

**NEURONS**

**VOLUME II**

**2008**

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From: L. Michael Hall  
Neurons #1  
January 7, 2008

## A NEW YEAR— A NEW YOU?

*Ah, a new year and with it—new year’s resolutions.* Decisions, hopes, dreams, wishes, commitments, resolutions, and plans for making your life better, fulfilling your dreams, becoming more fully your full potentials, turning things around, eating better, exercising more, taking care of relationships, and the list goes on and on. What are your *resolutions* for this year for yourself? What *decisions* are you making for improving the quality of your life this year?

As we begin the new year, I hope that you have not pooh-poohed new years resolutions or, for that matter, *resolutions*. Making mental-emotional-and-conative *resolutions* activates the part of consciousness that makes us unique and truly human. A resolution for how to live, what to do, what to avoid, new directions for living, dreams to actualize—these are things that indicate that we can take charge of our lives and translate great ideas into actual lifestyle. It indicates that we humans are a class of life that are the architects of our lives. Whether you know it or not, whether you exercise the power extensively or not, you do play an architectural role in your life. And if you so desire, you can learn how to run your own brain in order to manage your own states.

Of course, there’s a science and an art to creating empowering resolutions that enable you to effectively actualize your dreams. That human science begins with the Well-Formed Outcome pattern of NLP. This means that there is a proper structure to “goals” and that we can just as easily create ill-formed, sloppy, inadequate, and even toxic goals. Well-formed outcomes provides a set of questions and distinctions for making sure the *outcomes* that you set and how you set them are well-designed and life-enhancing.

Yet the science doesn’t end there. Well-formed outcomes is taken to a whole new level with the KPI pattern of Neuro-Semantics (a pattern that we use in Meta-Coaching) and that Meta-Coaches learn as part of how they coach for a person’s self-actualization. The *Key Performance Indicator pattern* enables you to take the precision and specificity to yet another level as it enables you to clearly articulate your goal and measure your progress to actualizing the goal.

Now equally important to the skill of creating life-enhancing resolutions is *the art of execution* when you translate your dreams and exciting meanings into actual life-style. This also is where state management plays a critical role. After all, if you can’t manage your state—if you can’t monitor the states that you experience and if you can’t manage the thoughts, feelings, and energies of those states, then you will not be able to consistently get yourself to *do* what you resolve to do. And that seems to be the biggest problem for those who have become cynical and distrusting of new year’s resolutions.

Making the resolution is one thing; following-through on it so that you actually execute the decision and live it out in your body, well, that's a very different thing. In Neuro-Semantics we call this the *knowing-doing gap*. Know what to do, even knowing how to do it, and having the motivation and determination to do it—all of that is the *knowing*. The *doing* is the embodiment of the knowing. In the doing we translate from mind into body so that we “know” it in our body. This makes the knowledge “intuitive” (in-knowing).

So, given all this, how are you doing? Where are you in your ability to translate from *mind* into *body* so that what you construct mentally from your ideas, insights, studies, and dreams, your highest and best *meanings* become your actions—what you actually do, your performance? How well are you able to monitor and manage your states so that you can get yourself to come through and follow through? How are you at taking effective action in practicing, persisting, continuously learning, refining, and improving?

Because it is a new year, all of us have an opportunity to examine our style of actualizing our highest and best and step up to be the architect of our future, the quality of our life, and the direction that we set for our lives. If you don't—then you leave these things to chance, or worse, to someone else determining your life, your direction, and even your goals.

Will this be the year that you'll be *a conscious architect* of your own self-actualization? Would you like to set that as your goal and resolve for this year? Actualizing your highest and best is the pathway of happiness and joy because it activates the two dynamics that make us fully alive/fully human—challenge and competency. *Challenge* is what makes life meaningful and significant; *competency* is what enables you to rise up to be equal to the challenges. And of course, these critical success factors are the heart and soul of Neuro-Semantics: *meaning and performance*.

To your self-actualization in 2008!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
Neurons #2  
January 14, 2008

## **WILL THE NEW YOU BE YOUR HIGHEST SELF?**

When it comes to *self*-actualization, the very term implies that we have a *self* to develop. It implies that there's a core *you* and that *you, as a person*, are made to develop. It implies that there are possibilities and potentials within you to unleash, to grow, to evolve, to develop so that you can *become* more and more *you*, more and more of what you can become. It implies that you are not finished.

Self-Actualization also implies that there is within you *the possibility of your best self and a highest self*. Now it might seem counter-intuitive, but an avowed atheist created this model! It was someone committed to the scientific model, who actually wrote a book on science (The Psychology of Science, 1966), someone who began as a Behaviorist and studied with leading Behaviorists in his time, and who launched a “third force” in psychology, who launched the Journal of Humanistic Psychology—it was that person who discovered through his studies of chimpanzees, female sexuality, and the needs that drive and motivates humans, that we have within our biology the possibility of a higher self.

For Maslow this was critically important because it meant that for science to be complete and true to the facts of human existence it must include *values*, peak or mystical experiences, and the experience that we call “spirituality.” So surprisingly (or perhaps not so surprisingly), this avowed atheist also wrote a book “Religion, Values, and Peak Experiences” (1964). He led out in the 1950s study human values, arguing that science inherently involves values as does education, politics and, in fact, everything human. And this is not because he believed in a God, but because he discovered that we are made with a higher self.

This *higher self* is biological and inherent in our nature. It emerges as a need, a higher need as we learn how to effectively and adequately gratify our lower animal needs. Both sets of needs (lower and higher) are equally valid and important because they work together as a system of drives. The lower needs creates the foundation for the higher needs. And as we learn to adequately gratify the lower needs with “true satisfiers” (and not false substitutes), the driving motivation of our lower needs go away. They disappear. And what emerges is the next level need, the next level drive. And it is in this emergence that the higher self arises.

So in self-actualizing, you learn about yourself—about your true nature. You discover your lower nature as an animal and how to cope with the lower needs of surviving (food, shelter, exchange, money, activity), safety and security (structure, order, protection), social (love,

affection, bonding, connection), and self-regard (value, status, significance). These are animal needs. All of the higher and more intelligent animals have these needs.

At the level of the lower needs, “knowing yourself” means knowing yourself in terms of these drives, what they are, how they work, what feelings they trigger inside you, how to satisfy them, how to get beyond them, etc. Regarding our lower needs, Maslow said that we need to be “good animals.” That’s because these needs are not bad or evil. They are just drives of our organism for living and thriving, so that we can feel good and make an effective adjustment to life as it is.

Yet these are also *deficiency* needs. That is, *deficiency is the mechanism* that drives us when we experience need at this level. We don’t have enough. Enough food, enough water, shelter, sex, money, safety, structure, touch, contact, bonding, friends, regard, value, significance, etc. We lack. We are deficient of the very factors that satisfy the requirements of life. But, and this is an amazing thing, when we find a true satisfier and learn how to adequately cope with these requirements, the need goes away. At that point, we often then experience post-gratification forgetting—forgetting how driving the need was.

At this point also that *the truly human drives kick in*. Each level of need is prepotent and keeps us occupied there until it is basically gratified. Once it is sufficiently satisfied then the next level emerges and with the gratification of the lower needs, the higher needs emerge. Now we need things that satisfy our best self, our highest self. And what are these things? They are the human drives for meaning, purpose, beauty, order, mathematics, justice, fairness, contribution, legacy, love, goodness, truth, honesty, aliveness, uniqueness, playfulness, completeness, etc. Maslow called these the *being* values (B-values) and in this *Being*-realm we experience B-love, B-cognition, etc.

It is at this level that *you can discover and “know” your highest self*. And this is where you can increasingly *become* more and more of who you really are. Nor is it a process that ever ends. What is the purpose of life according to Self-Actualization Psychology? It is to *be* and to *become*. It is to keep learning, growing, changing, and developing as you keep moving up higher and higher levels of the *being*-values and *being*-life. This makes life an adventure. It also keeps you young, curious, playful, and fascinated. It keeps you in the state of “continuous freshness of appreciation.” It gets you thinking about collaborating, cooperating, giving, and contributing.

Neuro-Semantics is all about this— enabling ourselves and others to grow to our fullest humanness, to the greatest fulfillment and actualization of our highest potentials, to help us become the best we are capable of becoming and to becoming actually what we deeply are potentially. Welcome to the adventure!

**From: L. Michael Hall**

Neurons #3

January 21, 2008

## BECOMING MORE YOU

Two insight ideas swim around in my thoughts as I begin to write this reflection. One comes from Alfred Korzybski, the other from Abraham Maslow. One first one warns against the very thing the second one proposes. Is it a paradox—only a *seeming* contradiction or was there a true and irreconcilable difference? Yet both offer great insights about how to become *more of who you are*.

Korzybski passionately wanted to see the “soft” sciences of psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, etc. to advance and develop, generation after generation, in a way similar to how the “hard” sciences develop. To facilitate that he said we have to do what the hard sciences have done, namely, create an accurate linguistics for our field so that we can adequately map the content of our knowledge. That’s why he invented the field of General Semantics. That’s also why he warned that it is *the confusion of map with territory* that creates so much of the unsanity that we experience and that undermines our ability to have an adequate language. When we confuse map and territory, we *identify* one with the other and use the insane term, “same,” as in, “They are the same.”

From this Korzybski showed that it is *identification* that undermines our sanity and our science. He especially warned about the “is” of identity. “This is that.” The passive “to be” verb (is, am, are, was, be, being, etc.) hides these insane words. And from that came the focus on E-prime language—eliminating these “is” verbs from all of our speech and writing, something I undertook for 3 or 4 years to the dismay of many readers and editors!

Korzybski’s point was that identification is insane because nothing is ever “the same.” Everything is always in the process of change. This is especially true of living things. So if identifying any two things is insane, then to *identify ourselves with anything* that we think, believe, do, own, etc. is an even greater un-sanity. Whatever we say that we “are,” we are not just that or exclusively that. We are more. We are more than our thoughts, our emotions, our speech, our behaviors, our relationships, our experiences, and so on.

Maslow’s focus was about human motivation, *being*, and becoming and that focus took him to self-development as people actualize their highest and best potentials. First studying healthy people and then the “best specimens” to discover what’s possible in human nature, he began modeling self-actualizers to identify their characteristics and qualities. In that process he discovered the following as an indication of their development:

“We can learn from self-actualizing people what the ideal attitude toward work might be under the most favorable circumstances. These highly evolved individuals assimilate their work into the identity into self, i.e., work actually



becomes part of the self part of the individual's definition of himself. Work can be psychotherapeutic, psychologic (making well people grow toward self-actualization." (*Maslow on Management*, 1998)

Maslow here proposes what may seem to be the very opposite of what Korzybski urged. But before we draw that conclusion, let's first seek to understand what he meant by *assimilating their work into the identity of self*. These words occur in the context of work, management, and self-actualization companies. So it is about actualizing one's self with one's work and at work. Maslow's description is about how self-actualizing people relate to their work—those who have found a passion that fits their talents and who use their work to create a meaningful life that contributes, that leaves a legacy, and that gives them moments of peak experience.

The description then is about *how they relate to effortful activity*— to how they can *give themselves* in an engagement with what they do so that it becomes an expression of their *self*. And in doing that they enter the "genius state" where they are in "flow," where the world goes away, time disappears, and they are lost in an engagement so much that they "become one" with it. Maslow called this a peak experience—a momentary and fleeting moment that seems almost like a mystical experience, an oceanic experience.

So what do you think? Are these insights polar opposites and contradictions? I don't think so. One speaks about dis-identifying yourself from any and every identification in order to be know yourself apart from all of the connections and ways that you express yourself. The other speaks about bringing experiences into your ego-boundaries and using the ways you expression yourself as part of your self-definition. By the first, you become more authentically *you* as you discover *you* apart from identifications. By the second you use your uniqueness to expand yourself in your expressions that enriches your sense of self.

How can you become more *you*—more authentically the you that you can potentially become in this new year? First clear away every identification. That will give you a clean slate to start from. Then when you identify with something, do so mindfully and consciously so as to not deceive yourself. Now as you develop your talents and find ways to express your inner self, you can assimilate all kinds of experiences into yourself. You can create a synergy from your work so that it becomes your play—an expression of your real self.

**From: L. Michael Hall**

Neurons #4

January 28, 2008

## YOUR MEANING INDEX

In Neuro-Semantics we centrally focus on meaning. Why? *Because we know that ultimately it is all about meaning.* Life is all about meaning. Lose meaning and you despair. Your job is all about meaning, lose meaning there and you become a liability to your employer. Your relationships is about meaning, lose the meaningful of the relationship and you'll look elsewhere. Your responses is all about meaning, your health, your money, your sexuality, and on and on. Everything in human experience ultimately comes down to (or *up* to) your semantics.

What explains this idea that life in all of its facets is all about meaning? How is it that *meaning* is so important? The explanation is that meaning is what enables, facilitates, and governs life, communicating, relating, creating, enjoying, etc. *Meaning* plays this central role because meaning determines our sense of what *is*, what it stands for, what it leads to, and what we're to do. Meaning is what we *map* as what's real, what's significant (important, valuable), and what's required.

How do you know how to *respond* to anything unless you know what it is and what it means to you? The question is rhetorical. Obviously you cannot. To respond to anything you first have to recognize what it *is*, and you have to attribute some significance to it. Until then you won't know what it is or what to do. Should you approach or avoid? Animals have this as an inherent part of their programming which we call "instincts." But we humans lack such programming. Being instinctless means that we don't know inherently what things are or what significance to attribute to them. This we have to discover in part and create in part. And that makes us meaning-makers.

Numerous things fall out because of this: the gap within us as our consciousness between stimulus and response, the gap of choice, of response-ability, the gap of meaning-making, our identity as meaning-makers, the fallibility of our responses, the possibility of being the architect of our own personalities, identities, and futures, the transcendence of our programming, our humanness, our morality, and much, much more.

If *meaning* is this important, then all of the stuff you do in your heads to create meaning, represent meaning, understand meaning, evaluate meaning, suspend old meanings, etc. are part and parcel of how to live meaningfully and actualize your highest. So Neuro-Semantics, as a field about human psychology, focuses on the role of meaning in our lives and the quality of the meanings as we respond.

Over the years we have developed numerous models about meaning. It began with the Meta-States model which identifies how we create and hold in mind layers of ideas, thoughts,

representations, beliefs, etc. Then the Inner Game model (Frame Games), the Mind-Lines as the structure of meaning, then the Matrix model for a system approach to the meanings we create about ourselves developmentally. Then a couple years ago the Meaning and Performance Axes of the Self-Actualization Quadrants (which you can find in *Coaching Change*, Meta-Coaching Volume I and *Unleashed: A Guide to Your Ultimate Self-Actualization*).

While thinking about these axes I began wondering about how to create a scale for each axes. This, in turn, led to two indices, *the Meaning Index* and *the Performance Index*. What do we measure on this Meaning Index? What facets of meaning will we seek to gauge to determine the level and the quality of our *meaningfulness*?

As I thought about this, I began making a list of the sub-skills within the process of meaning-making. What skills are involved that make us *competent* in creating robust meanings? What skills are involved in finding and identifying meanings? What are the skills for suspending, refusing, and negating meanings? With these facets of meaning-making, I set up a 0-to-5 scaling for each so we could scale them from 0 for meaningless up the levels to full meaningfulness.

- 5: Legacy or mission
- 4: Unique or personal
- 3: Conventional
- 2: Trivial
- 1: Futile
- 0: Meaningless

How meaningful is your life? How skilled are you as a meaning-maker? How much power, flexibility, range, and what robust meanings inspire you? Where would you gauge yourself on the scale of meaning? Where are you in terms of creating meaning, quality controlling meanings, suspending meaning, and so on?

The *sub-skills* for *the Meaning Scale* involve not only the ability to create meaning, but to create quality meanings, to quality control the meanings, and to create specific meanings about such areas as psychological health, self, needs, time, problems, knowledge, etc.

- 1) Quality of Meaning
- 2) Psychologically Healthy Meaning
- 3) Power to Create Meaning
- 4) Self Meaning
- 5) Meaning about Needs
- 6) Meaning about Time
- 7) Meaning about Problems / Difficulties
- 8) Domain Knowledge Meaning: procedures, strategies, heuristics

*Quality of meaning*: What is the quality of the meanings that you create? Are your meanings inspiring, compelling, exciting, and enlivening? Do they get you up in the morning and excite you through the day? Or, are the meanings that you give to things conventional, “average,” okay, but nothing special? To what degree can you *sacrilize* anything? This refers to looking at things

in terms of them being special, delightful, wonderful, sacred, full of wonder, seen through the lens of eternity? Or, to what extent does your view of life, people, work, relationships, exercise, etc. full of *de-sacrilizing* and *discounting*? How accurate are your meanings in terms of being “maps” of the territory? How precise are they? How useful? How effective?

*Psychologically healthy meanings:* The meanings about yourself as a person, as a living, breathing human being and your development through life, your self-actualization, the health and vitality of your mind, your emotions, your memories, your imaginations, etc. How healthy or unhealthy are the meanings that you create in this area? To what extent have you developed an awareness of your own typical cognitive distortions? To what extent have you eliminated them?

*Power to create meaning:* The meaning you give to your *power* or ability to create meaning in the first place. Do you view yourself as powerful to do so or do you view meaning as given, fated, controlled, and out of your hands? Do you know your powers of constructing meaning? Do you use these powers? To what extent? How much more could you take charge of these powers, develop them? How flexible are you in your creation of meaning? Can you give anything 3 other meanings, 7, 20? How flexible is your creativity in this?

*Self Meanings:* The meanings that you give to yourself. Do you love yourself, adore and appreciate yourself, see yourself as lovable, precious, sacred, etc. Or do you view yourself as nothing special, okay, average, or do you de-value yourself with judgments, contempt, hatred? The meanings you give about yourself enable you to either get over yourself and on with life or stuck so that you become your biggest problem. Do you separate self-esteem from self-confidence? What meanings do you give to your fallibility, character flaws, and errors? How well do you maintain your dignity when you make a mistake?

*Meanings of needs and impulses:* The meanings you give to your biological, physiological, and animal nature. Do you view your nature and human nature as good or bad; sacred or evil and depraved? What meaning do you give to your basic drives? What are these needs? How do you gratify these needs with accurate and effective gratifications? What meanings do you give when you have a basic needs that's frustrated?

*Meanings about time:* The meanings you give to the concept of recognizing that our lives begin at a certain time and end at a certain time. Do you construct positive meanings about time so that you enjoy and appreciate each day or do you create interpretations that make you impatient about time, skeptical, regretful, living in the past, fearful of the future? What meanings do you give to scheduling? Prioritizing? Making time for things?

*Meanings about problems and difficulties:* The meanings you give to the gap between your present state and your desired state. How do you think of that difference? What meanings do you give to the tasks required to move you to your goal state? Do you love the effort to reduce the difference? Is it fun? Does it mean the activation of your problem-solving skills? Or is it a bother, a nuisance, unpleasant, etc.?

*Domain-knowledge Meaning:* The meanings about knowledge, about learning, developing strategies, figuring out how to do something, developing procedures and heuristics. What do you think about investing time, energy, effort to understand things? What meanings do you give to learning, unlearning, and re-learning? Is learning fun, delightful, the purpose of life? Or is drudgery, hateful, boring? What do you think about not-knowing or confusion? Are these valuable or dreadful states?

**From: L. Michael Hall**

Neurons #5

February 4, 2008

## WHAT'S YOUR PERFORMANCE INDEX?

In the last Meta Reflection I introduced the Meaning Index. This comes from the Meaning/Performance Axes of *the Self-Actualization Quadrants* which identifies the path of self-actualization. This path is within the fourth quadrant where we synergize our highest meanings with our most consistent and robust performances. Behaviorally this means that we are translating what meaningfully excites and thrills us into embodied reality. When we do this we are using the basic process of taking something of *mind* and incorporate it into *muscle*— that is, as we say in Neuro-Semantics, *performing meaning*.

In this process the *Meaning Index* indicates if we are constructing the kind of understandings, idea, values, beliefs, etc. that give the activity, skill, or experience sufficiently rich, accurate, and productive meaning. “Meaning” embraces value and significance, it also embraces accuracy and usefulness. In this “meaning” comprehends all of our cognitive and conative processes —from understanding, map-making, languaging, visioning, inspiring, etc.

To compliment meaning and to create synergy, we need “performance.” If the meaning is only in the mind, we’re just dreaming. The *Performance Index* corresponds to the neurology side of Neuro-Semantics. This index enables us to measure how we are doing in actualizing, making real, embodying, and acting on our inspirational meanings. It embraces our actions, behaviors, habits, speech, relating, etc.

So, how do we measure performance? How do we determine the quality and quantity of actual performances that makes things happen in the world? We begin with a list of sub-skills as we did with the Meaning Scale. *The sub-skills within the Performance Axis* include how we speak, plan, get along with others, cope with our needs and impulses, exert effort, practice, follow procedures, persist, keep refining our performances, and bounce back when we experience a setback.

And, how do we scale these various skills within the idea of *performing our meanings*? This one is fairly simple. We begin the scale where there is no competency, to the first steps in developing some skill, to competency, then on to elegance and finally mastery. For the performance scale we therefore have the following as levels of proficiency in terms of our competency in performing. This allows us to discern poor, medium, and top performances.<sup>1</sup>

0: Incompetent and unaware.

1: Inexperienced and incapable.

2: Almost competent, the first steps toward competency as an initiate, consciously incompetent, skill in the rough, trainee, first learner, novice.

3: Competency, able to cope effectively, apprentice, and then a journeyman.

4: Expertise, elegant and efficient in demonstrating the skill, skill well integrated into personality, consistent across contexts.

5: Masterful, consistent and dependable in demonstrating the skill, extending the skill to new areas.

Because we focus on synergizing meaning and performance in the Self-Actualization Workshop, the following activities gives us a way to make explicit the numerous different facets of performance.

- |                                    |                |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1) Verbally expressive and precise | 2) Planning    |
| 3) Social, interpersonal           | 4) Coping      |
| 5) Effort, discipline              | 6) Practice    |
| 7) Procedures                      | 8) Persistence |
| 9) Refining                        | 10) Resilience |

*1) Verbally expressive and precise:* This concerns your verbal behavior, your ability to put into words and effectively articulate the meaningfulness and significance of the skill or experience. Are you clear or fuzzy? Can you effectively describe the skill? Can you effectively communicate your passion of it and excite others about it? Does your self-communications induce you into the required states? Your best states of the skill? How precise are your words? How expressive?

*2) Planning:* To embody meaning, it is almost always a matter of efficiency and effectiveness to create an action plan that details what you're going to do, when, where, with whom, using what resources, for what objectives, etc. In designing a desired future, planning is typically one of the first actions that we take to embody our highest meanings. Do you have a written plan? How clear, detailed, relevant, compelling, etc. is your action plan? How often do you look at it and use it? How do you use it?

*3) Social, interpersonal:* This refers to the social dimension of performance, the actions that we take that involve others as we work *with* and *through* people. How are you at the social interactions of contacting, networking, informing, communicating, supporting, listening, delegating, leading, managing, etc.? What do you do to facilitate the resources of others/ who do you have to work with? What do you do to win that person's heart? How are you at conflict resolution, forgiveness, starting over, holding accountable, etc.? Do you have a support group?

*4) Coping:* This dimension of performance involves how we cope with our basic needs as well as cope with the demands and requirements of the environment. How are you at coping with the challenges, problems, and difficulties involved as you unleash this potential? What's holding you back, keeping you down, or interfering? What coping skills do you have? What coping skills will you need to learn and develop? What are the satisfiers that you use to gratify your needs? Do they satisfy your lower needs so they vanish and the self-actualization needs emerge? Do you take care of your physical needs for exercise, fitness, and energy?

*5) Effort, discipline:* The dimension of effort explores how much effort, work, discipline,

struggle, etc. are required in developing and unleashing the potential. What is the effort that you have to expend to learn or further develop your competency? What area is this effort in? How long will you be required to put forth the effort? How consistent are you in the discipline of learning, apprenticing yourself, etc.? What percentage of effort do you put out in your daily actions? Do you have a disciplined approach? How well can you get yourself to follow through?

6) *Practice*: The dimension of practicing our skills involves rehearsing what we know to do until our skills habituate as our daily ritual. Within your rituals will be the regularity of your practice, the quality of the coaching, consulting, training, etc. you receive. Do you practice your skills? How much practice do you give yourself to? How structured is the practice? Do you set stretch goals? How often? Do you engage in “deliberate practice?”

7) *Procedures*: Within the actions that make up a skill that we want to unleash are often specific procedures that have to be followed in a stepwise way. What procedures are required for developing your skills? To what degree do you follow through on the procedures? How do you handle your own excuses?

8) *Persistence*: Within practice, discipline, and effort is the activity of persisting in our action plan. Are you persistent? Do you keep focused on developing competency and expertise? How consistent are you in persisting over time? What interrupts or interferes with your persistence? What would increase or improve your persistence?

9) *Refining*: Inside of practice and persistence is the refining process of *kaizen*—continuous improvement. This occurs through the receiving and using of feedback. How open are you to receiving feedback and shaping on your skills? From whom do you look for feedback? What kind of feedback? How often do you receive feedback? How do you use the feedback? What do you do with it? Do you ask for feedback? How often?

10) *Resilience*: In the development of any skill there will be set-backs—set-backs in our schedule, to our health and well-being, to succeeding or failing, etc. Resilience is the dimension of embodying the skill through getting back up when we have been knocked down, shaking off the dust, and going for it again. What do you do to “bounce back” with resilience when you have experienced a set back? When you are knocked down, what do you do? How long do you stay down? What resilience-building things do you do? What puts “bounce” into your spirit and attitude?

Then you have the basic format for increasing your level of productive performance and in the hands of a Meta-Coach, this becomes a program that can facilitate in you the ability to reach your highest levels of performance or take your current performance to the next level as you actualize your highest and best.



From: L. Michael Hall  
Neurons #6  
February 11, 2008

## ACTUALIZING “IDOL” POTENTIALITIES

“*Idol*” is a talent search phenomenon on TV in several countries. It is a Reality Show wherein auditions are held to look for the next big musical talent. Recently I’ve been watching the new seventh season of “*American Idol*” during our cold Colorado winter. In the first weeks of the program the first auditions for new talent were held in seven major cities where sometimes 20,000 to 30,000 people showed up for the auditions. From 100,000 contestants, 164 were given “golden tickets” and chosen to go to Hollywood for the next level of auditions.

If you’ve seen the *Australian Idol*, *American Idol* or any of the other ones, you have seen the funny, silly, ridiculous, pathetic, and curious phenomena of people who obviously have *no singing talent* trying really hard in the audition only then to suffer utter shock and disappointment when they are told that they can’t sing. The reality shock of the non-talented is simultaneously a mixture of comedy and tragedy. As untalented in music as I am, I can auditorially detect that they can’t sing, so I’m always wondering, “Hasn’t anyone ever told them that they can’t carry a tune? Why would their friends and family not let them know? Are they all tone-deaf?”

Because these auditions involve *a performance* and the contestants are there to *actualize their highest and best musical potentials* in hope of becoming the next American Idol, I’ve been watching in terms of the *Self-Actualization Quadrants* and the Meaning/ Performance axes.

After the participants get a number, they enter a room to perform a song for 60-seconds acapella. The judges (Simon, Paula, and Randy) then *make a judgment* whether their talent is good enough to go to the next level. Sometimes they give feedback regarding the person’s musical, singing, or entertaining talent, but mostly they just give a thumbs up or thumbs down judgment.

Several factors make the show entertaining—the search for new talent, the incredible singers that do show up, and touching stories of what some people have done to get to the audition, and the sometimes the incredible lack-of-talent.

At the heart of the contest is *the evaluation of the person’s performance*.

Can the person sing? Can he or she carry a tune, sing the notes, hold the pitch, remember the words, etc.? Is the person’s singing of “star quality?” How does the person carry him or herself? Can the person be entertaining in the performance? Can the person manage his or her nerves and the test anxiety of the situation?

Now in terms of *actualizing* one’s best and entering into the pathway of a peak performance, I have been paying attention to the combination of *meanings* and *performances* that the contestants bring to the auditions.

*What does it mean to them?*

For many, it is their chance at riches, fame, and stardom; for others it is about the music, or the message, or to make their family (or spouse, or child) proud. For others it is a chance to dress up and be silly, or to get on national TV, or to gather with thousands and see how outrageous they can be.

*How much meaning do various people give to the audition?*

For some it is *the biggest* meaning of their lives. Some have planned for it for years; some are returning from previous seasons when they were rejected in their audition. Others seem to have just showed up for the day because they didn't have anything better to do. Many worked extra jobs to save money to get to the audition city; some borrow money, others were supported by their family.

*How well is a person doing in the performance?*

The participants ranged from those who didn't prepare at all to those who extensively prepared. Of those who prepared, some took voice lessons as part of their preparation, others practiced everyday for hours. Among those who didn't prepare were many who forgot their lines in the auditions. One series of video clips showed 30 or so who forgot their lines and stumbled for the words in the 60-second audition. Some had the words written on bits of paper or on the palm of their hands.

*Is the person self-aware, self-monitoring, and open to seeking and receiving feedback?*

Perhaps the most common feature of the first auditions is how many people apparently had never received any feedback on their singing skills. Simon frequently asked, "Is this a joke?" "Has anyone ever heard you sing?" And just as common would be the judge's feedback: "That was bad." "That was horrible." "You were off-key, your pitch was all over the place." "It was pitchy." "You can't sing."

It is obvious that some of the contestant are there just for the fun of it. But among many, they apparently thought they sounded good to themselves and so they assumed they were good, even "the best ever!" Often when they were told that singing is not their talent — half would be shocked, stunned, amazed, reduced to tears, etc. Some would beg for another try. And their lack of reality-testing which made their hopes, expectations, and beliefs unrealistic led to them feeling utterly crushed. The other half would get aggressive, call the judges names, insult them, curse at them, give them the finger, and make a big scene.

What enables you to actualize your best potentials? How can you actualize your "idol" performance? Isn't it obvious that you must first identify your actual talents? Once you do that then you can develop the talent through practice, discipline, learning, coaching, more practice, feedback, etc. And yes, you need to believe in yourself, believe in the value of actualizing your best. Then handle test anxiety, find support from those who also believe in you, and stay with it with persistence and resilience. Here's to you actualizing your highest and best!

**From: L. Michael Hall**

Neurons #7

February 18, 2008

## META-ANSWERS

This past week while I was in the *Coaching Mastery* training in Mexico City, a participant said something to me that gave me a new perspective. It happened when he I checked in with him at the end of his coaching session.

“I really appreciated this whole thing of meta-questions! This is great and to have more than 70 meta-questions really makes this meta-coaching powerful. It has just opened up so much for me.”

As I thanked him, I wanted at the same time to find out a little more as to what was opened up for him, and what were some of the specific values that he found in the meta-questions. So I asked,

“What has opened up for you and why is that so important?”

That’s when he said something that I had never thought of before, and especially not in particular words he used. He said,

“The great things about meta-questions are the meta-answers that you get!”

The first thought that dashed through my mind was,

“Why hadn’t I ever thought of that phrase? I’ve been talking about and working with *meta-questions* for many years now, and I have never thought about *meta-answers*.”

Do you know how a term or a phrase can dance in your mind opening up new vistas? It’s a great experience, usually a creative experience when you find a turn of phrase or a new term that allows you now to think about new things or things in a different way. Well, that’s what happened to me with this phrase “meta-answers.” These were my second and third and fifteenth thoughts. I began turning the phrase over and over in my mind, trying to understand it and letting it elicit new perspectives.

*Meta-answers* —answers at a meta-level that make up the belief frames, value frames, identity frames, etc. that are “answers” to things, that are *the higher-level answers* which provide the resource solutions that we’re looking for.

*Meta-answers*— let me see, what would be an example of that? A meta-answer might be a belief about identity, meaning, purpose, intention, and so on that solves a particular situation.

