

FOURTH EDITION



NLP

AT WORK

Neuro Linguistic Programming

The Difference that
Makes the Difference

Sue Knight

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‘This book may help you to understand life more clearly’

Paul Smith, fashion designer

‘The definitive volume on the topic ... an excellent introduction ... a clear, thoughtful structure. The style of writing is realistic and practical and it is easy to become immersed in the book’

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NLP World



Sue Knight was the first to use NLP to improve the quality of the business world and is a leading international consultant and speaker. She provides public courses for NLP certification, in-company leadership development and training, offers one-to-one performance coaching, and is a sought-after conference speaker. She works across the world, especially in Europe and India.

NLP at Work

The Difference That Makes the Difference

Fourth Edition

SUE KNIGHT



NICHOLAS BREALEY
PUBLISHING
London • Boston

To my beautiful grandchildren. Wishing you a world to be proud of.

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Taking your learning further

Preface to the Fourth Edition

I could never have imagined the journey that this book would take me on when I was first invited to write it 25 years ago. And so much has happened in that time. Who would have thought that in my seventies, when most people of my age have retired, I would be embarking on a fourth edition and exploring how I could capture all that is important today? It seems as if the world has shifted on its axis – there is so much turbulence, so much violence. As I write this, I am deeply saddened reading about the fires in the Amazon. We face a time of huge challenge if we are to be able leave a rich legacy for our children and grandchildren. I have sought to build communities of like-minded learners around the world; people who recognize that we are inextricably linked one with the other and that we are merely passengers on this remarkable planet that we are allowed to travel on for a moment in time. Change is inevitable. It is tempting to think that all should stay the same, and yet we live in a world of constant change. The question is – can we embrace those changes and respond in a way that ensures we remain whole and respectful of all that we have and all that we wish to preserve for future generations?

The book scouts out the territory for me in advance. It goes out to countries to which I have never been, and to ones I have been to or will shortly go to – countries such as India, France, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Spain, Turkey, Madagascar, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, Greece, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and, now imminently, Oman, Saudi Arabia and South Korea. The book's success around the world has confirmed for me that NLP can bring people together and facilitate cross-cultural learning. It is indeed about 'the difference that makes the difference' and how we can learn from that difference rather than it being a source of fear, mistrust and hatred.

And my life is so very, very different. I live alone now, in France in a remarkable rural community where people support one another in every possible way (not only with the wonderful food that is shared between us all). My sons are adults, one living in the UK (having now left the Royal Marines where he was decorated and honoured for his service) with his wife and my amazing grandchildren, and the other in New Zealand where he is completing his studies on genetics and wildlife conservation and also learning to fly! I cycle still and refuse to acknowledge that age has any limitations. I recently cycled through Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand with my younger son, and I will soon be cycling through Tamil Nadu in Southern India. And I have resurrected my love of cooking, and it has become a passion and a meditation. I believe that movement is key, so Feldenkrais (based on the work by Moshe Feldenkrais – Awareness through Movement) and yoga, especially when I am in India, are vital for my health. I mention Feldenkrais in parts of this book.

I feel that my learning with NLP helps me through all the challenges in life. And through my training sessions many people know me and what goes on in my life. Consequently, I have put an even more personal slant on this edition. I use my life examples as a source of learning on my programmes, so I am mirroring that in the examples I have chosen to use in this edition.

And there is a new chapter – Metamessages. This appeared in an earlier edition and when I took it out readers told me it was one of the most useful so here it is again in the current edition. As is so often the case, it is one of those areas that I draw on so frequently in my work that I was taking it for granted. I have revised and updated all the chapters, though some more than others. For example, Provocative Coaching (based on Provocative Therapy with Frank Farrelly) is a huge part of the way that I work now. I think that since Frank died in 2013 he has invaded me! I certainly aim to live out his legacy, and I have added a lot about his ideas in [Chapter 23](#), Coaching with humour (Provocative Coaching). And maybe, just maybe, I will write a book exclusively on that one day soon.

Most of my work consists of the open training programmes plus quite a lot of online one-on-one coaching which I can conduct from any part of the world. I have moved into some significant charitable work with people in the townships in South Africa, with a homeless charity in the UK (one that seeks not just to put a roof over people's heads but to coach them back to a self-supporting life), and with women who are finding their voice in the world (so many of the ones I interact with are in India). I will support them till I die. In Mumbai I take my delegates to visit the slums in Dharavi and for everyone that is an eye opener, not usually in the way they expect. I have many delegates who work with children and teachers and parents. This is the future (assuming we have the time on this earth for this to evolve). This book is my background material, and the result is that most of my delegates come to me understanding my take on NLP and the way that I teach it. I recognize, too, that many NLP trainers use it as their course material and recommend it to their clients. I am so grateful for that.

It is like taking a step back in time to write a new edition, and I am confronted with what is happening in the world and our move towards technology in the form of artificial intelligence, the use of social media to influence huge swathes of the population, the rise of extremism in politics, and the seemingly prevalent trait for many politicians to view the world myopically. It seems that people like Greta Thunberg (the young Swede campaigning for the environment) are beginning to take things into their own hands. And I am so glad for that. If nothing else, the troubles in the world are waking us all up to the responsibility we have to act. And that is the essence of NLP – to act and to learn.

What I want for you with this book is a sense of the possible where previously there was none, a feeling of wonder and mystery and the logically inexplicable, and that there is always more to learn. If you finish the book with more questions than answers, if you find yourself seeking and discovering outstanding talent in the most unexpected of places, if you attract people and opportunities significantly more than before, if you find a way of moving the world in the direction of good and unity, if you find that you are increasingly appreciating being in the 'now' and if you are inspired

to know and experience more, then I will feel it will have been a job well done.

And if you learn as much as I have in this magical realm and if your life becomes as rich as mine as a result, I think that you will feel truly blessed. I hope this book inspires you to work towards a great world filled with love and fun and learning.

Sue Knight

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Details of all my work are on my website: www.sueknight.com You can contact me at any time.

1 What is NLP?

Your beliefs become your thoughts; your thoughts become your words; your words become your habits; your habits become your values; your values become your destiny.

Mahatma Gandhi

Neuro linguistic programming (NLP) is the study of the structure of subjective experience. The study of excellence is a subset of that. I avoided using that full and original definition in previous editions for fear that, as the first line of [Chapter 1](#), it might put people off, as it nearly did when I heard it on my very first NLP training! It is, however, very important because it embraces all our experience ‘good and bad’. So, for example, in the context of coaching we can study and discover how people do sabotage themselves and create a pattern of problems. However, the overall search is for the unique excellence that exists within each of us.

With NLP we discover our unique excellence

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing it is stupid.

Albert Einstein

NLP is an attitude of learning, curiosity and respect for unique ways of being in the world. At the heart there is no good or bad in our ways of being – there is structure. And when we find that structure we have the choice to enrich the way we are, to change the way we are or to stay much the same. These words are so easy to write and yet so, so challenging to really live out. This is what this learning is all about – the ‘how’ to do just that.

Over the years NLP has uncovered an increasing number of tools and techniques for discovering what works. In particular, it is a means of finding the essence of that excellence – the difference that makes the difference – and doing so in such a way that it can be coded and reproduced. We can have excellence at our fingertips, available whenever we choose. As a result, we can coach ourselves and others to consistently achieve the results that we want for ourselves, our business and our life.

NLP is a means of finding the essence of excellence

What is neuro linguistic programming?

Neuro linguistic programming (NLP) is a process of studying (modelling) the conscious and unconscious patterns that are unique to each of us in such a way that we are continuously moving towards a higher potential. NLP is not a thing – it is the study of what works, especially of what works well. What is there not to like about that?

We learn habits – some good, some bad

- **Neuro** refers to our brain and our physiology. We learn habits, some of which we need to get by in life: how to walk and talk, how to breathe, how to drive, how to ride a bike, how to eat, how to laugh and cry, and how to feel the way that we do. Most of our habits are stored in our unconscious mind and our muscles. Some will be for the better and some will be for the worse. By increasing our awareness of the patterns in our thinking and movement, we can learn how we are influencing the results we are getting in work and in life more generally. The key to finding personal and business success comes from within ourselves; learning about how we think and act enables us to find the answers we need. And sometimes the key lies in

learning to let go of thinking and in learning to move in the way we were designed and just being.

- **Linguistic** refers to the language that we use to communicate with ourselves and others. We typically think of our verbal language, but we also have our non-verbal language, which is a 'language' of its own communicating important messages. Our language is an expression of our life. What we can say is what we can think and what we can do. Learning to understand and master the structure of our language is essential in a world where communication in all its various forms is the lifeblood of our personal and business welfare.
- **Programming** is the way in which we put these patterns of thinking, language and behaviour together to get the results that we do – good and bad. We run our lives by strategies, in a similar way that a computer uses a program to achieve a specific result. By understanding those strategies we give ourselves choice: choice to do more of the same or choice to enhance our potential and our individual excellence. In essence, NLP is the study of our thinking, behaviour and language patterns to help us build sets of strategies for everything we do – for making decisions, building relationships, starting up a business, coaching a team of people, inspiring and motivating others, creating balance in our lives, negotiating our way through the day and, above all, learning how to learn. The good news is that we can learn how to refine our existing strategies as well as discovering new ones and even discarding those that are redundant. The bad news is that, for the most part, the critical pieces of these strategies are outside our conscious awareness. We do not know what we do or how we do it.

We run our lives by strategies

One of the definitions of NLP I relate to the most was written by one of the founders of NLP: 'NLP is an attitude and a methodology that leaves behind a trail of techniques ... It's an attitude that has to do with curiosity, with wanting to know about things, wanting to be

able to influence things, and wanting to be able to influence them in a way that's worthwhile.' With NLP, we can unpack not only the conscious elements but especially the unconscious ones, so that we can learn how we do what we do. This allows us to do what we really want and achieve what we deserve.

I have long relied on the advice given by Merlin in *The Once and Future King* by T.H. White: that if you are ever sad or low (and even if you are not), the best thing you can do is learn something new. I have learned French and Malayalam, how to climb hills on my bike, how to cook the food of different countries, creative writing and the Feldenkrais method. I have learnt to let go, to commit, to forgive and to be happy alone. And at a crossroads in my life, I started to learn NLP and continue to learn NLP. And there is always more to discover.

The relevance of NLP

NLP will continue to increase in relevance as we embrace new cultures, break new ground, challenge traditional ways of doing things and embrace those traditions where appropriate.

NLP will always be relevant as it is the study of what works!

We need to learn how to use new technology in ways that are creative and different. If you do what you always did, you get what you always got. And it is the combination of 'thinking about thinking' and technology that sets the new breed of leaders and independent business owners apart from the rest. There is nothing else in the world of human development and learning as powerful as NLP. Emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, mindfulness and various other concepts are derivatives of the NLP process.

NLP enables us to go beyond the details - to create working models that provide the formulae for success in every context in which we operate. Modelling what works for

ourselves and others enables us to find the most efficient strategies to do this. It is the key to success and if you read the feedback and the reviews of models on my website www.sueknight.com, you will see this success over and over again.

We live in a world of unprecedented change. We are immersed in unpredictability and complexity. The more we discover, the more there is to discover. Every question reveals yet more questions. We need skills and attitudes to help us learn how to make sense of this chaos. When everything around us may seem to challenge who we are, we need to know how to find certainty within ourselves about what we want and what we believe. We need to take care of ourselves and stand alone in our self-assurance and empathy for others, yet we sometimes need to be able to show others our vulnerability and ask for help. We need to know how to pick ourselves up when we are down, to learn from uncertainty and disappointment, to shape our direction and even to be prepared to lose everything.

We need the capacity to move more quickly than ever before and at the same time to stand still and drink in the richness of the moment. We need to know how to communicate with people of vastly different cultures and, more than anything, how to communicate with ourselves. We need to understand others' perceptions even if they are poles apart from ours; and we need to listen to the wisdom of our own bodies.

We need to know how to laugh, to let go, to learn, to grow, to mourn, and to move on. We need humility and graciousness and the strength to absorb our own and others' inconsistencies. We need the resilience to remain in situations that cause us pain and to be able to find the joy in everything and everyone. We need to know how to act in the face of evil. We need to be able to distinguish the good from the bad. We need to know how to find the excellence that is within us all and to celebrate it with every part of our heart and soul. We need to forgive others, but first we must forgive ourselves. We need to know how to forget, and we need to allow ourselves and

others to be who they truly are. We need to learn as we have never learned before. And, above all, we need to love.

Above all, we need to love

Love is the only force capable of turning an enemy into a friend.

Martin Luther King

How can we achieve all this? In some ways the answer is a paradox. Far from embarking on courses of accelerated learning and speed reading to be able to learn faster, we need to look within ourselves and find our unique resources. In this way we can develop our own formulae for success. We need to know how to learn from every situation, every person and every intuition.

There is so much to learn in both technology and personal development that it is impossible for anyone to learn everything. It is our ability to manage our thinking, our conflicts and our experience that will ultimately make the difference between those who will lead the way into an exciting, creative and cooperative future, and those who will rapidly fall by the wayside as they attempt to follow. This is what we can learn with NLP.

What can you gain from this book?

Success comes from within. Our success depends on our ability to be excellent in everything we think, say and do. NLP provides us with a way to achieve this excellence.

By mastering the concepts in this book and making them your own, you will discover the essence of your own and others' excellence. You will achieve more of what you really want and become more of who you truly are.

Excellence is context specific

Excellence is context specific. Many business models fail because they assume that what works in one environment will work in another, yet what makes a leading entrepreneur in one environment may be quite different from what constitutes success in another. NLP is a means of coding experience and enhancing it so that you can establish what really works for you in your environment and with your skills.

More specifically, NLP can support you in learning how to:

- discover the structure of your excellence so that you can tap into that in whatever context you choose
- learn how to bring out that excellence in others
- accelerate your ability to learn so that you can not only manage change but initiate and embrace it, enabling you to excel in your particular specialism and field of work
- learn how to laugh at situations with others in ways that create healing and learning.
- discover how you relate to and use time, and make choices that will enable you to experience time as you want
- learn how to listen with respect and naivety in a way that allows you to truly learn about others and their needs and wants
- continually develop new ways of thinking that support you whatever the changes in the external world
- let go of old, traditional patterns and habits that constrict your growth and release hidden talents that are appropriate today
- embrace feedback in a way that enables you to develop new ideas and products with the involvement of all your customers, colleagues and friends
- set compelling outcomes for yourself, ones that by their very nature take on a momentum of their own and maximize the chances that you will achieve what you want, both personally and for your business
- develop formulae for yourself to enable you to respond to, and more importantly take a lead in, this rapidly evolving world so that you combine the best of new thinking with awareness of yourself and others

- build high-quality relationships with significant people in all contexts of your life
- heighten your awareness of yourself and others, so that you are sensitive to the subtle shifts in behaviour and attitude that provide feedback on the effects of the way you communicate
- develop your flexibility so that you have more choices and consequently more influence over the situations in your life
- improve your ability to generate commitment, cooperation and enthusiasm in the people around you
- manage your thoughts and feelings so that you are in control of your emotions and your destiny.
- develop your ability to tap into your unconscious mind and draw on its superior power and potential
- accept and love whatever you have, and in so doing love yourself and others in a way that transforms your business and your life.

You will find your own applications and your own formulae for success – that is the real joy and power of NLP. In business especially, NLP is the difference that makes the difference in personal and business coherence, communication, strategic thinking, e-business, motivation, influence, negotiation, leadership, entrepreneurship, self-development ... the list is endless.

Overall, the purpose of learning NLP is to generate further learning and to be the best you can be. If you want readymade answers, NLP is not for you.

How does NLP work?

NLP pays very little attention to what people say they do, as that usually bears very little or no resemblance to what they actually do. You might think that by asking exemplars how they succeed you would get precise answers. You would be wrong! The key to success is often unknown at the conscious level. Being able to access the previously unknown pieces is sometimes referred to as the ‘magic’ of NLP. It is not magic, merely an awareness of what really makes the difference that is so often missing in more traditional models and

techniques. Using the tools of NLP you can elicit these unknown pieces so that you can 'code' talent.

There will be things you do that you do not (yet) understand. Do you know, for example:

- How it is that in some situations you have moments of brilliance yet you can't reproduce them whenever you want?
- How it is that sometimes you bring out the best in others yet at others seem only to trigger the worst?
- What you do that is different in those relationships where you have exquisite rapport, where you know what the other person is going to say before they say it?
- How you control your feelings in some situations when in others you lose control?
- In those situations where you feel especially confident, how you generate that inner feeling of calm and certainty even when everything is stacked against you?
- How you attract people who want to be around you in work and life?
- How it is that some of your remote communications achieve as much if not more than face-to-face conversations?
- What it is about the way you use technology at those times that influences people to want to do business with you?
- How it is that sometimes everything you do seems just right, you feel at one with yourself and you achieve new personal bests?
- What happens at those times when you are able to shift gear to a more successful way of being so that you achieve more than you previously dreamed was possible?

When you know the answers to these questions and others like them, you begin to have more choice over the way you think, feel and behave. You have more influence over the way you respond to your unique calling in the world.

References

John Grinder & Judith DeLozier (1996) *Turtles All the Way Down: Prerequisites to Personal Genius*, Metamorphous Press.

T. H. White (2001) *The Once and Future King* (new edn), Voyager.

William James is usually considered the father of American psychology. He was once invited to deliver a series of lectures at Harvard on a topic of his choosing. These lectures were presented on the green and were special in that they were open to the public. After some deliberation, he chose boldly and the title for his first presentation was 'Can One Prove the Existence of God?', a topic sure to raise eyebrows in the early part of [the twentieth] century in New England.

Thus, it was with some trepidation that he watched the audience file into the lecture hall and, sure enough, at the very last moment, a little old lady rushed down the center aisle and deposited herself front row center. Professor James presented his topic with his usual wit and charm. He noted as he worked his way through his lecture that the little old lady was very attentive and seemed to be enjoying herself – he did mark the fact that she seemed to laugh when no one else did. Nevertheless, all seemed quite in order.

At the end of the presentation, which was very well received, the inevitable queue formed. And, of course, at the end of the queue was the little old lady. When her turn came, she looked up brightly at James and said: 'Dr. James, I very much enjoyed your lecture. But I do still have one question.'

'Please, Madam, ask your question!' returned William James courteously.

'Well, Dr. James,' she replied with a glint in her eye. 'If there's no God, what keeps the earth from falling down?'

James quickly reviewed his options ... he considered such explanatory notions as centripetal force, gravitational systems ... but wisely chose to respond in such a way as to learn something from this woman. Turning his attention back to her, he said, 'Madam, I would be happy to answer your question, but tell me what it is that you believe that keeps the earth from falling down?'

'Why that's very simple, Dr. James, the earth is resting on the back of a gigantic turtle!'

James mused to himself over her extraordinary response for a moment and then with a hint of triumph in his voice asked the obvious question. 'Then pray tell me, Madam, what keeps this gigantic turtle from falling down?'

'No, no, no Dr. James!' replied the little old lady. 'You can't get me there ... it's turtles all the way down!'

Taken with permission from the Preface to Turtles All the Way Down by John Grinder and Judith DeLozier.

| Part I

The Elements of NLP

NLP brings together many techniques that have been around for years and combines them with discoveries that are new. It is both the study of masters of change, some of whom are no longer alive, and a recognition of the talents that exist within each person today. NLP is a journey of discovery. It is always relevant because it is a study of what works whatever the context.

NLP didn't evolve in a neat chronological sequence; it exploded into the world of therapy and then did the same in the world of business. And it continues to grow in part because it is an evolving subject. The form that is common to all living systems is that they make themselves. They are produced by particular elements and in turn produce other elements. Take a compost heap, the beauty of which is that it exists to support the production of the very things that make it work. We put biodegradable material on the compost and that in turn is used to fertilize the production of more of that very same material – plants. This is how a living system works and this is how NLP works. It is used to 'produce' more of the elements that in turn feed the whole process of modelling.

NLP continues to grow

NLP produces the elements that in turn feed the modelling process

Rapport is a good example of this. When John Grinder and Richard Bandler first studied great exemplars in the world of hypnotherapy, they discovered that one of the things that made the difference was the quality of the rapport these therapists created with their clients. The knowledge they gained about building rapport was then used to enhance the process of modelling itself by enabling the modellers to build a trusting and respectful relationship with their clients, thereby increasing the speed and effectiveness of the whole modelling process.

When I wrote the first edition of this book, my publisher and I discussed in detail how I could structure the subject in a way that would enable the reader to quickly grasp the elements and begin to appreciate and experience the power of the whole. I experimented with many approaches before we decided to use the name 'neuro

linguistic programming’ as the basis for the structure. But that’s easier said than done!

The elements of NLP don’t fit perfectly into the categories of **Neuro**, **Linguistic** and **Programming**. Nevertheless, these headings act as useful umbrellas under which to introduce the subject. The feedback I have received over time is that readers have found this structure helpful, and so I have continued with it and expanded the content of each section.

I have chosen those pieces of the subject that I believe serve as a useful introduction and are most relevant to work and our rapidly evolving world. I have written both an easy introduction to NLP and source documents for those who want support for their coaching and training; indeed, this book contains the material that forms the basis of my own NLP training. In the last few years many NLP trainers have told me that they use the book as their reference material for courses and, with this in mind, I include steps for utilizing the skills discussed in all of the chapters.

Neuro

The first section is ‘Neuro’. Neuro is to do with the way we use our minds, our bodies and our senses to think and make sense of our experience. The more awareness we have of our thinking patterns, the more flexibility and therefore the more influence we have over our experience and our destiny.

NLP gives us the ‘how’

I start this section with [Chapter 2](#), Thinking patterns. The discovery of the unique ways in which we think opened the doors to many of the models for change covered in the subsequent parts of the book. Many books encourage you to ‘think positively’, to ‘stay calm’, to ‘keep control’. NLP is much more than this, offering ‘how’ to achieve these results.

NLP is ‘thinking about thinking’, and this chapter in particular will help you expand your thinking power. NLP does this not by

prescribing fixed techniques that work for some, but by enabling you to explore what it is that you do when you ‘think positively’, ‘stay calm’ and ‘keep control’. And it enables you to explore what you do when you ‘get stressed’, ‘wake anxious’, ‘feel demotivated’.

When you know what you do, you can do what. you want. (I repeat this line often in this book and with good reason!)

You have your own unique ways of accessing and using these kinds of resources, no matter how infrequently or how briefly you may have used them in the past. Once you understand the elements of your personal ‘program’, you can distil it down into the essence of all that is needed for it to work and run that program when you choose. This chapter will raise your awareness of how you do what you do, a stepping stone to personal mastery. Increasingly, you will find that leadership models and models for change talk about mental maps. With NLP you can discover the nature of your own mental map and how it influences everything you do.

You can learn how you do what you do

Also, in the Neuro section is [Chapter 3](#), Filters on your world. The filters through which we experience the world govern our perception of situations and of people. By recognizing these filters, we can capture what it is that we and others are doing and thinking in achieving the results we do. And we can understand more about our ability to relate to the unique styles of others. For example, have you ever noticed how in meetings some people talk about what is different about ideas and proposals, whereas others search for what they like and how these ideas compare to other similar ones? And have you ever experienced people who are inspired by a vision of the future trying to get through to others who want to dwell on the problems? We need to learn how to accept all the differences and similarities that exist between us if we are ever to live in a unified world.

We need to learn how to accept differences and similarities to live in a unified world

Chapter 4, Thinking with your body, is a central part of NLP and still draws the greatest interest in those embarking on this study of human behaviour. This is an important chapter, as so many people have come across more traditional theories of body language where, as examples, scratching your nose means that you are lying and folding your arms means that you are being defensive. NLP offers a very different kind of understanding, one that is unique to the individual and respectful of the person. It does not put gestures into predetermined boxes, but enables us to develop the subtlety of calibrating our own body language and that of each person we meet, no matter what the context of the communication. In this chapter you will learn how to recognize different patterns in behaviour and consequently different patterns in thinking. In this way you can improve how you communicate with anyone in any situation.

Linguistic

Under the 'Linguistic' heading are chapters on enriched communication, metaphor, precision questions and hypnotic language, clean questions and a reintroduced topic – metamessages. This addition is significant. I realize that I am conscious of metamessages (the message behind the message) in so many aspects of my work and yet I omitted it in the Third Edition. Unconsciously we are always an example of something; the key questions are whether we are aware of the example we are giving to the world and whether that example is what we would choose it to be! Understanding this bigger message and how we can be the example we want is the subject of this chapter. The ability to walk the talk is in my experience very much the difference that makes the difference. So the chapter on metamessages is back! (Well, it never really went away but is back in the book.)

The ways of using language to facilitate change formed a large part of the early work of John Grinder and Richard Bandler, the founders of NLP. In business, language is one of the most readily available forms of influence. When you are aware of your language patterns you can use each of your senses to enrich your language

and bring it alive. With precision questions you can learn how to generate quality information, the lifeblood of business. Precision questions are also undoubtedly one of the most powerful tools for challenging the constraints that we create for ourselves. Precision questions exist to reconnect us with our sensory experience and our truth.

The section of this book on language now covers the remarkable range of questions and premises on which we can work both with ourselves and others to discover the excellence that exists and to facilitate change. The questions are not reserved for the world of coaching and change. Learning language patterns and ways of responding to them will support you in achieving the results you want in the way you communicate, build relationships, lead, present, negotiate, manage conflict, show respect, learn and, of course, model ... as well as much, much more.

In my initial quest to promote NLP in the world of business, I played down the role of hypnotic language. I wanted to concentrate on how we could make the unconscious conscious, rather than promoting the use of working with trance. I have since moved on. Business has also moved on, and I think that there is now a much greater understanding that hypnotism is more than a stage performance. My aim in this chapter is to help you realize just how much we are influenced by the hypnotic language that is around us every day, and how sometimes it is used to achieve ill-gotten gains. We are being subjected to hypnotic suggestions through the media, via people in power and often by people who are unskilfully using it without realizing what they are doing. Through this awareness we can learn to use this language to achieve the results that we want. Many of the techniques that are essential to business and our personal development rely on our willingness to draw on our unconscious mind, and hypnotic language is a way to work with that.

Programming

The Programming section of the book reflects the increasing importance and interest in this, the heart of NLP. The awareness of NLP has mushroomed since the Third Edition. Most people I speak to now have heard of it and have either had some exposure to it themselves or they know someone who has. I have more delegates for advanced levels of training than ever before. I have trained representatives of my work and the way that I do it in many countries – in India especially but also South Africa, Greece, Qatar, France and in the UK, of course. In the last year alone (at the time of writing in 2019) and in the coming year the places I have or will work in include Mumbai, Cherai, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Santorini, Athens, Muscat, Senegal, Auckland, Henley-on-Thames, Rotherham, Manchester and Ibiza. Most major companies have a significant population of NLP practitioners and master practitioners. The level at which I start my training is well beyond what I would have done some years ago. So, the realization that modelling is really what NLP is all about is increasingly reflected in my work and in the chapters on Modelling, Strategies for successful living, and the TOTE model.

The development of NLP internationally has grown exponentially. It has been and still is my aim to create and support communities of this learning and teaching around the world. Many of the people who train with me consistently are those who head up these communities. I have listed them at the end of this book.

I had feedback that many readers did not really get the significance of the TOTE model, included here in [Chapter 12](#), so I rewrote it for the Third Edition and I now often get feedback that those who didn't understand it before now do. It is too important for it not to be understood. It is at the heart of how we can live a healthy (in all senses of the word) life.

All of the elements of NLP can be used in different ways. As independent techniques they will enable you to improve the quality of your relationships and gain greater control and choice over the way you live your life and the results you achieve. Additionally, even though many of these elements were discovered through the process of coding excellence, they are now also used to enhance the

quality of the coding process itself. For example, your awareness and understanding of the finer distinctions in language and behaviour will enable you to elicit and refine the difference that makes the difference in the models of excellence you choose to study.

There are many ways of teaching NLP. There was a time when I knew most of the NLP trainers running certification courses. There are now thousands, with a multitude of styles and emphases. What I have aimed to do in this book is accurately to reflect my own very personal style and my passion for the integrity and accessibility of NLP. I have been described as an NLP junkie, in that I don't just write about NLP and teach it, I aim to live it – and by and large I do and it has served me very well. Many say I live the dream and I believe I do. I have included more of my own stories in this edition. I hope you find them interesting, amusing and, above all, a source of learning.

Neuro

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind.

Albert Einstein

We cannot change other people; we can only change ourselves. Our environment is tempered by our mental models. There are some people who see only the good in others. They have no representation for bad. In their world, bad doesn't exist.

Our thoughts leak out in everything we do, often in ways that are outside our conscious awareness. These thoughts send out signals to the world about what we want, what we believe and who we are. And the world responds to those signals. Consequently, the key to influencing the responses is to change the inner signals.

Learn to manage your mind

NLP offers us the opportunity to manage these inner representations and signals. In doing so, we begin to tap into the potential of the world's most powerful computer – our mind. By learning how to manage our thoughts we can:

- change our experience of situations and people
- influence the reactions we get
- hold memories in a way that supports the person we want to be
- create the future we want
- build the relationships we would really like

- discover the thinking that releases our unique excellence.

That list is only for starters. We can learn to manage our mind in ways that work for us and help us lead the life we are meant to lead.

On my recent bike tour of Tamil Nadu in the south of India, our group of Lycra-clad cyclists travelled through some of the region's most remote villages. I was reminded of the story of Magellan's explorers sailing along the shores of Tierra del Fuego in Argentina: the Spanish galleons were dismissed by locals as an apparition because they could not make sense of the unfamiliar sight in front of them. Judging by the shocked looks on the faces of some of the villagers we passed, we seemed to inspire much the same response.

2 Thinking patterns

Our achievements of today are but the sum total of our thoughts of yesterday. We are today where the thoughts of yesterday have brought us and we will be tomorrow where the thoughts of today take us.

Blaise Pascal

The structure of our experience exists to a large degree in how we think. What we think influences how we act. So learning to identify how our thinking is shaping our actions enables us to unpack and understand how we are creating the life that we have – upsides and downsides.

And, in particular, learning to recognize how we think gives us the ability to reproduce not only others' talents but our own. With the awareness that we can develop with NLP, we turn what might have seemed like 'luck' into choreographed success.

Learning how we think enables us to understand and relate to the many different cultures with which we come into contact. Most of the teams with whom I consult are multicultural, and even when team members originate from the same country and speak the same language, each person still has their own unique language and personal culture. We can learn to recognize, respect, accept and relate to these unique styles and in so doing navigate our way successfully through the diversities of the global network of which we are a part.

We can learn to relate to all cultures

By exploring the structure of how we think and how others think and act, we can begin to understand the subtleties of these different

cultures. We can do this as we encounter them; we do not need to research for months in advance. The value of learning NLP is that we use it in real time.

We often only learn what is important by noticing others reactions. I have worked for over 14 years in India now, spending between two and three months there every time. I have friends who have educated me in so many aspects of Indian life and yet from time to time still I notice reactions that make me question what is happening. For example, as well as regular chairs we have large Indian floor cushions in my programmes. So many people are so used to sitting on the floor cross-legged that to expect them to sit on an upright chair is counter to their natural choice. These large cushions are at the front of the training room, and I saw several Indian delegates recoil when they saw one of the European delegates stand on one of the cushions. They said nothing. I asked them what had happened. They explained that those cushions were seats of learning and God is in the learning. This is similar to the Indian custom of never putting a book on the floor and certainly never putting one's feet anywhere near it. To notice is to learn.

The connections we make and the way we represent memories, ideas and information are unique to each one of us. Everyone has their own way of thinking. When we understand the nature of our representations, we begin to influence our thinking, our emotions and consequently our experience. What we think is a representation of who we are.

What we think is a representation of who we are

We take in information through all the senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. We represent this information in our mind as a combination of sensory systems and inner feelings. These thinking patterns are a part of how we 'code' our experience. By learning to manage our thoughts, we learn how to create the life and career we want for ourselves. Life is literally what we make it.

Life is what we make it

Preferences in thinking patterns

Let's explore some differences in thinking patterns. Think of 'coffee'. What comes to mind?

A picture? Maybe you imagined coffee cups and a coffee maker?

Or maybe you heard the hiss of the coffee machine? Or the noise of the coffee being poured into the cup?

Then again, maybe it was more of a feeling? The feel of the coffee cup, perhaps? Or the feeling of relief you associate with your morning coffee break? Or the taste or aroma of the coffee?

Possibly it was a combination of some or all of these.

These different ways of thinking are:

- **Visual** We think in pictures. We represent ideas, memory and imagination as mental images, for example a picture of a cup of coffee.
- **Auditory** We think in sounds. These sounds could be voices or noises, for example the sound of a coffee machine.
- **Feelings** We represent thoughts as feelings, either internal emotions or the thought of a physical touch. We can include taste and smell in this category of feelings, the taste of the coffee, for example, or the aroma.



You will find that you have a preference for some systems over others, both in the way you think and in the way you communicate.

When we are relating to the world at large it helps if we appeal to all the senses. In this way we connect with all the preferences of our readers, our listeners, our viewers and our potential clients. At the time of writing there is a backlash against some e-business

propositions, and yet there is also a boom in interest in ‘clicks and mortar’ businesses. These are established high-street businesses (the mortar) that have developed ways of attracting people to their premises through the web (mouse clicks). Given what we know about our need to appeal to all senses, this is not surprising. The combination of the technology with a physical outlet appeals to both our intellectual and our physical needs. So people are currently more likely to search for what they want on the web but follow through with a visit to a store where they can see, hold, touch and talk through the items they want to buy.

Is it any surprise that communication is one of the most widely spoken about problems in business? Consider the level of frustration so many people express with the meetings they attend. Even when an objective is agreed, it is likely that each person at the meeting will represent a successful conclusion in a different way. For example, outcomes could be expressed in the following ways:

- **Visual** An image of all the agreed proposals written up on a whiteboard with names against each one.
- **Auditory** People talking to each other at the close of the meeting, making comments such as: ‘That’s been really useful. I know exactly what my department has to do next.’
- **Feelings** Thoughts about shaking hands with other people at the meeting and a satisfied, warm feeling.

The ability to offer choice has become a key differentiator in business

The ability to offer choice has become a key differentiator in business. We can choose the layout of our home page on the web, the colour of the displays. We can choose how we want our orders sent to us in the post. We can choose what extras we want to pay for when we book travel tickets. To do so we need to understand the way our customers think, even if they themselves do not consciously know (and they often don’t). This awareness of unconscious need is becoming much more important than the information that we gain from standard customer surveys. We don’t know what we don’t

know! We need to be able to offer choices that our customers only realize are important to them as they experience the difference.

Our eye movements contain clues to how we think

A clue to the way we think is in how we move our eyes. For example, is there someone near you now who considers themselves a good speller? Ask them to spell 'phenomenon' without writing it down. Watch their eyes as they do so. If they are really skilled, ask them to spell 'phenomenon' backwards. Good spellers will typically look up, eyes right or eyes left, to see the word in their mind's eye. (Some may look straight ahead but in a defocused way.) Because they can 'see' the word written out, they have no difficulty in spelling it backwards. It is as if it is there on the page in front of them.



Did your school teacher ever say to you, 'You won't find the answer on the ceiling'? The truth is that you probably would!

Your eyes are an indication of how you are thinking. I have come across managers who, when interviewing candidates for a job, have been suspicious of people who break eye contact. The implication for them is that they may very likely have recruited people who do not think!

Details of all the eye movements and their meaning can be found in [Chapter 4](#), Thinking with your body.

Finer distinctions in thinking

Within each of the main thinking patterns of visual, auditory and feelings there are finer distinctions, for example the colour and clarity of an image, the tone and volume of a sound, the strength and location of a feeling. People who can influence their emotions and their experience have the ability to choose these fine distinctions in their thinking. Learning to exercise and extend your range of thinking patterns leads to mental agility, just as physical exercise leads to bodily flexibility.

You return home and walk into the kitchen area. The working surfaces are clean and white. On one surface is a blue ceramic bowl filled with fruit - vivid green apples, purple grapes and several bright yellow lemons. You pick up one of the lemons and feel the textured surface with your fingertips. You raise it to your nose and smell the sharp aroma. Also on the surface is a sharp kitchen knife and a wooden chopping board. You place the lemon on the board and slice through the middle of it. A fine mist of lemon juice sprays into the air. You pick up one half of the lemon and see the defined segments and pips, some of them cut through. You raise this half to your mouth; the sharp aroma is even stronger now. You sink your teeth into the skin.

How is the saliva flow in your mouth now? This is the power of thought. The way you think affects your internal state, which in turn triggers a physical reaction, in this case saliva flow. Your mind does not distinguish between what is imagined and what is real.

Mind and body are one

For example:

Jim often had to give presentations as part of his work. Although he felt comfortable in one-to-one meetings, whenever he had to present to groups of half a dozen or

more he felt anxious, tense and nervous. It was worse if he knew about the presentation several days in advance, because he would start to imagine what could go wrong. In particular, he would imagine a dark room, and the faces of the people that he imagined there would be blurred. He would typically start telling himself in a harsh, critical internal voice the problems he might have. For example, he wouldn't be able to explain his points clearly, he would lose his place in his notes, and people would get bored. If he heard himself speaking, it would be almost in a whisper. He could see people straining forward to hear, or sitting back and looking away. He would feel a heavy, sick feeling in his stomach, his heart would begin to beat faster, and his mouth would feel dry. Beads of perspiration would break out on his forehead and hands. And all this even before he gave the presentation!

We 'dry run' our lives in our minds to such an extent that we influence the eventual result. Our lives are self-fulfilling prophecies. Our self-image and the way we represent that influence completely the state we experience and consequently the patterns that run through our lives.

Our lives are self-fulfilling prophecies

Managing your thinking process

Think about something you did last week. Now think of something you could have done last week but didn't. The question is, how do you know you did one and not the other? After all, these are only memories, one remembered, one created. How often have you had the experience of not knowing for sure whether you did something or not? 'Did I lock the front door?' 'Did I turn off the light?'

Think of something you did yesterday that you will do in an identical way tomorrow. It might be getting out of bed, brushing your teeth, or setting the alarm. How do you distinguish between the

one you did yesterday and the one you will do tomorrow? In fact, can you distinguish between what you did yesterday and what you will do tomorrow?

How do you distinguish events in time?

Many people distinguish between the past and the future according to where they position the images in their mind. For example, the past might be behind you or to your left. The future for some people is in front of them or to their right. Where is your past? Where is your future? And where is the present? There is more about how we code time in [Chapter 17](#), *Carpe diem*: Time.

Identify two people, one you like and admire and one you dislike. Now take the one you like and admire. In your thinking about this person, consider the following:

- Do you see them and, if so, what is the quality of the image? For example, is it bright or hazy, colour or black and white, moving or still?
- Are there any sounds associated with the thinking?
- What are the qualities of the sounds? Are they loud or faint, harsh or soft?
- What is the location of the sounds?
- And what about the feelings? What exactly do you experience and where?

Now think of the person you dislike and consider the same questions. What is similar in the quality of your thinking about the two and what is different? The content is irrelevant. It is the nature of your thinking that makes the difference.

It is the nature of your thinking that makes the difference

This ability to distinguish between the various aspects of your own and other people's experience is a way of determining the difference that makes the difference between those who do achieve what is important to them and those who don't.

Visual distinctions

Let's consider these distinctions in thinking patterns in more detail by taking a few simple images and experimenting with them.

Think, for example, about your journey to work. You can change your experience of this journey to make it better or worse by experimenting with your thinking about it. Start by changing some of the visual distinctions. For example, if it is dim, turn up the brightness. Then put it back as it was. If it is still, make it into a movie. Each time you experiment with a distinction, return it to its original form before you experiment with another. This way you will be able to establish how a change in a specific distinction affects your experience of the situation, in this case the journey. You may find that your thinking about it becomes more relaxed, more stressful, more interesting, or maybe even more exciting.

Brightness	Bright or dim? Dull or sparkly?
Clarity	Dim and hazy or sharp and in focus?
Size	Larger than life, life size, or smaller than life?
Colour/black and white	Full colour, shades of grey, partial colour, black and white?
Location	In front of you, to one side, behind you?
Distance	Close to or distant?
Motion	Still snapshots or movies?
Speed	Fast/slow?
Framed/panoramic	Enclosed in a frame or panoramic?
Sequence	In order/random/simultaneous images?

Associated/dissociated	Are you seeing as if out of your own eyes (associated) or can you see yourself in the picture (dissociated)?
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You may find initially that you are not aware of any pictures in your thinking. This is not unusual. If this is the case, do the exercise with your eyes closed and allow yourself to become aware of what you do notice.

Auditory distinctions

Take another memory, for example your last disagreement at work. Experiment again, this time with the auditory distinctions.

For example, if you can recall voices, make them soft and whispery. Now give them a different accent. Make them loud and boomy, remembering to return the memory to its original state before experimenting with the next distinction.

Volume	How loud/quiet?
Speed	Fast or slow?
Location	Where is the source of the sound? Is it in front of you, to one side, behind you?
Distance	Is the sound close or far away?
Voice/sound	Is it a voice or can you hear other sounds? If it is a voice, whose voice and what tone is it in?
Pitch	High/low/mid-range?
Continuous	Is the sound continuous or intermittent?

Note how this experiment affects the quality of the memory. What starts as an unpleasant memory can become an amusing one merely

by changing the nature of the voices. Give someone the voice of a cartoon character, such as Bugs Bunny. What effect does that have?

Feelings distinctions

Now think of a time when you felt happy. What does 'happy' feel like to you and where exactly in your body do you experience it?

What does 'happy' feel like?

Experiment again, this time with the intensity of the feeling. Can you turn it up and down? Return the feeling to its original state. Change the pace of the feeling. Continue to experiment with each element of the feeling, returning it to its original state before you experiment with the next one.

Pressure	What sort of pressure can you feel? Is there a sense of being pushed, a general or specific pressure?
Location	Where in your body do you experience any sensations?
Motion	Is there movement to the feeling? Is it fluttery, steady, intermittent, tingling?
Temperature	Hot/cold/damp?
Intensity	Strong/weak?
Pace	Is it a fast feeling or a slow one?

You will find that in each case there will be one or two key distinctions for you. By changing these distinctions, you can change the quality of your experience.

Jim experimented with his thinking about presentations, first thinking about one-to-one meetings in which he felt confident and relaxed. He discovered that the key distinctions for him were brightness, focus and the tone of voice with which he spoke to

himself. By bringing the quality of his thinking about presentations into line with his thinking about one-to-one meetings, by making the image bright and in focus, and by softening his internal voice tone, he noticed that he felt a steady rippling feeling in his chest. This was the same feeling he experienced in one-to-one meetings. This was the feeling that he associated with confidence.

Everyday expressions indicate trends in thinking

There are some general trends in the distinctions associated with feelings of confidence, happiness and certainty. Not surprisingly, there are expressions in everyday language that reflect this – for example:

- ‘The future is looking brighter’ or ‘The future looks black.’
- ‘That’s becoming clearer’ or ‘That is a bit hazy.’
- ‘Aha, that has clicked for me now.’
- ‘We had a rough ride in that discussion’ or ‘That went smoothly.’

The richness of our internal thinking leaks through into our communication and into the way we influence ourselves and others. Enrich your thinking – enrich your life.

Enrich your thinking – enrich your life

Summary

Once we have experienced something, it becomes a memory. When we react to a memory we are reacting not to the direct experience but to the way we store that memory in our mind. Managing the distinctions in our thinking gives us the ability to influence and change the nature of our memories, so that we can store them in a way that results in us feeling the way we want to feel.

You can choose the state you want

Many people develop the habit of storing memories in a way that leads to depression, anger or other negative feelings. Why choose these when you could choose pleasure or peace? The same is true for the future. Why make yourself worried or frustrated about an event that hasn't occurred when you could be at peace? You might choose to keep some of the worry in the form of concern. The point is that you choose the state you want rather than it choosing you. Our ability to manage our state is more and more important in a world that defies control and seems to be increasingly chaotic. Or is that just my thinking?

Why choose to worry when you can choose to feel pleasure or peace?

You can be sure that you already use distinctions in your thinking patterns in this way. Whenever you change your experience of something you are almost certain to have reprogrammed the way you think about it, even though you may not have realized that this was what you were doing.

Shortcut to managing your thinking: the SWISH

The SWISH is a technique for utilizing these distinctions in thinking to replace a problem state with a desirable state. It is fast and powerful, as well as being great for dealing with unwanted behavioural habits. Note that the SWISH will not necessarily be ideal for deeper, more significant issues; there are other techniques later in the book that can help with these.

- 1 First, identify the response in yourself that you want to change. What exactly is the reaction you would like to replace? For example, you might want to change a state such as anxiety or apprehension.
- 2 Identify precisely what it is that triggers this response. There will be something specific that immediately precedes your reaction. Identifying this trigger is a key part of the process.

If, for example, it is a response to the way in which someone speaks to you, identify what it is they say or what it is about the way they say it that triggers your reaction. Recreate this in your thinking in exactly the way it happens. If it is the way in which someone speaks to you, then hear them saying the words in exactly the way they do. If it is the sight of an audience in front of you, imagine yourself in that situation looking out at the audience in the way you do. See exactly what you would see if you were there.

- 3 Now determine which facets of the way you think about this trigger have the greatest effect. There will be some elements that intensify your reaction. The SWISH lends itself most readily to visual triggers; often the size and brightness of the image have the greatest impact. For example, if it is the sight of a certain person who works for you that triggers a response, experiment with each distinction in turn, putting the image back the way it was before you experiment with the next one. The aim is to find the one or two that intensify the response. Although these elements are currently triggering the response that you don't want, the aim of the SWISH is to hook these elements to the response that you do want. In so doing, you are making your own resources work for you rather than against you.
- 4 Think about something completely different to 'break your state'. For example, what colour was the front door of the last house in which you lived?
- 5 Now imagine the person you would like to be, irrespective of what you have been in the past and irrespective of any specific behaviour. This is an opportunity to imagine how you would like to be, the sort of qualities you would really like to have, the style that fits with who you truly are. Imagine this as if you are looking at yourself as an observer, dissociated. Develop this until you have an image that is compelling and desirable. Check that this 'you' really fits in with the significant people in your life – it needs to be a real benefit to them, too, for you to be this new way. Explore how this fits with whatever sense of purpose you have, with

your beliefs and values, with every aspect that is important to you. Check that this new you meets any needs that you may have been satisfying in less healthy ways in the past. If, for example, you have been getting attention for being stressed, check that you are going to get the level and quality of attention you need from this new way of being in the world.

- 6 Think of something completely different to break state again – for example your telephone number backwards.
- 7 Make an image of the trigger, the stimulus that prompts the response that you want to change. Use the key factors that enhance the trigger. For example, if the distinctions of size and brightness intensify the trigger, make this image bright and big.
- 8 Take the image of the ‘new you’ and make it small and dark. Place this small, dark image in the corner of the bigger image.
- 9 Very quickly, make the large image small and dark and at the same time make the small image large and bright. Do this as fast as you can; the speed is important. You can make a sound to accompany this movement, a SWISH sound, hence the name of this process. (You can choose another sound if you wish.) The sound can become the association for the feelings of becoming the new you.
- 10 Break state again. Clear the images so that you start afresh. Create a new image so you break the image before you start again, otherwise you may set up a loop in your thinking.
- 11 Repeat the process five times and check to see if it works. You will know this when you either experience or imagine the trigger for the original state and your response to it has changed to what you want it to be – you SWISH into the new you immediately. If this is not happening, go back and experiment with different parts of the process until it does.

It is interesting how the importance of different techniques emerge over time. I recently coached a young woman who had witnessed a tragic accident and could not get the image out of her mind. There

were many things that she needed to resolve that underpinned her reactions. However, the SWISH was helpful in the short term and accelerated her ability to remember people and situations as she wished to remember them ... and subsequently to find some peace.

Thought provokers

- 1 What sort of jobs do you think would best suit people whose thinking preference is (a) visual; (b) auditory; (c) feelings?
- 2 Think of a successful outcome of a regular meeting that you hold/attend. How do you think about this? Is it a picture? Do you hear sounds or conversation? Do you experience certain feelings?
- 3 Look at a website that appeals to you. Which senses does it employ to capture your attention?
- 4 Think of a part of your work that you really enjoy. Now think of a part that you enjoy less well. How do the distinctions in your thinking vary?
- 5 Think of someone with whom you have a really good relationship. Now think of someone you find it difficult to deal with. Compare the differences in your thinking about each person. What are the main distinctions?
- 6 Take out a letter or email that you received recently. Which senses are you using as you read it?

Reference

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One day a traveller was walking along a road on his journey from one village to another. As he walked, he noticed a monk tilling the ground in the fields beside the road. The monk said 'Good day' to the traveller and the traveller nodded to the monk.

The traveller then turned to the monk and said, 'Excuse me, do you mind if I ask you a question?'

'Not at all,' replied the monk.

'I am travelling from the village in the mountains to the village in the valley and I was wondering if you knew what it is like in the village in the valley?'

'Tell me,' said the monk. 'What was your experience of the village in the mountains?'

'Dreadful,' replied the traveller. 'To be honest, I am glad to be away from there. I found the people most unwelcoming. When I first arrived I was greeted coldly. I was never made to feel a part of the village no matter how hard I tried. The villagers keep very much to themselves; they don't take kindly to strangers. So tell me, what can I expect in the village in the valley?'

'I'm sorry to tell you,' said the monk, 'but I think your experience will be much the same.'

The traveller hung his head despondently and walked on.

A few months later, another traveller was journeying down the same road and he also came upon the monk.

'Good day,' said the traveller.

'Good day,' said the monk.

'How are you?' asked the traveller.

'I'm well,' replied the monk. 'Where are you going?'

'I'm going to the village in the valley,' replied the traveller. 'Do you know what it is like?'

'I do,' replied the monk. 'But first, tell me, where have you come from?'

'I've come from the village in the mountains.'

'And how was that?'

'It was a wonderful experience. I would have stayed if I could but I am committed to travelling on. I felt as

though I were a member of the family in the village. The elders gave me much advice, the children laughed and joked with me, and the people generally were kind and generous. I am sad to have left there. It will always hold special memories for me. And what of the village in the valley?' he asked again.

'I think you will find it much the same,' replied the monk.

'Good day to you.'

'Good day and thank you,' replied the traveller, smiled, and journeyed on.

3 Filters on your world

*The world exists as you perceive it.
It's not what you see, it's how you see it.
It's not what you hear, it's how you hear.
It's not what you feel, it's how you feel.*
Rumi

Technology is becoming ever more intelligent at knowing and responding to, as well as influencing, our personal needs. In a culture so infused with technology, we had better be pretty smart at knowing our clients' needs too. If we want to build lifelong relationships, either in our personal lives or, as is becoming the expectation, in our business lives, we need to learn how to read other people's styles and requirements with ever-increasing sophistication. Either that or we need to become experts in our understanding of the perils and the dangers of AI for the future of humankind. And maybe just both!

We need to be smart at knowing our clients' needs

The better able we are to identify needs, the better able we are to present ourselves, our products and our services in a way that is excellent. Companies talk about doing much more than keeping customers satisfied – they talk about customer delight. To delight our customers we need to be able to 'model' their thinking and behaviour to ensure that we appeal to what really matters to them. We not only need to 'read' these styles, we need to have the flexibility to respond to them.

At one time I decided that I would learn some Danish so that I could open my next programme in Denmark in the native language. I felt that this would be respectful of the time my delegates give to

listening to me speak in English. I asked a Danish delegate on a programme I was running in England if he would translate a passage I had prepared so that I could practise what I wanted to say. I asked if he would send the translation to me via email. He made a decision that it would be more helpful for me if he were to record the translation so that I could hear the words instead. In his heart he was being helpful, but auditory is not my preferred choice for learning a passage like this. I wanted to see the written word, having already learned some of the pronunciation.

It can be tempting to make choices about presenting material in ways that fit our own preferred ways of thinking rather than suiting the preferences of our customers. We may think we know best in terms of what our customers ‘should’ have. And we make unconscious as well as conscious choices about the people with whom we want to do business, depending on how well they skilfully match our needs. In the instance I quote what happened led to learning for us both, but in business making the wrong choice might cost you the work.

We may think we know best!

In our choices about how to present ourselves to customers, the margin for error has become significantly smaller. The way we use the internet is a good example of this. If you haven’t grabbed your potential clients’ interest by relating to the way they think within six seconds of their logging on to your web pages, research shows that they will not wait to make sense of what you are saying – they will move on.

In this chapter I illustrate some fundamental needs. There are hundreds, even thousands of needs, and it is your skill in detecting not only those I have explained here but the unique ones you can discover for yourself that will enable you to model what is happening. Being able to do this and having the flexibility to adapt to what you discover can determine your success in working, dealing, communicating and living with other people.

So let's consider some of the patterns in thinking and communicating that enable us to recognize what is happening in our thoughts, language and behaviour, and in other people's. As we understand this, we can learn what affects how we present ourselves so that others can relate to what we are doing and saying, and so that we can relate to them in a language and style they understand.

We are bombarded with stimuli throughout our life. There is no way we can take in and pay attention to everything that happens to us. So what we do is filter for some things over others. This is what makes our perception and experience what it is. It is not the experience itself that affects us but how we process it. When we understand what we and others are doing, we can begin to understand how we get the results that we do.

It is what we do with experience that makes the difference

Learning to relate successfully

Have you ever bought a car and suddenly become aware of all the other cars of the same type on the road? Or have you ever had an experience, maybe an insight about yourself, only to discover that many of your friends have had the same or a similar experience, even though you weren't aware of that before? Do you see the glass as half full as opposed to half empty by looking for what is there as opposed to what is not?

Do you see the glass half full or half empty?

These are examples of ways in which we have subconsciously chosen to pay attention to some things and to delete others from our awareness. What we think about is what we get.

What we think about is what we get

Here is an example that highlights the need to be able to understand and relate to different filters.

When Janet and Bill had a conversation, each found the other frustrating. Janet liked to discuss the details of what was needed, whereas Bill preferred to discuss the broader strategic concepts. For example, Janet would say, 'I'd like Peter to go to the next meeting,' and Bill would reply, 'We haven't decided on the main areas of the plan that didn't work.' Janet's conversation centred on future actions, whereas Bill concentrated more on the past. Janet would pay attention to the similarities between one situation and another: 'This is like another idea I have about what we might do to improve the office layout.' Bill would concentrate on the exception by saying things like 'No, this is different' or 'We didn't include an overall plan.' It was as though they were talking different languages. They had different filters on their experience. They didn't find meetings with one another easy!

When two people are using the same filters there is a greater chance that they will be communicating with each other in a way that both understand. They are likely to experience rapport. If the filters you use are different from those used by your partner, then, as with Janet and Bill, you may experience discord and frustration. By using similar language patterns to your partner, you are increasing the level of mutual trust and influence.

By using similar language patterns you increase the level of trust

Learning to recognize the filters that we and others use is the first step. Developing our flexibility in the way we use the filters then gives us a greater chance of finding a way of communicating with each person we meet. We make hundreds, thousands, even millions of unconscious choices every day about what we pay attention to and what we don't. And that is fine, provided those choices work for us. However, if we are not getting the results we want, we can learn to make new choices until we find what does work.

We can make new choices until we find what does work

In our example, Bill could have replied in the following way:

JANET I'd like Peter to go to the next meeting.

BILL Yes, Peter would make some useful contributions. Let's note that, so when we have decided what areas of v plan didn't work we can also decide who else we might want to include. *(Bill is here matching Janet's preference for agreement and future thinking yet still registering his concerns.)*

JANET This is like another idea I have about what we might do to improve the office layout.

BILL You come up with lots of ideas, Janet. Can we discuss those when we have gone through my idea about the overall plan? *(Here he is acknowledging, future referencing and then making his request.)*

Overall, his strategy now has a much greater chance of gaining agreement from Janet.

We don't always know what will work in advance, but by having an awareness of what is and what isn't working we give ourselves choices.

Let's explore some of the filters. What follows is a 'starter set'.

Associated/dissociated

Think of a conversation you had recently with one of your colleagues. As you think about this conversation, pay attention to *how* you are thinking about it. For example, are you seeing, hearing and feeling the situation as if you are in your own body – seeing it out of your own eyes, hearing it with your own ears and experiencing the feelings of being there? Or are you experiencing the situation as if you are outside of your own body – seeing yourself in the situation, hearing yourself as if you were an

observer? The experience of being in your own body is referred to as *associated* and the experience of being outside of your body is known as *dissociated*.

Pay attention for a moment to your surroundings. You may begin to notice what you see around you, the quality of the light, the colours and shapes, the shadows, and the clarity of the scene. As you notice the scene, you may begin to hear sounds close to you and farther away. As you become aware of even more sounds, turn your conscious mind towards them. Be aware of the location of the sounds, their loudness or softness, their tone and speed. You can become aware of what you feel, of the textures and pressures on your body. Sense those parts of you that are touching the ground or a chair. Allow yourself to notice any smells or tastes that you experience. As you do this, pay attention to the feelings within you, to any tensions or internal emotions, their precise location and intensity.

The above is an associated state.

Now step back or stand behind the chair in which you were sitting and see yourself sitting or standing, as you were a moment ago. Look at yourself so that you can see the whole of you. Notice how the 'you' there interacts with the environment. Be aware of how the 'you' there in front of you looks and sounds.

In this dissociated state you will be detached from the feelings. You have the ability to consider situations with a detached objectivity without getting involved in the emotions.

Both associated and dissociated states are valuable. There are times when associating is the best option, for example if we want to engage our emotions, create a state of motivation or show

vulnerability. However, people who are able to ‘keep their heads’ in the midst of a crisis can usually dissociate.

One of the people responsible for coaching and supporting the people in the London Fire Brigade discovered that the members of the crew who experienced the highest levels of stress were those who relived their memories in an associated way. As they recalled what had happened, they re-experienced the emotions they had felt at the time. So, as well as experiencing the trauma of each situation, they were experiencing it over and over again and subsequently intensifying the stress they felt. The coach also established that those who had the lowest levels of stress were those who were able to dissociate from what they experienced.

Game designers have discovered that software that encourages us to ‘associate’ into the role of one of the players gives us an intense emotional experience. It is as if we are there. Considering that we make many decisions in an emotional state, these game manufacturers are also potentially influencing our addiction to the experience. It is important to be aware of how these tactics are used on us and how they can potentially work for us.

These tactics can be used on us or for us

When I first worked in IT, we would send off programs to a nearby computer centre and wait for the results to come back, ideally later that day or more often later that week. Not so today. We are accustomed to getting a response from our computer in a split second. It is important that we too can work in this real-time way, and we can do this successfully only if we are willing to immerse ourselves in a climate of feedback. One of the elements we need is the ability to dissociate from feedback that we might otherwise take personally and reject, and then associate once we have the resources we need in order to let the feedback in and act on it. [Chapter 21](#), Giving and receiving feedback, explores ways of doing this.

