-down*, the depression lifts.

Because depression is not a primary state, it is not an emotion like sadness, frustration, anger, fear, etc. Instead it is a meta-state, a state-about-a-state. It may be fear of sadness, rejection of sadness, anger at sadness, anger turned against self, surprise and shock at a disappointment, etc. And because it is not a primary emotion, it does not provide information about the relationship between one's map and experience in the territory. Instead, because it arises as a person *turns his negative emotions against oneself*, it is the result of misusing one's emotions.

The proper use of emotions begins by accepting that they measure the difference between what we mapped and what we experience. As such, every emotion is useful and provides valuable information. Perhaps the map was off, perhaps our skill in the experience was deficient. Either way, we can change our emotion by changing either what we're thinking or what we're doing or some combination of the two.

By way of contrast, we misuse our emotions and abuse ourselves when we take our negative emotions and turn them against ourselves. Whereas a negative emotion tells you that something is wrong with either your mental map or the way you are coping with things in the outside world, that negative emotion gives you the energy to take action to change the map or the experience. However, when you turn the emotion against yourself, the emotion's energy has nowhere else to go but against your mind and body. It's what I originally called a "dragon" state— an unresourceful state. This is the source of all sorts of psycho-somatic illnesses.

The mental mapping typically goes to the expectations that we have mapped. Given that, we can ask, "What were you expecting?" Take any situation of loss, disappointment, frustration, anger, etc. and ask, "What expectations did you have as you went into that situation?" Then, when you get the answer, ask a follow-up question, "What is the quality of your expectations?" "Was it realistic, probable, impossible, improbable, demanding, etc.?"

A person's expectations refer to what a person has projected into the future. The expectations may be coded as representations, beliefs, understandings, and so on. These are then projected into the future as what we anticipate. They become expectations when we look forward to seeing them happen ... and if the thoughts behind the expectations are "shoulds" or "musts" then high demands are driving them.

"I must succeed." "Things should always be fair." "I should reach my goals quickly and with little effort." "I should be approved and respected by everybody."

Now if you want a good case of disappointment, here's the formula: set unrealistic or high expectations beyond what's realistic about what will happen. Imagine this beautiful future as vividly as you can— in full color, close, with the most enhancing sounds or music, then step in that movie. Then say, "This is what I expect, what I want, and what I demand will happen or it will be the end of the world for me."

From: L. Michael Hall
2017 Neurons #58
December 25, 2017
This Thing Called "Depression" #4

TRANSFORMING DEPRESSION

When it comes to the complex meta-state called "depression," given that we create it as noted in the past three Neurons posts, we can now ask two very different questions. First, "How does a person create depression?" And second, "How can we transform depression?"

First, Creating the Meta-Muddle of Depression

How does a person get into such the meta-muddle of depression? What kind of structure does this involve? Here is a common formula for creating depression.

1) Reject, refuse, and attack negative feelings. When you feel down or discouraged, the "negative" feeling could be sadness, grief, discouragement, fear, frustration, stress, tiredness, fatigue, etc. These emotions are valuable. They result as "the difference" between your map (expectations) and your experiences. They indicate the map-territory difference. When you reject them, you reject the information they offer you about your expectations and your skills or experiences. To create a good bout of depression, reject, refuse, and fear your negative emotions. Hate them and get angry at them.

A subtle way to reject negative emotions is to pretend that you are not really down and try to "cheer up." When you try to cheer up yourself or another, you assume is that there's something wrong or bad about feeling down and depressed. You "should" get rid of it. Your cheering up, as a command, "Don't feel bad!", amounts to a demand to *not* have some feelings (sadness, pessimism) and a demand to have other feelings (cheer, optimism).

Have you ever tried to cheer up someone who was depressed? Have you ever offered positive words of cheer and hope and optimism as you confidently assured him with your inspiring words? Have you ever tried to reason yourself or another out of feeling a feeling? Have you ever felt assured that if you use the common sense logic of telling a depressed person to "snap out of it and start counting blessings? that will work? It didn't help much, did it? Do you know why it did not? The "cheer" does not work because it ignores the primary feelings, covers them up, and asks you to feel something that violates your current thinking and feeling.

2) Use your attempted solution to create a second level problem. If you *command* your sad feelings to go away, if you *hate* them, or *fear* them, all of these "attempted solutions" are actually amplifying the depression and creating a second-level problem on top of things. By ordering yourself, "Don't feel X, feel Y" *this supposed solution itself becomes yet another problem.* It implies a taboo (prohibition) against your emotions and sets up a double-bind. By *trying* to not feel one emotion, and *trying* to order another (feeling cheerful) creates an internal conflict. In the long run, it will increase a sense of inadequacy, powerlessness, helplessness, and badness.

3) *Layer on more problems.* You started with a discouragement, you then used cheering up as an attempted solution that prohibited the first emotion. You then brought other emotions against yourself— fear, guilt, anger, etc. deepening the sense of being helpless, powerless, and inadequate. These meta-problems then outframed the first level problem generating more negative feelings and amplifying the depression. It's all a vicious spiral that will only pull you down further into a vortex of negativity creating a full-fledge "depression."

Transforming and Transcending Depression

Ready to change all of that? Now that you know how you have created your experience, you know a little bit about how to un-create it, how to stop creating it, and how to create something much better and more resourceful.

First, Distinguish the Levels of States and Accept States.

All states are not the same. At the primary level *sadness* signals you that there's a difference between your map and experience. Given how you have mapped some facet of the world, there's a sense of loss in your experience. *Sadness* appropriately registers the loss as it also motivates you to replace what you have lost. This is actually good and valuable— you need it it makes you human and real.

Primary level "negative" emotions have a positive role and purpose in our lives. At the primary level your thoughts-and-feelings are in relationship to something "out there," the emotions, while unpleasant and distressful, are valuable. When you turn your "negative" feelings against your own feelings (sad about sad, anger at sadness, fear of sadness, shame of sadness, etc.), those second-order emotions create the semantic damage of depression.

"Depression" is *not* a primary level emotion, but a meta-state. If you fail to distinguish the levels of states, you will probably mis-understand "depression," thinking it is a primary state and about something out there in the world. It is not. It is a meta-state made up of negative thoughts and feelings *about* some other thought, belief, expectation, hope, demand, etc. This explains why it's easy to solve sadness and why the sadness releases emotional pain. The same, however, does not hold true for depression.

Second, Positively Accept Sadness and Negative Emotions.

Knowing that all of your emotions on the primary level are good, valuable, and important, use them for self-awareness. Counter-intuitively, you effectively manage your emotions by positively *accepting* your fear, sadness, anger, guilt, etc. Acknowledge *what* you are feeling, then decide what to do. If you have brought negative feelings against yourself, accept that, realize the mistake that you are making, and set about to reverse it.

Counter-intuitively, by accepting the very thing you don't like and don't want gives you control over it. Acceptance means acknowledging what *is*; it does not condon it, want it, or approve it. Give yourself permission to feel sad, to feel down, to feel discouraged. Paradoxically, the more open and receptive you are with your emotions, you'll do the emotional work and the emotions pass on.

Third, Undo the De-Pressing.

Instead of pushing down your energies, hope, dreams, values, etc., lift them up. Positively reframe your meanings, set high level intentions to re-ignite your inspiration, get off your butt and get 30 minutes of exercise every day, make a contribution of your time, money, and energy to others.