*Meta-answers*— answers to the meta-muddles that we so often create in our mind that self-organizes into states of disorientation, confusion, stupidity, erroneous and the *meta-answers* now straighten out that mess.

And so it went, a rush of thoughts in the stream of consciousness and then I had another thought (two in one day!). “I wonder what meta-answer he got that delighted him about meta-questions in the first place?” And so, I asked him.

“Oh, you mean the *meta-answer* that we got in that coaching session this morning? It was when my client said that she needed permission to just have an emotion without *having* to act on it, that she could *just notice and witness* the emotion. So I said that if she could set that as her new mental frame about emotions and especially strong negative ones ... and she then said that *that would be the answer* she was looking for, that she wouldn't have to fix the emotion or make it go away, that she could just notice and then have choice about whether to take counsel from the emotion as you say or let it go as irrelevant to the situation. And that was the meta-answer.”

A *meta-answer* then can be any meta-level belief, understanding, decision, permission, intention, memory, hope, anticipation (or any of the other 80 logical levels of Meta-States) that *answers* a question that we have in our mind or emotions or behavior. These higher level *answers* gives us the perspective and resource that we need to achieve our goals. These higher level *answers* are the more resourceful frames and maps that give us access to our full potential and which also *unleash* those potentials.

*Meta-answers.* What higher level *answer* do you need inside yourself that if you got that new frame of mind, new robust attitude, new perspective about the meaning of things, new definition or metaphor that frees up your energies and powers—it would empower you in unleashing more of your potentialities? What higher level *answer* would give you the leverage in your meta-mind over yourself?

*Meta-answers.* If you want a meta-answer—ask a meta-question!

To your success as you actualize your highest and best potentials!

**From: L. Michael Hall**

Neurons #8

February 25, 2008

## **BEYOND HAPPINESS TO GLOBAL IMPACT**

Recently Chuck (Charles) DesJardins, who is working on his doctorate, sent me an email with a series of questions about self-actualization. The questions are challenging and insightful.

Among them were these:

Is self-actualization relevant to society?

If it is true that man has deficiency needs and being needs, so what?

What does knowing that do for us?

If there are models that can take a person from deficiency motivated to *being*-motivated, what does that do for us?

In the big scheme of things in today's crazy run-away world, so what?

How can self-actualization psychology make the world a better place?

How can this kind of psychology change the world?

Would actualizing individuals and groups do anything other than make people happy or can it have a global impact?

I told Chuck that these were great questions and that I wanted to address these questions as a Meta Reflection. So here goes.

In Maslow's original work on self-actualization, he began asking what would happen and what would be created if a thousand self-actualizing people and families got together? What kind of a society would they create? How would they organize things? What would their businesses be like? Their government? Their schools and ways of educating. Their newspapers and what they would consider "news?" How they would structure courts, police, and jails?

This led Maslow in his last years to focus on self-actualizing businesses and many social issues. Earlier he had been asking, "How good a society does human nature allow?" Later he shifted his focus to translating his ideas on the bright side of human nature to leaders, managers, and businesses. You can find a lot of this today in the reprinted book, *Maslow on Management*.

So yes, self-actualization is relevant for society. In fact, society in all of its forms and expressions *depends upon have good, informed, and responsible people*. In political theory we have heard for hundreds of years that it takes an informed and educated populace to have democracy. Dictators don't want thinking people who take the initiative and get involved and hold government responsible for what it does. That's why dictators hold thinkers and activists as political prisoners; they consider freedom of thought and speech too dangerous.

As I wrote two years ago in the series on Self-Actualization Reflections, Maslow launched his

work on studying healthy people, self-actualizing people in order to understand human motivation and to provide leaders, politicians, and people *a theory of human motivation* that could explain why people would give up their higher values and needs to follow a Hitler.

So what does it do for us if we know how to take a person from deficiency motivation to *being*-motivation? Lots of things. This moves people from living in a *jungle world* of deficiency where people compete and strive to beat each other because there's not enough to go around. And it moves people to a world of abundance, cooperation, collaboration because there's more than enough to go around.

*Deficient motivated people* live in the world of animal nature un-modified by the higher human values. *Being-motivated people* live in the human world, the higher dimension of human experience of being-values: love, meaning, justice, abundance, music, beauty, mathematics, honor, contribution, legacy, etc. *This is the psychology that can change the world.* And it changes the world from the bottom-up, from one person to another who becomes enlightened about the greater good, the "spiritual" values of the *being*-values.

So does self-actualization of individuals and groups do anything other than make people happy? You bet it does. These lower-gratified people now move to the higher needs that create within them a new restlessness—a desire and need to make a global impact. Now they live with enough internal resources to give out of their inner abundance.

Maslow's vision about self-actualization went far beyond individual happiness. In *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* he wrote this:

"The empirical fact is that self-actualizing people, our best experiencers, are also our most compassionate, our great improvers and reformers of society, our most *effective* fighters against injustice, inequality, slavery, cruelty, exploitation (and also our best fighters *for* excellence, effectiveness, competence). And it also becomes clearer and clearer that the best 'helpers' are the most fully human persons. . . . The best way to become a better 'helper' is to become a better person." (p. 334)

**From: L. Michael Hall**

Neurons #9

March 3, 2008

## THE LEVELS OF LIFE

I was recently surprised and delighted as I revisited the writings of Alfred Korzybski and found some new stuff that somehow (!) I missed my first two readings. This happened when I reread the first book that he wrote, *The Manhood of Humanity* (1921). So in the next couple weeks, I'll be writing some Meta Reflections about this. This is the first one.

Korzybski wrote this book to make one point. Korzybski felt that the biggest problem in all of the soft sciences — psychology, sociology, anthropology, law, economics, philosophy, ethics, religion, politics, government, etc. is the fundamental error in how we define human nature. What is man? What kind of a class of life is humanity? Korzybski saw that if we define man as a mere animal (as did behaviorism, evolutionary theory, Freud, etc.) or as a supernatural being whose functioning does not operate by natural laws but supernatural laws— then we cannot have a solid foundation.

So Korzybski decided to try to hand at describing *human nature* from a scientific perspective. This led to him creating a logical level system about our kind or class of life using the mathematics of Russell and Whitehead to create his “scientific definition of man” or human nature. This meant that he relied upon the mathematical discriminations between classes, types, dimensions which he noted is “of the utmost importance in the natural sciences.”

What resulted is the following logical levels of life distinguishing the different classes of life with respect to dimensionality. Lifeless, Plants, Animals, Man.

Level 0: *Lifeless*: no life. Nothing moving, ingesting nutriment from the world, responding to stimuli, etc.

Level 1: *Plants*: the transformation of solar energy into organic chemical energy. Plants are living things taking, transforming, and appropriating the energies of sun, soil, and air. But they do not have the autonomous power to move about in space. So Korzybski described plants as a *chemistry-binding class of life*. They bind chemicals into themselves, making the new chemicals and chemistry part of their own life.

Level 2: *Animals*: a more dynamic class of life. The energy that animals have is kinetic—they have a remarkable freedom and power that plants do not possess. They have the freedom to move about in space. This makes these two-dimensional beings, according to Korzybski, a *space-binding class of life*. Animals have the autonomous power to move about in space, to creep, crawl, run, swim, or fly. They bind the value and experience of space (movement, going to where food is, etc.) into their being.

Level 3: *Humans*. We possess a most remarkable capacity, entirely peculiar to us, the capacity to summarize, digest, and appropriate the labors and experiences of the past. We have the capacity to use the fruits of past labors and experiences as intellectual or spiritual capital for the developments in the present, to conduct their lives in the ever increasing light of inherited wisdom. And this is what makes us *a time-binding class of life*.

“Man is a builder of civilization, whereas animals are not.” We are a class of life that can make the past live in the present and the present in time-to-come (the future). In this we can bind time (the value and benefit of what happens in time and over time) into ourselves so that we do not have to start over with each generation, but have the capability—ideally—to start each generation where the last generation ended.

*We are time-binders!* *Time-binding* is what we do and so we need a *theory of Time-Binding*. In fact, and this is something I either forgot or never got in the first place, Korzybski originally intended to entitle his system and the book (*Science and Sanity*) as *Time-Binding*. Then on second thought, he decided to entitle it “The Science and Art of Human Engineering.” Then someone talked him out of that and it became *General Semantics*. (And I thought I had problems creating titles for things!)

Now you’ve heard about *time-lines*, the *time zones* that we live in and visit (past, present, and future), but what is *time-binding*? *Binding “time”* into ourselves refers to taking what happened in other times in the lives of other people and incorporating those learnings, discoveries, insights, beliefs, etc. into our lives. So an example, what Aristotle learned in 300 BC using what he saw, heard, and felt and what he concluded in his mind and the insights he created about language, ethics, classifications, science, philosophy, etc. does not have to be rediscovered in every generation. *You and I can bind into our nervous systems and mind what he learned in his time*. In fact, we can start from where he left off and further develop things.

As a time-binder, “we are creators” (Korzybski). We do not just find food as do animals, we create food and shelter (p. 73). We identify seeds, understand soil, water, seasons, and so plant, nurture, and harvest. We manage our environments, we create tools, we discover the governing principles, we experiment, we keep refining our knowledge, we invent language, terminology, hypothesis, and we are never satisfied with our current level of invention. There’s always more to create.

We create cultures and civilizations. We create all of this “wealth” and this wealth creation is “the definitive mark of humanity—the power to roll up continuously the ever-increasing achievements of generation after generation endlessly.” (p. 110). And without time-binding—  
“... our state would be that of aboriginal man. Civilization is a creature, its create is the time-binding power of man.” (p. 123)

We bind-time by our ability to use symbols and by creating semantic contexts and environments. And this time-binding gives us exponential powers for progress, wealth, and meaning. But that will have to wait until next Monday. To the unleashing of your time-binding powers!



From: L. Michael Hall  
2008 Neurons #10  
March 10, 2008

## FROM TIME-BINDING TO WEALTH-BINDING

“Birds have wings—they fly. Animals have feet—they run. Man has the capacity of time-binding—he binds time.” (Korzybski, 1921, p. 145)

“*We are a time-binding class of life.*” That was Alfred Korzybski’s big discovery and his main point as he sought to create a solid foundation for his massive work that followed, *Science and Sanity*. For Korzybski time-binding was not a minor or sub-point in his work. That’s how I had always thought of it and so if you read some of my paragraphs in various books, that’s how I presented time-binding. I treated it as a concept, an important one, but just as a sub-point in General Semantics. But I was wrong.

Korzybski said that Time-Binding Theory was the basis of all of his work and developments. What is this theory? It is that our *nature* is to *bind* into ourselves—into our minds and emotions, into our speech and actions, into our relationships to each other and to the world *the developments in earlier times*. While we are more than just that, this time-binding capacity and time-binding energy lies at the heart of what makes us unique in our kind of life.

In his levels of life, Korzybski distinguished plants as the chemistry-binding class of life and animals as the space-binding. We also have these *dimensions* in our nature. We also take into ourselves chemicals and have a chemistry nature in our nervous system and cells. Humorously we say, “You are what you eat,” And there’s a great deal of truth in that. We also have the next dimension of reality within our nature. Like animals, we also *bind space* into ourselves. That’s what makes environment, territory, context, movement, action, etc. important in our way of life.

Yet in terms of dimensionality, we have yet another dimension to our being and nature that no other creature has—*time-binding*. This is the basis for our *ongoing progress*. This is why there’s no need for us to reinvent the wheel, farming, industry, the steam engine, computers, the internet, etc. Why *reinvent* when we can adopt what others have invented and when we can improve it? This is the basis for being able to “stand on the shoulders of the giants” who have preceded us and to go beyond where they went in their discoveries.

The theory of time-binding explains lots of things about the unique dimension that we humans live in. It positions language and symbolism. After all, to bind into our nervous system and brain the learnings Aristotle made, we have to have *a way to transfer* what he knew inside to our insides. It isn’t transferred by DNA. It isn’t genetic. It is transferred by learning—by encoding our learnings in language, symbolism, diagrams, books, trainings, etc. so that others can *bind* the learnings into their mind and nervous system. And this is where having an accurate and

appropriate language system plays such a critical role. If we map it inaccurately and falsely, the learnings will not transfer to create intellectual capital.

Ah, intellectual capital—this introduces another idea from Korzybski, the idea of wealth-binding. While this is my phrase, the idea comes from Korzybski.

“Civilization as a process is the process of binding time; progress is made by the fact that each generation adds to the material and spiritual wealth which it inherits.” (106)

This means that wealth is not money. Wealth is the use of our time-binding powers as we use our brains to learn, figure out things, and invent ways of producing models, tools, processes, and cultures. These things comprise true “wealth.” Korzybski said that “wealth is production” (p. 80). From raw materials we produce tools and machines through our time-binding capacities of learning how to innovate our creations. Raw materials in and of themselves are not wealth. It is not wealth to those who do not understand the raw materials, know what they are, how to use them, how to invent technology to deploy iron, oil, water, etc.

Korzybski speaks about time-binding *energy*. This is the “energy” to learn—to learn from those who have gone before is a “higher energy,” a mental or spiritual power, that we have by which we use our time-binding power to make past achievements live in the present and present activities in time-to-come. (p. 89). And because of this, *time* enters as an exponent in human progress. Korzybski used the formula of  $PT^t$  to describe this time-binding power of progress and creativity. (**P** is for Progress, **R** for Rate and **t** for Time).

The theory of time-binding in this mathematical formula says that *progress is a function of the rate that we can bind time*.

“He becomes a civilized man only by the accumulation of dead men’s work. Then and only then can he start where the preceding generation left off.” (p. 123)

Ideally, human civilization could progress at an exponential rate. And in the hard sciences, we are now seeing things progress almost that quickly. With each generation, the new generation can accelerate growth and progress as we are now beginning to see in the acceleration of change in our modern world with how quickly the newest inventions become obsolete.

What is “wealth?” Wealth is the time-binding power that gives us resources as “capital” that we can then build on.

“Nature made man an increasing exponential function of time, a time-binder, a power that transforms and directs our basic powers.” (129)

“In nature’s economy the time-binders are the intelligent forces. We are living in a world of wealth, a world enriched by many generations of dead men’s toil.” (131)

“Animals do not produce wealth. Wealth consists of the fruits or products of this time-binding capacity. Human achievements and progress are cumulative knocking out the barriers of time. ... Wealth is almost entirely the product of the labor of by-gone generations.”

“Our wealth, civilization, everything we use and enjoy is in the main the product of the

labor of men now dead. The wealth of the world is in the main the free gift of the past.”

Wealth then is knowledge—the ability to know, to learn, to connect things, to create models, to solve problems, and to add value. Wealth is the mind-and-heart of human beings understanding, caring, and making a difference. And we create all of this “wealth” as a “definitive mark of humanity.” This is our “power to roll up continuously the ever-increasing achievements of generation after generation endlessly.” (p. 110)

One phrase Korzybski used in describing this was: “the living powers of the dead.” If you think that sounds like the title of a horror movie, it is not. This phrase identifies that almost all of our wealth, all of the wealth on this planet, we did not create it ourselves, we inherited it from those who have preceded us. It is now *the living powers* of the dead. We inherit “the material and spiritual fruit of dead men’s toil” which we can then augment in the brief span of our own lives, and then transmit it to our posterity. This is the process of civilization and shows that civilization itself is one of the things we create with our time-binding powers.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
2008 Neurons #11  
March 17, 2008

## PERSONAL TIME-BINDING

In the two previous Reflections about the process and dynamic of *time-binding* I have followed Korzybski on its social affects on us and how we are all indebted to the intellectual capital and incredible “wealth” left to us by those who have gone before. Yet there’s another side to time-binding that is very personal. It relates to how each of us *time-bind* as part of our learning history which explains why our early family experiences are so formative.

Because we do not inherit *what* we know, because *knowledge* comes from learning, not from our DNA, and because as the human species we are unique in lacking *content knowledge* about how to be, our development and self-actualization is completely dependent upon our learning. And given our self-reflexive consciousness, we have a form of consciousness unlike that in any other creature. Our self-conscious mind is so self-reflective that we can observe our own experiences, our own thoughts and emotions, our own behaviors and actions.

Our self-conscious mind also has access to most of the data stored in our long-term memory. What this means is that we can use this information intentionally and consciously to plan our future. Being able to observe our behaviors allows us to evaluate that behavior and to consciously decide if it’s working or not and to choose how to respond if it is not. It is in this process that we are able to override old programmed habits and to consciously change.

While this is a special gift, it comes with a special weakness. Bruce Lipton (*The Biology of Belief*) says that it is our brain’s ability to learn that enables us also to “learn perceptions,” and that we can acquire perceptions indirectly from others— from parents, teachers, peers, etc. Yet once we accept the perceptions of others as true, as our truths—these perceptions become our programs. Lipton describes how they then become “hardwired into our own brains.” In this way we can download the mis-perceptions from others into our brains and nervous systems. That is, as time-binders we can bind the mis-perceptions and false concepts of others into our own nervous system.

Woha! We can bind the mis-perceptions and false concepts of others into our own nervous system??!!

*Personal time-binding* of the perceptions of others is the foundation for excellence and delight *and* it is also the foundation for creating a living hell. By it we can model and replicate the excellence and expertise in others. Instead of relying only upon trial-and-error learning where we have to learn and experience everything first-hand, we can utilize second-hand learning and third-hand learning, etc. The danger is that if we model and replicate the misery of another, the

neurosis of an exemplar, the misunderstandings of someone—we time-bind that which is hurtful, destructive, and even morbid into ourselves.

Personal time-binding relates most powerfully to what happened in our earliest life before we learned how to use our self-reflexive consciousness to quality control the contents of what we were exposed to and so learned. To the extent that the people in our lives suffered from mis-perceptions, erroneous ideas, fallacious beliefs, and cognitive distortions—to that extent we probably picked up such things and bound them into our nervous system. That's why it's often said that most of adult life is an attempt to get over our childhood (!).

What we now have to get over is *the non-sense of our childhood time-binding*. This is part of the growing up and maturing process, identifying and replacing our cognitive distortions, and learning to effectively use our reflexivity so that we are constantly able to clean out old perceptions and meanings.

Nor does it end with childhood. We are continually exposed every day to the perceptions and mis-perceptions of others via television, radio, new, internet, emails, gossip, etc. And every day we are binding things that others have learned or created in their times.

Now the backside of time-binding is *unlearning*. And unlearning is just as significant for success and self-actualization as learning. That's why accelerating our learning with the newest techniques is never enough; we need to be able to accelerate our skills at unlearning as well in order to clear the path for new learnings.

[If you recall, I wrote three Meta Reflections last year on the Crucible as a Neuro-Semantic process for unlearning.]

The power of time-binding for creating exponential progress and creativity lies in binding time—it lies in binding useful, effective, and life-enhancing learnings into ourselves. The same exponential power becomes a living-hell for us if, as a time-binding class of life, we bind into ourselves perceptions that are non-ecological and dis-empowering.

In a way, personal time-binding is a form of modeling. And it occurs, at its best, when we download into ourselves the perceptions of the wise and the mature self-actualizers. So with your time-binding energies and potentials take care to quality control what you time-bind!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
2008 Neurons #12  
March 24, 2008

## **TIME-BINDING, SELF-ACTUALIZATION, AND THE MEDIA**

*We all know that “the media” is negative.* Every morning when you open up the newspaper, or listen to the radio on the way to work, or every evening when you tune into the news programs whether on cable or via public television—you are going to hear stories and reports about *what’s wrong, what’s bad, and what’s terrible.* You are going to see and hear people going on and on about catastrophes, scandals, betrayals, murders, deaths, drugs, wars, economic crisis, mobs, riots, and on and on.

The week I wrote this (March 15, 2008) was like every week—full of scandals, disasters, crime, etc. The democratic governor of New York was discovered using a call-girl service and had to resign. The media’s frenzy of excitement acted as if this was a great and wonderful thing; it so dominated the media in the US that you would have thought this was the most important news on the planet! Later tornados hit Atlanta creating 150 million dollars of damage. Then the worst labor disaster in years in New York—a crane fell off a building in New York City killing several, and so on.

*What is this attraction to disaster?* What is this thirst in reporters, the media, and the buying public for hurt and pain, for destruction and scandal, for crime and hypocrisy? *Why?* What is this fascination with the dark side of human nature?

*The easy answer: Blame the media!* Blame the publishers, reporters, and all the people who deliver all this bad news. But that’s too simplistic. After all, we live in a free market. So not only does “bad news sell,” but the public, that is, everyday people including you and me, keep buying this bad news and so want it! They want it? Yes. A few years ago after there had been months and months of preoccupation about President Clinton and his sexual behaviors with the intern, The Boston Globe newspaper decided to take it off the front page. But the outcry from the public was so strong, they had to put it back on the front page! What gives with this? Why do so many people hunger for, want, and even demand *bad news*?

### **Welcome to The Jungle**

There must be a *need* and a *drive* for the dark side within us. Somehow the answer to this must involve the motivational need level at which people live. If people are living at the lower needs (survival, safety, social, and self-regard), at the *deficiency level*, then they are living at a dimension of life that Abraham Maslow called “The Jungle.”

Our lower driving needs are biological or animal needs. And we share these with all of the

higher intelligent animals. As deficiency needs, when you live at that level, you live in a world of scarcity—in a world where there is not enough. That's why you compete— *there's not enough*. There's only so much and if you don't get yours, someone else will. And if someone else is having problems, troubles, and disasters, that's good for you! Their dis-advantage gives us an advantage. So if you live at the level of *the Jungle Life*, you live in the domain of the darker side of human nature where deficiency signals your subconscious mind to feel threatened and in danger which leads to aggressively fighting for yours. And that approach values when others are worsened.

Maslow considered this as the source of the great majority, perhaps 95%, of all human evil. We do evil to each other, hurtful and ugly things, because we feel threatened. As we then become desperate, we lash out, we play games, we manipulate.

The hunger of deficiency, scarcity, distrust of others, competition, etc. drives people to want to hear about the *bad news* of others. We feel better about ourselves and our world when we hear that their world is falling apart. We especially feel better about ourselves when that someone is successful, famous, rich, beautiful, etc. Ah, the Jungle!

Obviously, this is not rational and most of it is not even conscious. It's not that we consciously want bad news. Yet while we claim to dislike it, *we* buy the scandal journals and financially support disaster news, movies, blogs, etc. *The unconscious hunger* for bad news, for catastrophe, for disaster reveals where a person lives motivationally.

Alongside this, there is another deficiency hunger, *a hunger for the trivial*. People also hunger for news, television shows, books, magazines, etc. about the exciting lives of others. It's as if the boredom of our own lives drives us to live our lives vicariously through the lives of celebrities, politicians, and people in the news. The gossip level of meaning is more exciting. This, again, is a sign that motivationally, we are living at a low meaning level, that we have not moved up to the level of *meaningfulness* at the *being*-needs of self-actualization.

Sure, *good news* programs, books, magazines, movies, websites, blogs, etc. are out there and indicate that there are lots of people living at the higher *human* level of self-actualization. Yet in comparison, these are few and small. The positive side of life shows up from time to time in the media as "human interest" segments, but there is far too little of it.

I'm not arguing here that the negative and dark side should not be presented. Of course it should. We need to know about problems and challenges so that we can tackle them with our creativity and resources. *The problem is the proportion* of bad to good; of disaster to inspirational, of deficiency and scarcity to abundance, of competition to cooperation and collaboration, of dark side to bright side of human nature. The problem is that when the mass media focuses most of its attention to the dark side, it becomes a socially destructive force diminishing human possibilities and potentials because it seems to present this as the norm.

From the perspective of Self-Actualization Psychology, we need *being-level* newspapers,

television programs, news programs, movies, books, magazines, etc. to provide a clearer and more compelling vision of what's possible. We need *being-level* mass media that works as an empowering and enhancing influence for the self-actualization level of life.

While those who make decisions at newspapers, news programs, magazines, screenplay writers, etc. are not fully responsible for the current hunger and taste for the dark side, they are responsible for *how* they feed the dark side and *the degree* they feed it. *A self-actualizing media* could begin by slowly minimizing the daily reporting of murders, crimes, scandals, disasters and slowly increasing and encouraging a hunger and taste for the bright side. After all, as Maslow once noted, "What's news? There's nothing new about death."

Don't you think it's time that we not only talk about *self-actualization leaders*, but *self-actualization news reporters, anchors, screenplay writers, investors, publishers*, etc.? I do. And that's why our focus on self-actualization in individuals and organizations at all levels.



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
2008 Neurons #13  
March 25, 2008

## DEFICIENCY LEVEL LIVING

After writing *Meta Reflection #12* on the media's focus on the dark side of human nature, I had several emails. Some asked questions about living life at the deficiency level, some wanted to explore what the deficiency level living means, how to determine if one is living there, etc. Because of these great questions, I have written this follow-up *Meta Reflection*.

To the extent that we are biological beings, we all live to some extent at the deficiency level, and always will. That is, we have *lower level needs* for surviving, being safe and protected, experiencing love and affection, and knowing that we count and are important in our social contexts. The problem is *exclusively* living at these lower deficiency levels. If we are *exclusively* living at the deficiency levels it means that we are *not* getting those needs met. This is often the case when we are just beginning life and when we are first launching out on our own. Having the *coping skills* to handle these demands of our organism and to cope effectively is the first prerequisite. If we are not able to cope with these demands—we feel deficient, driven, even desperate.

But it is not just a matter of having the basic coping skills, it is making sure that we do *not semantically over-load* these needs. And being human beings who are a semantic class of life, this is a significant problem. We can and do easily semantically overload the human needs by giving them *too much meaning* or worse, by giving them *distorted meanings*. When we do that, then we are psycho-eating, psycho-sexing, psycho-spending, psycho-earning, psycho-securing, psycho-connecting, psycho-esteeming.

What does that mean? It means that we are *attempting* to use the lower deficiency needs (food, sex, security, love, affection, etc.) to attain *psychological values*—meaningfulness, contribution, significance, justice, music, beauty, goodness, long-term purpose, etc. We are eating for “the good life,” reward, love, fulfillment, connection, de-stressing, etc. This is developed more fully in *Games Slim and Fit People Play*. We are earning and spending money for “being right,” success, power, control, self-esteem, etc.

And, semantically over-loading lower needs creates a distortion in our drives, in our motivation, so that we *get stuck at the lower deficiency levels*. Then we do not self-actualize to become an authentic, real person fully alive/ fully human and fully functioning. That's why *deficiency mentality and motivation* then drives us to ruthlessly compete, put others down, are ugly and hurtful to others, seek revenge, take insult easily, and live in the darker side of human nature.

So, obviously, first it is critical for your self-actualization to know how to effectively *live at the lower deficiency level*. Maslow suggested that you be what you are—be a good animal. Have

your needs, satisfy them with “true satisfiers,” gratify them, then *move on*. Move on up to the higher abundant level needs.

Next question: How do we live in the deficiency realm as we must in the workday world with all of its bad news, negativity, lies, fears, ugliness, betrayal, scandal, cheating and evil? From the perspective of Self-Actualization Psychology, the answer is to live at the self-actualization *being-level* integrating the *being-values* into oneself and then using this abundance and these meta-motivations to then focus on solving these problems.

In this, Maslow constantly spoke about the difference between *real* problems and *pseudo*-problems. He noted that there are many, many *pseudo*-problems that occupy the minds, hearts, and activities of people—pseudo-problems. And we create most of our pseudo-problems by semantically over-loading something with too much or distorted meaning. We create the pseudo-problem of—

failure (what if I fail at...?), disapproval (what if they don't like me?), perfectionism (what if it is not perfect?), etc.

So what are *real* problems? The ultimate problem is the question of self-actualization:

What are my innate gifts and talents? How can I unleash my highest and best potentials? What do I have that's best for contributing? How can we as a race (the human race) create a civilization out of all of our cultures that respects the basic dignity and value of every person? How can we as a race not kill ourselves? How can we create more just and humane cultures? How can we transform work so that it synergizes profit with well-being? How can we support medical research for improving the health and vitality of people, curing crippling diseases? How can we design an education system so it turns children on for being passionate life-long learners? How can we create self-actualizing businesses? Self-actualizing media? Self-actualizing politicians? Self-actualizing leaders?

In all of this *problems activate self-actualization*. And that means that *solving problems* lies at the heart of our purpose as humans. And that brings us back to *self-actualization creativity*—which is the subject of the next Meta Reflections.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
2008 Neurons #14  
March 31, 2008

## THE ULTIMATE CREATIVITY

There's creativity and then there is *self-actualization* creativity. The first is what we all inherit as human beings—our ability to create things. In this, everybody is creative. And the reason for this is our lack of instincts. We are born with a knowledge gap about how to be human—we do not naturally, intuitively, instinctively know that. That is the gap within us that we have to fill—and fill it we do. And this explains the tremendous range of *how to be human* and *how to create human cultures* that there are.

Without instinctive knowledge hard-wired into our DNA, the knowledge gap of the content of how to be the species that we are is wide-open for us to invent all kinds of ways. And invent them we do. This is the foundation of creativity. It begins as we create our thoughts, our ideas, our hopes, dreams, fears, dreads, terrors, etc. Thinking itself is an act of creativity. We cannot *not* escape from the demand of creativity. Even when we try to give up all individuality, all uniqueness, all personality, personal responsibility and try to conform perfectly to what other's want, say, require, demand, etc. —even that is an act of creativity!

As we cannot escape being creative, we cannot turn off the creativity. In fact, even when we close our eyes and rest in the comfort of sleep we are creative! Our nature as creative beings is seen in our sleep—in the wild and crazy ways that we dream. Released from the constraints of daytime reality, we are free to wildly create in our night-time reality. This reveals our creative nature. It's within us. *Creativity is what we are* in our very nature!

In the field of Creativity, the problem to solve is not how to become creative, how to think creatively, how to invent new ideas about things— the problem to explain is the opposite.

“How do some people seem so uncreative? What kills their creativity? What are the leashes that imprison some people to fail to tap into their God-given, innate creativity? Why and how do some people escape creativity into bland and stale conformity? What is so fearful for them to be what they are—creative human beings?”

This is the problem. In the new Training Manual, **Creativity and Innovation**, I begin the Executive summary with the following:

*The ultimate creativity is the self-actualization process—self-actualizing as a human being.* This refers to how we create our self and our sense of reality. Regarding this, Maslow wrote the following as his opening statement in *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Chapter 4, *The Creative Attitude*, 1963).

“My feeling is that the concept of creativeness and the concept of the healthy, self-actualizing, fully human person seem to be coming closer and closer together, and may perhaps turn out to be the same thing.” (1971, p. 55)

So *self-actualization creativity* is using your innate creativity to *create* your highest visions and values and then to actualize those in real life as your contribution. Self-actualization creativity gives a more specific focus for creativity—it focuses on creating yourself. Traditionally, we refer to this as maturing, growing up, developing, becoming an authentic and responsible human being. Using the new *Self-Actualization Psychology* of Neuro-Semantics, we frame all of that as *using* and *being* the creativity built within us. We frame that as self-actualization psychology.

Commenting on all of this, Colin Wilson, one of the biographers of Maslow wrote the following in *New Pathways in Psychology*:

“Maslow’s observation [is] that *all* self-actualizers are creative—sometimes artistically or scientifically, sometimes in more down-to-earth ways; but always creative.” (p. 169)

To self-actualize is to discover, enjoy, and fully experience your own unique creativity. So, using that as a gauge, how much of a self-actualizing life are you now living? How much more of a self-actualizing life is possible for you? How much have you unleashed that to this date? What do you need to be unleashed from so that you can fully experience your innate creativity? What would you like to invent and innovate into the world?

- How creative are you as a parent?
- How creative are you in exercising and staying fit and healthy?
- How creative are you in your relationships?
- How creative are you in enjoying the small pleasures of life?
- How creative are you in cooking a meal? In designing your career?
- How create are you in your wealth creation and financial independence?

The final stage of creativity is innovation. *In innovation we take our creativity to market.* Whether it is creative ideas, products, information, or services, we are creative enough to successfully translate the great ideas into something that adds value and creates wealth for ourselves and others.