The skill lies in choosing an associated or a dissociated state for a purpose. The appropriate choice depends on your desired outcome. You might choose to dissociate to protect yourself from painful emotions, or you might choose to associate in order to fully experience all the feelings of a situation. Most people's decision-making strategy results in a feeling, no matter how much logical analysis might have preceded that. If your preferred style is to keep yourself and others dissociated, don't be surprised if you and they struggle to make decisions!

Most decision-making strategies rely ultimately on what we feel

If your business depends on supporting others in making decisions, you need to know how to associate and how to help others do the same.

One of the directors of a marketing company found that she was struggling to get potential clients to make a decision about the work her company was proposing. She ran through what she had presented and how she had done that. What we noticed was that she came across very objectively and factually. Everything she said was logical, but she gave no space to feelings. Her voice communicated a consistently auditory way of thinking; the tone was even and slightly hard. There were few pauses in her presentation.

Once she'd been given feedback about her style and the likelihood of her clients' needing to make decisions through a feeling, she tried the technique of associating into her presentations and changing her tone of voice to make it softer and lower (communicating and inviting feelings). She spoke with greater certainty, whereas before she had raised her voice at the end of most sentences, as if asking a question. The next time she presented to a customer, they stopped her part way through the presentation and told her that she need not continue - they liked what she

was saying and she had got the business. This presentation and subsequent ones broke the record for the time needed for the client to make a decision.

Towards/away from (Desired state/Problem state)

Think of a goal you have for yourself right now. It can be a personal goal or a work goal. It can be short or long term. Be aware of how you are thinking about this goal. Are you imagining what it is like to achieve the goal, what you are seeing, hearing and feeling? Or are you aware of what stops you and what you don't want? For example, if you are thinking of being healthy, do you imagine yourself slim and fit or do you think of the food you want to avoid and the weight you want to lose? What is in your mind? Your ability to think about what you really want is known as *towards thinking*. Your ability to think about what you don't want is known as *away from thinking*.

I recently received a request to carry out some training with the senior management team of one of my clients. Their request frames the goal of the training as follows: 'How to avoid letting strength of personal view get in the way of management.' This is a classic 'away from' statement. Before I commit to the work I will want to know what it is they really want. And I've drawn some conclusions already!

And closer to home, as I was discussing the drafts of the cover for this book, I asked my personal web designer (who has trained with me in NLP) to give me some ideas as I felt that the design that was being proposed was 'too blocky'. 'Sue,' he replied, 'you are telling me what you don't want – how about telling me how your ideal cover would be?' Point taken!

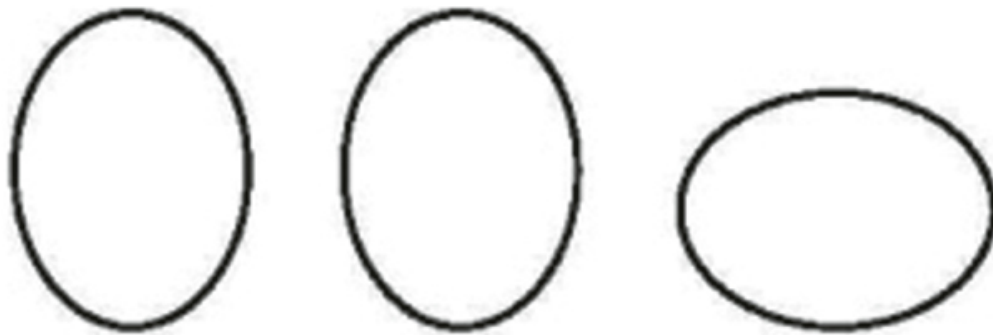
Do NOT think about kangaroos right now

The concept of towards/away from is explained further in [Chapter 4](#), Thinking with your body. In the context of goal setting, the principle is that what we think is what we get. Our mind does not recognize the ‘not’ part of a problem-centred statement. For example, if you tell yourself not to worry, you are effectively programming yourself to worry. If you think about being confident, then the likelihood is that this is what you will begin to experience.

What we think is what we get

Match/mismatch

Look at the shapes below and describe their relationship to each other.



Describe what you see. Do you notice in what ways they are similar – that is, they are all oval – or do you notice that two are upright and one is on its side? In effect, do you look for what is the same – match – or do you look for what is different – mismatch?

When meeting a person for the first time, someone who sorts for a match might think of similar people, similar situations, or how the other is like them. Someone who sorts for a mismatch will identify what is different about this person and this situation compared with others they know.

Certain professions train people to think in a particular way. For example, I have come across more mismatching patterns of thinking in professions associated with information technology and finance than I have in many other fields of business. There is no right or

wrong. Certain jobs depend on a person's ability to match, just as some depend on an ability to mismatch. A software engineer trained to uncover system 'bugs' may be skilled at mismatching, looking for what doesn't fit, as indeed will someone in accounting whose job it is to find the imbalance. What matters is to what extent our choice takes us closer to the outcome that we want. If they do then the choice is presumably a 'good' one, and if not then it is time to find a new choice.

The 'Yes, but' pattern in conversation is an example of mismatching.

Yes, but ...

PERSON A I'm really pleased with the way this project has gone.

PERSON B Yes, but there's a danger we're going to get overconfident.

PERSON A You're right. Let's review objectively what we've achieved so that we build some of the good practices into future projects.

PERSON B That's all very well, but we don't have the time right now.

PERSON A Well, how about putting a date in the diary in a few weeks' time?

PERSON B That's easy to say but not so easy in practice. Things change so rapidly around here.

Everything before the 'but' is bull!

As someone once said to me, everything before the 'but' is bull****!

Dealing with this in conversation can be hard work unless you are another mismatcher who enjoys a good argument.

Big chunk/small chunk

Look around you at the room you are in. How would you describe the room to someone who has not seen it before? To what do you pay attention: spaciousness, feel and style? Or do you pay attention to the number of windows, colour of furnishings, the details? Is it a mix of both? The spaciousness, feel and style are examples of big chunk thinking, whereas the details are small chunk.

This pattern of thinking can apply to anything. For example, if you have set a specific goal for yourself, you could chunk up to more global goals or chunk down to more specific examples of the bigger goal.

Let's suppose you are in a cookery class. You need an orange for the dish you are preparing. Another member of the class also needs an orange, but there is only one. Without flexibility in thinking the usual solution would be to accept the facts as they appear and cut the orange in two, taking half each.

If, however, you chunk up in relation to your needs in the situation by asking 'What do you need the orange for?' you will discover broader needs. For example, you might want the orange for a cake and your colleague may want it for a soufflé.

If you chunk down on the request for the orange by asking 'What specifically do you need for your soufflé?' you might discover that the other person needs just the pulp. You know that you only need the skin, the zest, for your cake. It is possible for you both to have exactly what you want.

This is a demonstration of skilled negotiation. The ability to chunk up and down is an ability of excellent negotiators. This is most likely to uncover the possibility of a win/win outcome in which all

parties achieve not just what they want but, more significantly, what they need.

You can increase the likelihood of a win/win

Past/present/future

Where in time do you put your attention? Some people live their lives in the past, thinking about what has gone before. Some people live for the moment and their attention is on the present. Some are continually planning and thinking about the future.

Some people live for the moment

You may have experienced these kinds of questions and statements that look to the future:

- What's for dinner?
- How long until we get home?
- Where are we going on holiday?
- What's next on the agenda?
- What I want to achieve by the end of the project is ...

Or you may know someone who concentrates on the past:

- What did you say earlier?
- Did you see what that person was wearing?
- Do you remember when we were on holiday?
- The last meeting we had was important.

The ability to be present is an important skill in many contexts, including coaching, listening, presenting ...

- What is happening now?
- What is that like for you?
- What you mean is ...?
- What I am experiencing is ...
- What else is true right now?
- The way that I understand what you are saying is ...

There is no right or wrong, no good or bad, here but where we give our attention in terms of time does have implications for how people communicate with each other.

A friend called to invite me to a school reunion to talk over old times. As someone whose attention is more on the present and the future, the thought of reminiscing about the past didn't strike me as an attractive proposition! (However, since first writing this I have been to a 50-year anniversary reunion of my old school and loved it, which demonstrates how we change over time.)

Activity/person/object/place/time

Think of the best meal you had in the last few weeks or months. The filter you use will determine your memory of this. For example, if you sort by:

- **Activity** ... you recall what you and others did at this meal. Maybe you had a memorable conversation or there was a band playing.
- **Person** ... it was your companion who made it special.
- **Object** ... your memories are associated with the food, a present you were given, the pictures in the restaurant, the type of furniture.
- **Place** ... your memories are of the location: the restaurant, the town, the country, or possibly the location of the table at which you sat.
- **Time** ... You remember the time and date, an anniversary or another special occasion. You might remember that it was the first day of your new job or a farewell dinner at the end of term.

Internal/external

How do you know when you've done a good job? Which of the following responses would be most likely to be true for you?

I know I've done a good job when ...

- I see people using the results of what I have produced.
- I feel good inside.
- I know I've met the standards I set myself.
- We get more orders.
- I can say to myself, 'That was a job well done.'

People who have an *external reference* rely on external sources for their evidence of fulfilment. For example, they rely on what other people say and do. They may also rely on external factors such as 'more orders' or 'people use the results of what has been produced'. Someone with an *internal reference*, however, uses their own internal feelings, images and voices as their evidence of fulfilment.

Your preference here will make a big difference to the way you work. If you are externally referenced, you are more likely to depend on having others around you. If you are internally referenced, you tend to be independent of external people and events.

People who are independent in style are usually internally referenced. This is a characteristic pattern of senior managers. They can be concerned about what happens outside themselves; they need to be! However, they do not depend on external circumstances to feel satisfied. Can you imagine a managing director who depended on having his staff tell him that he was doing OK?

Just this morning I met with a local lady who used to run a restaurant in the village. She and her husband had sold the restaurant three years before to do all the travelling that their work in the restaurant had prevented them from doing. I had not seen her about for a while, and she explained that she had suffered from severe depression for the last three years. She had discovered how important the connection with her customers every day had been to her and, once that was gone, she had felt lost. It was a hard way for her to discover her filters!

Self and other

Have you ever had one of these conversations:

PERSON A We are thinking of moving home.

PERSON B I decided to do that last year, but have changed my mind now in the light of the economy.

PERSON A Well, we have the offer of work in Spain.

PERSON B I got offered work in the Danish branch of our business – I'm still thinking about it.

PERSON A It is an opportunity for us to introduce a new training programme into our new offices there.

PERSON B We have developed a wonderful new training programme for our staff.

Compare that to this:

PERSON A We've been thinking of moving home.

PERSON B Oh really, what has prompted that?

PERSON A Well, we've been travelling a lot lately and we feel we would prefer a more stable permanent base now.

PERSON B Have you thought about where that might be?

We have very different conversations depending on whether our attention is on self or other. Neither is universally right or wrong. Both can be good and bad, depending on the outcome. In my experience I come across more of the former than the latter, though. One of the biggest elements of NLP training is learning to put one's own agenda to one side and give full, undivided attention to the other.

In some cultures it is the norm to put other people first. That would be the experience of many Indian women, for example, whereas in Denmark the expectations for women are somewhat different. These are generalizations, but nevertheless there are

cultural trends. With an awareness of all of these filters, we can unpack what is happening and when it is appropriate to make a particular choice or not.

Convincer pattern

I was explaining to a client how he might restructure his management team. He seemed unsure, although he accepted the principle of what I was saying. We discussed the plans in a number of different ways. I eventually reflected his uncertainty back to him.

He replied, 'I just don't see it, Sue.'

I explained again and he replied, 'I just don't get the picture.'

At that point I drew it on the whiteboard.

'Now I see what you are saying,' he said.

Everyone has a specific means by which they become convinced. In this client's case the principal factor was that he needed to see the ideas visually before he was convinced they would work. So part of what makes someone convinced is the channel through which they receive the information.

Other people might equally well have been convinced by:

- hearing what I had to say
- trying it to find out if it worked in practice
- reading the plan in more detail.

There are differences in the way people need to receive information within these broader categories. Some people need to be told a number of times or have a number of examples before they are convinced. Others need to be convinced over a period of time; time is the deciding factor for them. Some people make decisions on the bare outlines of the facts – they don't need the details in order to be convinced – yet others need to have something proved to them over

and over again. They will be convinced, but only for one situation and one context at a time.

If your job involves you having to convince others to achieve the result you want, you need to know the pattern by which they operate. You can then match this pattern in the way you present your information.

In India, I spent time with a swami who can take a person's pulse to determine what they need for their health. We all need a swami in our lives – or maybe we need to learn how to 'take the pulse' for ourselves!

With NLP, and especially by learning to recognize the ways in which your customers take in information through filters, you can provide a level of sophistication in your support that few have yet achieved. Most people know what they need to know, but few know how to gain that knowledge. Learn to recognize the filters in yourself and others and you will master the 'how'. If you don't do this, the artificial intelligence used by someone else will!

Summary

The filters on our experience determine how we make sense of the world. When we can differentiate between the various choices we make about how we choose to experience life, we can begin to understand how our experience is the way that it is.

When we can determine what choices are affecting our lives, we can begin to replicate those times of excellence, choose to relate to people in a way that makes sense to them, and debug those moments when we are taking ourselves down a rabbit hole of emotions. The choice is ours. Never has it been more important to choose how we make sense of this world. Our choice will influence the way it is for us and for future generations.

It is not the place, nor the condition, but the mind alone that can make anyone happy or miserable.

Roger L'Estrange

Thought provokers

- 1 Read the following passages and determine which filters each writer is using.
 - a I'm someone who enjoys life to the full. I play squash, I write, I work full time as a salesperson, and I have a young family who keep me busy in any spare time I have! I get a lot of satisfaction from what I do. I set myself goals and I know by my own standards when I have achieved them. I enjoy travel, and I love eating out.
 - b I can be a difficult person, or so others tell me. I can usually see the alternative point of view. I enjoy a good discussion, some would say argument. I like perfection. If something isn't quite right, it irritates me. I spend a lot of time working and I am meticulous in the way I go about that. I am a programmer and the work I do requires attention to detail and the ability to see immediately if something is wrong.
 - c I am a good listener. People come to me with their problems. I have always had this sort of role, not only in my work life but also with my friends. I have spent most of my life in the same part of the country. I have always liked the people here. I can recall some very special occasions that I have spent with friends in the past. I have always been a bit indecisive about what I might do next. I have always let others push me into new situations or jobs, and have tended only to change if I have been dissatisfied with what I was doing at the time.
- 2 Take an example of communication that you 'received' recently. What filters do you detect in the language the writer has used?
- 3 Take an example of communication that you recently wrote/published. What filters do you detect in the language you have used?
- 4 Compare the filters you are using in response to a communication from someone else. To what extent have you

matched/mismatched the filters the other person is using?

5 Select one of your key customers. Take examples of their behaviour and writing and identify some of their key filters.

6 Take a context in which you want to appeal to a wide audience, one in which people will have a wide range of filters. Identify how many filters you are using in the way you are presenting yourself, your products and your services.

Reference

Shelle Rose Charvet *Words That Change Minds: Mastering the Language of Influence*, 3rd edition, Institute for Influence, 2019

One of our course delegates was recounting an incident involving his three-year-old daughter.

‘How many times do I have to tell you to put your toys away?’ he asked her.

‘Four times,’ she replied categorically.

4 Thinking with your body

Just because you are making a noise in my direction, don't think that you are communicating!

Anonymous

NLP is a process of identifying the structure of our experience, particularly to find the difference that makes the difference. And the difference is very often the elusive part of what we do. Suppose I am skilled in the way I can build rapport in business meetings with potential new clients and you want to know how exactly I do that. I could tell you that when I prepare for a meeting with a new client, I think about the outcomes for the meeting. I can also tell you that I review what I know about the company and pay attention to how I build rapport throughout the process, especially in the first few moments of our meeting. That is all very sound, but the question is: can you reproduce the procedure I have explained well enough to get the same result?

Our eye movements contain clues to our thinking

The clues lie not so much in the content of what I say as in my non-verbal behaviour and my actions. As you watch me speak, you might notice that as I talk about a new client I look fleetingly up and to my right. What I am doing in this moment is imagining visually what this company would be like if it were to implement my thoughts for the future. I do this each time I approach a new client (I do this when I am working with individuals, too) but I take this thought so much for granted and it is so unconscious that for a long time I did not think to mention it in my explanations of my client-facing strategies. However, this eye movement of looking up and to the right is a very strong clue that what I am doing at that moment is creating a visual image I have never seen before.

By being sensitive to my eye movements, you know that I am creating something visually, even though you may not know the content of what I am doing. This clue can give you the prompt to ask me something like: ‘What do you think about just after you have considered the outcomes?’ You could be more specific, noticing that I had seemed to have accessed some inner thoughts, and say ‘What happened then?’ That could be the prompt for me to realize that I am creating this visual image. This is one small clue that opens the door to one of the most significant pieces of my thinking when I meet a new client.

By learning to be sensitive to body language, you can begin to detect the pieces of the strategies that really make the difference. And these are the pieces that otherwise lie undetected. David Grove (the source of the ‘clean questions’ we look at in [Chapter 6](#)) has said that it is the sighs, the change of breathing, the ‘hmms’ that are surface signs of some much deeper and revealing thought.

The eyes have it

Our eyes give powerful clues to the way we are thinking. Ask someone who claims to be a good speller to spell Mississippi. What are their eye movements? Watch carefully, because some of the movements are fleeting. Most good spellers visualize the word they are spelling by picturing the word as if it were on a screen in front and slightly above them. They typically look up and to their left, but some may look up and to their right or straight ahead with a defocused stare. These eye movements usually characterize visual thinking, a key part of a successful spelling strategy.

The way we use our eyes indicates the kind of thinking that is going on. Bear in mind, however, that these are not facts, just tendencies – everyone is unique. It is vital to calibrate the patterns that follow to the individual rather than to apply them universally. It is more important to just be aware of someone going inside to reflect rather than to assume you know what kind of thinking they are doing.

However, here are some usual patterns:

Eyes up and left (your left) – Visual remembered

This (for some people) is where we look when we are remembering images we have seen before: the face of our partner, the last place we went on holiday, our workplace, what we did yesterday.



Eyes up and right (your right) – Visual constructed

This is where we sometimes look when we are constructing images we have not seen before: ourselves in a location we have always dreamed of but never been to, a colleague with an expression on their face we have never seen, our home redesigned, the vision for our business.



Eyes straight ahead defocused – Visual

The clue as to whether this is remembered or constructed can be determined by how the weight is distributed in the rest of the body – to the left or the right.



Eyes to the side and left (your left) – Auditory remembered

This is where we might look when we are remembering sounds that we have heard before: a favourite piece of music, the sound of a friend's voice.



Eyes to the side and right (your right) – Auditory constructed

This is where we might look when we are creating a sound that we have never heard before: someone we know speaking in a completely different tone of voice, for example.



Eyes down and left (your left) – Auditory digital, inner dialogue

This is where we might look when we are having a conversation with ourselves or asking questions in our heads.



Eyes down and right (your right) – External feelings and emotions

When we experience feelings, this is where we sometimes look.



The direction may vary, in that left and right may be reversed, but visual is usually up or straight ahead defocused, and auditory is usually looking towards the ears, which can be a good way of remembering it. There is a theory that left-handed children of left-handed parents are more likely to have the sides reversed.

How else do we think through our body?

Our thoughts leak out through our body language, which is one of the reasons it is important to be aware of what thoughts are being communicated through this medium. Body language is everything in our behaviour with which we communicate other than words.

However, the way we say those words – the tone, the volume, the pitch of our voice – is also part of our body language.

So, in detecting whether we are thinking in a visual, auditory or feelings way, not only can we use eye movements as clues, we can also detect clues in body language.

For example, someone thinking in a **visual** way will typically:

- speak quickly in a high voice (they are trying to use words to get across the images they can see, so they need to speak quickly to do this)
- breathe high in the chest – using rapid, shallow breathing

- gesture high in the air, often trying to depict the images they can see internally
- often show tension in their body.

Someone thinking in an **auditory** way will typically:

- speak in a rhythmic way, almost tunefully
- talk in a mid-tone.
- breathe from their mid-chest
- gesture lower than someone who is thinking in a visual way
- often have their head tilted to one side as if to accentuate the amount they take in through their ears
- frequently touch their ears and mouth and often have their hand against their face as if on the telephone.

And someone thinking in a **feelings** way will typically:

- speak in a resonant way, slowly and with frequent silences
- breathe low in the chest – with deep, slow breaths, as if sighing
- gesture down and to their right (you'll have heard the expression 'downright angry' – down and right is usually where people go when accessing feelings)
- have a 'laid-back' body posture, relaxed and free moving.

So body language is:

- Voice
- Body
- Tone
- Rhythm
- Facial expressions
- Muscle movements
- Skin colour
- Posture
- Head and face
- Intonation
- Accent
- Pauses
- Eye movements
- Muscle tension

- Body movement
- Arm and hand gestures

Frequency and nature of touch, both self and others Body rhythm – the kind of movement or stillness that is characteristic

- Speed
- Emphasis
- Head movements
- Eye contact
- Mouth expressions
- Timing of movements
- Hesitations
- Frequency of response to others
- Facial lines
- Head position
- Proximity to others
- Breathing rate
- Breathing position: high, mid or low in chest
- Position and direction of legs and feet

All of these elements and more are communicating our innermost thoughts every moment of every day. It is not that people don't recognize these signals – they do. The staff in one company I worked in knew very well that when the managing director's lip became taut and whitened slightly, it was time to stop asking questions!

We do all read one another's body language, but many of us have become used to ignoring signals we detect unconsciously. We have learned to delete or distort what we pick up intuitively. By developing our conscious awareness of what these signals might be telling us, we start to draw on an immense untapped potential in our communication.

The importance of reading body language

Learning to be aware of body language and the differences between one person and the next and one culture and the next creates a marked improvement in how well we understand and influence other people and they us. Some people seem to have a natural ability to influence, creating a climate of instant rapport in which all parties feel at ease with each other. Others may find these people eminently approachable, easy to talk to on any issue, with an obvious advantage in any negotiating, communicating or influencing situation.

The outstanding conclusion reached by researchers in this field is that typically more than 90 per cent of our ability to influence lies outside of the content of what we say.

If we don't understand and respect difference, we are liable to judge what we don't know as negative. For example, in the UK there is a very much higher expectation of feedback to what we say (even if it is just a grunt) than is the norm in many other cultures. Consequently, we can find lower levels of response to what we say (especially when we are talking on the phone) very disconcerting. We might, for example, be tempted to misread it as lack of interest.

In British culture there is a higher expectancy of feedback than in many other cultures

We not only limit ourselves by what we can say: the choices we make about how we use words make communication even more risky. When we don't understand what we hear, in a meeting for example, most of us are unlikely to say so. If we don't entirely agree with what someone is saying, most of us are likely to say that they do agree or say nothing. However, whatever choices we make with the words we do and do not use, our non-verbal behaviour signals what we truly feel.

By learning to pay attention to body language signals we can:

- know when to end a conversation
- tell to what extent the person we are speaking to has understood what we are saying
- determine the level of agreement we have achieved

- recognize the degree to which we have touched the core motivation of the person we are talking to
- establish how we represent time and the impact of that on the way we use our time
- recognize when we have created a connection
- determine when we have established a deep level of rapport
- recognize what kind of emphasis in a presentation will work best in getting our message across
- ascertain whether we have read and respected the culture of the person with whom we are dealing
- learn the etiquette of the local culture.

If you look and listen as local people greet each other in the part of rural France where I live, you will notice that they say ‘Bonjour’ whenever they encounter anyone (whether they know them or not). You can never overdo it with *bonjour*. When you think you’ve said it too much, you’re probably saying it just enough. So if you think saying ‘Excusez-moi’ to a shop assistant is enough to get them to respond civilly to you, then think again. As one of my French friends explained, every sort of interaction with the French has to start with a heartfelt *bonjour*. ‘This is how you announce that you want to speak with the French,’ she said. ‘You can’t just smile and start talking to the French, or even say “excuse me” and start talking. Saying *bonjour* also means, “I am entering your territory.” So you can get this if you pay attention, but few do. The result is that many visitors think that the French are rude, when in fact the French think that those who do not follow this custom are incredibly rude.’

In the NLP process of modelling particularly, it is by watching and listening to body language that we can:

- find out how someone structures their thinking to achieve what they do
- elicit the unconscious (and therefore taken-for-granted) ways of thinking that make the difference in the results we achieve
- do an inner benchmarking of excellence rather than relying only on external behaviour
- deduce the values and beliefs behind someone’s behaviour

- recognize other people's different emotional states.

By developing our sensitivity to body language signals, we can tell when someone has changed the way they are thinking. We can begin to determine what strategies they are using when they are achieving what they want and when they are not.

I was talking with a client about her goals for her work and her life. She talked about two goals. The first was a goal she had been given in her work. As she talked about this, her face was pale, her lips were taut, and she sat forward with her shoulders hunched. Then she talked about a goal she had to travel and work in Canada. The moment she began to think about this her face flushed slightly, her shoulders dropped, the muscles of her face relaxed, and she began to move her arms in a fluid, easy way as she gestured while she spoke.

What we established (with not too much difficulty) was that when she was thinking about her work goals she was very much into problem thinking, concentrating on what she had to do and what she ought to do. She was dissociated in her thinking as she did this. When she thought about her goals for working in Canada, she immediately imagined herself there doing the kind of work she really wanted. She was thinking about this in an associated way: she could see it as if she were looking through her own eyes and hearing it through her own ears. Most important of all, she was feeling what it was like to be there. The body signals she was evidencing for the second goal were characteristic of what was, for her, compelling motivation.

We have two characteristic states

Most people have two key characteristic states: one when they are aligned and in touch with their unique skills and attitudes, and one

when they are out of touch with who they are and their true capabilities. Each state has its own characteristic thinking patterns, beliefs and body language. By learning to recognize the characteristics of each and the distinctions between the two, we can learn how to choose the most effective one for the outcomes we want to achieve.

Traditional ways of reading body language

You may have read books on body language saying that, for example, if someone is crossing their arms it means that they are defensive. Or maybe you have heard that if someone touches their nose with the back of their finger this means they are lying. In my experience it is foolish and disrespectful to make such judgments.

The way body language is used in NLP is very different. In NLP we respect that each person has their own unique patterns of body language. The challenge is to be sensitive to that and not make assumptions – positive or negative – about what those signals mean.

One of my friends was commenting on someone they had just met.

‘She is very intelligent,’ he said.

‘How do you know this?’ I asked.

‘She speaks very quickly,’ he replied.

We might find, for example, that crossed arms for one person mean something completely different from what they mean for someone else. One of the aims of NLP is to heighten our awareness of patterns in body language for everyone we meet, so that we can learn how to flex our behaviour to connect with them if we so choose and in a way that is respectful of who they are.

Mind and body are one

What we think is how we are. Through our body language we show our skills, our values, our beliefs, what kind of person we are, our cultural preferences, and even our purpose in life. By a handshake we reveal everything that anyone can ever know about us if they are sensitive to us in this way. We show what we are feeling every moment of every day. If we are expecting disagreement in a meeting we are about to attend, we show that in our body language.

We reveal all in a handshake

When Peter expected disagreement in a meeting he ran a negative inner dialogue, imagining the worst that each person might say to each other. Consequently, his eyes went down and to his left. At the same time, the muscles in his face became taut and he lowered his head. You wouldn't have to have too many meetings with Peter in this state to begin to know what was going to happen next!

As we remember happy memories, we show that in our body language, too.

When Julia thought about the success she had achieved in her involvement with the board of directors, she looked up and to her left initially (remembering what one of the most successful meetings looked like). She then started to smile slightly and looked down and to her right (as she associated into her feelings when the board had achieved a major agreement about the way forward in the business and had done so in a very creative way). She looked sideways and to her right as she imagined some of the conversations she expected to have in the next meeting. All the time she was rhythmically swinging her foot from side to side.

Our body language reveals the truth of our inner thoughts and feelings.

Spotting the filters

In [Chapter 3](#), Filters on your world I explained some of the different filters we use to think and communicate. We can detect these filters through our language. And we can deduce someone's type of thinking by the patterns in their body language.

Body language reveals the truth of our inner thoughts and feelings

Remember that the patterns are only clues, not absolute proof. It is our awareness of patterns in body language, verbal language and our knowledge of a person over time that enable us to get closer to what is really going on in their thinking. Nevertheless, the more we read the signals, the more we are likely to choose the way of communicating with each person we encounter that will enable us to relate to them effectively.

Let's explore some of these body language patterns in more depth.

Associated/dissociated

In [Chapter 3](#) I described how we might be *associated*, engaged in what we are saying and thinking, by experiencing situations standing in our own shoes. In this state we are connected with our feelings. Or we can be *dissociated*, observing and listening to events as if we are a fly on the wall. In this latter state we are disconnected from our emotions.

Our body language changes dramatically according to which of these states we are in. In meetings it is easy to detect those people who are in an associated state. They usually lean forward and gesture animatedly to show their feelings. They often interrupt as their emotions rule their actions. When talking about their feelings,

they hold their hands to their chest, close to their heart. In contrast, someone who is dissociated is usually sitting or leaning back. By putting some distance between themselves and the situation they keep themselves objective. They do this mentally as they do it physically. When dissociated, they often talk about themselves and point to themselves as if to an imaginary self in the air in front of them (which in their thinking is often how it is).

Try selling to someone who stays in a dissociated state and you will probably find that it is hard if not impossible. For most people the decision to buy is associated with a feeling. The skill in this kind of influencing situation lies in knowing how to achieve that and recognizing when you have it.

I was surprised how often the French people use the word *on*, meaning 'one' as in 'one is going to eat now' or 'one is going to leave' rather than using 'I' or 'we'. I commented on this to my neighbour and he was very clear. He explained that if I came to him and said, 'J'ai perdu mon chien' (I have lost my dog), they would leave me alone to search for him. However, if, instead, I said, 'On a perdu son chien' (one has lost one's dog) everyone would look for him with me! So rather than being an expression of dissociation *on* is an expression of connectedness and community!

Problem state/desired state (away from/towards)

The ease or tension we hold in our body is a result of how we think. Think for a moment about something you must or should do today. Notice what happens in your body as you do this. Now think about something you would really like to do. Imagine yourself doing this. Notice what has happened to your body. How are your shoulders, your neck and your back? Can you tell what expression you have on your face?

When we think in terms of problems or what we don't want in our lives, we concentrate on what we want to move away from. This kind of motivation is often based on moving away from pain or

discomfort. Consequently, the body language we demonstrate when thinking this way is tension. In this problem state we are likely to frown, hold our shoulders tense and hunched, and show tension in other parts of our body. Not surprisingly, one of the most common reasons for absence from work is back problems. What do you think that says about how a large proportion of the population feels about the work they do?

On the other hand, when we imagine what we do want, we have corresponding body language. This is how people who think this way influence the achievement of their goals: they are acting as if they already have achieved them and the world responds accordingly. Their behaviour is likely to 'hang loose': they are relaxed, have loose facial muscles, easy-moving limbs, flowing movements. If we watch and listen to the way we are using our bodies, we can get clues about what we are doing that is either helping or hindering us to achieve what we really want.

Our posture, our gestures and our facial expressions and lines communicate the habits we have developed in our lives. Take a look in the mirror: what is your face telling you?

What is your face telling you?

Match/mismatch

Some people like to be liked and to please other people, and some of us would rather have confrontation and argument. Sometimes we prefer one approach in one context and another in a different context. Whichever approach we like better shows in the way we behave. Someone who searches for similarity (matching) will seek to be like the person or people they are with in every way they can. They will move like them, dress like them, look like them. And it is likely that they will be attached to being liked.

You may have noticed how couples who are close to each other seem to grow to look alike. This is not surprising when you think that people who are fond of each other or in love will match each other's behaviour and expressions. Over time, the lines that form on

their faces will be similar. Even if their basic face structure is different, the habits they form together will show in the way their bodies develop over time. Take a look at your partner: do you like what you see? You may be looking at a mirror image of yourself!

So someone who creates a climate of rapport naturally – someone who is very approachable and is easy company – is usually someone who matches others around them. This doesn't mean that they agree with everything other people say. However, they will be searching for the opportunity to support other people in some way, building them up rather than knocking them down. Their behaviour, including their movements, their posture, their facial expressions, their gestures, even the rate at which they blink and breathe, will be similar to, if not the same as, that of the person to whom they are relating at that moment.

This matching of non-verbal behaviour is influential in situations of discord. We can communicate at a non-verbal level that, although we do not agree, we do support the other person. You may have noticed how some people with critical feedback to give will simultaneously touch the other person on the arm or on the shoulder. In effect, what this is saying is that I am still connected to you even though I am giving critical feedback.

Notice what happens when someone whose preferred style is to match in this way is faced with someone who mismatches. As the other person changes to be different, the matcher will look confused, and will often be shocked into silence. Mismatching behaviour is alien to them. Alternatively, they will skilfully follow the other person, not allowing them to be out of synchronization.

Similarly, someone who searches for difference, preferring to mismatch, will show that in the way they behave. They will use body language that is contrary to the person they are with. If their partner in conversation is leaning forward in an associated manner, the mismatcher will lean back, dissociated. It is a pattern for them to be different, and they will show it in the way they dress, behave and speak.

You can easily notice someone who prefers to mismatch: they stand out from a group as the one whose behaviour is different from

everyone else's. Mismatching externally with others often stems from conflict going on inside the person, and they may indicate this conflict by talking about or experiencing parts of themselves at odds with each other. They show this by spatially indicating the parts as being in separate hands, hence the expression 'on the one hand ... on the other hand ...'. Trying to match someone whose preference is to mismatch can feel somewhat like nailing jelly to the ceiling! This kind of behaviour is characteristic of someone who may have difficulty in relationships, who may not be easy to converse with, and who seems to put obstacles in the path of any connectedness to anyone else.

Past – present – future

Consider your office or your home for a moment. Do you know where everything is? Do key items have their place in your environment? If you have an office and use a computer, you very likely file different sorts of information in their allocated places. Even if you are not orderly about this, it is likely that there is some method in your world.

We do the same with the space around us. You will have a place in that space where you represent the past, the present and the future. Think about it now. Where are your past memories: behind you, to one side, above you? Ask someone close to you – you might be surprised to find that they have their time zones allocated to very different parts of their personal space.

It is as if we have a spatial filing cabinet that goes with us wherever we go. We typically have a place for parts of ourselves that we like and identify with and quite another space for the parts of ourselves that we would prefer to dissociate from.

We have a spatial filing cabinet

When I am coaching, I note where these parts are stored. I can gradually make the person I am coaching aware of this storage system so they can make more choices in how they use it. It is often

the case that we keep the parts of ourselves that we like close to our chest and the parts that we don't like at arm's reach, in front or to one side of us. Watch people's hands and where they gesture as they speak to you and you will learn where they store their memories, parts of themselves, visions for the future, and much more.

Procedure/choice

We give clues about how we make decisions by where we gesture. Think for a moment about how you make decisions. How, for example, did you decide to read this book? Did you have a choice of books or was its purchase part of a planned approach and this was one step in a sequence? Whichever it was indicates your preference for choices or procedures.

And if I had asked you to explain that choice to me, I wonder how you would have indicated your preference in your body language. Someone who prefers choice tends to wave their hands in an arc in front of them, indicating the array of choice. Someone whose preference is procedural is much more likely to make a chopping action, moving their hand away from them, indicating the steps stretching before them in sequence.

Internally or externally referenced

Have you ever noticed a person who, when making a suggestion in a meeting, glances in the direction of someone from whom they are seeking approval? It may not be the person to whom they are making the suggestion, but it is the person whose feedback and acknowledgment they rely on for feedback on how they are doing. This is characteristic of someone who is externally referenced, in that they need feedback from an external source to know how they are doing.

Externally referenced people glance, seeking approval, from key members of a meeting

Someone who is internally referenced has an internal yardstick that they use to know how they are doing. Someone with this preference is much more likely to look straight at the person to whom they are making a suggestion, or even not to look at anyone but perhaps to be reading the next item on the agenda.

Someone who is externally referenced is much more likely to seek feedback than someone who is internally referenced.

Using body language to influence our state

It works the other way round: how we behave influences how we think and feel. If we hunch our shoulders and tense our neck, we are likely to think about the problems in our lives. If, at the same time, we look down and (usually) right, we will also feel the emotions attached to those problems. Saying ‘keep your chin up’ to someone who is feeling down is very sound advice. By lifting our head up we disconnect from our feelings, which are experienced in a head down position for most people. And when we say ‘distance yourself from it’, we are inviting our listener to imagine themselves outside of themselves in their thinking and to dissociate from their feelings.

‘Keep your chin up’ is sound advice

By changing one or two factors in the way we are thinking about a situation, we can significantly change how we feel about it.

I have learned many things about how to eat in India – the first about eating with your hands. Just gathering the food in the fingers was the first challenge, and my temptation was to hold on to my training as a child to sit upright at the table. Well, that ensured that by the time my hand had reached my mouth that there was no food left on my fingers. And when I watched my Indian colleagues I saw that they lowered their heads to the plate (which was, of course, contrary to everything I had been brought up to do). However, when I did this not only did I discover that the food stayed on my hands

long enough to get in my mouth but that by looking up at the same time (and not looking at the food) it became a very connected sociable experience.

I also initially thought that my Indian colleagues were being very unsociable by not talking at the table until one of them explained that as a child he had been brought up to treat eating food as a prayer. Now that was a reframe!

Shortcut to using body language to achieve an aligned state

- 1 Work with a partner to do this.
- 2 Ask your partner to think of a time when they didn't feel at ease with themselves, when they felt out of balance, possibly stressed in some way. Ask them (but only briefly) to step back into this time so that they are seeing, hearing and feeling it again.
- 3 Note their body language. See how many characteristic elements of this state you can detect.
- 4 Ask your partner to break state (think about something completely different).
- 5 Ask your partner to think of a time when they felt completely at one with themselves. Ask them to associate into this time by seeing, hearing and feeling it from their own shoes.
- 6 Note their body language. How many characteristic elements of this state do you detect?
- 7 Feed back to your partner what you noticed to be the differences between the body language of each state.
- 8 Ask them to do the same for you.

Summary

Our body can know much more than our mind alone. If we limit our learning to what we can know intellectually, we significantly

compromise what we can learn.

We live in an age when learning is key. We not only need to learn how to learn, we need to use every resource to do so. Whole-body learning comes from using our body to tell us what our mind doesn't consciously know. And the quickest and most effective way to learn how to respond to the different cultures we come into contact with each day is to listen to and look at their body language.

Making people aware of their body language can often have the effect of lifting them out of the issue, so that they can take a more dissociated view of what is happening. This can be valuable if they are so emotionally caught up in an issue that they cannot break out of it. Awareness of body language creates a meta state from which we can watch and listen to the patterns of what is happening and how it is happening.

In the context of modelling excellence, it is the body language that contains most of the clues about how we and others are achieving the results that we want to be able to reproduce.

Treat the spoken word as unsubstantiated rumour unless supported by non-verbal behaviour

Thought provokers

- 1 Watch someone taking part in a real-life discussion on a TV programme. Notice where they put their hands. Notice also where they look when they speak. You don't need to know what their gestures mean; just be aware of them.
- 2 Ask someone you know to compare something they did last year with something they plan to do this year or next year. Notice where they look or indicate with their hands when they are talking about the past compared to when they are talking about the future.
- 3 Listen carefully to someone on the phone. Determine when they are associated and when they are dissociated by the emotion (or absence of it) in their voice.

- 4 Pay attention to one person in the next meeting you attend. (Choose a meeting where you do not have a key role so that you can give time to observing someone else.) Determine how much of the time they are in the present with the other people in the meeting and how much time they spend elsewhere. Do this by noticing their eye movements.
- 5 When you are next with someone from a different culture (and that might still be from the same country as yourself), adopt as much of their non-verbal behaviour as you can. When you do this, what do you learn about their underlying values (what has to be true for them to behave in this way)?
- 6 If you are in a new country – one that you have not visited before (or even one that you have) – what do you notice that is different about the way in which the local people behave (perhaps in the way they eat, engage with each other, or speak)? What can you find out about what that means?

Diane had struggled with her work, her weight and her ability to move forward in life. She described herself as going round in circles. Whenever she was asked a question about something in the present or the future, her responses always referred to the past, and she often described what she didn't want or hadn't done, which often gave her questioner the feeling that she wasn't really answering the question. Her answers also invariably started with 'I'. Through feedback, she began to notice how blinkered and habitual her thinking was. As she became increasingly aware of these habits, she began to catch herself and say, 'Oh, wow – I am just talking about myself!' She also became uncomfortable with her problem-centred way of thinking and her tendency to dwell on negative aspects of the past. Gradually, she began to introduce some new choices. She started to ask about others rather than concentrating on herself. She began talking about what she did want or already had, and she shifted to not only

talking about the present but to being present. Diane began to 'show up' at her best, and others began to connect with her. She seemed somehow to look years younger; her facial muscles relaxed, her shoulders dropped and over time she started to lose weight. The butterfly emerged from the chrysalis.

Linguistic

The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter. 'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.

Mark Twain

In the beginning was the word. Your words are an expression of your life. Your language is an embroidery of patterns of words that tell your story. Your language is either your gateway to learning and choice, or your jailer.

Your words are your life

In business especially, language is a powerful tool. It is the currency of business transactions. By learning to develop mastery of your language you can:

- improve the quality of the information you exchange with others in whatever medium you choose
- increase the level of understanding you create with your communication
- influence the outcomes of situations
- empower yourself and others by challenging the constraints that show themselves in language
- bypass conscious resistance by engaging the unconscious mind
- communicate in a way that is captivating and compelling
- enrich your language and consequently your life
- learn what messages you are communicating to others' unconscious minds and discover if they are those you want to

communicate

- learn how to recognize the signals that you and others are sending through your body language.

The opportunity to practise your skills with language is available to you not only when you interact with others, but more so when you interact with you.

5 Enriched communication

*When there is a gap between one's real and declared aims,
one turns instinctively to long words and exhausted
idioms, like cuttlefish squirting ink.*

George Orwell

Personal success relies largely on our ability to communicate. What we say matters little compared to how we say it, no matter what medium we use to convey the words.

The quality of language is one of the significant factors that make the difference between outstanding communicators and influencers and those who would aspire to achieve their standing but who do not ignite the hearts and minds of their listeners in the same way. When Barack Obama was campaigning for election as President of the United States, his name was linked to that of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King and other great leaders as people with the ability to engage and inspire, to create an enticing vision for the future and to move people to action.

Great communicators and leaders ignite the hearts and minds of their listeners

One of the early discoveries in NLP was that skilled communicators use language in a way that creates a climate of trust and understanding. A study of powerful communicators also revealed that they naturally use language that is rich in its use of all the senses. The richer our language, the richer our internal experience and the richer the experience of those with whom we engage. Read these lines from Shakespeare's play *Love's Labour's Lost*:

*A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind;
A lover's ears will hear the lowest sound,
When the suspicious head of theft is stopp'd:
Love's feeling is more soft and sensible
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails:
Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste ...*

What has Shakespeare's writing got to do with writing in business today? Everything! What constitutes excellence transcends time. He has embraced virtually every sense in this short passage. This is enriched communication. You may not use his words, but be aware that the reason his writing has reached so many people over so much time is because of the way he influences us with his style of writing. There's nothing bland in the words he uses, and in using our senses he engages our unconscious mind, the part of us that finds this kind of communication irresistible. It fires our imagination.

Compare that example to part of an article I received today:

I had the opportunity of developing alongside a group of people who came from all aspects of life and from various parts of the country. During my time I recognized the confluence of the different parts of this experience in which I was involved and the connections it made for me. I also had the opportunity to have interactions with teachers who were undertaking a new approach to teaching, in terms of their technique, approach and attitude.

I know the person who wrote this, and I had expected to find their writing exciting and inspiring; it wasn't. I was surprised, and my reaction prompted me to take a closer look to find out what it was about the style that had left me untouched in this way. Given that the writer was hoping to 'touch' many more people with this article, this was important. The language is not enriched. The writer uses neutral language with very little appeal to the senses. Neutral language is likely to keep the intellectual, critical, unimaginative side of the brain engaged rather than the imagination.

Contrast that example with the words of the French writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry:

And suddenly that tranquil cloud-world, that world so harmless and simple that one sees below on rising out of the clouds, took on in my eyes a new quality. That peaceful world became a pitfall. I imagined the immense white pitfall spread beneath me. Below it reigned not what one might think – not the agitation of men, not the living tumult and bustle of cities, but a silence even more absolute than in the clouds, a peace even more final. This viscous whiteness became in my mind the frontier between the real and the unreal, between the known and the unknowable. Already I was beginning to realize that a spectacle has no meaning except it be seen through the glass of a culture, a civilization, a craft. Mountaineers too know the sea of clouds, yet it does not seem to them the fabulous curtain it is to me.

It is reassuring to know that we can learn the enriched style of great leaders, authors, poets, communicators and influencers. Let us work for a return to those who do speak and subscribe to these kinds of sentiments and words.

My introduction to NLP

Ironically, it was over 30 years ago on a creative writing course that I first came across NLP. I wanted to be able to write with interest and style. The course I attended was run by two people: one an author, the other a consultant who had ‘coded’ the writing skills of this author in order that we might reproduce some of his writing style in our own work. I became curious about this process of coding talent, which is how I came to be interested in NLP.

NLP is a process of encoding talent

Since then I have modelled many writers. I had the privilege of listening to Brian Keenan talking about the process he went through to write *An Evil Cradling*, about his harrowing experiences as a hostage in Beirut for four and a half years. His discussion of the writing was as compelling as the writing itself. Both his spoken and his written communication are rich in the use of all the senses. When he spoke to our course you could have heard a pin drop, such was the quality of his communication.

You can code the writing or speaking style of any great communicator. It sometimes seems that the qualities of compelling communication have been stripped away, to leave the cold, neutral language that fills so many hours of business presentations and pages of reports. By studying the difference between the people to whom you are more likely to give your attention and those whose reports you shove to the bottom of the pile, you will uncover the secret of enriched communication.

Sensory-specific language

The passage from Shakespeare quoted above contains language appealing to the eyes, the ears and the feelings: ‘gaze an eagle blind’, ‘hear the lowest sound’, ‘soft’, ‘tender’, ‘gross in taste’. The dramatist engages our every sense so that we can see, hear and feel what he is saying. Feelings language is what encourages the reader to associate and connect with what is being said, and this is at the heart of this passage. And, finally, he leads us to a less usual form of language – leaving a sweet taste in our mouths.

You may not want to communicate exactly like Shakespeare in one of your project review meetings, but you probably do want to capture and hold your audience’s attention. And you want to speak or write in a way that increases the likelihood of your listener or your reader understanding what you say.

Adapting to others’ preferences

It is important to be able to have the choice of using all the senses in the way you speak or write. You will discover that your listeners and your readers have preferences, as in the following example.

It is important to be able to use all the senses as you speak or write

Pete and Joe rarely agreed. They both complained that they found the other frustrating. As senior managers in a rapidly growing organization, it was vital that they understood each other's point of view.

Whenever they got together to make decisions, Pete wanted to gain a grasp of the situation and make decisions based on his gut feeling. He'd had a lot of success working this way. Joe, on the other hand, liked to talk his ideas through in full. Typically, he would have a list of points that he wanted to discuss. Pete quickly got frustrated with this and usually cut the meeting short. Their inability to reach a satisfactory conclusion had resulted in Pete moving Joe to a new position where they had less direct contact.

It seemed as though Pete and Joe were speaking a different language; in a way they were. Pete thought and talked mainly in terms of feelings. He made decisions based on 'gut feel'. Joe had a very auditory way of communicating: he would 'talk his ideas through' and have 'points to discuss'. They were using different senses to communicate, or rather to try to communicate.

If your means of communicating is the same as the person to whom you are speaking, then you are literally talking the same language. If, like Pete and Joe, you use different systems to communicate, then you will have difficulty understanding and accepting what the other has to say.

I was occasionally chatting online to another cyclist who had asked if I might go for a meal with him, and the following was characteristic of his messages:

I have been doing some rides with the local bike club. A week ago 2,000 metres of hill climbing in 22 miles. Friday was 38 miles due North and another 22 and a half miles on Sunday. Was out yesterday morning from Warminster. First time on a CTC ride. 24 miles, big group split into 3. Rest day today as lead on 30 miles 2 more.

I asked him what had struck him about the country that he was cycling through and told him how much I loved the smell of roadside herbs in Provence, and, when in India, the sound of the rising calls of the morning birds. There was no future in this relationship! I guess I could have adapted to his style, but I was rather attached to what I experienced as a sensory, rich way of enjoying not only cycling but life.

Once you get to know someone's preferences, you can adapt the way in which you communicate to match their style so that you increase the likelihood of them understanding what you are saying. And that in turn increases the chances that they will relate to what you say and potentially agree with it. If, however, you do not know the person, or are talking to a larger audience whose thinking and communication styles are going to be varied, enriched language is the style to use. In this way everyone will be able to relate to some of the style that you are using.

Examples of language using various senses

Your speech is an expression of the way you think. For example, when you think visually you are likely to say:

- 'I get the picture.'
- 'It's clear now.'
- 'I see what you mean.'

However, when you think in an auditory way you are more likely to say:

- ‘That sounds good.’
- ‘It rings bells for me.’
- ‘I hear what you are saying.’

When your experience is more feelings based, you tend to say:

- ‘That feels right.’
- ‘It made an impact on me.’
- ‘I was moved by what you said.’

Then we have the language of taste and smell (often grouped under the category of feelings):

- ‘It left a bad taste in my mouth.’
- ‘There was something fishy about that suggestion.’

Some of the key words for each of the three systems are:

Visual	Auditory	Feelings
see	sound	impact
focus	hear	taste
clear	tell	feel
bright	say	touch
picture	click	smell
hazy	bang	tense
colour	talk	rough
view	volume	bitter
dim	loud	relaxed
look	snap	whiff

Some of the key expressions for each of the three systems are:

Visual

Things are a bit hazy.

I take a dim view of that.

The future looks bright.

The outlook is bleak.

He sees things through rose-tinted glasses.

He is in a black mood today.

We're in the pink.

I look forward to seeing you.

Things are looking up.

We've a clear way forward.

That's a colourful expression.

Auditory

I tell myself to take care.

I'm glad to hear it.

Tell me how it is.

My teeth are chattering.

Things clicked into place.

Let me explain.

We're in harmony.

Listen to yourself.

We're in tune with each other.

It was music to my ears.

I'm pleased you said that.

Feelings

I was racked with pain.

It was the sweet smell of success!

You need to get in touch with reality.

She got a taste of fear.

I've got a grasp of what you mean

Warm regards

I've got a handle on it.

I was moved.

It was a blow to my pride.

Let's firm up on this.

I savoured the moment.

Hold on!

Excellent communicators naturally use the system preferred by the person to whom they are speaking, at least initially if they want to build rapport. This ensures that they are talking the same language and are more easily understood than if they used a representational system less suited to their audience.

Use of enriched language in business

*Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.*
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'The Theologian's Tale:
Elizabeth'

*You'd scarce expect one of my age
To speak in public on the stage;*

*And if I chance to fall below
Demosthenes or Cicero
Don't view me with a critic's eye,
But pass my imperfections by.*

*Large streams from little fountains flow,
Tall oaks from little acorns grow.*
David Everett, 'Lines Written for a School Declamation'

*Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there, wondering,
fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream
before.*
Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Raven'

These are examples of compelling, inspiring language. By developing your ability to use all sensory systems in your language, you will be developing your ability to communicate in a way that is interesting and compelling.

Contrast the following:

As you walk down the corridor to the main office you will see a pink notice on the wall to the side of the EXIT door. Read this – it will remind you of the emergency procedures we have demonstrated this morning.

This has a very different effect to saying:

Be sure to take account of the emergency procedures on the way out.

The first example is more likely to engage listeners' attention. It uses sensory -specific language, and it encourages association into the experience of reading the procedures. It is therefore likely to be more memorable than dissociated, neutral language.

Compare this:

Things have been difficult for some time now. As a result of this, our objective for the next period is to introduce a quality programme. It will be crucial to the future success of the company. By giving attention to quality we will be

understanding and meeting the requirements of our customers, both internal and external. I cannot stress the importance of this enough. For the last year our sales, and it seems our spirit, in this team have fallen.

with this:

Because of what I feel to be the problem and because you tell me that our focus of attention now needs to be different, I have written out my thoughts on our outcomes for the year to come. I would like to explain these to you; I'd like you to listen and ask yourself, 'How can I make this work for me?' I want to hear the answers to this question. My vision of the future is one where each person with whom we come into contact – staff and clients alike –will see a new image emerging, one that communicates attention and care and concern that we really meet their needs. I believe we can do this by ensuring that we see each and every one of them to ask them all, 'What do you really need from us in order for you to feel that you are being served well?' and 'What would have to be true for you to want to continue to keep us as your main supplier for the next three years?' We will know when we have achieved our goal when our customers invite us to meet with them to discuss their needs and when they say, 'You understand us and demonstrate that you will act to ensure our needs are met.'

Each style of communication has its place. Unfortunately, neutral, abstract language is often used in business through habit rather than choice. If you want to increase understanding, to motivate and to inspire, then enriched communication is the way to do it.

Language that encourages association is memorable

Shortcut to using enriched language

- 1 Choose something that you want to communicate to someone. It could be via an email, a letter, a report or a presentation.
- 2 Decide on the outcome that you want to achieve. (See [Chapter 16](#), Achieve what you really want: Well-formed outcomes.) Work out how you will know when you have achieved this – for example what you expect to see, hear and feel that indicates your success.
- 3 Think of the person with whom you are going to communicate. What do you think is their preferred way of communicating: what is their most preferred sense, next preferred, least preferred? If you aren't sure, take a look at any communication you have had from them. If you are communicating to a group of people, use all the senses unless you know there is a cultural norm for the group that you can match.
- 4 Imagine yourself associated into the situation that you want to communicate so that you can see, hear and feel it. (This could be a past, present or future situation.)
- 5 Choosing the preferred style of your audience, write down what you are seeing/hearing/feeling (matching the way they would use these). Aim to convey with language what it is that you see, hear and feel. If you are not sure of some of the vocabulary, check back to the lists included earlier in this chapter.
- 6 After you have communicated what you wanted to say, check out how far you achieved your outcome. To what extent have you achieved the indicators of success that you set yourself at the outset?
- 7 What have you learned about how to use enriched communication in the process of doing this?

Summary

Enriched communication is the essence of motivation and commitment. Appeal to the eyes, ears and feelings of your listeners and you will have their understanding and their attention. Inspirational leaders throughout history have instinctively had the ability to capture the hearts and minds of their audience. By understanding the components of enriched language, you too can inspire and delight your listeners. Bring your business meetings and presentations alive with your skilled use of language.

Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality.

Edgar Allan Poe

Thought provokers

- 1 For someone you haven't met before, how could you prepare to present your ideas so that you take account of each of the visual/auditory/feelings systems?
- 2 Rewrite these sentences using enriched language:
 - a It is important to me that I progress within this organization.
 - b I want to know what we aim to achieve with this meeting.
- 3 Select someone you work with. Listen to the language they use. Identify any preferences for visual/auditory/feelings systems.
- 4 How can you ensure that you address each of the senses when giving a presentation?
 - a Visual
 - b Auditory
 - c Feelings
- 5 Pick one of your favourite books. Read the first page and note examples of each of the sensory systems that you detect being used.
- 6 Watch some adverts on television. For each one, note which senses it appeals to predominantly.

7 Go online and choose a website. Which senses does the home page appeal to? How attracted are you to continue to explore this site?

References

Brian Keenan (1993) *An Evil Cradling*, Vintage.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1943) *Airman's Odyssey*, Reynal & Hitchcock.

Gregory Bateson was one of the influences on John Grinder and Richard Bandler, the founders of NLP. Much of his thinking about change and learning has been incorporated and developed in the concepts of NLP. Some of his discoveries about learning came from the time he spent studying porpoises, which involved watching captive animals in performances for the general public.

In particular, audiences were shown how a porpoise learned to do a trick. As the porpoise circled in the pool, the trainer would wait and watch for the porpoise to do something different: flipping its tail or spinning around. As soon as it did this different behaviour – it didn't really matter what it was as long as it was different – the trainer would blow a whistle and give the porpoise a fish. As soon as the porpoise repeated the behaviour, the trainer would once again blow a whistle and give the porpoise another fish. In this way the porpoise learned what it had to do to get its reward and would demonstrate the new behaviour in order to obtain the fish.

There were usually several shows each day, so at the next show the porpoise would, naturally enough, swim out into the pool and begin to demonstrate the new behaviour that had previously earned the fish. Of

course, this time the trainer wanted to demonstrate to the audience how the porpoise learned new tricks and consequently didn't give it the fish. The porpoise would become increasingly frustrated and towards the end of the show would do something else: jump out of the water, for example. As soon as it demonstrated this new behaviour, the trainer would blow the whistle and give it a fish. The porpoise quickly realized that this was what it needed to do and would continue to jump out of the water, and each time it did so the trainer blew the whistle and gave it a fish.

At each subsequent show the same pattern was repeated, the porpoise getting increasingly frustrated each time until in desperation it performed a new behaviour by chance, at which point the trainer immediately blew the whistle and gave it a fish. The frustration in the porpoise increased to such a point that occasionally the trainer would break the procedure and give the porpoise a fish without its demonstrating a new behaviour.

Eventually, after many shows. the porpoise's behaviour seemed to change dramatically, becoming very excited as it was waiting to be let into the show pool. When it was released into the pool the porpoise put on an amazing performance that included eight completely new behaviours, some of which had never been witnessed before.

When asked about the unearned fish, the trainer replied, 'Those fish were to maintain my relationship with the porpoise. Only by maintaining our relationship can we communicate in this way and achieve the kind of results you have just seen.'

6 Clean questions

Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion and the last.

Samuel Johnson

Pause where you are right now. Where is your attention? Where has it been over the last ten minutes? Have you been concentrating on the pages of this book or has your attention wandered on to other things? Are you paying attention to what I have written here? Has your attention been at any time on the way I am saying it? Are you noticing any patterns in the way I am communicating with you? If not, let's begin!

I was, as I often am, in India. And my Indian colleagues were, as usual, engrossed in the cricket. Despite its English origins, it had never been a sport that had interested me. Yet here they were fascinated and totally in awe of the top players. Of course, the one that stood out for everyone, though now retired, was Sachin Tendulka. I asked one of my friends to tell me what it was that made 'the god of cricket' so great. At first, he gave me general answers but then after some more questioning he gave an example of one of his talents. 'Watch him when he has hit the ball badly (which was not very often). When he turns back to take the next ball, he has totally regained his composure. He takes each shot afresh and lets go of anything that has happened before. And so it was in life too in the way that he came back from injury and operation.' My interest in cricket was ignited in this moment.