I write all of this reflecting on how *creative* a field NLP ought to be and how yet *uncreative* and *non-creative* it has been and is today. NLP ought to be the most creative of fields! As a meta-discipline about the structure of subjectivity, running our own brains, managing our own states—why you would think that NLP people would be among the most creative. Well, then again, maybe they are. Perhaps they do have lots of creative ideas. Yet even if that’s the case, what they are *not*—they are *not creative innovators*. They are not translating those creative ideas into actual processes and taking them to market. So NLP continues to be a small niche that most people on the planet don’t know about and most of the wonder and magic of NLP is not available to most people.

And all of this also explains why we are now launching the Second Module of the Self-Actualization Workshops— **Creativity and Innovation: Unleashing Your Creative Potentials**. The design of this is, obviously, to facilitate more creativity among us and more ability to innovate.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
2008 Neurons #15  
April 7, 2008

## **CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION**

“Necessity,” they say, “is the mother of invention.” *Needing* to fix a problem, solve a distress, iron out a difficulty, come up with a new way of doing things—“necessity” awakens us and prepares us for figuring out how to change something that is currently not working or to put together a new approach that will make a positive difference. As you well also know, *necessities* are *problems*. That is, a problem, as the gap between where you are currently and where you want to be, refer to the things you *need* to change, to solve, to resolve, to correct. So, do you have any problems? I sure hope so!!

*Problems come into being through the gap between now and the future.* The larger the gap between now and one-day, the bigger the problem. The larger the gap between your perception and anticipation, the bigger your problem. A perfectly contented person sitting in yoga position, mediating on the absolute perfection of the moment, and humming “Ohmmmmm” has no problems. And, he or she also has no creativity. Because “problems” are a function of the mind, the contented person’s creation is already perfect. There’s no energy and so no *now-future gap*, no gap to drive one to find or create a solution.

Given all of that, *who is primed for creativity?* The discontented person! The discontented person with a problem on his or her hands. So what does creativity feel like? We often call the feel of creativity by such words as frustration, irritation, annoyance, disgruntledness, and restlessness. The discontented person is the person awakened to a vision of greater possibilities and who is thereby energized to take new creative ideas and experiment with them, try them out, put them to the test, fail gloriously, refine the ideas, gloriously fail some more, and passionately pursue the creativity until there’s a product or service to innovate into a given market. That person is primed for creativity! That is the person who feels a necessity. And we stand in awe of that person’s holy discontent driving him or her through all the constraints, problems, difficulties, and struggles.

There’s one thing that really distinguishes great creative geniuses—their joy and delight in the pursuit of problems. *They love problems.* They search for problems. And when a problem lands in their lap, they get passionate, turned-on, fascinated, curious, aroused, energized. How does that compare with your attitude? What’s your attitude toward problems? To what extent are you a problem-lover?

Of course, not all problems will do. There are lots of pseudo-problems—experiences that masquerade as problems, but are not real problems or significant problems. I’ve been noticing that creative problem-solvers, who change the world, are quite picky about problems—they

search for and discover *good problems*. They search for problems that are significant, that are big, that are robust, that are solvable, and that are often mind-blowing. And usually they have to refine the problem to get it to a form where it's a well-formed problem. This, indeed, is a skill in itself.

In 2007 I began presenting the first Self-Actualization Workshop, *The Ultimate Self-Actualization Workshop*, and on Day 3 of that training I introduced a bit about “problems.” And when I did, several people objected to the term itself. “Don’t say ‘problem,’ say ‘opportunity.’” Others said, “When you use the word ‘problem,’ you are being negative.” Now while it’s true that our feelings are a function of our meanings (semantics), and that you may give the term “problem” negative meanings and so feel negative, my feeling is that *problem* is a great term. It’s one that I have personally come to really like.

What does the word *problem* mean? It is a Greek term that refers to something *thrown* (balleo) *before* (pro) you on your path. A problem is any *obstacle* that stands between you and your goal. In this, the term highlights the gap and interferences between where you are now and where you want to be—the now-future gap. As it spotlights the gap, it evokes your creative powers to solve it. “Solving” is meaningless unless tied to the “problem” that we need to solve, hence “problem-solving.” And if the problem isn’t a formulaic problem, one that’s so common and regular, that you can simply identify the solution formula, then you need *creative problem-solving*.

- So, what obstacles are in your path?
- What obstacles do you need to deal with so you can move from your present state to your desired outcome?
- What solutions do you need to create that will address the problems?

In problem-solving analysis, we first need a well-formed statement of both *the “problem”* and *the “outcome.”* Once you create these two statements, your search turns to the required resources. Ah, resources! Problem-solving is a search for, accessing, and application of resources. Problem-solving is resource management. In problem-solving we search for strengths, skills, insights, best states, etc. In creative problem-solving we invent new connections and linkages between these resources and the gap of our hope and dreams for a new outcome state. What an adventure!

And this adventure is at the same time the structure of wealth creation. “Wealth” arises from creative problem-solving. What adds real value to yourself, others, life, business, relationships are new creative ideas that you translate (mind-to-muscle) into products and services. This is what creates new wealth. In fact, this *is* new wealth. Every year people are making millions and billions from such creative problem-solving solutions. Every year people are giving birth to new companies and new ways of doing things. Such creative problem-solving enables us to bring into being new solutions for healthy, well-being, connection, justice, democracy, etc.

Now you know why I love *problems* and why problem-solving, and especially creative problem-solving is how we use our innate potentials to actualize new possibilities. Ah, how we’re back to self-actualization again—creative self-actualization is problem-solving of human needs and wealth creation—the human adventure par excellence.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
2008 Neurons #16  
April 14, 2008

## **ARE YOU THE PROBLEM OR THE PROBLEM-SOLVER?**

A few weeks ago in preparation for the new training, *Creativity and Innovation: Unleashing Your Creativity*, I sat down and made a list of problems. I also did that partly because Day 2 of the training is on Creative Problem-Solving and I wanted to create a problem-list, I had two reasons. First as a menu list of “problems” that will help participants focus on a problem to run through the problem-solution model. Second, I wanted to think through the range of problems that would probably come up.

As I then started listing problems, I had one of those light-bulb “Aha!” moments. The insight might not be revolutionary to you, but it was for me. Insight: Most problems, maybe 95 percent of problems, are *people* problems. They are *in* people, *between* people, *from* people, *about* people. Sure there are some non-people problems: storms, earthquakes, winter storms, tornados, death, accidents, and so on. But most problems are by human creation: mental and emotional problems, definitions of things, words that we use, there are problems about what we’re thinking, feeling, saying, doing, and relating. There are problems of what other people are thinking, feeling, saying, doing, and how they relate.

“Aha!” I said to myself. “Most problems are of human construction. In fact, the great majority are functions of the meanings we give to things! And if that’s so, then a good part of problem-solving involves changing our constructions, developing the ability to accept and seek to understand why others are doing whatever it is that they are doing that’s pushing our buttons!”

Later that day I got a call from a business owner who wanted to order the book, *Games Business Experts Play*. After I got his name and mailing details, he then asked, “What other book would you recommend?” And as usual, I responded by asking about his objectives:

“What’s your interest or outcome? What are you looking for in terms of what you want to achieve?”

That’s when the conversation we had moved to some of the challenges and problems that he had with his business. So, given my immersion into listing and categorizing problems, I asked him a series of questions.

“Are the problems you’re facing problems of how you or they are thinking? Or how you or they are feeling? Problems of expectations? Problems of understandings? Or problems of how you are talking to them or they to you? Or problems of behaviors? Performance, productivity, negotiating, etc.?”

As the conversation continued to develop, I then asked a question I don't think I had ever asked before:

“Are you the problem . . . [long pause] . . . or are you the problem-solver?”

I don't know where that came from, but it came and so I asked it. Then after an excruciating silence that lasted all of 2 or 3 seconds, he responded:

“Wow. I never thought of it that way. I don't know.”

By the time we ended the conversation, I had effectively lost the sale of a second book, but felt that we had a fierce conversation that got to the heart of things. I didn't know that for sure, just a feeling. And it stayed just a feeling until 7 days later. That's when I got another call from him.

“You remember that question you asked me? Well, every day at least 10 and sometimes 20 times a day, I have asked myself that question. ‘Are you the problem or are you the problem-solver?’ It took a few days, but in all of the encounters at work, *they* keep telling me that they don't like the way I talk to them and that I don't listen and lots of other things about me. I have always thought that *they* were the problem—ungrateful, selfish, lazy, and disrespectful. But when you asked ‘Are you the problem-solver?’ I know that I'm *not* that. I have been the problem-blamer. I think I'm the problem.”

“That's great!” I said. “So what's happened during the past week?”

“Well, that's the funny thing. I didn't feel bad at all about discovering that I was the problem. It was like, ‘If I've created this mess, I can fix it.’ And then, those words about being a problem-solver, shifted me to thinking, I can be the problem or I can get busy solving the problems here at work. And so I did.”

“And how did that go?”

“Great. It was so matter-of-fact. I just focused on solving the problem because that's what I wanted. The whole thing about blaming wasn't working. I realized that it did not really matter who started something or their attitude, what mattered was what I was going to do about it. And I think that in the past week I have become ‘a problem-solver.’”

I complimented him about this change of focus and intention and said, “Sounds like you are now *winning the inner game* with that one simple new frame! Congratulations.” That's when he said, “You've got a book by that title! Would that be the next book to get?” I then sheepishly said “Yes, I think so.”

So I got two “Aha!” moments, one about most problems being *human* problems— problems in, by, about, and between *people*, and the other about the fierceness of the question, “Are you the problem or the problem-solver?” I think I'll use that one again!



**L. Michael Hall**  
Neurons #17  
**April 21, 2008**

## **WHAT POTENTIALITIES!**

Imagine holding a tiny little seed in the palm of your hand. Then with the other hand, you turn it over and over with your fingers, examining it and playing with it. And all the while in your playful examination, you wonder, really wonder—*what potentialities are within this seed?* What will it become? When the potentials here are actualized, what will emerge and will it produce?

That tiny little seed, if planted in rich dark earth and watered and given the right amount of sunshine, that seed could produce an abundant stock of corn with many, many ears of corn which could then be planted so as to create a whole field of corn which those kernels could create a vast field and then fields of fields, fields covering an entire county, state, country, or even continent. Such potentialities!

Or if it were another seed, it could grow into a vast redwood tree spanning centuries of time and reaching 100 feet or 200 or even 300 feet into the sky. Such potentialities in a seed. The Redwood tree and forest is there inside that seed—not actually, but in potentiality.

The potentialities in the small seed becomes so much in actuality *if it is just given a chance*. It only needs some good conditions for it to become all that it can become. And if that's amazing, how much more amazing is your brain with its 100 billion neurons? Because from those 100 billion neurons there's a combinatory possibility of 100 trillion connections. So the potential here isn't completely determined as with the potential in the plant seed. In the human seed of a fertilized seed that gives birth to the human brain there is an incredible exponential power if only it is given a chance with some good conditions.

With human potentiality, it too needs good conditions to support its growth into full development. It needs to be unleashed from every limiting factor that holds it back. It needs to be liberated for its full self-actualization.

Human potentiality goes far beyond the potentiality of basic life forms also because of self-reflexivity. This means that *you and I can participate and direct that development*. We can play an intimate and intentional role in guiding and influence how we unfold and actualize our hidden potentials. And we do that to a great extent with our beliefs, understandings, metaphors, identities, intentions, language, and all of the other facets of our meta-levels (or meta-states).

What is possible for human kind? What potentialities are within the range of our trillion neuron connections in our brain? If it is possible for some humans to use their trillion neurons to create new paradigms, new models for science, physics, chemistry, electronics, psychology, music, art,

etc., then these are the things within human potentiality. And what else is there? And how much of your potential do you think you've unleashed so far? How much more potential is there to find, liberate, and mobilize?

These are the questions for the psychologically healthy. These are the most basic existential human questions and they are the questions that, if you welcome and embrace them, will launch you on your adventure of self-actualization. Yes they are scary questions. And yes, there is no final answer to these questions. And yes, yes, you have to get used to embracing ambiguity, non-closure, and the not-knowingness of the adventure. Yet if you do, then you begin to awaken to incredible possibilities and the one and only pathway to genuine human happiness.

“The one and only pathway to genuine human happiness?” Yes, I'm sure that sounds like a right-wing statement, but I'm not talking about a particular technique, philosophy, belief, religion, school, etc., I'm describing *the human experience*, the self-actualizing experience. The one and only way to happiness, joy, and fulfillment is the pathway to *be and become* your potentiality. It is to self-actualize. You'll never get there, but that's not the point. The point is the pathway. The point is the journey itself. And this is the path least taken.

More common and more often we take the path of stopping the adventure. We want to know “for sure,” and so we settle for simplistic black-and-white answers. For pseudo-simplistic answers that do not really answer things, but make us feel comfort, “right,” sure, and confident. What then results? We stop learning, stop growing, stop actualizing. It feels safer. It feels more pleasant. But that's just the limitation of the small perspective we allow ourselves.

If you're reading this, you probably don't play that game and don't operate from that frame. You have tasted the delights and the ecstasy of peak experiences and know that the human adventure is one of continually actualizing to the next level. You know that your capacities clamor to be used and won't cease clamoring until they are used well, and that when you use them well and actualize your best with them, new capacities then emerge and so the process starts over again, and again, and again.

Ah, such potentialities! To your highest potentials of value and visions and to your best performances along the way.

We now have 3 Workshops that are designed for your self-actualization:

APG: Accessing Personal Genius

The Ultimate Self-Actualization Workshop: Construct, Crucible, and Zone

Creativity and Innovation: Unleashing Your Creative Potentials

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
2008 Neurons #18  
April 23, 2008

## UNLEASHED BY YODA

One of our local cable channels has been playing the entire series of *Star Wars*. And of course, as a closet Star Wars fan, I just had to see the whole series! Well, as many of them as I could. Recently I got to enjoy watching the classic scene where Luke Skywalker took off to the Delta System to find a Jedi Master by the name of Yoda. There he met Yoda for the first time and began his Jedi training.

Now as I viewed those scenes this time, I did so through the eyes of self-actualization. And why not? Luke went there to be mentored and trained by Yoda so that he could access and actualize his potentials, especially his potential of learning how to use the bright side of the force.

Of course, Yoda doesn't look like or talks like or acts like a Jedi Mastery. He looked and acted and talked as if he was a little mischievous elf! And like the Oracle in the Matrix Movie, he not only did not look the part, the way he interacted with the apprentice involved a lot of teasing and hinting. [Maybe that's why I like him so much!] He teased Luke in order to open his mind and to get him to think out of the box. But after the shock of recognition and after some training, the experiences that Yoda sets up enabled Luke to get in touch with his powers and potentials. Interesting enough, he had to learn to quiet himself, be present to the now, and become aware of his senses to a new depth and degree.

But Luke had some personal qualities that worked against his development, mainly, his impatience. Young and impetuous, he just wanted to get on with things. And when he learned how to sense the future, he wanted to stop the training and go save his friends.

One of my favorite scenes was the one where Yoda encouraged Luke to use the power of the Force to lift his spacecraft out of the bog of the swamp. And Luke tried. But he could not. And he said so with a tone of resignation and defeat, "It can't be done."

That's when Yoda began a pretty fierce conversation with Luke Skywalker confronting his attitude.

Yoda: "Always with you what cannot be done.  
You must unlearn what you have learned."

Then still with a tone of resignation, Luke said: "Okay, I'll give it a try."

Yoda now shouting: "*No!* . . . no try, only do. There is no try. [Then a pause] ...  
Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter." [pinching Luke's skin]

As a Coach working to unleash Luke's potential to be a powerful Jedi Master, coach Yoda teased and provoked. He trained and questioned; he taught and set up experiential experiments for Luke. All of this was done to identify, understand, and access his powers and resources, as well as to expand his sense of self and his mission.

In *the Star Trek sage*, Yoda mentioned that Luke's father had been trained by Obee-Konebi [I'm not sure how to spell that name], but that the training had been inadequate and that's why Luke's father, Anakin Skywalker, had turned to the dark side and become Darth Vader.

That got me thinking. Who trained me? Who unleashed me? Who trained, coached, or unleashed you? Luke Skywalker could have had a little branding statement sewed to the inside of his coat or sleeve, "*Unleashed by Yoda.*" Anakin Skywalker's would have been, "Unleashed by Obee-Konebi." Who's your personal executive coach? Who has been among your trainers? What Jedi Master have you been coached by?

In my reverie I thought:

"It's really an honor and privilege to facilitate through coaching, training, consulting, etc. the unleashing of another's potentials. It's also an awesome responsibility! How am I doing? Has my facilitation of someone's self-actualization potentials ever been so incomplete, on my part, that it left them susceptible to the Dark Side? What do I need to do to be more skilled and effective at facilitating the full unleashing to the Bright Side of the force of human nature?"

I then wondered,

"And what about myself? Am I unleashing the bright side possibilities for creativity and full human development in myself? Are the *being*-values of beauty, excellence, order, justice, equality, democracy, love, contribution, meaningfulness, etc. being fully unleashed in myself? Are there any dark side potentials of destructiveness, bitterness, hatefulness, etc. being unleashed?"

If there are human potentials yet to be unleashed in you, if the bright side of your human nature has incredible possibilities in it for good—then find, evoking, and unleashing those potentials is one of the most important decisions you will ever make, if not the most important. So, here's to the unleashing of the very best of the bright side of your nature — your highest values and visions and your very best states and resources!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #19**  
**May 2008**

## **GIVE ME PROBLEMS!**

*“I want problems! I want good problems, well-formed problems, solvable problems, challenging problems, stretching problems, fascinating problems, and impossible problems.”*

That’s what I said and when I said it to a friend the other day over coffee at Starbucks, he immediately responded by saying,

“What’s wrong with you? Why in the world would you want problems? What have you been drinking? Are you nuts?”

My next response, I think, was even more surprising to my friend:

“No, not at all. I’m just trying to live a self-actualizing life! I’m just want the context that brings out the best in us humans, the context that causes us to reach down deep within ourselves for resources, and the context that activates the untapped potentials.”

Then he said,

“Well, I’ve got some problems you can have!”

I’m writing this Reflection to follow up the previous Meta Reflections. In #15 I wrote about *Creative Problem Solving and Self-Actualization* and in #16, *Are you the Problem or the Problem-Solver?* What I’m learning from my ongoing studies in self-actualization is that we human beings *need* problems. I mentioned this in *Unleashed!* (2007) in Chapter 20 “Capitalizing Problems” where, following Maslow’s lead, I referred to how he discovered that self-actualizing people have the unique skill of capitalizing on their problems. They turn them into intellectual and emotional capital for resources, discovery, learning, and wealth.

And while *problems* play that role in our psychology, I’m discovering something else about problems. Namely, that problems play an even deeper and more profound role. That’s because as negative as this may sound, loving and longing for problems *fits* our very nature. It’s what makes us grow! It’s what turns on our brains. It’s what activates our creative powers. It’s what makes us feel more alive.

When you think about it, effective teaching involves creating fascinating problems that kids will love to solve. In school we train and evoke and develop minds through math problems, geometry problems, language problems. Putting a person to a test that’s appropriate to age and skill calls forth that person’s potentials and resources thereby enabling growth.

It is so much in our nature that we seek problems even in our entertainments. After all, what are

“games,” but controlled problems that we’re called upon to solve? And the best games are those that put us or our team to the test! There’s no fun to play against those who we can devastate and wipe out. That’s not the point. We want to go up against a team that will call upon everything in our team and then succeed! And if you play tennis or golf or some other sport, you want someone to play with you at your level or even a bit better.

And what about movies? What’s a movie if there’s no plot of challenge? The movies that keep us on the edge of our seat are those where the heroes cannot possibly win, and yet they find a way! Movies where everybody loves everybody, and where people are enjoying a great job in a growing industry who are people who are friends to each other and so on—are *boring*. We want drama. We want suspense. We need a significant problem. We need a Darth Vader who turns out to be our dad who seems all powerful and ready to take us over to the dark side!

That which is won easily and without a struggle is seldom valued, let alone treasured. It is what we win through struggle, effort, discipline, and team work that we value, that calls for a celebration. It is the problem that matters, that makes a difference, that opens up new possibilities and new worlds—those are the problems that are worth solving, worth devoting yourself to, worth a full commitment for a lifetime.

And what about business? What business is “business” in anyway? Is it not the business of problem-solving? Why do you need any business? From the grocery store and the department store, to companies that provide electricity, water, security, education, training, etc., every business is *in business to solve problems*.

And the bigger the problem, the more critical and important the business. Given this, what do we spend money on? *Solutions*. Creative solutions to problems is what creates wealth. Solve a problem that bothers people, that undermines their peace of mind, well-being, health, family, etc. and you have a source of wealth. All you need now is to package and frame it as a commercially viable product or service. Then you have a financial engine that you can use to build financial independence.

The problems that have been solved now exist as part of the time-binding wealth of our race. These problems are those that don’t need to be solved again and again (although we can do so to learn about how they were solved and the solution process itself). These are formula solutions. These are among the solutions we learn in school and when a problem that fits these formats or structures, we only need to pull out the formula and solve it. Lots of everyday problems are like that. No creativity is needed, just a basic education in the area of the problem.

Then there are the *new* problems. And this is where the excitement begins. These are problems that we are either discovering or creating today. Science seeks to *discover* new problems in order to solve them as scientists and engineers discover new questions for new explorations. Then there are the problems that we create that need solving. Recently there’s been a lot of concern over the *solution* of creating fuel from corn because when we devote more corn fields to growing corn for energy for cars rather than food for people, this creates new problems— higher food

prices, then food shortages, then starvation in some parts of the world.

This demonstrates a systemic principle about human life: With every solution, we create new problems. New problems which you face individually, and new problems which we all face as human beings, are due to the complexity and systemic nature of problems. And for that we are doing to need more and more *creative* problems-solving. But more about that next time.

For now, Are you ready to unleash your creative problem-solving? Ready for the *Creativity and Innovation workshop*?

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #20**  
**May 6, 2008**

## **REGULAR AND CREATIVE PROBLEMS**

*All problems are not created equal.* Some are really great because they enable you to grow as they unleash new potentials within you. Others are stupid and stupefying because they distort your mental maps and diminish you as a person. So you like all of us need great problems! In the last Meta Reflection I ended by drawing a difference between formula and creative problems. Several have asked about that distinction and asked that I write a little more about it. So here goes.

### **Regular Formula Problems**

We call problems that have already been solved “knowledge.” Such solved problems in mathematics, geometry, bridge construction, etc. is the racial wealth that comes to us through time-binding and is a gift of the past. Such time-binding wealth means that we do not have to re-invent the light bulb, horseless carriage, heavier-than-air flying machines, etc. There’s no need to be creative and develop creative-thinking for how a light bulb works.

Solutions to these problems requires the ability to read, to ask questions, to hire skilled people, to work with a coach, trainer, professor, therapist, or consultant. The solutions are already available. In fact, creativity in this context is not only irrelevant, it is a waste of time, energy, and effort. The problem has already been solved!

### **New Creative Problems**

Creativity and creative problem-solving is what’s needed for the problems that have not been solved. And these are the problems that, for the most part, are still emerging. They are driven by three forces—change, by complexity, and by new solutions.

1) *Obviously, change drives these new problems.* Just when you solve one problem, things change and presto! You have a new problem. Today as the price of a barrow of oil changes every month, sometimes every week, and always changing upward so that fuel costs keep rising, this creates problems in many areas. There is the change that arises when companies file bankruptcy. Suddenly, they are gone. New ones arise. The companies on the top 500 or top 100 keep changing. Products and services are variable. There’s planned obsolescence, there’s new programs each month for fixing things and solving the problems of management. There’s the changes that politics brings, that new inventions bring, that previous solutions create ... there’s changes everywhere. Heraclitus has never been more right, “Change is the only thing that’s permanent.”



2) *Complexity also drives and creates new problems.* As the systems we live within become more and more complex, new problems arise. We see this in the globalization of each country's economy within the global economy. We no longer live in isolated economies that operate by their own logics, but with things becoming more and more inter-related, what happens in one part of the globe affects every other part. This reduces local solutions and often makes them completely ineffective.

3) *Even solutions drives new problems.* In fact, here's a principle of problem creation: Every solution creates new problems. And this is all the more true within complex systems. And if we don't think systemically, quick fixes which may offer a short-term wonder solution may at the same time set in motion the factors for a much bigger and more difficult problem.

### **Solving the New Problem Creation Problem**

What are we to do about all of this? Maslow argued that fundamentally *we need a new kind of human being*—a person who is comfortable with change and able to effectively cope, even master, the challenges of change. He argued that we need a new kind of human who is open to the creative challenges before us, who easily lives with ambiguity, embraces uncertain, knows how to reduce risk factors, and so on. He said that above and beyond specific creative products and solutions, *we need to focus on developing creative people.*

This is especially true for businesses. Businesses are in business for the sole purpose of solving problems. They find and focus on *problems* in order to find and invent creative solutions. The design is to *solve* problems that confront the business ... and due to the changing world, changing technology, changing markets, etc. --- problems once solved is no longer enough.

And that's why *creative* problem-solving is now needed for people at all levels in an organization.

The people at the top—need to create new management practices, new branding, new packaging, new framing.

People in the middle need to create new ways of relating, new enlightened management, new ways to balance life/work, new measurement procedures, new coaching methodology, new hiring practices, new retention practices.

People on the front lines need to be creative in customer service, seeing gaps in the market, seeing trends, creative in meeting customer's needs.

Approaching it from the *problem perspective* enables the leaders and managers to tap into the untapped creative potential of their people — use their knowledge workers more fully, give people more fulfillment at work, more committed, more buy-in, more passion ... and that lessens all of the problems with keeping good people, creating responsible work force, theft, etc.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #21**  
**May 12, 2008**

## **HUMAN EVIL**

### **How Do We Explain that?**

*Self-Actualization Psychology: The Psychology of the Bright Side of Human Nature* is about the paradigm shift that Abraham Maslow initiated positing that “human nature” is not evil, but good. This does not settle well for people who operate from a frame about “human nature” being bad, evil, corrupt, depraved, sick, animalistic, etc. And so, in the past couple weeks I’ve had some conversations with some people who believe in the dark side of human nature.

In this Meta Reflection (and perhaps a couple more), I’d like to share some highlights from some of those conversations. Mostly, I want to address the question of evil and man’s inhumanity to man. So given the premise of Self-Actualization Psychology of the goodness of human nature, the question is:

*If people are so good, and how why can they be so bad?*

For me, Self-Actualization Psychology offers several answers to the questions of this exploration and my guess is that these answers are critical for all of us, especially for those of us who work with people. After all, if we don’t understand how people can turn aggressive and end up doing ugly and hurtful things to others, then it will be easy to turn cynical, distrustful, fearful, defensive, negative, and pessimistic. So to prevent that, we need a theory of “evil” that can maintain respect and awe and love of “human nature.” So, is that possible?

Let me begin with a simple assertion.

The potential for *good* includes the potential for evil. Every one of us has within the inner potentiality for both constructive and destructive behaviors. We have within us the potential to choose either good or evil, to express ourselves constructively or destructively.

In fact, it is this dual potentiality that makes us *moral beings* with a sense of conscience. If we didn’t have this dual potential within our freedom and powers, there would be no moral choice or ethical behavior. We would simply be acting out programs of our nature.

To answer the question of human “evil,” Maslow introduced the *Theory of Thwarting*. The central principle here is that if we thwart an important and non-trivial human need so that a person experiences it as a threat to survival, self, and self-actualization needs, and human beings will become aggressive. We will aggress toward that which threatens us (or the person who threatens us). That is, we defend ourselves. With significant and personal threat, we become defensive and access our defensive techniques. We go into a state of self-defense. We don’t want to die, lose precious and valuable assets, be diminished by something or someone.

Is any of that inherently “bad” or “evil?” Who would claim that? The value and preciousness of life itself is a value to be fought for and defended against. So the foundation that comprises “aggression” that can lead to being hurtful to others is in itself a good thing. Even *aggression*, in itself, is not bad. It can just as equally be a force for good.

But how it is used, when, where, with whom, in what way, etc., these are the factors that determines if the aggression is good or evil. The force, the energy, the perception, the urge, and the drive to aggress against a threatening force is not innately evil. Anger, the emotion behind the aggression, as well as fear—both of these are valuable emotions. To be without fear or anger is to be without the ability to fight for life and the quality of life.

Having said that, the problem with anger and fear (and every other negative emotion) which indicates that we feel threatened with danger or loss or attack in some way is whether the emotion is appropriate or inappropriate, whether it is strong enough or too strong, whether it accords with our morals or if it overwhelms our morals. To feel fear or anger is just the beginning. How we respond to these emotional energies is the next step. How we act out the fear or anger in behaviors—that’s when the moral and ethical considerations arise.

Each of us have it within us the potential to destroy. We can destroy things, relationships, and people. We can turn our destructive potentiality against ourselves in suicide, against others in homicide, and against society in rioting, stealing, blowing buildings up, terrorizing groups of people, etc. We can destroy through gossip, untruths, criticisms, lies, and scores of other activities that undermine people.

So what is the source of human evil if human nature is basically good? It is the *misuse of our powers and our freedom*. It is not the case that we are by nature bad, evil, corrupt, aggressive, unsocial, etc. It is that we have not adequately learned how to manage our powers effectively in a human and humane way. Adequately learning means that *the impulse* for being moral beings needs to be educated. As we are born without instincts for knowing how to be human, we are also without instincts about moral values. These we have to learn if we want to be good and choose goodness.

It is *the very freedom* we have to think, feel, speak, and act in a large variety of ways without any “programmed” instincts that makes us response-able persons, moral persons, and persons who have tremendous potential for both constructiveness and destructiveness. Or we could say that we have *creative potential* and this potentially can create good just as well as create evil. And to create evil is actually much easier than to create good. We can create hurt and pain and evil by being ignorant, not thinking long-term about consequences, not thinking about others, believing erroneous ideas like we are just animals and the world is a jungle, or believing that others are not fully human, or learning in a culture of violence to value violence. And these are central to what causes “evil” in our lives.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #22**  
**May 19, 2008**

## **DENOMINALIZING “EVIL”**

In the last Meta Reflection I introduced the challenge of “evil” to *Self-Actualization Psychology*. “If human nature is basically where, what accounts for evil?” This was the very complaint that Rollo May and Abraham Maslow made about the shallowness of Esalen and the primary focus of the “new age” programs and thinking that came from the early human potential movement—it had no explanation for the presence of evil or what explanation it had was quite inadequate. It presented the positive side of human nature, but without any balance for the dark side.

Yet a complete psychology must account for the presence of “evil” in human existence and how good humans can sometimes create such hurt and destructiveness. To not understand the full range of potentials within humans—the creative and the destructive is to not fully understand man (and woman).

I noted in that Reflection also Maslow’s contribution of the Theory of the Thwarting. The thwarting of human needs explains most human “evil.” So much of what we experienced as “evil” that brings hurt, destructiveness, trauma, etc. is a human being feeling threat and attack and fighting back in whatever ways that person knows in defense. Behind the evils of fighting back is self-defense and the pursuit of life. That’s the positive intention.

And sometimes, *when* that thwarting is chronic or life-long, people then develop beliefs of hopeless that lead to destructiveness. People become self-destructive and destructive of everything good and honorable and hopeful and that reflects the opposite of their experience. Perpetuated thwarting of basic needs distorts human nature as does beliefs that are morbidly destructive of others like any belief in the superiority of one human family over another.

The fact is, if we start counting up all of the different sources of evil in human life, almost all of it comes from us humans—we *create* the evil and *we engage* in the destructiveness. And why? Why do we do this?

We do so out of ignorance and especially ignorance of systems. This shows up in short-term thinking and responding so that we sell ourselves and others short. It shows up in unintended consequences as we just didn’t think about things and use our intelligence. It shows up in just plain stupidity—failing to use what intelligence we do have. It shows up in philosophies of selfishness that sells long-term values and larger context values for the short-term. It shows up in erroneous ideas and beliefs (like believing that the world is a jungle; that human nature is depraved, that people are determined and without choice or power). It shows up as depersonalization as beliefs and practices make some people as second-class or disenfranchise them so that we do not see them human beings. It shows up as such cultures as the culture of violence, the culture of hate.

Yet in writing to this point, I have been accepting the nominalization of the term “evil.” Yet can you put “evil” in a wheelbarrow? Or in a chair? Nor can you put “good” on the table and measure it or smell it—they are not empirical. Good and evil are not things, they are not nouns—not “persons, places, or things.” They are value terms, evaluations. The process within these terms is that some person or group of persons has *made an evaluation according to some standard that something is good for something or evil to something*. But what?

Using the terminology of good and bad, when Jesus spoke about bearing “good” fruit, he contrasted that to “evil” fruit. That is, fruit that’s no good. Fruit that’s gone bad—that is, fruit that’s rotten and unfit for consumption. Using the standard of what food fits for digestion and health and what does not fit, but creates illness, fruit can be “good” or “bad.”

If good and bad are relative terms of evaluation according to some standard, then what is “good” or “bad” (evil) for human life, relationships, health, growth, development, cooperation, progress, etc.? What brings out our best? What enables groups and communities and nations to collaborate, be respectful, support each other, honor differences, and facilitate the full self-actualization of all people? Whatever does is “good.” Whatever does not must be “bad” and “evil” for these outcomes.

In this area, we call “evil” in human nature that which creates illness, mental and emotional illness, pathology and meta-pathology. These are the things that diminish people, undermine peace of mind, learning, developing, relating, supporting, etc.

So as we say about *meaning*, so we can say about any particular *meaning* that we have created. Nothing is good or evil; good and evil does not exist “out there,” but these evaluative meanings are what *we create in our minds about things*.

And in doing this, we thereby create the meta-frame categories that we call morality and ethics. These are our beliefs and understandings about what’s good or evil as we relate to each other then create the quality of our specific cultures. And of course, some sets of values work better than others as they facilitate the creation of good societies where all people are considered valuable and equal, where we respect persons and property, where we grant freedoms for responsible speech and action, and so on.

May you discern “good and evil” in a way that unleashes your highest values and best visions!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #23**  
**May 26, 2008**

## **THE TWO SIDES OF CREATIVITY**

What is the dark side of creativity? It is destructiveness. The back side of creating is destroying. The back side of constructing is de-constructing.

And *if* we all have the power to be creative both positively in creativity and negatively in destruction (Meta Reflection #21 and 22), then creating good and/or evil is inherent in our nature and our potentiality. We have the potentiality for creating good and destroying evil; and we also have the potentiality for creating evil and destroying good.

And from where do these powers arise? Yes they arise from our nature, our human nature—yet they do not arise because we are evil. *They arise because we are free.* We are free to choose our thoughts, our emotions, our speech, and our behaviors and, in fact, choose we must. We are free to think, feel, speak, and do and these responses as actions has consequences.

Yet choosing is not all that easy. We often choose what we think is a good, but it ends up being hurtful and destructive to us and others. Often this involves choosing a short-term value that we think will bring good and contribution, but then it has some unintended and unexpected long-term negative consequences. And this creates the moral and ethical dilemma that each of us face everyday. For in choosing our thoughts, ideas, beliefs, understandings we so choose our feelings which lead to our conversations and actions.

In choosing the choices we choose—there are many factors and variables that play into whether we are choosing to create goodness or evil.

- What criteria are we using in making our choices?
- In making our choices are we considering just ourselves or others as well?
- In making our choices are we thinking just about the immediate moment or about future moments?
- In making our choices, are we thinking about the context and layers of contexts within which we operate?
- In making our choices, are we asking ecological questions to quality control our decisions?
- In making our choices, how well informed are we about the nature of things?
- Are you taking the views and opinions of others into account, especially those who may be better informed and intelligent about things outside our understandings?

How often do we do harm and “evil” to ourselves and others simply due to poor decision making skills? How often do we end up saying, “I just didn’t think about that!” What we thought about

as we made decisions was too limited. If we didn't think about others in our lives, our choices will probably be self-centered and even selfish. If we didn't think about consequences and long-term effects, our choices could have done harm without us even realizing it. And did we even think about the criteria or values that we use in making our choices?

So much human "evil" arises from ignorance and stupidity. And it is summarized in the statement that we have all made so many times, "I just didn't realize." If we had thought, if we had realized, we would not have made the choices we did. Of course, doesn't this describe the process of learning from our mistakes? This also speaks about the maturing process of mind and emotion so that we make *conscious decisions and choices rather than just reacting* and over the years of our lives develop a conscious and intentional set of values that help us make up our mind about things.

The majority of the destructiveness and hurt that children do, especially to each other, arises from ignorance, reactivity, insecurity, and stupidity. I speak from experience! The hurt, the ugliness, the nastiness, and the destructiveness that we create during childhood mostly arise because we were so ignorant about things. That's why we needed guidance and direction. We needed wiser ones to help us know right from wrong, good from evil, and how to be okay enough within ourselves to *think* before we act.

*The dark side of creativity is destructiveness and lack of thoroughly choosing which then leads to the de-construction of something good.* In this, it is so much easier to destroy than to create. Creating takes more intelligence, consciousness, choice, effort, discipline, commitment, passion, etc. Destructiveness is easy. Bateson noted this in his meta-logue on meta-muddles. Muddling up something is so much easier and there's so many more ways to muddle things than to find the proper and correct way to do something.

Here's to your creativity! Here's to your destructive creativity as you tear apart and de-construct things that undermine your resourcefulness, productivity, and happiness. Here's to your positive creativity in building up and constructing wonderful frames of mind that bring out your best and unleash your highest potentials. May your creative powers be much more in your hands—much more at your disposal—and much more available when you need it!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #24**  
**May 27, 2008**

## LET THERE BE ALCHEMY

I had the privilege this past weekend to facilitate the transformative process that we call *The Crucible* in Neuro-Semantics. This is the second **change** model that we have in Neuro-Semantics; the first being *The Axes of Change* (Coaching Change, Meta-Coaching, Volume I, 2005). The first change model is designed for conscious change and for psychologically healthy people and while we think of it as the “dance of change” around four axes and eight coaching positions, it is still mostly a linear process. It is linear in that it moves along the four stages of change: motivation, decision, creation, and integration.

By way of contrast *the Crucible Change model* is entirely non-linear. It works in a holographic way as a system of energies that work on a set of meanings—exposing, dissolving, de-constructing, and altering until something new emerges, some new set of meaning frames, some new expression and form for how to be in the world.

While we use several metaphors for the Crucible, one of them is the metaphor of alchemy. And last week several people seemed to prefer that metaphor. In the middle ages of Europe, alchemy was a medieval science and speculative philosophy whose aim was to achieve the transmutation of the base metals into gold. Today we use the term *alchemy* for a power or process of transforming something common into something special. In the middle ages people hoped to use alchemy find transform lead into gold. From that arose the pre-scientists of that age trying to figure out the secrets that would enable them to generate that kind of transformation.

The gold of human personality, the gold of a person actualizing (making-real) his or her highest values and best competencies is the alchemy that we seek and that the Crucible is designed to create. And it *creates* it using both sides of creation— de-construction and construction. First comes the de-construction as we put the heavy lead and other raw materials of life into the crucible so that the heat within such can be released and activated.

Now life often has this effect upon us anyway. Challenging life events can work as a crucible upon us —bringing us into a self-encounter, bringing us to the end of an old way of being, and expose us to truth, to reality, to love, to fear, to anger, to joy, to a wide range of emotions and dreams and visions ... and through it all boil down one way of life to bring into being a new way of being. In the lives of such persons of history as Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Viktor Frankl, Christopher Reeves, and many others, an alchemy of personality occurred and history changed.

The crucibles in such cases tended to be hard, extremely challenging, and could have just as easy



destroyed or wiped the person out as to have given birth to a transformative leader. *The Crucible Model* differs in this way. It is not hard or rough or any of these things. Like the release of nuclear energy that provides electricity for millions or within a nuclear submarine, the energy activated and released for new creation in the Crucible is under our control. We can form and reform it so that it works for our self-actualization.

Among the common lead of human experiences that we can now take into the Crucible and have transmuted into gold are old habits, old lifestyles, old thoughts, old beliefs, old emotions—creations of meaning that no longer serve you well. Are you ready for a transformation? Try the Crucible. [There's a chapter in *Unleashed* on the Crucible.]

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #25**  
**June 2, 2008**

## **WHAT IS A NEURO-SEMANTIC ENVIRONMENT?**

In some earlier Meta Reflections I wrote about time-binding. This refers to one of the great contributions Alfred Korzybski introduced in *General Semantics*—a foundational source of NLP and Neuro-Semantics. Another concept from him which we use and keep alive in Neuro-Semantics, and that is the concept of *neuro-semantic environments*.

We know that environments are important. Research has long demonstrated that we feel better in beautiful places and worse in ugly places. In places of beauty enable us to more easily access states of awe, inspiration, peaceful serenity, excitement, love, and compassion. And places of ugliness that look bad, smell bad, sound noisy evoke in us states of irritation, annoyance, frustration, defensiveness, destructiveness, and so on.

Research has demonstrated that people are not able to lift as much in rooms painted light pink as in rooms that are bright and bold colors. This has led to the use of pastel colors in prisons and holding places with people who could potentially become violent. And most of us know all too well the difference between cold days of clouds and rain and inclement weather versus days of blue skies, puffy bright white clouds and sunshine.

The criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling in *Broken Windows* explored the effect of environment and recommended using environment to facilitate social change. When a broken window first appears in a neighborhood, it subtly begins affecting the psychology of the people who live in that neighborhood. If the window is immediately fixed and the building is cleaned up, people have a sense that people care, that people are watching, that they are involved and responsible.

But if the window isn't fixed, it is then more likely that another broken window will soon appear, than another, then graffiti, and so on. The psychological messages is, "No one cares." "No one is watching." "No one is exercising responsibility." And so the neighborhood goes downhill. In this case, the environment, as a psychological atmosphere is essentially communicating the message, "Crime is easier here. There's no consequence for destroying things."

Major Ruddy Giuliani learned about this Broken Window theory as he was preparing to become major of New York City. Then upon being inducted into office, he invested the city's money in cleaning up the graffiti and making arrests for small crimes like jumping subway stalls. And the influence of this is accredited, in good part, for taking New York City from number one Murder City down to 106 in the nation (*The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell).

That's the power of an environment upon people. So, if that is environment, what is a *neuro-semantic environment*? This refers to a psychological context. It is the context of meaning (semantic) which our time-binding powers and energies create within our nervous systems and neurology (neuro). And once set, it is the space or field within which we live and from which we operate.

Our *neuro-semantic* environment is made up of *the meaning frames* (beliefs, understandings, representational connections, identifications, and the other 100 meta-levels) that we carry with us in our bodies so that we carry a psychological environment everywhere we go. This psychological environment, as a neuro-semantic environment, is the "space," "atmosphere," and the "field" that we experience as our reality—as our sense and feel of reality. And of course, that's why we find it so hard to run away from ourselves. We can run away from an external environment. But even when we change physical environment and move somewhere else, we tend to find ourselves in the same kind of states, thinking, emoting, responding. We take our neuro-semantic environment with us everywhere we go.

*So what makes up neuro-semantic environments?* Our words, ideas, premises, assumptions, images, metaphors, and all of the other ways that we create meanings. First we create these on our insides in our mind and nervous system, but then we eventually externalize them and create them all around us on our outsides. It's our self-talk and our other-talk. And none of this is neutral or harmless, but powerful neuro-semantically as it creates our inner and outer environments.

If then you carry your psychological and semantic atmosphere and weather wherever you go, *what "weather" do you take with you?* What "weather" do you bring to others? Is it dark and cloudy, cold and wet, hot and dry, blue skies and sunshine, or what? Is it loving and kind? Or is it mean and cruel? Is it affirmative of humans or does it diminish people and drag them down?

Korzybski used the word "evaluation" and "evaluational" in his descriptions of neuro-semantic environments. Obviously, when we give meaning to anything, we are making evaluations about what something is, how it works, its value, importance, and significance. For example, he wrote, "I included neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic (evaluational) environments as environments" (p. xlv)

Now Korzybski treated these neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic environments as conditions or factors which mold human personalities and that hold our time-binding learnings in place. In other words, these neuro-semantic environments is part and parcel of our *culture*.

I like this phrase, *neuro-semantic environments*, because it highlights the systemic nature of human environments. And it means several things. It means that our environments are not neutral. Put a human in an environment and that human will fill it with all kinds of artifacts that anchor his or her meanings, beliefs, identities, etc. What's inside is projected outside. And what's outside is introjected inside. There's a communication loop. We form our environments and our environments form us—our feelings, beliefs, experiences.

And our inside neuro-semantic environments as meta-state structures are within layers of embedded neuro-semantic environments. Given this, we can now say, *Your Matrix is the sum of all of your neuro-semantic environments*. Using this as a way to think about ourselves, what are your neuro-semantic environments? What meanings do you live in as your universe of meaning? Is it pessimistic or optimistic? Is it sad and dreadful or joyful and hopeful? Is it supportive and nurturing or limiting and critical?

Many questions and in the next Meta Reflection I will use these exploration questions to examine your physical health, well-being, peace of mind, resilience and more in relationship to the neuro-semantic environment that your cells are living in. Because your cells, by their very nature, live in your neuro-semantic environment— communicating with it and adjust to it!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #26**  
**June 9, 2008**

## **CELLS AND YOUR NEURO-SEMANTIC ENVIRONMENT**

*Do you know that your cells live inside of your neuro-semantic environment?* They do. I mentioned the terminology of a “neuro-semantic environment” in the last Meta Reflection. It’s a term that comes from Alfred Korzbyski which describes the meaning-structures that we build within our mind and then externalize in the world.

This means is that we all live in *neuro-semantic environments*—environments that we create and that are formulated by the meanings that we create. What makes these neuro-semantic environments powerful and profound is that they serve as the *contexts* within which we live and so we mostly forget about them and live in them unconsciously. We live in them as fish live in water—unaware of that medium.

One of the things that this means for us is that our cells, the very cells of our body and brain and nervous system, the cells that give us life, also live in a neuro-semantic environment. Not only do the billions and trillions of cells in your body live in the physical environment around your body and inside your body, they also live within the psychological (or neuro-semantic) environment that we provide them. But what does this mean and imply for our health and well-being?

First and foremost it means that the *life and vitality* of your cells ultimately are influenced by your meanings—your beliefs, understandings, decisions, identities, intentions, etc. This is one of the central mind-body interfaces, if not the most central.

Here’s a little bit of Cells #101 (if you’re a little rusty on your biology and anatomy or neuro-sciences). Cells are the foundation of life itself. A cell is composed of a bit of living protoplasm, a membrane that holds it together, and DNA with a genetic code in the middle of it. And cells are responsive. Cells respond to their environments. Every cell move about in its environment searching for “food” to ingest. It then processes the nutriments and then expels various products. Cells move toward factors that nurture its life, warmth, food, etc. and they move away from toxic influences. The simplest forms of life are single cells, amebas.

What is the “brain” of the cell? For years, scientists assumed that the DNA was the “brain” of the cell and that it was the DNA that informed the cell regarding what to do. But with *enucleation* (which refers to the process of taking out of the cell the cells’ DNA), the cell does not die. Instead, it continues ingesting and digesting and moving in response to things. The only difference and limitation without the DNA in the cell, is that they do not reproduce. So the brain

of the cell must lie elsewhere. Bruce Lipton identifies *the membrane* as the cell's "brain."

The membrane is the cell's "brain" in that it is the membrane that detects its environment and responds to that environment. As the interface between the life inside the cell and the outside world in which the cells seeks to live and thrive and grow and reproduce, the communication loop works at the level of the membrane.

What does all of this have to do with Neuro-Semantics, NLP, Psychology, Self-Actualization, Coaching, etc.? As a multi-cellular organism, your cells and mine not only live in an external environment so that at our skin level we have a communication loop within our outer environment, but our cells also live inside of the environment of our bodies. This means that our cells also have to deal with and relate to the neuro-semantic environment on our insides.

This brings up lots of questions:

- Is our inner neuro-semantic environment friendly or unfriendly?
- Is it full of acid bitterness or loving gentleness?
- Is it an environment of trust of yourself, trust of life, trust of others or distrust, suspicion, fear, worry, etc.?

It is this inside environment that each of us create. You create your neuro-semantic environment which is one of the most important environments that your cells have to deal with. It is this environment of your meanings that baths your cells and organs and nervous systems (autonomic, parasympathic, central, immune). If that's the case, what internal *meaning* environment are you bathing your cells in?

Could this, in part, explain why "stress" is a central factor in 90% of all illnesses and diseases? Could this, in part, explain why there are "personality factors" in so many diseases? That there are personality factors for heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, etc.? What if the *meanings* you create that make up the neuro-semantic environment inside your body is how your "mind" sends messages and commands to your body? Would this say something about psycho-somatic diseases and psycho-somatic healing? What does it say to you?

The good news in all of this is that the neuro-semantic environment within which all of our cells live is an environment that we create every day as we access, invent, and process meaning within our entire mind-body system. So how are you as a creator of your neuro-semantic environment? To the unleashing of your highest and best health!

L. Michael Hall  
2008 Neurons #27  
June 16, 2008

## THE CULTURES THAT TIME-BINDING CREATES

In March I wrote some Meta Reflections about *time-binding* and described *time-binding* as Korzybski's unique definition of human nature. If our very nature involves time-binding then this results in something else. *Time-binding creates our cultures and civilizations*. The bottom line of "culture" is that it cultivates our minds, emotions, speech, behaviors, and ways of relating in communities. As a human construct "culture" is entirely fallible and, to varying degrees, every culture either supports or undermines our full development and unleashing. Some cultures are very toxic and morbid while others are more life-affirming and nurturing. Do you know the quality of the cultures that you live in? Do you know how to change your cultures to make them more self-actualizing?

In Self-Actualization Psychology, the pioneering person in the area of culture was *Ruth Benedict* (1887- 1948). As she developed her models and theories about cultures and engaged in extensive hands-on research into numerous cultures, she became highly dissatisfied with the concept of cultural relativity that was popular among anthropologists of her day (the 1930s and 1940s) and with which her name has been closely associated.

Her creative breakthrough occurred as she was comparing different cultures in an attempt to create an explanatory model. Working with four pairs of cultures, she found four cultures wherein the people were surly and nasty and four where the people were nurturing and supportive to each other. At first she described the cultures as low-morale / high-morale. Then she described them as secure / insecure.

"The four good cultures —those she liked—were the Zuni, the Arapesh, the Dakota, and the Eskimo society. The nasty, surly ones were the Chuckchee, the Ojibwa, the Dobwo, and the Kwakiutl. ... She compared them on the basis of race, geography, climate, size, wealth, and complexity, but none of these criteria seemed to explain the differences."  
(*The Third Force*, p. 112)

In the book that she's most known for, *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth wrote,

"A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action." That's what she was looking for a pattern or set of patterns. How could she describe the patterning of cultures?

"Cultures are more than the sum of their traits." (*Patterns of Culture*, p. 46)

The explanatory model that she finally create as her model was that of *Synergy*— *high synergy* / *low synergy*. And her theoretical understanding arose by shifting from focusing on behavior, on what people did or did not do, to focusing on *the function of behavior*. In other words, she

shifted her focus to meaning and intention (the semantic forces driving the behavior). By shifting to *why* people behaved as they did, rather than on *how* they behaved, she took her Synergy Model to a higher level. *Synergy*, referring to *the design* of behavior, distinguished cultures in terms of whether the activities of individuals led to advantages for others or not.

“The high synergy societies were those where people cooperated together for mutual advantage, not necessarily because they were unselfish, but because the customs of society made cooperation worthwhile.” (*The Third Force*, p. 112)

*Benedict used synergy to describe how any given culture is organized.* Her focused inquiry now became:

- Does the welfare, wealth, and success of individuals contribute to the whole or does it take away from the whole?
- Does the wealth of those who become wealthier spread around or does it get segregated so that only the wealthy benefit?

The social arrangements in a *high synergistic culture work* is democratic and mutually enhancing. It is to our advantage to cooperate, to work together, to acknowledge and honor each other, to collaborate. As Maslow theorized about synergistic cultures he noted that they are societies where “virtue pays.” If in a given society, virtue does not pay, cooperation and goodwill will not be reinforced and it will not govern the customs of that society.

Maslow also noted the relationship between synergy and security. *The more secure people, the more they will be synergistic.* The more secure a society, the more synergistic that culture will be. And conversely, where people and societies are insecure and living at the lower basic need of safety and security, there will be more aggression, selfishness, greed, competitiveness, exploitation, manipulation, distrust, paranoia, etc.

Synergy at the individual level, at the relationship level of person to person, shows up as nurture, compassion, empathy, care, support, and so on. Conversely, the lower the synergy, the more conflict, competitiveness, secrecy, arrogance, aggression, fear of people, fear of humiliation, parochialisms, etc. When you arrange a synergistic relationship, you set things up so that one person’s advantage is also an advantage to other persons—mutually beneficial self-interest. At the cultural level, a synergistic arrangement will facilitate the achieving of the potentialities of the most people. All of this is the healthy, self-actualization psychology of what Stephen Covey popularized as “win-win thinking” and relating.

When I read *Patterns of Culture*, I discovered that Benedict had described a particular culture that really fleshes-out *what a low synergistic society is like and how it operates.* Benedict discovered the Dobu people and noted that they seemed to have developed their pattern of culture from the physical environment they found themselves in. That environment was stark, poor, dangerous, ungenerous—and so they became.

In writing about the Dobu people on Dobu Island. Unlike the Trobrianders who

“... live in the fertile low-lying islands which provide an easy and bountiful living. The



soil is rich and the quiet lagoons full of fish. The Dobuan islands, on the other hand, are rocky volcanic upcroppings that harbour only scanty pockets of soil and allow little fishing.” (130)

As the environment was dangerous, so the Dobuans became. They even developed a reputation for their dangerousness.

“They are said to be magicians who have diabolic power and warriors who halt at no treachery . . . cannibals . . .”

And living in that environment, eventually that context had a detrimental influence on their psychology. Dobu had no chiefs, no political organization.

“Dobu put a premium upon ill-will and treachery and make of them [these attributes] the recognized virtues of their society.” (p. 131)

The largest functioning Dobuan grouping is a named locality of four to twenty villages “which is the war unit and is on terms of permanent international hostility with every other similar locality.” Benedict provided many word pictures of the quality (or lack thereof) of daily life and how the culture was built around non-synergy.

The people with whom one associates daily are the witches and sorcerers who threaten one’s affairs (132).

Marriage for the young men is considered an indignity, it is an event is forced upon him by the old witch in the doorway—his future mother-in-law (!).

There is fierce exclusiveness of ownership among them.

*Scarcity drove the culture.* Benedict wrote that food is never sufficient in Dobu and everyone goes hungry for the last few months before planting if he is to have the requisite yams for seed. The greatest Dobuan delinquency is the eating of one’s seed yams. The loss is never made up. As a result of this,

“All existence is cut-throat competition, and every advantage is gained at the expense of a defeated rival. . . . In Dobu, rivalry is secret and treacherous.” (141-142)

Given the harsh, dangerous, and non-synergistic environment, every aspect of the culture became formed in this image. For example, consider their beliefs about religion:

“In Dobu there is no propitiation of supernatural beings, no gifts or sacrifices to cement cooperation with the supernatural. The supernatural beings that are known in Dobu are a few secret magical names. The name gives power of command. The important names are never spoken aloud, but mumbled under the breath to prevent anyone else’s hearing. . . For any result of any kind one is dependent upon the magic one knows.” (143)

“The magical incantations, therefore, are of incomparable importance.” (145)

Benedict noted also that the magical incantations of Dobu must be word-perfect to be effective, again suggesting a scarcity that creates a demand for utter perfectionism. About synergy, she wrote about a Dobuan belief, “Any man’s gain is another’s loss” (146). And this meant that “a good crop is a confession of theft.” Imagine that! If one person succeed then, in that culture, *it means* that he must be a thief! Obviously, there was no celebration of another person’s welfare

and there is every motive to be afraid of letting others see your success!

“It is supposed to have been alienated from the gardens even of one’s own susu by dangerous sorcery. The amount of the harvest is carefully concealed, and reference to it is an insult. (148)

“Suspicion in Dobu runs to paranoid lengths and a counter-charm is always suspected. Men are in terror of the machinations of their women, so much so that, believing that Trobiriand women do not practise witchcraft, they put on in the Trobriands a self-confident manner which they do not assume at home.” (161)

So, not surprising, their social relationships are not valuable experiences:

“Dobuan conventions exclude laughter and make dourness a virtue.” (166)

“In the gardens we do not play, we do not sing, we do not yodel, we do not relate legends.” (167)

The personality cultivated in this culture leads to the Dobuan being “dour, prudish, and passionate, consumed with jealousy and suspicion and resentment. Every moment of prosperity he conceives himself to have wrung from a malicious world by a conflict in which he has worsted his opponent.” (168)

All of this feeds fear and takes fear to extreme paranoia levels:

In Dobu eavesdropping is constantly feared because knowledge of an incantation obtained in this way is as good as knowledge obtained in any other.

“Life in Dobu fosters extreme forms of animosity and malignancy which most societies have minimized by their institutions. Dobuan institutions exalt them to the highest degree. The Dobuan lives out without repression man’s worst nightmares of the ill-will of the universe, and according to his view of life virtue consists in selecting a victim upon whom he can vent the malignancy he attributes alike to human society and to the powers of nature. All existence appears to him as a cut-throat struggle in which deadly antagonists are pitted against one another in a contest for each one of the goods of life. Suspicion and cruelty are his trusted weapons in the strife and he gives no mercy, as he asks none.” (p. 172)

Wow! What a horrible picture of what human culture can become *if the idea of scarcity is allowed to grow and developed unchecked* so that it forms the structures of a non-synergistic society. Talk about a way to create a toxic human culture and environment! Ultimate it’s all about meanings and this story is an example of how one cultural group allowed their environment to set the meanings for their thinking, perceptions, values, social life, and personalities.

May you and I now take full ownership of our creation-of-meaning-powers and be the cultural frame setters so that we can transcend our cultures and together create a more empowering and self-actualizing culture!

L. Michael Hall  
2008 Neurons #28  
June 23, 2008

## THE CULTURE OF ABUNDANCE

If I wrote about *the culture of scarcity* in the last Meta Reflection, this time I want to write about *the culture of abundance*. To have a self-actualizing home, relationship, company, business, school, church, or country—we have to have a culture of abundance. What does this mean and how do we create such?

*A culture of abundance* refers to some of our basic beliefs about the world, economics, relationships, creativity, development, time-binding, human nature, etc. It relates to such questions as:

Is there enough for everybody?

Can we set things up culturally, socially, organizationally, and relationally so that there's a structure of sharing, cooperating, and collaborating?

Do we believe people are basically selfish, greedy, and narcissistic?

Do we believe people are basically social, interactive, kind, good, and democratic?

Do we believe people and organizational structures can learn to take the democratic ideas of the equality of all people and more consistently translate it into everyday life?

Living at the lower levels on Maslow's Hierarchy of Prepotent Needs puts us in the world of scarcity. There isn't enough. What you have takes from me; robs me; makes me less. What I have takes from you and makes you less. There is just so much pie and each piece you take as well as the larger your serving—the less for me. This is the world of animals and so, as Maslow called it, the Jungle. This is Darwin's world of the survival of the fittest—of the fight over resources which are scarce.

Only when we move to the higher levels of the Hierarchy and begin experiencing the self-actualization needs does the world of abundance open up to us. Before that level of development of person and consciousness, abundance seems like a dream, like magic thinking, like fluffy over-optimistic nonsense. Discovery and learning of abundance requires experience, it requires self-actualization experience. Then we truly enter into the human world, the world of *being*, the world of expressing our real self and *being* our truest self, and so actualizing our highest and best.

In the culture of abundance we recognize a whole new dynamic and mechanism. It is the process whereby the more you give, the more you have. The more love you give, the more love you have within yourself and the more to give. The more knowledge and information you give to others, the more you have within yourself. It makes you even more intelligent, more wise, and more *able* to learn even more. The world of scarcity doesn't work this way, but the world of

abundance does.

That's because in the Jungle, your values, your perception, your meanings, and your actions are all *instrumental*. You are *trying to get something*, to achieve, to possess. But in the *Being* dimension, your values, perception, meanings, and actions are different, they are non-purposeful, non-instrumental. The values and meanings are ends-in-themselves; for no other reason than just being and just expressing what they are. Love is for love's sake; justice is for justice's sake, so with knowledge, wisdom, beauty, order, wonder, curiosity, and so on. And this completely changes motivation.

I don't see any evidence that the field of NLP has moved beyond *the Jungle* to the dimension of *Being*. Instead I see competition, put-downs, parochialism, camps, kingdoms, the "Mine is better than yours" games, name-calling, denominational wars, individualism, "I have to do it my way," lack of acknowledgment of sources, and so on. And even in our field and community of Neuro-Semantics, I still see some of that and not enough of true team spirit, collaboration, validating and referring clients to each other, giving and investing oneself in others and in the community, etc.

In my first profession, I was introduced to a very conservative Christian community who were the "true" ones, the only ones with a ticket to heaven. And being new to it all, I was glad, really glad, to be a part of the "right" group. But then over the years I met good people in other traditions who I knew were "wrong" and yet they were good and decent people with good intentions and good hearts. It confused me. How could that be? Weren't they reprobates, apostates, and false teachers? Weren't they confused, deceived, blinded, and evil? Scarcity made the salvation resource in short supply. More Jungle life, scarcity, and exclusiveness.

I thought that was all over when I first entered the field of psychology, but no. There were the camps and kingdoms there: Freud, Adler, Jung, Watson, Skinner, Glasser, Ellis, and on and on. So when I entered the field of NLP, I was delighted that we didn't have that kind of thing—we believed in abundance, plenty-of-resources-for-all; we looked for positive intentions in everybody; we had a communication model that taught pacing, rapport, connection, matching, and cooperation and collaboration. But it wasn't long before I found out that this was mostly talk, and not reality.

Why? Robert Dilts explained for me one reason. *Thought Viruses*. The thought virus of scarcity has penetrated the minds-and-hearts of the first leaders so that we too had our camps and divisions. Terry McClendon offered yet another explanation in his book, *NLP the Wild Days* when he explained the division and break up of Bandler and Grinder, "The stages was not big enough for both egos."

Scarcity and abundance; abundance and scarcity—two worlds, two dimensions, two ways of living, two cultures. To move to the culture of abundance we have to have the satisfaction of the lower needs, we have to clean up any and all semantic overloading of those needs, and we have to move on to self-actualization where *being, non-instrumental striving, and full abundance*

*dominates.* That will solve the thought viruses and get the egos out of the way. That will enable us to learn to “play well together,” be good team players, and build a legacy based upon being able to do so much more together than alone or apart.

And as you know, this is the heart of our vision in Neuro-Semantics.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #29**  
**June 30, 2008**

## META-RACE

September of 2007 I wrote about the term “race” or more precisely the mis-use of this term and some of the pseudo-concepts that fall out from it. At that time I mentioned that Alfred Korzybski used the term “racial” to speak about the human race. So while I had grown up thinking and believing that “racial” meant other human races, Korzybski helped me to understand a larger truth: *There is only one race—the human race.* On this planet there is only one race and we all belong to the same species. The reason for this is singularly simple—because there are no other species of humans.

A result of this misunderstanding is the mis-use of the term “race” which has created a tremendous amount of pain, distress, hate, fear, stress, and jealousy. It’s amazing how one small word can create a universe of pathology! If there is but one race on this planet, then there are no “race” problems. There is no such thing as race conflicts, race strife, race distinctions, etc. Poof! They are gone. Well, I wish.