In contrast, I was doing an exercise with a group of delegates on one of my courses. The challenge was for one of the group members to explore the goals of one of the other people on the course using open questions. The person doing the questioning looked

uninterested through most of this process. When we explored this subsequently he said, ‘I was waiting for them to talk about something I am interested in!’ On another occasion one of my delegates seemed increasingly frustrated with the guest we had invited. He commented that ‘X (the guest) keeps turning the questions upside down!’ ‘This’, I replied, ‘is exactly one of the talents that he has!’

My experience of watching cricket and other sports, which has been repeated many times in other ways and with other people, is that there is a richness in many things that I often overlook. Yet when I become sincerely and openly curious about another person’s area of interest, I begin to take on their passion for the subject.

*The public have an insatiable curiosity to know everything,
except what is worth knowing.*

Oscar Wilde

An attitude of curiosity

Richard Bandler, one of the founders of NLP, said: ‘NLP is an attitude characterized by the sense of curiosity and adventure and a desire to learn the skill to be able to find out what kinds of communication influence somebody and the kinds of things worth knowing ... to look at life as a rare and unprecedented opportunity to learn.’

Rather than taking a curious, open-minded approach to learning, people tend to want to make their experiences fit their preconceived ideas. This happens so frequently when learning a new language that in English and French we have the expression *faux amis* (false friends), meaning French words that sound similar to English words but mean something different (and vice versa). If, for example, you want to order chips (as in French fries) in a restaurant, you ask for *frites*. If you ask for *chips*, you will get crisps (as, indeed, you might in the USA)! And just in case ... if you ask for a *préservatif* (which might, to an English speaker, suggest something used to preserve things), you will get a condom.

And, that aside, we have words that can seem as though they are questions on the surface but are not really. I mentioned at the beginning of this book that NLP is a state of not knowing. And that is the source of a genuine question of curiosity which we will explore in this chapter.

I was hosting a dinner party and one of the guests (after rather a lot of alcohol) was beginning to dominate the conversation and so loudly that others could not avoid her. There was a lot of uncomfortable body language. She turned to me and said, 'Can I recount a story?' (She had already recounted several.) 'No,' I replied directly (only directness seemed to land with this person). There was a general silence. 'Well, I am going to,' she replied. 'So that wasn't a question?' She looked shocked. 'Well, I am asking that question again now - it will be short,' she answered. 'And the answer is still no,' I replied.

This is not unusual. The ability to question and listen in an open and 'clean' way is rare in my experience. And yet without this ability we go through the world confirming our already established ideas and learning little that is new. A tendency to impose our 'map of the world' on others is sadly the norm. That is true at many levels and is, I believe, the root of many of the problems we experience in the world today.

The ability to question and listen in a 'clean' way is rare

Many of the participants in my programmes in a different country to their homeland are tempted to recreate their world as they know it. They are likely to want the food to which they are accustomed, to dress the way that is their habit, to speak with their own familiar language patterns. I avoid returning to some of the Greek islands that I first visited over 40 years ago for fear that the loss of their natural beauty and the growth in tourism might shake the memories I have of their unspoiled charm. I class this tendency to impose our

way without permission as a form of bullying. With this attitude we are unlikely to discover the unique excellence that exists in the world around us.

So what is the alternative?

Clean

David Grove, on whose work the concept of clean questions is founded, unfortunately died in 2008. His work as a therapist was remarkable for the profound change and learning that he was able to facilitate with extreme efficiency and elegance. There are a few people who have influenced the subject of NLP and, in particular, the way we use it, and he, ironically, is one. I say 'ironically', as he would never have classed himself as an NLP coach or trainer. He was nevertheless without doubt an exceptional therapist, linguist and coach.

I was spellbound when I first saw him working with a group. His skill with language and awareness of patterns of behaviour was captivating and profound. When I consider the similarity in the people who have had this effect on me, I realize that one of the factors that makes this remarkable difference is the quality of their attention.

It was no surprise that NLP modellers and trainers Penny Tompkins and James Lawley decided to model his attitude and his skills, despite his initial resistance to the whole idea of NLP. And thank God they did. We have some of his thinking and qualities available to us now through the results of their work. And his greatest legacy must surely be clean questions – simple common sense, yet elusive to all but the naturally curious and the experienced and trained coach.

What is clean?

To be clean in the context of modelling excellence is to be naive, present, open, not knowing, alert, aware, fascinated, eager to learn

and selfless. If that were not enough, it is the ability to know the effect of every word and sound and nuance of language you use, to employ your language and silence completely in the service of discovering what lies beneath the surface, and to do so in such a way that, together with the client, you are able to elicit the essence, the truth of their experience, so that you have either a description of their excellence or the key to change. Yet even though they can achieve so much, the structure of clean questions is remarkably and astonishingly simple.

To be 'clean' is to be naive, present, open, not knowing, alert, aware, fascinated, eager to learn and selfless

An example of a clean question is:

And ... [mirror their words] in what way ...?

The attitude that is the backdrop to the words needs to be dedicated, sincere, non-judgmental and curious.

Let us consider this question in context, in a conversation between a client, Jim, and me.

JIM I felt I made a really good connection with the customer.

ME And a really good connection in what way?

JIM Hmm, good question, we just sort of gelled. I guess I was expecting this to be the case.

ME Expecting, how do you mean?

JIM Well, I did a lot of thinking about this meeting beforehand and I had imagined how it might be.

ME When you say imagined how it might be, in what way?

JIM Thinking about it now I realize that I pictured me and the customer and I even imagined us talking

together in the way that I wanted the meeting to develop.

ME And when you imagined yourself talking together in the way that you wanted the meeting to develop, what is that like?

JIM Oh, it is a dream – a good dream where everything is happening the way that I want it to happen and I feel really confident.

We'll push the pause button on this conversation for a moment to explore what is happening here.

Jim initially said what had happened. And he did so in the way that most of us would initially explain our experience, in an abstract way: 'a really good connection'. This conversation was part of a coaching session, so it was appropriate for me to explore with him what he meant. 'And' indicated that I was listening and going with his comment.

'And' is a small yet powerful word. This magic word is often used in hypnotherapy, as it communicates that as a listener you are with the client and they can relax. 'And' says 'I want to build on what you say.' It's a friendly word.

'And' is a small yet powerful word

Then I repeated the abstract words that Jim had used: 'a really good connection'. He had deleted the details of what he meant, although not deliberately; it would be impossible to have everyday conversations if we were to include all the details, so we usually rely on others making correct assumptions about what we mean most of the time. Repeating the words exactly as they were said seeks to assure the listener that they have been accurately and truly heard. This mirroring back of the language also encourages the recipient to reflect: to go inside themselves and find out what they meant by what they said, as up to this point they might not consciously know.

Repeating words exactly assures the listener that they have been accurately heard

And finally I asked: ‘In what way?’ This is the essence of clean. Note that I did not ask: ‘What does that feel like or look like or sound like?’ Nor did I ask: ‘So what did you do?’ I used a question that was without any of the filters described in [Chapter 3](#), Filters on your world. It is a neutral question, allowing the other person to answer in the way they choose. If I were to ask ‘What did you say?’ and they had not actually said anything, the question would jar and interrupt their state of reflection.

You can see how much is going on in this one sentence. Of course, the measure of whether the question worked is the result. If Jim had looked confused or startled at the question, then that would tell me that I had not asked the best question or had not asked it in a way that obtained an open and fuller response. Many of the essentials of clean questioning are encapsulated in this sentence.

I introduced a slight variation on this question later on:

‘And when you imagined yourself talking together in the way that you wanted the meeting to develop, what is that like?’

This is a classic clean question. It has the same ‘and’ opening, the mirroring of the words that Jim used, and then the question ‘what is that like?’ Note that most clean questions are asked in the present tense. This has the effect of encouraging the client to remember their experience as if it were now (to associate into the experience). And this question does more than that. It invites the client to access the metaphor by which they hold these experiences (see [Chapter 7](#), Metaphor: The key to the unconscious mind). Metaphors bypass our unconscious mind and hold so much more than we can encompass in our conscious thinking. Once we access a metaphor, it is a bit like striking oil (to use another metaphor). They are a rich source of detail for our experience – exactly what we want when we are modelling excellence.

When Jim compared his experience to a dream, I might have asked him what kind of dream, but he has already answered this one (an indication he has started to internalize the questions):

‘A good dream where everything is happening the way that I want it to happen and I feel really confident.’

We begin to get the structure of Jim’s experience. There is much more, but we now have a framework for how he builds good connections with his customers. This is not a one-off occurrence – it is something he does intuitively and now we and he can begin to understand the structure of how he does this. Once we have the detailed structure (the program), that structure is available to Jim whenever he wants it so that he can access this ability with consistency. And we or he can teach this program to others (maybe colleagues in the same business), so that they can achieve his level of success in the way he works with customers.

Some of the rest of this modelling/coaching session follows:

ME And this confidence, whereabouts is that?

JIM I feel it in my chest. (*He points to the centre of his chest.*)

ME (*I point towards his chest indicating where he has this feeling.*) What is this feeling of confidence like?

JIM It’s a very steady feeling running right through me. I feel really good when I feel like this. I feel as though I can achieve anything.

ME And when you have this feeling, what happens just before?

JIM Hmmm ... (*He pauses and thinks.*) I remind myself of some of the recent times when I have had good connections with customers.

ME You remind yourself, in what way do you remind yourself?

- JIM I run a sort of video of some of the highlights of recent times that have been good and I can hear the sort of things that I and others were saying and I feel the confidence that I felt then. Hmm, that is interesting. I hadn't realized I did that. *(I wait to let him really appreciate this. Pausing at times like this allows a person to integrate their learning. I can see that he is reflecting within himself. I wait until he looks up and back to me. He smiles. Silence.)*
- ME And so you run a sort of video of the highlights and you hear what you and others were saying, and you feel confidence. *(I point to that same area in his chest where he had indicated that he felt this.)* This is like a good dream where everything is happening the way that you really want it to happen and you feel confidence ... and then what happens?
- JIM Then I feel in this very good state. *(He lifts his shoulders, smiles and gives a small laugh as he moves his hands and arms freely in a wide sweep.)* And I trust that we will have a really good and interesting discussion no matter what the issues are.

Pausing allows the person to integrate their learning

We have the key elements of Jim's structure for building good connections here, the depth and some of the sequence. I have come across similar structures in successful leaders, salespeople, husbands, wives.

What are the clean questions?

Some of the questions encourage the client to expand and go deeper into the perception that they are describing in the moment. These are the ‘developing questions’. As you read these examples, what do you notice about the tense that is used?

And what kind of [their words] is that?

This invites the client to expand on what they are saying. It is likely that as they do so they become more associated into the sensory-rich descriptions that are characteristic of the way we hold experiences in our unconscious minds.

And [their words/a summary of the key words so far] anything else?

This is a very useful question to test for how to know when to stop. Sometimes it prompts much more at a deeper level and sometimes it highlights that you have emptied the cache of information and thoughts available in this area. By asking this question you are allowing the person to determine the stopping or moving-on point.

You allow the person to determine the moving-on point

And whereabouts is [their words]?

This can help the person become precise about the locality of a feeling, for example, or the way they are using this space in their thinking. Some examples of how this question can be used are in [Chapter 16](#), Achieve what you really want: Well-formed outcomes.

And that’s like what?

This is a classic clean question and invites a metaphor.

And is there a relationship between [their words] and [their words]?

This question encourages the person to explore how the elements of their thinking are connected.

And when [their words] what happens to [their words]?

This question also explores the connection between elements and how a change in one affects another. The presupposition that is enforced here is that all elements in our experience have an impact on everything else.

Then there are questions that invite the client to put their attention outside their current perception and locate their experience in time.

And [their words], what happens just before?

This can help to identify the trigger for a key state. If, for example, we feel confident and we know what that is like and the whereabouts of the feeling, then to know what happens just before is to know what step we can take to switch this feeling on. We begin to have access to our emotions, which enables us to penetrate further into the sequence in the strategy.

We can learn how to switch on feelings

And [their words], then what happens/what happens next?

This question helps to elicit the sequence of actions that form part of the strategy. We begin to get the order of the steps that achieve the result.

And [their words], where does that come from?

When this is asked in relation to a feeling we can begin to identify the cause or the source of our emotions. We challenge the belief that things or emotions ‘just happen’.

What did you notice about the tense used in each of these clean questions? (Did you notice the tense?!) They are all expressed in the present tense. They invite an associated state – so important if you are in a modelling session especially.

Jim now has the conscious awareness of the specifics of a key state that is essential to the way in which he builds good

relationships. And we do, too. Only when we ask the right kind of questions and listen with a totally open mind do we have the possibility of truly learning and respecting the talents of other people.

The value of clean questions in everyday conversation

Clean questions are not only the property of coaches and therapists, they can enrich the way in which we relate to others on a daily basis. Consider this example of someone who was not using clean questions:

Clean questions enrich the way we relate to each other

Just recently my accountant invited me to a meeting with a financial adviser, someone he thought might act on my behalf. After a few pleasantries, this adviser proceeded to question me:

‘You probably know about some of the changes to pension schemes?’ the advisor asked.

‘No, actually I don’t,’ I replied.

‘Well, you will probably be wondering how you can secure your future in the light of the downturns in investments.’

‘Not necessarily,’ I replied.

‘I can see that your business has done very well over the time that you have been independent and I guess you will be wanting to wind down in the not too distant future.’

‘Not at all,’ I replied, not sure whether to feel irritated or amused at the wild mindreading in which he was engaging.

He gave me no time to elaborate on my answers before he fired another loaded and assumptive question at me.

This continued for quite a while, at which point he pushed a piece of paper across the desk for me to sign to give him permission to explore the state of my current pension scheme. I refused. He looked puzzled.

How often do you jump in and make unhelpful assumptions about another person's experience? I most certainly do, for all the training I have had. However, now I am much more likely to wait and react after some thought and questioning than I would have done in my youth!

It is not always appropriate to jump straight in with the questions. Create a clean foundation first and then follow up with the questions. Can you imagine how the above conversation might have gone?

ADVISOR Hello, pleased to meet you. Harry has invited me to meet with you and I was wondering what goals you might have for this meeting?

ME Well, I value Harry's advice and I am curious as to why he thought us meeting might be important.

ADVISOR Well, I can fill you on what I believe and we can check that out with Harry, too. He did suggest to me that it might be useful for me to explore with you the changes in pension schemes and investments, as they might have an impact on your future.

ME OK – well, I have not taken any interest in these things, so I am curious what changes he and you think might have an impact on me.

ADVISOR Great, so let's proceed on that basis. Can I ask you what are your thoughts about the future in terms of your work and possible security?

ME Well, I'm keen to continue the work I do no matter what my age.

ADVISOR When you say ‘continue’, in what way continue?

And so the clean basis and then the more specific clean questions would have led to a very different outcome.

Other applications of clean questions

- When collecting information about the style and needs of a new or existing client, so that not only do you understand their needs precisely, you also understand the style with which they would like you to deal with them.
- When someone has an issue that they want to talk through with you. Clean questions may be all they need to work out this issue for themselves. By asking the questions, you raise their awareness of how they are making their experience what it is.
- When you are not sure what someone means. Rather than assuming a meaning, check using a question.
- When you want to encourage someone to know that they have all the resources they need within themselves. By not providing the answers or suggestions, you encourage them to take ownership of their issues and find their own resources to deal with them.
- When you want to delegate and encourage independent thinking and working.
- When you want to show respect for another person’s experience and knowledge.
- When modelling excellence.
- When coaching.

There are thousands of everyday specific contexts when clean questions are called for. Enjoy finding out more!

Thought provokers

- 1 Think for a moment: when did you last have a conversation when the only agenda present was that of the other person? When did you last listen with your whole being, with the sole purpose of understanding and appreciating what the other person had to say? If you can say 'today', then I applaud you. That is not the norm.
- 2 Decide on a time or a conversation when you will choose to listen in an entirely open and clean way. Choose a time when practising new skills will not be critical to the outcome of the discussion. Take some time beforehand to make sure that you are in a relaxed state of sincere curiosity. Evaluate how you think you did and with what results. If you have the opportunity and it is appropriate, ask the person with whom you had this conversation how it was for them.

References

Penny Tompkins & James Lawley (2000) *Metaphors in Mind*, Developing Company Press.

Out for coffee with someone a friend had introduced me to, he kicked off the conversation:

'What do you do?'

'I run training courses.'

'So you work for a college?'

'No, I work for myself.'

'So what do you teach?'

'Well ... it is a subject called neuro linguistic programming.'

'Oh, positive thinking.'

'Not exactly just that ... much more than that.'

'Oh yes, I know what it is – we had a day on that in my company – it's psychometric testing.'

'Not exactly – much more than that.'

‘So you are teaching college students? You must find it very tiring and stressful.’

‘Well, actually I find it invigorating.’

I even hesitate to put the question marks after what he said because none of his ‘questions’ were really questions. They were disguised assumptions. And I felt bullied and discounted in the conversation. Given that how we do something is how we do everything, this did not bode well for any kind of relationship. Call me picky but I would like to meet a man who shows genuine interest in what I do.

7 Metaphor: The key to the unconscious mind

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière*, *In Search of Lost Time*

When preparing for each race in the Olympic Games and subsequently receiving the gold medals for both the 100 metres and the 200 metres sprint, Jamaican runner Usain Bolt adopted the pose of an archer and did so in a playful way. This is a powerful metaphor: he was reinforcing his beliefs about his speed and the ease with which he was approaching the race, and at the same time communicating that to his competitors and the watching world. There was a lot of influence packed into that one posture.

What is a metaphor?

A metaphor is a way of understanding, expressing and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. For example, we may think of life as ‘a bed of roses’ or work as ‘a battleground’. Whatever the metaphor, it emerges in the words, expressions and physiology we use, and it influences our own and others’ experience.

Metaphors correspond to the original experience they are describing; the symbols are different, but the structure and the organization of it are the same. Usain Bolt, for example, was representing his running ability as an arrow (or a bolt, perhaps!). The arrow corresponded to him being released from the bow, the starting blocks, and aiming for the target, the finish line. The

symbols were different, but in both cases the runner gets released just as the arrow gets fired. Both have a target.

Metaphors represent the essence of who we are

A metaphor captures the essence of the structure of our experience. Much is reconstructed from what is presupposed. If we experience home as a prison, then this presupposes that there is someone or something that keeps us in that prison, that there are boundaries beyond which we cannot go, that there are rules we must obey, that we have done something that has got us in there and that we have no control. If, however, we talk of realizing our vision for the future, this implies that we have had it all along and we are just discovering it, that it is a moving process, that we can see it and that realizing what is important happens over time.

Metaphors communicate a lot of complex information in a very compact package. We can say more with a metaphor than we can ever say with a literal description.

Metaphors say a lot in a little package

Where do we find metaphors?

Metaphors permeate our lives. They exist in our language, in our stories, in fairy tales, in parables, in our dreams, our gestures, our movement, the way we use space, our choice of environment and the way we position ourselves in that environment. The photograph that a training colleague of mine was using to promote herself was slightly off centre, for example; she spoke of feeling incongruent in her expertise.

Metaphors permeate our lives

We are subject to metaphor in our everyday lives: the advertising we see and hear incorporates metaphors, as do the films we watch and the books and magazines and newspapers we read. If an

advertisement shows someone dining and drinking in a centuries-old building, there is an implication that this has been true for centuries and will continue to be true for centuries into the future – that there is a security over time about this product.

Metaphors can be enchanting, enticing and mesmerizing. Their effects may be enlightening and empowering when they are developed and recounted constructively. Used carelessly, however, they can be damaging and disturbing. The more we can learn to notice and listen to the metaphors in our life, the more we can choose the way we influence ourselves and the way we allow ourselves to be influenced.

In all aspects of life we define our reality in terms of metaphors, which subsequently shape our everyday behaviour. The structures of the metaphors are the structure by which we live our life. These might be productive and contribute to our unique excellence, or they might be patterns of destruction. Once we become aware of our metaphors, we can recognize how they limit or empower us. They can therefore be explored as a means of modelling excellence or as a means of healing, transforming and enriching lives.

The metaphors by which we live our lives shape our everyday behaviour

Ken often described his experience in life as being between a rock and a hard place. He went from one seemingly irresolvable conflict to another, and that is the pattern that repeated itself throughout his life. He reeled from one lawsuit to the next, always feeling 'badly done by'.

Discovering the metaphors by which we live our life helps us elicit the essence of excellence as we model someone we admire, or even as we model ourselves. We might also do this in order to coach someone to become aware of their limiting patterns and let their excellence develop and emerge.

Metaphor in the context of modelling excellence

It is certain that at some point in the process of modelling excellence we will uncover a metaphor that captures the essence of a person's way of being in the world. That metaphor is unique to this person; only they have the representation of its meaning. If we want to discover how they are, then it is vital that we respect their symbols, their meaning, their way of expressing their world. If I introduce my terms and my meaning, I have trampled on their map – I will have learned very little about them and only imposed my way of doing things.

Metaphors capture the essence of a person's way of being

Clean questions (see [Chapter 6](#)) are the means by which we can discover the unique meaning of another person's way of coding their experience. In particular, the metaphor symbolizes what it is like to be that person. 'Like' is a significant word in the world of metaphor. A metaphor is an expression of something in different symbols but in a like way.

Listen to the language that colleagues and friends use. Have you heard these sorts of statements? Consider, too, what they might presuppose that is not explicitly said.

I need to combat his response	<i>Interaction is a battle</i>
We can overcome objections	<i>They need to be overcome</i>
We need to keep our heads down	<i>We are at the mercy of others</i>
On track to achieve what we want	<i>A track exists</i>
Steaming ahead	<i>An old form of moving!</i>
We will carry no	<i>We are capable of</i>

passengers	<i>carrying them</i>
Everything in the garden is rosy	<i>Life is something that can grow</i>
They are blooming	<i>They grow and do well</i>
Business has died down	<i>Business has a life cycle</i>
Life is a ball	<i>Life is play/a game</i>

A metaphor is unique to the person holding it. If we wish to explore the metaphor as the basis for modelling their experience, then it is vital that we give that person choice about how they explore it and even if they do want to explore it. As they do so, they will not only talk about what this metaphor means to them, they will show it with their gestures and the way they move and use the space around them. And it will be not only their words but their exclamations, their erms and coughs, laughs and pauses, that communicate meaning. We need to pay attention not to what the person is saying but to what they are doing as they say it.

Pay attention to how rather than what

When we are aware of the metaphor by which we and our friends and colleagues live, we are aware of the way we and they are thinking. It is a way of making sense of life. Understanding the metaphor both in and behind the communication can help us make sense of an individual's experience. A metaphor gives form to what it is like to be that person.

If you know someone who thinks in terms of overcoming objections, you may begin to understand any resistance they experience from their colleagues, staff and customers. Imagine how you would feel if someone were attempting to overcome your objections!

Metaphors are rich in their ability to enhance communication. Here are some examples of visual metaphors drawn by course delegates to depict either the way they saw themselves then or the way they wanted to see themselves in the future.



These pictures provide a wealth of information, not only for the observers but also for those who drew them. Questions can reveal many implications of the metaphor that have sometimes been outside the awareness of the owner.

Metaphor and symbolism enable us to give form to those aspects of life which are the most mystifying; namely, our relationships, our problems and their solutions, our fears and desires, our illness and health, our poverty and wealth, and the love we give and the love we receive.

James Lawley & Penny Tompkins, *Metaphors in Mind*

When thinking about what metaphors are true for you, you may find that your unconscious mind pops an image or a thought into your head. Your unconscious mind is the source of your real hopes and fears. The more you learn to acknowledge what your unconscious tells you, the more you will have access to this powerful resource. Major breakthroughs in thinking are believed to have come about through the power of metaphor. It is held that Albert Einstein discovered the theory of relativity as he lay daydreaming, imagining himself riding a sunbeam.

Your unconscious mind is the source of your real hopes and fears

Excellent communicators

Excellent communicators and influencers use metaphor to capture and hold attention:

The present life of men on earth, O King, as compared with the whole length of time which is unknowable to us, seems to me to be like this: as if, when you are sitting at dinner with your chiefs and ministers in wintertime ... one of the sparrows from outside flew very quickly through the hall; as if it came in one door and soon went out through another. In that actual time it is indoors it is not touched by the winter's storm; but the tiny period of calm is over in a moment, and having come out of the winter it soon returns to the winter and slips out of your sight. Man's life appears to be more or less like this; and of what may follow it, or what preceded it, we are absolutely ignorant.
The Venerable Bede

Using metaphorical stories as a form of influence

Metaphors may be single words, expressions or stories. To understand how to construct and tell a story metaphor is to know how to influence with elegance and respect.

Milton H. Erickson, a therapist of world-class stature who was studied by John Grinder and Richard Bandler as part of their early research into what made a difference between outstanding performers and the rest, was a master of the metaphor. He was also a master of change. Although the context in which he worked was therapy, his methods apply equally to business. The following is an example of one of his stories, told to explain the way he worked with his clients:

One day an unknown horse strayed into the yard of the farm where I lived as a child. No one knew where this horse had come from as it had no markings by which it could have been identified. There was no question of keeping the horse - it must belong to someone. My father decided to lead it home. He mounted the horse and led it to the road and simply trusted the instinct of the horse to lead itself towards

its home. He only intervened when the horse left the road to eat grass or to walk into a field. On these occasions my father would firmly guide it back to the road. In this way the horse was soon returned to its owner.

The owner was very surprised to see his horse once more and asked my father, 'How did you know the horse came from here and belonged to us?'

My father replied, 'I didn't know, the horse knew! All I did was to keep him on the road.'

This story illustrates not only the way Erickson worked with his clients, but also the way most NLP is conducted today. By providing guidance only where it is needed, NLP respects the fact that everyone has all the resources they need to solve their problems. Given the space and encouragement to use these resources, you are more likely to find solutions that are congruent with who you are. These solutions are therefore much more likely to be ones to which you are committed and will therefore work to produce the outcome you want.

People have all the resources they need within themselves already

When presented with a metaphor, we make our own unique interpretation of it in a way that makes sense to us. Most significantly, it is our unconscious mind that makes sense of it, and so metaphors bypass conscious resistance and embrace our unconscious. If you are faced with someone who will not intellectually consider what you are saying, try telling them a story, a parable for what you want them to learn.

Metaphors bypass the conscious mind (and its resistance) and embrace our unconscious

A client of mine was unhappy with what she experienced as the dominance of her business partner. She thought of working independently, although she did not have experience of marketing,

nor did she have financial expertise to manage her own business. She was not listening to the advice others were giving her about having someone with her who could support her in some aspects of her business. I told her a story:

Once upon a time there was a duo trapeze act. They were famous, although in any promotions the elder acrobat always got first billing. The younger acrobat was increasingly doing all the new stunts and had managed a triple somersault swinging from the trapeze on one side of the tent to the other, where her partner would wait with arms outstretched to balance her as she landed on the waiting platform. She decided to practise some new acts on her own and was increasingly confident with her mastery of a quadruple somersault with a twisting turn at the end. She did not tell her partner about this, although he could tell how much more skilful she was becoming and had congratulated her on that.

One night in the circus tent, during a live performance, she decided that she would attempt her new act. She whispered to her partner that she was going to do something solo and for him to trust her. He looked surprised, but stood back on the platform. She prepared herself and swung out high and far. As she gained momentum, she launched herself into this mid-air somersault, but as she did so realized that she might not have given herself quite enough momentum. She turned in the air and looked towards the waiting platform. With fear she pushed herself towards it and at that moment her partner, sensing the danger, reached out, catching her hands in his ...

You will know if the person is making a connection with the metaphor by their state as they listen. The stronger their reaction, the more likely it is that the metaphor has triggered something for them. The beauty of metaphor is that people make sense of it in their own

way. What it does is allow them to hear what you perceive to be the structure of their experience in another form. It gives them the opportunity to discover the wisdom that an observer might have and yet at another level to recognize the structure of the story in such a way that, at an unconscious level, they know it is for them. My client in this case went into a very deep, thoughtful state and much later came back and asked me questions about the story. Neither her unconscious nor her conscious mind could forget it.

People make sense of metaphor in their own way

Another client had difficulty detaching from her emotions. Most circumstances in life were a drama. She would be very unlikely to stand back and use the wisdom of a third-party observer. She reeled from one dramatic situation in her life to the next. She could make a cup of tea at breakfast a drama!

Travelling in the car one day, she asked for my feedback. I had often given her feedback before, but had not seen much evidence of her taking this feedback on board. So this time I told her a story:

I have a story for you. I have a friend and this friend was fascinated by mazes, the sort of maze you might find in the expansive green gardens of a grand English country house. She had heard about this one very famous maze, famous because so few people had found their way to the centre – where there is said to be a tower. So this tower had rarely been reached by the visitors to the grounds.

The friend decided to visit the maze and was determined to find the centre. And so she paid her admission price, and as she was entering the maze, she overheard someone on the way out saying that they had made it to the centre and the strategy worked. She stopped them and asked what the strategy was. They explained that if you kept your left hand always in touch with the side, you would find your way to the centre. She was a-maze-d (!) and decided to try it out.

So she entered the maze between the dark, deep foliage of the hedges that lined the pathway. It was such an old maze that she had to strain her neck to look up to see the sky. Keeping her left hand always in contact with the leaves, she continued. Sometimes she was tempted to take her hand off the hedge, as she could see that the path was obviously a dead end, but following it round she came out the other side and continued closer and closer to the centre. She could tell that she must be close, since the path was less worn as fewer people had trodden the ground here.

Eventually the bushes opened up and there was a clearing. In the centre of the clearing was a wooden tower with a winding staircase to the top. 'Success!' she said to herself in a congratulatory voice as she climbed the steps. At the top was a view not only of all the winding maze but of the countryside beyond. It was a view that astonished her and she stayed there for some time just appreciating this novel perspective of the path and how she was going to get out of the maze to enjoy the rest of her day.

Writing your own metaphor

Maybe in your role as a coach, facilitator, trainer or leader you want to use a metaphor that will communicate a particular message to others. How do you go about constructing one? Here are the principles:

- 1 Identify the message that you want to give.
- 2 List the elements of the current situation, for example confusion, lack of overview, no strategy, little ability to detach from emotions.
- 3 Choose a parallel context, and in that context choose symbols that you will use in the metaphor to correspond to each of the key elements. Select symbols that have the

qualities of the original elements – for example for confusion, a maze; for lack of overview, the high hedges.

- 4 When you write or tell the metaphor, tell it as a story: ‘Once upon a time ...’ (although you may not use those actual words).
- 5 Keep it simple, using one story thread that builds anticipation and curiosity.
- 6 Decide how you will use the metaphor to communicate the message so that you leave the listener with the space to work it out in a way that fits for them – you don’t have to spell out an answer!

Communicate the metaphor in a way that gives the listener space to interpret it in their own way

- 7 Now write or tell the metaphor as a story. Use enriched language with all the senses – visual, auditory, feelings. This keeps people’s attention. Done well, it is mesmerizing. That is what you are aiming for.
- 8 Leave the moral of the story untold. An open ending is compelling. The unconscious mind will hold on to the story until it has a meaning and an answer. It may take days, weeks or months for someone to get a meaning. Be patient!
- 9 Give the listener(s) space and time to digest it. Stay silent. Your listeners may well be in a trance at this point. Use it.

Using metaphors in business

A director of a company was confronted with the unenviable task of announcing to one of the divisions that they had to lose half of their workforce in the following two years. This meant making 2,000 people redundant. Everyone was tense. Rumours of the cutbacks had already spread throughout the site, and it seemed unlikely that the

employees would be willing to listen to what the director had to say, let alone participate in the implementation of the cutbacks.

The director cared about his employees and believed that there was a possible future if they all cooperated and thought together about how they could reconsider the future. He called his staff to a meeting. This director was a much admired man; everyone trusted him and knew him to be a man of great integrity. Nevertheless, they were all apprehensive and resistant, sensing that he was going to announce some very bad news.

He explained the facts. Then he said:

‘This business is like a snowball rolling downhill. It is gathering snow and momentum as it gains speed. There are two possible routes that this snowball can take. One is that it gets heavier and larger as it gains speed and speeds down the hill, only to roll onto the plain where in the heat of the sun it gradually melts and disappears. The other possibility is that the snowball rolls on down the mountain beyond the plain. It has gathered such speed that nothing can stop it and, although it slows momentarily as it crosses the plain, its momentum keeps it going and it rolls on and on until eventually it reaches the fertile plain at the bottom of the valley. We can influence the path that snowball takes.’

And they did.

As another example, I was involved with a company whose directors talked in military metaphors, using terms such as ‘being in the firing line’, ‘attacking the competition’ and ‘aiming at the target’. They described the workforce as the ‘troops’. Employees in this company did not ‘step out of line’ nor did those with any entrepreneurial style stay very long. I even saw a slide in one of their presentations headed, ‘We will fight them on the beaches.’ Fight whom, I wondered?

It is important to question whether and how these metaphors fit with the network culture in which the business world is immersed, in which we need to learn how to help our customers to thrive, how to support our employees to grow, and how to flourish in conditions that are right for us personally. Individuals and companies have metaphors that express their unique culture. The question is whether or not these are metaphors that support the culture and style they really want. The clue is in the language and behaviour of individuals, as in the military example above. Not surprisingly, many of the older managers in this company had spent time in the forces. Now the company was searching for a way of developing a new style of leader who encouraged autonomy and cooperation. It was time to change the metaphor that underpinned the culture.

Metaphors communicate company culture

Summary

Metaphors have been with us in many forms for as long as we can remember. Stories in the form of fairy tales and parables are passed down from generation to generation. Metaphors are so rooted in our upbringing that for many people they act as an anchor for relaxation and involvement.

As such, metaphors bypass any conscious blocks or resistance and slip into the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind responds to the challenge of the metaphor by finding a unique solution that fits the listener's experience and needs.

Metaphors are powerful and memorable. Many of the best speakers and leaders use metaphor as a way of communicating what they want to say. A skilled storyteller is a skilled communicator.

By learning to listen to metaphor we learn to use our internal wisdom

Metaphors are also used in our everyday lives. The metaphors in an individual's or company's language provide many clues to the patterns by which that individual lives and the culture of the

company of which they are a part. By learning how to construct and recount metaphors, we are learning how to open our listener's or reader's mind to new possibilities and choices. And by learning how to listen to the metaphors that our unconscious mind gives us, we learn to use our internal wisdom and develop our coherence so that we become more of who we are truly meant to be.

Thought provokers

1 If you were to draw a metaphor for yourself, what would you draw? As you read that question you may have noticed that a picture popped into your mind. What is it? Consider the following questions:

- a What does this represent for you?
- b What are the characteristics of this metaphor?
- c What are its strengths?
- d What are its weaknesses?
- e How are the elements of the image related?
- f What does this signify?
- g What is missing and what does that signify?

Now make that drawing and show it to someone else, encouraging them to ask you questions about it. Their questions may give you insight into the deeper significance of the metaphor for you.

2 What metaphors would you use to describe:

- a your career?
- b your relationships?
- c your social life?
- d your past?
- e your future?

How do the characteristics of the metaphor manifest themselves in these areas of your life? For example, if you say 'Life is like a dream', what does that mean? Is it unreal? Dreams can be intangible. Dreams have many meanings, and

the purpose of them can be unclear. There are pleasant dreams and nightmares. Explore the possibilities of the metaphor for you.

- 3 Think of a situation that you would like to influence. It could be a presentation, a meeting or a discussion with one of your colleagues. Develop a metaphor that you can use the next time you are in this situation.
- 4 Think of someone you admire whose abilities you would like to model. What metaphor underpins their excellence? What is your evidence for this?
- 5 Think now of the company that you manage or work for. Is there a metaphor that expresses itself through the language and actions of the employees? Set yourself the task of identifying any metaphors that you hear being used in your company or in the companies of any of your customers during a particular day.

References

James Lawley & Penny Tompkins (2000) *Metaphors in Mind: Transformation through Symbolic Modelling*, The Developing Company Press.

I hired a carpenter to help me restore an old farmhouse. After he had finished a rough first day on the job, a flat tyre made him lose an hour of work, his electric saw quit, and now his ancient pickup truck refused to start. While I drove him home, he sat in stony silence. On arriving, he invited me in to meet his family. As we walked towards the front door, he paused briefly at a small tree, touching the tips of the branches with both hands. When opening the door, he underwent an amazing transformation. His tanned face was wreathed in smiles and he hugged his two small children and gave his wife a kiss. Afterwards, he walked me to the car. We passed the tree and my

curiosity got the better of me. I asked him about what I had seen him do earlier. 'Oh, that's my trouble tree,' he replied. 'I know I can't help having troubles on the job, but one thing's for sure, troubles don't belong in the house with my wife and the children. So I just hang them up on the tree every night when I come home. Then in the morning I pick them up again. Funny thing is,' he smiled, 'when I come out in the morning to pick 'em up, there aren't nearly as many as I remember hanging up the night before.'

8 Precision questions

Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.
Voltaire

The only person who is accountable for how you experience what happens to you in life is you. If you spend time apportioning blame, being frustrated and feeling hard done by, then you are avoiding the truth. Without doubt, you are compromising yourself and clouding, if not completely obscuring, your talents and true potential.

One day when my sons were very young, on a seaside holiday in the English county of Dorset, we were joined by another little boy. He and my son decided to build a sandcastle. When they were doing this I overheard them talking. My son asked him what he liked doing best at school. 'I don't know,' he replied. 'I'm not very clever.' He was six years old, and his words reflected a choice he had already made or learned that would undoubtedly limit his future success.

The only person who can look after you is you

Ultimately, the only person who can look after you is you.

Responsible organizations, families and communities encourage their people to take ownership of themselves. To do so is an expression of love. To encourage dependency is to communicate a belief that others do not have all the resources that they need. Children pick up this message and may either accept or rebel against it.

Levels of language

Inside any deep asking is the answering
Rumi

The linguist Noam Chomsky distinguished two levels of language:

- **surface structure** – everything we say, either to ourselves or to other people
- **deep structure** – the underlying meaning of what we say, containing information that is neither expressed nor consciously known.

A number of things can happen between the deep structure and the surface structure of the language. The intention of the communication may be lost or changed in the process of converting one to the other. The more aligned we are between what we say and what we truly mean, the more coherent our message and the more likely we are to reveal our true excellence.

Our language is rich in clues

Our language is rich in clues about our willingness and skill to take on this kind of responsibility. We can learn habits to support this way of being. And we can learn to recognize the habits we have that hinder this way of being. Language is a good place to start to begin to make this kind of difference.

Lazy language

Look at the expressions below. Read them quickly. What do they say?



Now read the following passage. How many *fs* are there?

*FEATURE FILMS ARE THE RESULT OF YEARS OF
SCIENTIFIC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE EXPERIENCE
OF YEARS*

The expressions actually read ‘Once in *a a* lifetime’, ‘Paris in *the the* spring’, ‘A bird in *the the* hand’. In part, the way the words are written in the triangle encourages misreading. Even so, we frequently delete and distort what we read, hear and see to fit in with our expectations. In the passage there are six *fs*. (There really are! Many people write to me saying that there must be a mistake in the number we have printed here!) How many did you count?

These simple exercises illustrate the sort of processes that occur in our thinking every day. We delete, distort and generalize information so that we become disconnected from its deeper meaning. We typically use an imprecise form of language in speech, a lazy language. This is at the heart of many business problems often paraphrased as communication issues.

We were sitting next to someone we had not met before at a local fête, and before long he was expounding his suspicions about the ‘they’ who were deliberately filling the skies with toxins and triggering earthquakes, among many other things. When challenged, he could not explain who ‘they’ were.

I have come across this mysterious ‘they’ in many settings:

- ‘They’ don’t communicate effectively.
- ‘They’ introduce changes without consultation.
- ‘They’ don’t listen.
- ‘They’ expect you to know what’s going on.
- ‘They’ keep you in the dark.
- ‘They’ are responsible for the problems in the world.

Do you have a ‘they’ in your life?

‘They’ are very elusive. They are never in the same room as the people who are talking about them (or, if they are, they keep quiet!). They are very often one or two levels higher in the management structure, even when the people referring to them in one case were the board of directors themselves! Alternatively, they are an unknown quantity outside the organization, a group of people who represent existing and future clients, suppliers, members of a holding company and so on.

The ‘they’ syndrome illustrates our tendency to put the source of problems (and therefore the possibility of change) outside ourselves. ‘They’ are elusive and impossible to pin down, which leads to the loss of ownership of our own circumstances. Effectively, when we blame others, we give away any influence we might have had.

Language patterns

Below are a few language patterns that we can learn to recognize and challenge in ourselves. Doing so will not guarantee excellence, but it will certainly clear the path towards it.

Precision questions challenge the constraints we put on ourselves

John Grinder and Richard Bandler made a study of these language patterns. They developed and refined a set of questions designed to challenge and influence the constraints that people put on themselves. These questions are designed to do so in a way that challenges the perceptions we form about ourselves in the way we

delete, distort and generalize our experience. The questions challenge the way we express these patterns in our language, both internally to ourselves and in conversation to others. The questions aim to reconnect the speaker with their original experience and the truth of their potential.

By learning to challenge our language, we create greater coherence in who we are and we increase the influence we have in all aspects of life.

The main categories

There are three main ways in which we shape our perception of the world. These are by deleting some of our experience, by distorting and by generalizing.

- **DELETION** When we delete, we filter out some aspects of our experience and pay attention to others. For example, when a mother is apart from her baby she can typically filter out everything except the sound of her baby's cry. When we delete, we reduce our experience to something we believe we can manage.
- **DISTORTION** When we distort, we change the way we experience sensory data, for example when we assume that silence means we have offended someone or that a harsh tone of voice means that someone is angry with us. Alternatively, we can, if we choose, distort our experience in a way that works for us. We can choose to believe that if someone is giving us a hard time they must care about us a great deal. None of these are hard facts – they are inventions of our creative minds – and some will work for us and some won't.
- **GENERALIZATION** Generalization is the process by which an experience is attributed to the whole category of which the experience is an example. For instance, when someone is let down by one person and subsequently says 'You can't trust anyone', this is a generalization. Generalizations are the basis of what we choose to believe about the world, good and bad.

In some instances all of these processes can be useful. We could not cope with everyday life if we didn't use them all in some way. The aim of learning these patterns in language is to identify patterns that are limiting us in our way of being in the world and replace them with patterns that support us to be the best we can be.

Note which patterns 'speak' to you in some way

If you are committed to facilitating your own and others' excellence, then I encourage you to learn these patterns. Start with you. Read the next sections through and note which patterns 'speak' to you in some way. Pay attention to these first and begin to note any instances in which you might be using them. Just be aware – that is often the most useful starting point. Let the change emerge and maybe later consciously explore what options you have in what you might be saying to yourself instead.

So here are the more detailed patterns with some ways of challenging them. When we challenge we are influencing significant change, not just in the use of words but in our way of experiencing the world.

As we go through these examples, let's explore how the nursery rhyme 'Jack and Jill' might be expressed and challenged. And just in case you are not familiar with the rhyme, here it is:

*Jack and Jill went up a hill
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after.*

Deletions

Abstractions

An abstraction is the result of taking a verb (an active word) and turning it into an abstract noun. (If you can put 'ongoing' in front of

it, it's probably an abstraction.)

e.g. Jack and Jill went for some exercise.

What kind of exercise was that?

More examples	The challenges
It was a difficult conversation	Who was talking to whom? Difficult in what way?
It is a special relationship	Special how?

Vague actions and subjects

These are non-specific actions or subjects where the detail of what is happening or who is being referred to has been omitted.

e.g. They went up the hill.

Who went up the hill?

More examples	The challenges
Fred needs to improve his presentation skills	In what way does he need to improve?
People don't let you make decisions here	Which people?

Opinions expressed as fact

An 'opinion as fact' statement is when the speaker expresses an opinion as if it were a truth by deleting the fact that it is an opinion.

e.g. It is advisable to have regular exercise.

According to whom?

More examples	The challenges
This is the right way	According to whom?

It is bad to be lazy

According to whom?

Comparisons

A comparison uses words like ‘better’, ‘worse’, ‘happier’, ‘more’ ... but without a specific yardstick or measure.

*e.g. Jack and Jill should have been more careful
In what way should they have been more careful?*

More examples	The challenges
We need more sales	More than what or how many?
A better world	Better than what?
We will be the best company	Compared to whom or best in what way?

Distortions

Mindreading

When mindreading, the speaker presumes to know what another person is thinking or needing without any hard evidence in support.

*e.g. I know why Jack and Jill fell down the hill.
How do you know?*

More examples	The challenges
I know why you did that	How do you know that?
You're upset	How do you know?

Value judgments

A value judgment is made when no evidence is presented to support it.

e.g. Jack and Jill were careless.

On what do you base that?

More examples	The challenges
I am a slow learner	On what do you base that?
Your work is substandard	What is your evidence for that statement?

Cause–effect

A cause–effect statement attributes one thing to another.

e.g. Carrying a heavy pail made Jack and Jill fall down the hill.

How did carrying a heavy pail make them fall down the hill?

More examples	The challenges
You made me angry	How did I make you angry?
How does it make you feel?	How can it make me feel anything?

Interpretation

In interpretation, two statements are linked in such a way that they are taken to mean the same thing: ‘This means that ...’

e.g. Jack and Jill are obviously irresponsible to fall down the hill like that.

How does falling down the hill mean that they were irresponsible?

--

More examples

I haven't heard from him -
he is obviously angry

You're quiet, you must be
bored

The challenges

How do you know it
means that?

How does me being
silent mean I am bored?

Generalizations

Universal statements

Sometimes we take specific experiences and make them universally true outside their specific context.

*e.g. If you carry heavy pails of water down a hill, you are
always going to have an accident.*

*Was there ever a time when they carried a pail and they didn't
fall down the hill?*

More examples

I always catch colds in
wintertime

No one makes
decisions round here

I have never been able
to do that

The challenges

Always?

No one at all?

Was there ever a time
when you could?

Drivers

Drivers are statements of need. The person making the statement is denying themselves a free choice.

*e.g. Jack to Jill: 'We have to go up the hill to get a pail of
water.'*

Jill to Jack: 'What would happen if we didn't?'

More examples	The challenges
I have to finish this	What do you want to do?
I must tidy my desk	Who says so?
I should visit my parents	According to whom?

Limiters and stoppers

These expressions imply that there is no possibility.

e.g. Jill to Jack: 'I can't carry a heavy pail of water down that hill' (She was right!)

Jack to Jill: 'What will happen if you do?'

More examples	The challenges
I can't do that	What stops you? What would happen if you did?
I won't be able to speak	What stops you? What would happen if you did?

Be an attractive example

A word of warning: it is vital that you have rapport as you ask these questions of others. They can otherwise be experienced as intimidating and aggressive. We don't always have permission to use these techniques on other people, so the place to practise first is with yourself. I want to emphasize this point. Far from building rapport, NLP techniques used enthusiastically but without permission will do more harm than good. It is by developing ourselves that we influence others. A goal to aim for is to be such an attractive example to others that they want some of what you have. I believe that then and only then do you begin to have permission to facilitate others' awareness and learning.

Manage your internal dialogue

The language you use may be what you say openly to others. Equally, it can be what you say to yourself internally. You can use the precision questions described above to challenge your internal dialogue and in so doing change your feelings and your experience.

Your unconscious mind works on your behalf

We are influenced by what we hear, not only by what others say to us but especially by what we say to ourselves. The questions we ask ourselves are especially significant, as our unconscious mind loves questions and will work on our behalf until it has found answers. Remember those occasions when you forgot a person's name and asked yourself who they were, only for the name to pop into your head several hours later? Your unconscious was working on your behalf.

However, the unconscious mind only does as it is asked. If we ask our unconscious 'Why did that job go so badly?' that is what it will search for and that is what we will get. And what we will very likely get as well is depressed! By contrast, if we ask ourselves 'What could I have done differently and how can I learn from this for the future?', then that is also what we will get. With the answer we get to this kind of question we are more likely to move forward by learning how to be more successful in the future.

As we become aware of the questions we are asking ourselves, we can significantly influence our emotional state. Our state influences our reactions, reactions become habits – and habits determine our destiny.

I was asked by the technical director of a software development company to help him build his confidence for the international presentations that he was often asked to give. When he explained what he wanted, I discovered that it wasn't help with the design of the presentation, but help to manage his feelings before and after. Typically, he could not

sleep well for at least three weeks prior to the presentation and he often felt physically sick on the morning itself. We began to explore how the conversations he had with others and himself related to these presentations. What emerged was this:

‘These presentations never go well. They expect me to manage the material and all the technical demonstrations. Giving these talks makes me stressed. I know what people in the audience will think, they’ll think this is all obvious. They’ll want to leave. I can’t relax. It will be the same experience all over again.’

We discovered a series of deletions, generalizations and distortions in his thinking. Over time, we took each of these statements and challenged them as shown in the table below. Bit by bit we unravelled the complex web he had spun for himself. He gradually sorted out what he did want to achieve and how he could manage himself to do that.

His thinking	The challenges
‘These presentations never go well.’	Never? Have they ever gone well?
‘They expect me to manage the material and all the technical demonstrations.’	Who expects you to do this? How do you want to be able to do them?
‘Giving these talks makes me feel stressed.’	How do they do that? How do you want to feel?
‘I know what people in the audience will think; they’ll think this is all obvious; they’ll want to leave.’	How do you know that? How do you want them to react?
‘I can’t relax. It will be the same experience all over	What stops you? How do you want to

again.'

be? What would
happen if you did
relax?

Three months later I received this letter from him:

Dear Sue,

I have just returned from giving a presentation in Paris. It was a joy to do. I enjoyed the demonstrations and I particularly enjoyed the questions I got from the audience. The hardware didn't all work perfectly but I used this as an opportunity to show how quickly we could recover problems when they occur. You'll be pleased to know nobody left the presentation - at least not until the end! Most of all in the weeks prior to the presentation I slept well; in fact I think I can safely say my family were pleased to have me around. This was not the case in the past. I actually enjoyed the run-up to the presentation and I'm looking forward to the next one. Thank you.

Yours peacefully,

John

Manage your external dialogue

We have choice: choice about who to use as our suppliers, choice of who we remain with in a relationship, choice of whose method of presentation appeals to us most, choice of who we want to do business with. For the fortunate, the choice is endless. So it helps to be aware of whether we are offering a choice to others that they find appealing.

Maybe you think that people choose you for how you look, for the products you offer, for the information you provide them with. You may be wrong. More than anything else, people choose you because of the effect you have on their state.

Our legacy is the effect we have

Just as we influence ourselves with our inner dialogue, so we influence others with the words we use. And because of the unconscious mind's love of challenge, our questions have a greater influence than our statements. Questions stay with us until we have the answers, and questions that we ask of others will do the same. So awareness of the questions we ask is important in realizing what state we are inducing in the receiver of the question.

Questions are irresistible

Ask yourself who you would rather be with: someone who leaves you feeling invigorated and inspired, or someone who leaves you feeling that the world is dark and hopeless and full of woe? Would you choose someone who leaves you feeling confident in yourself or someone who reminds you continually of what you are doing wrong?

Consider the following scenarios and imagine the effects of each of the behaviours, some of which are in line and some out of line with a desirable outcome. Consider what overall effect each question might have and how desirable that effect might be.

- 1 You want to boost the confidence of a member of your team. They frequently come to you with questions. What do you do?
 - a Give them the answer.
 - b Encourage them to find an answer.
 - c Ask them how someone else in the department (who is good at this aspect of the work) would do it.
- 2 You want to encourage someone to enjoy and value your company. You are talking about their issues and problems

they are experiencing. What do you do?

a Tell them specifically about all the problems you have noticed.

b Ask them what they want from you.

c Ask them to imagine what it would be like if their situation were just as they wanted it to be.

d Tell them what you believe the answers to be.

e Ask them how they want to be and what that is like.

3 You want to create a culture of learning in the organization by supporting a process of giving and receiving feedback. You are being given feedback. How do you respond?

a Explain why you acted in the way that prompted the feedback.

b Ask the giver of the feedback to expand on it.

c Ask the giver of the feedback to explain what you could do for them to know that you have learned from the feedback they are giving you.

d Give immediate feedback to them.

There are no prizes for the correct answers. This is common sense, after all – but are you aware of how often you use your common sense? And more important than that, can you imagine what it would be like if you always acted on the common sense you know you have?

Shortcut to recognizing language patterns

I have often emphasized the importance of learning the language patterns, and I still recommend that. However, there are shortcuts to spotting the patterns in your own language and in others. The way we speak to ourselves – whether it is internal dialogue or words spoken aloud – affects our state.

I am currently watching Wimbledon and noticing how the players speak to themselves either as they play or when they sit to the side when changing ends. Some are in deep trance in those moments and some talk aloud (to themselves and sometimes to the umpire!). What matters is whether what they say has the effect of boosting their game or not.

And that can be the clue about the value of the language you experience – what is the resultant state for you either as a result of what others are saying to you or what you are saying to yourself or others?

Here are some examples of how various language patterns can affect your own and others' states negatively:

The state	Possible language being used
Tension	Limiters – must, got to, try, etc.
Confusion	Abstract terms (which are used for hypnosis)
Intimidation	Opinions expressed as fact
Blame	Cause–effect
Stuck	Actions changed to abstract words
Stuck	Stoppers – can't, won't, etc.
Depression	Problem-centred language

The alternative

So when you experience any not OK states it can be the prompt to examine what language pattern you are using on yourself or that you are experiencing in someone else. If it is you that is using the pattern, you have the choice of changing it to something freeing and uplifting – the language of possibility. If it is someone else, then that is different as we do not automatically have the right to coach someone else. You do have the choice of removing yourself from the conversation or dissociating yourself from it. And one of the ways in which you can raise awareness and find a way to be unaffected and potentially amused is to be provocative (see [Chapter](#)

23, Coaching with humour (Provocative Coaching)) – provided you do this in a state of rapport and love!

Summary

Recognizing and challenging deletions, generalizations and distortions in your own and others' speech patterns will not only improve the quality of the way you communicate, it will improve your ability to experience what you really want from life. Skilled communicators have mastery over their language. The more flexibility you have over your language, the more potential influence you have over your experience.

Given that we have less and less control over the pattern of external events, the one place where there is room for growth is within. In learning how to use technology we are looking to save time and effort, and yet the contexts in our lives where we waste the most time are when and where we create an effect in others through our language that subsequently needs repair. If we become skilled in choosing language in line with our own and others' needs, we will cut hours, days, months and even years in some cases from the time it takes to achieve what we really want. How much new technology can offer you that?

Challenging deletions, generalizations and distortions in language with rapport and when appropriate will reconnect you and others with your experience. These challenges are a way of restoring ownership and are an elegant way of increasing the choices you have available to you. The skill of questioning is a way of clarifying and influencing relationships with self and others.

Thought provokers

- 1 Take a piece of paper and write down your ambitions for yourself, and what, if anything, gets in the way of your achieving them. Do a brain dump: whatever comes to mind,

write it down. Set yourself a limit of five minutes and keep writing down whatever occurs to you in that time.

- 2 Reread the passage you wrote about yourself. What patterns can you detect? Use the questions set out in this chapter to challenge those patterns for yourself.
- 4 Think of a meeting you had with someone you met for the first time recently. First, what effect did they have on you, and do you know what it was about them, and especially the way they spoke, that produced this effect? And, secondly, do you know what effect you had on them? How conscious was your choice of language?
- 5 To challenge the language patterns in the following statements, what questions would you ask?
 - a I can't change the way I am.
 - b No one can help me.
 - c I know they'll think I'm nervous.
 - d He did it deliberately.
 - e I'm annoyed because you are late.
 - f There is only way to give feedback constructively.
 - g My staff don't respond to my directions.
 - h This relationship isn't what it should be.
 - i I'm upset.
 - j You upset me.
- 6 Think of a situation recently where the outcome was dependent on what you said and you didn't get the effect you wanted. What did you say? How much time did it take you to resolve the issue (assuming it has been resolved)? What could you have said instead?
- 7 Now think of another situation that was strongly influenced by the words you used and where the outcome surpassed your expectations. How did what you said affect the outcome? How might you surpass your expectations in other contexts of your life in a similar way?

References

Richard Bandler & John Grinder (1975/76) *The Structure of Magic*, Vols I and II, Science and Behaviour Books.

There existed a psychotherapist who believed that many of the problems people brought to him were characterized by the presence of fish in their dreams. One day a client came to him and was discussing the problems he had.

‘Tell me,’ said the psychotherapist, ‘did you dream last night?’

‘I might have done,’ replied the client.

‘And tell me, in this dream was there a river?’

‘I don’t think so,’ replied the client.

‘Well, was there any water, if not a river?’

‘I guess there might have been.’

‘And was there a pool on the ground?’

‘I couldn’t be certain but it’s possible,’ the client replied.

‘And in this pool could there have been a fish?’

‘I can’t rule out the possibility that there might have been a fish.’

‘Aha!’ said the psychotherapist. ‘I knew it!’

9 Hypnotic language

Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

W. B. Yeats, 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven'

People sometimes express concerns about the 'programming' part of the name neuro linguistic programming, which may be associated with manipulation and brainwashing. Given that NLP is a powerful tool, they are right to be concerned. My approach with business is to make the unconscious conscious, on the basis that through conscious awareness we have choice. I also feel this is in line with the business goals of empowering and developing individuals through awareness and choice.

It is interesting, then, that the truth is that we are programming other people and ourselves most of the time. We are manipulating our own and others' responses and we are brainwashing ourselves and being brainwashed just about every moment of every day. The problem is that, without awareness and without training, we tend to do it clumsily and often in ways that are at odds with what we really want to achieve.

In a team meeting I attended about the future of a business the group leader looked at everyone directly and said, 'Don't be apprehensive ...'

His words had an effect the exact opposite of the one that he wanted to create.

Our unconscious mind obeys commands

Our unconscious mind obeys commands – we seek out the commands in a sentence and ignore the rest. Embedded in the group leader’s sentence was a very clear command: ‘Be apprehensive.’ I wasn’t apprehensive until the group leader said this! If I say to you, ‘Whatever you do, don’t stop now’, I have given you the instruction to ‘stop now’.

Speaking to one of my coaching clients she told me that her partner would make her feel guilty if she spent time away from him. She said they had angry exchanges when she did and she would tell him not to lay his feelings on her and not to get upset with her. She didn’t want this way of talking to him. When I asked her what she did want instead of this drama she looked surprised and confused. What she was telling him was all the things that she didn’t want and, not surprisingly, she got them. They were exactly what she did attract!

We need to learn how we already use these hypnotic language patterns. By doing so we can learn how to be more respectful of ourselves and others in choosing language that supports what we want.

When John Grinder and Richard Bandler set out on their exploration of the structure of excellence, they modelled outstanding psychotherapists. One of these people was the US psychiatrist Milton H. Erickson. In studying him, they learned about the power of the voice and the influence of language, especially hypnotic language. The results of this work became known as the ‘Milton Model’.

Hypnotic language is a way of being artfully vague

The Milton Model, described in John and Richard’s book *Trance Formations*, provides the user with ways of being ‘artfully vague’. Being artfully vague allows a communicator to make statements that sound specific and yet are general enough to be an adequate pace for

the listener's experience, no matter what that is. This is the opposite of the model for precision explained in [Chapter 8](#), Precision questions, which is designed to specify experience more fully. The Milton Model provides the user with a language structure in which just about all specific content is omitted.

Hypnotic language is used for the following reasons:

- It stimulates altered states of consciousness: trance.
- It allows us to bypass conscious resistance.
- It gives space for the listener to make sense of the language in their way and therefore draw on their inner resources.
- It avoids saying anything that might mismatch the specific meaning of situations for the listener and can therefore be good for building rapport.

Hypnotic language at work

If you think hypnotic language (trance-inducing language) is the preserve of psychotherapists, go to any regular business presentation and check out the trances that have been induced in the majority of the audience!

The workplace is full of hypnotic language

I would first of all emphasize that this is not so much about introducing hypnotic language into the workplace – the workplace is full of it already, often inappropriately – it is, rather, about being aware of what language patterns we are using and choosing ones that fit our purpose and lead to a win/win situation. A business report or presentation is likely to contain more hypnotic language patterns than anything else. The use of vague language (and it is more likely to be 'clumsily' vague than 'artfully' vague) avoids confrontation and challenge. If it is too vague for you to be sure exactly what it means, it is more likely to be ignored than challenged, and that for many people in business has been the safer option. I quote from an article in a recent business magazine:

Therefore, in view of the absence of any objective evidence provided by the original proponents of the hypothesis, and the failure of subsequent empirical investigations to adequately support it, it may well be appropriate now to conclude that there is not, and never has been, any substance to the conjecture that people represent their world ...

This is overwhelmingly hypnotically vague language and is taken from a report designed to highlight the ineffectiveness of NLP! Yet the author appears to be unaware of the patterns in his own language and the effect of those patterns on the reader.

A managing director was discussing the style of coaching that he wanted the management team to adopt. He repeatedly asked the managers questions like the following: 'What would I have to ask to be sure that he [the person being coached] came to the right conclusion?' or 'How can I say this to her so that she realizes what I want?' The effect of these questions was to irritate the managers, who wanted a freer, more open style of coaching. Although he believed he wanted to encourage a coaching style in the business, he had not let go of the desire to find a way to 'coach' people to come to his conclusions! On this occasion they did not reach any agreement.

Some questions contain powerful assumptions

What the MD was doing was using questions that contained powerful assumptions. The assumptions were ones that other members of the board didn't share, but they didn't know how to unpack the questions in a way that allowed them to challenge the assumptions. This is a pattern of hypnotic language that I explore later in this chapter.

The reasons for using hypnotic language skilfully are to be able to:

- choose language in line with the outcomes we want to achieve
- respect other people's unique interpretations of a situation, especially when we do not know the context
- be aware of when others may be attempting to use hypnotic techniques on us manipulatively and block them
- create space in our language for others (possibly someone we are coaching) to draw on their own resources rather than relying on us for answers. In this way we can help build confidence and self-esteem.

Ambiguity

A delegate on one of my courses in Denmark was doing a coaching exercise. I was the subject for his questioning skills, and he was exploring how I thought of my role in different contexts. He asked me, 'Who do you think you are ...' and was about to add 'in your work context?' but, because of the accent and the way he emphasized the words, I heard it as merely 'Who do you think you are?' The meaning I put on this was: 'What right do you have to think of yourself in this way?' I am quite sure this was not the way he meant it, but the fact I put this meaning to it meant it had a significance for me that was more powerful than the original. I began to appreciate the arrogance I was communicating.

Ambiguity is an important aspect of hypnotic language

Ambiguity is an important aspect of hypnotic language. It causes disorientation and creates space for the listener to create their own meaning, one that might take us much longer to discover at a conscious level. And for the listener to find their own meaning they have to reflect inwardly, and when they do that they are in a trance. The significance of encouraging the listener to find their own

meaning is that they are likely to have a higher level of commitment to any meaning they find for themselves than to any we might offer them.

Embedded commands and questions

I often hear parents telling their children:

- ‘Don’t *run around the pool* in case you slip and fall in!’
- ‘Don’t *eat any biscuits before your dinner!*’
- ‘Don’t *speak to me in that way!*’
- ‘Don’t *fight with your brother/sister!*’

Note the commands in each statement. The unconscious mind ignores/deletes the words wrapped around the command and just takes the command and seeks to obey it!

Words shape our experience

Words shape our external experience. When the new manager told his team that they ‘must not lose the business with this client’, he was offering their unconscious minds the structure of thinking that could lead to loss.

Words sculpt our inner world and subsequently shape our outer world. What we say to ourselves (our inner dialogue) has an influence on what we see, hear and feel. Similarly, our spoken words influence not only ourselves but also our listeners. It is vital that we take responsibility for the effect we create with our language if we want to maximize our influence. In other words, the meaning of our communication is indeed its effect.

We can embed positive or negative commands. Examples of positive commands might be:

- ‘You can begin to *relax.*’
- ‘I’ve been wondering how you might begin to *see a way forward.*’

- ‘I don’t know if you will *begin to feel motivated.*’

There are some negative suggestions that, when our unconscious mind finds them, are stripped back to the command component:

- ‘Don’t *think deeply about what you might be learning.*’
- ‘On no account do you need to *be aware of what you are saying.*’

You can really get learning and insight now

You may already be starting to think about some of the inappropriate examples you have heard. For example, has anyone ever come to you and said, ‘Don’t worry, everything is going to be alright’, when probably what they meant to communicate was ‘You can put your mind at rest now’?

You can also embed questions as a way of gently prompting a response from your listeners:

- ‘I am curious to know *what would you like to get from this meeting.*’
- ‘I was just wondering *what would you like to drink.*’

Most people will answer the question without even realizing that they have not been asked a question directly. What they often experience is a respectful and allowing style of conversation. This style of questioning is entirely appropriate when dealing with someone who might feel very sensitive, say in an appraisal or coaching meeting or with someone who is feeling nervous in an interview where direct questions might be too unnerving.

On one of my courses I heard one delegate say to another (who wanted to develop a new relationship): ‘Does thinking like that make you feel more alone?’ If they had been aware of the effect they really wanted, they might have said: ‘Does thinking like that make you feel more connected?’ Alternatively, they could have asked an open question: ‘What is it like when you think like that?’

Appropriate use of commands is a graceful way of collecting information

One way to help embedded commands or questions be received as such is to mark them out in the way we present them. For example, we might pause before and after the embedded command or mark it out with a raised eyebrow or a hand movement. If our marking out is subtle, it will be perceived but not consciously detected. The appropriate use of embedded commands and questions can be a graceful way of collecting information and a respectful form of influence. I know that with a little practice you can!

Embedding a quote in a sentence can be a very powerful way of getting a message across by bypassing any conscious resistance. For example, you might describe a conversation with one of your clients to another client by explaining that the first client had found it difficult to delegate responsibility. You might then explain that you said to her: ‘You will only realize your true potential when you learn to let go of control.’ You have in effect said what is in quotes to the person you are talking to now, but you have avoided taking responsibility for the message. The effect of this is that they cannot dispute the story; they are likely to take in the quote as if it applied to them without being able to challenge your right to offer it to them personally. This can be useful if you are dealing with someone whose preference is to dispute and mismatch what others say.

This kind of embedded command or question can be intentional and recently served to help me get rid of some frustration. I was with someone whom I was increasingly finding frustrating. They were criticizing the kind of work I do, and were the kind of person who does not take feedback easily, if at all. Rather than bottle up my frustration, I said, ‘I was working with someone recently and they would not see anyone else’s point of view, so I said to them, “Just how naive can you be? Can’t you see how frustrating your attitude can be for others? Might you ever accept someone else’s opinion?”’ I was talking about someone else, but I was really directing those embedded

statements to the person I was with at the time. At one level they knew that, but at another level they could not challenge what I was saying as it was not overtly directed at them. Do you know, they seemed to change after I said that! More importantly, it helped me get the things I wanted to say off my chest.

Presuppositions

You may have wondered while reading this how you can use these language patterns in your everyday work.

The previous sentence is a classic example of hypnotic language. It is a fact that you are reading this (unless someone else is reading it to you or you have found some other way of taking in the information in this sentence). And I have linked with that fact a response that I would like you to have – that is, wondering. And I am suggesting that you wonder about how you can use these language patterns in your everyday work. The question I have posed is how you can use these patterns.

Notice that I have therefore based this on the following presuppositions:

- that you can use these language patterns
- that you can use them in your everyday work
- that you want to use them in your everyday work
- that there are such things as language patterns
- that you are able to wonder about them
- that you would want to wonder about them.

Presuppositions are a powerful form of influence

If you accept the introductory statement, you are accepting all these presuppositions simultaneously. Presuppositions are a powerful form of influence. Used effectively, they can accelerate your progress towards an outcome. Used ineffectively, they will irritate and provoke your listener, even though your listener may not always

be sure what it is that is having that effect. The value of learning about these patterns is that you can become aware of what works for you and for others. By having this awareness, you also have the means to explain what is happening and the words to plan differently.

Presuppositions are very effective in training programmes when you want a group to accept certain premises for their development. For example, if you want a group to learn how to give feedback to each other, rather than asking if they want to give feedback, you ask how they will give feedback. You have given choice, but not over what you consider to be the non-negotiables. This is why in coaching it is so important to be aware of the language you use. There is a big difference between asking someone ‘Can you make a commitment to a next step?’ and ‘What commitment can you make to a next step?’

And in my view one of the worst questions that some people seem to get taught is ‘How does that make you feel?’ Dreadful! It presupposes that they do feel something and that is the primary way of representing what is happening in the moment. And in addition to that it promotes the idea that outside factors make them feel something (in language terms, cause–effect – see [Chapter 8](#), Precision questions). This is quite the opposite of what you would want to encourage in anyone!

To find out what is presupposed in a sentence and therefore not open to question, there is a simple test. Take a simple statement, ‘Colin mowed the grass.’ If we negate it, we have ‘Colin did not mow the grass.’ What is still true is:

- Colin exists.
- The grass exists.
- Colin could have mown the grass.
- The grass can be mown.
- There was an expectation that Colin might mow the grass.

In the earlier example, when the manager asked ‘How can I coach people to come to the right conclusion?’ he was presupposing that:

- There is a conclusion.

- There is a right conclusion.
- He has a right to coach people.
- He can coach people.
- He has the right to coach people to come to a right conclusion.

This is powerful language when used by communicators who presuppose what they don't want questioned. Often the communicator does not realize what they are presupposing (especially when they are unaware or unskilled in the use of these patterns). Learning about presuppositions can help us to discover what control we are holding on to and of what choices we might be able to let go.

As I was writing this chapter I became aware of an outcome that I had set myself, to decide which option of two key opportunities I was going to take for my future. I realized I had presupposed that it had to be one or the other. With just this realization, I discovered that the way forward for me was to believe that it did not have to be one or the other but could be both.

Some more examples of sentences and questions that contain presuppositions are:

- 'You might wonder who is going to volunteer for this project.'
- 'When do you think you will be able to see me?'
- 'Do you want to sit down while we go through this report?'
- 'You might ask yourselves which department will achieve its target first.'
- 'How can I delegate in such a way that we devolve ownership in the business?'

Some traditional sales closes include presuppositions, for example: 'Do you want to place the order now or later this week?' For me this is an example of inappropriate and outdated use of presuppositions. One of the factors that determines whether a statement is appropriate or not is whether you have a right to assume the presupposition. Does a salesperson have the right to assume that you

will place an order? I don't think so, which is why I would find this style of question offensive. However, I will not presuppose what you can believe about it!

Do you realize how much of this you are taking in unconsciously?

Distortions

I am opposed to smoking, and a colleague who does not share my view is aware of my feelings. We have had discussions about this where we both tried to convince the other that we were right. Recently, I sent an email to this colleague talking about a fellow presenter, whom I admire very much and had met for the first time. My colleague knows this person and responded by saying how much she admired him too and how caring this presenter was at all times, even in casual moments like a smoking break. When I read this I felt an inner conflict and was not sure initially what that was about. Then I realized that my colleague was linking something with which I agreed (the admiration I felt for the colleague) to something of which I did not approve (smoking).

What my colleague had done is a form of unconscious anchoring (see [Chapter 13](#), Tap into your inner potential: Anchoring), which works very effectively if we want the two things to be linked together. However, if it is authentic for us to link the two, the distortion leads us to experience the inner resistance that I felt when I read this email. And a conflict of thoughts like this leads to a state of cognitive dissonance* and that is the prelude to an unconsciously induced trance.

Nevertheless, as I describe in [Chapter 12](#), anchoring is a valuable and naturally occurring tool. We can use it for ourselves and to support and coach others when we link something that is occurring

or is true for them with something to which we want them to respond. For example:

- You are reading this sentence and you are wondering what other forms of hypnotic language there can be.
- You are taking in this information and you are exploring how you can practise these patterns in ways that enhance what you do.

In these two examples it is the use of the 'and' that has the influence by linking two components of the sentence together. What happens is that you get the listener into a 'yes' way of thinking and without a break you present another (non-factual) idea to their mind. It's a bit like getting someone to open the door to accept a parcel they have ordered and while the door is open starting a discussion about the weather!

Other forms that this linkage can take:

- As you sit here listening to what I am saying, you can begin to wonder how what I say applies directly to you.
- While we talk this through in this way, you can start to think how we might take this forward.

And a stronger form of this kind of linkage:

- Sitting here listening will make you aware of just how much there is to learn.
- Watching this presentation requires that you relax and concentrate fully on what we are saying.
- The way you are breathing causes you to begin to relax completely.

My experience is that if the motivation behind your statements is a genuine win/win and is perceived that way by your listener, these kinds of statements will be accepted and will accelerate your progress towards a mutual outcome. If they are not – if they are, for example, being used to manipulate someone against their wishes – then, although the listener may not know what is wrong, they will sense it. They may get that 'something's not quite right', instinctive reaction to you or what you are saying.

Mindreading

You are probably wondering what I am going to say next. I am mindreading when I say that. However, if you are wondering or if it is plausible that you could be wondering or might choose to, then it nudges you down that route.

Mindreading assumes you know what someone else is thinking

Mindreading occurs when you act or speak as if you know the other person's internal experience. As with all the other patterns, it can be helpful and an enriching experience, or it can be patronizing and disruptive. (And rather than presupposing that these are the only two effects it can have, you can also think about what other possibilities there are!)

Some examples of mindreading:

- 'You are probably asking yourself what you can do about this.'
- 'I expect you will have an answer.'
- 'I know what you will say if I tell you.'
- 'Your next step is predictable.'
- 'You might be thinking what your outcome might be.'

I remember a car journey into London with a colleague. It was as if this colleague had been waiting for the opportunity to tell me (without interruption) what they had on their mind. The conversation took the form of her telling me for most of the journey what I should do with the opportunities I had and with the business and what I must do for myself. The effect of this mindreading and the powerful language of shoulds and musts was that I felt as if I was under fire. I was mentally exhausted and very relieved when we got to our destination!

Summary

It is important for us to be aware of hypnotic language patterns. With this awareness we can choose the patterns we use with others and ideally select those that most support us in achieving our mutual outcomes. With this awareness we can also be aware of what is not working and precisely select alternative ways of meeting our own and others' needs.

Thought provokers

- 1 Take a piece of written communication that you have sent recently. It could be a letter, an email, a report. Select three or four sentences, especially ones in which you are making suggestions or recommendations. Negate the sentences and list the presuppositions on which you have based your statements. How many of those presuppositions were you aware of using and how many were used without conscious thought? What do you learn from that?
- 2 Identify someone with whom you experience a lack of choice in conversation. Write down some of the typical things they say to you. What (if any) hypnotic language patterns are they using?
- 3 Think of someone who typically resists any suggestions you make. Thinking back on the way you have put those suggestions, what options do you now have that might work more effectively to reach a win/win position?
- 4 Identify three situations where you believe that using hypnotic language would support you in achieving mutually desirable outcomes with another person.

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Since the publication of the Third Edition so much has changed in the world. So much that was previously unspoken is now in the public domain. The Me Too Movement has given voice to abuse that was always known about but rarely discussed. This abuse (and it can take place in many different contexts) is often accompanied or even perpetrated by people who either from birth or by sheer experience have learned how to manipulate others. Their ability to confuse and influence matches that some of the most powerful coaches I know. I have been shocked by the skill of some of the manipulators I have encountered – builders who duped me, men who hoodwinked me, a person I thought was a true friend who used me – and I, a teacher of everything to do with human behaviour, did not see through the deceptions for some time! I think my mistake was to trust too much. I would not change that, but I have learned a lot about the skills that some people have and the self-serving ends to which they will use those skills. While labels can be dangerous, they can also be useful. More and more, we're seeing the media using and popularizing words like 'narcissism,' 'love bombing,' and 'gaslighting' which describe the ways in which manipulators can prey on others. So we do really need to understand the structure of these concepts, both in order to prevent them from being used to harm us individually and to counter them in the world at large. And in learning how to be whole and to be truly who we are we minimize and even remove the likelihood of ever being a possible target for such abuse. For this reason alone, it

is important that we learn these concepts and that we ensure others do, too.

* Cognitive dissonance is the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioural decisions and attitude change. Experiencing this (which is a tactic used in many NLP techniques) creates a state for change.

10 Metamessages

You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop.

Rumi

What is a metamessage?

I enter a local café. It is attractively decorated. The menu looks interesting. As I approach, I notice that an ashtray outside the front door is overflowing. I enter and the girl behind the bar is talking to the owner. They continue talking while I wait. I consider leaving and turn towards the door. Only at this point does the owner end the conversation to move outside, leaving the waitress free to serve me.

The message behind the words is the voice of the heart.

Rumi

So often it is tempting to think that just because we have explained something in conversation that we have achieved the result we want. Or that because we say that we really care about our customers or that we love someone that the message is received as we say it. Not at all!

I have often been in the company of parents seeking to control their children who say things like ‘If you don’t stop running on the edge of the pool I will take you home now.’ They stop for a few moments but then they start running again. ‘I told you!’ However, no action follows. So, the metamessage is: ‘I will threaten you with a consequence but I won’t carry it out.’ And children know this.

This overarching message is what we refer to as the ‘metamessage’. It is the message that we are giving or getting from the total system that supersedes the words alone. And it is this that we respond to often unconsciously. We communicate through words; however, we also communicate through posture, gesture, stance and movement. Our metamessage might be supporting us in moving towards our goals, or it might be contradicting what we want without us even realizing that.

One of my clients told me about another NLP trainer they had experienced. ‘She is very technically knowledgeable but she does not seem to work through any of her own issues using the principles of NLP!’ So, the metamessage to others could be ‘This stuff is interesting but doesn’t work in practice.’

There are many exercises that I do on my NLP programmes where the learning lies as much if not more in the metamessage than it does in the content. For example, one exercise involves everyone giving spontaneous feedback to another in the group. Everyone does this at the same time and it is fast and immediate in that they do not know who will be the next person they face to either give or receive feedback. Given time to think, people will often say, ‘Oh, I am not sure I have any feedback yet for this person.’ In this process the metamessage is that I believe they do, just by dint of giving them this exercise to carry out. And I aim to be the example of this to them in being ready to give them unique personal feedback at any moment in time.

I am writing this chapter at the time of the ‘Yellow Vest’ (Gilets Jaunes) protests in France. In essence, this started as a protest against rising fuel prices and then extended into a protest about the general cost of living. The president of France, President Macron, at first responded with force but when that seemed only to fuel the protests, he addressed the public on TV from the Élysée Palace in Paris. And he did so from behind an enormous gilded desk. Hmm – the protests continued weeks after that insensitive broadcast.

Experience of the metamessages we give out

I believe that knowing oneself is the most important thing a human being can do for him or herself. Let yourself become living poetry.

Rumi

I noticed that one of my delegates was taking selfies at every opportunity with just about everyone with whom she came into contact. And she featured in the middle or front of every photo that she posted on social media. She asked my advice on launching her training/coaching business and, having decided that she wanted to communicate that her clients were all-important and at the forefront of her attention, she dramatically changed the way she took photos and rarely again appeared centre stage.

So, what might be the consequences of being unaware of our metamessages? Have you, for example, experienced:

- being surprised when you discover that someone has the ‘wrong’ impression of you?
- discovering after an event that the way you thought you had come across was different from the way that others perceived you and this was evident in the feedback you received?
- feeling annoyed with someone because they failed to understand what you wanted from them?
- being surprised that something you asked of someone was not delivered in the way you expected?
- finding that other people react to you in unexpected and undesirable ways?
- hearing ‘second hand’ what someone thought of you but was unable to tell you directly?

- frustration that the way that others approach you is not what you wish for?
- difficulty in expressing the ‘true’ you?
- frustration knowing that there is an inner conflict between your words and actions and thoughts and feelings?
- being baffled as to why someone chose not to do business with you when you thought it was a ‘done deal’?

Or do you experience:

- that you get just the response that you hoped and planned for?
- that people seem to understand what you want from them without too much explanation because you have been the example of the very thing that you wish to emphasize?
- that any feedback you receive is in line with how you wish to be perceived?
- that by and large you get what you ask for from others?
- that, on the occasions when you know you have not portrayed yourself as you would have wished, others are able to talk about that with you?
- feeling free in the way that you are able to express yourself, and that others get that whether they like it or not?
- that others would say of you that ‘what you see is what you get’?
- that people would say about you that ‘you get what it says on the tin’, so to speak?
- that when you ‘do business’ with someone you know whether or not you have ‘won the contract’ and you know why?

To provide the support, service, friendship and love that shows you care in the way that others recognize, you need to know just what you are communicating. To care about this and to act on it is to believe that ‘the meaning of the communication is the effect’ – one of the beliefs of excellence explored in [Chapter 15](#), Write your own life script: Beliefs of excellence.

Examples of metamessages

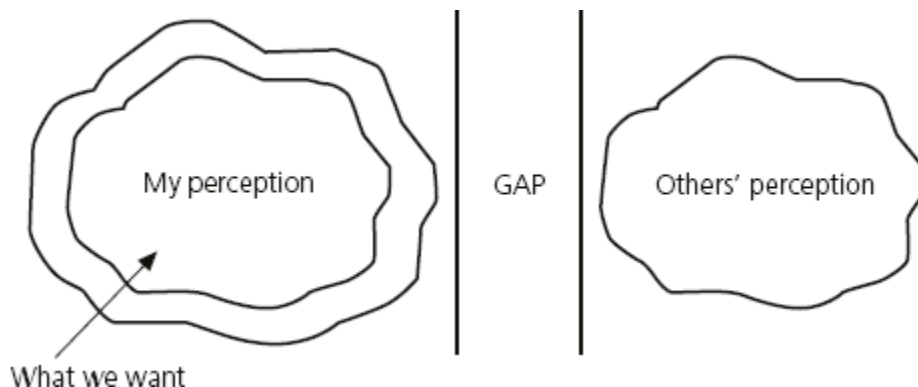
- If I say that I want my presentation to be interactive but then talk without breaking for the first five or 10 minutes, then it is likely that the message that will be received is that this is going to be a 'lecture'.
- I interrupt when a client tells me their familiar 'problem' issue. The metamessage is that I am not going to collude with them when they persist with their story and their desire to stay in that problem state. (This is a Provocative Coaching strategy that we look at more closely in [Chapter 23](#).)
- I give crazy or funny suggestions in response to a client's issue (another one of the Provocative Coaching strategies) – the metamessage is that their issue is not as serious as they are making it out to be and that, if all I can come up with are ridiculous suggestions, then they may as well find an answer for themselves.
- I write a letter to potential customers and say that I am 'at their service'; however, the predominant pronoun in the opening paragraphs is 'I'!
- If I refuse to answer questions asking me for generalized answers for what will work in any given situation, then the meta - message is that there are no generalized answers and that the answer lies in their experience.
- If I hold space for someone when I believe that they have just learned or realized something important, then my metamessage is: 'Stay with this – it's important; learn to be with this state – it is important to give yourself time to reflect on this.'
- If I always give reasons for why I did what I did (which another or others are telling me did not work for them), then my metamessage is that I am not open to feedback.
- A company purports to value their customers and be open to them in every way, yet their reception desk resembles the Berlin Wall behind which are receptionists who can barely be seen. The metamessage is at odds with what they say they are about.

I once visited one of my client's premises for the first time. This was a company that wanted to promote a welcoming style – one of being open to their customers at all times. The most convenient parking spaces for access to the reception were reserved for the directors. Each spot had the name of its respective 'owner'. The entrance doors were very heavy and difficult to open, and the receptionist could barely be seen behind the bar of the reception desk and she was on the phone. By the side of the reception desk was a noticeboard and on it a welcome note. 'Today we welcome Sue Knight.' A nice touch, I thought. The receptionist asked for my name. 'Sue Knight,' I replied. 'Who?' she said, clearly unaware of what was on the board beside her. I had a lot to go on in the work I did with the MD that day!

Potential scenarios

SCENARIO 1

Our perception of what we are communicating is different from others' perceptions of what we think we are conveying, and we are unaware of this. We 'think' we are communicating in clear and unambiguous ways.

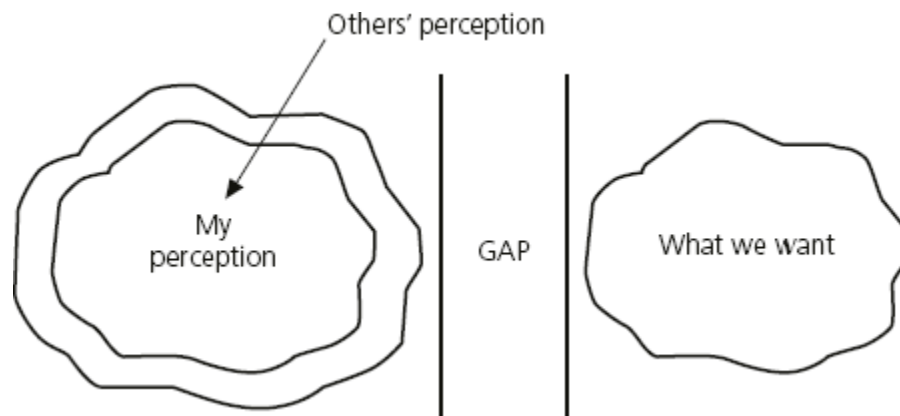


In this scenario we will have problems with others. We may not understand how or why they react to us in the way that they do. And

others probably have difficulty dealing with us and explaining why they feel the way that they do towards us.

SCENARIO 2

Our perception of what we are communicating is the same as that of others and it is not what we want.



In this case we know what others think of us and it is not the impression we want to create. Awareness is better than no awareness, nevertheless.

A discrepancy between your self-perception and others' perceptions can be one of the biggest sources of frustration – for everyone involved. This gap can occur if the implications of receiving others' perceptions and possibly therefore their feedback can be so challenging to the core of who you are that you are unwilling to go there. Supposing that to accept others' perception of you would shake your whole self-image, then it is going to take a superhuman amount of strength and commitment to really listen.

The question is whether you do want to create a different impression and, if so, what has to happen for you to do that. In some way it will mean increasing your flexibility, and all the chapters in this book address that very issue. Most people find that as they study and practise NLP the perception that others have of them does approach and eventually line up with the impression that they wish to create. This, after all, is a key recipe for success.

SCENARIO 3

Our perception of what we are communicating is the same as others' perception of us and it is what we want it to be.



This is the ideal for healthy work and life! 'It does what it says on the can', as the expression goes! All our ducks are in a row, to use yet another expression, and we are aligned with our purpose in the message we are giving out both consciously and unconsciously.

How do we achieve this aligned state?

Awareness is the key, and awareness of many different aspects. For example, our beliefs can support us in there being a match between our perception of how we are and others' perceptions. So, here are examples of beliefs that support this:

- The meaning of the communication is the effect. If you hold this to be true, you will recognize that whatever effect you have on others or your environment is your responsibility and only you can change this. If you want the effect – that is, the result you are achieving with others – to be different, it is you that has to change. This is a recurrent theme in all the learning here. You want change – you become the change!
- If you hear someone saying 'That's their fault' or 'That's not my problem' (when someone reacts to them in an adverse way) or 'That's your opinion' (as if it is wrong), then you can be sure that they do not subscribe to this belief. However, those who look to themselves for a way forward, those who recognize we are all connected in a bigger system, are those who very definitely do!

Everyone has their map (unique perception) of the world. All we have is perception. We filter what we experience through our senses and we do this in ways that are unique to each of us (see [Chapter 3](#), Filters on your own world). This does not (in the broader scheme of things) make one person's perception right and the other wrong (although it can be very tempting to believe so sometimes!). By holding this belief, we are likely to be willing to explore the differences. Surely, this is the recipe for loving living. It is a way of learning to understand, then perhaps accept, others for who and how they are. The natural tendency is to seek out those who support our way of thinking in order to invalidate those who think differently. Those who gossip tend to gossip with those who will support their point of view! So believing in difference (which is what this belief is all about) is likely to support us in learning about others' perceptions of us, especially when such perceptions differ from our intention.

How else can you check your metamessage?

The result of learning all the concepts in this book will give you increased and heightened awareness, so you are likely to find this happening automatically. And there are particular things that you can do (like subscribing to the beliefs described in the previous paragraphs).

And what else? Well, feedback is key to this understanding; not just hearing it but truly listening to it. I am writing this in 2019 as the news of the European elections are flooding in with big upheavals for what have been the leading political parties in the past. And what is especially interesting is how the candidates are responding to that feedback as they are being interviewed. Some are taking it as the 'kick up the backside' and realize that they must listen and note what the public is saying with these votes. Yet some are saying: 'Ah well, these votes don't really count; it will be different in a general election and the support will return!'

Feedback is like oxygen to our whole being. There is a saying that ‘The quality of our relationships is directly proportional to the quality of the feedback.’ But it should really say: ‘The quality of our relationships (and our lives) is directly proportional to the extent to which we elicit feedback and then truly listen to it.’ And to listen means to hear (and watch, too, as some of the most significant feedback can come through subtle non-verbal reactions) and to seek to understand. Clean questions (discussed in [Chapter 6](#)) play a key part here. Any justification, explanation or defence will minimize the likelihood of you learning about yourself and discovering what effect you are truly having in comparison with what you think! Often the most subtle feedback can come from exploring what is not said but what is shown – for example a look to the heavens, a frown, a harrumph ... and all you need say is ‘What happened there?’ or ‘What’s your response to that?’ Stay objective – that’s the key.

However, what if you don’t have access to the person or people giving you feedback or who you think might have feedback for you? I often receive feedback on my books via Amazon from people I have never met and may never meet. I do not have the opportunity to question them directly. And there are increasingly more people that we connect with online whom we may never know personally. Now the ability to put yourself in their shoes is vital (this is explored in [Chapter 19](#)). This is not the same as just thinking about the receivers of your messages – it is the ability to imagine that you are them on the receiving end of yourself and all that you are doing and saying. This ability to ‘second-position’ yourself can mean that you do not have to rely on others to tell you the effect you are having. However, with both the ability to truly listen to feedback and to invite it you have a powerful combination to achieve this aligned ideal state. So your intention matches the way you are received, and both align with what you want.

Use the logical levels outlined in [Chapter 14](#), Align yourself: Levels of influence, as your framework.

The message behind the words is the voice of the heart.
Rumi

Our self-image, which is so closely connected to our purpose, shapes our behaviour and the way we choose our environment and settle (or not) for what is around us. What does your environment say about you? The people with whom you 'hang' out, your home, your workspace, what you are wearing, where you go in the world?

What is characteristic behaviour for you? What would others say? Speaking with certainty, smiling, speaking over others, asking open questions, hesitating, seeking to please, speaking independently? Whatever it is, it is creating an impression no matter what the content of what you say.

What qualities do you think you demonstrate to others through those behaviours? What are your natural talents? Most people don't know and therefore do not use them fully. They are very often not the things that you see on skill profiles in organizations. They are more likely to be things like humour, spontaneity, tenacity, truthfulness, directness, courage, joy. Even if the way that they are expressed is not legitimate, the structure behind the behaviour is what has an effect.

And beliefs – well, they inform and shape all of the above. Many of our beliefs are developed at a very early age. We carry them with us, and they permeate everything we do. Most people are sharing their beliefs openly in most conversations whether you like those beliefs or not! You may not realize how overtly you express and demonstrate your beliefs, but you can be sure that you do!

We all tend to act in accordance with our self-image. We are all born with a nervous system, bones, muscles, skin, glands and senses. We all have these, and then we develop our unique self-image as a result of our actions and reactions to what happens to us in life. And in that we often act without conscious choice. What is important is that we can learn to choose, to have that flexibility to be who we wish to be. We build our self-image and we act in line with it. Our every move expresses our self-image. It is undeniable. Who am I? Look at the message I am giving out and you will know who I am.

What is your purpose in work/in life? Probably not the sort of question you ask or get asked over a quick coffee with friends!

Unless perhaps you are in India where there is a much greater connection with 'the beyond self' than there often is in the Western world. You may or may not think that you have one. Be sure, however, that you are making a difference in some way. (We all have a legacy, even if it is not what you would wish it to be!) The question is: in what way? Is it the way you wish? If you were not present on this earth, in this group, in this relationship, what would be missing? And something would be missing. We are all inextricably linked. We all have an effect on others and on the whole system. And although many do not pay attention to this their whole life long, we can choose the legacy that we wish to leave whether that be at the end of a meeting or at the end of our life!.

Awareness is the key

Summary

It was Mahatma Gandhi who said we must be the example we want to see in the world. And we are always being an example of something. Being the example of what we want is probably one of the most rapid, skilful and profound ways of influencing the world around us. One of my friends on one of the social media sites asked me what I was going to do given my critical comments about the current state of politics. It was a very thought-provoking question; one that is dear to my heart. I was promoting the importance of coalition in government and the need to let go of self-interest for the greater good. I applied this to myself and am finding ways to form coalitions in my own life where previously I had avoided them purely on personal grounds. I am choosing to consider the greater good before I consider any actions that are purely for self-interest.

Thought provokers

- 1 Look around you now. What is present in your surroundings? What characterizes your environment? Is it inherited and, if so, have you accepted it as it is or sought to change it to suit

your outcomes? How is your acceptance or influence symbolic of the decisions you make concerning other bigger systems of which you are a part – for example your team, your organization, your family, your relationship?

- 2 Visit your workplace, your webpage, your home, as if you were someone else (someone perhaps who is important to you). Pay attention in the way that you experience them paying attention. What are you drawn to? What do you notice and hear? How do you feel? What strikes you as being important and how might that impression convey messages about the culture of the bigger system – for example the company or the family. Notice how space is used, how open or closed the area is, how easy it is to make contact with those people you want to reach. What is the decoration, and what accessories are there? In what kind of state are the surroundings? (The presenter Tom Peters used to say ‘Coffee stains on the flip-down tray on an aircraft mean that they don’t do their engine maintenance right’.) What are people saying and doing? (Think back to that bar owner who always continues her conversation with her staff before acknowledging an arriving customer.)
- 3 Invite feedback. From customers, friends, relatives, anyone ... Ask open questions – what is your impression of me as a manager/supplier/colleague/partner? What would I have to do to be the best manager/supplier/colleague/partner for you? And just hear what they say. Do not justify or explain, just seek to understand. When you have implemented any suggestions they make, ask them how things are for them now.
- 4 Consider some of the things you have done today. What kind of example do you think you have been to others?
- 5 To what extent are you aware of what you communicate through your posture, gesture, stance and movement? Ask others what they think you are communicating typically in this way?

- 6 Think of someone you noticed recently whose words were at odds with their actions. (There is a lot of media news of politicians at the moment, so there's no shortage of examples there!) What effect did this person have on you?
 - 7 Someone whom you recognize as being a person who lacks confidence in themselves asks you if you think they are right in a decision they have made. You want to help them boost their confidence – what do you say?
 - 8 Read the story below – what is the metamessage behind the headmaster's actions? There is a metamessage in all of the end-of-chapter stories. That is where the learning lies even if you don't recognize that consciously at first.
-

I read a newspaper article describing the behaviour of a schoolboy who had become so unruly that teachers were recommending that the headmaster expel him. The boy bullied other children, swore at teachers, and was usually involved in a fight at least a couple of times a week. The teachers had tried every form of punishment and detention they could think of but the boy would not conform.

Eventually the headmaster summoned the boy to his office and gave him an ultimatum: 'You have this choice – either you accept the offer I am about to explain to you or you will be expelled.' The boy said nothing.

The headmaster carried on: 'This is the offer. You are to agree to bully once a week, to swear a total of five times a day, and to fight once.' (This was a lot less than the boy's current behaviour.)

'Well, Susi Q, what's the issue?' he asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

I had planned this moment, having studied Frank Farrelly (the master of Provocative Therapy) so thoroughly over the years. I believed I could reproduce

what he did in my own way now. I knew he wanted clients to bring 'real' issues and not just have a session with him for the sake of being able to say that they had been coached by the great 'FF'. This chair alongside him was not a place to come to just experience Frank without having a real issue. He didn't have much patience for anyone who might waste his time in that way.

So over lunch I thought through the issues I might bring and I boiled it down to two. I worked through how he might respond depending on which issue I raised as 'the' one. If I brought issue A, then I figured Frank would interrupt me to see how I would react and then I had worked out that I could laugh about that and I wouldn't look vulnerable. And the same with issue B. I had a feeling that he would prompt that issue with a cheeky question and maybe attempt to provoke me on something relating to my age. I was ready for that too and worked out what I would do if that happened. I had a sense then of how he would come back to that. So I was well prepared ... or so I thought!

So here I was facing the expected and usual opening question: 'So what's the issue, Susi Q?' he said affectionately and with humour.

'Well, Frank, I have two issues,' I replied confidently.
'OK, then, let's deal with the third.'

Programming

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.

Aristotle

Modelling is the process of coding experience, the means of discovering the difference that makes the difference. When we step into someone else's shoes and reproduce what they do and the results they achieve, we are modelling. Modelling involves reproducing the sequence of thinking, language and behaviour patterns of our subject in such a way that we can reproduce the same result with consistency. To do this, we may also need to take on (albeit temporarily) their identity and beliefs. In effect, to use a computer metaphor, we are eliciting the program code needed to demonstrate the talent and we are running the program as and when we want it. So primarily we model in order to be able to be aware of how we and others achieve the results we achieve. In business we are most likely to do this to be able to consistently reproduce the best. We may also study experience in the context of coaching so that we the coach and particularly the subject are aware of how they are doing what they are doing so that they can discover how they might create choices for themselves to release their full potential and overcome any limiting patterns they may have.

Reproducing excellence

So the usual purpose of modelling in business is to reproduce excellence. If we want to reproduce the success of an outstanding individual no matter what medium they use to present themselves, we can study how they do what they do and what makes the

difference. We have the opportunity to refine the strategies that they use so that we discover the most elegant and efficient way of achieving the result.

Excellence is context specific

So often the difference that makes the difference is something quite specific and outside the conscious awareness of the person you are modelling. That is why NLP is about learning how to study experience because the person being studied (modelled) usually cannot tell you what it is that they do that makes the difference. NLP has been described as the Structure of Magic. What you can discover is often outside any standard textbook, and it can be the simplest of things that make a remarkable difference (seemingly magically!) – the ‘things’ the person being studied often takes for granted or of which they have no specific or conscious awareness. You will very likely discover, too, that there are things the person does that they do not need to do; you can refine and strip back the model to its simplest, most elegant state.

Watching Rafa Nadal, the Spanish tennis player, serve, for example, you might wonder if he needs to make such lengthy and intricate preparations. His habit for how he prepares himself has become more complex and lengthy as time has gone on to the point where he risks forfeiting points (and indeed has) because he has exceeded the allowed time to serve.

By discovering and developing what we learn, we can not only reproduce the skill we are modelling, we can tweak and enhance it so that we can achieve an even higher level of skill than the original. And the beauty of that for the person being modelled is that, if they so wish (and that is important – modelling is not automatically coaching), they can learn how to refine their own strategies for success.

NLP is about learning how to learn

NLP is an active process. It is research into what works, with the purpose of enabling us to reproduce and enhance success in ways that are unique. The more we model experience, the more we discover. NLP operates at a higher level than most traditional training in the sense that it enables us not just to learn what works but how it works. When we learn NLP we learn how to think and how to act – and to be aware of the choices we are making. The process of NLP offers ownership and discovery, and enables us to reconnect with the way we were born to learn. By embarking on the process that is NLP, we not only learn how to learn but increase our ownership and personal discovery in work and life. .

11 Modelling

It is rare that one cannot learn from another or from life's experiences, if the effort is made. Perhaps that is the secret of achieving a peaceful society; searching for each other's unique and special knowledge.

Anonymous

If someone can do it, anyone can do it. That is the basis of modelling. We can learn to capture our moments of brilliance, study them, code them, and reproduce them at will. Consider any outstanding performer in sport, the arts, business, life. This is what they do. They don't just have one-off moments of luck; they reproduce their brilliance wherever and whenever they choose. That is what puts them at the top of their game. And we can learn to do the same.

We study those we consider to be models of excellence, but we take out what is redundant and keep the essence. We apply it to ourselves to test how it works, and when it does we teach it to others – that is NLP

Be like a tree and let the dead leaves drop.

Rumi

Modelling is a state of curiosity and selflessness. It is a desire to listen. It is an ability to watch, respect and learn from others as well as from ourselves.

There is no longer any such thing as a job for life. We are increasingly directly accountable for everything we do. The number of people who are self-employed has risen tenfold in the last five

years. We are only as good as the results we are achieving today. That's why we need to learn.

When my son sent emails from his travels around the world, I was initially interested in what he had to say, what he was doing, where he was, and where he was headed for next. However, I also started to become interested in how my son's ability to communicate what he was doing matured as he travelled. His use of words and expressions developed a style and richness that I had never noticed before. On one occasion I got a copy of an email that went out to all his friends as well and I learned things that no email addressed 'Dear Mum' was ever going to reveal. I was astonished at some of the content, and then I noticed *how* he was saying it! His rebellious behaviour meant that he was never considered to be academic at school, and yet, throughout his life, his remarkable way of communicating has allowed him to influence those around him.

There is talent behind every behaviour, whether we approve of the behaviour or not. And with NLP we can access the structure of that talent and reconnect it to new behaviours if we so choose. For example, if you regularly get depressed or stressed, you can learn how you do this irrespective of what is happening in your environment. The very fact that you repeat this behaviour with regularity says that it is something that you have learned how to do. And the fact that you can do this suggests that you have a strategy, although undoubtedly it is an unconscious one. My guess is that you would not choose to be stressed and so would do things differently if you knew how you were creating this state for yourself. And you can. Suppose you have learned how to let something external trigger this response – maybe someone says something to you in a particular way. Or perhaps you get stressed when you are asked to do something like a presentation. Whatever the trigger, the next thing you do is to visualize the situation getting worse. This is your strategy – and it's a strategy you can change.

Modelling is a state of curiosity

Even though you may work for a large organization, the chances are that, no matter how much support you receive, you either already are or most certainly will be expected to be self-reliant in the way you respond to the challenges you face. There are few easy options at work, and the pace is such that others are busy looking after themselves.

Modelling is not just a technique, it's a lifestyle

However, the good news is that most people have barely scratched the surface when it comes to drawing on their inner resources and few really know how to do this. Modelling is the answer. It is not just a technique; it is a lifestyle. Wherever you are and whoever you are with, you can be learning and growing.

The unexamined life is not worth living.
Socrates

Modelling is a way of achieving lifelong learning and true personal fulfilment. It is a way of respecting the unique talents we all have.

I recently watched a TV programme showing how the IQ tests that were once used for college selection in one part of the USA discriminated against the young black population. These people did not score well on the qualities measured. However, a researcher discovered that when they experimented with another test that measured very different aptitudes, the same population excelled. The implication of relying on the original test was, in one of the black interviewees' words, that they had 'no option but to make a living by going on the streets and selling drugs'. By introducing the new test the researchers were opening doors to education for this previously neglected group of people.

Modelling draws on the principle that we all have talents of value

There are powerful implications in the yardsticks we use to ‘box’ people into what is acceptable and what is not. Modelling goes way beyond a new test. It respects the fact that whatever talents we have are of value and can be directed towards our own good and for the good of others. To learn to model is to explode the myths of IQ stereotypes. It is to learn to respect and allow everyone their rightful place in the world. As the quote at the beginning of the chapter suggests, maybe our ability to model is the key to a peaceful society. And it is a state of not knowing, openness and curiosity.

A friend was saying that he was having difficulties in his marriage and that he and his wife seemed to have lost interest in each other. He described the kind of scenario that bothered him – being in bed beside his wife with her more or less ignoring him while she watched a reality - TV programme – *Love Island* – on her iPad. He explained that they were in the process of seeing a couples counsellor and he had described this scenario to her, expecting her understanding and compassion for his reaction. Instead she said, ‘So how much curiosity have you taken in your wife’s interest in this programme?’ *Et voilà!*

In the business context, we need to be exploring previously untapped resources. We need to learn from what every individual has to offer. If we do what we always did, we get what we always got – a recipe for business suicide. So modelling opens up a completely new world in how we recognize potential and, more significantly, release it for the good of everyone.

Modelling can take many forms. We learn some of our most fundamental skills by modelling others. Babies and young children are expert modellers. Only when they start learning by more traditional methods do they begin to lose this skill. Some traditional methods of schooling train our most natural learning talent out of us. ‘Sitting by Nellie’ was the method by which many employees were taught to do their work. This only worked well if Nellie was a model of excellence or if the new employee was smart enough to know what worked and what didn’t. Unfortunately, it often resulted in the reproduction of bad practice.

We can model anything; people are excellent in many different spheres. We can, for example, have excellence in our ability to:

- generate commitment and respect
- motivate ourselves and others
- bring humour to alleviate tense situations
- sell and influence
- achieve a personal best in sport
- let go of old limiting patterns
- listen
- speak a second language fluently
- communicate using the latest technology
- network
- lead and inspire.

Equally, we can have excellence in our ability to:

- get depressed
- sulk
- lose our temper
- remain untouched by emotion
- procrastinate
- worry
- resist change
- respond aggressively to others
- panic.

By modelling any of these we can develop a conscious awareness of the process, and with conscious awareness we have a choice, which is to continue the same or to do something else. The process of studying what we are doing and how we are doing it lifts us to a level of detachment in which we can choose what we do and, more importantly, what we continue to do in the future.

Many companies now have a system of mentoring whereby members of staff, as part of their development, are allocated to a more senior or more experienced employee in order to learn from them. All too often, the success of this system hinges on the experienced employee's ability to impart their skills. Often they don't know their most powerful skills nor how they use them. If,

however, the learner is equipped with NLP modelling skills, they can elicit the skills they need to learn irrespective of the awareness and skill level of their mentor. The subject being modelled can also benefit from this process by learning from feedback on how they structure their experience. With this awareness they can achieve greater consistency in the skills they possess.

In any situation we can look for the best (the examples we wish to emulate/the examples that ‘succeed’, in our perception) and we can model them. We can model those people who successfully get online followers. We can model those who seem to be able to unpack the details of all the online personal profiles in such a way that they find the genuine folk. We can model people who successfully recover from injury or illness. We can model people who have authority and get heard when others are drowned out. We can model the people we meet in new countries to be sure that we respect the local culture in the way that we behave.

You can learn to reproduce a talent in one context of your life so that you can use it in another

You can apply the process of modelling to yourself. You might, for example, want to reproduce an ability or skill that you have in some areas of your life or work, in order to use it in other contexts. Let’s suppose you are influential when dealing with colleagues but don’t have the same level of influence with clients. You could model yourself in order to discover the difference between the two, so that you can use your influence in whatever context you choose.

One company that employed a telephone marketing team could not understand why there was such inconsistency in the results it was getting with some of its telemarketers. With some clients they were very successful and were able consistently to convert a call into an appointment, but with others they struggled to get past the first few minutes of the conversation.

What the company discovered when it modelled what was happening with these calls was that the telemarketers were building mental images based on what they had heard from others in the company about the different groups of people they had to call.

One of the biggest differences between the successful calls and the unsuccessful ones was connected with the mental image the caller had in their mind as they made the call. Those who were most successful imagined the recipient of the call in a brightly lit room. The image was vivid and in colour and they imagined the other person smiling. (This was entirely in their mind, as they never saw the people they phoned.) The unsuccessful callers typically imagined the recipient of the call in a dark room, the image was defocused and grey in tone, and the person had a serious expression on their face. All this before they had even dialled the number!

By modelling the successful mental strategies, the company was able to train the previously less successful marketeers in these thinking techniques. The average conversion rate of call to appointment increased significantly.

We achieve the results we do through the programs we run in our minds and in our actions. Just as computer programs are a sequence of codes, so personal programs are a sequence of mental and behavioural codes. When you walk, talk, drive, read or laugh, it is unlikely that you think consciously about how you do these things. The programs that make them happen are managed on your behalf by your unconscious mind. These programs are known as strategies.

The key to reproducing experience

If you want to model excellence either in yourself or in other people, your aim is to elicit these unconscious strategies as well as the conscious ones that enable you to do what you do. When you have

the strategy for how someone manages their experience, you have the key to reproducing that experience for yourself.

When a chef produces a gourmet dinner, not only is he following a recipe for the ingredients, he is also following a recipe for thinking and behaving. He may, for example, have an image of what he wants the dish to look like accompanied by the aroma of the final meal. He may also be concerned with timing and the look and feel of the ingredients. He has a unique way of achieving the result.

A team of business experts took on some local companies to help them boost their business. One of these companies was Mo's corner shop. This was a typical corner shop, packed full of thousands of different product lines, many of them beyond their shelf life and many almost impossible to find easily on the cramped shelves. Mo applied to the team of experts to have them redesign his business. He was under threat from the big supermarkets nearby, so not only did the team want to increase the efficiency of the shop, they also wanted to find ways to differentiate Mo's shop from these bigger competitors.

The expert team set about reorganizing and relabelling the products on the shelves. They installed self-clean, maintenance-free ovens to supply daily fresh bread. They introduced a new stock control system and eliminated the 80 per cent of products that had not sold for years. And they went into Mo's office, where they found that his method of personal organization was to use three-year-old diaries (or older), cross out the days, and overwrite them with the current year's days and dates. So the office came under the experts' scrutiny and revision as well.

After all of this and much more, Mo was left with a completely overhauled shop. The time needed to find and buy items had been cut by at least 50 per cent and his customers were delighted with the changes.

The team returned six months later and were shocked to find that the shop was back to how it used to be before their overhaul. This was not surprising really when you start to deduce what must have been going on in the owner's head or, more to the point, how it was going on in his head. Mo's thoughts were as disorganised as his shop: in conversation, he jumped from one topic to the next. He seemed to constantly be interrupting himself. He admitted that his mind was 'all over the place' as he described it. Mo's shop was an expression of his internal structure. His shop, and everything about him, was a mirror of his internal experience. And that was the part that the team had overlooked.

The methods used by the expert team (the results of which were wonderful, in the short term) are the methods used by many businesses wanting to update and bring about a culture change. The remedy so often seized on is to change the environment.

*We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves
after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us.*
Marcel Proust

How many people have you seen go about a facelift in just this way? Yet the only facelift that really makes the difference is the inner facelift. By modelling what was going on in Mo's inner experience, we can deduce not only how he has got what he has but also, to take it one step farther, what he might need to change in his inner world to really make a difference.

It is the inner facelift that makes the difference

We have strategies for making decisions such as what to have for dinner, where to go on holiday, how to plan our day. There is a pattern to the way we do this.

For example, the way I decided to write this new edition of this book was:

- 1 I was invited to do it as it was ten years since the previous edition.
- 2 I remembered (visually) what it had been like writing the previous edition.
- 3 I asked myself repeated questions over time about what the new elements/emphasis would be and how I would do it.
- 4 I searched news articles to compare what was happening ten years ago to what was happening today.
- 5 I got to know the new publisher, and his enthusiasm for the new edition sparked my motivation.
- 6 My all-time mentor, Gene Early, highlighted for me how I had changed and how that was an important theme for the new book.
- 7 My publisher invited me to do an audio version when it was finished and that was a huge boost to my commitment to the writing as I imagined myself reading my own words.
- 8 I announced my commitment to write on social media.

In all the above I realized how important the external stimuli were. I had always thought of myself as very internally referenced, but in truth the difference that made the difference in terms of my commitment to the writing was external – my mentor, the publisher, the responses I got on social media, and the thought of how people would receive the book being read by me.

Understanding a strategy gives me choice about how and when I use it. Equally, if someone wanted to influence my decision about writing, it would help if they understood my strategy rather than trying to impose their own.

Suppose you identify that your friend has a strategy that involves:

- 1 creating a picture of what they want (visual)
- 2 asking themselves a question about the viability of that outcome (auditory)

3 getting a feeling of certainty that this is what they want (feelings).

By matching this strategy you will be helping and influencing their decision-making process. Let's say their outcome was to consider the possibility of finding an ideal partner in life. You could match their strategy by saying:

- 1 'Imagine what it would be like to find someone with whom you have the kind of relationship that you want (and not what you don't want!).' (visual)
2. 'Picture some ideal scenarios that are the way that you would wish them to be.' (visual)
- 3 'Ask yourself what is important to you and how you can begin to describe yourself to others.' (auditory)
- 4 'How do you feel about what you are imagining.' (feelings)

What people think they do is rarely the same as what they actually do

It is important to remember that if you ask someone 'How do you do that?' – if you ask them consciously to recall their strategy – it is unlikely that they will be able to give it to you. They may either say 'I don't know' or they will tell you what they think they do. This is rarely the same as what they actually do. To elicit a strategy, the person you are modelling needs to be doing or reliving the experience you wish to model. Hence NLP is a study of the structure of experience!

Modelling in business has led to significant breakthroughs in the way skills are taught. Traditionally, companies used standard training programmes to teach standard skills. More often than not, trainees were left to their own devices to adapt these skills to their unique environment. There are unique patterns that work in one company, one department or one market segment, and that will not work in another. Modelling enables you to elicit these context-specific patterns in order to reproduce excellence in a place of your choice. By choosing the people who excel within the given context, not only will you be able to reproduce their levels of success, you

will also be able to help those same people achieve greater consistency in their own performance.

When PricewaterhouseCoopers wanted to reproduce the outstanding performance of some of its top project leader coaches, it decided to use NLP to model the strategies that worked. It selected its outstanding performers, and I was invited to model them to find out how they do what they do. I watched them in action working with groups of trainees and talked with them about their beliefs, their values, and their sense of identity and purpose.

What emerged was a consistent pattern for the ones who achieved results significantly above the norm. All had a quality of selflessness, a purpose that was beyond themselves, and all had values that included love and care for others. At the level of behaviour, they were all skilled in the way they used metaphor and visionary thinking. And they were so dedicated to meeting the learning needs of their trainees that if they did not do that to their satisfaction (in one case especially) this resulted in the coach's temporarily feeling physically sick. (I did not necessarily want others to have to reproduce that!) However, once we knew what some of the key pieces were in the strategies (and there was much more), I was able to present this to others who had not yet achieved the same level of excellence.

The joy of modelling is that you can refine the model by testing which elements add to excellence and which detract or make no difference. By taking away one element at a time, you can determine how this affects the overall result. This enables you to generate the most effective model, which you can use to teach others, including the person you modelled.

This process applies when modelling anything, whether it's an individual, a team or a complete organization. The skills it takes to

sell a luxury car are quite different from those it takes to sell a software package. The skill required to motivate a group of production-line workers is quite different from that needed to motivate advertising account executives. The skill needed to communicate face to face may be very different from that needed to communicate via the internet. The skills you need in the Information Age are vastly different from those that might have stood you in good stead in previous times. Modelling enables you to uncover the uniqueness of the model, the quality of the inborn talent, and the natural skill.

In the last few years, I have been working with young people from the townships in South Africa who have escaped the chains of gangs and drugs and are working to enable other young people to do the same. They know intuitively how to use the thinking that is NLP. They discovered that the behaviour of some young people would attract the attention of gang members as being characteristic of someone who is vulnerable and open to the influence of the gang. This behaviour was apparent in just the way that they walked down the street. The gang members are skilled 'modellers', knowing what to look for in the physiology, the eye contact, the way of walking. So one of the things that those who had made the break began to do was to teach young people how to hold themselves in order to appear less vulnerable: how to walk and how to believe in their own inner strength.

Modelling – the secret weapon

A client of mine said, 'This modelling is the secret weapon for today's business if everyone but knew it.' This is a key part of what is happening with artificial intelligence. We are teaching machines to learn what works in unique situations. It may well be that the machines will be more talented than the general population in their ability to do this. And that is quite likely a result of our addiction to mobile phones. The systems behind them are learning what we like and what we do all the time.

We can find useful strategies behind any behaviour. It is the process of what we do that is always valuable, even if the content is not. We need to look at all the behaviours we use to uncover the underlying strategies. By doing this, we can find that even behind some of our weaknesses we have strategies that are invaluable In other contexts.

I know of people who can sulk for hours, days, weeks and, in some cases, years! This might not seem a valuable skill to have, but behind the sulking lies the strategy of maintaining one emotional state for a period of time. In this context it is a negative skill, but suppose this same person wanted to maintain a state of confidence or motivation and had not succeeded in doing so. Where do they look for the answer? Not to self-help books and not to other people – what they want is what they already have. They have the strategy for maintaining a state, all that they have to do is transfer that strategy to another emotional state.

Examples of business modelling projects include the following:

- The MD of a major car manufacturing company encouraged its employees to invest time in their personal development. He funded everyone to learn something new on one condition, that it was not to do with their work. Some people learned a new language. Some learned how to play a musical instrument. Some took up a new sport or hobby. Whatever they did, they did it because they wanted to. What the MD was doing was strengthening the employees' strategies for doing for what they really wanted (outcome thinking) and for learning.
- The owner of a start-up company modelled others who had been successful in starting their own business in a similar field.
- The owner of a manufacturing business that had merged with another business modelled the way other companies had handled successful mergers.
- A building society modelled the way one of its directors inspired those who joined the business.

The point is that modelling is a very different way of thinking and working to what happened in the past. Giving people in a company

the skills to model is giving them the means of generating ways of finding solutions to any situation they encounter.

Shortcut to modelling excellence

NLP is a process of modelling, and the rest of this book explores the details of how you can do that with skill and professionalism.

There are many ways to model, and in my training programmes I encourage my attendees to experiment and find out what works for them in their experience. Two of my own early trainers, David Gordon and Graham Dawes, wrote:

Modelling is a doorway into the vast storehouse of human experience and abilities, providing access to anyone willing to turn the key. For the individual who pursues modelling, this means:

- *Access to an ever-widening range of new experiences and abilities.*
- *An increasing ability to bring those experiences and abilities to others.*
- *A finer understanding of the structure underlying unwanted experiences and behaviours so that you know precisely what to change in those experiences and behaviours.*
- *Ever-increasing flexibility in your experience and responses.*
- *A growing appreciation of the beauty to be found in the patterns of human experience.*

This shortcut is an introduction to that process:

- 1 Identify the skill that you want to model and reproduce. For example, you may know someone who attracts people with their loving authority, someone who can get and hold the audience's attention within seconds of the start of a presentation; make decisions; wake themselves up in the morning without the aid of an alarm clock; learn from situations that others find offensive; or start the day in a

positive frame of mind. Be specific in defining the skill and the context in which you want to use it.