Actually when we invest dysfunctional meaning into that word and use it to distinguish members of the human family—what ugliness and evil we create! Our invention of the word *race* starts the problem, calls it into being, and gives people permission to be hateful to others in the human family.

Now as semantic beings *we humans live in language.* As we invent and use words, so we create our world. And here the word “race” creates not only an intellectual misunderstanding, it subtly leads us to construct our realities, our worlds, our behaviors, our emotions, and our reactions to others. The word separates people. It transforms the most superficial differences (skin color, eye shape, nose, mouth, etc.) into semantically loaded problems. The word blinds us to being members of the same family. It differentiates us so that we act like these superficial differences are important as if it indicates different species or races. And once the word locks in the differences, a battle begins about superior/ inferior, good/evil; intelligent/ stupid. All over a word! Someone should outlaw that word!

Over a word people then get stupid. They get upset, hateful, ugly, and nasty with each other. They view each other as belonging to different “races” and imagine differences that don’t exist.

What we call the different “races” are actually just different family distinctions. Yes there are differences. There are differences between the family traits of people who have grown up in different areas of the planet. Yet what differences are we talking about? We are talking about such important things as color of skin, shape of mouth, nose, eyes, etc.—family traits! This is on the same order as when an aunt or grandmother says, “You have your mother’s eyes.” “Your brother has a nose from your father’s side of the family.” The so-called “racial” distinctions are

just family traits. Nothing more. They are not actually “racial” differences since we are all part of the same race—the human race.

So what is the problem with these *family distinctions*? What if someone’s skin has more or less pigmentation than yours? When you think about it—*skin color has to be the most superficial and trivial distinction between peoples!* Whoever thought to make that a criteria about the value or worth or honor or esteem of a human being? What were they thinking? When it comes to people—*character* is a thousand times more important than color of skin! And what about *integrity*? Isn’t that a thousand times more important than where on the globe you were born and the amount of pigmentation in your skin or what family characteristics you happen to have?

Yet imagine the insanity of people all of this planet feeling superior or inferior in comparison with other people due to skin color, facial features, etc. What a waste of time, energy, intelligence! And when you think about the fights, conflicts, insults, and wars due to the fact that some families of the human race have differences in this trivial matters—it boggles the mind to think about the waste of human potentials.

Yet even in this so-called enlightened 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have “race” problems and “race” conflicts. In the recent political season here in America, the democrats have brought all of this to the forefront. People have been “playing the race card,” others doing “race baiting,” and people who hold grievances about what our great-great-grand parents thought and did in their ignorance toward each other.

*All of these things are pseudo-problems.* If there are not multiple races on this planet, but just the one singular human race, then we are inventing and creating problems where there doesn’t need to be a problem. The *real* problem is that we are inventing *in our minds and thoughts and language* differences and semantically loading those differences. The *real* problem boils down to a lack of respect and love which arises from failing to see that we are all members of the same family.

If we respect all people as *human beings*—*equal* in value, dignity, and esteem and if we love all members of the human family, what would happen to “race” and all these unnecessary distinctions? We call this problem of “race” into existence by the creation of the term and then by meta-stating the term (framing it with layers of semantic meanings) so that we build up morbid and erroneous ideas: some people are superior, some are inferior.

In the final analysis *this problem is a problem of frames.* If you think there’s such a thing as “race” and that there are different races, and that some people are more equal than others—then you create what we call “racism.” Then we look at people, not as *people*—*as human beings*,\_but we look at others through the various lens of these concepts that disrespect and discount people.

Is there such a thing then as “racism?” Sure there is! But we deceive ourselves, and we delude others, when we call it “racism.” The problem is not that complex or complicated. It is much simpler. What we call “racism” is fear and insecurity and hatefulness and anger which all results

from the pre-judged (prejudiced) frames that refuses to see and acknowledge the full human family. It is when we start with the idea that some people are less valuable because of superficial things as skin color, facial distinctions, location of family heritage ... the result is the morbid pathology that we call “racism.”

And this problem could easily be solved. *Love* for all people as family members—*acceptance* of physical differences as we accept differences in our children and sibling, *understanding* that all people need respect and dignity, *honor* that all people are just trying to find their way and discover who they are. Then we will unleash tremendous human potentials!



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #30**  
**July 7, 2008**

## **SELF-REFERENCE IS THE NAME OF THE GAME**

*“Meta-States? What are meta-states? I never heard of that before.”*

That’s what he said to me; not unsurprising and yet it was precisely what I wanted him to ask. I was sitting at Starbucks and while he had seen me there numerous times, today he started up a conversation. And so interrupting my reading and writing, I began with some small talk, then he asked me what I was working on, which happened to be *the Psychology of Meta-States* which I’ll present at Trainer’s Training this year in New Zealand. And that’s when the question came.

“Meta-States? What are meta-states? I never heard of that before.”

Now you have to know that I’m always looking for new ways to answer the question. Over the years I’ve answered it in many different ways:

Meta-States— how you respond to your own responses.

Meta-States— how you go spiral round and round the thoughts and emotions you experience.

Meta-States— I don’t know, it’s *above* me. It’s *over* my head. That’s too *high* of a question for me to answer. :)

Meta-States— how you layer level upon level of thoughts and emotions to create the Matrix of your mind.

Meta-States— how you create second thoughts to your first ones; third thoughts and feelings to your second ones, and so on.

But this time I tried something new.

“Meta-States— how you create and ride the self-referential loops of your mind.”

“What?” he immediately said. “I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

“Yes I know...” I said playfully, winking so that he would take it in as conversational play. “That’s because self-reference itself is the name of the game.”

“And what is self-reference?”

“It’s how we refer to ourselves, and reference our thoughts and emotions and repeatedly spiral round and round our own experiences. It’s how we create horrible downward spiraling of responses to our responses as we react to our reactions and how we create wonderfully inspiring and awe-stirring states as we spiral upward into those “Aha!” moments of inspiration. Does that make sense?”

“Well, I suppose. Yes, kind of. So, what are you doing with these Meta-States and this self-reference game?”

“I’m tracking them. I follow them. I mostly map out how we spiral round and round something to create moments of genius, experiences of self-actualization, and the most astonishing experiences of excellence that’s possible for human beings. As a Bright-Side psychologist and modeler, I am doing this to make specific and explicit how we can model and replicate the very best experiences so that we can pass them around and *raise the quality of life on this planet.*”

I uttered the last words “*raise the quality of life on this planet*” slowly and with a tone of an old fashion radio broadcaster ... doing so playfully as part of our conversation. After that he asked if he could sit down for a minute, so he sat down and we had an engaging conversation for the next ten minutes. We talked about the self-referencing nature of language and of mind and Heidegger’s famous quote, “Language is the house of being. Man dwells in this house.”

When he asked about some of the trainings and materials we have in Neuro-Semantics, I talked to him about how we are the creators of meaning and that Meta-States models the layering of meanings to create a Matrix of frames of meaning. I was delighted that he was so interested and seemed to pick it up very quickly. And he said he would peak into the Meta-Coach training that would be in town in a week or two.

Later I realized something as an “Aha!” awareness: Living life in a self-referential world is precisely what makes human life, emotion, personality, thinking, consciousness, problems, etc. so complex. When it comes to the self-referential, *everything recursively feeds into everything else*. Not infrequently I am absolutely amazed and even astonished when I listen to the conversations in the Meta-Coach trainings when one person relates things to something else.

Usually I am not the coach, but the person benchmarking skills so I can’t jump in and say,

“Wait a minute, how is X related to Y? How did you come up with A connected to K?”

People in conversation with others and privately with themselves as they “think” use words, symbols, meanings, memories, imaginations, fears, hopes, worries, movies, lines from a teacher 30 years ago, quotes from a song, etc. and recursively feed all kinds of things back into other things. And in this way they create their meanings, their psychology, their psycho-logical state of mind-and-body. *No wonder we are all so psycho-logical!* No wonder that almost all of our problems are essentially and fundamentally problems of self-reference which creates the so-called “paradoxes” of life.

So, if self-reference is the name of the game, how are you at playing this game? Are you able to win at this game? Or it is this game itself that keeps defeating you as you keep spinning around things and getting lost? Are you willing to learn the art of riding the spirals of self-reflexivity? If so, welcome to the dimension of Meta-State Mastery!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #31**  
**July 14, 2008**

## **THE SELF-REFERENCE GAME**

*If* self-reference is the name of the game (Meta Reflection #30), and *if* it is a game that we are all involved in, and *if* it is the essential game that generates our meta-states, then how do we learn to play that game effectively? How do we learn to win at it? How do we understand self-reference in a way that simplifies the complexity that arises from spiraling round and round things?

The meta-stating process of self-reflexivity and self-referentiality means that you as a human being can catch yourself in states of awareness. When did that last happen to you? Did it happen just now reading this? Did you become aware of your own self-consciousness and if you did, what do you think about that? And if you do, how do you experience *catching* yourself in that act? And if you don't like catching yourself, what reflexive belief or thought do you set to prevent yourself from being aware of catching yourself?

Our self-referentiality explains why we often get ourselves caught up in a game of trying to outwit ourselves. Smokers often do this. When a smoker discovers that smoking is an actual and real health risk and begins to want to quit, he or she may also know that the habit is well-habituated and that can be fearful to not be able to quit. The smoker has to quit but also fears whether he or she can. The smoker wants to quit and doesn't know what will happen if he doesn't succeed. So the smoker wants to hide from himself how much he really wants to quit. So to quit the smoker has to outwit the smoker within. This typically leads to convoluted tricks, tricks when involve tricking his or her own self in various defense mechanisms.

In this way you relate to yourself as both the acting subject and the object of your concerns. Using the Meta-States model, self-as-a-subject is a meta-state and self-as-an-object is the primary state. First you objectify yourself as if an object of your awareness. If you then reify this process you'll end up with entities inside yourself (e.g., id, ego, superego). Then you say things like, "My id is struggling against my superego." "I don't know how to raise my self-esteem; I've tried everything." The paradox here arises from how you create confusion by confusing the self-reference levels and layers.

In language, self-reference enables you to stand outside of yourself. You can then observe yourself, edit your realities, create new selves, establish a destiny and direction. You can talk about yourself as if you were someone else. And if you ask, "What is this madness?" The answer is that it is your human creativity. Yet whether you use it as your glory as a human being or your hell, that depends on the content of how you use this structure.

In Neuro-Semantics we recognize that language is semantically loaded and that we can semantically load language and when we do we create various aspects of the self-reference game

that we play with ourselves and others. This means that every time you have an experience you also have a conversation about that event. In human experience, *experiences* do not occur without our semantically-loaded conversations. In the conversation you construct the event, you construe it, you interpret it, you evaluate it. And as you do this, you *become* the stories you tell! This is self-reference at work. Your self-reference also leads you to arguing with yourself.

How do you argue with yourself? What arguments do you have?

How do you draw conclusions and create your interpretations about your previous levels of experience?

Does it enhance your life and empower you as a person?

How you reflect back on yourself and your experiences (the meta-stating process) critically determines *the quality of your thinking, emoting, speaking, and acting*. It critically determines the quality of your life. Taking something serious imprisons you to it. Your reflective and self-referencing sets the frames at the higher levels. Now on the surface it may seem that working with this and managing this effectively is like trying to arm wrestle yourself, but it is not.

And why not? It's not because you can step back to self-reference yourself and set that so that you don't get lost or don't spin around in a spiral. You can *hold* a level of self-reference in place so that you step back to quality control, to choice point, to ecology questions, etc. You can set back and, holding that level of experience in place, you can ask a whole series of meta-questions to gain a whole new level of clarity.

The Self-Reference Game is played by learning how to handle your self-reflexive consciousness. You learn to win at that game by learning how to recognize levels and then hold them as you quality control the value of any given self-reflection. You can win by applying the higher frames of your best values and visions. You can win by catching the self-reflexive arguments you have with yourself. And, of course, all this is Meta-States and meta-stating. To your highest and best self-reflexive referencing!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #32**  
**July 21, 2008**

## **NLP MIS-UNDERSTANDINGS**

A friend recently sent me some of the “dialogue” that other NLP trainers and people are writing on various NLP forum sites about myself about Meta-States. He sent it to me so I can stay informed about the state of this field. Within it was a statement that J. Grinder started in his “Blown Away in the Wind” book (wasn’t that the title?, well it was something like that). Anyway J. Grinder (I guess that’s what he wants to be called since he calls me M. Hall!), said that he asked me “what the logical relationship was with a state to a state” and I supposedly “failed to answer the question.”

Of course I did answer. All a person has to do is to see my answer to the question is to see the articles on [www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com) of the exchange between myself and John Grinder. I answered. Whether John likes the answer, or understands the answer, or agrees with the answer—well, that’s another issue. But I answered the question.

Interesting enough, someone in the current dialogue decided that by using the term “frame,” he could solve the problem of logical levels in NLP and the levels of Meta-Programs. I say *interesting enough* because anyone who studies the Meta-States Model knows that in Neuro-Semantics, we use “states-about-states” and “frames” synonymously. That is, when you bring a *state of thought-and-emotion* to another state, you not only create a *meta-state*, you also set a *frame* of reference and meaning to that first state. That’s what meta-states do.

*That’s why we describe meta-states as frames*—as the frames of the inner game. Now the writer in that dialogue seems to think he invented the idea of frames. He writes as if finding a brand new never-before-discovered insight: “Frames allow us to keep track of different contexts.” Of course, this is why I used *frames* in so many books —*Winning the Inner Game, Games Business Experts Play, Games Great Lovers Play, Games for Mastering Fear, Games Slim and Fit People Play*, etc. And where did I get it? Primarily from Bateson who was the person who popularized the term and brought it into NLP.

For a field like NLP which is supposed to be about “running your own brain” and modeling how humans function in order to model excellence and expertise, the lack of understanding *self-reflexive consciousness* creates so many limitations and dead-ends. After all, *how* can you run your own brain if you think the brain *only* works by representations? Yes, we make pictures, sounds, and sensations to re-present what we have experienced via our senses. But that’s just the first thing we do cognitively to make sense of things.

After the first level, we step back to our internal movies and edit them. This is the realm of the so-called “sub-modalities” (See *Sub-Modalities Going Meta*). Then we label, classify, and

categorize our movies by language (see *Communication Magic*). Then as we reflect on these thoughts, we draw conclusions that we can call a whole variety of things (beliefs, values, decisions, understandings, intentions, memories, imagination, expectations, etc.) (see *Secrets of Personal Mastery* and *Mind-Lines* and *Coaching Change* for meta-questions). These “logical levels” of processing occur because of our self-reflexive consciousness that is forever reflecting back onto itself and its products (see *Meta-States* and *Winning the Inner Game*).

With each move back or up, we respond to our previous response. And because this infinite regress of processing as we try to “make sense” of things never ends, we can use it as an *infinite progress* if you know how to step back from yourself, hold the previous layering of thoughts and feelings. Do that and you step up to *Choice Point*—now you are in charge. Now you can access your executive levels to choose your thoughts, your feelings, your responses. And with this expanded awareness and empowered sense of choice, you can truly run your own brain.

But the Bandler and Grinder divisions of NLP do not seem to know any of this. Grinder goes so far as to reject Meta-Programs declaring that they are not an NLP Model (I think this is mostly because Leslie and Richard discovered them!). He says that “its [meta-programs] reasoning is self-referencing” and so rejects it as “feeding itself garbage.” Richard similarly thinks that self-referencing only does one thing—it puts people into spins in which they will get lost and never seen again!

Obviously, if we have a self-reflexive consciousness, a mind (a mind-body system) that reflects back onto itself and by nature is inescapably and wildly reflexive, then we have to deal with that nature of our mind. That’s what the Meta-States model is about. It tracks and models *how* our self-reflexivity works, how we create state-about-state, state-upon-state, state-embedded-within-state and so create a Matrix of Embedded Frames all the way up and then back down. *Up* for frames and the psycho-logics of our mind and *down* to ground and stabilize our Matrix in the real world to see if it works.

Self-reflexivity is not really all that complex, yet it is systemic. It starts from the simple act of reflection as we reflect upon ourselves. This is not dissociation [that’s another myth perpetrated by some NLP people who just don’t know any better]. It is our self-reflexive consciousness processing. Our mind is rich enough to not only process the content of its thoughts, but to reflexively process the fact that it is processing. As it does this, we step up as it were to a higher level. And as we reflect again and again on ourselves we layer level upon level of thoughts-and-feelings. This creates our psycho-logics—our so-called “logical levels”—the dynamic fluid layering of our meta-states.

So pass the word to J. Grinder and the others—the logical relationship of one state to another state is a function of our human self-reflexive consciousness which layers one level upon another. The result is a meta-state structure of frames or beliefs as a Matrix of references which define’s one’s sense of reality. J. Grinder won’t like the answer, but then again, I don’t know of anything he likes except what he invented. Perhaps he should attend *Meta-Coaching* and learn how to celebrate the successes and insights of others!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #33**  
**July 28, 2008**

## UP AND DOWN QUESTIONS

One of my personal goals is to always be attempting to improve *how* we communicate what precisely we do in Neuro-Semantics with NLP, Meta-States, Matrix, Self-Actualization, Axis of Change, and the other models. With that as a lens, I sometimes find that some off-handed comment is what gives me the next creative idea. It happened this week, again.

Working with the executive team of a Canadian company I introduced the idea of the *question driven conversations for creative problem solving*—the dance of the three well-formed conversations that lead to magic-like solutions (this is what was introduced in the *Creativity and Innovation Workshop* for the first time). Anyway, using the diagram of *the Meta-Model questions* for precision and grounding, a diagram that had arrows pointing down to the ground and then using *the Meta-Questions* for exploring the Matrix of meanings in the back of a person’s mind for richness and quality of meaningfulness, a diagram with arrows going upward, I set out the first set of questions in front of the little man and the second set of questions above and behind the image of the person.

The arrows show that some questions ground in reality with precision for the outer game and others move upward to the frames of the inner game to unpack the layers of psycho-logical frames of meaning. I then did a demonstration or two. Afterwards in the debrief, one senior manager asked a question about the processes:

“How do you know when to use *the down questions* and when to use *the up questions*?”

I immediately thought, “What a great question!” I answered that timing and coordination of the questions is important and lies at the heart of skillful questioning. Yet what I mostly liked about the question was the way he summarized the questions —not “Meta-Model questions,” “precision questions,” “Meta-questions,” “Matrix questions,” etc. but simply *up and down questions*.

So I stole the phrases. And that became the language for the next few days— *Up Questions* and *Down Questions*. And when you do them with a subject you can not only explore a matrix of frames that defines, describes, and informs a person’s reality, but you can ground it so that it is embodied, contextualized, and actualized, that is, made *neuro-semantic*.

Later I found that many of the people were asking other new questions using this terminology:

“Where can I learn more about *Down Questions*?”

“Is there a book somewhere on *Down Questions*?”

“Are there more *Down Questions* than these 6 that you gave us?”

“Are there more *Up Questions* than these 12 that you gave us?”

“Where can I learn more about *Up Questions*?”

“Can you start with *Up* questions and then move to *Down* questions?”

“How long should I ask *Up* questions before grounding them with the *Down* questions?”

It was great. People who never heard of NLP before or Meta-States or Neuro-Semantics or logical levels were asking great Meta-Questions and grounding with Meta-Model questions!

Now the key with both sets of questions is *iteration*. Simply asking the down questions of what, where, when, with whom, and how is very seldom sufficient. You have to ask them again and again. You have to ask them in different combinations. You have to ask them following the client’s energy while simultaneously holding a relevance frame about the client’s outcome. Engage in that kind of iteration and your questions will enable the person to ground his or her matrix of meaning and et it increasingly into neurology. The down questions are the questions the de-fog confusion, clear out the cobwebs of muddled thinking, and de-hypnotize us from old trances of childhood.

The up questions activate the client’s matrix of frames as it allows the person questioning and the person being questioned to enter the Matrix. Here we find the fluid layering of thoughts-and-emotions tied together into a complex web of interconnections. Here we discover the psychologies of the person’s way of constructing his or her Matrix. And here are all of the rich things that make us most human—our beliefs, values, hopes, decisions, intentions, imaginations, etc.

Here’s to lots of *up* and *down* questions for you this week as you release more of your innate potentials!



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #35**  
**July 30, 2008**

## **WEALTH CREATION IN MOSCOW**

This past weekend I returned to Moscow Russia to present the *Wealth Creation Workshop* for a second time. It had been 3½ years since my last visit and at that time (which was my third trip), we filled a training room in a particular hotel to capacity, 120 crammed into the room. This time myself and the sponsors assumed we would have a smaller group. We were wrong.

This time subscriptions to the training began coming in and a few weeks prior there were 150, and then I was told 170. So the training took place in the auditorium of the school where Andrei Pligin was once headmaster. It seated 250 and it was packed; as the closed registration a week before, many dozens others were turned away. So the room was packed with people standing in the back and on the sides.

During the training I met a dozen or more who had been at the last training and they testified that their income and equity had doubled, tripled and in the case of a couple people, quadrupled! And of course, that's a pretty good selling point for others to find out about the *Wealth Creation Training*.

Who was there? We had people from several countries—former Soviet countries: Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and from many cities in Russia. We mostly had coaches and consultants. But we also had a few therapists and many business people—some in real estate, others beginning their own first steps of self-employment.

A group of 26 came from Latvia bearing gifts of chocolate for me and telling me that I was “the most famous NLP trainer in Latvia.” Now I've never been there, but of course, no other international trainer has been there either! So what's the reason for my popularity there? They have my books there.

That goes back to four or five years ago when I contracted with a Russian publisher to translate and publish 12 of my books, then later Crown House Publications contracted for another 8. Now books can sell in Russia for \$2 or \$5. So books are cheap and there's really no money for the writer. I think I received maybe a thousand dollars as I gave the publisher the publication rights—\$1000 for 12 books. Sure it was not much, but my belief in abundance is part of my own wealth creation plan. The principle I operate is that of abundance: “Give and you shall receive.” I discovered this past week that another “famous” NLP trainer was in Russia about the same time I was, but he refused to sell the right to have his book translated. “No enough money!” he said. So it was not translated. And so he is not known in these other countries where NLP is just now entering.

At the training was an NLP trainer from Latvia who had been trained by the Moscow NLP Center that Andrei Pligin and Alexander run. She brought 26 people from Latvia! And now they was me to go there to train and others want me to go to Ukraine. So while I never set a goal to train in those countries or to have influence there, things are moving in that direction because of a more general principle of abundance and collaboration.

The *Wealth Creation Training* is currently formatted and titled, “**Inside Out Wealth**” to highlight the them that “wealth” is not just money, and not essentially money, but ideas, creative ideas that solve problems that add value to people and that enrich people. The title and focus also highlights that this kind of inner wealth is *an inside-out process*. It begins *inside* and is then externalized in the real world in actions that create problem-solving products and services that enrich the lives of others.

It is created and developed *inside* as our inner experience of *being wealth* and then is expressed in terms of *doing wealth* which finally leads to *having wealth*. The order of inside-out wealth is important. It is *being—doing—having*. To try to create wealth by merely trying to “have” without giving, without acting, without creating value, without using one’s talents, without developing them into skills, without caring about what adds value to people and identifying your market where there’s a need to satisfy, a problem to solve, or a value contribute, you cannot create wealth. You will be lost on your wealth pathway without no center to ground you.

While at Moscow in the Training, I used the tools of Neuro-Semantics—*Meta-States* to create the kind of complex layered states required for a wealth-building attitude, *the Matrix Model* to format and organize all of the facets of wealth creation that I’ve modeled from millionaires and billionaires, *The Self-Actualization Quadrants* for unleashing your wealth creating potentials (a new piece to this training), and numerous patterns that are unique in Neuro-Semantics. So from time to time the questions that began arising had more to do with these models and processes than wealth creation. One man at a break told me,

“How about giving less on the wealth and more on the Neuro-Semantic models!”

Later when I thought about that I realize something. *Models* themselves are forms of wealth! Models have always enriched us, given us tools by which we can do things that otherwise we would not. So models are a form of wealth and wealth creation. They guide us in being able to *do* what we envision and dream about doing.

Moscow itself is an impressive city. In the past two years cars have more than doubled there. There are now two-to-three times more cars on the road than just two years ago. So traffic jams are as problematic as in Mexico City. And prices also have risen in Moscow to levels that now parallel costs in other major cities. With 12 to 16 million people, the city swells with another 6 million during the day, so it is has become a truly mega city.

In spite of that I was really impressed with the changes that I see there since my last visit. Capitalism has come to modern Moscow and it is here to stay. On this trip I met lots and lots of people who are investing, buying property, creating new businesses and in spite of the over-

bureaucratic nature of the government and recently changes in the politics, tremendous change and transformation is occurring on the ground level. And I suspect that will continue for many, many years.

Then there is the impressive accomplishments of Andrei and Alexander of the NLP Center. Over the years, they have trained almost 20,000 people in NLP. 20,000! They caught a vision of NLP when they first encountered it and have been spreading it so that there are now NLP Centers in many, many cities throughout Russia. It's incredible. Meta High Five for their success of their vision and commitment!!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #36**  
**August 4, 2008**

## **CLASSIC NLP WON'T MAKE YOU WEALTHY HERE'S WHY**

If you find my title shocking—good! I wanted it to shock. Why? Because last week in the Wealth Creation Training in Moscow I had several people ask me *the question*,  
“If NLP is so powerful for modeling, for creating success, why are most NLP people not wealthy?”

And one man asked me a more pointed form of that question,  
“How is it that most NLP Trainers who should know about modeling and replicating excellence not rich? How do you explain that?”

That's when I said,  
“That's because ‘classic or pure NLP’ is inadequate for that kind of modeling. That's why it will *not* make you wealthy. It has not even made leading NLP trainers around the world wealthy!”

Later I got thinking more about that. “I wonder why that is? What is the reason that traditional NLP has not led to financial success, and hardly business success, for most practitioners?”

So what is the reason for this gap between what the model should be able to do and what most people are able to do with it? Before presenting what I think is the reason, I'll start by first describing what is *not* the reason.

The reason is *not* due to the model itself. As a model of communication, of how the sensory-based “languages of the mind” (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.) enable us to communicate to ourselves and induce ourselves into states, NLP has since its beginning always provided a cutting-edge model. And because “meta” is built into the NLP model, NLP can be used facilitate emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-monitoring, self-control, and self-discipline. It *can* be used for that. Not everyone in NLP so uses it, but it can be used for such. Several years ago Denis Bridoux and Patrick Merlevede, wrote *Seven Steps to Emotional Intelligence*—essentially a book on the basic NLP model and how to use it for E.Q.

Further, the NLP model of how we communicate within ourselves and with each other to map our sense of reality is a tremendous tool for modeling. And it can be used even to model the creation of wealth. Of course, the only person who I know who has even partially done that is Anthony Robbins. You'll find bits and pieces of that in his two NLP books. But his own

personal wealth is not from that, it is from his own genius in marketing and as an incredible high energy entertainer.

The real reason *classic or pure NLP will not make you wealthy* is due to a virus. If you used the model for communicating, getting rapport, understanding others, looking for needs to solve, getting into rich states of seeing how to contribute and add value, modeling some “business smarts”—if you did that with the NLP model, you could become wealthy.

The problem doesn't lie there. The problem lies in some of *the thought viruses* that have been inside NLP from the beginning and with which many in the field of NLP are afflicted. I'm now speaking about the thought viruses of scarcity, competition, non-cooperation, non-collaboration, and non-celebration and acknowledgment of others. In a word, I'm speaking about the poison that's still contaminating NLP people—the poison of ego, insecurity, fear and fearfulness, paranoia, and the lack of abundance. And it is this poison, these thought viruses that have prevented Bandler and Grinder from getting along and have led to the problem that seems to plague so many fields—petty competition and fearful scarcity.

The poisonous thought of *scarcity* leads to fear that there's not enough for all, competition with others who want to get a bigger share of the pie, paranoia that they are out to get you, and insecurity that if you don't jump in and grab yours, they will undermine your success. It is the *belief in scarcity* that leads to the fear of sharing information, the refusal to recommend others, trying to get any and every client or customer you can, putting others down to build yourself up, plagiarizing the works and ideas of others, and a general refusal to collaborate.

This *scarcity thought virus* arises from the assumption that “there is only so much” and when it's gone, there won't be anymore. It does not recognize that in there's such a thing as *abundance* and that abundance as a mechanism creates an entirely different dynamic.

People who understand *the mechanism of abundance* recognizes that with intangible things, the more you give, the more you have, and the more you are able to have. The more you give love, the more love you have and the greater your capacity for love. The more you share information, knowledge, and insights—the more you strengthen your knowledge, expand your ability to learn, and open yourself up to receive more. So with care, compassion, connection, commitment, proactivity, resilience, etc.

This even works with tangible things. After all, just look at the history of money on this planet. Each year there is more money than ever before. Each year the stock markets reach new heights of the wealth for nations and peoples. Where does all this new money come from? How can creating new products and services, new things that add value and quality to human life, spending and giving of money make more money come into existence? In fact, recently there's been too much of this as speculators in oil have been passing papers back and forth and thereby increasing the cost of oil.

It is the *creativity* (and innovation) *factor* that allows *abundance* to keep adding more and more

to our lives. We keep creating new things. We create new ideas, new dreams, new possibilities, and then we get busy innovating new things. And the more we create, the more we are able to create!

*Fear* feeds and poisons us with the idea of *scarcity*. Fear that there won't be enough. Fear that we will run out of resources. *Abundance* makes us believe in greater creativity, increased value, and that if we have to share a pie—we can invent larger and more pies!

If classic or pure NLP is fear-driven, ego-centric, and governed by scarcity, then isn't it time to move beyond that and adopt a more *abundant attitude and belief* so that it unleashes your wealth potentials? Would you like that? Are you ready for that? Adopting abundance as a belief and lifestyle means cooperating and collaborating with others and giving and contributing your best. Yes, it is paradoxical. Yet it is in giving that you become more *abundant* because you will be creating wealth. And the value that you create which enriches the lives of others will come back to make you wealthy.

To the unleashing of your greatest wealth potentials!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #37**  
**August 11, 2008**

## **THE SECRET OF NEURO-SEMANTIC MODELING FOR CREATING WEALTH**

From the last *Meta Reflection #36* “Why Classic NLP Won’t Make You Wealthy” here is the rest of the story. Now you may think that the rest of the story is more about ridding yourself of the thought-viruses that I mentioned, or about adding some new refinement to setting a well-formed outcome, financial or entrepreneurial know-how, or figuring out “how to get in.” And while all those are legitimate ideas, my focus here is different.

My focus here is on modeling. In addition to the limiting attitudes and thought-viruses within the original “pure” NLP that some are promoting, there is a basic problem of limitation due to the original NLP idea of modeling. Let me put my thesis forth as bluntly as I can:

Modeling something that occurs in a *moment of time* radically differs from something that occurs *over time*.

Modeling “wealth creation” is not, never has been, and cannot be a “moment in time” experience. It is an experience that occurs “over time.”

In the first instance of *moment in time experiences*, the NLP strategy model is superb. So, if you want to model how an excellent speller spells, how to get out of bed in the morning with ease and grace, how to delegate a responsibility, how to make a decision, and many other things that occur in a given *moment of time*, then use the classic NLP strategy model. Interview a person with that skill and mastery, watch eye accessing cues, listen for sensory predicates, map out the step-by-step representations as the person processes from the first triggering stimuli to the final activity. Do that and you will obtain a pretty good model for how to replicate that competency and get those results.

In the second instance, however, of *experiences that occur over time*, the NLP strategy model will not be very helpful. You can watch eye accessing cues all day; gather pages and pages of predicates, and map out the micro-activities of the expert and in the end all of that information will be pretty much useless. In fact, it will mostly be irrelevant.

Now the surprising thing is that most NLP people, and even trainers, do not seem to know this. They seem to think that they can model *life style activities* that occur over weeks, months, and even years in the same way they model a micro-activity like spelling or deciding. But they cannot; it does not work that way. And why not?