- 2 Select a person, or people, who for you are models of excellence. Define excellence in terms of the results that your model of excellence achieves, what you see, hear and feel when this person/these people achieve the effect that you wish to achieve. Make no assumptions about what it is that they do to achieve the result – that is, what you are going to find out.
- 3 The cleanest form of modelling is to hang around the person you admire; I hung around the people that I admired for years ... and still do! However, you can model in a moment. The key is to experience that person in action and failing that have them relive what it is that they do that you admire:
 - a What specifically they do and how they do it
 - b Specific behaviour patterns
 - c How they manage their environment
 - d Their language patterns and filters
 - e Their thinking processes
 - f The beliefs and values they exemplify
 - g The way in which they communicate their sense of identity
 - h The purpose they say they fulfil, and the purpose that they actually fulfil.
- 4 First, ensure that they associate into an experience when they are using the skill you wish to model or ideally witness them doing what it is that you are modelling. If, for example, you want to learn how someone connects with strangers instantaneously, be with them when they do that. Modelling is a process of discovering what the subject usually does not know about themselves; it is not about them telling you what they think they do. If they are imagining/remembering themselves using the skill, be sure to phrase your questions in the present tense to keep them associated, for example ‘What is happening’, ‘And now what is happening?’, ‘Where is that coming from?’ You are interested in the ‘what’ and

the 'how' of what they do, not the 'why'. Watch and listen and put yourself in their shoes (adopt their way of moving). Check out what happens at each of the logical levels (see [Chapter 14](#)). For example:

- a How they choose and manage their environment.
 - b What they say and what they do.
 - c What is going on internally. (Watch their eye movements, and adopt their way of moving, sitting, standing.)
 - d Ask yourself the question: 'What has to be true (beliefs and values, sense of self, purpose) for them to be doing what they are doing in the way that they are doing it?'
 - e If you are going to ask questions, ask clean questions ([Chapter 6](#)) to minimize your contamination of their strategies.
 - f Keep testing what you are learning internally within yourself to discover the sense you have of being able to do the same.
- 5 Have someone else model the skill and compare your findings with theirs.
 - 6 Now try on what you have discovered and find out what is working and what is not working. This constant testing is vital.
 - 7 Test your model by taking away one element at a time as you use it. If the element isn't key to the process, it won't make any difference. In some cases taking away an element may even enhance the process.
 - 8 Do the results you achieve match the results your model achieves? If they do, you have been successful; if they don't, go back and find out what else make a difference.
 - 9 Note down the strategy so that you can continue to use and, if appropriate, develop it.
 - 10 The real test will be if you can impart this model to others so they achieve the same result. It's feedback all the way, so it is vital to hold the belief that there is no failure, only learning and feedback. It is unlikely that you will get the

strategy in one pass. And so it is hugely valuable if you have access to your exemplar over time.

A note: modelling can form the basis of the way in which you coach yourself and others. Studying the structure of experience enables you to uncover the structure of unwanted experiences so that you can identify what you can change.

Summary

The result of modelling is conscious competence, a mastery of the results you want to achieve. With practice, the strategies you uncover become a part of your unconscious competence; you don't have to think about them, they become a natural part of who you are. In its simplest form NLP is a process you have been using all your life. In its most sophisticated form it is a way of generating excellence in everything you do, as an individual, as a team, as a company.

The skills and techniques explained in the later chapters of this book are the result of modelling excellence.

Thought provokers

- 1 Who are your models of excellence? That is, whom do you admire and wish to emulate in: a) your family; b) your work; c) the world at large?
- 2 Think about the events you have planned for the rest of this week. Are there any about which you don't feel too confident or happy? Think of someone you know who could handle these events in the way you would like to. How might you model that person so that you tap into the resources that they have for succeeding in this scenario?
- 3 Which people have been the main influences on the way you are today? What is it about each one that you have incorporated into the person you are?

4 Watch young children and note how they model those around them – it is a natural talent with which we are born.

One day a man was tending his garden, which bordered the desert in Arizona. Dusk was descending, and in the distance he heard the sound of motorbikes. A gang of Hell's Angels rode up, attacked him, tied him to the back of one of the bikes and drove him into the desert. There they left him, barely alive, as night fell.

The man survived the night and began to regain consciousness as the sun appeared above the horizon. He knew that the sun in the desert means certain death. Without food, water or shelter he stood no chance of survival.

Then at his side he noticed a small bush. He crawled underneath and curled up using the little shade there was to protect himself from the burning rays of the sun. He felt despair – no one knew where he was.

Just at that moment he saw a falcon landing on the bush. To the man's amazement the falcon spoke and asked, 'Can I help you?'

Shocked, the man replied, 'I am dying of thirst, my mouth and tongue are swollen. To survive I need water.'

'Look behind you,' said the falcon. 'There is a snake. Follow the snake, for it knows where the water seeps out of the rocks. There you will be able to drink.'

The next day the falcon came back. 'How are you?' it asked.

'I have drunk but I need food to survive – water alone is not enough.'

'Stay quiet and wait until the antelope passes by. When it does, follow it – it can show you where the cactus plants are, whose flesh you can eat.'

The next day the falcon came back. 'Can I do anything for you?' it asked.

'Yes,' replied the man. 'Although I have drunk and eaten, I still need salt to survive. How can I get the salt I need to live?'

'Have no fear,' replied the falcon. 'The fox also needs salt. If you follow the fox, you will see where it finds the rocks to lick that will give you the salt you need.'

The man did as the falcon said and returned to find that the bush under which he had sheltered was burnt and charred. 'What will I do now?' he asked himself. 'I have no shelter, I will burn to death.'

Then the man realized that by following the animals he had learned how to find food, water and salt. He knew how to survive. He noticed the rich colours of the sky as the sun dipped low on the horizon, the blues, the purples and the gold of the sun itself. He heard the exquisite songs of the birds in the distance and he felt an inner peace and joy.

'Shall I show you the way home?' asked the falcon.

The man thought for a moment and then said, 'I think I'll stay a little longer.'

12 Strategies for successful living

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.
Romans 12:6

We are creatures of habit. Our lives follow patterns that we take with us wherever we go. I remember a phone call from someone I had met on a course. He explained, 'I just wanted to tell you that I am going through a bad patch in my life. My relationship with my partner was not working out so I decided to finish it. And I have been very unhappy in my job so I have decided to resign. And I wanted to tell you that on top of all that I have decided to leave this country – I am fed up with the climate and the culture here.' And he thought that he wouldn't take his patterns with him!

We create our circumstances

It is our patterns in thinking and behaving that create our response to our circumstances, not the circumstances themselves. And by becoming aware of these patterns or habits we can begin to choose the life we want. Running away from what we don't want is not the answer. We remain the constant that creates our circumstances.

Strategies for success

We learn strategies – which can be used to in a way that supports a healthy congruent state but can equally be used in a way that thwarts that healthy state.

In NLP these patterns and habits are known as strategies. A strategy is a sequence of thoughts and behaviours based on a set of beliefs and a sense of self. We might use our strategies to create a resourceful state, and equally we might use it to create an unresourceful state. For example, we may have a strategy for maintaining an emotional state of calm and peace; however, we might use that same strategy to maintain a state of annoyance. The structure is the ability to maintain state. Where and when we apply that structure/strategy is within our influence once we become aware of it. Once we are aware of what we are doing when our lives are going well and what we are doing when our lives are not going well, we have choices.

Those able to realize that the thinking of today is about strategy and communication rather than technology alone will be able to run rings around the pure technologists.

Peter Small, *The Entrepreneurial Web*

Here are some examples of strategies:

Harry was concerned with his response to some of the people in his organization. He was aware that he treated some people with respect and courtesy at all times and yet with others it was all he could do to contain his frustration and aggression. He also recognized that he let that frustration spill over into his private life. He knew that the former was the way he wanted to be with everyone, not only because of his values as a human being but also because it made good business sense and because his family was the most important thing in life to him.

When he talked about the people he treated with respect (who were also the people with whom he learned the most), he looked directly at me and he talked about himself using the personal pronoun 'I'. All his gestures were close to his chest (his heart). When he talked about the people with whom he had difficulty, he stopped saying 'I' and said

‘you’ or ‘one’ instead. He indicated these people in his thinking by pointing to them in the air as if they were up and to his left, away from him. When he talked about the people he respected his whole face softened, he spoke in a relaxed manner, and his demeanour was one of ease. When he spoke of the people with whom he had difficulty, his voice as well as his facial muscles hardened and his body state was tense.

Neil described himself as struggling in his marriage. His wife had accused him of not really taking an interest in her. At a friend’s party he was invited informally to play the guitar. His face became taut as he started playing and especially so when he was deciding what to play next. There was another guitarist present at the party who also offered to play. While he was playing Neil was flicking through possible further numbers on his phone. When asked what he had thought of the other guitarist he went blank (he had not paid any attention to him). When asked about this subsequently, he said he felt a great responsibility to have something that he could follow with and the consequence was that he was not present.

The way we do something is the way we do everything

The groove in the well

At my home in France I have a well that dates back to the seventeenth century. There is a groove in the front of the well where the rope to lower and raise the bucket has been pulled for all these years. It would be difficult to get the rope positioned in any other place than in this groove.

The rope defaults to the groove

It is the same with our patterns. Once the groove is formed, the easiest choice is for us to do what we have done before. Unfortunately, this is not a recipe for success. You may be familiar with the expression 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' Today it is more likely that if it ain't broke it is probably redundant! We don't get many second chances; we take our chances or our chances pass us by.

What is important is to be able to cut new grooves for ourselves, and to do so daily, so that we are continuously making new connections in our behaviour and our thinking. To do so we need first of all to find the behaviours that we want and then practise them until they become a natural choice. We already have these alternative choices in our repertoire. We just need to note when we are behaving in a way that is in line with how we want to be and mark it out (anchor it) so that we can access it when we choose.

Coding strategies

Before I started to write one morning, in my head I saw the title of the chapter I was going to work on that day. I then went for a bike ride with this in mind. I pictured any writing I had done to date on this subject. I asked myself what was important to me about this subject right now in the world and how I was using it for myself today. I noticed how as I was cycling up a hill the temptation was to slow down and stop. Then I thought of the riders in the Tour de France, which was taking place at that moment, and how determined and committed they are to keep going to the end, especially if they are the leaders in the final stretches. I put myself in the shoes (cycling shoes, of course!) of one of the riders and imagined that I had to get to the top to win. Then I thought of how this topic would help others in the world experiencing the crises that are challenging them today and how it would help them turn these crises into opportunities. I thought about how this topic was now

connected to new ways of thinking such as neuroscience and artificial intelligence. I recalled images of recent situations where I had used this topic to make a difference for myself and I also began to imagine (by picturing them) situations that might occur during the day that would be helped by my paying attention to this theme. I began to feel associated and experienced a sense of satisfaction. As I allowed that to develop, it became a feeling of eager anticipation of what I could say when I sat down to write. I started to create some of the sentences and examples I would use.

And ... I got to the top of the hill without slowing or stopping. And the baker drove past me in his van and shouted a bravo. I didn't control that but it's interesting how that happens!

We can discover the essence of what works

The above is a strategy. I have refined it over the years so that I have taken out the redundant parts. What I have now is the essence of what really works for me so that I can accelerate the process of writing in the way I want. My first book took six years to write; the last one took 12 months.

Yesterday I was feeling tired. My friend asked me for feedback. She had not taken feedback well on some previous occasions, and on recent occasions I had chosen to not give feedback in the interest of our friendship. This time I gave her the feedback, and she defended herself and justified what she had been doing. Surprisingly (given the history) I was surprised! And I kept replaying the way that I had given the feedback, wondering if there might have been a better way or whether to have refused would have been the better strategy and more likely to have triggered learning. Each time I replayed it I realized I was

exaggerating my friend's response and remembering other times when she had defended herself against feedback in a similar way. I started to feel frustrated and started to imagine how I might tell her this in the future so that she might feel bad! She spoke to me again, and I was brusque in my response.

The above is also a strategy. This is an example of an unproductive strategy, but by coming to a conscious knowledge of it I can begin to make new choices.

We have the ability to transcend limiting states of mind

The ability to stand back and recognize our strategies is the ability to transcend limiting states of mind. Strategies consist of much more than thinking patterns; they consist of the way we structure our beliefs, our values, our sense of purpose, our sense of identity, and more. However, if we start with a simple approach to modelling our thinking strategies, we can code the elements.

For example, we can have any of the following elements in a strategy:

- an image that we see externally – Visual/external: **Ve**
- an image in our mind that we remember – Visual/internal/remembered: **Vir**
- an image that we create in our mind – Visual/internal/construct: **Vic**
- a sound that we remember – Auditory/internal/remembered: **Air**
- a sound that we construct – Auditory/internal/construct: **Aic**
- an inner dialogue – Auditory/internal dialogue: **Aid**
- a feeling that we experience physically – Kinaesthetic/external: **Ke**
- an emotion that we feel – Kinaesthetic/internal: **Ki**.

I have frequently used my cycling as an example of modelling, and one of the significant elements for me was to adopt other cyclists' ways of approaching hills as I did this morning. To model a skill we

have to want to do it and believe we can do it. I most certainly want to always improve my ability to climb hills when cycling. The area where I live and the areas I often travel to here in France are hilly and mountainous, and I love them and want to enjoy these regions.

The strategy I had been using was to see a hill approaching (Visual/external), tell myself, ‘Oh no, this is going to be a problem’ (Auditory/internal dialogue), picture how difficult it was going to be (Visual/internal/construct), start to feel frustrated with myself (Kinaesthetic/internal), and go round that loop until I got off the bike or even paused, feeling exhausted! So the sequence was:

$$Ve \rightarrow Aic \rightarrow Vic \rightarrow Ki$$

Then I decided to model others’ strategies and started by watching them (either other cyclists on the road with me or cyclists in the Tour de France on TV). I noticed that the good hill climbers rarely looked up; they looked down at the pedals or the ground (a Visual/external element, although different from the one I had been using). They maintain a regular rhythm with their pedalling (Kinaesthetic/external). That was what I got by watching them. I tried these bits of the strategy, and it made a difference. I got up the hill at a consistent speed, but it hurt! I was aware of the pain in my thighs all the way up.

We discover strategies by watching and listening, rarely by having the subject just tell us what they do

So I then told a good cycling friend about this strategy (though I didn’t use those words). I told him what I thought I had discovered about the hill climbing strategy, and he confirmed that was what he did. However, he added some new pieces that I could only get by questioning or by watching his eye movements. When he looked down, he said that he did indeed watch the pedals but only fleetingly; as he listened to the regular rhythm of the pedals as they turned (Auditory/external), he said something to himself like ‘That’s good’ (Auditory/internal dialogue), and he felt satisfied (Kinaesthetic/internal). So I asked him about the pain and he said

that, yes, he felt pain (Kinaesthetic/external), but he told himself that the more pain he felt the fitter he was getting (Auditory/internal dialogue) and he felt good about the pain (Kinaesthetic/internal).

This was quite a different strategy from the one I had been using, and there were some key pieces I had not picked up the first time round. His strategy coded was:

$$Ve \rightarrow Ae \rightarrow Aid \rightarrow Ki$$

and anywhere in there, if he became aware of pain, he would insert a loop:

$$Ke \rightarrow Aid \rightarrow Ki$$

I have used and refined this strategy for some time and we are of similar ability now on most aspects of cycling, but (importantly for me) I enjoy the hills and so I enjoy France!

Why it is important to learn how to model

Modelling is the way to discover the structure of experience

Modelling is the way we discover the structure of experience in ourselves and others. If our work depends in any way on our ability to influence others, to do this successfully we need to know how to model. We all have strategies for how we learn, for how we make decisions, for how we buy, for how we motivate ourselves ... the list is endless. So if we want to influence ourselves or others, we can do so only if we use the relevant strategy. If we are already good at influencing and we have never come across the concept of modelling, then we probably do this unconsciously. However, we cannot leave these skills to chance and intuition – we can be masters of our trade. The more skilful and respectful influencers know how to detect the strategy of the person with whom they are dealing and

how to use that strategy to adapt their communication to suit the individual.

For example, if you want to help someone make a decision and you have learned that their strategy for decision making involves them creating an internal image, then asking themselves a question in order to get an internal feeling that lets them know the decision, you can adjust the way you summarize your discussion with them. To match their strategy you can say, 'Imagine the scenario in the future [you might be more specific here if it is appropriate] (Vic), and ask yourself how is this going to make a difference to you (Aid), and you will sense that this is the decision that fits for you (Ki).'

Parents need to know their children's strategies

At the end of [Chapter 22](#), High performance coaching, I describe a very elegant use of a learning strategy by Robert Dilts (one of the leading creative developers of the use of NLP) to help a boy who had been described as learning disabled spell complex words and regain his belief in his ability to learn. If you are in business, it is important to know the strategies of the people who work with you to enable them to reach their true potential. If you are a parent, it is important to know the learning strategies of your children to help them have confidence in who they uniquely are.

A man I know described how he was totally demotivated by a teacher who told him he was different and therefore would not succeed. And he says he went off the rails at that point; he hung out with gangs, truanted from school and failed all his exams. Then one day (one of the few days when he did attend) a new teacher told him, 'You are different and that is good.' He said that simple comment restored his faith in himself. It was a turning point in his life. This man is my French teacher today. He is very different and very popular, and he is admired by everyone who studies with him.

If you are a salesperson, you need to know the buying strategies of your customers. If you are a member of a team, it is important to know the motivational strategies of your fellow team members. There really is no end to the contexts in which this is important in your dealings with others.

This also applies to you personally. If you want to write, it is important to know your best writing strategy. If you want to motivate yourself, you need to know your motivation strategy. I have just started coaching a friend who is using NLP to help herself find a strategy for full recovery from a stroke. When you know your own strategies you can use them, modify them, develop them, transfer them to other contexts in your life, and, if you wish, replace them.

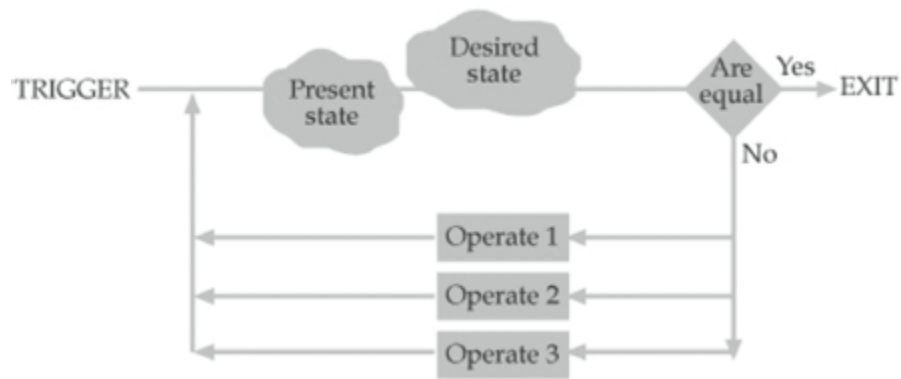
Alan was describing the success he had had with his team running a coaching-type meeting with them. And the news of the success of this meeting had spread, and another colleague in another team asked if they might use the same model. Alan acknowledged not only how successful it had been but how much he had enjoyed it (funny that!). Then he said, 'I wish I could have the same approach when I meet with my CEO!' 'You have the structure already,' I replied. He looked surprised. but we truly do have all the resources we need within ourselves already!

TOTE

You may be thinking that with the word 'tote' I am introducing the concept of gambling to modelling! I'm not but in a sense it is about taking a risk and acting in order to find out what works! Ultimately, however, modelling is a way of ensuring certainty and consistency in the results we achieve.

The TOTE I refer to here is not the betting kind but stands for:

Test → Operate → Test → Exit.



I sit at my desk in my study in France. The sun comes out and shines through the window, warming the room. We are experiencing a *canicule*, an unprecedented heatwave that many say is evidence of global warming. I have an ideal comfortable state, which includes the temperature in which I am working. As the room warms, I check to see if I have open doors and windows that are letting in the hot air. I check each one and close the doors, windows and shutters to protect the cool air in the house. I keep checking (testing), and if it is still getting too warm I bring down a fan or I move to a cooler part of the house to work.

I run the same structure for my mental state. I was aware that just before doing an online interview recently I was in a harassed state. This is not the state I wish to be in for any of my work. I had ten minutes before the interview was about to start. I consciously directed all my attention to what I knew about the interview and the interviewer. I put aside any thoughts of anything else, especially those things that I had allowed myself to get stressed about. As the interview started, I concentrated all my attention on the patterns of the interviewer. I often find noticing patterns amusing. This was no exception. I found that ideal state. The interview was a success.

Both of the above are examples of TOTE in practice. In a healthy way of living we operate in a way that allows our behaviour to be

guided by an outcome (often a physical or emotional state) and we recognize when we have achieved our outcome by a unique set of evidence criteria (i.e. what we will be seeing, hearing and feeling when we have achieved that outcome). Ideally, we are continually comparing our present state to our desired state to find out if they match. When they do match, we know that we have reached the exit; we have achieved our outcome. If the present state does not match the desired state, we have to do another operation to discover if that makes a difference.

Living in France I am increasingly aware of people's strategies to be heard and understood when speaking to someone whose primary language is different from their own. Some people just repeat what have said over and over, maybe with an increased volume! Those who succeed keep trying different ways of explaining what they want to say – by changing the words they use, using non-verbal behaviour, showing an image of what they want, pointing, and so on ...

What is the definition of madness? Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result!

We are running TOTEs throughout our lives comparing where we are with where we want to be and taking actions to bring us closer to the exit and eventually to the exit itself. What we have learned from successful people (whatever that may mean to you) in business over many years is that they keep going until they have reached a successful exit, whatever it takes, whereas others who do not naturally achieve what they want also exit but at an earlier point than their original outcome determined. In effect, when I was modelling hill-cycling strategies I was running a TOTE. I knew what the exit was: for me to enjoy hill cycling and be able to focus my attention on my surroundings. And I wanted to have enough breath to keep on cycling at the same rhythm. After my first pass at cycling my state did not match the desired state, so I knew that some of the operations in the TOTE were missing. That prompted me to learn more.

What they think they know and what they really know are two very different things

The key here is not just to ask the person you are modelling. What they think they know and what they really know are two very different things. It is key to have the subject imagine that they are doing the act you want to reproduce. Alternatively, you can have them actually do the thing you want them to model. So by questioning and watching for clues as my cycling friend talked about his strategy, I got the remaining operations that enabled me to achieve my outcome.

TOTE is a feedback loop

Essentially, the TOTE is a feedback loop designed to prompt you to find what you need to achieve your desired state. Key skills for successfully navigating the TOTE in order to be able to model are the ability to set a well-defined outcome, sensitivity to what is happening, a willingness to learn from feedback – that is, the belief that there is no failure, only feedback – the flexibility to do or learn something different when what you are doing is not working, and the ability to access and anchor resources within yourself. This is the structure for learning.

So, if you are not achieving what you want in life, the chances are that one or more of these fundamental skills is in need of development.

Our days are a series of TOTEs

Our days are a series of TOTEs. Some repeat every few moments, some every few hours, some perhaps every few days or weeks. And there will be some TOTEs that only repeat every few years or maybe longer. The value of knowing someone over time is that we are in a position to learn about their TOTEs with a longer time frame and they can learn about ours.

Shortcut to developing a strategy

Many years ago when my son was at school he was reprimanded for unofficially getting himself down to Southampton on a school trip to join his friends. To do this he had to think of a way to get there and find somewhere to stay with very little money in his pocket. He was in trouble for not doing this through the official channels and for not letting anyone know where he was. He was suspended from school for a week for his actions. However, what he was doing was showing great initiative and determination to get to where he wanted to be. This same son was awarded the Military Cross for his initiative as an Officer in the Royal Marines and often now gives leadership talks on his experience in the Marines. A somewhat different outcome to the one expected of him by his teachers back then.

I discussed earlier in this chapter the concept of cutting a groove. We cut grooves that result in resourceful states, and we cut grooves that result in unresourceful states. Given that the states to which we give our attention are the ones most likely to be strengthened, this exercise is about identifying a strategy that leads to a resourceful state, so that you increase the likelihood of having consistency in your ability to choose this state when you wish.

- 1 Identify a resourceful state that you would like to experience when you choose, one that you have experienced before. It might be a state of confidence, enthusiasm or motivation.
- 2 Catch the next time you have this state. (You could alternatively go back in your thinking to associate into a time when you had this state previously.)
- 3 Be aware of what it is like to be in this state: what are you seeing, hearing, saying to yourself and feeling? How are you moving?

- 4 What was the trigger for the state: what set you on a sequence of getting to this state?
- 5 What happened next: what did you see/hear/say to yourself/feel? (If you are not sure, keep the question ‘What am I doing in my thinking?’ in your mind each time you experience the state.)
- 6 Write down the sequence of thinking patterns so that you can check it out again the next time you experience it.
- 7 Test to see if you can create the state without the usual trigger. If it doesn’t work, keep tracking what happens when you do get the state so you can find the missing pieces.
- 8 Keep the question ‘How am I doing this?’ in your mind.

Summary

NLP is the study of the structure of subjective experience. We all experience external events, but what we do with them is subjective. If we want to reproduce the results that we recognize in ourselves or in others, then we can study the structure of that subjectivity. Not only can we then learn how to reproduce those skills, but we are respecting the uniqueness of our individual interpretations of life. The map is not the territory – we respect that uniqueness. Ah, the recipe for peace in the world perhaps?!

Thought provokers

- 1 Write down (in code) what you think is your thinking strategy for each of the following:
 - a How you get up in the morning
 - b How you respond to feedback
 - c How you decide when it is time to stop work
 - d How you decide to buy something
 - e How you learn

- 2 Identify any TOTEs that you recognize you often run successfully (familiar behaviour or thinking loops that result in you achieving your desired state).
- 3 Identify any TOTEs that you recognize you often run unsuccessfully (familiar behaviour or thinking loops that are unfulfilled and for which you are left in an problem state).

References

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Stephen Wolinsky (1991) *Trances People Live*, Bramble.

Two monks came upon a girl struggling to cross a river. One of the monks offered to carry her across and the girl accepted, so he picked her up and waded to the other side of the stream, where he put her down safely.

When the other monk joined him he remonstrated with the first monk. 'I cannot believe that you carried that girl. It is against all our principles. You know that we are not allowed to touch or even think about women. And yet despite that you carried this young girl in your arms!'

The first monk looked at his brother and replied, 'Yes, I did carry the girl. The difference between you and I is that I put her down when I reached the other side. You are still carrying her!'

| Part II

Model Yourself with NLP

Once you have explored the elements of NLP, the exciting part is putting those skills together in many different ways to achieve the results you want. One of the principles of the way NLP is taught is that it starts with you.

A woman took her son to see Mahatma Gandhi, who asked what she wanted. 'I'd like you to get him to stop eating sugar,' she replied.

'Bring the boy back in two weeks' time,' replied Gandhi.

Two weeks later the woman returned with her son. Gandhi turned to the boy and said, 'Stop eating sugar.'

The woman looked surprised and asked, 'Why did I have to wait two weeks for you to say that?'

'Two weeks ago I was eating sugar,' Gandhi replied.

With NLP you can learn to recognize the structure of your own strategies – you can model yourself. By first learning to model yourself with NLP, you become a model of the principles that influence those around you. For example, once you have learned how to set compelling goals for yourself, you are more able to facilitate compelling goals for others.

If you would convince a man that he does wrong, do right. But do not care to convince him. Men will believe what they see. Let them see.

Henry David Thoreau

What works?

The techniques in this section are derived from modelling people who are excellent in their ability to lead themselves. By learning these skills you will reinforce the self-leading skills you already have and develop new ones that suit your unique circumstances.

More and more, it is awareness and flexibility that are emerging as significant for this new age. Whether we work for ourselves or an organization, we need more than ever before to be able to manage ourselves. NLP is a way of creating your own sense of direction, of harnessing the resources that are naturally yours, and of influencing others to collaborate with you. More than anything it is a way of finding your own personal truth to be at one with your yourself and to find your own unique gifts.

The topics included in this part of the book follow a natural sequence for self-development.

Tap into your inner potential: Anchoring

The first of these is [Chapter 13](#), Tap into your inner potential: Anchoring. This is an approach for enabling you to access your personal resources when you want them. In particular, anchoring is a way of managing your emotional state. The ability to choose the best emotional state to suit your circumstances is one of the most powerful and yet most overlooked skills you can have. When you can choose your state, you can choose your techniques and the kind of influence you want to bring to any situation.

When – and only when – you have the state you want, you can build on that by ensuring that you are the example you want to be. You may not be able to control external events, but you can control the way you respond to them. All of us have values and beliefs that drive every move we make and every word we utter. Sometimes those beliefs and values are what we want them to be, and sometimes they aren't. Before we can ever think of how we might influence others, we need first to think of how we want to influence ourselves. And it is not just beliefs and values but our sense of identity and purpose in life that provide the example that unconsciously influences others to want to be a part of what we represent – or not.

Align yourself: Levels of influence

[Chapter 14](#), Align yourself: Levels of influence deals with all the elements of influence. By thinking through not only how you are but what you might want to change at each level, you can generate an aligned state where every part of you is working towards the same outcome. When you achieve this state of coherence, you can achieve your maximum state of success, influence and satisfaction. This model is invaluable in so many contexts, not only in getting personal alignment but also in how we go about influence and change in ways that really work ...

Write your own life script: Beliefs of excellence

When technical skills are equal, it is the person, the team or the company who has the greatest belief in themselves that will win through. The quality and nature of our beliefs override our technical knowhow. If we believe we can, we might. If we believe we can't, we won't. Those people who have mastery in their ability to lead themselves share certain core beliefs. [Chapter 15](#), Write your own life script: Beliefs of excellence explores these beliefs, their increased significance today, and ways in which you can try them on for size to influence yourself.

Achieve what you really want: Well-formed outcomes

People who consistently achieve their goals have a way of imagining those goals as if they already have them. They are able to harness the power of their unconscious mind to work for them to realize goals in ways that are compelling. You can learn how to do this for yourself by following the steps in [Chapter 16](#), Achieve what you really want: Well-formed outcomes.

It is interesting to contrast the elements of this approach with some of the standard objective-setting approaches used in business. The difference between NLP approaches and many of the techniques that have been taught previously is that NLP provides you with the tools to find out what really makes the difference. How often have you learned techniques on training programmes only to return to work and resume your normal practices after a day or two?

If the techniques worked, then you would probably continue to use them. And this way of thinking and speaking is a way of expressing what we want to others, so that rather than saying what we don't want (which has a tendency to reinforce exactly that) we express what we do want so there is little or no ambiguity.

Carpe diem: Time

[Chapter 17](#), *Carpe diem*: Time explores how the way in which we relate to time affects everything we experience. It explores how you can use your perception of time to make your experience in the present increasingly closer to how you really want it to be.

The above skills and ways of thinking are at the heart of self-leading. By starting with yourself, your example is in line with your words and your actions. Although I would say that you could dip into this book at any point, when it comes to applying the principles you are the beginning and the end.

Standing on the shoulders of giants

The beauty of the time that has elapsed since NLP was first developed is that we have accumulated years of learning from models of excellence in all walks of life. I have modelled sportspeople, inspirational leaders, people who have recovered from injury, motivational speakers, monks, vicars and priests in all faiths, stallholders in the local French market, world-class restaurateurs, local musicians (and the area in which I live in France is full of wonderful so-called retired musicians!), my friends, my children, my French teacher, the local bar owner, my cats, delegates on programmes, people in townships in South Africa who have extricated themselves from the gang and drug culture, the fishermen on the beach in Kerala in Southern India, traditional Keralan storytellers, Swamis and Ayurvedic doctors, temple drummers, entrepreneurs in the slums in Mumbai, outstanding NLP trainers,

world-class psychotherapists ... The list is endless. I have modelled qualities – commitment, the ability to show emotions and grieve, Booker Prize-winning writing styles, mountain cycling, how to respect local culture, especially in rural France, the way to move with speed and elegance on crutches, captivating speaking skills, grace and energy in old age, the ability to work with passion no matter what age you are ... And that is just my experience. You can see what some of my students have modelled on my website, www.sueknight.com. You will find the examples under the subheading ‘NLP Master Practitioner – Projects’.

So we have years of research on what constitutes the essence of excellence in thousands of spheres. I offer you some of the results of those years of modelling in this book: how to hold on to the best emotional state for the moment; how to think about your outcomes in such a way that you are most likely to achieve them; the beliefs that support these states of excellence; how to create an instant state of trust and respect; how to use laughter to heal; how to manage the way we experience time. These are not NLP processes; they are the results, the discoveries of those processes. And we can try them on for size to explore how they work for each one of us. We can then tailor them, adjust them and reinvent them to make them work in a unique way for us personally.

Some of the discoveries have been reapplied to enhance the process of modelling; the fertile compost is returned to nourish the very plants from which it came. And so NLP, and the study of excellence in this special way, continues to develop and grow.

What you will find in Parts II and III are the results of modelling the qualities that make the difference in leading yourself with excellence and leading others. The world has never been in more need of true leaders. Perhaps you are one of them ...

13 Tap into your inner potential: Anchoring

Let the foundations thereof be strongly laid.
Ezra 6:3

As I write in France with my family here with me for their holiday, the song 'Dancing in the Moonlight' is playing on the radio. That music has become a regular part of our time here together. I suspect that particular track will be a reminder to me for years to come. The music is now an 'anchor' for a very special time and the good emotions I have attached to this period. The value of associating the music to this time is that I will not only be able to recall the events we have experienced when I hear it, I will also re-experience the emotions I feel right now.

We need to be able to manage our emotional state

Leading starts with the ability to lead ourselves. To do this we need first and foremost to be able to manage our emotional state. Not only is this the first step, it is probably one of the most important, and yet surprisingly it is omitted from many leadership models. Any glitch in emotional state leads almost inevitably to a less than resourceful response to any situation. If we feel irritation, guilt, anger, frustration, doubt or self-consciousness, the result will be less than we are capable of and is unlikely to be a win/win. In contrast, feelings of ease, confidence, forgiveness, acceptance, inspiration and amusement are states that are much more likely to lead to us giving of our best, whatever the context. Anyone who achieves excellence in any form undoubtedly has the ability to manage their

emotions, to choose them according to the situation and do so with consistency.

Different states lend themselves to different circumstances. For example, a state of relaxed concentration is the best in which I can cycle. A state of thoughtful meditation is the best for me to write, and a state of amused self-assurance is best for me when giving a talk at a conference. We can learn to recognize and choose which states work best for us in those situations when we want to give of our best. And once we have the state we want, the challenge is to hold on to it when it is threatened by circumstances outside our control, particularly if those circumstances are less than desirable.

When presenting ourselves to others, we need to be able to stand firm and hold on to our convictions and our beliefs, even if everything around us may seem to be changing. As I am writing this chapter, many comparisons are being made between the world's current and aspiring leaders. We have such extremes, and many who are considered to be the least well equipped are leading a country! Authentic leaders are typically people who have the capacity to stand firm and stand alone, and yet do so in a way that serves the bigger system.

People who succeed and are able to sustain their success have the ability to stand firm and hold on to their convictions in a way that serves the bigger system beyond themselves

Anchoring is a process of learning to hold on or re-access the states that are crucial to success. It is a process of associating an internal response (a desirable emotion) with some external or internal trigger so that the response may be quickly, and often covertly, re-accessed. It is a way of choosing the emotional state we want and finding a way of accessing it when we choose. An anchor is a stimulus: it may be a sound, an image, a touch, a smell or a taste that triggers a consistent response. Calling this process anchoring relates to the way that ships down anchor to keep themselves in a specific place to avoid drifting away. And so it is with our emotions. We can choose where we want to keep ourselves to avoid drifting into feelings of tension, stress or worry, for example. At a time of economic and

global turmoil there is a huge market for people who can help us do this!

My daughter Evie had recently learned to stand, walk and then run, which changes the parenting experience somewhat. We were living in an apartment, and I was playing with her in the living room. She suddenly got up, ran out the door, and paused nervously.

The hallway was dark. Very dark.

She ran back in to the room and picked up a red ball. Examined it. Put it down. She picked up a purple ball, examined it, gave a slight nod, and ran into the darkness.

To this day I wonder what that purple ball meant to her, that it could increase her courage like that.

Darren Horne

People benefit from being able to anchor their state in the present

Very simply, anchoring involves associating two experiences, one a desired emotional state and the other very often a physical touch. For example, we could ask someone to recall and vividly re-experience in their imagination a time when they felt very confident. As they do so, we might touch them on the elbow. By repeating this process the touch will eventually become linked to the feeling of confidence, so that eventually just by touching their elbow the person will automatically experience this confidence.

The ability to use anchors in NLP enables us to:

- access the resources (feelings and states) that we want when we want them
- replace unwanted feelings and thoughts with desirable ones
- gain control over our emotions
- transfer and accelerate learning experiences
- keep on course when going through periods of intense change
- positively influence the response we trigger in other people
- experience the day as we want to, no matter what is happening in our work and life.

You already have anchors that work for you. For example, think of the associations you have with:

- a favourite piece of music
- a special perfume
- a specific touch
- the taste of a memorable meal
- the view of a special place
- someone who is close to you
- the memory of a particular time in your life
- the anticipation of a future event.

We have anchors that work for us as well as anchors that are counterproductive

It is likely that you also have anchors that are counterproductive.

Anchors can make or break our day

Consider this scenario:

You get up and look out of the window. It is cloudy and wet and your heart sinks a little. You think about the day ahead and anticipate your first meeting. You know the person you are meeting, and you start to feel a bit heavy as you think about how you expect this meeting to go. You think about the journey you have to make and you begin to imagine how difficult that can be and the sort of delays you might experience. You wish it were still the weekend and slightly dread the week ahead. En route to the meeting, you get stuck in delays and begin to feel tense and irritated. You can feel yourself fidgeting as you wait for the delays to clear. You get to the meeting with little time to spare, and it goes much as you expected.

You arrive at your place of work and there is a stream of messages to deal with, some of them marked urgent. You start to feel stressed. The phone rings and you hear the voice of a colleague whose calls you dread, as he seems only to tell you problems. The day continues in a similar way, and you arrive home in the evening with a headache and feeling tired.

Now consider this:

You get up and look out of the window. It is cloudy and wet. You are glad you didn't have this weather over the weekend; you can let yourself concentrate on your work now. You think about the day ahead and anticipate your first meeting. You know the person you are meeting, and you decide to pay more attention than usual to the outcome you want to achieve. You start to get quite excited about the possibilities for the future. You think about the journey you have to make to get to this meeting and establish some contingency plans in case there are any holdups. You also plan how you can use the travelling time to good effect.

En route to the meeting you get stuck in delays, but you realize there is nothing you can do about them, so you use the time as you had planned to consider other things. You think about the weekend and how good it has been and how resourceful you feel now because of it. You get to the meeting with little time to spare, and it goes much as you expected: you are well on your way to achieving not only the outcomes you set yourself but also ones you had not anticipated.

You arrive at your place of work and there is a stream of messages, so you decide to work through the urgent ones and put the rest out of your mind until you have got through the other high-priority issues for the day. This helps you to focus your thinking. The phone rings and you hear the

voice of a colleague who seems to talk to you about his problems quite often; you are privately amused at how someone can centre his attention on the negative aspects of life so consistently. You listen with empathy, and he seems to become more positive over the duration of the call. You feel very fortunate to have the work you have and to be surrounded by people who make your days so rich and entertaining. You arrive home tired but satisfied with the day and ready for a relaxing evening.

We make associations throughout the day every day

Our days are governed by the associations we have chosen (often unconsciously) to make with the various kinds of events we encounter. We make associations throughout our lives; the question is whether they lead to the kinds of outcome we want for ourselves, or whether we are making our lives a misery because of what we are choosing to think about our circumstances. Given that what we choose to think is one of the single most powerful influences on the outcome of a situation, this is one of the most significant ways in which we can influence how we experience our lives and what we get as a consequence of our thinking.

... for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

The anchoring process is a vital way in which we influence how we lead ourselves from within. We can choose the experience we have in life, irrespective of our external circumstances.

Making anchors work for you

The previous examples demonstrate how we sometimes use anchors in ways that trigger unresourceful states, such as depression, anger,

frustration or unhappiness. These are states that typically limit our subsequent behavioural choices.

Let's suppose you are a person who sometimes gets stressed. Many people are likely to ask themselves either 'Why do I get like this?' or, slightly better, 'How do I get like this?' Both of these questions are likely to lead to a deepening of the undesirable state. It would be more useful to ask 'What do I want instead of this state?' and, following on from that once you have the answer, 'How do I do that?' Asking 'how' in relation to the desired state raises awareness of the structure of the desirable experience, as opposed to reinforcing the reasons for the state and consequently the state itself. It helps to appreciate that most of our limitations are self-taught.

We were invited by a manufacturing company to explore the staff's resistance to the new appraisal scheme. We discovered that previously the only time a manager typically sat down with a member of their staff was when they perceived a problem. Any discussion between a manager and a member of staff was usually a critical one. It was no surprise, then, to understand that the staff would be reluctant to welcome any scheme that promoted a discussion with their manager! The managers were unwittingly linking (anchoring) discussions about problems with the appraisal scheme.

We can take control of the effect we are having

By using anchors hand in hand with outcome thinking, we can begin to take control of the effect we have on ourselves and others. For example, we can decide first of all how we want to feel in key situations such as:

- at the start of a presentation
- being on the receiving end of aggression
- when a key relationship ends

- when one thing after another in our day (or our life) seems to be going wrong
- when we have to tell someone they have been made redundant
- when delegating an area of work to a new employee for the first time
- in a meeting when our point of view is different from that of the majority
- when we get some tough feedback
- when we are faced with unexpected change
- when all the technology we rely on fails us.

Similarly, we can decide what effect we want to have on other people, when, for example:

- they are entering a discussion with us
- we are delegating jobs to them
- when we meet someone for the first time
- they have feedback to give to us
- we are asking them for a decision
- when someone does something that usually annoys us
- they receive an email from us
- they check into our website
- someone makes contact with our company
- they receive a call from us.

We have the ability to influence our own and others' responses in a way that is resourceful, one in which we have confidence and choice about what we can do.

Anchoring a resourceful state for yourself

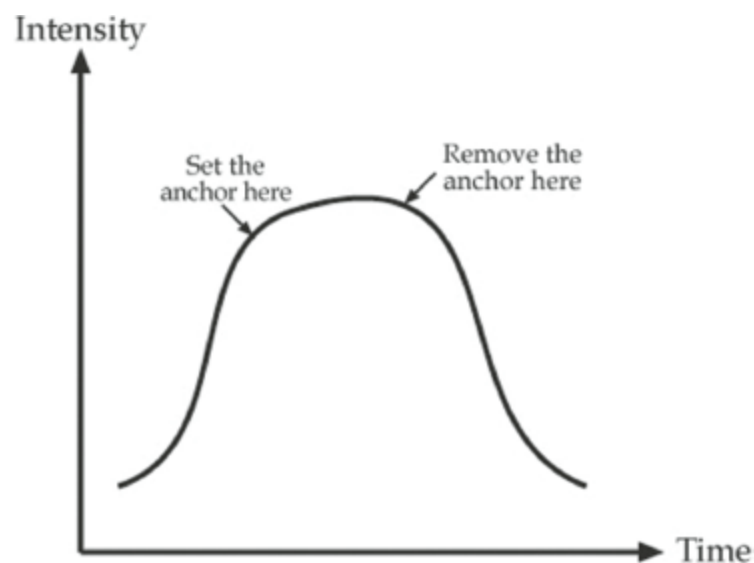
Let's start by considering how to generate the state you want for yourself. The process of anchoring involves linking a specific sight, sound or touch with an experience that is present – that is, a situation into which you are associated. The linking process subsequently enables you to use the anchor to re-access that same

experience when it can benefit you in another context. Here is the procedure for anchoring a resourceful state:

- 1 Choose a place that is free from distractions and make yourself comfortable. This helps but it is not ultimately necessary. It is valuable to be able to set and use anchors whenever and wherever you are.
- 2 Decide on a state/a feeling that you have experienced in your life that you would like to be able to access when you choose.
- 3 Choose an anchor that you can use whenever you want to access this feeling. It must be something precise and easy to use. For example, you could press the little finger and thumb together on your left hand.
- 4 Now recall the memory of a time when this feeling was strongest for you. Check you are associated into this experience, experiencing it as if in your own shoes and not as an outsider.
- 5 When you are completely associated, allow yourself to experience what it is like to be in this experience, seeing, hearing and feeling it. As you do so, touch your little finger and thumb together for as long and only as long as you feel these sensations intensely. When you have experienced the feeling and the touch of your finger to thumb, release that touch. Shake yourself or move in some way so that you bring yourself back to the present. This is called *breaking state*.
- 6 This touch becomes the anchor for the feeling. Repeat the process several times until you have a strong connection between the touch and the feeling.
- 7 Test the anchor. Think of something else and as you do so, touch your little finger and thumb together in precisely the way you did when you were setting up the anchor. This is called *firing the anchor*.
- 8 What happens? If you have set up the anchor effectively, you will get the emotion of the desired state instantly (without

the need to revisit the remembered scenario). If this doesn't happen, keep practising. It may be that you weren't fully associated when you set the anchor. Check that you use exactly the same anchor to recall the experience as you used to set it up in the first place. The sensations in an experience tend to rise and fade. Set the anchor just as the experience is reaching a peak, and remove it as soon as or just before the feelings begin to fade.

- 9 Now think of a future situation where you would like to have the feelings you have anchored. This time, as you imagine the situation in the future, fire the anchor. What do you see, hear and, particularly, feel now? When you do this successfully you are transferring your desired feelings, your resourceful state, to another, and in this case future, context.



- 10 Learn first to do this for yourself so you can recall the resources you want when you want them. Then you can coach others.

Remember the key factors in anchoring:

- Fully associate into the experience before you set the anchor.
- Make the anchored experience intense.
- Use a distinct and specific anchor that is easily reproduced.

- Set the anchor just prior to reaching the most intense part of the experience.
- Use exactly the same anchor to recall the experience.

In this example we used a touch as an anchor, but an anchor can be anything as long as it meets the above criteria.

Natural anchors are related to sensory preferences

Natural anchors are related to sensory preferences. For example, a visually oriented person is more likely to be sensitive to visual cues, someone who is aurally oriented is more likely to respond to sounds, and some one who has a feelings preference is more likely to make associations with tactile cues. Smell is a powerful primitive anchor for many people.

Exactly the same process works for anchoring others as for yourself. You cannot easily know exactly when the point of greatest intensity has occurred for someone else in order to know when to set the anchor. You rely on your ability to detect from their external behaviour exactly when this occurs. By building rapport, you will learn to detect when this peak state is occurring. Otherwise, the process is exactly the same as it would be if you were anchoring yourself.

Steps for coaching others

- 1 Ask the other person what state they want to have in a particular situation. Ask them to identify a time in the past when they had that state.
- 2 Ask the other person to step into the time when they had the state they want now. Help them to associate fully into that experience by asking them rhetorically what it is like to experience this state in this way.
- 3 Invite them to experience fully all the sensations of being there so that they intensify the experience. ‘As you

experience this state, you might allow yourself to experience it even more intensely than before ...’

- 4 Have them dissociate so that they can review how it is for them, and have them choose an anchor that they will use when they return to their remembered ideal state.
- 5 Pay attention to them so that you invite them to set the anchor when you know they are reaching the peak of that experience.
- 6 Before the intensity of the feelings begins to diminish (it is important that they anchor the state just before it peaks), invite them to step out of the state and bring them back to the present. You can repeat these steps a few times if you want to ensure that the anchor and the state are associated.
- 7 Test by asking them to imagine a time when they would want the desired state that they have just anchored, but they might not typically access it. As they imagine this time, invite them to use (fire) the anchor. As the anchor works, you will see the person reproduce all the characteristics of the desired state. If this is the first time that they have done this, they can be startled as to how powerful this can be. And it can take many forms. If the anchor needs strengthening, go back and repeat the process, checking for full association, intensity of the experience and accuracy of the anchor.

Business anchors

We are anchoring others all the time

You are anchoring other people all the time. The question is, are you anchoring them in resourceful or unresourceful ways?

When I worked in the training department of a large IT company, we often invited external consultants to join us on some of our projects. They invariably brought different

perspectives and new ideas. One consultant, Peter, brought much more than that, however. He was always positive and invariably arrived with a smile on his face. When Peter was around, everyone felt a good energy and was in high spirits. If there was a choice, we would invariably choose to work with Peter in preference to anyone else.

Can you imagine how different work meetings would be if managers were measured by the state in which they left their staff at the end of the discussion?

The examples of anchoring we used earlier in this section, such as touch, aren't always as available in a business setting. It isn't always part of the culture to touch others in this way. It is necessary to be a little more creative with the anchors you use to enable others to access resourceful states.

Examples of anchors you can use in business are:

- a word or words that you would not use regularly in conversation, said with a specific volume and tonality
- space, which can be employed to good effect in a presentation, where you can anchor different information and responses to you by standing or moving to different parts of the room
- a posture or movement that you would not naturally make in a discussion.

My experience is that using anchors in this way works only if you use them with integrity, in a way that fits with other people's outcomes. I believe that, if you attempt to use them manipulatively, in a way that is out of line with the other person's outcomes, the other person will sense this, often intuitively, and block the anchor.

Steps for anchoring a resourceful state in a meeting

- 1 Identify the state you want to anchor in the other person that will support the achievement of your mutual outcomes. This

might, for example, be a state of confidence, decisiveness or happiness.

- 2 Decide what anchor you will use, a particular word, a specific gesture or a posture that can be noticed by them in some way (very likely unconsciously).
- 3 When the other person naturally demonstrates the desired state, use your anchor. You will probably need to do this a few times.
- 4 If the discussion gets to a stage when this state would be valuable and it is not naturally occurring, fire your anchor. Notice what happens. If you have been successful in setting the anchor, then the other person will demonstrate the state.

Switching states

There are many different ways of using anchors. One easy way is to use a technique called ‘collapsing anchors’. This is a way of reconciling two states, for example an unresourceful state and a resourceful one. You could do this when you want to lessen an extreme negative state and achieve one that is a blend, so that you don’t lose the unresourceful state but experience it in a way that is manageable. The consequence of collapsing anchors is that you will achieve a third different state from the original two that is in some way a mix – a cocktail of the two with a uniquely new flavour.

One of the simplest ways to do this is to use the knuckles on one hand. With the extreme end of your right-hand index finger, touch specific knuckles on your left hand. If it is easier for you, reverse the way you use your hands in this exercise.

Steps for collapsing anchors

- 1 Decide on an unresourceful state that you want to change. It might be, for example, a state of anxiety, stress, lack of confidence or frustration.

- 2 Associate into this state so that you are re-experiencing it and anchor it by touching your index finger to the first knuckle on the other hand. Test the anchor until you know it works. Only access this state briefly.
- 3 Choose a different state altogether, a break state. This might be thinking about something funny or just something that requires thought, like saying your phone number backwards.
- 4 Choose a resourceful state, one of confidence, calm or security for example. Associate into a time when you had this feeling. When you experience the intensity of this feeling, anchor it by touching your second finger to the second knuckle on your other hand.
- 5 Test the anchors in the following sequence:
 - a Break state.
 - b Fire the first anchor.
 - c Break state.
 - d Fire the second anchor.If either of the anchors fails to work, repeat the sequence of resetting them.
- 6 Now apply both anchors simultaneously. You will feel some confusion as the two states sort themselves out into a new, integrated state. If the less resourceful state is still a strong part of the subsequent state, go back to choose and anchor an even stronger resourceful state. Repeat the process. You may also find that it helps to fire the anchor for the resourceful state for a second or two before also firing the anchor for the unresourceful state.
- 7 Now think of a future situation, one that typically in the past would have triggered the unresourceful state. What happens as you think of this situation? If the collapsing anchors technique has worked, the unresourceful state will not exist anymore.

Some of these techniques may seem quite formal at first, yet these processes are ones that we are slipping into and out of through a typical day. What we are doing here is breaking them down into

their constituent parts in a similar way to how we might learn to drive a car. However, once you master the skill, you can begin to use it more informally. For example, if you find yourself slipping into a state of unresourcefulness, you can learn to step quickly into a resourceful one. Recall a time when you felt particularly resourceful and re-access those feelings by associating yourself once more into that situation.

You can learn to step quickly into a resourceful state

Eventually, you will find that even the process of switching from unresourceful to resourceful state becomes automatic. Your unconscious mind makes the switch for you without you even having to think about it consciously. You will have ‘hard-wired’ the strategy for resourcefulness by learning to chain anchors.

Chaining resources

Sometimes the gap between the unresourceful state and the resourceful one that we would like in its place can be too wide to step from one to the other in one go. In such cases it is useful to learn to move through a series of anchored states in order to lead ourselves gradually from the least resourceful to the desirable state. It is worth emphasizing that it is also important to know when to stay in what might at first seem to be an unresourceful state. The risk of always creating a pathway out of what we believe to be ‘unresourceful’ states is that we fail to value the richness of diversity, the beauty of all emotions.

There is a beauty in all emotions

Staying in a state or moving to another is a choice. If the gap is a wide one – from, for example, a state of extreme stress to one of total relaxation – you might want some interim steps. You might choose to go from stress to concern, from concern to neutrality, from there to mild amusement, and then finally to relaxation. In this case

you would be chaining anchors so that you are creating a pathway for yourself from one state to another. By learning the chain each time you experience the first undesirable state, you will automatically move down the path you have created for yourself.

Steps for chaining anchors

- 1 Decide on an unresourceful state that you want to work with in this exercise. Choose a state that you want to replace with another much more resourceful state, but one that you recognize is a significant distance from the first undesirable state. You might choose an initial state of something like anxiety, stress or depression. The replacement state might be something like calm, relief or ease. Check that the replacement state is one that is truly desirable as a replacement whenever you experience the first.
- 2 Associate into the first state so that you are re-experiencing it and anchor it by touching a part of your thigh. (You are going to use places in line down your thigh to access each of the subsequent states until you get to the resourceful one.) Only experience this first state briefly (there is no need to stay there too long). Break state.
- 3 Choose a next intermediary state, for example irritation, but something much less intense than the first state. Experience this state and when you are fully associated into it, anchor that to a point a little farther down your thigh. Break state.
- 4 Choose a more resourceful state, one of confidence or security, for example. Associate into a time when you had this feeling. As you experience the intensity of this feeling, anchor it by touching a point farther down your thigh again. When you have done this successfully, break state.
- 5 The number of intermediary states you need will depend on the intensity of the first state and the gap between the first and the destination state. Repeat this process until you have anchored all the intermediary states and the final destination state.

- 6 Test the anchors to make sure they all work, being sure to break state between each one. If any of them is not yet fully anchored, return to experiencing and anchoring them until they are.
- 7 Now fire the first anchor and, when you are fully in that first state, fire the second anchor simultaneously; as you experience the second state approaching its peak, remove the first anchor and, continuing to hold the second one, fire the third one. (You are always linking each state with the next one in this way.) As the third one builds, remove the second anchor and fire the next one. You should experience yourself moving through each state in turn and as you do so, you are connecting them together in a chain.
- 8 Do this until you have reached the destination state. When you have the destination state, fully remove the previous anchor and fully experience this final resourceful state. Break state. This is important. Breaking state ensures that when you repeat the whole process to check that it works, you will end on the destination state and don't loop it back to the unresourceful state that you started from.
- 9 Repeat step 7 until you have the states chained together.
- 10 Now fire the first anchor. If you have chained the states together successfully, you will go through the chain you have created for yourself and automatically move through the states, finishing at the destination state.

It is not that we don't do this already; we do. However, without thought and care we tend to create chains that either are not very efficient (e.g. it takes longer than it needs to get out of an unresourceful state), or take us to places potentially even less resourceful than the one with which we started. How often have you begun a day feeling a little gloomy and then got frustrated with yourself for doing that, which led to your getting annoyed and then stressed, and so on? How much more desirable is it to find that, if you do get into a state of confusion, you can lead yourself through states of curiosity, inquiry and finally understanding and insight?

I believe that putting yourself into a resourceful state is a vital precursor to most situations. You can learn to recognize which state is most useful to you, for example in:

- giving and receiving feedback
- solving problems and being creative
- achieving balance
- listening
- tackling work you would not naturally be motivated to do
- spending time with your family
- making a presentation
- dealing with customers
- writing
- going on holiday
- starting the day or the evening when you arrive home.

More traditional training will teach you what structure to use, for example how to structure appraisal, how to handle objections, how to plan a presentation. NLP teaches you how to generate the state that triggers the resources and the style you need to achieve what you want.

Summary

Anchors occur naturally. You have many associations already established: some individual; some connected with other people. Most of these will have occurred by chance without any forethought. Some association anchors will be helpful, supportive and rewarding for you; some will not. The process of anchoring enables you to choose the associations you want both for yourself and for others. Mastering the skill of anchoring means learning to lead yourself by managing your state of mind. It also means taking responsibility for the effect you have on other people.

This chapter has set out a few of the ways in which you can apply the anchoring techniques, but you will find that anchoring is part of everything you do. Begin to explore how you can use these anchors

creatively as a way of enriching your day-to-day living and making your involvement with others a continually rewarding experience.

Thought provokers

1 What state do you typically have in the following situations and what state would you like to have?

Situation	Current state	Desired state
Giving a presentation		
Asking for what you want		
Responding to members of your family when you are feeling stressed		
Refusing personal requests		
Appraising or being appraised		
Going for an interview		
Exercising		
Dealing with aggression		
Having your ideas challenged in public		
Add your own situations		

Choose one of the above situations and use either the self-anchoring, the collapsing anchors or the chaining anchors technique.

2 Write down the state you would like to generate in yourself and in others in the following situations:

Situation	Own state	Desired state in others
Appraising others		
Giving feedback		
Explaining what you want		
Clarifying technical information		
Running or contributing to meetings		
Add your own situations		

3 Write down the states you would like to have when dealing with each of the following people and the state you would like them to have:

Person	Your desired state	Desired state for them
A member of staff		
A colleague		
Someone in your family		
Your best friend		
A friend		

A customer
A supplier
Your partner
Someone else

Use either of the anchoring techniques to experiment with achieving these desired states.

- 4 Develop a list of anchors that you could use in your everyday situations. Check they meet the outline for an effective anchor – that is, that each one is precise and easily reproducible, and that it can be used uniquely to anchor a specific resource.
- 5 How has your day been so far? What anchors have you used that have worked for you/worked against you?
- 6 Read *An Evil Cradling* by Brian Keenan as an example of someone who chose what he made of extreme circumstances.