The reason is that *life style activities involve lots and lots of micro-strategies embedded within layers of beliefs, belief-systems, matrices of meanings, and even higher level understandings and*

*concepts*. And because of this—to model complex life-style activities requires some Meta-State structures; it requires a shift to some of the Neuro-Semantic modeling tools. Yes, I know. That is an extremely bold statement, so let me see if I can justify it.

Consider *health*. If “health” was just a state, just a “moment in time” experience, and just a micro-activity, then we could find that state and the strategy for getting into that state. Then we could access “the state of health,” anchor it, and then whenever we don’t feel so well, or feel a cold coming on, or lack of energy, stress, etc., we could just fire the health state anchor, and presto! Health! And if we could do that, we would totally revolutionize the field of medicine!

But obviously, that’s ridiculous. “*Health*” is not a moment in time experience or activity. Health doesn’t occur in just a moment, and is not a “state” like confidence, relaxation, excitement, anger, love, etc. are states. It is a state as in a *condition* of one’s overall mind-emotions-body in relationship to one’s life-style activities—eating, exercising, drinking, sleeping, getting along with others, work, sense of purpose, and so on. There are *so many variables and factors* that go into the overall *condition* of being healthy, energetic, free of disease, accident, and illness.

So how would we go about modeling health? After we find some good exemplars of *health and healthiness*, we would begin to identify all of the multiple sub-strategies involved in attaining a state of health. In this instance, we would specify strategies for eating right, exercising regularly and properly, adopting attitudes and beliefs that support health, handling work, effort, relaxation, and sleep properly, and so on. [By the way, I’ll be presenting the Neuro-Semantics of Health next year in Montreal Canada, May 2009.]

The same considerations applies to the state of *wealth*. Wealth also is not a *moment in time* activity. It is a life-style activity that occurs *over time*. And in terms of wealth, it is created not in a day, a week, a month, and very seldom in a year. Generally it takes a decade. That’s what most of the leading thinkers and researchers say (not the ‘get rich quick’ gurus). So when we set out to model “wealth creation” we similarly need to identify many sub-strategies:

- The activities that are financially viable in our culture.
- Our skill level and competency of the required activities.
- Our beliefs about ourselves learning and developing those competencies.
- The self-management and discipline of taking our performances to the higher levels of expertise and eventually mastery.
- Our relationships with and through others in all of the business relationships (suppliers, customers, clients, employers, partners, colleagues, employees, etc.).
- Our best states in these many different activities.
- Our skills in handling money (earning, saving, budgeting, investing, etc.).
- Our skills in marketing, selling, negotiating, seeing opportunities, seizing opportunities, etc.
- Our skills in adapting to the market, branding, meeting the needs and wants of clients, etc.
- Our skills in creating a business, the systems required so that the business operates



- when we are there and when we are not.  
And so on.

Is that complex? Is it complicated? Yes. And given that it requires multiple strategies about multiple areas of concern at the same time and holding all of those together within a larger framework, it requires understanding and working with multiple meta-levels. And that's why classic NLP apart from the Meta-States model is inadequate for modeling a life-style, over-time activity like "wealth creation." This also explains how and why the Meta-States Model, the Matrix Model, Self-Actualization Quadrants, etc. does provide the required tools for effectively modeling how to create wealth over a decade and becoming financially independent. And because there's more to say about this, I'll do that in next Monday's Meta Reflection.

To your inside out wealth creation!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #38**  
**August 18, 2008**

## **MODELING INSIDE-OUT WEALTH**

From the time when I first began modeling *the creation of wealth* in 1998, I have learned a lot. And if you were to ask me, “What is the most important thing you have learned about creating wealth?” I would tell you not only the most important thing, but also the most surprising thing. And what is that? :

*Wealth is not money. Money is just one of the signs and indicators of wealth. Wealth is much broader than money. It is much more internal than money and much more psychological than money.*

Previously, I always thought that “wealth” and “money” were synonyms. They are not. I always equated *financial* wealth with “wealth” itself and had not distinguished the two. But now I do. And because of these confused and confusing thoughts, I had always assumed that to focus on wealth was to become more materialist, greedy, capitalistic, etc. Then I discovered what wealth really is, and the wealth that allows one to become financially independent.

*So what is “wealth?”* A synonym for wealth is “value” and so wealth creation is, at its heart, the *creation of value*. And since we create *value* in any given context depending on what people need and want, we create *value* by meeting the needs and wants of people. That’s because ultimately people pay for what adds value to their lives. That’s because, in the end, we all invest our money and time and energy in the things that adds what we believe makes our lives richer and more valuable.

And if we take one more step back from this connection between “wealth” and “value” we come to the place—the mental and emotional place where we are able to *see, recognize, appreciate, and honor that which is valuable in human experience*. And this is where most people fail. It seems that somehow, a large proportion of people who want to make money and to become financially independent, become susceptible to “get rich quick” schemes. That’s because they substitute “money” for “wealth.” Then as they continue to confuse the two, they next begin to lose the ability to see and appreciate true “*value*.”

All of this actually makes them *poor* inside. It misguides them to think that “wealth” is “out there.” It misguides them to confuse “money” for wealth as it did me. It makes them think that wealth is created and measured exclusive via external things. It deludes them from recognizing the psychological nature of wealth.

Kiyosaki says that “wealth is thoughts.” Robert Allen talks about wealth by creativity and as creativity (creative thoughts and responses). Others think of wealth as positive, optimistic

“seeing” how to add value. All of this indicates the inner heart of wealth, of true wealth, as being the state of mind and emotion, of belief and attitude.

Upon discovering that, I have formulated the same by saying that *wealth is inside-out* and that wealth creation is an inside-out process. This is where abundance, sharing, collaboration, etc. come in. It is also where being able to *be* and *become* a creator of *value* for the needs, problems, and wants of others come in. And that’s why “the ego” can really get in the way of wealth creation if all you want is to get wealthy for yourself and you think of it exclusively in terms of “money” and the symbols of wealth.

So as we take the next step, that of modeling *inside-out wealth*, we have to be able to track multiple beliefs systems that makes the wealth creator rich on the inside —mentally, emotionally, personally, etc. We have to map out the wealth creator’s sense of inner wealth in seeing and seizing opportunities, developing talents into skills, find and creation passion in some value-adding activity, sense of persistence and resilience, and lots and lots more.

This kind of multi-layered richness on the inside drives the wealth creator so that the dichotomies that pull most people apart and destroy them becomes a source of synergy. For the inside-out wealth creator “work” becomes “play.” “Effort” becomes excitement; and focused discipline becomes excitement as in challenging. And when that happens, the whole *wealth* process ceases to be about money; money becomes relegated to being what it is, a scorecard.

That’s why there are such shocking statements from billionaires about money. When Barbara Walters interviewed Ted Turner, she asked, “What is it like to be so rich?” He said, “It’s like a paper bag.” That took her back and she gave him a quissical look. And then said, “What?” He continued. “Everybody wants the paper bag; everybody strives for the paper bag. But do you know what they find when they put their hand in the paper bag?” Then a dramatic pause. “Nothing.”

That was his way of saying, “It’s not about the money.” And that’s why a person with lots of money may not actually be rich. If you don’t have time to do what you want to do, how wealthy are you? If you don’t have the health and energy and vitality to enjoy activities, how rich are you? If you don’t have a rich sense of self-efficacy, that you have the inner resources to figure things out and make dreams come true, how wealthy are you? If you feel fearful of losing, suspicious of everybody’s motives, apprehensive of being a fraud, how wealthy are you?

To create inside-out wealth directs us to the attitudes and beliefs that enable us to believe in our abilities to create value for ourselves and others. It focuses us on finding our talents and passions and creating a life-style of adding value. It embraces and unleashes our potentials in the context of our lives for making life richer for ourselves and others. *To your inside-out wealth!*

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #39**  
**August 25, 2008**  
Humor —1

## THE META-STATES OF HUMOR

*Humor* — What a wonderful, enjoyable, and delightful state! Who doesn't love the lightness and laughter of humor? Who doesn't delight in the fun of a good joke, in a play on words, in a funny incident, in the playfulness of a child, or in the physical humor of exaggeration? Humor is fun. That's why we like it. But what is it? What is it really?

When it comes to understanding and modeling *the structure of humor*, it happens that humor is not a simple thing, not at all. In fact, there's considerable complexity to the experience of humor. That's why to understand it we have to ask many questions about humor:

- What is humor?
- How does it work?
- Why are some things funny and other things are not?
- Why are the things one person finds humorous and funny not funny at all to another person?
- What is the element or elements that endow something with humor?
- How many forms of humor are there?
- What is the strategy or the structure of humor?
- How do we explain and model the experience of bursting out in laughter?
- What is the structure of feeling playful, silly, light-hearted, and joyful?

In Neuro-Semantics we use humor a lot. *Coaches* use humor to invite clients to step back from an experience (a meta-state) and bring other perspectives to the first awareness (another meta-state) in order to lighten up and create more flexibility (another meta-state). *Trainers* use humor in presentations to create engagement, interest, and fun about the learnings (a meta-state) and to lighten up so that one avoid becoming over-serious (another meta-state). *Health coaches* use humor as a key variable that facilitates well-being especially since the majority of illnesses are stress-activated. That makes health-ing (accessing the elements that make for well-being) a meta-state. Similarly, Norman Cousins used the humor state as a way to gain pain-relief (*Anatomy of an Illness*).

At first glance humor seems like a primary state. Yet, as indicated in the previous paragraph, it is really a meta-state. In fact, because it can take so many forms, humor involves numerous meta-states. The primary state of humor is the state of delight and joy and the primary expressions of humor is chuckles, giggles, laughter, sparkling eyes, and a lighter breathing, voice, and muscle tension. But what is there at the meta-level of cognition that causes the humor?

Nor is humor all fun and games. It can be very hurtful and damaging. That's because humor is powerful in many of these and other ways, and so like anything powerful, it can be misused.

How is humor mis-used? It is misused when we engage in sarcasm, insult, and put-downs. It is violated and misused in aggressive humor, degrading humor, and humor at the expense of others. Here is humor, yet it is not healthy or respectful humor at all. It is disrespectful, unhealthy, destructive, and degrading humor. It is humor that violates persons as it creates laughter *at* them and at their expense.

So back to the title of this Meta Reflection, “*The Meta-States of Humor.*” I use that title because, in humor, there are multiple meta-states and not just a single meta-state. So what are the meta-states of humor? Here are a few that immediately come to mind.

- *Lightness, perspective:* Stepping back to gain perspective on an experience.
- *Silliness by perspective:* Comparing the temporary importance of something against a larger and more long-term experience (“One day I’ll look back and laugh at this.”).
- *Exaggeration:* Exaggerating something to the point where we see or hear it as ridiculous. This implies a comparison between what’s appropriate and the exaggeration.
- *Physical exaggeration:* Exaggerating a physical response so that we sense a silliness between things. This is the case with much physical humor (making faces, acting out something).
- *Word play:* Realization that we can play with words— rhyming, alliterating, etc. as in the “playing around with words.”
- *Puns:* Realizing that some words can sound like other words or be substituted and in doing so, it completely changes the meanings, as in creating puns on words.
- *Mocking:* Making fun of someone by using a mocking voice, sounds, exaggerations, so that it brings awareness of the activity and contrasts it with what would be appropriate.
- *Shock and surprise:* Humor often comes from a shock of awareness, a jar of consciousness when something unexpected suddenly is surprised on us. A joke or idea sets us up to expect one thing, then we are shifted to another awareness.

Aristotle said that humor is “that which is out of place in time and space without danger.” It is *without danger* in that the shift, jar, surprise, exaggeration, mockery, and play acting is safe. What else is humor? In the Meta Reflections that follow I’ll explore some of the key theories of humor, describe its structure, share some of the benchmarking our Meta-Coaches have made of how to use humor, and more. To the unleashing of your humor!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #40**  
**August 25, 2008**  
Humor —2

## MODELING THE STRUCTURE OF HUMOR

I first began seriously studying humor after I read Elton Trueblood's book, *The Humor of Jesus*. Trueblood was the first person I read who highlighted the joking and teasing in the words of Jesus. (Later I found more of Jesus' humor in the writings of J.B. Phillips and C.S. Lewis.) But to see and experience the humor in Jesus I discovered that I first had to take off my "serious" glasses. It was funny how the lens I was using as my worldview set me up to interpret things as I did. And for me, as I suspect for lots of others, "seriousness," "being professional," and other such beliefs or meta-states blinded me from the humor that was there.

Some years after I learned the NLP model, I made a study of humor. That's when I first read the theoretical and research works on humor and learned about the leading theories of humor. The four big theories at the time were the 1) Relief theory, 2) Superiority theory, 3) Incongruence theory, and 4) Surprise theory.

*Relief Theory* was Freud's view, the idea that humor was a catharsis of energy, biological and emotional energy. Here humor is viewed in terms of the venting of pent up energies and feelings—kind of like a burp or the other ways the body can relieve itself. Even though I don't think this theory is accurate at all, I always liked the *term*, "Relief Theory" as a theory of humor—at least it is itself humorous. As with most things, Freud mostly thought of humor as a sick part of human nature—aggressive, ugly, sarcastic, making fun of people, etc.

*Superiority Theory* originated with Plato who thought that laughter was an evil and folly. This theory views humor exclusively in terms of laughing *at* people for their weaknesses and inferiority, deriding and mocking them. While this theory does explain how humor can degenerate into something malicious and harmful, it fails to see the bright side of humor.

*Incongruity Theory* says we laugh and find things humorous which mismatch and do not fit. When ideas, expectations, beliefs, feelings, etc. do not match, humor is the perceived mis-match. This fits the classic theory of Aristotle about humor. "Humor is that which is *out of place* in time and space, without danger." This theory explains how exaggerations, distortions, and weirdness contributes to creating humor.

*Surprise Expectations Theory* is like a mental tickle and so creates a joy or delight in us. It delights us, that is, if there is no danger. If you are safe, then it's funny. If you are not safe, it is not funny, but threatening. The Surprise theory speaks about humor in terms of

the surprise you experience when you expect one thing and then realize that something else happened. It is this theory that explains the humor of tickling, why you can't tickle yourself, and of the importance of timing in humor.

Now my first writing on humor was in early 1992 (2 ½ years *before* the discovery of the Meta-States Model). I wrote an issue of *Metamorphosis* with the title of, "Humor as an Enhancing Resource." In that issue, I attempted to identify the structure of humor but a I re-read it today, I see that I missed it by a long-shot. True enough, I was able to identify many of the key components: incongruity, safety, surprise, joy, relief, quick shifts, etc. But without the Meta-States model all I could attempt to do in structuring it was to identify the representational steps. "First see two incongruous images, or hear a play on words, then say to yourself X ..."

The problem is that *the experience of humor involves meta-levels or meta-states* (Meta Reflection #39). In the experience of humor, we have a sense of transcendence as we *step back* and recognize an incongruity, a paradox, an exaggeration, a silliness, a playfulness, and so on. It is in the stepping back, gaining perspective, and enjoying the experience that we create within ourselves the sense of humor. So in "humor" we rise above ourselves. In humor we gain a perspective that we do not have and that we often lose when we get seriously involved in an engagement.

This corresponds to a newer theory of humor—*The Semantic Theory*. This theory is a script-based semantics theory from linguistics which puts the emphasis on the context. In this theory, something becomes "funny" when we understand a context and then recognize exaggeration of it, a juxtaposition of incongruity with it, a playfulness of words inside it, etc. "Context" in this theory is the same as "frame" in Neuro-Semantics.

What this means is that to understand a joke or why something is considered funny, we have to know the context as the frame of reference. That's why in order to create a joke, we first have to set the stage for it by setting up a context that unfolds—words, ideas, metaphors, suggestions, premises, etc. that set up a context. Once we have the context set, we can then violate that context. We violate it by shifting to another stage, exaggerating, playing with words, combining a different category, and so on. The result is humor—a state of humor.

This theory suggests that every word of a sentence evokes or creates a script or context. The joke or funny point occurs when we suddenly shift from one context to another, from one frame to another. The switch is the "punchline."

"Is the doctor in?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper.

"No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

This joke involves the overlap of two distinct scripts. There is the "Doctor" script and the "Lover" script. Which is it? The ambiguity of the two possible scripts set up the possibility. It is when the listener searches for a solution, to find out what the person means. When the second script is chosen, then the meaning is that a young pretty woman is inviting a man into the house while her husband is away.

Two very young children ask their grandmother, “Grandma, where do babies come from?”

“Well, you were brought here by a stork one night,” she says.

The children exchange a look, and the girl asks her brother, “Should we tell her?”

“Nah,” the boy says, “Let the old fool die in peace.”

This sudden shift from one frame to another explains why “timing” is so important in the telling of jokes. You have to set a person up to expect one thing . . . one line of thinking, one direction for the brain to go, and then you have to pull the rug of meaning out from under the person by highlighting another frame that was there in possibility at all along. And if the context interpersonally and relationally is “safe,” if there is rapport and understanding, then *humor* happens.

W.C. Fields was once asked, “Mr. Fields, do you believe in clubs for children?”

He answered, “Only when kindness fails.”

Here the shift is with a pun on the word “club.” What script shall we use to understand the term? The script about social communities or the script about weapons?

“Mr. Fields, don’t you like children?”

“Yes, when they are well-done.”

So what is the structure of humor and jokes, and fun, and playfulness?

It is a meta-state structure of playing one contextual frame off against another and of being able to gain perspective (or awareness, insight) by stepping back and recognizing the incongruity within the ambiguous as we play, safely, with words, ideas, and meanings.

There’s more as you’ll see in the next Meta Reflection.  
To the unleashing of your humor and enjoyment of life!



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #41**  
**Sept 8, 2008**  
Humor —3

## **THE META-STATE STRUCTURE OF HUMOR**

I began this series on humor by identifying the meta-state structure of humor (Meta Reflection #40). We can now analyze the experience of humor to detect what it is that jars our consciousness into the delightful, joyful, and fun state as we experience the meta-state of seeing the lighter side of life. If you want to create humor for yourself and others, what is the strategy process for creating states of humor?

### ***1) First get into a “good” state.***

This mostly means an un-threatened state. It means that you basically feel “safe”—you feel secure, not in danger, and that your human needs are basically satisfied. This “good” state also means that you are not in an opposing state like a state of anger, resentment, hatefulness, self-contempt, and so on. We all know that when we are in such states, nothing is funny! State of stress, irritability, and feeling unwell diminish and can even prevent humor.

### ***2) Then enter into a context with specific expectations.***

This can happen in one second as when someone says something to you that “sets a frame” (sets the stage) putting you into a specific context of understanding. At that moment, your mind and emotion is oriented in a certain way. You live in a certain “world.” Sometimes it takes much longer; stories take longer to set up the expectations. Yet neither you nor the other person have to *consciously* know the expectations that are set—it is only required that meta-level expectations are set.

Why is it so difficult to make anything foolproof? Because fools are so ingenious.  
How many people here have telekinetic powers? Please raise my hand.  
So just why did Kamikaze pilots wear helmets?

### ***3) Then let your frame of expectations be jarred.***

With the set-up of a particular mind-set of understanding, orientation, and expectation, you next have to experience something that jars you from that state. It could be a word, gesture, phrase, etc. which suddenly and delightfully shifts the frame putting you into a different understanding, orientation, and expectation. This jarring has to happen quickly—surprisingly. Here *the timing* of the telling plays a crucial role in the jarring of consciousness.

### ***4) To this jarring, then welcome a meta-state moment of realization.***

With the sudden, surprising, and delightful shifting and jarring of consciousness, you then

experience a moment of awareness *about* the trick or the tease. For a moment, you rise up in your mind and “go meta” to a higher perspective. As you then gain perspective on the jarred understanding or consciousness, you enjoy the shift and surprise of the playfulness of the joke or pun. You experience *humor*.

And you thought humor was simple! When it comes to humor, it is actually amazing that it is so complex. Yet if you think about it, that really shouldn't be surprising. After all, how many times have you *not* “got the joke?” You didn't “get it” because to get it required certain background and contextual information. You didn't know enough to have the needed orientation or expectations and so there wasn't enough *inside you* to be jarred.

This last week the new nominee for Vice President of the United States, Sarah Palin, currently the Governor of Alaska who has a reputation for being tough and who has been called a bulldog, asked, “What's the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull dog?” “Lipstick!” she said pointing to her lips.

And what about those times when someone took the time to “explain” a joke to you? Didn't the very act of explaining deflate the joke? Typically it ruins it. Why is that? Because then there's no surprise, shock, or jarring of consciousness. This is the difference between telling a joke or a story with the appropriate timing and emphasis versus those times when you miss the critical emphasis, set-up, and timing. In humor, we induce one state with our set-up and then shift and jar that state quickly to surprise the person's expectations. So communicating humor requires the induction of two-states, one after the other, sometimes in very quick succession.

Some years ago I read about the sudden passing of a minister's wife. Distraught he wrote to his supervising bishop. “Bishop, I regret to inform you of my wife's death. Can you possibly send me a substitute for the weekend?”

What's funny here? The humor is in the ambiguity of the word “substitute.” Substitute for what? *What is the context?* Is it Sunday services or services of a different nature? And are you safe to hear the story? Or did you just lose a loved one?

This analysis of humor explains why even infants will laugh and giggle when mother or father tickles them, but often will *not* laugh and giggle, but scream and cry when a stranger does so. The infant doesn't *feel safe* (#1). [Research indicates infants are fifteen times more likely to laugh when tickled by a parent than someone else.]

This analysis also explains why parents cannot tease young children too much. If you're a parent, you know that it is often difficult, if not impossible, at times to tease your children about some things. Why? They also are not safe enough with their world to be teased. Professor John Morreall writes in *Taking Laughter Seriously*, “Once a child has a picture of the world and has operated in it for awhile, he can begin to enjoy humor.” Higher levels of humor require a solid sense of reality, a solid sense of your conceptual world.

This explains why *when sanity goes, so does humor*. It explains why mental wards are not happy places. Maymond Moody, Jr. M.D. writes in *Laugh after Laugh*.

“I’ve watched acutely schizophrenic patients in the day room of psychiatric wards, dolefully assembled before TV sets, gazing, unsmiling, and unlaughing, at the nightly dose of situation comedies. But their expression were serious, strained—even more so than when watching the grim and joyless soap operas in the afternoon.” (page 64)

If what happens in the experience of humor is a sudden change of meaning and awareness, then humor inherently involves *jarring consciousness* (#3). Suddenly, things change and we see things in a new or different way.

“We experience humor when we have a change in our psychological state, whether that state is primarily affective (emotional) or cognitive (intellectual).” (Morreall)

Humor requires creatively mis-matching incongruities. This explains why humor corresponds so closely to states of creativity and innovation. If “humor is that which is *out of place* in time and space without danger” (Aristotle) then as you begin from a safe state, you have a place from which to *play* with your concepts of the world, turn them upside down, exaggerate things to the point of being ridiculous, and mismatch things. So what structures “humor” also leads to creative innovations.

George really surprised me today when he told me that he had a big weekend. I knew his end was big, but I just didn’t realize that it was also weak.

Finally, humor also requires the meta-state of stepping back from oneself to *gain perspective* (#4). That’s why healthy humor is so often identified as a “philosophical attitude” or “philosophical outlook.” Stepping back (going meta) enables us to gain perspective. Often in the midst of conflict or challenge we say, “One of these days I’ll look back and be able to laugh at this.” Laughter here indicates that we have moved away from being *inside* the problem to being able to look at it from another perspective. We have *transcended* the problem.

It is in this way that humor protects and saves our sanity. This is what Viktor Frankl discovered in the Hitler concentration camp.

“Unexpectedly most of us were overcome by a grim sense of humor. We knew we had nothing to lose except our ridiculously naked lives. . . . Humor was another of the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation. . . . Humor more than anything else in the human makeup can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation if only for a few seconds.” (*Man’s Search for Meaning*)

Transcendence describes another aspect of humor. The state and mind-set of a humorous perspective enables us to transcend our situation. The philosophical attitude enables us to look at life philosophically so that we are not swallowed up by it. It gives us some psychological distance and objectivity when facing troubling problems.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #42**  
**Sept 15, 2008**  
Humor —4

## **THE ART OF CREATING HUMOR**

The sense of humor is our seventh sense. The complex structure of humor (#40 and #41) reveals a meta-state structure of eliciting two contrasting incongruous sets of expectations that jars our awareness, giving us a meta-state moment of lightness, perspective, and delight. It is the sense of transcendence that arises from meta-stating our experience. As such humor is a human sense that can positive contribute to our sanity, health, bonding, connection, philosophical wisdom, etc. Given all this, how is it created?

- How can we create humor?
- What are the tools (processes, techniques) by which we can create humor for ourselves, our clients, our audiences, and our friends?

### **1) Exaggerate.**

Take something that a person says or does, the way someone relates or performs something and exaggerate it, blow it out of proportion. Create a ridiculous picture or sound of the object. Be absurd; create absurdities. Raise things to laughable proportions. Be ridiculous. After all, as someone wrote, “Humor is tragedy standing on its head—with its pants down.”

In RET (Rational Emotive Therapy) Albert Ellis introduced *shame-attacking exercises* to counteract over-seriousness. A RET therapist might assign a person one of the following. 1) Walk down the street with an open umbrella on a sunny day. 2) Call out the stops on the subway in a loud voice. 3) Stop a stranger on the street and say, “I’ve been on the computer for a long time, what year is it?” 4) Go to a busy department store and announce unashamedly at the top of your lungs, “It’s 2:30 and all is well.” 5) Go into a drug store and announce, “I want 20 boxes of condoms because I plan to get lots of sex!”

In the beginning of NLP Richard Bandler introduced humor in terms of exaggerations. He especially exaggerated the words and cinematic effects of the inner movies and representations that made people miserable. “So you say that you are worthless and that you won’t ever amount to anything? Now hear those words in your mind in the voice of Donald Duck, and feel really, really bad.”

### **2) Tease.**

Take something and play with it. Mimic it (mock it), play with the words you or another use, create a pun from the words, rhyme the language, create a poem, a rap, play with a metaphor.

If someone explains that he or she has a sweet tooth and especially can't resist cookies, tease and play with it. "So if there are cookies in your pantry, they call out to you, 'Eat me! Eat me!' And then they exert a powerful invisible force making you walk into the kitchen and grab a handful of cookies. Then they jump from your hand and force themselves down your throat. Is that what you're saying? I know just what you mean. You wouldn't believe what lemon cream pies do to me!"

### **3) Create a surprise, shock, or jarring expectation.**

Surprise your listener with something unexpected. Set up an expectation and then violate it. Shift the person from what would normally be expected to something totally unexpected.

In the book of Genesis there's a story of utter surprise involving Abraham and Sarah. When they heard the announcement that Sarah would have a baby at 90 years of age, they laughed. "Abraham fell on his face and laughed." (Genesis 17:12, 17). Why? Because a grandmother would be entering the maternity ward with Medicare picking up the bill. So they named the baby "Chuckles" (Isaac in Hebrew means "Laughter"). Sarah explained the name from her experience, "God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me." (Genesis 22:6).

### **4) Identify and highlight incongruities.**

Identify incongruities and associate them so that the differences stand out. Mis-match what *is* with what one would normally *expect*. Use unexpected terms. Match things that do not fit together, "Now hear your critic insulting you, saying, 'You'll never amount to anything,' in the sexiest voice you can imagine and feel really depressed."

### **5) Play with words and ideas.**

Take words and create puns, rhythms, alliteration, alter the spelling or grammar. Use language to create satire, irony, and to play with the double-meanings in words. Use your wit to find and develop wisecracks and witty phrases. One wit gave a different, strange, and weird way for thinking about playing a violin: "It is the process of pulling the hairs of a horse's tail across the intestines of a dead cat."

### **6) Have fun.**

Lighten up with whatever you're doing, enjoy it. Have fun with it. We do that with babies and small children when we play peekaboo and engage in tickling bouts. Mirth in life is all about learning how to "be of good cheer" as an attitude for living. Originally "humor" referred to the Greek idea of *humus* which combined optimism and pleasure to create a light state of enjoyment.

### **7) Learn how to laugh at your laughter.**

With your self-reflexivity, enjoy your enjoyment, have fun about your playfulness, laugh at your laughter. When you do this, it takes you into meta-humor and meta-fun so that you can be dancing in your mind and emotions.

Now in the creativity of generating humor, make sure that you have permission within yourself to create, express, and enjoy humor. Do you? Give yourself permission to be silly, ridiculous, to exaggerate, to play, to create puns on words, to be comical, etc. Do you have permission? Does it settle well within you? Or is laughter and humor “silly,” unprofessional, foolishness, etc.? Do you have to be serious? Do you have permission to be imperfect? As a perfectly imperfect human being who thinks, says, and does lots of silly things, here’s to the perfection of your silliness! To the unleashing of your humorous self!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #43**  
**Sept 22, 2008**  
Humor —5

## **IF YOU GET SERIOUS, YOU WILL GET STUPID!**

I don't remember when I first came up with those words. The first time I remember saying them was in one of our summer intensive trainings in Florida more than a decade ago. I remember that because as soon as I said, "*If you get serious, you'll get stupid!*" someone in the group immediately asked, "Is that a new NLP presupposition?" And I said, "Yes, and it is a serious one!"

Typically we think of *serious* and *playful* as opposites. In Meta-States training I like using this contrast to illustrate the importance of the syntax of meta-stating. That is, if you *seriously play* or if you watch a game where people are *seriously playing* that's very different from *playfully serious*. The second state, as the meta-state, that qualifies the first state sets the frames that govern the experience. That's why *seriously* playing almost completely negates the "play" and changes the quality of the play.

By contrast, when we meta-state seriousness with play, the *playfulness* becomes the governing frame that textures the primary level activities. And what is *seriousness*? The dictionary defines the word *serious* and *seriousness* as "requiring much thought or work; thoughtful or subdued in appearance or manner; relating to a matter of importance; not joking or trifling, sober."

When we are serious, we are focused and earnest as we give our attention to something with focused energy. When we are serious, we endow the object of our seriousness with a sense of importance; we consider it highly significant. This creates a powerful state for the serious person. It endows one with a persistence, determination, and dedication that allows a person to get things done. But when we over-do seriousness, we over-load what we are serious about with far too much meaning.

It is at that point that we get stupid. As we get serious, we simultaneously lose perspective. We lose perspective about other values and other things of importance so that the singularity of our focus makes us intolerant, impatient, and even aggressive. When we become over-serious, we become zealots and fanatics. We become rigidly dogmatic about our beliefs and deeply and sincerely and earnestly *believe in our beliefs*. And we believe that they are serious. We also forget that we are silly human beings, that we are fallible, that we get things wrong, that we make mistakes, that everything is not dependent upon us.

As seriousness increases, we lose perspective on more and more things. We lose perspective of time and so become impatient with ourselves and others. We lose perspective about other people

and so become demanding of them. We lose perspective about what's relevant and so get our priorities mixed up and confused. And we lose perspective of humor and playfulness. This is where seriousness becomes toxic and hurtful. When we get so lost inside of the serious engagement—we then can no longer step back and laugh at ourselves, at our silliness, at our humanness.

All of this explains why we get stupid as we get serious. As we get serious, our stress levels go up, we become intolerantly perfectionistic, driven, compulsive, angry, aggressive, demanding, zealous, dogmatic, etc. It is at such times we say (or others tell us) that we need to “lighten up” and get some perspective and enjoy life. It's not that serious; after all none of us are going to get out of this things alive anyway!

*The solution is humor.* No wonder seriousness needs humor. Seriousness without humor is not only dangerous, it is toxic, sickening, and dangerous. That's why seriousness needs humor in order to be humane and healthy. Humor reminds us that silliness is part and parcel of human nature. By nature we are silly creatures—you are by nature a silly creature. Do you know that? Do you accept that? As beings who are capable of humor—we able to recognize our incongruencies, of things out of place, to enjoy the imperfections of life, and to perceive the silliness of so much of our lives. And this is good. It keeps us sane, happy, and human.