Many years ago there was a sailor who had travelled to many different countries around the world. He had been to many places and seen many different sights. One day as he was sailing across the seas, he came upon an island and decided to rest there for a while. He moored his boat on the shore and began to look around. All around the island was a beautiful white beach, and behind the beach was dense tropical jungle.

All was quiet until ...

He thought he could hear a faint noise in the distance and tilted his head to listen. He sensed it came from within the jungle and walked closer. Sure enough, once again he heard this faint noise in the background. He started to hack his way through the foliage in order to make a pathway. The more he

moved inland the louder the noise became. He continued to cut his way through, until eventually he reached a clearing and there in the middle of the clearing he saw an old man sitting cross-legged on the ground.

The old man had his eyes closed and was chanting 'Mo, Mo, Mo' in long, soft tones. The sailor stood and watched and listened. 'Mo, Mo, Mo,' continued the old man. Eventually the sailor approached the old man and tapped him on the shoulder.

The old man turned slowly around and smiled.

'Excuse me,' said the sailor, 'I think you have made a mistake. I think you should be saying, "Om, Om, Om."'

'Oh,' said the old man, smiling. 'Thank you so much,' and began to chant, 'Om, Om, Om.'

The sailor felt pleased with himself and made his way back to his boat. He began to sail away, and when he had sailed for a while he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around, surprised to see the old man, who said, 'Forgive me for interrupting your journey. Could you please remind me what the chant should be?'

The sailor, in a state of shock, said, 'Om, Om, Om.'

'Thank you so much,' said the old man, and walked back across the water to the island.

14 Align yourself: Levels of influence

*I know myself now; and I feel within me
A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience.*
William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*

We live in a complex, unpredictable world. We can no longer rely on plans and predictions. We are called to work in ways that are entirely different from those of the past. The only part of the system on which we can potentially rely is within us. And yet this is the part of the system that for many people lies largely untapped. We have to trust and believe that, if we are true to ourselves, our outcomes unfold in line with that truth.

Our outcomes unfold in line with our truth

When I wrote the First Edition of *NLP at Work*, I said that to achieve our goals we need to be able to imagine and feel them, and this still holds true. However, I have seen a new and different style of achievement develop in the last few years. This relies more and more on our ability to allow outcomes to unfold. We have to be able to walk forward with faith into a world that is chaotic and abstract, and allow the opportunities to present themselves. And we need to be so aligned, so true to what we believe, that we are in a position to seize these opportunities when they occur. Our example is our reputation.

It is as if we are sportspeople playing a game. We don't know where the next ball will come from or how it will come. But we manage ourselves so that we have a strong sense of the outcome we

want to achieve and are always in a state of readiness and flexibility to seize the chances as they present themselves.

How often have you heard someone say, ‘Wow! Just had a bit of a curveball!’

Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.
Confucius

At the time of starting up the NLP open courses branch of my business, I acted in faith that it was the right thing to do. It was something I had wanted for a long time. I had realized the connections between the NLP I had seen used powerfully in therapeutic scenarios and its potential for excellence in the workplace. I met with resistance not only from other consultants but from my own associates, who said that I didn’t stand a chance of succeeding. And for the first two years when I struggled to create a profitable business, I almost succumbed to their doubts. Nevertheless, my belief and my desire kept me on track and I am very glad that they did.

Only recently I advised a colleague who was launching an open programme who wanted to see what the number of potential attendees might be before committing to the schedule. ‘It doesn’t work that way. Only you can commit and when you do, then you find out who is drawn to what you are proposing,’ was my advice.

Build it, and they will come

They don’t say, ‘See if they come, and, if they do, then build it’!
And yet that is how many people expect business to work.

To support people in achieving their personal best day by day is one of my main aims in my NLP training and consultancy. By having a personal sense of direction, resolving inner conflict and managing personal change, we can move towards a state of coherence. When we have this state we are at one with who we are: there is little or no conflict or stress. We are approaching the best we can be.

In the previous editions of *NLP at Work* I acclaimed Lance Armstrong as a model of excellence. I saw him as someone who had the identity of world champion and I dismissed all the doping claims, believing his stories over those of others. Finally, when George Hincapie, one of his teammates and a man I believe never to have sought the limelight, came out and corroborated all the claims about the extent of Armstrong's drug use, I finally changed my mind. I have since read the autobiographies of so many professional cyclists damaged by the astonishing performance-enhancing processes that they are prepared to use and I've been shocked to the core. I believed Lance Armstrong, and I think that a factor in that was that he believed in himself and still does. In his mind he does have the identity of 'world champion' and he did anything and everything to maintain that. Such is the power of how we think of who we are.

When my publishers asked me to change the sections where I had promoted him I wondered who I might refer to in his place. Who holds the crown of someone who demonstrates excellence yet does so with integrity, humility and respect? Roger Federer's name came immediately to mind. I guess I should have included him before, yet what makes him so admirable is that, unlike Armstrong, he does not seek the limelight; he does not court the news headlines but continues steadily to demonstrate a remarkable gentlemanly persona in the face of other players who appear increasingly aggressive in their play and their attitude.

Journalist René Stauffer has noted that Roger Federer is acclaimed not only as a champion of many tennis tournaments but as someone who demonstrates an attitude and behaviour of elegance and calm. He was not, however, always like that—when he was younger, he was apparently something of a 'hothead'. Federer owes his success and his low rate of injuries in part to his 'stress less' approach: rather than thinking about his competitors or possible wins and losses, he focuses on playing a 'perfect game'. His emphasis is on the 'means' not the 'end'.

Just as a company can work more effectively if each of the teams within it cooperates and works towards the same goal, so an

individual can function more effectively if each of the internal ‘parts’ is cooperating with the others. This kind of aligned state can be achieved by paying attention to different levels.

The different levels

You can use this model to clarify your thinking about yourself, your team and your company. Start with yourself. Change comes from within; once we have a coherent mental model our environment follows suit. We create our environment.



PURPOSE

The level of purpose or spirituality relates to what we hold as being ‘beyond self’. That might include bigger goals than those of self-interest, legacy, contribution to the bigger systems of which we are a part, faith and our sense of the supernatural. At this level we are thinking about our relationship with those bigger systems. These might include:

- our family
- our marriage or partnership
- our team
- our community

- our company
- our faith
- our world.

Or it might relate to a temporary bigger system like:

- the group we are meeting today
- the client with whom we are interacting right now
- the dynamic between us and the staff in the restaurant in which we are eating
- the people around us on the train
- the people next to us in a queue
- the family members around us.

By paying attention to this level, we can become aware of the way we are always adding value by being who we are, no matter which system we happen to belong to at the time. This is our highest level of unconscious influence. This is the level at which most people make decisions about whether we are someone with whom they want to do business, live, collaborate, make a long-term business commitment and so on. Having goals at this level is more likely to ensure their sustainability. This is about everything that is beyond self.

This is the highest level of unconscious influence

There are companies with missions that are ecological – that is, they cooperate and contribute to the bigger system. Examples might include a travel company that pays attention to its effect on the culture of the countries with which it does business; an information technology company that thinks about and plans the impact it wants to have on the future culture and world at large through the development of technology; a consultancy that is concerned that the work it does supports the environment and the culture in which it is working.

What we have witnessed in the political and financial world in recent times is the result of greed and self-interest. And what we are all experiencing with its repercussions is what happens when the

goals held by the people in power do not encompass or contribute to the bigger systems – the communities of which we are all a part

Paul Smith is a British fashion house and as such works to impossibly tight and demanding schedules, holding several fashion shows every year. Despite that, the people in the company are open, warm and dedicated to their learning and growth. Their attitude to learning and change resembles the cultures I experience in Asia, where delegates are non-judgmental about learning. In India, for example, teachers are revered. Students take what is offered, check that they understand and try it out before deciding how they will use it. In Western culture it is more likely for delegates to judge at an intellectual level before trying something on for size. So the people at Paul Smith have a universally different approach to learning than is the case in many Western organizations. And they are simultaneously creative, loyal and passionate about what they do.

The unconscious value you add to the bigger systems of which you are a part is your most significant form of influence. You might think of it as your legacy. Your legacy does not have to be only what you leave when you die; it is what you leave when you leave a meeting, a room, a community.

What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments but what is woven into the lives of others.
Pericles

IDENTITY/MISSION

Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle.
Lewis Carroll

A company's mission statement defines the identity of the organization, the unique nature of its business, and it encompasses purpose, what the company does for others. For example: 'To support those leaders of the world in business who are dedicated to making an ecological difference and helping them to do that in the best way that they possibly can.' Prior to saying this one of my clients had just described himself as a coach. And let's face it, anyone can call themselves a coach. But when he described his true purpose he lit up with passion and I lit up, too!

This purpose drew on all the training, experience and confidence working with significant business leaders that this client of mine has. And more than anything it drew on his wish to work with others who have passion for the bigger system and to support them in any way that he could. It is different to the mission statements that appear on so many financial statements: for example 'We want to be number one in the car hire business' or 'We want to be the best web developers in Europe.' These are self-based mission statements and are generally meaningless to both the employees of the business and their potential clients.

Our personal purpose is lived out through the kind of person we are. Our self-image is closely connected to our purpose, and both define and shape everything we do, every move we make.

What we have 'coded' within ourselves in this way is central to who we are. In my experience, there is a huge difference between saying 'I write articles and books' (a behavioural statement) and saying 'I am an author' (an identity statement).

And there is a case for not defining our identity too tightly ... allowing yourself the space to grow and change and allowing the role to unfold. If you say you want to be the MD of such and such a company, that is not entirely in your hands. However, if you have an identity statement like the one at the beginning of this section – to support leaders of the world — then that is within your influence. And this allows the space for the 'role' to unfold in unexpected ways. This is supported by the recent research published in the *Journal of Developmental Science* that suggests that simply

reminding children of their many identities can lead to better problem solving and flexible thinking.

What role were you born to fulfil in the world?

A local and very talented musician who came as a guest to several of my programmes here in France told us how, at a very early age, someone said to him, 'You are a drummer.' And at this time in his life he didn't even have any drums! Yet he said that he knew that truth of who he was when he heard those words. Drumming is his passion and he did not tightly define his identity, so he is master of many instruments and a published author.

The problem is not in what we do but in what we become.
Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

BELIEFS AND VALUES

Our sense of identity informs our beliefs and values. A compassionate leader, for example, will very likely believe that it is the quality of our relationships that inspires people to work together towards a cause. A talented engineer will believe that there is a solution to every problem. Someone passionate about their learning and growth will believe that there is no failure only feedback.

Our beliefs are emotionally held opinions about ourselves, other people and situations we hold to be true. They are not fact. For example, I believe that:

- people in general can be trusted
- we can learn from any experience
- meeting customers' needs is at the heart of success
- there is excellence in everyone
- we make our life experience what it is
- integrity is the key to a successful business.

Our values are at the root of life's decisions

Our values, derived from our beliefs, are at the root of our decisions in life. These are the qualities that we hold to be important in the way we run our business and live our life – for example:

- truth
- openness
- integrity
- fun
- learning.

Some very interesting new values are emerging as important, such as:

- generosity
- vulnerability
- charity
- abundance
- relationships
- spontaneity
- selflessness
- freedom
- humility.

Each of us has our own interpretation of what these values mean and how we know they are met. It is important not only to have values but also to know specifically how you will recognize that they are being satisfied.

When asked about winning the 2019 Tour de France yellow jersey, Egan Bernal, a 22-year-old Colombian, said that the victory was not about his own success - it was about his team. He is being described as a great example for the sport and someone with a marvellous future ahead of him. I hope so and we will see!

Certainty in times of chaos

People are attracted to certainty – even if the content of what is being communicated is questionable. We see that in the election of leaders in the world. Those who hesitate or who are vague in their answers are lost. Sadly, it also means that those who speak lies with certainty also win votes!

*From the house of unbelief to true religion is a single breath;
From the world of doubt to certainty is a single breath; Enjoy
this precious single breath, for the harvest of our whole lives is
that same one breath.*

Omar Khayyám

So certainty is allied to congruence – that is, having all levels in line with each other.

CAPABILITIES

Our capabilities describe how we do what we do. Many organizations are paying increasing attention to competency-based training and development. It is important to recognize that this is only one of the levels in this model. What we can learn to do through modelling is to recognize unique capabilities, not only those that happen to be on a company's appraisal list. No matter how comprehensive this list, it can only serve to box people into predefined categories.

The opportunity for everyone – leaders, parents, partners – is to recognize and celebrate everyone's unique talents. More than that, it is a characteristic of charismatic leaders that they can and do recognize the unique qualities of the people who work for and with them, as well as the people with whom they do business outside the company. Natural leaders model naturally! And they can detect qualities such as the ability to:

- learn from failure and move on by concentrating
- show up 100 per cent and be present
- achieve instant rapport
- take feedback no matter how it is given and no matter from whom

- bring humour to ease tension
 - take time in the most critical situations to make a balanced decision (a quality that my eldest son has been acknowledged and honoured for)
 - build trust with wild animals (something my younger son is remarkably able to do).
-

When I was working with people in the stores of one company, I noticed that, whenever I asked a question, one of the packers, Mike, looked consistently left and to his side. It was a very marked preference in his eye-accessing cues. I had the opportunity to talk about the group's social interests and this eye-accessing cue became even more pronounced. I was able to comment on this (I had explained eye-accessing cues as part of a company-wide training programme), and I discovered that Mike had a great interest in music. Not only that but, rather bashfully, he said that he could hear a piece of music and remember it exactly. (His eye-accessing cue was auditory remembered.) I commented on what a remarkable skill that was, and he looked astonished and explained that he had always thought it was weird so had kept quiet about it!

I wonder just how many skills are buried in this way. Excellence involves discovering and releasing these natural unique talents.

When the Croatian Goran Ivanišević entered the Wimbledon tennis championships in 2001, he was not considered to have any chance of doing well, let alone winning. However, his belief in his purpose and himself gave him the influence to persuade the panel to let him enter the tournament on a wild card. His passion was intense. His purpose was to give something to a country that had been torn apart by conflict. Even during the war in Croatia, he believed that his best contribution was not to

take on the identity of a soldier but to inspire through his identity as a tennis player. He played every point as if it were match point. And he won the Wimbledon title in a final that will be remembered as one of the best in the history of the game.

BEHAVIOUR

All of the previous attributes – purpose, identity, beliefs, values and capabilities – show themselves in everything we do. Our behaviour is what we do and say. It is what the world around us can see and hear us doing.

The way we do something is the way we do everything

Think of behaviour as the tip of the iceberg, the bit of us that is above the surface, whereas purpose, identity, capabilities, beliefs and values are our internal thoughts and feelings.



Examples of behaviours include:

- asking questions
- saying what you want
- losing your temper
- writing out your goals

- giving feedback
- folding your arms
- smiling
- blushing
- running
- making eye contact.

People have characteristic patterns of behaviour that support what they want and patterns of behaviour with which they sabotage themselves. They may be the same patterns used in different contexts!

Martin is a caring man. He is open to feedback and acts on what he hears. He laughs a lot, especially at himself. He is skilled at creating visions for the future, and when he does this he looks very definitely up and to his right. He asks clean questions to be sure he has understood what others are telling him.

However, Martin can also sometimes dominate the conversation by taking much more airtime than anyone else in the meeting. He does this when he is feeling angry, and his upper lip pulls back taut across his teeth. At the same time his behaviour becomes muddled: he starts to answer his own questions and keeps talking without a gap. He looks down and to the right when he feels this way. He interrupts others, and he will not allow himself to be interrupted.

Behaviour can also be reflected in the personal development plans you set yourself – for example, committing to:

- writing down your priorities at the start of every day
- reading about a new aspect of technology every week
- smiling at everyone you meet today
- replacing ‘buts’ with ‘ands’
- stopping, pausing and asking a clean question before replying to questions

- ensuring that you listen by summarizing what others have said
- checking the response that you get to what you say (no matter what the medium) is what you want.

ENVIRONMENT

Finally, our environment defines the contexts in which we demonstrate all of the above elements. Environment refers to everything ‘outside’ ourselves: the place we work, the economy, people around us, our business, our friends and family, our customers, it even includes what we wear. What we think about as being in the environment is also a measure of how much we take responsibility for what happens to us.

For example:

- If we say ‘It’s a tough world out there’, this suggests that we put some of the power and influence outside ourselves.
- Equally, talking about ‘they’ (‘They won’t let me’ or ‘They don’t tell me’) gives the same impression.

As part of a programme I attended with the psychotherapist David Grove (known for his use of clean questions), participants were invited to draw a vision for ourselves. I love drawing, and I delighted in drawing mountains and valleys, rivers gushing over rocks, and a sky filled with magnificent clouds. It was full of colour, and I sat back, rather pleased with what I had produced. David came and glanced at my ‘work of art’. ‘Where is the space?’ he asked. I turned over my piece of paper.

The influence of the levels

There is a natural hierarchy of change

There is a natural hierarchy in the processes of learning, change and communication. The rules for changing something on one level are different from those for changing on a lower level. Changing something on a lower level could, but would not necessarily, affect the higher levels. However, changing something on the higher levels would always change things on the lower levels.

For example, if I want to influence my own or someone else's behaviour, I would need to make an intervention at least at the level of capability. So if someone says that they can't do something (at the level of behaviour), and I respond at the level of behaviour by saying something like 'Do it this way', I may have fixed the issue but that is all; no learning or cure will have taken place. To effect lasting change I would need to intervene at a higher level, which might be to show the person how to do what it is they can't do (at the level of capability) or challenge their beliefs about their capabilities.

Businesses often make the mistake of attempting to resolve an issue by taking action to deal directly with a deficit, for example the loss of a customer prompts cost-cutting exercises, shortage of business triggers skills training, and so on. We need to learn to shift levels so that we intervene at a different and higher level than the one at which the issue presents itself.

We won't solve the problems in the world with the thinking that generated the problems in the first place.

Albert Einstein

Let us hope that the leaders in the world today begin to learn this very important lesson!

Sustainable change

Remedial change is like pulling weeds, generative change is like planting new seeds; evolutionary change is like altering

the landscape upon which the weeds and seeds are growing.
Penny Tomkins and James Lawley, *Metaphors in Mind*

Our thinking about ourselves at the higher levels will determine our behaviour at the lower levels, whereas our behaviour may or may not influence our beliefs at the higher level. As in the examples of behaviour earlier in the chapter, companies that pay attention only to behaviour when trying to introduce a new culture of quality, for example, typically find that the change isn't sustainable unless they also address the higher levels of beliefs and values. In order to bring about change, it is necessary to work at least one level above the one you want to influence.

If you have someone in your organization who does not manage their time effectively to enable them to do their job well, sending them on a course to learn how to use an organizer may not be the answer. One manager realized that for one of his team the issue was not just a behavioural one: the person did not value or believe in the use of time in the same way as the manager.

Characteristically, NLP training works at the higher levels. Many change models are to do with beliefs and identity. Although NLP does include teaching of techniques, the emphasis is on using capabilities such as sensitivity and flexibility to make these techniques work. Much NLP can be done without knowing the content of the problem or the issue at hand. This distinguishes it from many other forms of training. NLP training operates on the philosophy that:

People have within them all the resources they need to achieve what they want.

With NLP we learn how to learn and how to think in ways that tap into our unique personal excellence. We can learn how to create a personal formula to manage our work and our life.

The shift in the teaching of mathematics is to teach mathematical thinking rather than techniques. And so it is for me with NLP – it is

not the techniques that matter but the thinking that generates those techniques in the first place.

Reactive or proactive?

Imagine yourself in the following situation:

You have been working on a new project for your company for the last six months. It is now nearing completion and all the results have been achieved to plan. You believe that the results of this project are an important contribution to the future of the company. You are pleased with the contribution you personally have made, and expect that the launch of this project will boost your promotion prospects.

Two weeks before the launch, the directors announce a major company reorganization. All projects started within the last year are to be put on hold, awaiting any further decision by the board. You and the rest of the project team feel very disappointed and disheartened.

Which of the following would you be more likely to do?

- Accept the situation and feel upset.
- Get annoyed.
- Complain to others about the way you have been treated.
- Hope that someone else takes action to change the decision.
- Ask for a meeting with your manager to discuss the decision.
- Accelerate the completion of the project so that you can announce its readiness for launch.
- Leave the company.
- Wait to see what happens.

What else might you do? Are you reactive or proactive in the way you respond to events in your life? Are you the puppet master or the puppet? What is it that distinguishes those who influence their own

destiny from those who leave their fate in the hands of others or to chance?

Puppet master or puppet?



In the following examples, Steve and Linda provide contrasting reactive and proactive approaches to their work:

Steve's conversations centred around what he and others did. For example, he would measure the strength of people's friendships towards him in terms of what they would do for him. Equally, he expected them to judge the level of his friendship by the type of actions he undertook on their behalf. He was self-employed and considered himself lucky each time a new large contract 'turned up'. He was never entirely sure what the source of the next contract would be, however. He was influenced a great deal by the climate. When the weather was sunny and warm he generally felt more optimistic, whereas when it was cold and cloudy he often felt depressed.

Linda is quietly self-assured. She is very skilled at listening to other people and reflects before she answers or acts on what they say. Her posture is very upright, balanced and symmetrical. She knows what is important to her and has strong beliefs, but does not impose these on anyone. In fact, she has a very non-directive style of being with other people. She is flexible in her behaviour, so if what she is doing is not working she tries something else until she finds a way that is effective. If things go wrong, she takes stock of the situation and decides what she really wants to do. She gives the impression of being at peace with herself most of the time and she is an attractive person to be with. People enjoy listening to her speak.

If your attention is directed mainly to the lower levels of change, you will be thinking about how you and others behave in the environment. You will be affected by changes in other people's behaviour and changes in the environment. If the weather is sunny, it may cheer you up; if it is dull and wet, you feel down. This tends to lead to a more reactive way of dealing with life. A company that concentrates on the lower, behavioural and environmental levels will be more likely to respond to 'the competition', rather than moving towards its own vision of the future.

Carla has a very clear sense of identity and mission. She knows what she wants to achieve and what is important to her. She believes that people can be trusted and that, if anyone behaves aggressively towards her, it is not meant towards her personally but is more a statement of what they are feeling inside. She believes that she can learn from whatever happens. She treats times of recession as an opportunity to learn how to approach work and customers differently.

Proactive behaviour requires you to focus on the higher levels of spirituality, mission and identity, beliefs and values. This is characteristic of those who operate independently of others (not without regard for them, but making decisions in line with what they believe to be important).

Consider these examples:

1 *Overall I think I've been very lucky, both in my career and in my personal life. I've always been employed and now self-employed; amazingly, work always seems to turn up. My personal life has been less smooth and though I have many regrets, especially with regard to my children, I have experienced much happiness. I enjoy being and feeling fit, and I enjoy my work, demonstrating skills that I have and spending time with my kids.*

2 *I know what I want and how and when I am going to get it. I have decided to become a physiotherapist. I have researched into this and had some experience in it. This work is right for me and I'm right for it. I'm a happy person who loves helping people. I get along with anyone and everyone, a feature of myself of which I am proud.*

3 *I find it very hard to talk about myself, maybe because I am quite a shy and inward person. I don't really like to let people know how I am feeling. I also know that I am a very negative person. I lack confidence in myself, so therefore I never believe in what I do. I would like to be more positive in my attitude towards life and I wish I had the ability not to worry and to be more relaxed.*

The level at which you think about yourself affects how you are

Consider what you know now about the levels at which these people are thinking about themselves and how their thinking is likely to be influencing their behaviour and the results they achieve.

How do you think about yourself?

When we go out of alignment

I don't know anyone who has a coherent state of alignment at all times. What matters more is that the incidence of this state of coherence is increasing for you and that you know what to do to regain it if and when you lose it.

You may recognize you are out of alignment when your circumstances affect you adversely, when you are preoccupied with a negative internal dialogue, when your focus is on problems, or when you feel stressed, tired or upset.

Are you experiencing any of the following right now?

- a family disappointment or upset
- an unexpected downturn in finances
- a shake-up in the economy
- an unexpected change in your work circumstances
- an uncooperative colleague or friend
- a change in health
- gloomy predictions for your business, your country, the world
- a surprise in the market sector in which you operate
- a personal conflict
- an unsatisfactory outcome in your work
- a home move
- a major work challenge
- a relationship problem.

The more familiar you are with what is important to you, the more able you are to hold on to a state of alignment

It is possible that you have one or several of these issues. It is when these kinds of problems occur that your alignment is most challenged. Often the combination of such difficulties can trigger an unproductive pattern of thinking and behaviour. At these times it is of most value to be able to hold on to a state of alignment. It is when you are tested that your true values and principles come through.

The question is whether they are the ones that you want to come through.

The more familiar you become with what you want to be important for you at each of the levels and the more you remind yourself of this, the more likely you are to be able to regain your alignment (and maybe hold on to it) in times of challenge and stress.

Steps to personal congruence

First become aware of your thinking, and then decide what you want for yourself at each level. Here are some questions to help you to do this:

What is the system of which you are a part or would like to influence?

- What contribution do you make to the bigger systems of which you are a part? What contribution do you want to make? (Other ways of thinking about this question would be to ask: what legacy do you want to leave? What added value would you like to give? What is your purpose in life?)

What is your identity/mission?

- How do you describe yourself? When you say 'I am ...' what do you follow this with? What roles do you fulfil in life? How do you describe yourself? How do you think about your self-image?

What are your beliefs and values?

- Be honest with yourself. Write down the beliefs and values that you actually operate to, rather than the 'good', textbook words. Think about the decisions you make on a day-by-day basis. What are the factors on which you make those decisions? What beliefs do you hold about yourself, other people, your family, your job, your life? Ask other people who know you what they believe you stand for. What do you want to stand for?

What are your capabilities?

- What are your natural talents? These are demonstrated not only by what you do in your work but by what you do outside work. You may not be the best judge of your capabilities. Elicit other people's views on what they might be. What unique set of skills would you like to be able to realize from within yourself?

What do you do?

- What is your everyday behaviour? It is often others who can give this feedback most accurately. Contrast your self-perception with others' perception of how you behave. Identify the behaviours that are characteristic of you, the things you say and do. What is characteristic of you when you are at one with yourself and when you are not? What would you like to be characteristic of you at all times? What is your characteristic language – verbal and non-verbal?

What is your environment?

- Where and when do you do the things identified above? What would you say are the external influences on you and your life? What does your appearance say about you, today? Every day? How is your physical environment a metaphor for who you are? In what contexts would you like to be able to make a difference?

The mere process of becoming aware of what these things are for you will give you more choice about whether you hold on to them or not. Awareness leads to choice.

Life is often simpler than we make it

The person who wrote the third pen portrait above, describing himself as 'a shy and inward person', has subsequently experienced significant shifts in his self-perception. He felt that the process of writing the paragraph highlighted some of the patterns in his thinking about himself that he didn't like and wanted to change. He has developed confidence in himself, has been appointed to a

position of responsibility, and is generally much happier with life and himself. The way forward may not always be as straightforward as that, but it is surprising how often it can be much simpler than we let ourselves believe.

Shortcut to personal alignment

- 1 Choose something that you know to be true of you when you are aligned and that you can imagine easily. It might be a behaviour, a value, a belief, or something that makes you feel good when you 'wear' it. It helps if you have anchored this aligned state previously, but this is also a way of doing that.
- 2 Imagine that the levels are stretched out in front of you. In effect, imagine that you can see the diagram above set out before you. You can do this sitting down, or you might find it easier to walk through the levels as if they were marked out on the floor.
- 3 Start at the level that you can imagine most easily and begin to walk up the levels, allowing yourself to imagine how you are and how you want to be when you are at one with yourself. Take whatever time you need to do this and allow whatever comes to mind to do so. This is not something you can do absolutely consciously or intellectually. Allow your unconscious mind to guide you. Awareness leads to choice. You may find that the higher you go in the levels, the more abstract your thinking becomes. You may be thinking in metaphors.

Awareness leads to choice

- 4 Once you have reached the level of spirituality, turn around and look back down the levels with this sense of overall purpose. Now walk back down, bringing the sense of purpose with you and explore each of the levels again, reminding yourself all the time of how you want to be.

Summary

Knowing our own or others' thinking at each of the levels described here enables us to get an in-depth awareness of how we are doing what we are doing. So, when we are excellent, we can use this model to unpack what is going on. Equally, when we are not doing as well as we would wish, we can compare the two and find out what the difference is. In this way, by adopting the thinking we have when we are at our best, we can increase the consistency with which we achieve this.

We can use the levels to study others, too. So if we want to know how someone is achieving the results they do, either because we are coaching them to develop or because we are modelling someone we admire, then the levels give us a framework with which to do this.

Think of sport as a metaphor for business. What creates outstanding performance in cycling or tennis or any other sport is what creates personal and business success.

There are many NLP techniques designed to bring about change at each level, and some of these changes may be best brought about with the help of an external facilitator. However, by becoming aware of your thinking and beliefs at each of these levels and by beginning to question and challenge those you want to change, you will begin to achieve the state of balance that you want for yourself.

Thought provokers

- 1 Consider the following aspects of your life. How close are you in each of these areas to the way you want to be? In the column headed 'Ideal', give each a mark out of 10, where 10 signifies this is exactly as you want it to be and where 0 indicates it is not at all as you would want it. In the column headed 'Reactive/Proactive', rate yourself in terms of how actively you are influencing each area. A score of 10 indicates you are, in your view, entirely proactive in the way you are influencing this area to bring it up to the ideal, while

0 indicates that you are waiting and hoping (or you've just given up).

Ideal	0–10	Reactive/Proactive	0–10
Your job		Your job	
Your social life		Your social life	
Your friends		Your friends	
Your skills		Your skills	
Your relationships		Your relationships	

You will be building up a picture of where you lie on the reactive–proactive scale. Even if you have what you consider to be an ideal situation, or close to it, you may find you actively influence that situation to keep it that way.

It can be useful to get other people's feedback on how they perceive you on this scale. It is easy sometimes to delude yourself, for example into thinking that being busy is the same as being proactive, when in fact what you are doing is having little influence.

- 2 Take a few moments and imagine you are applying for the work you really want to do. Write a paragraph about yourself which, in your view, describes what makes you uniquely you. Or what is becoming more likely for many people is to write a personal profile for an online relationships sites. What do you say about yourself and how do you say it?
- 3 Ask a colleague or friend if they will answer the following questions about you in the order given:
 - a What is characteristic behaviour for you? (Behaviour)
 - b What does your environment say about you? (Environment)
 - c What unique skills do you demonstrate or might you demonstrate? (Capabilities)
 - d What is important to you about what you do and what values do you communicate to others by doing what you do? (Values)

e What do you believe is true about you and those around you that enables you to do what you do? (Beliefs)

f Who are you? (Identity)

g What value do you add to others by just being you? (Spirituality)

What was it like to answer these questions? The ease with which your partner answered the questions can be an indication of how familiar they are with that level of thinking about themselves.

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I was married for 20 years – a huge learning journey. We were both very independent people, unused to compromise, so the early years of our marriage were often turbulent with neither of us willing to back down. Gradually, we learned when to keep quiet when we disagreed about issues. I realize now that I learned how to ‘walk on eggshells’. I often felt it was more important to ‘keep the peace’ than to get my own way and that was an important piece of learning for me. I had been a volatile young woman. A few years ago, we divorced. Inevitably, it was a painful time.

Since then I have noticed big changes in myself, and I describe it as returning to the ‘me’ that was characteristic of how I was when I was growing up in Liverpool, where I lived until I was 20. Scouse Sue was back! (A scouser is the name for someone from

Liverpool.) In the time I was married my identity had changed; I had learned to suppress parts of who I was, sometimes appropriately but, overall, inappropriately. I found myself reacting to situations in ways that I felt I 'should' even after our separation and divorce. I would put time pressures on myself when in reality there were none. I would rush to get up very early when there was no need. I would rush through shops (I recently returned to a favourite town in the south of France – Saint-Rémy-de-Provence – and realized that I could give myself permission to stroll around in ways that I had not done in all the times I had been here previously with my then husband who rushed around from place to place). The habits had become ingrained.

I have probably gone to the other extremes more recently as a way of finding a balance. Now I feel I have found a congruent way of being (most of the time), and business has never been so good and so free flowing (even though most people would have retired by my age!). It is not about being married or not married, but how I lost track of how I was losing myself and how now I am refinding me!

15 Write your own life script:

Beliefs of excellence

Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said. 'One can't believe impossible things.'

'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast ...'

Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking-Glass

Our beliefs influence and shape our behaviour. They form our life script, in the sense that whatever we believe dictates how we respond to the situations and people we meet in our life.

My mother always used to say to me 'You will fall on your feet, Susan, no matter what you do!' Sometimes she said it in frustration, thinking that I didn't deserve to succeed at times. But the effect of her saying that to me is that I do believe that about myself.

Our beliefs influence every moment of every day

Most of our beliefs are formed by the age of seven and are shaped by our parents or the equivalent of parent figures. In most cases we don't realize what our beliefs consist of, and yet they influence every moment of every day. Every belief has a structure to it, which we can influence if we choose. It is a little like carrying round a recording in our head. If the recording is working for us, we can keep it, maybe updating it to refine it from time to time. If, however, the recording is limiting what we think about ourselves, we can take it out and re-record it so we have one that does work for us. It is a

fundamental of NLP that, if we understand the structure of what we hold in our thinking, we can change it if we choose.

If we want to model excellent performance, it is important to ‘step into’ the beliefs of the person we are modelling in order to influence the way we behave. Equally, to tap into our most resourceful state for a specific context, we need to be able to ‘step into’ the belief that supports us in this (to model ourselves). For example, if I want the confidence to talk with ease at a conference, it helps me to model those times when I fully believe that I do have something of value to share with the conference delegates. In reminding myself of this belief, I tap into a resource that I already have but may temporarily have shelved.

Beliefs can be expressed as statements. These are not factual statements, but are emotionally held opinions that we have reinforced over time. So what are the beliefs that are so vital today? We have available the result of years of study of people who exhibit excellence in the way they are. We can shortcut the road to excellence for ourselves by assuming and trying on for size any or all of these beliefs.

They are as follows:

- **Everyone has a unique perception of the world.** It will be different from our own. It is not right or wrong. To accept this belief is to accept and understand people as they are.
- **Everyone makes the best choice available to them at the time they make it.** By believing this we can learn how to understand, coach high performance, and forgive.
- **There is no failure, only feedback.** We can take in and learn from changing situations. Consequently, we need to be able to learn continuously, and this belief is central to our ability to do this.
- **Behind every behaviour is a positive intention.** This belief is fundamental to our being able to take whatever happens to us, no matter how detrimental it might be initially, and turn it into personal learning and growth.
- **The meaning of the communication is its effect.** We may not be able to control our environment, but what we can do is be

aware of the effect we have on it. In holding this belief we take full responsibility for the effect of our actions.

- **There is a solution to every problem.** This belief is characteristically held by people who find new ways of working through or round obstacles and challenges. It is the source of creativity and characteristic of leaders.
- **We have within us all the resources we will ever need.** By believing this we can learn how to tap into every resource (skill, attitude, belief) that we will ever need to achieve what we want.
- **The person with the most flexibility in thinking and behaviour has the greatest influence.** If what we are doing isn't working, then the more choices we have, the more likely we are to find a way that does work.
- **Mind and body are part of the same system.** Our mind and body are totally interconnected. What affects one affects the other.
- **If one person can do it, anyone can do it.** If one person can do something, it is possible to model it and teach it to others. In this way everyone can achieve excellence in their own way.
- **What we recognize in others is true about ourselves.** To recognize a quality in someone else, we have to be able to represent it in ourselves. If we can represent it, we have the capability of reproducing it. If you can spot it, you've got it.

If you can spot it, you've got it

- **Knowledge, thought, memory and imagination are the result of sequences and combinations of ways of filtering and storing information.** If we learn what those sequences and combinations are (the programs), we can influence what is and isn't working for us and do something about it.
- **The way to understand is to do.** We learn by doing and being open to feedback. This belief underpins the style of most NLP training (or should do!). We learn NLP not by theoretical study, but by experiencing it.

These beliefs form an ethical set of principles for life

These beliefs form an ethical set of principles for life. However, they are not just ‘nice to have’, they support the best of who we are. Take any influential leader. Take any successful independent person. Take any top sportsperson. Take anyone who successfully facilitates the development of others. Take anyone who is a part of fulfilling relationship and behind their actions you will find beliefs like these. Take anyone who is thriving and making the best of their life, no matter what the circumstances. Equally, take anyone who has managed themselves through turbulent physical and emotional times and you will also discover that their actions are based on such beliefs.

These are beliefs, not facts

These beliefs are central to NLP. They are often referred to as presuppositions, as you do not have to believe them. They are not claimed to be true or universal and they are certainly not fact. They are called presuppositions because you presuppose them to be true and then act accordingly and discover what happens as a result of that. In my experience, anyone who does that ends up doing more than merely holding them as assumptions; they come to believe them – because they work.

Doubt everything. Find your own light.
Buddha Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni

How beliefs originate

I used to struggle to make my opinion known in meetings or group gatherings. Unless asked, I kept my views to myself. And even when asked I would rarely elaborate on what I thought. I found this increasingly frustrating, and I usually left meetings exasperated, overwhelmed by feelings of

inadequacy and helplessness. I vowed to handle the next meeting differently. But nothing changed. I just could not overcome the feeling that I could not say what I wanted.

Finally, I asked a friend – a good coach – for help and they helped me trace the source of this experience. I remembered that, when I was young and in the presence of my mother, my mother invariably spoke on my behalf even if a question was directed to me personally. Before I had a chance to say anything she had answered for me (sometimes even with regard to things for which she did not know the answer!). Over time and with the coaching I realized that, although my mother was well meaning, she had no idea of the effect her behaviour was having on me. And so I came to believe that I could not speak for myself. It haunted me for a long time, but, as you might have guessed, given the work that I do, I did finally relinquish that limiting way of thinking about myself!

We experience others' behaviour and opinions and believe them to be true

This is an example of how beliefs are formed. We experience situations and accept opinions from influential people in our lives and hold them as facts. My mother wasn't literally saying that I could not speak for myself, but that was how (not surprisingly as a young girl) I interpreted her actions. So beliefs aren't facts at all. They are perceptions formed through our own experience and the views of others. I formed the belief from the metamessage of my mother's actions (see [Chapter 10](#), Metamessages).

Beliefs are emotionally held opinions that we assume to be fact. For example:

- “‘I wants’ don’t get.’ (Another one I got from my mother!)
- You can achieve whatever you want in this world. (She gave me that one, too!)
- People close to you will abandon you. (My father died when I was 13 years old.)
- You always get what you want and you always will.

- You'll always land on your feet whatever happens.
- You're lazy. (My mum told me that one often. I think the hard work I do now is still to prove to myself that I'm not!)
- You have to work hard in this life to get what you want.
- You're a grade A student.
- You're stupid.
- People can't be trusted.
- Children should be seen and not heard.
- Feelings don't count.
- You're a liar.
- You're the 'good' child in the family.
- You're a born artist.
- You're a lousy mathematician.
- People will always look after you.

We can create our own set of principles

The nature of NLP is that we can change our beliefs so that we create our own set of principles to support the way we want to be. We need not carry around redundant or even destructive belief systems belonging to someone else. We can create our own empowering set of beliefs instead.

How many of us carry around baggage that really belongs to someone else? Because our beliefs are principles that we hold entirely within ourselves, they are completely under our influence. We do not have to be limited by patterns of the past; we can write our own life script.

There are several ways to do this. One way is to presuppose that we do hold beliefs that, although new to us, are more in line with the way we want to be. Alternatively, NLP gives us the techniques to rewrite our own history. Because our unconscious mind does not know the difference between what is real and what is imagined, we can imagine the past we would prefer to have had and rewrite our memories. This comes from the belief that knowledge, thought and memory are the result of sequences and combinations of ways of filtering and storing information. By knowing what sequences and combinations of thought patterns we are using, we change how we

represent the memories we hold. We can influence our memories to support us in the way we would like to be now, as opposed to the way we happen to be. This is a mental agility that can be learned.

How beliefs work

Top sportspeople believe that they have the potential to win every match they play. This belief works for them in this way:



The less consistently successful players are more likely to think as follows:



Our beliefs act as a self-fulfilling prophecy. We act in a way that proves the validity and value of our beliefs to ourselves. If our beliefs are self-limiting, we limit our performance, thus proving the belief to be 'true'. Over time, the beliefs become more and more entrenched as we continue to live them out each day.

However, if we hold empowering beliefs such as the beliefs of excellence outlined below, we act and behave in a way that releases our potential and allows us to be the best we can be.

The beliefs of excellence

Have you ever wondered how some people achieve success? For example:

- How Christopher Columbus held on to his vision of discovering a new route around the world and maintained the courage and tenacity to cross waters that no one had sailed before?

- How the Americans managed to break through the limits of what seemed possible to land a man on the moon?
- How British hostage in Lebanon Brian Keenan retained his sanity and self-worth when held in solitary confinement bound, blindfolded and threatened with death?
- How previously unheard-of entrepreneurial companies such as Google and Amazon became household names overnight in markets that hadn't existed a year before?
- How the US inventor Thomas Edison persisted through hundreds of 'failed' experiments to invent the first commercially practical light bulb?

Many people would have given up after a fraction of the journey. What made these and so many more achievements possible? These people succeeded because they believed they could. Once Roger Bannister had run a mile in under four minutes, within months many other athletes did the same. Once he had broken the barrier, he created a belief in others that it was possible.



Let's consider what each of the beliefs of excellence means.

Each person is unique

I'm not strange, weird, off, nor crazy; my reality is just different from yours.

Anonymous

We do not know what reality is. Our senses, beliefs and experience contribute to a map of the world that we use to find our way through life. A map can never be perfect – it would otherwise be the same as the territory that it represents. So the map is not the territory; it is a representation. Some maps work better than others for some people. The question is, how does your map of the world work for you?

Consider this conversation:

PERSON A I really enjoyed the film last night.

PERSON B It was rubbish.

PERSON A No, it wasn't – the photography was beautiful.

PERSON B Yes, but the storyline was non-existent.

PERSON A That's ridiculous.

PERSON B No, it isn't!

Recognize that? Neither person in this conversation is right or wrong, although they may not appreciate this. However, each has their own way of experiencing life, their own 'map of the world'.

How often does your map of the world bump up against someone else's? And what happens when it does? Once you accept that everyone has a unique map of the world, you begin to understand and accept difference.

So many of our governing bodies are set up for conflict. We have opposition parties, yet rarely do different political parties work together towards common goals.

We can learn to understand and accept difference

When I think about other cultures I think about what they represent in terms of human possibilities: a whole set of ways to see and hear and feel about the world that could potentially resonate with my neurology, a place where news of difference is waiting to be discovered.

Judith DeLozier & John Grinder, *Turtles All the Way Down: Prerequisites to Personal Genius*

Imagine a world where this understanding and acceptance existed – how different our daily lives would be. How would the press survive? What stories would they print? Can you imagine how different the headlines would be?

How often are you party to the following kinds of situations?

Jim was explaining how he saw his future and the sort of obstacles he wanted to overcome.

Jane listened to him for a while and then said, ‘You know, Jim, what you really ought to do is to leave this job and move into sales; you’d be much more suited to that.’

‘But that isn’t really what I want to do, Jane.’

‘You may not think it is,’ replied Jane, ‘but believe me, I know it’s the right move for you.’

Jim sat back and folded his arms. He disagreed.

Bill, who lived in France but who originated from the UK, was very upset about the way that the government in the UK was governing (or not, as he thought!) the country. He expressed his views vehemently online and was met with the response from someone that he had no right to complain given that he had left the country to live elsewhere. (It was expressed somewhat more emphatically than this!) Bill responded by telling this person that they did not understand and that they were a nasty person! As far as I know, neither came to understand (which is not the same as agreeing) the other’s perspective.

Both of these illustrate what can happen when someone doesn’t presuppose ‘each person is unique’ to be true and consequently doesn’t value others’ ‘maps of the world’. This means we all have our unique perception of the world, the way things are, the way people behave, our own experience. And that perception is only a

view of those things, an interpretation. It's not an exact representation of reality. Just as a map is only a representation of a territory, highlighting some features and ignoring others, so your personal experience leads you to highlight some features and ignore others.

Accepting this presupposition means that you respect difference.

Difference is the difference that makes the difference.

Gregory Bateson

The table below compares what it would be like to hold the belief that each person is unique with what it would be like not to do so.

	People who believe 'each person is unique'	People who don't believe 'each person is unique'
Have this sort of approach	Coopertive, respectful and open to difference and feedback	Rigid, inflexible and dogmatic
Hold these sorts of beliefs	Difference is valuable	Their own opinion is right They know best
Have these capabilities/ limitations	Listening skills, sensitivity to and respect for difference	Determination and singlemindedness
Do and say	Look interested, cooperate, ask questions, are curious about others' experiences and explore differences	Speak in terms of what others 'should' or 'ought' to do. Disagree and interrupt

	Ask for clarification when they get feedback of which they were previously unaware and had not seen in themselves	Dismiss Do what they have always done Defend themselves and rationalize away feedback
Feel	Relaxed and curious	Frustrated, irritated and stressed
Experience	Find new talent, cut new ground	Stagnate

Everyone makes their best choice

When your colleague argues with you and refuses to see your point of view, at that moment it is the best choice available to them. And the way you react to them is your best choice at that time.

If you had learned the most elegant and cooperative ways of achieving what you want, life would be very different. But you didn't. You learned healthy and unhealthy ways of getting what you want. When a child cries and shouts in the middle of the supermarket, that child has learned that is the way to get the attention they want; not the best way for those around, but the best choice for the child. You do what you do because at some level it works. If what you are doing didn't work, you wouldn't do it.

If you run away from potentially painful situations, that is what you have learned to be the best choice. This does not mean it is the 'best' choice overall, but it is the best you can come up with given your experience to date and your emotions and state at the time of making the decision. It is a measure of your flexibility.

The best is a measure of your flexibility

However, one thing is for sure: if you do what you always did, you will get what you always got.

Think for a moment about anyone you have felt frustrated with within the last month – for example:

- the colleague who gave a boring presentation
- the person who dominated a meeting
- a member of your family who made an insensitive comment to you
- the person who made wrong assumptions about you
- the support person who was abrupt with you
- the car driver who cut in front of you
- the salesperson who wouldn't answer your questions
- the receptionist who kept you waiting
- the person who took their time in the queue in front of you.

Now step into the belief that 'everyone makes the best choice available to them at the time'. Imagine what it would be like if you were to believe that. As you imagine what it is like, how does that affect your feelings towards the people you have listed? Would that colleague really have chosen to give a boring presentation if he had a choice? Would the colleague have dominated the meeting if she had other choices about how to influence you?

This may not be your belief, but you can experience the results of holding it by presupposing that it is true for you. If you don't hold this to be true, you might respond to the deliverer of the boring presentation with disdain. By presupposing that this is their best choice, you will be more likely to give them constructive feedback and suggestions for other ways they could present their ideas. It doesn't mean that you have to accept what they are doing in the way they are doing it. It does mean that you are more likely to be in a state where you can influence it.

Beliefs of excellence give us resourceful ways to respond to less than ideal scenarios

The beliefs of excellence give us more resourceful ways of responding to less than ideal situations in ways that are most likely

to lead to a win/win outcome. The focus shifts from blame, disdain and frustration to curiosity, understanding and concern, particularly in terms of how to enable ourselves and others around us to have more choice, so that the best choice for one or a few becomes the best choice for many.

How many people do you know who live their life with regrets? Do you? Knowing what you know now, there may very well be decisions you would change, places you would have gone, people you would have treated differently. But this is you now, with different skills, different knowledge, different experience. At that time the choices you made were the best available to you. Once you can accept this, you can let go of regrets; they clutter the places reserved for other more self-fulfilling choices.

There is no failure, only feedback

Christopher Columbus, John F. Kennedy, Brian Keenan and Roger Bannister are all people who persevered to get what they wanted against all odds, people who held the belief that ‘There is no failure, only feedback.’ I’m sure if we interviewed Christopher Columbus today he would not say, ‘Actually, I put it all down to this belief, “No failure, only feedback”’! However, for him to do what he did, this must have been what he believed in order to find the courage and tenacity to carry on with his exploration.

Experience and acceptance of failure = defeat and resignation

Experience and review of feedback = learning and choice

Imagine that you hold this belief to be true. How would it influence how you respond to:

- your acceptance of feedback from others?
- your confidence in giving feedback?
- your self-esteem when presenting ideas?
- your willingness to take risks?

Try it on for size: what would it really be like for you? Imagine the learning potential this can unleash. This is a very powerful belief in the context of self-development. When we truly hold this belief, we can learn from everything that happens to us.

This belief is taking a new and even greater importance day by day. We live in a world where feedback is ever more available, in real time. The people and companies that are able to take advantage of this are the ones who do believe that there is only learning; there is no failure, only feedback, in many more forms than we have ever before experienced.

A friend of mine who was struggling to get her views heard and be noticed asked for feedback. Someone pointed out to her that she always laughed or smiled after she had made a point. It had the effect of diluting her authority and the seriousness of the points that she was making. She was invited to model someone who did have authority; who could say things with a strength and authority that got them heard and noticed. She practised this new serious approach, effectively trying on a style that was more internally referenced than externally relying on others liking her. She found it very uncomfortable, said that she didn't like it at all and (in accordance with what often happens when we experience 'cognitive dissonance') sought out the views of people who encouraged her to stay as she was. She gave up with the change rather than seeing that her initial reactions and feelings were just a step on the way to a new option about the way that she presented herself.

Behind every behaviour is a positive intention

This belief can be mind-blowing in my experience. It means that we choose to believe that behind every action there is a positive

intention towards us. The key thing to remember here is that it doesn't have to be true. The benefits come from believing that it is true.

I choose to believe that the leaders in the world that I consider to be incompetent are serving the positive intention of provoking all those that they govern to find a way to change the bigger system. I can choose to believe that if someone behaves aggressively towards me, the positive intention behind their behaviour is for me to learn a greater independence of state. The person being aggressive does not consciously have this purpose for me; I choose to believe that this is behind their behaviour. By believing this I have choice in how I respond. Without this belief I am more likely to become either submissive or even aggressive in response. I might start to lose self-esteem and confidence because of how I am feeling about the way they are with me.

People who are able to maintain choices in the way they respond to the behaviour of those around them are typically people who hold this belief or something very similar.

My client Tim was struggling to express what he really wanted in relationships and recognized that his tendency to please others often led him to sacrifice important things. As we were talking, he told me he was haunted by one incident in particular. His wife had been left an old Citroën 2CV by her beloved grandfather in his will. She was very touched by this gesture, and the 2CV was a great reminder of the times they had spent driving together. However, her brother (a bit of a car fanatic) suggested that they take it to the local car mechanic to have it checked out. My client's wife didn't really want to do this, but she went along with the proposal; and so she, her brother and Tim took the car to the mechanic (also a dealer). Lots of faces were pulled and the dealer said that there were a number of problems that would be expensive to repair ... but he would take it off their hands for spare parts. The brother urged them to sell. Tim felt this was not right; that they should get a second opinion.

He felt uncomfortable, but he let the brother and the dealer have their way. And as you might have begun to guess, when they passed the dealer's premises some months later, there was the car displayed for sale. The dealer had obviously found a way to get the car officially registered again and there it was. Tim said he felt sick that he had not acted on his gut feeling. The memory was a huge reminder to him to express what was important to him and to act on his instinct. And all these years later, he was grateful to the dealer for being the reminder for him to do what he senses to be right.

This is the sort of influence you can have. If you choose to believe that there is a positive intention towards you in the following kinds of circumstances, you can transform the way you respond to the situation. For example:

- Your boss criticizes you for your incompetence.

You could choose to believe that the positive intention towards you is to provide you with the opportunity to learn how to stay calm and confident when faced with aggression.

- A colleague misunderstands what you tell her.

The positive intention is to teach you how to be more flexible in your communication so that you find a way of explaining that she does understand.

- Your business takes a nosedive.

The intention is for you to make a new start and learn how to pick yourself up when things go wrong.

When you find a positive intention, the behaviour takes on a new meaning

These examples may or may not work for you. It is important to generate your own ideas of what the positive intentions might be, ones that make sense of the behaviour for you. This is an opportunity to let your creativity generate some ideas. When you

find a positive intention that works for you, you will find that the behaviour takes on a whole new meaning. More than that, it will free you from giving a compulsive response: it will change your state so that your response is one of choice and not of inappropriate habit.

The meaning of the communication is the effect

The principle operates at many different levels. For example:

- Have you ever experienced a moment of frustration when you have carefully explained an idea to someone and they have misunderstood you? Or have you ever given feedback to someone with the intention of helping them to learn and develop, only to find that they felt angry about what you said?
- Have you ever heard a teacher say things like, 'This particular class is a difficult group to teach; they aren't good listeners. They've got to learn to pay attention.' How does this reflect on where that teacher puts the responsibility for the learning?
- Have you ever appraised someone working for you in a way that devolved all responsibility for their performance from the way you were managing them? How do you think they felt? Have you ever been in the same position? How did you feel?
- Has an audience come to you and praised you for moving them with your performance? How is that an expression of how you play?
- If you have a colleague who won't cooperate with you, how is that a reflection of your influencing skill?
- If you have a child who won't 'behave', how is that a statement about your ability as a parent?

Of course, the other people in these situations play a part in what happens. And you are a part of the system. Something you do is allowing and even encouraging the response you receive. The power in this way of thinking is that you take responsibility for the responses you receive. If you don't get the response you want at

first, you can find new ways of communicating until you do. For example, if someone doesn't understand you, you can find a way of explaining your thoughts in ways they do understand.

To believe that 'the meaning of your communication is its effect' means that:

- If you have people working for you who give their all to their work, it is an indication of how you manage them.
- If you explain a new concept to a colleague and they don't understand, it is a measure of lack of flexibility in the way you explain.
- If you have a warm, loving family around you, it is a reflection of how you are.
- If you give feedback to a friend and they are offended, it is a result of how you gave the feedback to them.
- If people choose you as their main supplier, it is a measure of how you have related to them in the way you conduct business.

Someone who holds this belief is less likely to experience customers, staff, managers, friends and family as problems; they are much more likely to experience a 'problem' as an opportunity to change themselves. Holding this belief means that you take responsibility for the reactions you get and take them as feedback on how you are doing. By holding this belief you do not consider others to be a source of problems. You seek to develop your own flexibility so that you find new choices that elicit new responses.

A 'problem' is an opportunity for change

There is a solution to every problem

What happens for you when something goes wrong? Do you down tools? Do you sulk or shout? Do you take your frustration out on others? Do you perhaps try to conceal a problem for fear of recrimination or blame? Indeed, do you try to lay blame at someone

else's door? Or do you take what has happened as feedback and persevere till you find a way forward?

Imagine what it would be like to believe that you could find a solution to every problem you ever encountered. You would probably spend much less time worrying about how you are going to get on in life. You would have confidence that somewhere, somehow, you will find a way to achieve what you want.

Somehow you will find a way to achieve what you want

That is what it is like to hold this belief. This belief is characteristic of people who find new solutions to old problems. They do because they believe they can. This is the belief at the heart of all creativity. There is a solution to every problem, and believing this opens the mind to the possibilities, to innovative solutions. What might frustrate you are people who do not hold this belief; people who give up when they encounter a difficulty. However, if you truly hold this belief, then the chances are that you will find a way to influence them as well.

We have all the resources we need

We have all the resources we will ever need within ourselves already. The most self-sufficient people recognize that the place to look for resources is within themselves. (And that includes the ability to ask for help.) Most of us have largely untapped reserves of qualities, skills and attitudes that we have never learned how to use. It is not unusual for people to either be ignorant of or play down their talents for fear of seeming arrogant. Nelson Mandela in his famous speech (quoting a poem by Marianne Williamson) said, 'Who are we to play small?' And yet many of us do.

Who are we to play small?

From the day we are born we are experiencing, learning, experimenting and growing. En route we develop a huge repertoire of talent that works for us uniquely. Even if we only demonstrate a talent for a brief moment in time, we still have it in our memory banks just waiting for when it might be needed again.

When I need confidence to say what I want to say fluently, but instead I doubt my abilities, then I can look within myself for resources. If I believe that I have all the resources within me, I can search until I find a time in my life or a context in which I had the very resource I want now. By asking myself the question ‘Where do I have this resource (self-confidence, amusement, determination, detachment ...)?’ I trigger my unconscious to search for the very same thing. So by remembering and associating into a time when we had the resource we want now, we can access it in the present.

My mother had severe osteoporosis and struggled to walk or move without pain. Her back became deformed as a result of the decreasing bone density. One day she was talking about an officer she had met during the war and how whenever she came into a room he would stand to attention. She became totally immersed in this memory, and, as she explained how the officer stood to attention, she sprang to her feet and illustrated exactly how he did this. She was smiling and amused by the memory. She was totally unaware of her movement and how, in that moment, she had somehow forgotten and overcome all her physical disabilities.

I continue to be surprised by the abilities that we have within us all.

The person with the greatest flexibility has the greatest

influence

At one stage in my career I worked for the training department of a large IT company. We ran a range of skills development courses for customers. At that time I was involved in an influencing skills course in which we taught the delegates choice in the way they expressed themselves verbally. We also taught them how to choose the most effective language to achieve the outcomes they wanted, particularly for meetings. We returned some highly verbally skilled people to our client companies.

Then we started to get complaints from the IT company sales teams. When a company salesperson was in a meeting with a client who had attended the influencing skills course, the company person was consistently being outmanoeuvred by the client in the way they managed the meeting. Needless to say, the company changed its training policy. This course immediately became a key part of the training programme for its sales teams!

With flexibility in our thinking and behaviour, we have choice. If one choice doesn't work, we can try another until we find one that does.

The tennis player Roger Federer, to whom I referred in an earlier chapter, has incredible flexibility. Whereas most players have a preferred and a less preferred stroke or move, by a very young age he could play any stroke equally well. How does a sports player get flexibility? They train: they exercise the different parts of their body so that they can move freely, so that they can vary their style. Athletes undergo an extensive range of training programmes. The most effective exercise is often the simplest but the most frequent.

We can train our minds as athletes train their bodies

By regularly practising the skills and techniques explained in this book, you will develop your range of behaviour and thinking and consequently your flexibility. You can achieve world-class status as a communicator as a consequence of the way you train your mind.

Mind and body are one

Anything that occurs in one part of the system will affect the other parts.

Stand up to do the following exercise:

- 1 Look ahead, stand feet apart, face forward, raise one arm horizontally out in front of you, and gently twist around, keeping your arm horizontal until it is pointing as far behind you as it will go.
- 2 Keeping your arm fixed in that position, turn round and note the point to which your arm is pointing.
- 3 Now look carefully at the scene behind you and decide how much farther you would like your arm to point.
- 4 Fix that point in your mind as you turn to face forward again.
- 5 As you face forward, twist again, moving your arm behind you as far as it will go. When you have pushed it as far as it will go, hold it steady, turn round, and see how far you have moved your arm this time.