The bottom line is a warning: seriousness is dangerous to your peace of mind, health, and the well-being of those around you. Seriousness can be utterly stultifying and suffocating. So, should we never be serious? No. That's not the solution. The solution is to temper seriousness with humor; so be *playfully* serious. Let your earnest focused energy find your passion and fan your determination and persistence and do so with a fun-loving attitude. Bring to your dedication the playfulness of joy so that you keep perspective and release the demandingness of being perfect.

Finally, in olden times it was recognized that every king needed a court jester! Why? Simple, so that the king would not take himself too seriously, so that the king and the king's court could laugh at themselves and thereby maintain their perspective. The same is true for us today. It is true for our politicians, CEOs, senior management, ministers, teachers, etc. Maybe we need a new profession— Humor Coaches. May you be playfully serious in all your endeavors!



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #43**  
**Sept. 29, 2008**  
Humor —6

## HUMOR DRAGONS

I began *Meta Reflections* on the meta-state of humor by looking at some of the theoretical frameworks about humor and I then identified the state of humor itself as a meta-state involving various meta-states. That's what makes humor so powerful—while it feels really simple, basic, and primary, it is actually a complex state of mind-and-emotion which can involve numerous complexities of our self-reflexive consciousness. That's why humor itself jars consciousness as it turns our expectations and understandings upside-down and inside-out. And that's also why we would normally expect humor to expand and grow as intelligence grows and expands.

But it doesn't always. It is not always so positive and bright. There's seems to be a dampening effect so that whether it is in schools, churches, government, politics, industry, or business, the more intellectually complex something becomes, the more serious people get. And when they then become serious, they also become humorless. The humor goes. Things now are serious and "no joking matter." Now things are in earnest and there's no time for kidding around. Now things are life-and-death matters and so we banish playfulness, teasing, lightness, joking, etc.

It is for that reason that I wrote the last *Meta Reflection* and focused on the premise in Neuro-Semantics which heals the dichotomy between humor and seriousness. When we dichotomize seriousness and humor, we rob ourselves of a great resource that keeps us sane and human. If in seriousness we are likely to become "dead" serious, and then stupid, we need humor for balance and perspective.

*Humor is that powerful.* In terms of power, humor is very powerful. For example, those who torture and brainwash say that if a victim laughs, they have to start all over. In that context, humor powerfully protects our sanity. Humor is also powerful for improving our health and well-being, for expand our ability to mindfully reflect on things, gain inner distance, and keep perspective. Humor can reduce tensions, bond people together, and improve learning and memory.

Well, if humor is that powerful in a positive way, it is inevitable that humor can also be mis-used and abused. It can also be powerful in a negative way. It is inevitably that humor can be used in ugly and hurtful ways—ways that undermine health, sanity, and resourcefulness. In other words, we can turn humor against ourselves in various ways and be consumed by these humor dragons.

James J. Walsh in *Laughter and Health* writes, "While laughter is a mystery from its mental aspect, it is easy to appreciate its far-reaching physical effects. Laughter makes us feel better for having indulged in it. There seems no doubt that hearty laughter stimulates practically all the large organs, and by making them do their work better through the increase of circulation that follows the vibratory massage which accompanies it,

heightens resistive vitality against disease. Besides, the mental effect brushes away the dreads and fears which constitute the basis of so many diseases or complaints and lifts men out of the slough of despond... Laughter makes one expansive in outlook and is very likely to give to the feeling that the future need not be the subject of quite so much solicitude as is usually allowed for it.”

### **Desacrilizing Dragons**

Humor is most powerful in the way it can desacrilize. To sacrilize is to see the value and importance of something. It is to gain a perspective of how something is special, valuable, precious, and sacred. So to *de-sacrilize* is to rob a person, experience, or thing of its value and specialness.

So via humor and laughter, we can *laugh things off*. We can use humor to dismiss things, fail to treat something as important or serious, and trash it. In this we have to be careful what we laugh at, laugh at precious and sacred things long enough and you can desacrilize it. You can rob it of meaning and significance. That’s why there’s a line of humor and laughter where once we cross it we enter into the area of being sacreligious and blasphemous.

When we apply humor to people, we can *laugh at* them rather than *with* them. This leads to the humor that insults, puts-down, and mocks. This is making someone the butt of our joke. This is the vulgar humor that gets us to laugh at another’s misfortune, deformity, weakness, etc. And when we do this, we can thereby violate the dignity and honor of a person and destroy a relationship.

This kind of derisive humor typically tends to be vulgar and scornful. It was this kind of humor that led to the superiority theory of humor that I mentioned earlier. This theory talks about the ugliness of using humor to put oneself up by putting others down and doing so via mocking them and making fun of them. Some stand-up comics use this kind of humor and get by with it because they do it to everyone and do so with a wink of the eye. Yet it is a dangerous kind of humor.

Then there is humor as a defense mechanism. We see this kind of humor in the nervous laughter that occurs when we feel insecure, unsure of things, out of place, etc. One of the first kinds of laughter that was ever studied was hysterical laughter. We often laugh with others or at something as a way to fend it off, to make it laughable to us, something to reject, show disdain to and not deal with.

It is the disarming power of humor itself that in some context can enable us to connect with each other and create a sense of rapport which in other contexts can take advantage of others, manipulate them, and enjoy a laugh at their expense. Humor and laughter, while seemingly non-serious and therefore innocuous are actually powerful and serious. To your healthy and enjoyable humor!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #44**  
**Sept. 30, 2008**

## **THE META-STUFF OF MONEY**

Having just arrived back in Colorado after the *Coaching Mastery* training (Meta-Coaching III) in New Zealand, I landed on the day that Wall Street took a real plunge, losing 778 points on the DOW sock exchange. And why? The seeming “cause” was the failure of the US House of Representatives to pass the 700 billion bailout legislation. And what was the “cause” of that? It seemed to be the failure of some large banks and insurance companies. Yet the causation isn’t quite that simple.

Such events are just events. In themselves, those events do not inflate money or strengthen the value of money. What does that is much more subtle. What does strengthen or inflate is what business calls the “soft” stuff of life—people and more specifically their thoughts, their emotions, their anticipations, their fears, their worries, etc.

When it come to money, there’s a lot of meta-stuff involved. After all, “money” as such does not exist in the external world. What we call “money” refers to *how we establish value*—value for our time, our energy, our knowledge, our skills, and so on. Money is just the scorecard. The paper and coins, the credit cards, and instruments are just tools—tools for evaluating. When I first began to drive and to buy petrol, gasoline was 19 cents a gallon. I could buy 5 gallons of gas for one US dollar. Now the same 5 gallons cost \$20. Did the gasoline get more expensive or did the dollar become less valuable? Or did both occur over the years?

And how could the same dollar be valued at 1/20 of what it once did? How does “inflation” work? Who does it? And how do they do it? How is it that there are millions, even billions, of dollars of less value in the market today than there was yesterday? It occurs as a joint venture of lots of people—those speculating on the market, those fearful of what might happen, those worried about spending, etc. In other words, *human thoughts and feelings*. And that means human states—and that means *meta-states*.

All of this points to the meta-stuff of money. We are the ones who *do the valuing*. In themselves, things including dollars have no value. They are just things. Things sitting around waiting for some human to look, to think, to evaluate, to draw conclusions, to calculate, to frame, to appraise value. We are the ones who *invest our thoughts and emotions* into things and as we do, we create a social or cultural realities—money, economics, exchange, and so on.

For money to become worthless all that has to happen is for people, a community of people, to develop beliefs that a system of management doesn’t work. All they have to do is fear that the value they have created will be valued for less. Then like Zambaway, inflation can go spiraling

out of control so that the price of a loaf of bread can cost \$1 one day and \$10 the next and \$100 the next. Group fears and distrust can inflate an economy and group trust and belief can make an economy richer and more valued. This is the meta-stuff of money.

All of this takes us back to the key players—speculators, government regulators, legislative bodies, and millions of everyday people known as stockholders. The leverage lies in soft stuff of their meta-minds. It also lies in the political leaders as well as in all the reporters, news people, journalists, analysts, etc. The way they report things, the bias of the reporting, the amount of positive or negative reporting—all of these things *set the frames for the rest of us—for how we think and feel about it*. It sets the frame for our *framing*. And, how we frame things determines whether the “soft” stuff in our heads (our meta-states) will feed our trust or distrust, our faith or doubt, our positive orientation or our negative focus, or confidence in our money or lack of confidence.

The “soft” meta-stuff also explains why all of this highly circular. If we slide into a regression, we slide primarily because of our negative meta-states of doubt, distrust, fear, worry, apprehension, etc. This seems to be a blind-spot for many. The media especially seems to believe the old myth of objectivity—that they are just reporting and that what they do does not help create the very phenomenon that they are reporting on. And given that the psychology of the media (another blind-spot of the media about itself) involves a focus on what’s negative and sensational, the media powerfully helps all of us set our frames about what’s happening, what we think and feel about it.

True enough the meta-stuff of money is bigger than any one of us, it is the social mind that we all participate in and co-create. And like the meta-stuff of gossip and myths, some ideas are like viruses that grow exponentially and create massive infections everywhere. What’s needed today is enough well-informed Neuro-Semanticists to challenge the fearful and pessimistic framing and take charge of this facet of managing our social mind.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #45**  
**Oct. 5, 2008**

## I CAUGHT A THOUGHT

I remember when I first began teaching NLP (the practitioner and master practitioner courses) I began meeting people who complained about not visualizing. They said that they didn't make pictures in their mind. When someone would say that, I would then repeat a little process that I learned from Richard Bandler. I'd ask for their billfold or purse and ask for a picture of their loved one or children. When they produced it I would point to the people in the pictures and ask, "Who is this?"

When they would tell me, "It's my wife." I'd ask, "How do you know?" They would say, "I just know?" "Maybe that's not really your wife. You don't make pictures in your mind, you are just looking at a picture that you're carrying, how do you know that it is her? Maybe it's someone else's wife! Maybe it's a mistress! How would you know if it isn't?"

The design of that response was to provoke a person to catch their own thoughts. It was designed to set a question within a person regarding *how do you know and recognize your thoughts*. Of course, that's just one way to evoke a person's recognition of their internal pictures. There are many others. I learned to catch my auditory thoughts by "snapshotting" sounds. I would listen to something on TV or radio, then turn the source off and see if I could *re-present* it to myself. If not, I'd turn it on again and make another "snapshot" of it—noticing its qualities, tones, volumes, etc.

This is the exercise I recommend to anyone wanting to learn to visualize or to enhance the quality of their inner thoughts of images. Look at something, see it, really see it, now close your eyes and see it inside. *Re-present* its colors, shapes, form, etc. Now look at it again, really look at it for all of its qualities. Use your hand to feel it. Now close your eyes and feeling it—in your mind—see it. Then using your hand, knock on it and listen to those sounds. Now with eyes closed, hear those sounds and let the images emerge.

What's all this about? It's about catching thoughts. Most of the time we think and don't even recognize our thoughts and especially don't recognize the form or code of the thought. Yet because we humans have a brain with a visual cortex, an auditory cortex, a motor cortex, an associative cortex, etc., we *think using the sensory modalities*. This is the most fundamental level of our thinking and the genius of NLP. Others had discovered this long before NLP, but Bandler and Grinder put this together into a format that enable people to "run their own brains."

This explains why NLP can be used for developing emotional intelligence. Given Daniel Goleman's list of the four facets of EQ: self-management, social awareness, relationship management, self-awareness is first. No wonder Denis Bridoux and his associates wrote a basic NLP book (including Meta-States) entitled, *Seven Steps to Emotional Intelligence*.

Well, this week I caught a thought. I was watching the political debate between the vice president candidates and when it was announced that it was at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri—all of a sudden pictures, images, sounds, and even smells popped into my mind. And because there were so many of these sights and sounds, I became aware of them. In fact, I missed a bit of the beginning of the debate because of the intrusion of this inner movie.

Now I'm pretty sure you didn't experience that. "Pretty sure" because the likelihood that you have not spent much time in the neighborhood of Washington University in St. Louis, Forest park, and Skinker Blvd. But I did. And as I caught the first thoughts of those sights and sounds, then also I caught higher level thoughts—old thoughts from 25 years ago when I lived in St. Louis.

When it comes to catching your thoughts, you can catch thoughts at many different levels. Here's one way that we frame the levels of thoughts in Neuro-Semantics:

1) *Awareness*. The first thinking is simply being aware, sentient, and conscious. The content of this consciousness is whatever you're aware of, whatever gets your attention, whatever grabs it. You are aware but not aware of that awareness. This is the mind of a small child or animal. It is only the beginning of consciousness.

2) *Awareness of awareness*: Then you catch a thought. You become *aware* of your thought. "I was just thinking about X." "An image just popped in mind." Or someone interrupts your daydreaming asking you "Where were you just now? Where did you go?" At this level you become aware of the two key sensory representational systems: visual and auditory and the snapshot or movie playing in your mind. At this level you experience the first meta-state.

3) *Dimensions of thoughts*: You can then identify the dimensions of your thinking in terms of their qualities. My images of St. Louis were of the stone buildings and green trees around Washington University. Some were close, others were far away. In this I was using the *concept of distance* as well as the *concept of color* to create and re-present my thoughts. At this level you catch your meta-modalities of the cinematic features of your movies ("sub-modalities" in NLP).

4) *Narrative of the thoughts*: Then there is our self-talk as we have a running commentary in our mind about our thoughts. We use this self-talk as our *story* to describe and narrate their meanings. At this level you catch your words and the linguistic representational system (the meta-representation system of NLP).

5) *Experience of the thoughts*: And if we use our sights and sounds in such a way that we imagine ourselves *inside* things, then we use the *concept of "as if I am there again."* This re-creates the sense of the experience so that the messages you send your body accesses your kinesthetic encoding and activates your motor cortex. At this level you catch your kinesthetic sensory system so that you do not merely think the thought, but *experience* it.

6) *Evaluation of thoughts*: From there you can, and do, make all kinds of evaluations of your

thoughts and thoughts-of-thoughts. You create metaphorical evaluations, intentional, meaning, etc. as we *frame* things with higher levels of concepts and understandings. At this level you enter into all of the 100 meta-levels of the meta-state distinctions and can map out the fuller Matrix in which you think.

*Catching a thought*— ah, that's what any good Meta-Coach with his or her salt does! We catch the thoughts that operate as our maps of reality, the maps that either effectively enable us to get on in life or that trip us up. Because we don't deal with "reality" directly, but through our maps, catching a thought is the first step in reframing. We *catch a thought* in order to know what framing we're currently living in and what needs to be reframed.

Here's to your successful thought-catching this week!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #46**  
**Oct. 12, 2008**

## NEURO-SEMANTIC FRAMING

Since we have levels in our “thinking” (“I Caught a Thought,” Meta Reflection #45), the levels that we *layer*, one upon another, create our meanings—our *meaning frames*. I often am asked about the term “frame” and what we mean by that. Actually, it is very simple. Your *frame* refers to *the way* you interpret things. It refers to *how* you interpret and understand something. It is your *frame of reference*.

Now your *frame of reference* can take a great many forms. We have 100 different forms in Neuro-Semantics. This expands what Robert Dilts began with his 5 “logical levels” (beliefs, values, identity, vision and mission, spirit). His other distinctions are not meta-distinctions, but primary level distinctions (behavior, environment, capability).

So your *frame of reference* may take the form of a belief, a decision, an intention, a permission, a prohibition, a rule, a memory, an imagination, an understanding, a plan, a strategy, a meaning, and on and on. (You can find lists of these meta-levels of frames in the list of Meta-Questions in *Coaching Change*, *Coaching Conversations* and many of the training manuals.) This means that a belief is a *belief frame*, a decision is a *decision frame*, and so on.

And where do they come from? Again, simple. When a person begins speaking about anything, if we don’t know *the context* of the conversation, we naturally and intuitively ask, “What are you talking about? What are you *referring to*?”

“That’s just not the way to do that! I’m really upset about this. And I’m not going to just roll over and not protest!”

“Bill, What are you talking about? What are you *referring to*?”

“The new rules of the softball team in our neighborhood, of course! What did you think? Haven’t you been listening to me?”

“That’s a relief, I thought you were talking about your marriage ...” Or, your job, the city counsel’s new decisions, your study habits, etc.

Without a context we don’t know what a person is *referring to*—that person’s *point of reference*. It is the person’s *reference* that we can then *keep in mind* as their *frame of reference* which then allows us to understand them. Without their *frame of reference* or “frame” for short, we really don’t know how to understand their words. Even the words, “How are you?” are not self-evident. It all depends upon the *reference point* as the context and frame. “How are you?” is understood very differently when a friend says it as a greeting, a therapists asks it as a session



begins, a close personal friend asks when you come out of surgery, a doctors on a return visit, or a counter-person asks when you order coffee.

The *point of reference* locates the external context and the *frame of reference* identifies a person's internal thinking (an internal context) that sets one's understanding context "held in mind" as a lens through which to process the information. Accordingly, our *down questions* seeks to find the grounding *point of reference* in the real world "out there," whereas our *up questions* enables us to explore the layers of internal frames for interpreting the words (see Meta Reflections #33 on Up and Down questions).

*Down Questions:*

- What are you talking about? What are you referring to?
- When did that happen? Where did that occur at? Who was there and involved?
- What was said and what did you say in response?

*Up Questions:*

- How do you interpret that? How do you understand that?
- What do you believe about that? What does that mean to you?
- What's your intention in believing that?

Up Questions are meta-questions that takes us up into a person's mapping about things, into a person's Matrix of all the beliefs-within-beliefs that make up the person's interpretative style and structure. First we *find and identify* the frames that a person is using to see, perceive, understand, and emote about things. Then we *quality control* those frames by asking about how useful, productive, enhancing, empowering, and ecological are they. Then we can decide whether to keep them, lose them, suspend them, change them, or refine them. And that thought— that frame itself— puts us at choice point. Now the semantic structure that forms our mapping and experiencing and responding can be changed! Now we are but one step away from transformation.

*You have now entered into* [hear the sound and tune of Twilight Zone playing ... do do, do do...] *the world of Neuro-Semantic Framing!* It is the world that emerges when you take the Red Pill and escape the Matrix. Now you are ready for training for taking charge of your Matrix and changing it at will—with your mind. Now you are ready for the magic of framing and deframing, for reframing, for outframing, pre-framing, post-framing, analogous framing (see *Mind-Lines: Lines for Changing Minds*). Now you are beginning to operate as a Neuro-Semantic Framer!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #47**  
**Oct. 19, 2008**

## THE ART OF LIVING IN LANGUAGE

*We live in language.* As a species of life we have no full fledged instincts, but only “instinctoids” (Abraham Maslow). Our *instinct* is to learn and create mental models in our heads (“maps” Alfred Korzybski) is what makes us “a semantic class of life.” Not knowing what anything “is,” or means, or what leads to what (causation), we have to learn. We have to discover. We have to formulate, conclude, and construct a model of reality. We have to create meaning and we do so at multiple levels.

So *we live in language* as a chief *inner context* in our minds which then governs what we see, what we perceive, what we feel, what we expect, etc. With the words that we accept, absorb, and invent we live inside them so that they govern what we are prepared to see. If we say that something is “terrible,” horrible,” “awful” *so it becomes to us.*

“Criticism is horrible; I hate it. I’m just not able to handle it when people don’t like me. I always fall apart.”

How’s that for a toxic thought? A toxic instruction? A pathology-creating hypnotic induction? And that’s just one of many, many, many that we all face everyday of our lives. Want more? Here’s a sick list of thoughts full of semantic toxicity:

“Over the hill.” “I’m having a senior moment.” “I think I’m cursed when it comes to money; nothing ever goes right for me.” “It’s his fault, if he had not made me feel insignificant and worthless, I wouldn’t have given up so easily.” “I’m alcoholic.” “Change is hard and painful.”

By language we create our categories of reality and by an unthinking acceptance and use of words, we experience and feel things that undermine our effectiveness and leash our potentials. I often tell the story of Wendell Johnson (*People in Quandries*, 1946) and his chapter, “The Indians Have No Word for it” (Chapter 17). As a speech pathologist and stutterer himself, Dr. Johnson studied two Native American Indian cultures (Bannock and Shoshone Indians) and could not find anyone who stuttered. And it so happened that their languages had no word for “stuttering.” That idea, that category, that experience was not punctuated by their language, so the experience of “stuttering” didn’t exist for them. When Dr. Johnson first sent his associate, John Snidecor to the Native American tribes to speak about stuttering, they didn’t understand what he was referring to. To even communicate what he was referring to, he had to demonstrate stuttering which they thought was kind of funny. So when a child spoke in a non-fluent way, no one noticed. It didn’t exist.

“Speech defects were simply not recognized. The Indian children were not criticized or evaluated on the basis of their speech, no comments were made about it, no issue was

made of it. In their semantic environments there appeared to be no speech anxieties or tensions for the Indian children to interiorize, to adopt as their own. This, together with the absence of a word for stuttering in the Indians' language, constitutes the only basis on which I can at this time suggest an explanation for the fact there were no stutterers among these Indians." (p. 443)

Later Johnson found children from those groups—children who had been adopted by white families who did stutter. In the new English language, the category of “stuttering” did exist and so those kids raised in that culture learned to punctuate it as real. They then learned to fear it as something dreadful and so meta-stated themselves to create *avoidance* of non-fluency and *fear and dread* of non-fluency. They learned to live in the language of stuttering with these frames.

For better and worse, *we all live in a world of language*. When we say a word, we call a world into being. It's a creator power. Genesis describes the beginning as occurring when God spoke the world into being, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” We also participate in that same creative power. As we use language, so we create our reality (what is real to us) and then operate within it semantically. In our languaging, our meanings are created.

Without language, we would live life moment-by-moment without any awareness of ourselves or life itself. We would lack “... narrative, evaluation, comparison, and contemplation. We would not know who we are, where we are going, or whether or not we have gotten there—the very issues...” that make life human and meaningful (Jay Efran, Michael Lukens, Robert Lukens, *Language, Structure, and Change*, 1990).

“Without language, there is only ‘now’—life unfolding moment by moment without self-consciousness or meaning. With the advent of language, an observing ‘self’ is created and experience is evaluated. Those evaluations continuously and recursively modify what is being experienced, leading to the self-referential quagmire that generates business for psychotherapists.” (p. 33-34)

So given that we live in language, *what is the art of living in language?* How can we live with language, and in language, so that it supports and enhances life rather than diminishes?

1) Obviously the art begins with awareness of language. First we need to become mindful of our words and mindful of *what we are doing with our words*. What are you doing with your words? And, what are your words doing for you? This is the *neuro-linguistic* and *neuro-semantic* facet of language. *Language does things to us!* Language gets into our eyes so that we see the world *in terms of our words and concepts*. Language induces us into states. Language gets encoded in our body, in muscle memory. Now you know why Meta-Coaches and Neuro-Semanticists are always asking,

“Do you hear what you’re saying?”

“As you hear yourself say that and use those words, what are you aware of?”

“Hearing yourself say that, how will you start to clean up your language and frame things in ways that support you?”

2) Once you recognize that you live your life in language and always will, the next step is to *quality control your language* so that you can choose life-enhancing and empowering ways to speak and encode things.

“What cognitive distortions have you found in your language today?”

“How empowering is that term, concept, understanding, or belief?”

“How is your language?”

“What are some of your best formulas that unleash your potentials?”

There’s more—which I’ll pick up in the next Meta Reflection.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #48**  
**Oct. 26, 2008**

## **EFFECTIVELY LIVING IN LANGUAGE**

If we are a class of life that lives in language (Reflection #47), then *how* do we learn to live in language effectively so that it enhances our lives and unleashes our potentials? In the last Meta Reflection, I suggested the first two steps. Here I will add two more.

1) *Develop an awareness of language.*

What are you doing with your language?

What is your language doing to you?

2) *Quality control your language.*

Is your language enhancing and empowering rather than limiting and diminishing you?

3) *Chose to consciously use language for enrichment.*

Language offers you linguistic power—the power to call subjective realities into existence and to create life-enhancing categories. With your words, you can do so many, many things. You can bless and you can curse. You can bond and you can dis-bond. You can ask, entreat, present, assert, negotiate, sell, promise, anticipate, plan, lead, manage, and a hundred other things. By your words you can hypnotize and invent places in the mind that can tap into your body's potentials for healing and actualizing. By your words you can de-hypnotize from the curses and myths that limit and diminish you as a person.

Given this, how conscious are you of your language use? How conscious are you of the invitations that others offer you with theirs? What choices do you make with regard to all of this? Are there any words or language expressions that you have chosen to avoid? For myself, I have eliminated numerous words like “failure,” for example. That term no longer has any place in my consciousness. I can fail to reach a goal, I can discover what does not work, but I can't be a “failure.”

4) *Challenge the language of diminishment.*

Once you are able to detect language that diminishes you rather than unleash your potential, then you can challenge that language as inadequate mapping. This includes detecting and challenging language that dis-empowers, that creates limitations to possibilities and potentials, and that are toxic to your well-being and health.

Actually this step of challenging language can be a lot of fun. What I've found is that by learning to play with words drives home the point that words are words; they are just terms, labels, phrases. They are not real. And as just words, that means we have a choice about how much meaning and seriousness to attribute to them. After all, who's in charge? You or the words? As

you learn to play with words, you can learn to refuse to accept words at face value as if they are literal descriptions of reality. They are not. All words are metaphorical. Words as *symbols* operate by *standing for* and *representing* something other than themselves. So any and all kinds of word-phobia is silly. The word isn't going to get you! The word isn't a monster. It's just a word.

### 5) *Challenge the Cognitive Distortions*

As you play with words and phrases, and know that they are just symbols and metaphors and potential maps (if you accept them), you now can catch cognitive distortions. Cognitive distortions are mostly the left-over remnants of childhood thinking. We learn the cognitive distortions as children as some of our first steps in learning to think. In developmental psychology they are the thinking stages that we all go through as we learn to become clear and critical in our thinking. They are stages on the way to adult thinking, formal thinking.

Yet while they were useful for those learning stages, if perpetuated beyond childhood, they create tremendous misery for us. In fact, if you want to be profoundly miserable, I can think of no better formula than devoting your time to learning to use the cognitive distortions as an adult. These are the patterns that will not only make you miserable but enable you to spread that misery around so that you create tremendous misery for your children, lover, boss, employees, colleagues—everyone!

Now most of the cognitive distortions are identified within the NLP Meta-Model which not only identifies them, but also provides ways to question them. As an aside, this really excited me when I first found this. It filled in many of the missing details in the Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) and Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) models that I was using at the time. So after some years of studying Korzybski I went to the International Interdisciplinary Conference of General Semantics at Hofstra University and presented the connection between RET and CBT and the Meta-Model using the formulations of General Semantics. On my way, I stopped in New York city and visited Albert Ellis who developed RET and told him that the cognitive distortion distinctions in RET are also in the Meta-Model. He didn't believe it, and actually argued against it, but everybody else could see the wonderful correlation between them.

And this is indeed where the Meta-Model becomes such a powerful tool—a tool for questioning the cognitive distortions in our thinking and map-making so that we chase away the misery of confusion and distortion.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #49**  
**Nov. 3, 2008**

## **SYNERGISTIC META-STATING**

When you work with The Meta-States model and particularly when you work with the meta-stating process for running your own brain, you are working with a system—a living, dynamic system. It is a system of interactive parts that all work together in a synergistic way. That's because the "parts" are only "parts" in language, in the way we think about, classify, and punctuate the experience, and not in reality. In reality, there is just a single thing—a single system, namely the person with his or her mind-body-emotion system. There is a system of interactive variables and in this case, of a mind-body-emotion state processing some content in some context.

Is this important? You bet it is! Okay, so how is it important? It's important if you want to understand and work with the mind-body system. It's important if you want to tap into the power of the human system to create some great states. It's important if you want to *think and work systemically* and get the highest responses from the system. It's important if you want to know some of the basic rules and processes of the system and especially if you want to quickly get to the leverage point for change and unleashing. So what are some of these basic rules? Here are a few.

*1) When you think and work systemically, you are working with the principle that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts."* We use the term *gestalt* for this system principle. As a system operates, properties arise from within that system that cannot be explained by adding the parts together. It is not summative. The property is more than that, it *emerges*. It is *an emergent property*. And that emergence cannot be reduced to parts, elements, or components. Something more has arisen. In Meta-States we speak about these emergent properties as a *gestalt state*. Courage is an example. So is a solid sense of self, self-esteem, proactivity, and many, many other complex states.

*2) When you think and work systemically, you use the process of iteration.* This is the process of repeating a process again and again and again. This is the process of iteration. That's because systems have loops of information and energy. There is the feedback loop and the feed forward loop. In the mind-body-emotion system, information enters into the system and goes round and round reflexively until it is then fed forward and is transformed into energy. This feed forward loop takes the energy and incorporates it by activating neuro-pathways and embodying it in muscle memory and then feeding it forward into the world in speech and behavior. The information and energy go round and round the system and with each iteration, the system responds to itself.

In the field of Meta-Cognition, the lower levels in a system are governed by the “feedback loops” of the higher level iterations. In this way a thermostat governs the temperature of a room or house. The loops of the system feed information about the temperature which then evokes pre-set biases of the system which then activate a furnace or an air conditioner. Later, more data about the temperature of the room is fed back into the system which leads to other responses. The data of the lower loop (registering the temperature) is fed into the higher loop (the thermostat biases) which governs the lower loop.

We have iterations in Meta-States. And because we are self-referential in our thinking-and-emoting and responding, we can send the same information back onto ourselves and our experiences again and again to create a self-organizing influence. We can take fear and become afraid of our fear, and then fear our fear-of-our-fear, and so on. We can appreciate ourselves and then appreciate our appreciation, and so on. And depending on the structure, this can create positive self-reinforcing loops or negative loops. The state can spiral upward positively or downward negatively. It can create rich and empowering resourceful states or limiting “dragon” states that undermine health and well-being.

In Meta-States, what and how you use iterations determines whether you are running your own brain at the higher levels or whether you are the victim of some higher level frame that’s running the show. We can set frames or allow frames to be set that can become a self-organizing meta-state so that through the repeated iterations, it organizes a self-similarity of the diminishing frame over and over and over. And with each iteration of those thoughts and feelings, the mind and state becomes more complex and solidified.

*3) When you think and work systemically, look for the direction of the system.* Which way is the system spinning? What direction is the system going and evolving? Toward health or illness? Toward enhancing life or diminishing your life forces? Toward empowering resources or limiting resources? Direction also refers to whether the system is open or closed, whether the system is spiraling upward or downward, whether the system is healthy or toxic and pathological. And to address this we need to step back from the system to run a quality control of the system itself. In this way we can check the congruency, ecology, quality, and direction of the system.

When you meta-state you have the possibility of creating synergistic experiences and the richest mind-body states possible that bring out your highest and best and/or those of others. And this can open up a whole new world of possibilities. So here’s to your synergistic meta-stating!



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #50**  
**Nov. 10, 2008**

## **THE LEASH OF FREEDOM AND THE REFLEXIVE DOG**

I recently made a new friend, Buddy Lucas. Well, let me restate that. I didn't *make* the friend, he was the one who *made* me his friend. But there was a problem—my new friend is a dog. That isn't a description of his character, but his species—Buddy is a real dog. I don't know who actually owns him, Buddy might belong to Cheryl, Carey, Jerome, Kai, or Mable. I don't know.

Actually, that is probably the wrong frame. Instead of Buddy *belonging* to anyone, I think perhaps the reality is that he has lots of people who belong to him. I think the truth is that he collects people as his pets—then he blesses them by taking them on walks, teaching them how to get him food, to pet him, snuggle with him, and so on. Buddy's pretty smart that way—getting people to work for him and to be at his beck and call. Quite a leadership skill, if you ask me. Actually dogs in general seem to know this and use this strategy. They trick people into working for them—buying their favorite treats, taking them on walks, playing with them, and so on. They also encourage the deception that humans have that *they* have a pet whereas in truth, *they are the pets*.