Most people find that they have moved their arm farther the second time, often much farther than they expected. When you imagine yourself throwing a ball, the muscles of the body that would move if you were actually throwing a ball tense and flex in exactly the same way. Those of you with a vivid imagination probably recoil physically when watching something unpleasant on television or at the cinema. You can reproduce the feelings in yourself that are experienced by someone else. Your body becomes an expression of

your thinking. Recent research has shown many connections between what we think and the wellbeing of our body.

What are the implications for you of believing that mind and body are part of the same system?

- You are independent, in the sense of believing that you have control and influence over your own experience.
- You recognize that by adopting particular ways of sitting and standing and moving you can change your mental state.
- You believe that you can influence your state and health by the way you think.
- You are capable of generating whatever state you want in yourself: relaxation, excitement, peace, confidence.
- You take care of both your body and your mind.
- You recognize that it is others' body language that communicates with you as much as, if not more than, what they say.
- You create the memories and imaginations that you want to have and you have the ability to do this.

Holding the belief that mind and body are one, you experience that what you do to one you simultaneously do to the other. Because memory and imagination have the same neurological circuits, they potentially have the same impact.

Feldenkrais (named after Israeli physicist Moshe Feldenkrais) is a process of awareness through movement. It uses gentle, organized movements to awaken awareness and enhance the way someone moves as a whole person. Moshe Feldenkrais helped people who had lost the use of their limbs to find ways to make new neural connections in their brain, and in so doing to find ways to relearn movement they thought they had lost. He believed totally that mind and body are one – that by developing new choices in one, we automatically create new choices in the other.

**What we recognize about others
is true about ourselves**

*Let the waters settle and you will see the moon and the stars
mirrored in your own being.*

Rumi

If you can spot it, you've got it. That is the axiom and that is the principle here. If I can recognize a quality in you, then I am able to represent it in my mind. If I can represent it, I am capable of it. I may not exhibit the same behaviour, but I have that capability.

This belief underpins our sense of connectedness. Without it there is a chance that we might stand in inappropriate awe of someone else, feeling inhibited by their talent. Equally, we might be patronizing towards someone, believing that we would never be 'like' them, when the very fact that we can think about them in this way suggests that we are very much 'like' them!

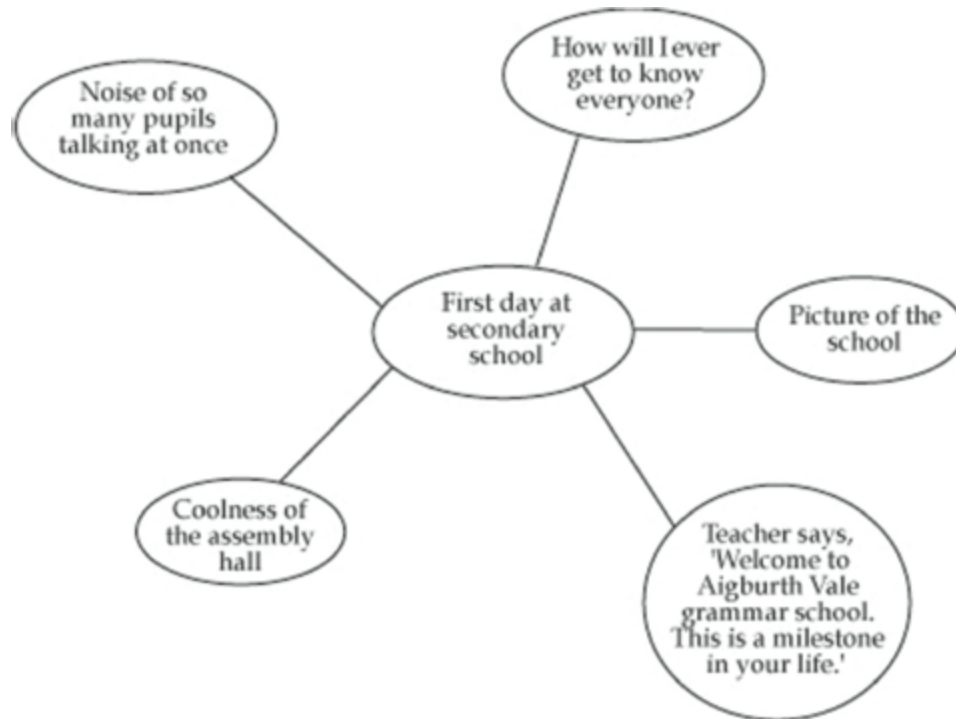
Knowledge, thought, memory and imagination are the result of sequences and combinations of ways of filtering and storing information

This belief is at the heart of all NLP. With NLP we have discovered the details of the way we hold memories and thoughts. We know now that, by developing our mastery of the way we represent these thoughts, we can change our experience in the present.

Remember your first day at secondary/high school. How do you remember this? What came to mind first? Was it an image, a memory of someone's voice, a feeling? What followed? Another image? Sounds? What are the qualities of the memory? Is it bright, dark, loud, gentle? Your memory and the way you hold that memory are unique to you. That unique representation is what gives the memory its quality. Without the representation in your mind it is

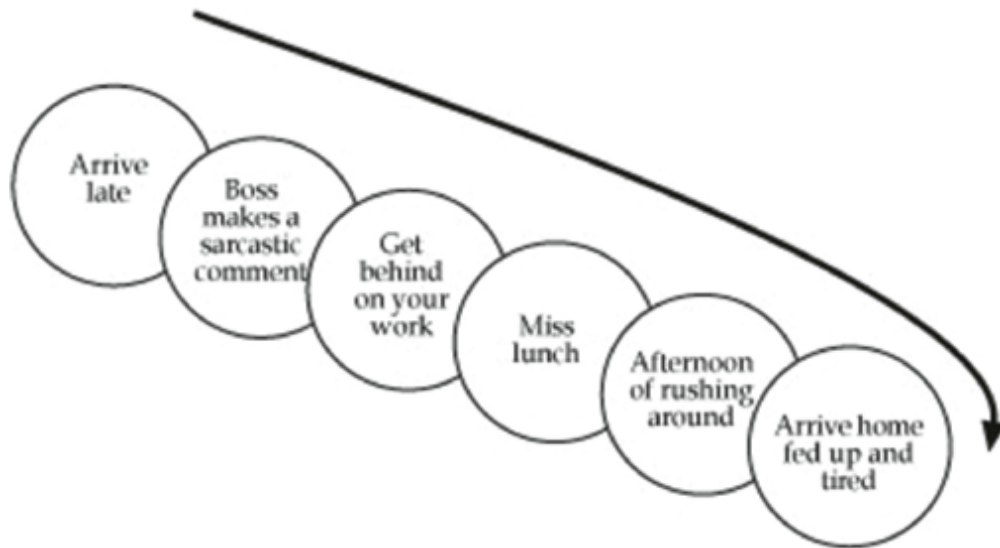
merely a statement, 'First day at secondary school.' What makes it live as a memory is the way you think about it.

For me this is an exciting memory, also a slightly scary one. What I have illustrated below is the way I represent that memory and I can, if I choose, change any part of it in the way I think about it. I can turn up the brightness. I can imagine the teacher saying different words. I can change the order of the thoughts.

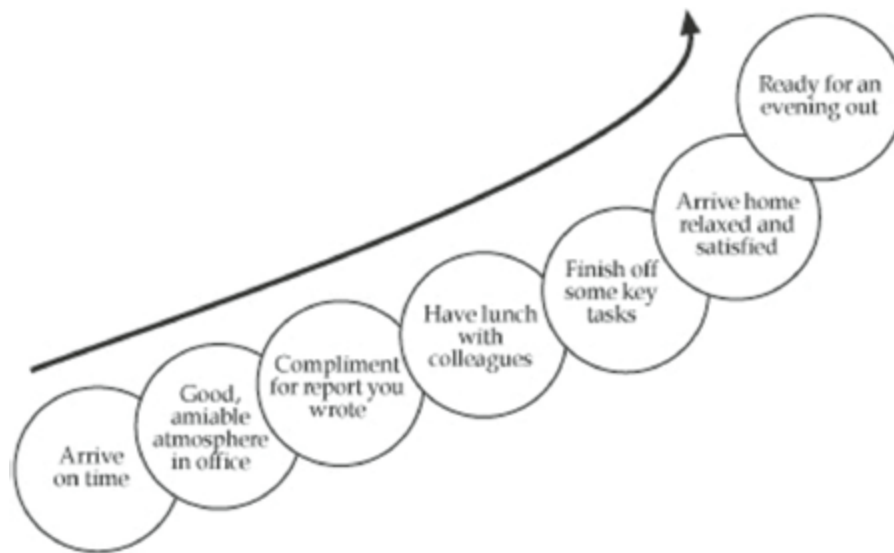


Now imagine how tomorrow might be for you. What does your imagination conjure up for you? Successes? Problems? Satisfaction? Frustrations? Does your imagination create for you a representation of the 'tomorrow' that you would like to have? It's all a 'con trick' of the mind – so why not 'con' yourself positively? You can change these representations so that you have the imagined day that you want to have.

Turn this:



to this:



It may not happen exactly like this, but you have increased the chances that it will and you will feel differently in your anticipation of the day than you would if you thought the first way. Managing your thinking process is at the heart of being able to manage yourself.

Shortcut to stepping into a belief

Imagine trying on a new outfit of clothes. You can have them for as long as you want, so that you can discover how they feel, whether they look the way you want them to look, what reactions you get from people around you and whether they fit. If you don't like them, you can return them and wear your original clothes, or you might retain one or two items and wear them with some of your existing clothes. Or you can keep all of them and make them a part of your wardrobe.

You can try beliefs on for size

Beliefs are like this. You can presuppose that they are true; you can 'try them on'. If they work, then it is likely that they will become a belief. If not, you can put them to one side. To help you do this, use the following shortcut:

- 1 Think of a situation, A, where you would like more choice and where you believe that taking on one of the beliefs of excellence might encourage you to behave in a way that makes the difference you want. Pick the belief of excellence from the ones listed in this chapter that you think would be the most appropriate here.
- 2 Identify another situation, B, when you did hold this belief or one that was very similar.
- 3 Associate into this time B and associate into the feeling that you had at this time. Find a way to hold on to this feeling (anchor it).
- 4 As you hold this belief, re-experience situation A, doing the following as you do so:
 - a Be aware of where you are and how you are experiencing this environment
 - b Know that what you are saying and doing demonstrates that you are holding this new belief
 - c Realize what skills and qualities you are bringing to this situation

- d Know what is important to you and how you are fulfilling those needs, both for you and for anyone else involved in the situation
- e Appreciate how what you are doing and the way you are feeling fit for you personally.
- 5 Discover how you are influencing bigger systems of which you are a part, both right now and at other times.
- 6 Reflect on what your experience has been of holding this belief as you re-experienced the situation.
- 7 How do you feel about the situation and others like it now and how you might approach them in the future?
- 8 What is your experience of the belief that you chose and how it can work for you now?
- 9 Repeat the process for two other situations that you know will occur in the coming week.
- 10 Decide what you will specifically commit to doing or believing in the future.

If we believe we can't, we won't. If we believe we can, we just might.

The pilot who landed a plane that had an engine failure and saved the lives of the majority of his passengers in doing so said, 'It was belief that kept the plane in the air. I believed against all the odds that I could get the plane safely on the ground.'

Summary

You can spend your life being busy. But if deep down you don't believe you will succeed, then no amount of work is going to make a difference. If, however, you believe you can succeed no matter what the situation, then you are likely to act in a way that will lead to success. And you will find the behaviour you need at the time you need it.

Operating on the basis of belief is a very different way of going about work and life than operating on the basis of do ... do ... do ...

People who have achieved excellence have beliefs that support that excellence. Finding and accessing those beliefs is the shortcut to excellence for us all.

Thought provokers

1 Identify someone to whom you do not relate as well as you would like:

a in your family

b in your work

c in your social circle

d in your relationship(s).

For each, list what you believe about them. Think of an occasion when you communicated with them and it was not the way you would really like it to have been.

Now think of someone in each of these groups with whom you have a good/excellent relationship. Identify one of the beliefs you hold about them. Imagine holding the belief that you have about the family member with whom you have a good relationship for the family member with whom you would like to improve your relationship. Imagine having an interaction operating from that belief. What are you seeing, hearing and feeling? How are they responding to you? If they are not yet responding in the way you would like, re-experience the belief of excellence until you have it more firmly or strongly in your mind.

Repeat the process. Now repeat the whole process for the person in your work and then the person in your social circle.

2 Think of a goal that you want for yourself but have not yet achieved and you are not sure why not. What beliefs do you hold about:

a your ability to achieve this goal?

b your right to achieve this goal?

What beliefs might be limiting you in the achievement of this goal? What beliefs might you hold instead of the limiting ones?

3 Which of the beliefs of excellence do you already hold?

4 Which beliefs of excellence would you like to hold?

5 Which one belief of excellence would make the biggest positive difference to your life if you held it? What do you imagine would be the effect of holding this belief for you?

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I live in a township outside Cape Town, South Africa. Long ago my parents were forced to leave their homes and dumped in an empty windy area called Crossroads. The South African Apartheid government wanted us and other black people to live far away from the city centre. My mother was a cleaner and cook and my father sold newspapers.

I remember the 16 December 2003; the day is a public holiday in South Africa, called the Day of Reconciliation. This is a day that is meant to bring South Africans of all races together, to slowly heal the wounds of racial segregation and colonialism that have devastated our country since 1652.

I remember it was about 9pm and cold outside and my dear older brother, who was my idol, strong and clever and helped me with my homework, was still out with his friends. My father had warned him before, many times, about hanging out with his friends, after dark.

I remember I somehow feared the worst that night. And I'm still haunted by what happened next – the

smash on our door and desperate shouting, the smell of fires and petrol and then they found my brother lying on the road, stabbed and killed by a 'gang friend' of his as they argued about a girlfriend.

That day I decided I must do something for the children of Crossroads, so they don't join the gangs that killed my brother.

And ten years later I set up a not-for-profit organization, Ikamva Labantwana, not far from where my brother was killed.

Today we have a beautiful centre in Crossroads where 500 young people come and visit every week. And we give them food, homework support, the chance to sing in a choir, skills training and work placement opportunities. We also provide NLP training which I believe gives the hope and the tools to move out of poverty and build a positive future.

You know about Ubuntu – it's the belief of excellence that 'I am, because we are'. And the best way to show people about Ubuntu is to practise it, to do things that speak louder than words, things that transform people and communities, by making a small difference each day, helping people find work, because these issues are bigger than us, they need collective action.

And for years NLP has inspired me. It has brought me awareness at a much bigger level. I use the beliefs of excellence every day. I model other people every day, and I find ways to capture what they do and I try it out and aim to achieve the same result.

Siviwe Dlukwana

16 Achieve what you really want: Well-formed outcomes

‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.’

‘I don’t much care where—’

‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.’

Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

How sustainable are your goals? At the time of writing we are going through one of the most turbulent periods in world history. The turbulence has been in the force and unpredictability of the weather and in the unforeseen nature of the changes in power in politics. Just how much more evidence do we need to realize that focus on profits, income, self-interest and material gain is the most fragile way to set goals for ourselves? Unfortunately, we do not seem to have learned the lessons. Who knows what will be happening in another ten years? I fear for the future of the world for my grandchildren. Blinkered, self-interested goals may seem to work in the short term, but what we are seeing is the inevitable result of this myopic way of thinking. How robust are you in times of turbulence? Indeed, how robust are you at all?

Here in rural France, and particularly in the south of India where I work much of the time, the locals probably have no idea that the flashing lights of the financial markets even exist, nor are the numbers likely to change their lives significantly in the next few years. The fishermen who live in palm-leaf-roofed huts by the beach

in Kerala are more likely to be devastated by a tsunami than the appointment of some controversial politician. So how do we create these panics in the world? And how can we personally rise above it?

To change this madness we can learn to think differently

It was Albert Einstein who said that in order to affect the world's problems we need to think (and act) differently: that we won't change the issues with the thinking that generated those issues in the first place. So the question is: what have we learned from our models of excellence about the way they think about and set their goals? How can we find a way to discover what we really want (which may not be what we think we need) and do so in a way that supports this beautiful world in which we live? And how do we come together to achieve this?

What we have learned is that those who have a way of life that is in line with how they really (this is important) want to be are a very small percentage of the population. Statistics suggest that only 6 per cent of the population thinks strategically, and this includes the ability to set and hold compelling goals. Yet thinking in this way is available to all of us. Some people inherit this influential way of thinking from their parents or parent figures. Some people learn through adversity. The key is that they learn!

The key is to learn

Surprisingly, most company training schemes do not teach the most vital elements that make the difference with respect to goals, even though they might spend millions of pounds on objective-setting programmes and appraisal schemes. As we frequently find when we use NLP to model excellence, the critical pieces are so often either taken for granted or so subtle that they are omitted from training.

High achievers act out of passion

Many training programmes concentrate on formats such as SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) goals.

Do you really think that the high achievers in life, the people who act as the inspiration to the rest of us, sit down and wonder if their goals are realistic? The high achievers act out of passion and a love for what they do. It is their belief that they can achieve what others might consider to be unrealistic that makes them outstanding.

The difference between those who succeed and those whose goals last as long as a house built on sand lies in their willingness to pay the price. For example, are you willing to let go of everything you think you hold dear to achieve what you really want? The things we believe we cannot live without are often the very same things that we need to let go of if we are to realize our deepest desires.

People who live their lives the way they really want and who find fulfilment in what they do have a structure to their thinking that we have modelled over the years.

Pete Goss is a British sailor who took part in the Vendée Globe, the single-handed round-the-world yacht race, in 1996–7. I was tempted to describe him as the person who won the race, but in fact he came fifth to a French competitor. However, many people do believe that he won the race, such was the influence he had with the way he took part. Not only did he potentially sacrifice his place by diverting his course to rescue another sailor in distress, he also made major repairs to his damaged boat in high seas and treacherous weather. He stood by his values and principles no matter what the circumstances to achieve a position in this race that no other man of his age had achieved before. Although British, Goss attracted the passionate support of many other nations, especially the French, who gave him a bigger homecoming than even their own competitor.

Pete Goss is the epitome of all that constitutes successful outcome thinking. The joy of what we see in him is that we each have our equivalent achievable success. What we will explore in this chapter

is what success can mean for each of us individually, and how we can think and act in a way that makes that success possible, not only in the future but also the present.

Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine and at last you create what you will.

George Bernard Shaw

Problem thinking

Let's consider some contrasting examples, ones that are all too familiar.

These examples are not unusual.

Kevin was continually searching for success. He'd had eight different jobs in five years, but all had failed to meet his expectations. Every time he'd fallen out with his manager or the market conditions for each business had not been 'quite right'. 'Customers just aren't coming through the door,' he was in the habit of saying. Lack of success certainly wasn't due to lack of effort. Kevin tried very hard. He was constantly busy; he rarely had time to spare for anything else. He regularly talked about it being 'a tough world out there' and yet each new challenge resulted in the same familiar disappointment. He talked about not wanting to make the same mistakes again, particularly in terms of his choice of business and manager, but somehow he always did.

Jay worked for a large organization. He had fulfilled his particular ambitions by continuing in the family tradition of engineering. Although he had developed quickly within the organization, he somehow felt that the job he had wasn't quite what he wanted to do, but he wasn't really sure what that was. He felt as though he was continually searching

for what his future might be. Initiative and ambition, particularly in younger managers, were generally frowned on, although Jay's own manager had been supportive of him. His family, however, were pleased with what they considered to be his success. In their terms he had done well.

Mary managed a sales team. They had been given new sales targets. As the company had decided to grow, it had changed the way in which it set the targets. Wanting a greater volume of sales, it decided to use unit sales as the measure of sales performance. To reach their targets the salespeople, who lacked an overall empathy with and understanding of the company's goals, practically gave the products away! Unit sales soared, but profits plummeted.

Ask yourself: 'What do I really want?'

- Today?
- Tomorrow?
- This year?
- Next year?
- In the next five years?
- In my career?
- In my life?

This is not about what you must, should or ought to do. Nor is it about what you don't want to do or what you will try to do. Those kinds of thoughts tend to be the legacy of the goals that others want for you rather than the outcomes you truly want for yourself. Either that or they arise out of your fears of what you don't want to lose. Outcome thinking is to do with what you really want; you must recognize that you probably have the essence of what you express already if you go beyond materialistic wishes. That might seem selfish, but you cannot make others' goals come true for them, although you do influence others by what you achieve for yourself.

Outcome thinking is to do with what you do really want

Thinking about what you don't want is problem thinking. What is happening when you are thinking this way is that what you are imagining in your mind is how things are today – that is, what you want to change – even though you might be saying how you want to change it. This leads to an 'away from' motivation, in that you are motivated away from what you don't want. For example, you might change jobs to get away from what you don't like about your current one. You might leave your partner because you are not happy with your relationship, or you might go away on holiday to get a break from the stress you are feeling in what you are doing. The following are examples of this kind of goal:

- I want to lose weight.
- I don't want to have another argument with him.
- I want to give up smoking.
- I want more spare time.
- I want less stress in my work.
- I must clear my desk.
- I should go to that meeting.
- I want to finish off the decoration on my house.
- I want to be happy when I retire.

The language in all of these indicates that what the person is thinking about is how things are at the present, even though they want to change them.

Outcome thinking

Goals expressed in outcome thinking mode indicate that the person is imagining what they really want as if they have stepped forward in time and have got it. The motivation generated by this way of thinking is 'towards', in that the owner of the outcomes is motivated towards what they do really want.

Imagine what you really want

For example, they might change jobs because they are so attracted to a new job opportunity. They might exercise because they want to

be really fit, and they might go on holiday to a particular location because it is a country they have always wanted to experience.

Outcomes expressed in this way are as follows:

- I want to be really fit.
- I want to achieve agreement about how we go forward.
- I want to be in good health.
- I want to have balance in my life.
- I want to achieve a state of peace and wellbeing.
- I want to be someone who makes a difference in the world.
- I want to have a really attractive, state-of-the-art office.
- I want to make a key contribution to my community.

You can enjoy the journey

Tim works for a family business, and he feels he has been boxed into a role of Product Manager. His real desire, he told me, was to become a coach. At first this seemed quite a bland statement until he explained that he wanted to help those leaders who were seeking to make a big ecological difference in the world. He wanted them to be the best they could be so that they did indeed influence the course of world events for the positive. He had decided that he wanted to take more time away from his work to study to do this. He then talked about a development meeting he had held with his team which was in effect coaching and he had used some of his learning with NLP. The effect of this meeting had been noted by another manager in the business who wanted to reproduce the format. Tim was preparing to talk to the CEO to ask for a shorter working week so that he could develop into being a coach.

I pointed out to him that he already was doing this in the way he was holding these meetings. And he was doing it in a way that was inspiring others to do the same. What he expressed as something he 'wanted' was in fact a large part of what he was already doing! And that is often the

case – when people express what they want, they often believe that it is ‘out there’ in the future when in truth they already have the essence of what they want but have just not realized it.

What precisely is the difference in the way Tim began to think about his outcomes and the way Kevin and Jay think about theirs? Tim began to realize that he was already well en route to achieving his goals ... he was already the coach that he wanted to be. Now he had the choice of where he applied his talent.

We already have what we say we want!

How is it that some people are satisfied, highly motivated and consistently achieving the sort of success they want? What exactly is the difference? Let’s explore this in a way that will enable you to set compelling outcomes for yourself and to support others to do the same.

People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don’t believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can’t find them, make them.

George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs Warren’s Profession*

Consider this statement: ‘Don’t think about kangaroos!’ Can you not do that? I doubt it. Your unconscious mind cannot recognize negatives. When you tell yourself not to worry or not to make a mistake, you are actually programming yourself to do just that. However, if you program yourself to think about being calm or getting things right, you are dramatically increasing the chances that this is how you will be.

The truth is that we are brainwashing ourselves all day long by what we choose to think about and more especially how we choose to think about it. What we get with NLP is the recognition and

awareness to program ourselves in a way that will not only work for us but for others too.

Mary used to manage a team of software developers who had been very successful in winning business with their contribution to the sales pitches for new systems. Then they were taken over by a bigger company and they reported to a new director. The bigger company asked the development team to pitch for the software business for some of their existing accounts that they had been at risk of losing. Normally, this team's style had been relaxed and confident and this was how they approached the new challenges, until the director instructed them, 'On no account lose this business.' He followed this up with 'You just can't afford to go wrong here.' After several days of these problem statements, the tension in the team began to mount and they found themselves feeling unusually stressed by the prospect of the presentations. They did not get the business.

Manage your thinking to achieve a 'personal best'

Successful top sportspeople know exactly how to manage their thinking to achieve a consistent personal best. They know that, if they start worrying about hitting the ball out of court or off the green, that is what they are programming themselves to do. Even if the bulk of their thinking is positive, they know that a fleeting negative thought can make the difference between winning the point and losing it. They have modelled themselves on excellence.

How often have you said to yourself, 'I mustn't do that', only to find yourself doing it? When I was preparing to pay for my coffee in the local bar I caught myself thinking that I might drop the money as I was wearing my cycling gloves, although there was no reason why that should be given that they were fingerless gloves and it was perfectly easy to hold money in the way I normally would. I

approached the bar and dropped the money on the floor! What we think is what we get.

What we think is what we get

Two teams had been given the job of identifying ways in which their business could pull itself out of recession and achieve new business objectives. The teams had been asked to develop their ideas and come back on a specific date to present their conclusions. They returned with new proposals as agreed. One team looked dejected. They presented their ideas: how to cut costs, reduce overheads and rationalize the workforce. They felt this was the way forward. An air of gloom hung around them. The rest of the room was silent.

The second team presented their ideas. They looked delighted. This team was made up of people from the manufacturing side of the business. Previously they had looked at ways of improving quality and reducing wastage. This time they had decided to take a different stance. They had thought about the future they really wanted: the number of plants they would like to build, the amount of research they wanted to do, and the people they wanted to employ. They were fired up with their ideas and their passion for the future. They had decided it was time to turn the company around. It should be they who were telling the salesforce how much business they needed to support this programme, instead of them responding to whatever the salesforce sold, as had been the case in the past. They had adopted the style that they were describing was key to the future success. By thinking about it they got it.

Enthusiasm is infectious

The difference in the enthusiasm and sheer energy of these two teams was dramatic. One had thought about what they had to cut back and lose, and the other about what they really wanted. It is almost inevitable that if you think about what you don't want you become disheartened. You will develop the feelings and responses that are triggered by being in an environment of circumstances, people and events that you don't like. It is no surprise that, if you think about what you really want, if you imagine what it is like to have what you really want, then you will be committed, you will be motivated, and you will be influential because your enthusiasm will be infectious. This is one of the reasons visionary leaders are compelling.

I was working with a group of trainers and was with them as they met the groups they were going to train. One of the trainers, who had been nervous but excited and looking forward to the challenge, entered the room with their prospective delegates. This trainer believed that the delegates could really gain from the training programme and was positive about everyone's potential to change and indeed believed that the group already had the capabilities that they were going to explore. The group greeted this trainer with warmth and acceptance.

The second trainer had doubts about the abilities of the members of his group, particularly their ability to change. He had a tendency to talk in problem-centred language: for example 'I won't let the group get out of control' or 'I'm not worried about how the group will react.' When this trainer entered the room the atmosphere seemed to change from fun to confrontation. The group asked challenging questions and wanted proof of how the programme would help them personally.

Desired state thinking is often charismatic

A team of researchers set out to quantify the relationship between the speaking styles of US presidents and the inspiration felt by citizens. They measured charisma and greatness, charisma being the emotional bond between leaders and followers, and greatness the measure of perceptions of actual achievements. Then they studied the inaugural addresses and key speeches of US presidents, including such contrasting figures as John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Carter.

John F. Kennedy, a clearly charismatic president, used phrases like ‘Together let us explore the stars, conquer the desert, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce.’ Jimmy Carter’s 1977 address, in contrast, included ‘Let our recent mistakes bring a resurgent commitment to the basic principles of our nation, for we know that if we despise our own government, we have no future.’ The differences are striking. John F. Kennedy’s speech is an example of communication based on outcome thinking, whereas Jimmy Carter’s is almost entirely problem-centred. Barack Obama’s style was increasingly likened to that of John F. Kennedy. The hypnotic language patterns (see [Chapter 9](#)) used by Kennedy and Carter evoke very different unconscious responses. Compare ‘let us explore the stars, tap the ocean depths’ with ‘despise our own government, we have no future’. It is all in the words.

Some things lend themselves to outcome thinking, and some things very definitely do not. There is good news and bad news. The bad news is that goals that include the following are not achievable with this way of thinking:

- to be number one
- to win the race
- to cut the legs from under our competitors
- to get married and have children
- to achieve the profit target
- to lose weight
- to make my children happy and successful.

That might surprise you, as it is very likely that some of your goals do fall into some of these categories. The point is that some goals

are indeed outside of your control, or they are not in the best interests of other people. You will see the significance of these goals as I go through the other conditions for well-formed outcomes in this chapter. The only part of the world for which we can set outcomes and hope to achieve them is in the kind of person we want to be.

Keep it within your control

So the kinds of outcome that you can expect to achieve with this way of thinking include:

- to be an example of a caring, entrepreneurial leader
- to achieve my personal best in whatever field I choose
- to be true to myself so that I attract people who like me for who I am
- to work in a way that is supportive of others
- to achieve a role in life that is a position of leading others in a high-tech business
- to create a climate of learning and fun in all or most of my interactions with others
- to be the kind of parent who can support my children emotionally and practically.

Someone I know who is successful in their business has targets to achieve and does quite naturally want to achieve them. However, when he considers his existing and potential customers, what he thinks about is not how much he is going to make out of each of them, but rather how he can make their time with him valuable and enjoyable. To do this he thinks about his state and how he wants to be when he is with them. He puts his attention on what is within his control, his way of being in the world. He achieves all his financial targets with remarkable consistency.

In the example at the beginning of this chapter, one of the reasons Kevin did not achieve his goals was that those goals depended on others and on external circumstances. When he didn't achieve what he wanted it was because his manager or the business climate or his customers weren't quite right. He had not asked himself how he

could be different whatever the external circumstances. He wanted others to be different. A useful question here is to ask, 'What kind of person do I want to become?'

Are you waiting for the mountain to move?

Where is your attention in relation to your outcomes? On yourself or on others? Do your outcomes depend on someone else being there or responding in a certain way? If so, they are not self-maintained. In a story in *Waiting for the Mountain to Move*, Charles Handy describes a traveller who, journeying around the world, came to a road and across this road was a mountain blocking the way. The traveller sat down and waited for the mountain to move.

When Egan Bernal won the Tour de France in 2019 he did not have the goal to win for himself. It was expected that one day he would win, but it was a total surprise that he won so early in his career (he was just 22 years old). His goal had been to support the others in the team in the best way that he could. He did that with great success in 2018, and he did it again in 2019 until the expected winner, Geraint Thomas, urged him to push on without him as he was not on form. Given this permission, he took his chance with an amazing and very popular win. And in part because of his humility his win was popular with everyone who knew him. And in part because of the relationship he had with his teammate Geraint Thomas they together collaborated to get a win not only for Egan Bernal but for the bigger system – the team.

Know how you will know when you have arrived

What will it be like to have what you really want? If you can imagine it, it is virtually yours. The more you step into this imagined future, the more you are programming yourself to get there. Think again about one of the outcomes you really want for

yourself. Imagine having achieved what you really want. What is it like?

- **What does it look like?** What do you see? What is around you? Is there anyone else in the picture? Look around, take in the details.
- **What does it sound like?** What do you hear? What are you saying to yourself? What are others saying?
- **What does it feel like physically?** What can you touch and what sort of feeling is that? What textures do you experience?
- **What does it taste like?** What sort of taste do you get in your mouth? What is that like?
- **What does it smell like?** What is the aroma of achieving what you really want?
- **What does it feel like emotionally?** What are the emotions that you feel in achieving what you really want? What is the quality of those emotions and where do you feel them?

Your unconscious mind doesn't know the difference between real and imaginary

Your unconscious mind does not differentiate between what is imagined and what is real. The more vividly you imagine yourself achieving what you want, the more your unconscious mind believes it already has it and will program you to act as if you do. And, of course, the more you act as if you have it, the more likely you are to get it! And you discover that you already have the very thing that you have wished for when you 'chunk up' to identity and go beyond 'having things'!

We can influence the way we journey through life

Sometimes people say to me, 'Won't I get disappointed if I imagine what I really want and then I don't get it?' I have found that those people who consistently achieve what they really want, often against the odds, also hold a belief that whatever happens is learning. In this way they are happy with the journey towards the goal as much as, if

not more than, arriving at the destination. This outcome way of thinking is a way of influencing the way we journey through life.

It is likely that you will want your outcome in some situations but not others. For example, if you want a feeling of certainty and self-confidence, this could be very appropriate when giving a presentation or planning your future, but inappropriate in a situation where you had some partly formed ideas and wanted your colleagues to develop their own thinking about these ideas.

Put it into context

So ensure that you put your outcome into context. Where, when and with whom do you want your outcome? If your outcome does depend on someone or something else, sometimes this can be the painful part. Can you let go of that need to have someone or something else change? Once you can, then in a strange way you increase the chances that you can have what you really want.

Is your goal in the interest of others?

When our goals are in the interest of others and beyond self, then they begin to defy the challenges of time.

Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.

John F. Kennedy

These key others might be family members and partners. They might be colleagues and other employees. They might increasingly be suppliers and competitors. If the outcome is a win for the bigger system, then that bigger system may very well support you. If the outcome is a loss for the bigger system, then those significant others will either consciously or inadvertently block its achievement.

Forward-looking organizations find ways to collaborate

The more forward-looking organizations are not only finding ways to help their competitors succeed by promoting them, for example by providing links to them through their website. They are also finding ways to collaborate so that together they promote the market to which they both belong. Businesses that invest in ecological issues are the ones that many are turning to. Most people want to save the world!

What will it take to achieve what you want?

- Risk?
- Feelings of discomfort?
- Giving up something you have now?
- Pain and sadness?

When asked about cycling up mountains. Egan Bernal replied, 'Yes, there is suffering but that is cycling.' And he certainly did whatever it took to achieve the remarkable results that he has.

Is having the outcome worth what it takes? You may decide it is not, in which case you can give it up or decide to go for a part or a variation of the outcome. If you decide the outcome is worth what it takes, you are making a decision to commit and to proceed to the next step.

What does your present state do for you?

Even though you have your outcome, your present state satisfies a need in you. If it didn't, you wouldn't maintain it. Think carefully about how your present state serves you. It may seem odd, but someone who wants to be fit and healthy may find that being unhealthy gets them sympathy and attention. Very often, learned helplessness gives the person who has acquired this a way to avoid accountability and responsibility. This will not be a conscious outcome, but what has been rewarded will be repeated. So if they get attention for being a victim, for example, that encourages them to continue to play that role.

It is important to consider these needs and either how you will challenge them or meet them in different ways in the future to leave

you free to achieve your outcome. Once you have identified what it is that you get out of your present state, you explore how you might satisfy that need but in a different way through your outcome.

Have a higher purpose

Having a higher purpose makes your outcome significant. It also puts your outcome into context and opens up options for ways you might achieve it. If, for example, your goal is to be healthy and fit, the higher purpose of this might be to be the kind of person who can play and join in with what your children are doing. If your outcome is to reach agreement in the meeting, it might be so that you are able to negotiate collaboration for a future way of working together. And if your goal is to run your own business, it may be that your outcome is to create a balance between your work and your personal life. Knowing your higher purpose keeps your outcomes in perspective and ensures that you stay on track with what is important about what you achieve. Purpose gives your outcome significance.

What positive influence do you want to have?

Another way of thinking about your higher purpose is to consider the contribution you want to make to the bigger systems of which you are a part. We all have an influence in the wider systems to which we belong – the question is what positive influence you want to have. Another way of thinking about it is to consider what added value you will bring to those bigger systems by achieving what you want.

Shin wanted to learn NLP skills and qualify as an NLP trainer. When asked about this, he explained that he really wanted to change the culture of the way that people both learned and acted in South Korea. He had been shocked by the inhuman way that the government had handled the sinking of a ferry boat a few years before and that had been

the tipping point for him wanting to make a difference. He now runs many NLP programmes every year. He works with people who have influence in many different spheres, and he has introduced a very different style of teaching and learning – an experiential one. No surprise!

Ensure your outcomes fit with who you are

Check your outcomes against the kind of person you are or want to be. If they don't fit, forget them – find ones that do. Only by doing this will you ensure that every part of you is rooting for your success.

A colleague who wanted to be friends with just about everyone she met and to be liked found it impossible to be tough when needed. She is a very nice, friendly person and smiles most of the time. But the business she had chosen to establish required her to be tough and assertive at times and she found this difficult. It was a big question as to whether she should continue to run her own business or work for someone else where she was not involved in tough negotiations.

Ultimately, all goals are about how you are developing as a person. You might get so locked into thinking about shorter-term outcomes that you lose sight of what it is all about for you personally. Keep in mind the kind of person you are and the kind of person you want to become. In this way, you will make sure that what you achieve is a fit for you as a person.

One of my sons, who has built wildlife sanctuaries in South America and has worked with the Jane Goodall Institute working with chimpanzees in Africa, moved to New Zealand. It was a relationship and not work that prompted

him to move there to continue his studies. However, his work and his studies have always been with animals, and in New Zealand there are only birds that are indigenous. A conflict of interests! So in truth his work (and therefore his short-term goals) did not fit with the essence of who he is.

Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius and power and magic in it. Begin it now!

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

You might be fiercely ready and passionate about your goal, but if you don't act on it all that passion will have been in vain. The sports company Nike was very astute to adopt the slogan 'Just do it!' What are you doing to achieve your goals? I often see action plans on company appraisal forms that have grand statements such as:

- 'Improve managerial effectiveness.'
- 'Develop better communication.'
- 'Build an effective team.'

It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.

Leonardo da Vinci

Organizational outcomes

What works at an individual level works at the corporate level, too.

Problem-centred organizations are moving away from what they don't want. They are more likely to react to the competition and in so doing to become dependent on what the competition does next. They are driven by market trends and are directly affected by the economic climate. They step into a 'firefighting', crisis-based way of working in which their actions are determined by the competition. The climate inside such companies is one of tension, worry and stress.

The company vision is an inspiration

Outcome-oriented organizations, on the other hand, have a clear expression of where they are heading and the difference that they can make for you. This is an expression of what the employees in the company believe in and want to deliver. Because of this, there is a high level of motivation and commitment. People in the company enjoy their work. The expression of what they are about is an inspiration both to those who work within the company and to those with whom they come into contact, their customers and their suppliers. This style of company sets market trends. It influences its customers to move forward with it to their vision of the future.

Outcome-oriented companies are innovative and influential. They do take account of market trends, the economic climate and competitors, but they do this in the context of having a clear, compelling outcome and business plan.

One of my clients, a family-run manufacturing business, took time out to ensure that they had a compelling vision for the business. The board members collectively imagined what future they wanted for the business so that they could see, hear, physically feel, smell, taste and emotionally feel what that was like. They did this individually and then shared their thoughts.

The measure of their rapport was that what they had each imagined individually was either identical to or complemented what others had imagined. Everything they imagined dovetailed with the outcomes of everyone else on the board. They each visualized the extent of the business, the culture they wanted, how the business looked, including its international premises, how they perceived themselves, the role they were fulfilling and the feeling of achievement.

What we measure is what we get

What we measure is what we get. And ‘measure’ can simply mean what we put our attention on. Measure the problems no matter whether their level is falling or rising (as in the case of one company that measured the level of complaints) and problems are what you get. You presuppose problems. How about measuring compliments instead of complaints? Measure goods manufactured to compliance rather than scrap. Measure successfully operating installations rather than waiting times.

The situation in the UK National Health Service is a classic one. The decision to measure reduction in waiting times for an appointment has led to my local health centre only allowing appointments to be made on the day of the appointment!

Consider the following potential measures of customer satisfaction:

- reduction or absence of complaints
- number of problems solved
- reduction in time taken to deal with customer calls
- extent to which you can keep customers off your back
- amount of resources allocated to your customers
- number of system crashes
- amount of downtime
- amount of praise received for a job well done
- number of thank-yous for the service you give
- amount of voluntary feedback on the benefits of using your service or product
- amount of repeat business
- evidence of improvement in customers’ work processes
- amount of smiling and fun
- amount of business generated from visits to your website
- difference made in the world

What we appreciate appreciates

The column on the left contains some traditional ways of measuring customer satisfaction. They are typically problem based. If your customer satisfaction measures are expressed in terms of what you

don't want, that is where you will put your attention and that is exactly what you will get. If you measure complaints, this presupposes this is what you expect and, sure enough, that is what you will get.

I returned from a very enjoyable cycling holiday to find a 'customer care' questionnaire waiting for me. In it I was asked to say not 'What was my opinion of the overnight accommodation?' but 'What problems did I experience with the accommodation?' What did I do? I immediately began to search in my memory for problems that might have existed. One well-known travel company has a whole floor of staff to deal with customer complaints. There is no equivalent floor to deal with customer compliments!

Shortcut to achieving what you really want

- 1 Think of something you really want – not something you don't want or want less of or feel you should have.
- 2 Is it within your control? To be the next first minister or president is not (though one might wonder given some recent appointments in the world!). To have your partner behave differently is not. To be an example of professionalism is, to work with the people you enjoy is, to take part competitively is. Find the part of the outcome that is within your control.
- 3 Imagine yourself having achieved what you really want. Let your unconscious do this for you – allow yourself to dream. Using your unconscious is a key part of the process. Be aware of what you are seeing, hearing, feeling physically, smelling, tasting and feeling emotionally. Be sure to do this 'from your own shoes'.
- 4 In which contexts are you imagining yourself with this outcome? In which ones do you want to have this?

- 5 As you imagine this, explore how it is a real benefit to the significant people in your life. It is vital that it is win/win. If there is anything you need to do in your thinking to make it win/win, do that.
- 6 What sort of cost will you have to pay to achieve this? Are you willing to pay this price? If not, let go of the outcome and put your energies into something else.
- 7 What does maintaining your present state do for you (assuming you could have achieved this outcome before)? In other words, if this is important, how come you have remained attached to the present state? How might you build the benefits of the present state into the achievement of the desired state?
- 8 How does achieving this outcome contribute to a higher goal for you or an overall purpose that you have in your life?
- 9 In what way does achieving this outcome fit with who you are and who you are becoming?
- 10 What specifically are you going to do that demonstrates your commitment to this outcome? When specifically will you do that? Be very precise here about your action plan. It need only be the first step.

Summary

Here is a summary of the criteria for a well-formed outcome based on the study of those who are statistically more able than most to achieve the outcomes they hold.

Outcomes should ...

- 1 be stated in the positive (what you do want rather than what you don't)
- 2 be expressed in the present tense (imagining it as if you have it right now – because you do!)
- 3 be expressed using all the senses – you can describe what you are seeing, hearing, feeling physically, tasting, smelling and feeling emotionally.

- 4 be self-maintained (it is about your part of the system, not what other people have or have not done)
- 5 be win/win – it is a win for the significant others in your life as well as for you
- 6 be an end result, not just a step en route – for example, dieting might be a step towards being fit and healthy, which is a step towards being a great healthy example and companion to your family
- 7 have a higher purpose (it is ultimately about making a difference in the world for others and is beyond self)
- 8 fit with who you are – if you are an explorer at heart, there's probably no point having a goal of comfortable security
- 9 satisfy the payoff that you get from your present state (if you get attention from being the way that you are and you like that, check that your outcome satisfies this need for attention in a healthy way)

Moreover, you need to ...

- 10 be prepared to pay the price to achieve the outcome (this is demonstrated by the ability to carry through number 11)
- 11 be committed to taking the specific next step
- 12 be willing to act and do so
- 13 hold the belief throughout that whatever happens is feedback – there is no failure, only learning.

Thought provokers

- 1 Are the following 'towards' or 'away from' statements?
 - a I really want a job that involves working with other people.
 - b The company I work for currently is very bureaucratic. I want somewhere else to work.
 - c I have a clear vision of myself working abroad.
- 2 You ask another department to agree a level of service with you. When you have explained what you need, they say they

will try to meet your requirements. How confident would you be that they would deliver?

- 3 What was the basis of your decision to take your existing job? Were you moving towards your ideal or away from something you didn't like? Ask the same questions about previous jobs?
- 4 Imagine yourself doing the type of work you would really like to do. What can you see/hear/feel?
- 5 Think of examples of action plans you have set yourself in the past. What is characteristic of the action plans that you have carried out compared with the ones you haven't?
- 6 How do you decide how to spend your holidays? How well does the reality match up to your expectations?
- 7 How often do you finish up with the things you don't want compared with the things you do?
- 8 Think about what you would really like to achieve by the end of this week. Pay attention to what is in your mind. Is it what you do want or are you imagining the problems of the things you don't want?
- 9 If you have lost sight of what it is that you want for yourself, start small and identify what you want for yourself by the end of today, for example, or by the end of the next meeting you have.

References

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I hold several of my NLP programmes in France. These are particularly intimate programmes with no more than ten attendees. I love introducing my delegates to the local community to discover the amazing array of talent that exists here! And just as with my programmes in India it is an opportunity to learn about another culture

and in doing so highlight some of the patterns that we might unwittingly have got attached to in our own. One of my colleagues had requested to assist and be an apprentice to me on one of these programmes. She asked how many people had booked on the one on which she was due to assist which was scheduled to take place in two months' time. 'Currently four people,' I replied. 'Oh, don't worry,' she said, 'I am sure it will pick up before then.' I was amused by her response as the programmes aren't about the numbers. I believe that however many turn up is what is meant to be, and in any case strangely there always seem to be ten!

17 *Carpe diem*: Time

What some may call the process we call the end. If I can stay in the middle of the turmoil, calm and unperplexed, that is the end of the purpose. It is the process not the end.
Oswald Chambers

Do you love every minute of life, rain or shine?

Do you do treat every moment as precious? Do you value the 'now'? If so, it is likely that anyone in your company will feel very special and that you love every minute of life, rain or shine.

Time is a metaphor

The moment Charles wakes up he embarks on his list of tasks for the day. He knows exactly what he has to do and there is always 'a lot'! Typical comments that Charles would make throughout the day are 'I am really pushed for time', 'I have got so much to do', 'There just isn't enough time in the day' and 'If only I had a few more hours/days.' If someone engages him in conversation, he is likely to cut them short by saying, 'Can't stop now, must get on, things to do.' It is unheard of for him to be the one who has to be curtailed in conversation – he expresses horror on the rare occasion that happens.

His days are mapped out in one-hour slots, so any interruption to this procedure is responded to with frustration and even anger. If he promises to deliver

something, he will have it there on the dot, and he will expect others to be there at the precise time, too. 'Just in time' is his motto, and time spent waiting is time lost in his way of being in the world. It is a joke in his family that they will put 'If only I had a few days more' on his tombstone.

Contrast Charles's approach to time with Alan's:

Alan rarely plans ahead. Travel tickets are usually expensive for him as he has never considered them far enough ahead in time to get the early-bird deals. Quite the opposite, he pays premium, last-minute prices. Although he promises to deliver on a specific date, it is rare if not unheard of for him to meet the target. There is always a good reason for the target date being missed.

However, Alan is great company – whatever you want to discuss, he gives his time freely. And if you ask for some of his time he invariably says yes, even though he might not arrive punctually for the meeting. His intention is always to be there for you. Alan loves to cook for his friends, but if he says that the meal will be ready in half an hour they know to expect to eat at least an hour later than that. Overall, Alan's friends would say that he is always there for them in spirit if not on time!

Do you recognize any, some or all of these patterns in yourself in the way that you relate to time? Are you someone for whom there is never enough time? Or are you someone for whom time just seems to expand for you to do whatever you really want? Think about your time this week. How would you describe the week ahead? Do you have things that 'have' to be done? How many 'musts' and 'got tos' are there in your thinking? What happens to your feelings as you consider the week: do you feel relaxed or do you experience a sense of pressure or something else?

Time is what we want most but what we use worst.
William Penn

Through time and in time

How do we know the difference between the past and the future?

Consider for a moment how you know the difference between what you did yesterday and what you might do tomorrow. How do you know that one is in the past and one is in the future? Have you ever had the experience of not knowing if something you wanted to do has actually been done, like locking the front door, telling someone something important, packing your tickets and passport? I referred to this briefly in [Chapter 2](#), Thinking patterns. Sometimes we confuse what we want to have done with what is yet to be done and we begin to have doubts.

There are many ways in which we represent time, but one of the main differentiators is how we represent it in space. There are clues to this in the way we talk about time:

- The past is behind me.
- I am looking forward to ...
- I was going to do that.
- I put that idea aside in order that I could go forward.
- That was back then.
- I am looking to be in a new home in ...
- I can see myself being ...
- Over time what has happened is ...
- I consider myself to have been very lucky in the past.

We begin to get clues about where we hold time in space. Consider for a moment where you hold the past: is it behind you, to one side, in front of you? When you consider time, does the future stretch out in front of you, to one side, up towards the sky?

Someone I was coaching had great difficulty in ‘facing the future’. When asked where the past was, she immediately put her

hand to her forehead. I could begin to understand how she had difficulty moving away from some damaging memories in her life.

Some people have an overview of time past, present and future

A distinction in the way we represent time is whether we can see our past, present and future in front of us. Some people see this as an arc, with the present the closest point to them on the arc. Whenever they consider themselves at any point in time, past, present or future, they can see and hear themselves as if they were an outsider. They have a dissociated way of experiencing themselves and time. People who code time this way tend to have their time mapped out. They are more likely to have schedules and they know the implication of one part of that schedule if any event changes, because they can see the relationship of one thing to another. They can become easily distracted by future or past events and it is likely that they are rarely fully present. This way of representing time is referred to as ‘through time’. It is very likely the way in which Charles in the example at the beginning of the chapter represents time.

Some people are totally immersed in the present

Alan, however, is much more likely to be ‘in time’, in the sense that he is more likely to be associated into time and does not have the kind of overview that Charles has. He is present and in the moment, now. And every moment is ‘now’. In this way he is not aware of the impact of his actions or changes to his plans – if, indeed, he has any plans. The upside of this is that he dedicates himself to the moment and is 100 per cent there for whoever is with him.

A colleague of mine who is most definitely ‘in time’ can rarely be relied on to arrive at appointments at the time agreed. This is very frustrating for the other person, but fantastic when she is with you. Most of her friends and clients are prepared to pay the price!

Downtime and up time

A jazz band was playing at our local village fête. One musician in particular gave total attention to the music. His whole body moved with the rhythm. His attention was dedicated entirely to the music and to the accordion he was playing (an unusual instrument to have in a jazz band). His performance was compelling. In contrast, the bass player was looking around, watching people in the crowd and engaging with passers-by. The effect on me (and I suspect on many others in the audience) was completely different. Most eyes (and, I assume, ears) were fixed on the accordion player.

The way we relate to time is a choice

The way we relate to the time we have is a choice. We live in a world of high technology, filled with devices that can transport us from our immediate company and surroundings. I might be in rural France yet be speaking to someone in Australia. I can be in the heat of southern India and looking at a live broadcast from the USA. I watch people walking down the road in London and see many with earpieces, presumably either listening to music or speaking on their mobile phone. There is much to tempt us away from what we have in our immediate surroundings in the 'now'.

There is much to tempt us away from the present

Think of one of the most peaceful times of your life, when you were completely at one with yourself. Take a moment to think about what that was like. What happened to your attention?

You might have identified the time without any reflection. You might even have been able to describe the time to yourself with no thought whatsoever; it was a time that was so key to you that you carry it with you in your conscious thinking wherever you are. This is unlikely, however. It is much more likely that you will have gone into yourself to access the memory, an inner search.

Downtime

This is what we refer to as ‘downtime’. It is unrealistic to expect that we can carry all our thoughts and memories and imaginings in our conscious mind. Our conscious is limited typically to between five and nine key thoughts; seven is the key number. This is why, once we get above seven members in a team or in a group meeting, the dynamics and the ability to give the same kind of attention to each person changes significantly. The rest we hold in our unconscious and going into downtime is a way to access this.

We often discover our resources in our inner thoughts

Most coaching processes rely on us being able to access our unconscious mind in a downtime state. It is often in this deep, reflective state where we discover the resources we need, so coaches need to be able to elicit this state in their clients. There is more about this in the chapters on clean questions, hypnotic language and coaching.

It is equally important to respect this need for others to access a downtime state when we are interviewing or just having an everyday conversation. It is unrealistic to expect them to think and look at you at the same time. I once knew a manager who said that he would never employ anyone who did not look at him throughout an interview. I can only assume that he employed people who didn’t think!

Up time

‘Up time’, in contrast, is when we are totally present, engaged in the moment with full attention on the people we are with and what is happening in our environment. This is an important state for coaches, trainers, salespeople, managers, leaders, sportspeople. The ability to maintain this state is a skill, and for those who have this ability to manage themselves in this way it is a huge asset.

It is valuable to be able to dedicate our attention to others

In an up-time state our attention is outside of ourselves, dedicated to the people in our presence and to our surroundings. This is vital for successful trainers, coaches and people who rely on results through their ability to influence others. These people need to be sensitive to every nuance in behaviour, particularly non-verbal behaviour, and being vigilantly present allows them to do this.

So there are times when it is vital to be in up time, just as there are times when moving into downtime serves our purpose well. Issues arise when we mix the two in a way that does not serve our purpose or when we use one when the other would be more appropriate. To appear distracted and absorbed with your own thoughts when training would probably not be the most effective style to adopt!

More choices in the way we represent time

My time working for a company in the corporate world coincided with the emergence of time management systems. I had a grand, leather-bound organizer with an array of different-coloured pages. There were all sorts of supplementary accessories that you could buy at quite some cost. The name 'organizer' is misleading, however. It suggests that the materials will do the organizing for you. Far from it. Only you can manage the way that you experience and use your time.

A member of my family has always had difficulty planning their time and keeping to that plan. I discovered that the future was to their side, which was not unusual, but whereas someone might say that a year out, say, might be some two or three metres to one side of them in the way they hold it in space, for this person one year on was only centimetres away from their face. That does not leave a lot of room for any detailed planning.

We change our relationship with time as we change the way we represent it

So space and distance are elements of how we code time. We are unlikely to change the way in which we use our time until we change the way in which we represent it.

Consider an old memory and a more recent one. What is different about the way you think about them? Ignore the content, just pay attention to how you think about them. For example, what image do you have of each? What is the colour, focus, quality of sound, emotion? What is the location in space? All or any of these factors affect the way in which we experience memories, thoughts and imagination. As you consider each of these memories, are you in them, reliving them, or are you watching and listening to yourself as an observer? This will be more likely if you have a preference for through time thinking. If your thinking is usually in time, you might also move yourself into the time that you are thinking about so that what was then becomes now, at least temporarily.

We internally code memories, thoughts and imagination

It is possible that the older the memory, the paler it is in colour or the less in focus, but your way of coding time might be different to this. It might be that the older memories are clearer. Perhaps it is the sound of a memory that changes with time. What about future imaginings or dreams you may have? Think of something that you really want for next week and note precisely how you think about this (for example, is it in colour? In focus? Do you hear it?). Now think of something that you want farther into the future. What characterizes the way you think about this? Check out all of your senses in the way that you are experiencing this.

I look out over the valley and the hills beyond. There is morning mist hanging lightly above the distant village. I can see the church spire silhouetted against the hazy woods behind. I hear a harsh bird cry intermittently, the rumble of a

lorry away in the distance. From the open patio doors I feel the light breeze occasionally across my shoulders. There's more birdsong. I feel at ease.

I believe I am present, that this is real, not a memory. How do I know that I'm not imagining this scene?

It is often the change in submodalities that enables us to differentiate between points in time, so any of the following may change:

- **Visual** – colour, clarity, position, moving or still, framed or unframed
- **Auditory** – volume, intensity, proximity, constant or intermittent
- **Feelings** – location of the feeling, intensity, nature.

In my office I have a means of finding the papers I want: I code them and have special places for different kinds of materials. We do the same with time, using changes in the distinctions in the way that we hold our thoughts to differentiate between different points in time.

Accessing resources over time

We can learn to 'time travel'

We can in effect learn to 'time travel' in the way that we can access the resources that we have and have had at any time in our lives, and do so in a way that is independent of context. This is how you can do this:

- 1 Think of a resource that you would like to be able to access now, a resource that has been evasive of late. For example, if you have been lacking in confidence and would like that now, choose that.
- 2 Identify a quality that you do have intensely in the present. Even if this is a 'negative' quality, for example stress,

discomfort or boredom; as long as it is intense, that is all you need. Explore how you are experiencing this quality in the present. What are the submodalities? For example, how are you seeing, hearing and feeling the moment in this way? Note the submodalities of this intense experience.

- 3 Now ask yourself: 'Where in my life have I had the resource [e.g. confidence] that I would like now?'
- 4 Allow yourself to drift or walk back in time with this question in your mind. Do this until you have identified several occasions when you have had this resource. Just let them come to mind rather than trying to work them out in your head. Move through the space that represents the past for you as you do so, to engage your whole body in the search for the answer.
- 5 Find a moment in time when you did have this resource. Take yourself into this point in time – associate into it.
- 6 Note the submodalities of how you are experiencing this moment: the distinctions in the way in which you are seeing, hearing and feeling this moment. When you have this state as richly as you would wish, choose a way to hold on to it (anchor it; see [Chapter 13](#)).
- 7 Bringing this resource with you, return to the present with the resource in place and explore how you experience it now.
- 8 You might even 'dry-run' a future scenario where you expect to want to hold this state. Move into a space that represents that time, bringing the resource with you, and explore how that is for you.
- 9 If that experience is a good one, then you can stay there for a while to wire it in. If you would like to improve on it, identify what further resource you would like and repeat the process.

You can bring desired resources from the past to the present

In this way you can bring your desired resources from the past to the present so that you have them available to you now.

Managing time with language

As part of my training programmes, I often do a coaching demonstration. I expect the person who is my subject to get insight and learning that will help them to progress. Usually, what they bring to the start of the demonstration is an issue of some kind from their personal lives or their work. I ask the rest of the training group to remain silent during the demonstration and I open it up for discussion at the end. Members of the audience can sometimes have a tendency to 'backtrack' – for example 'I had a problem like yours and what I do with it is this ...' By doing so the questioner is encouraging the subject to associate back in time to the problem with which they started. This can undo the coaching that has taken place.

So often we can be unaware of how our interest is affecting the other person. If I talk about the original issue at all with the subject, I put it into the past tense, for example: 'The issue that you had back then ... and the learning that you have now.' We are always coaching.