Anyway while in South Africa, I took Buddy on some runs in the mornings before our Meta-Coach trainings. He always made me run faster at the beginning of the run than I wanted to as we ran up and down the streets in Pretoria. This is the time of the year when the Jacaranda trees are in full blossom—bright purple and lavender blossoms flowering in a way that completely covers the trees so that they are quite majestic. And in neighborhoods where the tree limbs reach out over the street, they create beautiful purple tunnels that give off a stunning scent. And then a week later, I saw the trees as they began to rain purple.

Once the leash was on Buddy and we enter into the world of purple tunnels, the leash gave Buddy the freedom to run, to explore, to discover his neighborhood, to go so “hello” to other dogs behind fences. *It was a leash of freedom*. Without the leash, Buddy couldn't have had that freedom. Unused to cars, traffic, roads, growling dogs—Buddy would not have survived very long. But with a leash, he was free. The leash provides a control and management of his energies. The leash focuses his energies so that he can run without being run over. The leash provides direction and guidance. The leash is also connection—connection to me as the person offering guidance as we ran to new places.

From Buddy I learned something new about leashes that I didn't write in *Unleashed*. While leashes can tie us down and prevent our full potential, and interfere with our unleashing, there's another kind of leash—*the leash of freedom*. These are the leashes that enable us to handle the true constraints that are in the world so that we don't “run off in all directions at once,” but

channel and guide our energies in useful ways. Leashes of freedom enable us to hold back the wildness of our energy so that we can channel it and direct it and give it a productive direction.

On the second day that Buddy took me for a run, when we returned to the yard, he did something incredible. I let the leash drop to the ground, so he turned his neck and with his mouth got ahold of the leash and began leading himself around the yard. What a sight that was! He was using his leash to go for a run in the front yard. A reflexive dog! It was as if he knew that the leash was a key to freedom and fun and play and adventure and he wanted more of it!

By the third day, he would be at my door scratching and letting me know that if I wanted to be a good pet, I needed to get up and use the leash to release him from the house and yard. Running with him on the leash was a learning experience for both of us the first couple days; he often wanted room to run after birds or other dogs and so to give him more freedom, I went with his leash oftentimes drug into a sprint to keep up. But then there were times when he counted on me to hold him back just enough so that he could act ferocious but not have to prove it!

As I ran and reflected, I wondered about my own leashes of freedom: What are they? What leashes actually give me new freedoms and unleash new potentials with agreed-upon boundaries. Then I realized that every value sets such a boundary within which I'm free to turn my energies loose and outside of which I feel the constraint of conscience. Then there are the decisions, choices, intentions, and plans which provide me an area and range of movement and activity and beyond which I don't go because I don't allow that—it would take me away from my desired outcomes and highest visions.

But then there is the meta-question—the question of reflexivity: Can I take my own leashes of freedom and use them for my own self-guidance, self-direction, and self-management. Do I have permission within myself to do that? Will I grant myself that permission? Will I allow my highest values and best vision of my potentials operate as a leash of freedom for pursuing the grandest and most noble meaning? Then I realized, that's what coaching and especially self-coaching is all about. So meta high-five Buddy for the lessons in freedom, reflexivity, and the unleashing of more potentials!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #51**  
**Nov 17, 2008**

## **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ROSETTA STONE OF META-STATES**

In 1799 the Rosetta Stone was discovered by accident by Napoleon's armies. And with the discovery of that stone, the mysteries of Egyptian hieroglyphics began to be unlocked. This was possible because the stone contained the same message in two languages and three alphabets, two of which scholars already understood. This meant that the hidden code of hieroglyphics could be broken so that with the code the ancient world was opened to be explored in a new way.

Similarly the Meta-States model has provided a new way to unlock the code of all of the meta-language that evolved over the centuries for our higher levels of awareness, for our Meta-Life. For millennia the human race had been trying to come up with the language for describing the meta-levels of the mind, for the "realities" that we live in and deal with, but which do not exist empirically. We live in this higher realm which is an evaluative rather than descriptive realm. It is created by the human mind through the way we draw conclusions, abstract, and conceptualize. And it exists at that level, not at the primary level.

This means that whenever you talk about "beliefs," "values," "understandings," "concepts," "intentions," "memories," "imagination," "models," "permissions," "prohibitions," and use a hundred other terms similar to these—you are talking about *the higher levels of the mind*. You are talking about the "logical levels" of your Meta-Life.

But the referents of these words are not real. And they do not exist—well, at least they do not exist "out there" in the world. You can't go to Walmart and buy these things. You can't ask the attendant, "Where do you keep new beliefs; mine are worn out." "What aisle is 'values' on?" "I need a pound or two of some higher intentions." You can't put these meta-terms in a wheelbarrow—the NLP test for nominalizations. You can't weigh them, measure them, take pictures of them—no empirical see-hear-feel test will be able to identify these things.

And that's not only because they are not *things*, they also do not exist at the primary dimension. Their referent exist in the meta-dimensions of your meta-life. And further, this is where all of us mostly live our lives—we live in meta-land. We live our lives seeing each other and the world and the things we do through the lens of our *beliefs*. We shop by making our choices through the lens of our *values*. We relate and get along with each other, or don't, and have fights and arguments through the lens of *understandings*, *memories*, *imagination*, and all of the other hundred meta-terms. In Neuro-Semantics, we refer to these meta-terms as the *psycho-logical levels* (following Alfred Korzybski) and use the four Meta-Dimensions model to detail out the numerous Meta-Questions that this model gives rise to.

As a psychological Rosetta Stone, the Meta-States model explains how we create level-upon-level of layers of thoughts-and-emotions to create these psycho-logical levels. And Meta-States also shows how that each of these “layers” or “levels” of these processes are simultaneously “the same thing.” That is, they offer us multiple points of view of the same thing—the subjective experience. (This is the point of the Diamond of Consciousness diagram.)

Consider the experience or meta-state of “joyful learning.” Is that a belief? Do you *believe* in joyfully learning? Is it a value? To you value joyfully learning? Is it a memory? An imagination? A concept? A decision? An identity? Are you a joyful learner? A permission? A plan? It is all of these and many, many other meta-levels and it is all of these *at the same time from different perspectives*.

So what is a “belief?” One way we define a belief is to say that it is a confirmed thought. And that takes it to a meta-level from primary level thoughts or awarenesses. And as a meta-level generalization, it is also many other things—a value, an understanding, a concept, a permission, a thought, an emotion, a meaning, etc. The Meta-State Model as a Psychological Rosetta Stone now gives us an extended vocabulary and alphabet so that we can talk about and give expanded descriptions of the higher realms of the human mind and spirit. It gives us a redundancy about the layers of our meaning frames in our mind (our Matrix) so that we can open up a belief system and work with it using the language of permission, decision, value, identity, meaning, and so on.

So a belief may be a belief about the importance of something (a value), a belief about the direction to take (a decision), a belief about one’s self-definition (an identity), a belief about the allowance or dis-allowance (permission or prohibition), and so on. In this, it is beliefs all the way up.

Now we realize that each of the words that we have considered *different* logical levels are *just different languages for the same thing*—a Rosetta Stone enabling us to translate one “logical level” in terms of another.

And of course, you can always learn about this psychological Rosetta Stone via the APG training (Accessing Personal Genius) or NLP Master Practitioner as delivered by Neuro-Semantic Trainers, or through the foundational book on the Meta-States Model, the new third edition of *Meta-States* (2008).

To the decoding and higher levels of management of your Meta-Life!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #52**  
**Nov 24, 2008**

## **HOW VIKTOR FRANKL MISUNDERSTOOD MEANING**

I recently re-read one of Viktor Frankl's books as part of my research into the Human Potential Movement. His 1978 book, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* is an excellent work on Logotherapy and two of the primary techniques of Logotherapy. Yet in exploring that book again and now from the perspective of "Whatever happened to the Human Potential Movement," I recognized some of the things I've seen in every one of the leaders with the exception of Maslow. And now what I've been seeing through the lens of history provides a tremendous warning to those of us in the legacy of NLP and Neuro-Semantics.

I began re-reading Frankl because I knew that he did not miss the role of meaning in self-actualization as Maslow did. I also began reading to see if I could understand through the lens of Frankl perhaps how Maslow missed meaning. If you haven't read *Self-Actualization Psychology*, I have a whole chapter on this subject along with my proposals as to how Maslow missed meaning. He certainly did not miss it as a theme. He put *meaning* and *meaningfulness* at the top of the pyramid—as the heart and soul of self-actualizing. But he did miss it in terms of the processes *inside* the hierarchy of needs—conditioning the needs. And yet in saying that, he did catch it, only in different terminology.

In *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* Frankl talks about Logotherapy being accounted as part of Humanistic Psychology and he quotes Maslow and Maslow's acknowledgment of "the will to meaning" as "man's primary concern." (page 29). Twice in the book, Frankl quotes Maslow's approval of his work. But never does he return the favor. Reflecting upon that stunned me. I know it shouldn't—Will Schultz didn't, Carl Rogers didn't. But I thought Frankl would. But he also did not.

And to make matters worse he misunderstood Maslow as he certainly mis-represented Maslow's hierarchy. To put the best spin on this as I can, I have to say that Frankl probably never read *Motivation and Personality* (1954) by Maslow and so just did not understand the Hierarchy of needs. Here's what he wrote:

"Maslow's motivation theory does not suffice here, for what is needed is not so much the distinction between higher and lower needs, but rather an answer to the question of whether individual goals are mere means, or meanings." (pp. 32-33)

"I thereby understand the primordial anthropological fact that being human is being always directed, and pointing, to something or someone other than oneself: to a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter, a cause to serve or a person to love. Only to the extent that someone is living out this self-transcendence of human existence, is he

truly human or does he become his true self. He becomes so, not by concerning himself with himself-actualization, but by forgetting himself and giving himself, overlooking himself and focusing outward.” (p. 35)

Here Frankl presents the choice between self-actualization and self-forgetfulness in the format of an either-or:

Not lower and higher needs distinction — but means or meanings.  
Self-actualization — or self-transcendence.

As much as I like Frankl, and in fact made Frankl’s work part of my dissertation, in re-reading his work I see that he completely misunderstood what Maslow meant by self-actualization. For Maslow, the actualizing of oneself *means* living for something bigger than oneself. What Frankl defines as “self-transcendence” Maslow called “self-actualization.” But Frankl seemed to need to make a contrast and make Maslow wrong so that he could present self-transcendence as something that went beyond self-actualization.

As Frankl continued to define self-transcendence he said that it means reaching out not only for a meaning to fulfill, but also for another human being to love. He said that we transcend ourselves by either meaning fulfillment in some work or achievement or by a loving encounter with another human being. He then wrote the following as part of the way he defined self-transcendence:

“Self-Actualization is possible only as a byproduct of self-transcendence.’ (p. 94)

But for Maslow, self-actualization is not *for* the self and not even *by* the self. He constantly wrote and emphasized that we actualize *with* and *through* others, and that we do so by finding a larger meaning in other things—contribution, justice, fairness, mathematics, music, learning, love, etc. We actualize by getting out of ourselves, forgetting ourselves, and getting lost in an engagement that completely consumes our interest and attention. It is in that way that we transcend ourselves. So for Maslow these two terms were inter-changeable, not contrasts. So by dichotomizing them, Frankl perpetuates an unfounded mis-representation of Maslow.

Frankl also criticized the Hierarchy of Needs model:

“Maslow’s hierarchy of needs appears to apply here: first one must achieve a satisfactory standard of living and only then may he approach the task of finding a purpose and meaning in life.”

But he disagreed and talked about exceptions—when someone didn’t have their lower needs met and still went after meaning. Of course, Maslow wrote about that extensively in *Motivation and Personality*. And he commented repeatedly that the Hierarchy is not as hierarchical or rigid as it might at first appear.

Upon reading Frankl I was stunned that he had to make Maslow wrong in order to highlight his contribution of the importance of meaning. Unlike Maslow, who was so inclusive and so ready to find the value and contribution of others, Frankl did not.

What I have not found in my readings and research into Maslow—not in the two biographies of him, not in his Journals, nor his Memories is *an explanation of his inclusiveness, his non-competitiveness, his willingness to embrace others who differed*, and his belief in the possibilities of others, even colleagues. I would not have thought that that leadership trait would be that rare, that unique, and that missing in the lives of other leaders. But it seems to be. And perhaps that's one of the highest qualities we need today.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #53**  
**Dec. 1, 2008**

## **MODELING MEANING AND ITS DIMENSIONS**

I mentioned in the last Meta Reflection that recently re-read Viktor Frankl's book, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* on Logotherapy. In that work Frankl writes that as the struggle for survival subsides as we learn skills for surviving and surviving well, and as the standard of living goes up all around the world, the question emerges, "Survival for what?"

"Ever more people today have *the means* to live, but no *meaning* to live for." (p. 21)

"Consider today's society; it gratifies and satisfies virtually every need—except for one, the need for meaning!"

One way that we use the term "meaning" is in terms of *meaningfulness*. Is life itself meaningful? Is your life meaningful? Frankl writes about the existential emptiness and vacuum in so many people—a vacuum that they try to fill us by making something "the meaning of life" at a lower level in the hierarchy of needs (Maslow), a level that cannot operate as "the meaning of life." Then commenting that "Man does not live by welfare alone," Frankl explores some of the substitutes for ultimate meaning, that is, the meaning of life: conformity, authority, traditions. He could have listed many other things that we see people substituting for true meaningfulness: drugs, fashion, sex, money, consumption, fame, popularity, etc.

What are you living for? Where do you search for the meaning of life? What is the focus of your search, the heart and soul of what you are living for? Frankl writes:

"If we are to bring out the human potential at its best, we must first believe in its existence and presence." (p. 30)

Do you? Do you believe in human potential at its best? Frankl, coming out of the time when Psychoanalysis and Behaviorism dominated in the field of psychology (in fact, he started out as a Psychoanalyst and valued the contributions of both disciplines) argued that both missed meaning and human potential and not only missed it, but both also had a tendency to defend against such. With Psychoanalysis, he said they view the highest and best in humans, the authentic and genuine, as "defense mechanisms"—denials, justifications, explanations. And with Behaviorism, he said they view the same as merely "conditioned responses." Neither saw or believed in *human potential at its best*.

So against that Frankl wrote that *believing* in human potential and the highest possibilities was an important first step.

Once we believe in that possibility, the next step is the task of unleashing those possibilities in human nature. So how are we to do *that*? For that Frankl primarily talked about *answering in and with one's life* the questions that Life asks of us. He says that life questions each of us. We



are questioned by circumstances, events, people, and situations. We are questioned about our heart, our understanding, our character. We are questioned about our gifts—what are we equipped to do? We are questioned about our relationships—who do we encounter and how do we respond in that encounter? We are also questioned by unchangeable events—how will we respond? How will we change ourselves, our attitudes, our heart so that we are changed by the experience?

It is in these ways that we begin to detach from ourselves and to transcend ourselves and to live for something bigger and other than ourselves. And for Frankl this was the path for a meaningful and happy life. Quoting Albert Einstein, he included this:

"The man who regards his life as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life." (p. 34)

In addition to this first use of the word “meaning,” we can use it in another very different sense. I’ve been using the word *meaning* as purpose and reason and have been talking about “the *meaning* of life,” about meaningfulness, and about living for a purpose. A second use of the word *meaning* is in the sense of a construct, as cognition, and as understanding. “What do you mean by that word?” “What does X mean to you?”

Maslow recognized the first usage of meaning and so put *meaning* in the *Being*-dimension of self-actualization, but he did not recognize the second usage of meaning. It is that second usage that I’ve put *inside* the Hierarchy of Needs which is the key factor that conditions our impulses, drives, and needs. We experience those biological impulses as filtered and conditioned by our meanings, that is, by our beliefs, understandings, memories (history), permissions and taboos, etc.

With these two dimensions of meaning, we can now understand that Maslow used *meaning* in the first sense but not in the second. That’s why, in Neuro-Semantics, as we use *meaning* in both of these ways we are now able to take the Hierarchy of Needs to the next level of development. And that enables us to integrate it with the Self-Actualization Quadrants which allows us to effectively unleash human possibilities.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #54**  
**Dec. 8, 2008**

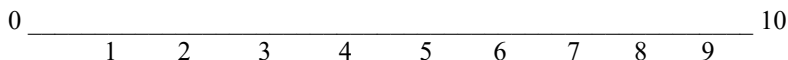
## **UP-SKILLING: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN AN ECONOMIC DOWNTURN**

This last week started with the Dow Jones Stock Market dropping 680 points. Woooo! With the roller-coaster ups and downs of stock markets all around the world, some strange and probably challenging economic times are before us. And with millions of people being laid off (made redundant), and millions of others losing major portions of their retirement (30 to 40 percent here in the USA), and with “recession” now being announced in Germany, Japan, Britain, and the USA (as well as other countries) —economic growth has shifted downward and people seem to be pulling back in terms of expenses.

If all of this sounds like bad news, there is some good news within it. The good news is that as the world changes and as the changing of the world accelerates so that there’s more uncertainty, more radical shifts, more ups and downs of markets, economics, politics, and so on—*the people who will come out through it on top will be those who are more prepared to adapt to the changes*. The good news is that flexible adaptability will become increasingly important as will the ability to learn quickly and thoroughly and to unlearn patterns that no longer serve you.

Test yourself on these qualities and competencies. Gauge yourself from 0 to 10:

- I am able to flexibly adapt to changes.
- I embrace change as inevitable and look forward to it as an exciting challenge.
- I have develop flexibility skills so that I’m among the first to embrace change.
- I have develop my learning skills so that I can learn quickly and thoroughly.
- I know how to unlearn and to release old patterns that are no longer effective.
- I am always working to expand my current skill-set of competencies.
- I know how to keep skilling-up for jobs and opportunities that don’t even exist yet.
- I think of myself as a free agent and totally responsible for my career and career development.



So how did you do? How well do you know that your worth in the marketplace and your competitive advantage there is a function of your productive capacity and performance? And if you know that, then you know that it is up to you to take charge of your career and to always be thinking about *the next level of skills* that you’ll need. You will have an eye on the coming trends.

So even if you have a great job, you know that it is a matter of wisdom to have a second one in the wings. You know that it's wise to think about your next career as the world changes. The onus is on you to understand where things are going and how you will need to market your skills in the midst of changes. It is completely your responsibility to keep gaining new skills.

Sometimes this means taking a job that pays less money so that you can put yourself somewhere where you can pick up the next set of skills you'll be needing in the future. Sometimes it means asking for new challenges in your current job simply for the purpose of expanding your skills (and get paid for it). Sometimes it means investing in your own competency development through training and coaching.

In all of this, your success and financial well-being is all about skills, competencies, and expertise. It is about your adaptability, flexibility, and accelerated learning. It is about your personal, intellectual, emotional, and creative capital and how you keep developing that capital. It is about your personal creativity and innovation. And if it is about this kind of *capacity* development, then it is also about attitude, frames of mind, and your personal meanings. It's about how you interpret things and your interpretative style.

So here's a futuristic prediction: In the future those at the top of their professions, those who adapted the changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and those who mine the times of change for resources are those who adapt, who use their mental and emotional flexibility to keep learning, to keep expanding their skill-sets, who look forward and identify their next level challenges. They were the ones who keep learning and who learn to learn faster and more thoroughly than others (meta-learning). They take on personal coaches and consultants; they invest in training, in books, in DVDs.

They are the ones who think about their marketability and know that their ability to create wealth was proportional to their ability to create and add value in the market. So they look for how to extent their skills, to become more competent in creative problem-solving, and to actualize their highest and best talents.

In the short-term, there's undoubtedly going to be more bad news of lay-offs and economic slow down. We are all connected on this planet as never before so there's a lot of leveling out as our world becomes flatter (Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat*, 2005). Yet even in the short-term, this will be good news for those of us in the business of *developing human capital, unleashing potentials, and equipping people* via coaching, training, and consulting. Those who realize that their economic future depends on their *capacity development* will be seeking you out for up-skilling. So here's to the further unleashing of your up-skilling abilities!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #55**  
**Dec. 15, 2008**

## MODELING MEANING

I wrote about two facets of meaning in the *Meta Reflection* (#53). The first facet involves the meanings we create and attribute to things and the second, the sense of meaningfulness that we experience in life regarding things. Those are two meanings of “meaning,” and two distinctions, we can make about meaning. Yet there are a lot more. A lot more!

If you’ve been to Neuro-Semantic trainings, you already know this. It’s what we regularly present. We present it when we are working with NLP framing and reframing models, Meta-Coaching, or the meta-stating process in Meta-States. We do this by making some key distinctions regarding the meanings that we make. We do this to identify the kinds and dimensions of meaning. And in this, we usually identify about 10 kinds of meanings which gives us that many dimensions of meaning.

The other day I presented this and pointed out the box of 10 levels or kinds of meanings, and later during the break one of the participants asked, “Have you modeled meaning in Neuro-Semantics?” His question stopped me in my tracks. “HmMMM, modeled meaning?” As I began wondering about that to myself, I realized that I had not. Not really. Not formally in any systematic way (well, not until now). Regarding the meaning-making process, we have several models in Neuro-Semantics:

1) First there is *the Meta-States Model* and the meaning-making process within it. Meta-States highlights that with every new mind-body state that we attach to a previous state also sets a new frame and embeds the old thoughts, ideas, feelings, understandings, etc. within the new and higher frame. It is precisely in this way that we create meaning. In this way we create layers upon layers of meanings and with every next higher level, the overall *meaning* of anything and everything shifts and changes.

It was from the Meta-States model that Neuro-Semantics has been able to identify ten kinds and dimensions of meanings which expands our choices. Knowing this enables you to ask meta-questions thereby expanding awareness, increasing mindfulness, and facilitating the emergence of new resources.

2) The Meta-States Model also informs the structure of the Mind-Lines Model. In *Mind-Lines* I came up with a new format for framing and reframing, a format about the experiential construction of meaning from some stimulus (“external behavior” EB) which leads to some state (“internal state” IS) or comes to equate to that internal state. In *Mind-Lines* I designated that equation as the “magic box” within which “meaning” arises. And, of course, that then led to the

*seven directions* that we can frame and reframe the meaning of something.

That led Bob Bodenhamer and I to put together the book *Mind-Lines: Lines for Changing Minds* in which we put the linguistic communication and persuasion model of NLP. Originally it was called “the sleight of mouth” patterns, but we felt that metaphor carried too much of the assumption of manipulation so our new title put the emphasis simply on “lines” (sentences) that inform and influence the mind.

3) Another exploration of meaning in Neuro-Semantics is the *feed-forward process* in Meta-States. In the vertical aspect of the feedback communication loop we have the meta-stating layering of meanings. That’s how it all begins. We feedback to ourselves our next level thoughts as we make our interpretations and draw our conclusions. When we then stop, at whatever level we stop at to see what difference that will make, we begin feeding-forward the frame or meta-state. That’s the feed-forward loop of communication—first in our own self-communication. When we do this with something that we “intellectually know” but do not feel and do not act on, we are essentially engaged in the Mind-to-Muscle pattern.

The Mind-to-Muscle pattern in Neuro-Semantics works with the neurology of meaning, how conceptual meaning can become neurological meaning—a neural pattern in the body that gives you a “knowing” that is deeper than what you know in your mind.

Thinking about the pieces of *meaning* and *meaning-making* that we already have in Neuro-Semantics got me thinking about modeling *meaning*.

“What would be involved in modeling something like ‘meaning?’ What would be involved in modeling the human phenomena of constructing meaning (meaning-making as a process)? What do we already know about what ‘meaning’ *is* and how to define it, and what do we not know? What have we not defined operationally yet? And what framework would we need in order to be able to understand, speak about, and work with *meaning* in all of its dimensions? Obviously *meaning* lies at the heart of what we do in Neuro-Semantics, and yet what is meaning? What theory of meaning guides and governs what we do in Neuro-Semantics?”

So as I got thinking about all of this, I returned to Korzybski and his original work. Korzybski mapped out how we use our body-minds to “abstract” from the world and create our human maps. As such he created the neuro-linguistic or neuro-semantic approach which by these words that he choice to use was an embodied approach. That is, we create meaning from the body upward. Meaning is not just a thing of the mind; it is a production that begins with our neurology. We “know” things first in our body then we translate them to our mind so that we can make what we know explicit and conscious. We holistically create meaning via our entire mind-body-emotion system. We first use our neurology, then we use our linguistics to generate our semantics— our felt sense and our understanding sense of reality.

What does this mean? For one thing, it means that *we make sense of things in life and in the world from the bottom up*. It means that *meaning is on a continuum*. We create meaning that

begins at an unconscious felt sense and experiential phenomena and then keep mining and refining that meaning until it becomes representational, linguistic, conscious, and conceptual. And if it is on a continuum, we can take a piece of 'meaning' and identify its form and structure at different levels. It means we can work with meaning at its multiple levels. It means we have a holistic framework for the construction of meaning, the quality of meaning, and the experience of meaning. And given that the quality of your life is the quality of your meanings, your ability (and mine) to construct robust and rich meaning determines the richness and robustness of life. Here's to the richness and robustness of your meaning-making skills!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #56**  
**Dec. 22, 2008**

## **SMACKED BY REALITY**

With the current economic downturn that seems to be affecting more and more of the countries around the globe I heard it announced this last week that we now have a “global recession,” and not just one in Europe or America. If you’re like me, I’ve been watching lots of the news programs about this as well as programs on the money channels and others trying to understand the current situation. And I also have a number of Meta Reflection readers who send me things.

In observing the cities here in the US that have been most affected by the sub-prime loan market, which has led to the de-valuing of the home market, to defaulting on loans, etc., the markets that have suffered the most where the markets where the home prices were the highest— California, Florida, Los Vegas and most of the major cities.

Denver here in the state of Colorado has suffered from foreclosures and a big drop in housing prices, but only 300 miles away on the other side of the Rocky Mountains, the houses in Denver are still higher than the houses here. And here, in the Grand Valley, housing prices have actually gone up during 2007 and foreclosures are almost unheard of. I have mentioned this frequently this year— when I was in Moscow doing the *Wealth Creation Training* and in other places where people ask about the economics in the US or where I live.

I encountered this a few years ago when I looked was in Sydney Australia and went out looking at properties. They were so expensive!! And yes, it was a case of “location, location, location.” And yes, only a few miles out of the Central Business District or the first residential areas like Bondi Junction, Queens Park, etc. homes were much less. And even further out, in the Blue Mountains, prices were more like what I was used to.

When I used to conduct trainings in San Diego and San Francisco, I would always check out housing prices. And they always amazed me, my thought always was, “How could anybody afford to buy here?” And I would compare those prices to the prices back home. What would pay for a very small house in San Francisco or Sydney or elsewhere would buy a mansion —a mansion here in Grand Junction. And I mean a mansion —7 bedrooms, 4 or 5 bathrooms, garages for many cars, tennis court, swimming pool, and on and on.

I remember once talking to a real estate agent and holding my hands as if miming a set of scales with “Colorado prices” in one hand and then “big city prices” in the other. “You can’t compare the two!” I was told. “But I do,” I replied, “and I certain can because I am. The same money that I could invest in this that would provide this very small place could buy a mansion back in Colorado.” So when is a house or building or business over-priced? When is it over-valued?

And what if the current de-valuing of houses in many of the big cities is simply a market correction?

When I was at the NLP Conference in London this year, I talked about these things with several people. Among them Charles Faulkner. Now if you don't know it, Charles has a background in the markets and specifically day trading and has applied NLP to trading in the markets both in his writings and some of the consultation work he does. Charles told me that it has been his opinion that the New York Stock exchange was over-valued after it reached 8500 and so when it hit 13,000 or so he pulled out all of his investments in spite of the hit he had to take on the taxes. But then again, unlike the rest of us who have suffered a 40 percent loss, his loss were minor.

Like the dot.com bust a number of years ago, perhaps that's what's happening now world-wide, what has been over-valued is now experiencing a market correction.

where



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2008 Neurons #57**  
**Dec. 22, 2008**

## SEMANTICALLY LOADED

“*Semantically loaded*” is a phrase that we use in Neuro-Semantics when we want to speak about the quantity of meaning that we invest in something. So when we ask, “How much meaning have you invested in this idea, person, experience, etc.?” we are asking about the *quantity* of meaning. This is also true when we ask, “How intense is this for you?” That’s because the more *meaning* that you invest in something, the more it *means* to you, the more you will *feel* it, the more it will drive you, the more energy it will produce, and the more it will govern your thinking, perceiving, valuing, etc.

- How much meaning have you attributed to your past experience with that person?
- How much meaning do you attribute to your past?
- How much meaning do you give to food, to eating, to eating out and socializing?

Name your subject and ask the question. Whatever the answer, it speaks about how *semantically loaded* that thought, concept, person, or experience is for you. Is it highly loaded or is it just barely loaded with meaning? Does it need more meaning? Does it need less?

Often we fail to semantically load an experience, idea, concept, etc. with enough meaning. It is “just” whatever it is and not semantically significant enough to provide the drive, the passion, and the motivation that we need. Take exercise. “It is *just* exercise.” So, how much meaning do you invest in exercise? Very much? Or is the problem with getting yourself to exercise the very fact that it means so little to you?

I think I can safely say that around the world, most people have given far too much meaning to food and eating. And during the holidays, people give even more meaning to food. And so they over-eat. They don’t over-eat to get fat. They don’t over-eat to ruin their health. They over-eat because they have a belief frame that semantically loads the food and the eating so that holding back and refusing to eat seems like, and feels like, self-denial, ascetism, even starvation. So most of us psycho-eat. That is, we eat for purposes other than health, energy, and vitality. We eat for love, reward, de-stressing, the good life, being social, following the customs, etc. When we do so, our eating is semantically loaded.

Because, as a meaning-maker you are always giving meaning to things, asking about the *quantity* or *intensity* of your meaning enables you to discover if you have invested enough or too much meaning. Knowing that, you can then adjust the amount of meaning you have attributed. Yet beyond the amount of quantity, you can also look at meaning in terms of *quality*. This gives us another set of questions:

- What is the quality of the meanings that you have invested in X?

- Is the quality of the meaning poor, low, high, rich, robust, delightful, etc.?
- Is the quality of the meaning you give to X rich and robust enough?
- Do you feel that something is meaningless, futile, or trivial?

Sometimes the problem with exercising having such low meaning and needing to be more semantically loaded isn't about the quantity of meaning but the quality. So now we can ask, "What would be the richest and most exciting meaning I could give to exercise?" If I asked you that question, would you immediately spew out 5 or 10 really great answers to that question? Or would you stutter? Would you be stopped in your steps? Would my question leave you feeling "blank?" Sometimes we just have not thought hard enough, long enough, or explored the possibilities of great enough meanings. No wonder we haven't meta-stated the experience with more meaning!

What is the quality of your meanings about food? If you load it up with a lot of rich psychological meanings like "good life," "reward," "love," etc., not only is there a *lot of meaning*, but the meanings are also rich, significant, expansive, even transcendental. No wonder the experience of eating is so semantically loaded. It has both a high quantity and quality of meanings.

How can you tell if something is semantically loaded for yourself or another person? Well, there will be a lot of emotion and affect with it! As a person talks about the experience or thought, he or she will be animated. And whether the animation is positive or negative, the key is the energy in the body, the voice, the eyes, and other expressions. That's because *emotion is how we feel meaning*. Meaning shows up in our bodies as emotions. So where there is emotion, where there is a "button" that can be pushed that "gets" us, there is meaning and semantic loadedness.

And there are other signs. Look for what the person stresses or emphasizes in language; listen for embedded words, commands, questions, and statements. These typically indicate that the person has semantically loaded those particular words. Observe also patterns— actions, gestures, words, etc. that are repeated several times typically indicates that something is semantically loaded. Repetition of repeated behaviors (patterns) indicate the loading of meaning.

So what have you semantically loaded? How did you do that? How much have you semantically loaded it? Does it work to support you and enhance your life or does it undermine and diminish you? To what extent do you, or have you, taken control of your meaning-making power of semantically loading? Do you know how? If not, then contact the nearest Neuro-Semanticist and power-up with Neuro-Semantic training or coaching with this central power of your humanity! You'll be glad you did!

To your highest and best meaning-making!