We are always coaching

We affect our state, our learning and our ability to progress through life by the way we use language on ourselves and with others. Consider these examples:

- What would you like to achieve?
- As you imagine yourself achieving it, what is that like right now?
- Let's explore how you might have had this problem and the resources that you have available to you now.
- If I were to do that, it might lead to that.
- Let's explore how this state of peace you have had is available to you right now and in the future.

- As you are sitting here, listening to what I am saying, you can begin to experience what it is like to be learning in ways that are already enhancing the way you can work and engage with others.

Our language can encourage an associated or a dissociated state

We can, through our language, encourage a dissociated state or an associated one. If we want to distance ourselves from our feelings and put an experience away from us in time, we can dissociate ourselves from our experience. Words like ‘would’ and ‘might’ and anything suggesting a different time frame to the present encourage a dissociated state. We might want to test a client’s willingness to change and take on a particular learning, for example, before inviting them to commit to it. So we could say, ‘Would you be willing to take on that learning, do you think?’ or ‘Can you imagine yourself with that learning in place?’ If the answer is yes to both of those questions, we might then encourage them to make it present and associated: ‘OK, I would like you to step into your own shoes with that learning in place and do that now. What is that like?’ Present tense – associated language.

Beliefs about time

What other beliefs do you hold about time?

- Life is short and you must do everything you can in the time you have.
- Time spent not doing things is time wasted.
- You have all the time in the world.
- Time passes slowly.
- Time speeds by.
- Your time is not your own.
- Time flies.
- Time is short – you must get on.
- Time is a gift.
- Death is a remote concept.

- Death is ever present.
- Time is a metaphor and we can choose to experience it as we wish.
- The process is the end.

By changing your belief, you can change your experience of time. Follow this process to change your belief:

- 1 Do you experience time in the way that you would wish?
- 2 What is the belief behind your experience?
- 3 What might you believe instead?
- 4 What would you like to believe?
- 5 How might you presuppose or choose to believe what you want?
- 6 How would this belief affect your ability to be with time?
- 7 How do you expect this to translate into everyday behaviour?
- 8 What do you expect the effect on others to be?
- 9 How does this fit with who you truly are and the person you want to be?

Remember, beliefs are a choice. We may have inherited beliefs about time from our parents or equivalent, but we can ultimately choose what we want to think about time in a way that enables us to achieve the true excellence of who we really are.

Retracing steps over time

I have long had a desire to retrace my steps in countries and places that I visited years before. Maybe these places had changed a lot – I was curious. I travelled to places some of which I had visited five years before, some much further back in time. Many had stayed much the same. What I had not expected was how each road and each village threw up some long-buried memory. There were things that I expected to remember but I got so much more

– an evening with a cycling group eating a communal meal on a balmy evening ... a pause en route to watch the floodwaters rushing towards a dam ... a feeling of total weakness after a full French lunch with wine with an afternoon of cycling ahead of me ... a moment of delight on seeing the beautiful pale-grey decor of the hotel booked for the night ... a memory of the heavy embroidered tablecloths that I bought on impulse at a market stall and the subsequent concern for the weight I had committed to carrying! All moments, rich in colour and emotion. No intellectual analysis – just moments – that came to me as I passed over my life before ...

We can explore our experiences in time with a concept known as the Timeline. It's probably best to experience this first with a coach on a programme. However, the essence of it is as follows.

We represent time spatially. There will be places where you imagine your past, your present and your future. And in some way this will be a line running from your past – which might be behind you or to the side of you, for example (it can be anywhere – these are just typical representations and none is right or wrong) – through your present to your future. Learning how you organize time in this way is the first step, and that in itself can give you understanding and choice. Some people represent the line as running through them so the present is inside them whereas others might have the past, present and future stretched out across in front of them. Those who have the line running through them are usually 'in time' (see earlier in this chapter) and those with the line (and the present) outside of themselves are usually 'through time'. Your experience of time and how you use it will be quite different depending on which way you are organized.

Now just as I did in revisiting countries and places that I had been before, you can do this without the need to take a ticket anywhere by walking on your Timeline. So, for example, once you have a sense of how your Timeline is coded – let's say that the past is behind you stretching back, with five metres representing five years

(the scales vary for everyone – some can be very condensed and some extremely extended), you can walk back down the Timeline collecting memories as you go, just as I did in reality in my travels. And you can program what you search for as you walk (or run or skip – whatever you choose!), just as you would program a search engine such as Google.

Using your feelings to do this you might access a state of confidence and amusement as you step into the present and become aware of what it is like for you to have that feeling. And with the feeling (and searching for other times where you had that feeling) you walk back down the Timeline letting moments come to you. This is important: don't try to decide in advance of the walking what moments there will be or when they will happen; you just walk with that sense of going back in time. This is a way of allowing your unconscious mind come up with 'answers'. And when you have gone back as far as you wish, you can return by walking back up to the present bringing these memories with you. No surprise that we call this process the Treasure Chest as it is a way of discovering many of the treasures that you have within.

That process just described is a good first introduction to walking the Timeline as it is such a positive experience in the sense of bringing up good memories. And the Timeline can be used in many other ways. You might be beginning to realize what these might be. And just in summary – a very powerful process for unlocking limiting beliefs that might have been formed in childhood, for example, is to go back to the moment or moments when that belief was formed. This often involves other people who may have been well intentioned or not at the time but the way that you made sense of what happened was to form a belief about yourself and others.

A delegate on a recent programme (a remarkably talented linguist and English student who asked a lot of questions – very interesting questions in my opinion) had been told as a child that she was weird and she should keep her mouth closed, especially in the company of others. Can you imagine! But you know these terrible kinds of descriptions

and orders are not unusual once we start to explore limiting beliefs. So, she had formed this limiting belief and had more or less shut herself away for years.

And the point is that a belief, limiting or otherwise, has a structure to it. It is a combination of thoughts, ways of representing memories of a moment or moments, and imagination that makes it what it is. What happened happened, but what affects us is the way in which we represent the memory. And so, by going back down our Timeline, we can discover first of all where the belief that is the source of what presumably is a not OK feeling was formed. And that can be a discovery in itself. It is not always where or when we first think it was formed. And once back at that point in time on the Timeline we can restructure the belief by changing the way that we 'code' it and the way that we represent it. There is a demonstration of this on my website (www.sueknight.com). And even just knowing this is possible, you might start to play with what you can do with the way you are holding any limiting beliefs.

During my training programme the delegate I mentioned above reprogrammed her belief (with some coaching) and realized that she could trust people (keeping her cautionary antennae out nevertheless) and that she might now be open to having a relationship (which she had not allowed herself before). She realized by putting herself in her parents' shoes that their intentions might have been to protect her, not to humiliate her. They were concerned that she might get judged and hurt by others. The irony was that it was they in their comments and advice who had inadvertently done the judging and hurting. Just by realizing this and imagining this, she let go of the negative self-image she had formed of herself.

Similarly, another delegate learned to believe what people had been telling her for years (though it was not what she had been led to believe when she was younger), that she was beautiful through and through. She was in

tears when she realized this. And subsequently, when discussing her learning with one of her friends who had told her often how beautiful she was, she revealed that whenever her friend had said this she just thought that she was just saying that and not that she really meant it. Now she knows her friend really meant it!

Summary

Time is not a thing, yet it is something by which we are inevitably affected. Flowers bloom in the summertime. We sleep at night. Even when deprived of any daylight, we default to a wake-and-sleep pattern that approaches 24 hours. And we as human beings seek to control time in ways that no other creature on earth does or can.

So time can be what we make of it. There are many ways to explore time and to change the way that we represent it, so that to an extent we become masters of our own time. Ultimately, though, we are its servants.

Frank Farrelly, in his Provocative Coaching sessions, would often ask the question, ‘How many good years do you think you have left?’ However many you said he would find a way of cutting the number down! The point was that being aware of the time we have and what we do with it means that we can leave this world knowing we have made the best use of whatever time we have had. We can’t do much better than that!

Thought provokers

- 1 Take some time at the end of a day. Reflect on what your relationship with time has been for that day. Is it what you would have wished? If so, what belief underpinned your day? If not, what belief underpinned your day and what belief might you choose to hold on to instead for tomorrow?
- 2 Think of someone with whom you have issues about time. For example, is there someone whose relationship to time

frustrates you in some way? Knowing what you know now having read this chapter, how do you think that they have coded time? In what way do you think their belief about time might be different from your own?

- 3 What would you describe as the best time of your life? What was it about the way that you approached that time that made it the best?

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One day a fisherman was lying on a beautiful beach, with his fishing pole propped up in the sand and his solitary line cast out into the sparkling blue surf. He was enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun and the prospect of catching a fish.

About that time, a businessman came walking down the beach, trying to relieve some of the stress of his workday. He noticed the fisherman sitting on the beach and decided to find out why he was fishing instead of working harder to make a living for himself and his family.

‘You aren’t going to catch many fish that way,’ said the businessman to the fisherman. ‘You should be working rather than lying on the beach!’

The fisherman looked up at the businessman, smiled and replied, ‘And what will my reward be?’

‘Well, you can get bigger nets and catch more fish!’ was the businessman’s answer.

‘And then what will my reward be?’ asked the fisherman, still smiling.

The businessman replied, 'You will make money and you'll be able to buy a boat, which will then result in larger catches of fish.'

'And then what will my reward be?' asked the fisherman again.

The businessman was beginning to get a little irritated with the fisherman's questions. 'You can buy a bigger boat, and hire some people to work for you,' he said.

'And then what will my reward be?' repeated the fisherman.

The businessman was getting angry. 'Don't you understand? You can build up a fleet of fishing boats, sail all over the world, and let all your employees catch fish for you!'

Once again the fisherman asked, 'And then what will my reward be?'

The businessman was red with rage and shouted at the fisherman, 'Don't you understand that you can become so rich that you will never have to work for your living again! You can spend all the rest of your days sitting on this beach, looking at the sunset. You won't have a care in the world!'

The fisherman, still smiling, looked up and said, 'And what do you think I'm doing right now?'

| Part III

Lead with NLP

Perhaps love is the process of leading you gently back to yourself.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The world has never been in greater need of true leaders. I wrote that for the Third Edition and here we are in a world with ever more seismic changes both in terms of climate and political leadership. For many of us, it is scary to witness the political changes which seem to be moving towards the extreme right and a desire for boundaries, racism and worse. In a state of shock, people look for someone to follow. The question is: are you a follower or a leader? We are all potentially leaders, especially given our access to social media, which is already being used in such politically different ways from the one with which the internet started out. Talking and complaining are not leadership. If we want to improve the systems of which we are a part, it is time to act and to find the leader within. This is what all of the processes here are designed to do. They are derived from people who manage themselves, who have found their own truth and a way of expressing that influences those around them and beyond. It has never been more important. When I first learned NLP over 30 years ago I had no idea how critical all of this would become for the very survival of 'human' human beings.

You are brilliant and the earth is hiring.

Paul Hawken

Great leaders are also great followers. And great leaders first learn to lead themselves. 'Lead with NLP' is the last part of this book for that very reason. It is tempting to want to just apply these skills to other people, but that is not the way they work – they work only because you are applying them to yourself. Make it a goal to be such an attractive example of what you have done with NLP for yourself that others want some of the same. That is the measure of success.

You can preach a better sermon with your life than you can with your lips.

Oliver Goldsmith

One of the most important skills discovered in people who are models of excellence is their ability to influence and bring about change in ways that are far-reaching and sustainable over time. There is one common element in all their approaches: their ability to build immediate rapport with the people with whom they are working. Without rapport, few management systems will work. If you think you can get by with technical skills alone, you are wrong. You need cooperation, commitment and respect to stand a chance of succeeding in anything you do. In [Chapter 18](#), Develop a climate of trust: Rapport, I explore how to build and maintain rapport with the people with whom we come into contact face to face, in writing, and on the web.

Develop a climate of trust with rapport

Negotiate your way through life with perceptual positions

All elements of NLP are complementary. Each adds another piece to the jigsaw of excellence. A more recent development in NLP thinking is experiencing situations from different perspectives in order to find a win/win – explained in [Chapter 19](#), Negotiate your way through life: Perceptual positions. This approach complements outcome thinking and is a way of taking a balanced approach to situations and outcomes. Those who are most able to negotiate conflicts in work and life have the ability to appreciate situations from different perspectives. And, boy, do we need this in the world right now!

Resolving conflict with parts integration

[Chapter 20](#), Resolving conflict: Parts integration, covers a topic that has long been a part of the preliminary training I offer in NLP. It would be good to think that conflict would not exist if you put all the other principles into practice, but that would be unrealistic. Conflict also plays an important role in our lives: through it we can

learn, heal and grow in ways that don't occur in other contexts. This chapter shows how to learn to deal with conflicts in your life – resolve the conflict within to resolve the conflict without.

Giving and receiving feedback

Giving and receiving feedback is becoming so important that it warrants a chapter to itself, [Chapter 21](#). NLP is about how we elicit feedback from our minds, our language and our behaviour, and the ways we use these together to achieve outstanding performance. And it is about continually testing to see how our discoveries work and continue to work. Nothing is static: we depend on feedback to maintain excellence. This is an important chapter; I encourage you to read and reread it, but above all to *do* it.

High-performance coaching

Closely linked to our ability to give and receive feedback is our ability to coach ourselves and others. [Chapter 22](#), High-performance coaching, is what all of this book is about in a nutshell. We need to know how to coach ourselves and others if we want to grow our potential as individuals, as teams and as organizations. And we need to know these skills if we want to grow our relationships, our marriages, our families and our communities. Coaching is about learning, and learning is about life. I have found NLP-based coaching to be life giving; I wish the same for you. Coaching is a very hackneyed term and can mean many things – I have updated this chapter to highlight what in my opinion makes NLP-based coaching so very, very special ... and so powerful.

And, finally, [Chapter 23](#), Coaching with humour (Provocative Coaching), covers one of those topics that is so obviously important that we often overlook it. Sadly, Frank Farrelly died in the time between writing this chapter and this new edition, and I am beginning to think that he has inhabited me since his parting from this world in the sense that the provocative style is so characteristic of the way that I work. And I continue to learn so much about what it means to use this style in a way that inspires and provokes truth

and learning. I think age is a factor, too, in that somehow it seems easier to be provocative the older I get!

I leaned forward and chose the wrong direction (apparently you go for the opposite side to the side on which French people drive – so left first!). And by making the wrong decision I got this elderly and mischievous neighbour on the mouth – aaargh! He did start to bring round regular supplies of eggs from his chickens after that, though! And then I accidentally called him *mignon* (cute) rather than *gentil* (kind). It is a wonder he didn't give me the chickens as well!

The idea of *la bise* is to air-kiss cheek to cheek but not actually touch. It is an artform. Even the French can't tell you exactly where and when and how many kisses! This is a training ground for sensitivity and flexibility. I should have noticed which way this guy was going and immediately switched and changed direction (a bit like driving in Indian traffic). Not only had I given this guy a smacker on the lips but even when I subsequently did it in a way that I thought was correct, apparently, so I was told later, I did *la bise* too close to the lips, suggesting that I really fancied him (*oh là là!*).

So it seems I had positioned myself as being more than a little bit interested in him (which I wasn't at all!). Then I noticed when I was close enough that some people make a noise when they air-kiss as if they were ... Just how complicated can this get?! Very, it seems! So, yes, you make a noise like a kiss, even though you're not, if you see what I mean. *Mwah* – first cheek. *Mwah* – second cheek, and then there might be the need for a third or a fourth. The local farmer invariably went for four, but I soon gathered by the look on his wife's face that this was more than was required! I subsequently used all sorts of ducking and diving to

avoid the fourth and sometimes even the third! But wait for it ... only the woman makes the *mwah* noise!! So, if nothing else, NLP will enable you to study the local etiquette such that you are not labelled as either the local fun girl, if you know what I mean, or the standoffish Britisher or whatever nationality you might be!

18 Develop a climate of trust: Rapport

Let the waters settle and you will see the moon and stars mirrored in your own being.

Rumi

We have seen the emergence of some extreme politics in recent years; politics that appears on the surface to be autocratic and controlling, and indeed it is. However, the means by which many politicians get into power is by appearing to voice the concerns of the part of the population that feels it has not been heard. Facts and truth can appear to go by the wayside – a seeming connection with and understanding of the previously ‘unheard’ are all that is needed.

In revisiting the Third Edition and updating in the light of changes in the world and in my learning, I realize to what degree power – and the way that power and influence manifest themselves – has shifted in that time. Now we are seeing the effects of building rapport – that is, connecting with people on a global scale. So that, even in a world where boundaries and borders are being reinstated, there are many examples where boundaries are being totally eclipsed via online communities connected by rapport.

Rapport is the ability to connect with others in a way that creates a climate of trust and understanding. It is also the ability to appreciate one another’s point of view (though not always to agree with it), to be on the same wavelength, and to understand and accept one another’s feelings. Rapport is essential for any form of communication to take place – unless, of course, you don’t want to make progress!

Rapport creates a climate of trust and understanding

I guarantee that most of your customers choose you because of the level of rapport you have with them. And, more significantly, the customers you keep when things go awry are the ones with whom you have this kind of relationship. You are more likely to buy from, agree with, support and stay with someone to whom you feel connected than you are when this isn't the case. Likewise, hospital patients who build rapport with the nursing staff or carers have a greater statistical chance of recovery as a result of the superior care they get in return.

You can build rapport face to face, over the phone, via email, through text messages, through letters, or just in your imagination. And you can build rapport over time, shortly after you have met, instantly on meeting, or in advance of even making someone's acquaintance. No matter what the circumstances or who the people are with whom you want to build rapport, it is without doubt the quality of the rapport that makes the difference.

Near to my home in France is a restaurant, which when I moved into the area was owned by an English couple. I had determined that I would not become part of the English community in this part of France but rather part of the French community as far as the locals would allow it. So I avoided this restaurant – after all, why go to an English restaurant when I could do that back in England? However, one day I called there just for a drink and the way I was greeted was such that I felt my resolve soften. I could not avoid feeling welcome and well cared for, even though the service was not over-attentive. I decided to go back, such was the subtle influence of the relationship that was built in those few moments.

I learned subsequently that the owners' approach had won the hearts of the local French people who also frequented the bar and the restaurant. I became a regular customer. Imagine my disappointment, then, to discover that this couple decided to sell the restaurant, which was now a thriving business throughout the year. The new

owner took over. He inherited an immense amount of goodwill and regular trade – and within six months he had lost it all. Nothing much had changed about the restaurant itself, and the food was still good. However, this owner did not relate to the French customers and gave no impression of building rapport. This once-flourishing restaurant is now closed most nights of the week and is rumoured to be up for sale again.

The skills involved in building and maintaining rapport were some of the earliest to be discovered with NLP, and they have become essential to the networking economy. The people who were chosen as models of excellence, particularly in situations of influence or change, demonstrated that rapport is one of the most important factors needed for change to take place.

Power, as Bertrand Russell describes it, is the ability to produce intended effects. As one of the beliefs of excellence states: the meaning of the communication is the effect. We have so many possibilities in how we can influence with the rise of social media. This power is now in all our hands. Nothing depends on qualifications – just vision and hard work.

If you think building rapport is just about matching people's behaviour, then think again. The skill of building and maintaining rapport goes well beyond the level of body language. Rapport involves not only relating to people face to face but also remotely, by appealing to their style of communication, their expectations and their unspoken needs. This is how the power of influence is shifting in the world. Campaigns such as the #metoo campaign and the #icebucket challenge are examples of the scale to which the population of the world can be influenced to act in very specific ways.

The skill of rapport goes well beyond body language

One of my clients received this email:

Jane,

Have been looking further at the issue of your company's fees – which, as you know, we are very concerned about. Your day rates not only equal those of the parent company but my investigations among my contacts have shown that they have increased exponentially in the last two years. I attach a comparison of your fees today compared with those charged in a previous proposal that you did for us a year earlier. Can you please justify to me:

- 1 Why you feel you can charge the same rates as the parent company?*
- 2 Why there has been such a movement upwards in fees over the last two years, please?*

I feel very concerned about this. Thanks.

Wendy Smith

My client emailed back as follows:

Wendy,

I have discussed the issues that you have raised with our parent company and internally with our fee department regarding company X. Please find attached a detailed explanation on both of the points that you have mentioned, which I hope will serve to clarify our position on rates and illustrate that our rate increases are actually quite different from those you have indicated. Once you have had a chance to read this through, I think it might be sensible for us to speak or even meet up to discuss the next stage.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Jane

To this (not surprisingly, once you understand the principles of rapport), Wendy gave the following reply:

Thanks for the email which I read with interest; however, I still feel that my questions are not fully answered ... May I suggest that I meet with you at your office to clarify the matter of the fee rates so that I can be reassured that the fees do fit for the work that you are proposing. Wendy

How would you have replied? Could you have found a way of replying that would have avoided the need for a meeting? We will come back to this email at the end of the chapter and see what Jane did eventually send after we had a session on rapport building.

Many people think that rapport is chatting about the weather

It is as important to know what rapport is *not* as it is to know what it is. Many people think that rapport is chatting about the weather, the family and the like. It may be, but only if the people you are talking to experience that as rapport. If not, then to chat about these things might have completely the opposite effect of rapport. If you are with someone who is aggressive, then, although you may not want to be aggressive, you would certainly want to match the strength of their style in some way. There are some clues later in this chapter on how to do this.

Rapport is about connecting

Rapport is not about passing the time of day. Rapport is about joining people where they are in their style so that you connect with them in a way that supports all future communication. Rapport may be as much about being hard in your approach to someone as it is about being soft. And rapport is not about accepting what anyone

says or does. In fact, by creating an environment of rapport you create the climate to discuss and influence those things that do present problems between you and others.

How to build and maintain rapport

Think of someone with whom you feel you have good rapport. What is true about your contact with them that isn't true for others? If you are in the company of other people, look around you. What would you say is your level of rapport with the people you see? Have you checked this out? What do you think your colleagues would say about the quality of rapport you have with them?

Consider some of the written communication you have with others. Who do you find it easy to communicate with? What is it about their style that you like? And whose communication do you find challenging? What is it about them and the way they communicate that you have found harder to relate to? If you are tempted to gloss over this question, take care – you might be missing the very thing that will make a huge positive difference for you.

Pay attention to the physical mannerisms of the people around you. People in rapport typically adopt the same posture, move and gesture in similar ways, laugh together, adopt the same style and rhythm in movement and speech. They 'match' each other. This happens naturally when two or more people are in rapport. They almost certainly aren't consciously aware of it happening. The result is that their thinking and feelings are similar.

People like people who are like themselves

How is your behaviour similar to that of those around you now? Or not? Have you ever had that uncanny experience of having someone say exactly what you were thinking, or finding that you know exactly what someone else is feeling? When you adopt the same body language as someone else, you create the likelihood that you are engaging the same thinking and feeling circuits. So even if you

are not thinking the same thing, you are very likely going to be thinking and feeling in the same way.

One of the core beliefs consistently held by people chosen as models of excellence in much of the research in NLP is:

Mind and body are part of the same system. What occurs in one part will affect all the other parts.

By modelling people who have deep levels of rapport, we discover that they adopt the same or a similar style of:

- posture
- movement and gestures
- breathing levels
- voice tone and quality
- language content: visual/auditory/feelings, and key words.



They also hold similar or, in some cases, identical:

- beliefs
- values
- sense of identity
- purpose in work and life.

When people demonstrate a similarity in any of these, we say that they are matching that characteristic.

And people with this rapport have the ability to tap into the truth of where others are and relate to that. Rapport can be one-on-one, group-based and worldwide. There are some who, through their very nature and ability to connect into what is important, have rapport with thousands, millions, of people around the globe.

Today we have the capacity to make films, friends, or money to spread hype or spread our ideas; to build community or build up movements; to spread misinformation or propagate violence – all on a vastly greater scale and with greater potential impact than we did even a few years ago.

I recently met with a financial adviser. He was late for the meeting and insisted that he had said between two thirty and three and not two thirty precisely, which was my understanding. He squeezed his large car through my gates and commented that I would need to get those widened if he was going to be calling here again frequently in the future! I asked where he would like to have the meeting (in my home) – inside or outside. ‘Inside,’ he replied curtly. He made no small talk whatsoever (I’m not a fan of small talk but this was extreme). He didn’t comment on the coffee I brought nor my home. He eventually asked questions about me (because he had to – to complete the questionnaire), but otherwise he spoke only about his company and himself. He did eventually ask about my profession, and I told him in summary and he became uneasy and commented that I was probably noticing his behaviour. I confirmed that I was! He said I could probably give him some feedback on his poor listening skills! ‘Yes,’ I replied. He then proceeded to tell me of a big contract he had just lost. He followed that by telling me how destroyed he had been by his divorce from his first wife and how he subsequently held back in his current marriage. ‘But she doesn’t know I do,’ he said. ‘She probably does,’ I commented. Needless to say, I am looking for another adviser!

Rapport is essential for any meaningful communication to take place. You need rapport to be able to conduct a productive conversation, to engage someone's attention with a message, to run an effective meeting, or to expect others to follow your lead and want to buy into your sense of direction. Without rapport, very little communication of value will occur.

Just because you are making a noise in my direction, don't think you are communicating.

David Gordon

The skills are most needed when rapport does not occur naturally

So what happens when this connection doesn't occur naturally? This is when your skill of rapport building is most needed. The real test is whether you can build rapport when it is not returned in kind by the people with whom you are dealing. Let's explore the characteristics of people who do this.

Skilful communicators build rapport by:

- seeking to connect with everyone with whom they come into contact in a way that demonstrates respect for difference – they respect the beliefs, values and styles of others even though these may be different from their own
- being aware of the degree to which they are similar (or not) in any of the following, recognizing that significant dissimilarity probably indicates lack of rapport:

posture – position of the body, position of the legs and feet, weight distribution; position of the arms, hands or fingers; shoulder tension or relaxation; inclination of the head

expression – direction of the look; movement of the gaze

breathing – rate of breathing; position of the breathing, in the chest, abdomen or low stomach

movement – signature rhythm (overall tempo of movement), fast, steady, slow or still voice – pace, volume, pitch, tone, type of words, intonation

language – visual, auditory, feelings patterns.

The more you can subtly get into the style of the person or people with whom you are communicating, the more you will begin to understand what their motives might be, and what attitudes, values, beliefs and feelings they must hold in order to act in the way that they do.

A friend was describing the head of the organization in which she works and the influence that the various leaders have in that organization. One leader in particular who had a lot to contribute to meetings in terms of current knowledge and expertise would, however, enter the office wearing headphones and with his head down, making no contact with anyone he passed. The consequence was that he had little rapport with the staff and his 'brilliant' ideas were lost. My friend had realized, though, that his lack of contact was not because of my kind of wish to disconnect but as a result of shyness and lack of confidence.

In written or online communications, too, be aware of:

- words used
- senses preferred
- values highlighted
- chunk size
- sequence of the communication (e.g. big picture first, details later)
- problem or desired state orientation
- use of time during and between communication
- passive or active language.
- use of metaphor or precise language.

This can be a long list to attempt to work on at one time. Some of these may come naturally to you. Choose one of the less natural ones and practise that until you can do it automatically.

Choose occasions to practise matching when you are an observer and do not have to engage in conversation. Using your written communication with someone is a good place to start, as you have time to analyse what they are saying and how they are saying it. You also then have the time to match your response to take into account their preferences.

Good rapport can often be silence

I closed my mouth and spoke to you in a hundred silent ways.

Rumi

Be prepared for the consequences. One of my friends who sat silently matching the behaviour of a manager who was engaged in conversation with a colleague was taken by surprise when the manager turned to my friend and said, 'I'd really like to know what you think.' It's interesting what happens when you actively demonstrate rapport, silent or otherwise!

Rapport as a form of influence

Rapport is influence. As you communicate you engage in a system. The higher the level of rapport that exists between you, the greater the positive influence you have on each other.

Rapport is influence

This usually doesn't require much conscious attention. When you have rapport you know it: you feel at ease in the other person's company, conversation flows, and equally silence is comfortable. What occurs is like a dance: as one moves, the other follows. It is impossible to tell who leads and who follows. Conversation flows as you understand the meaning and intention of what the other person says. You appreciate and respect each other's feelings. It does not mean that you necessarily agree with everything the other person is saying, but you understand what they say and why they say it.

Rapport on a global scale is often measured by number of followers or likes. At the time of writing this edition, Tim Karsliyev, founder of *Daily Dose*, has a 200-plus million network on Instagram that can reach one out of four people using Instagram. Today, *Daily Dose* is one of the biggest (and first) motivational accounts on Instagram. *Daily Dose* spreads influential messages that reach millions daily. He created *Daily Dose* because he believes we have a

duty to act – not talk, not think, not imagine, but to step up and make a real difference.

Pacing is the next step. You can test the rapport by shifting the style of the communication. For example, if the other person seems ‘stuck’ in a problem state and you feel that the desired state would be a more productive place to be, you might test the willingness to move by making small steps in that direction. If the other person shifts with you, you probably have rapport and therefore influence. If not, you need to invest some more into matching where they are right now.

When you match and pace, you create an environment in which you can lead. This constitutes influence.

Examples of how and when you might want to use rapport to lead and influence are:

- in a discussion or interview with someone who is nervous or hesitant, to help them to relax and open up
- when you want to attract potential customers to your company, either by face-to-face contact or remotely
- when you want to introduce new ways of working to an individual or department that has become fixed in their thinking
- when you want to encourage people to give you good support, service or care
- when someone is angry, to help them calm down
- when someone is worried and tense, to help them relax
- when you want to teach a new concept, by relating to what people know already.

Below are some examples of this kind of influence in conversation:

- ‘I can picture the new system that we want to develop.’
- ‘So when you see this system and imagine what it looks like, what are you saying to yourself?’
- ‘I feel uncertain about the customer presentation this afternoon.’

- ‘I can understand that you feel uncertain. How would you like to feel?’
- ‘My colleagues told me that they really valued the ideas I put forward at the meeting.’
- ‘I can understand that – I value the ideas that you put forward, too. What did you feel about them?’

I recently received a text message from one of my friends in the following style:

*Can you ring me wen u get bak I need 2 ask u a favour about
nxt wk – Ta!*

It would be inappropriate to send an eloquent, enriched-language message back! It would be much more on the same wavelength to say:

Will do c u soon I hope 2 – Luv S

The same principles apply on a bigger scale. For example, it is crucial to ensure that new systems match the style and culture of a company. The concept of ‘match, pace, lead’ works at every level, not only between individuals but when introducing any new element to a system. It is important that any system you introduce fits with what you already have.

I’ve sometimes seen small, informal organizations attempt to ‘bolt on’ more formal appraisal systems that belong to a much larger, more bureaucratic organization. One of the simplest and most effective appraisal systems asked only four questions:

- 1 What are your goals?
- 2 How well did you do?
- 3 What skills would help you develop further?
- 4 What actions shall we commit to?

This was successful because the style matched the informality and openness of the company in which it was introduced.

Similarly, it is important to ensure that rapport exists between managers and jobholders. To continue with the subject of appraisal, for a jobholder to accept feedback from his or her manager and vice versa, there needs to be rapport. With rapport the appraisal will find its own style and form. Appraisal is about learning and development; it is a vehicle that provides the stimulus for continuous improvement.

Matching and pacing values in negotiation

Achieving a state of rapport is the most important outcome at the beginning of a negotiation. From then on, it is important to ensure that you maintain that rapport throughout. Without rapport you have no negotiation. If at any time you lose rapport, rebuild it, and only continue on to anything else of import when you have restored it. When you have rapport, the structure of the negotiation suggests itself. The process of what is happening determines the content.

Genuine commitment to a solution will exist only if it is built on the values of each of the parties involved. Values are the principles by which we live and are core to who we are as people. A partnership, a relationship, a team and a company unite typically because they share common values. People are attracted to us because of the values we communicate.

It is not enough just to think about the values of the other party. Respecting and pacing values is a way of building a deep level of rapport. Without this, any other attempts to match and pace are superficial and temporary. Identifying and pacing values are therefore crucial to skilled negotiation. There are different ways to do this. For example, if someone holds the value of security, they will look for a solution to the negotiation that satisfies this value, but they will also want the negotiation to be conducted in a way that respects their need for security. They may, for example, want the points to be presented in a non-threatening way. If someone's value is fun, it is possible that they will want their representation of fun to

be present both in the way the ideas are put to them and in the solution.

Commitment is built on values

Your partner in a negotiation will be evaluating you and the way you present yourself, the venue of the negotiation and the ideas you discuss, among many other things. They evaluate these things against their own values. If they judge a person by their ability to listen, they will be judging you by the way they recognize this. And, even more significantly, they will have a unique way of knowing how each of their values has been met. They know this by a set of rules and standards that constitute their evidence of fulfilment.

Communicators who are considered to be excellent in their ability to achieve understanding and influence are people who can match, pace and lead the other person's values. They identify what conditions have to be true for those values to be satisfied. They operate from the belief that each person is unique.

Each person is unique

Learning the unique indications that have to be present for someone to feel that their values are respected and fulfilled is one of the most sophisticated skills you can develop to negotiate your way through life. The evidence of fulfilment for each of the following values could be as outlined in the following table (they will be different and unique for everyone):

Value	Evidence of fulfilment
Openness	A willingness to express feelings. Someone who is prepared to state their views before others state theirs. Someone who talks about what is happening in their personal life as well as in their business life.
Security	An acceptance of solutions to problems

Creativity	that have been tried and tested and shown to work in other situations. The ability to express ideas without having them ignored or dismissed.
Listening	Agreements and ideas that haven't been applied before. People who can think laterally and who can provide a new way of thinking about existing situations. Someone who doesn't interrupt, who is curious about what is being said and who asks clarification questions. Someone who leans forward and maintains eye contact for the majority of the time someone else is speaking.

To find out values, watch and listen

To find out someone's values, watch and listen. Pay attention to what excites them and what changes their state to one of interest and curiosity. To what do they pay attention? If they are constantly looking at their watch and want to get on with discussions straight away, you may find that attention to time and to the way time is used are important to them. The more you develop your sensory acuity, your awareness to notice even the smallest of changes in the person with whom you are dealing, the more you will begin to be able to determine when their state changes. Eventually you will be able to 'calibrate' these different patterns of behaviour to the different states so that you know what state each outward sign symbolizes for your partner.

You can learn to calibrate changes in behaviour

One of the surest ways of knowing that you have touched on someone's values will be a skin colour change. If you make a proposal that meets the values and evidence of fulfilment for the other person, they are very likely to blush. By matching and pacing your partner's values and their evidence of fulfilment, you are

building a deep level of rapport. Understanding your own values is a way of beginning to understand those of others.

Whole-body listening

People who listen with care and skill are still in the minority. The people who have this ability are usually those who generate immense respect and influence. And we usually find that rapport is a major component of their ability to listen.

When you listen with rapport you are listening with your whole body. Not only do you hear what the other person is saying, you also gain insights into what they are thinking and feeling. Your non-verbal behaviour influences the interaction more than anything else you do. Whole-body listening can be the trigger that influences someone to gain insight, to find their own solutions, and to generate commitment to those solutions.

Contrast someone whose attention is internal, on themselves, with someone who is listening with their whole body:

People whose attention is internal	People who are listening with their whole body
They think about themselves, make evaluations and judgments. They worry about and concentrate on what just happened, what was just said, or even what might happen next. They get distracted.	They are in a state of curiosity. Their attention is entirely on the other person.
Their intention is self-oriented.	Their intention is towards the other person.
Their gaze is defocused or	Their gaze is on the

distracted.	other person, looking away occasionally to process what the other person is saying.
Their body posture is independent of what the other person is doing or saying.	They match the other person's posture.
Their language is 'I' and 'me'- centred. They make statements and often express beliefs as facts. They will bring conversations back to themselves.	Their language is 'you'-centred and they use key words and language patterns that match the person they are speaking to. They predominantly ask open questions.

Whole-body listening means being able to give all of your attention to someone else. Some textbooks on listening advise you to make eye contact. You can probably remember those situations when, although someone was looking at you, you knew that their mind and spirit were somewhere else entirely! Eye contact alone is no proof of listening. NLP provides the techniques to enable you to listen with your whole body. Rapport is a demonstration of whole-body listening.

Everything someone says and does will give you some information about their values. They will tell you some explicitly and some may be unknown to them, but they are there. You have only to look and listen.

I want to talk to you about doing some design work for us. We've worked with one company for a long time now, but they seem to be getting behind the times with their ideas. We've got less time to spend on this than we had in the past, so we want a company who is going to take the initiative to find out what they need to give us what we want. We don't have a lot of time

and I'd appreciate you telling me whether you genuinely can work in this way with us.

Let's say that the values of the speaker in the passage above are:

- effective use of time
- openness and honesty
- up-to-date ideas
- initiative.

The depth of the rapport you build will depend on your ability to match these values in what you say and what you do. If you start to ramble in the way you respond, and if you wait to be asked the next question, you probably won't be very successful.

If, on the other hand, you answer concisely and openly, telling the other person frankly what you can and cannot do, and if you take the lead in asking questions, then you will probably make good progress. This will only ring true, however, if they are values that you also hold.

At one of our open evenings I was talking to a manager of a computer call centre. He was explaining the problems they had been having with their computer system. He also explained that when he raised these problems with the software suppliers they poured people on to the site. I also happen to know the software suppliers, and I know that when they did that they believed they were satisfying the customer's needs. They didn't have a surplus of staff, so it was a big decision to put so much resource into one place. How sad, then, that it wasn't what the customer wanted! They had made a judgment about what to do based on their own values and evidence of fulfilment for customer satisfaction, not those of the client.

What was in fact important to the customer was personal one-to-one reassurance: not only that the current bugs in the system would be fixed but explanations of what the

supplier was doing to prevent any similar bugs appearing in the system in the future.

Everyone has their own way of satisfying their needs, their evidence of fulfilment. It is crucial to know your customers' criteria for fulfilment and to find ways of meeting this if you want to succeed in business.

What would have to be true for you?

Ask your customers the most important question of all: 'What would have to be true for you to want me to be your main supplier for the future?' Then sit back and listen. You will learn some of the most valuable information for meeting your customers' needs that you will ever need to know.

That email

Have you come to any conclusions about what didn't work and what might work better with the email at the beginning of this chapter?

My client realized that her response to the original email had been predominantly auditory when her client's email was visual and feelings based. In particular, the client was saying (covertly) that her feelings were not being acknowledged, and that was true – in the communication they weren't.

The consequence of this was that when Jane replied she matched not only the sensory preferences but also the sequence in which she used them, so that they matched the sequence her client had used in her email. They did subsequently have a meeting in which Jane addressed and explored Wendy's feelings. Previously, she had assumed that because Wendy was in the purchasing department it would be inappropriate to bring feelings into their communication (despite all the clues in the emails). The consequence was that both parties said they had the most productive meeting they had ever had and they reached full agreement on fees and a way forward.

Shortcut to building rapport

Before any contact with the other person:

- 1 Choose the person or group of people with whom you would like to enhance the rapport you have or expect to have.
- 2 Imagine yourself having the kind of rapport with them that you would really like.
- 3 Imagine yourself being connected to them in a way that fully respects who they are.

During contact with them (whether that is face to face or online):

- 4 Pay attention to *how* they communicate as much as, if not more than, to *what* they communicate.
- 5 What is significant about their:
 - a behaviour?
 - b language?
 - c body language?Pick one of the above to concentrate on. Even if you have never met them in person, imagine what is likely to be characteristic for them.
- 6 Match the element you have chosen.
- 7 By being similar to this person, what do you detect as being important to them? For example time, silence, integrity, immediacy, innovation, decisiveness, action, strategic thinking, acknowledgment of feelings, sense preference (visual/auditory/feelings).
- 8 How do you/can you respect this aspect that is important to them?
- 9 Monitor how the connection between you strengthens.
- 10 What else can you do to build the rapport even further?

After the interaction:

- 11 How would you evaluate the strength of the connection between you?
- 12 What made a difference?

13 What else could you have done/could you do in future interactions?

Summary

Rapport is a vital life skill. Through your ability to build rapport, you can help other people feel at ease in your company and confident in what you offer – they choose to be with you/connect with you because you show you understand what is important to them. People relate to you and the services you offer because they feel you are sympathetic to their needs. Even if you are not technically perfect, the rapport you have with the people with whom you live and work determines the lasting nature of the relationship. By building rapport you build trust and understanding.

Thought provokers

- 1 The next time you are in the company of others, pay attention to the elements we have covered in this chapter. Notice their posture and their movements. Listen to their voices and the words they use. Identify which people seem to be most in rapport with each other. What similarities are there in these elements?
- 2 Seek out the company of two people you know who have excellent rapport with each other. What do you see and hear them doing and saying that is similar?
- 3 Choose one element per day, for example head movement, voice tone, body position. Pay attention to that element for each person you meet.
- 4 Ask a friend to engage in conversation with you. Notice each time your attention changes from external to internal.
- 5 Choose two pieces of written or online communication that you have created recently. To what extent did you consider what was important to the other person/people when you sent them? If you had paid more attention to their values and

their style of communicating, how might you now change this communication?

- 6 How would you rate the attention you pay to the rapport you have with:
- a your boss?
 - b your key client?
 - c a significant member of your team?
 - d each of your children (if you have any)? If it differs, what is that you do differently with each?
 - e your life partner?
 - f your parents?
 - g your suppliers?
 - h three people you came into contact with when you last left your home?
 - i three people you expect to meet up with when you next leave your place of work?
- 7 Is there an online audience that you wish to influence? What characterizes their style, preferences and values? Who else successfully appeals to this audience? What style do they use? How does their style match your own? What style can you choose to explore that is authentic for you and matches the style that works for the audience you want?
- 8 On any online sites that you wish to employ, whom do you follow? Whom do you admire? Who are your models of excellence? How might you adopt all or aspects of these styles?

References

Jeremy Heimans & Henry Timms (2018), *New Power: Why Outsiders are Winning, Institutions are Failing, and How the Rest of Us Can Keep up in the Age of Mass Participation*, Macmillan.

Many years ago in the hills of Patagonia there was a village. Its inhabitants were starving. They lived in fear of a dragon that they had seen in their fields and they would not go to harvest their crops.

One day a traveller came to the village and asked for food. They explained that there was none because they were afraid of the dragon. The traveller was brave and offered to slay the dragon. When he arrived at the fields he couldn't see a dragon, only a large watermelon. So he returned to the village and said, 'You have nothing to fear; there is no dragon, only a large watermelon.' The villagers were angry at his refusal to understand their fear and hacked the traveller to pieces.

Some weeks later another traveller came to the village. Again, when he asked for food he was told about the dragon. He too was brave and offered to kill the dragon. The villagers were relieved and delighted. When he arrived at the fields he also saw the giant watermelon and returned to the village to tell the villagers that they were mistaken about the dragon – they need have no fear of a giant watermelon. They hacked him to pieces.

More time passed and the villagers were becoming desperate. One day a third traveller appeared. He could see how desperate they were and asked what the problem was. They told him and he promised he would slay the dragon so that they could go to the fields to harvest their crops. When he got to the field he too saw the giant watermelon. He reflected for a moment, then he drew his sword, leaped into the field, and hacked the watermelon to pieces. He returned to the villagers and told them he had killed their dragon. They were overjoyed. The traveller stayed in the village for many months, long enough to teach the

villagers the difference between dragons and watermelons.

19 Negotiate your way through life: Perceptual positions

*O wad some power the giftie gie us, to see oursels as
others see us.*

Robert Burns

Have you ever wondered how it is that some people seem to be able to navigate their way through life achieving most of what they want and somehow supporting the people with whom they come into contact to do the same? Maybe you are one of those people. We can all do this to some extent, but there are some people who appear to be able to do it consistently. They seem to have some magic formula that enables them to transform just about every situation into one that has benefits for all involved.

Some people have a magic formula

If you are one of these people, even then it is unlikely that you consciously know exactly how you do this. You might be interested to compare what you know of your strategy with that of those who show a consistent excellence in their ability both to resolve conflicts and to make progress that is in the interests of all parties involved.

There are those who take a narrow view of the world

Travelling with one of my Indian colleagues we bought some water in plastic packs. As we approached his home he threw his empty pack on the ground. I was surprised,

particularly as were within the boundaries of the estate on which he lived and also because we had discussed the issue of litter in India and how it might be if everyone took personal responsibility for it. He had always been amazed and impressed by the cleanliness of the area in which I live in France. 'Who will pick that up?' I asked. He looked confused for a moment, then abashed, and then he replied 'Me' and turned round and retrieved the pack.

Too often today we are experiencing the fallout from those who take a narrow perspective on the world: for example countries who resist commitment to environmental protection treaties with the lame reason that they will be sacrificing jobs and raising unemployment. It is possible to learn how to:

- achieve what we really want in ways that enable others to do the same
- act in increasingly ecological ways that respect the bigger system of which we are a part
- tap increasingly into what is important to us and express it in ways so that others will listen
- learn and grow with every interaction we have, including those we might otherwise have classed as 'difficult'
- deal with people who we feel are regularly trying to block our path
- negotiate a win/win in situations that might otherwise be compromised
- empathize with others and yet not take on the burden of all their emotions
- learn from all experiences in ways that benefit us in all contexts of our life
- deal with situations as they arise, managing them in a way that is in everyone's best interests, and move on
- let go of resentment, anger, frustration and guilt
- increasingly move through work and life as a learning journey that becomes increasingly enriching with every step we take.

It really is quite simple and, of course, common sense – once we know how. This chapter presents some of the work done by John Grinder and Judith DeLozier to provide shortcuts to powerful techniques such as these. This is an example of what is sometimes referred to as New Code NLP. The strategy that John and Judith developed is a way of learning to take different perspectives on a situation in order to find balance in how we go forward to a solution. Because of this, the strategy for negotiation is often called ‘perceptual positions’. After all, the perceptual positions we take in our heads and in our physiology are what makes our life what it is.

Perceptual positions make our life what it is

Taking a balanced approach

John Grinder and Judith DeLozier modelled people who were skilled at negotiating a way forward that was a win for themselves and also a win for the person or people with whom they were negotiating and consequently respectful of the bigger system. They found that these people were able to experience a situation from many different perspectives, and that it was this mental agility that enabled them to gain the insights that provided the breakthrough. Not only did these people find ways to achieve a win/win, they also grew in their learning in life along the way.

We can benefit from the model that they derived from their exemplars.

The principle is that the more perspectives we can take on a situation, the more we have choice and understanding. And therefore the more likely we are to find a way to proceed and learn that is in everyone’s interest.

Some other principles apply here as well:

- **Every relationship is a perfect system.** What we get is what we allow, encourage and create. We might not like the system, even though it is perfect in the way we maintain it. And we can change it by changing ourselves. We are the only person in any

system that we can change, but in doing so we influence everyone else. It is just a matter of time to find the change that we can make in ourselves that influences the other person in a direction that is mutually rewarding.

- **Generic learning is available to us in all the situations we experience in life.** So we can take learning that not only benefits the immediate situation but all other contexts in our life, too.

Generic learning is available to us in all situations

There are three primary positions (you can take many more if you choose, but we will concentrate on three). I include below the description of what it means to take this position in your thinking and also some of the questions you can use if you are coaching someone else through the process.

Own shoes (1st position)

By putting ourselves in 1st position, we are able to connect with what is important to us personally. To do this we need to be able to see, hear and feel the situation from our own perspective (in our own shoes). In this position we think in terms of what it is like for me in this scenario. We speak using language such as ‘I feel’, ‘I want’, ‘I hear’, ‘I see’. We tap into the truth of our own perspective on the situation. This is a way of thinking that allows us to know what we really want. We can see and hear the other person (or people) and we experience them from our ‘map of the world’.

This might seem obvious at first reading yet it is so very easy (and I speak from personal experience) to lose touch with your own personal truth. If you live in a way that compromises yourself to please others, then it can become a habit and you can become disconnected from what you truly think and feel. The boiling frog is a fable describing a frog being slowly boiled alive. The premise is that, if a frog is put suddenly into boiling water, it will jump out, but

if the frog is put in tepid water which is then brought to a boil slowly, it will not perceive the danger and will be cooked to death.

Their shoes (2nd position)

By putting ourselves in 2nd position, we are able to experience the world/the situation as if we are that other. In this position we can discover what has to be true for them to be doing or saying what they are. It is quite different to 'put yourself' in the other person's shoes as opposed to 'thinking' about what it must be like to be in their shoes. By putting ourselves in the other person's shoes, we experience the situation as if we are them. We are able to imagine how it is to look out of their eyes and hear out of their ears and be in their body, such that we see, hear and feel the situation as if we are them. Of course, we can never absolutely do this, but it is amazing just how uncannily close we can get when we are skilled in this way of thinking.

You can experience the situation as if you are in the other person's shoes

When you are fully in the other person's shoes and have their perspective on the situation, you are able to understand their map of the world. No matter how bizarre someone's behaviour might have seemed from your own perspective, in their shoes it is normal and perfectly understandable. To put ourselves fully into the shoes of another person allows us to tap into the emotions behind what they are doing and saying. This is often a position of amazing insight about what is really going on for the other person in a situation.

Observer (3rd position)

In 3rd position you have the ability to stand back from a situation and experience it as if you are a detached observer. In your mind you are able to see and hear yourself and the other person as if you are a fly on the wall. You are unlikely to have emotions in this situation as you dissociate from what is happening. You may have

concern but not the emotions that you would have in either 1st or 2nd position.

This is a position of analysis and learning; in fact, it is the only place in which it is appropriate to do analysis. It is in this position that you can stand back and be aware of the dynamic that is going on between 1st and 2nd positions. You can be aware of how inextricably linked you and the other person are in the dynamic of what is happening. This is the position in which you can get the bigger picture, the systems view of what is going on. It is here that you can gain insights about what learning the other person is unconsciously offering you; not just learning about this specific scenario but learning at a much more generic level.

3rd position is one of analysis and learning

So if you have not been listening to someone, the learning is not just about what you can do with this specific person but how you might improve your ability to listen in all scenarios. Here is where you can identify how you can change to make a difference (and it is only you who can change!).

*A story's value lies in the space created by the relationship
between the teller and the listener.*
Anonymous

Where and when can we use this approach?

To fully experience what it is like to be in each of these positions, work through the shortcuts at the end of the chapter. The glib answer is to say everywhere and at all times. However, there is often a belief that these approaches work in face-to-face situations and nowhere else. This is far from the truth. This way of thinking can certainly benefit us face to face (and we can learn to do this in real time while we are in conversation, in advance as a form of

preparation, or afterwards to review what has happened), but it is just as relevant for remote communication. For example, we can apply this kind of thinking to ensure that we phrase our emails in a way that creates the effect that we really want.

We can apply this thinking at all times and in all situations

I had booked to go to a blues music concert and called the organizers to confirm directions as there was no specific address on the promotional material – just an area name. They assured me it was easy to find and that once I was in the area there would be lots of signposts to the concert venue. I arrived in the vicinity and saw one sign and followed that direction for 5 kilometres. I was beginning to think that I had missed a sign when I saw another and followed the direction that pointed towards for another 5 kilometres! I was now beginning to think I had got lost and was about to turn back when I saw several cars parked up, so I continued to the end of the road. That was the venue! When I arrived, I commented on my journey to others and they confirmed that most of them had got lost and turned back a few times before finding the place! Apparently, the organizer is renowned for not being organized! He certainly had not put himself in the shoes of those who had not been to the venue before. And I think that his interpretation of the meaning of ‘lots of signs’ was different from most people’s. ‘Lots’ to him meant two plus a pencilled welcome sign at the entrance. (The concert was great, however!)

We can help others to appreciate situations and services by taking them through any one or all of the perceptual positions. For example, the author of the following article from the @demon newsletter is helping us appreciate some of the design features of a website by putting us in the shoes of the web page user.



Imagine that you are browsing the shops one day. You walk into a department store called, say, Inter-Net Universal Superstores. There's no proper signposting and you can't find an information desk or any staff. You look for your favourite magazine but can only find hundreds of magazines, newspapers and paperback books, all mixed up. You try to find a loaf of bread but, again, there are no signs. And when you do eventually stumble across the bread shelves, most of them are empty.

You think you'll try the clothing department – but where is it? You turn the corner and trip over a trolley dumped in a darkened corner. You come across a big sign, 'Grand Sale Next Week = 50% off', but then you check the dates and realize 'Next Week' has long passed. By now you've had enough.

You want to tell the manager how annoyed you are – but no one knows where he is ...

It's hard to imagine any shop quite that bad, yet cyberspace is littered with sites that are the internet equivalent of our fictitious store from hell, many of them put there by people who ought to know better.

Skilful negotiators use all three positions

This insight into how we present ourselves to our audience comes from the ability of the author to put him or herself into the shoes of

the people on the receiving end of what we do. This skill is essential in developing our ability to judge how what we are doing and saying is being received. Skilful negotiators in all contexts and all media instinctively use all three positions as a way of taking a balanced approach to a situation.

Imbalanced positions

An imbalanced use of any of the positions has implications for your ability to make progress.

James often had to attend meetings as part of his work. He usually prepared for these meetings by carefully thinking through his proposals. He often had ideas for ways the department could handle new projects. He couldn't normally see why he wouldn't get the go-ahead from his manager. He felt that his manager's style was to stall and throw out objections. James usually felt extremely frustrated by the response he received. As far as he was concerned, his manager was being stubborn. Sometimes his frustration reached such a level that he wondered if it was worth staying with the department.

Excessive use of 1st position leads to lack of understanding of others

Excessive use of 1st position can lead to a lack of understanding and subsequent dismissal of other people's feelings and ideas. You might push for the achievement of your outcomes, but at the expense of others. So, although you may achieve what you want, your achievement is likely to be short lived and may backfire in some way. You may feel overcome by your emotions.

Diane was considered by her team to be caring and compassionate. She became concerned if any of her team

experienced problems and would endeavour to help them solve those problems through discussion. However, whenever she did this, she found herself experiencing the feelings of the person she was coaching. Not only did she experience these feelings during the discussion, she found they stayed with her, often for the rest of the day and sometimes longer. She began to avoid getting into such discussions for fear of the burden of emotions she might subsequently carry.

Excessive use of 2nd position can lead to loss of self-esteem

Excessive use of 2nd position can lead to a loss of self-esteem if you identify with other people's needs and feelings at the expense of your own. Essentially, you are giving others priority over yourself.

It is possible that, by overly identifying with the other person, you stop yourself achieving and even thinking about what you really want. You may find yourself taking on other people's feelings and being unable to shake them off. Over time the weight of others' emotions can be mentally and emotionally fatiguing if carried in this way.

David was a member of a project team engaged on a high-profile task for the company. The project team was working to a tight schedule and sometimes tempers flared and discussions would become heated. David, however, appeared untouched by this emotion. Physically and emotionally, he seemed to distance himself. This often irritated the other team members, who felt that he didn't care about the success of the project.

Excessive use of 3rd position can give an image of being detached and unemotional

Excessive use of 3rd position can give an image of being detached and unemotional. You would be likely to be objective and analytical without the capacity to experience the emotion of the situation.

The ability to use all three positions in a balanced way leads to cooperative, assertive behaviour and increased choice and understanding.

One of the labels that has received a lot of coverage recently is ‘narcissism’. The concept of emotional harassment being as abusive as physical harassment has now been formally and legally recognized. The web is full of descriptions of what someone who is considered to be narcissistic does and how they have come to be that way. I think we all have a degree of these characteristics within us. The issue is to what degree. I have sought to understand this personality type and to describe it in NLP terms. I have posted about this on Instagram #nlpatwork. One of the most outstanding characteristics is that narcissists can only experience situations from their own perspective. They are exclusively in 1st position. Any attempt to give feedback in order for them to appreciate the effects of their behaviour is met with a retaliatory verbal attack. So someone who fits this profile is unlikely ever to seek, question or receive feedback. And they are unlikely to be able to laugh at themselves (one of the elements of Provocative Coaching – see [Chapter 23](#)), which would require them to be able to stand back and laugh at themselves.

When to use each position

1ST POSITION

1st position is important when you want to stand up for yourself, see things from your perspective, hear things for yourself, get in touch with your own feelings, or when initially setting outcomes for yourself. It is a position from which to ask yourself the question, ‘What am I experiencing?’ It is a way of connecting with the truth of what you are feeling and what you want. It is also an appropriate

position in which to do an ecology check for any outcomes you set yourself – that is, ‘Does this outcome fit with who I am/want to be?’

2ND POSITION

When you can’t understand another person’s behaviour, 2nd position is a way of getting behind that behaviour and into their experience and feelings. Once you understand or seek to understand (because there will be times when you cannot absolutely check out that you are right), this can communicate itself to the other person and will often give them a feeling of reassurance that you do understand their position. More especially, it will give you greater understanding and therefore choice about how to deal with the situation, taking into account how the other person is affected by it.

3RD POSITION

This position can be valuable when you want to stand back, take stock and think objectively about a situation. It can be particularly valuable when you don’t want the emotions attached to either being in or thinking about a situation. People who are able to handle aggression from others in a controlled and unemotional way often do this from 3rd position so that they are not, for example, experiencing the feelings of anger, frustration or hurt that they might be feeling if they were in 1st position.

Andy Wilman was making a documentary about the skills of the fastest people on the planet. He interviewed racing driver Michael Schumacher and the then Ferrari Technical Director Ross Brawn. In an article in *The Daily Telegraph* in 2001, Brawn described Schumacher’s remarkable sense of calm during a race. According to Brawn, his ability to detach gave him an edge on all other drivers racing at the time:

The staggering thing about Michael is that, when I talk to him on the radio, it’s like you and I having this conversation; you’d think he wasn’t doing anything. And the reason he’s so good is that he has spare brain capacity. He can function

as an F1 driver and on top of that he can think about the race that is going on around him.

Schumacher suffered serious head injuries during a tragic skiing accident in the French Alps on 29 December 2013, and very little has been heard about him since that time. His talents were so extraordinary, though, that I have chosen to keep him here as a model of excellence.

IN BLOCKED SITUATIONS

If you want still further choices in a situation when there is conflict or a block to making progress, then step into the presupposition ‘Behind every behaviour is a positive intention towards you.’ This is one of the beliefs of excellence explained in [Chapter 15](#), Write your own script: Well-formed outcomes.

You only have to act ‘as if’

As with all the beliefs, this does not have to be true. You only have to think and act as if it were true. Some creativity helps here in your thinking about what the positive benefit might be. What is the potential benefit in the situation for you? How can you turn the situation into an opportunity, even though it may not have initially presented itself to you in this way? For example, if you are faced with someone who is asking you awkward questions, they may be doing that to test the validity of your ideas so they can decide whether or not they want to back them. That is a reason for them to ask questions for themselves. However, a benefit for you may be that they are providing you (unconsciously) with the opportunity of learning how to deal with awkward questions and thereby improving your skills as a presenter and negotiator.

In the scenario involving James earlier in this section, his ability to adopt different perceptual positions and to consider

the positive intention behind his manager's behaviour will affect his response to the situation.

James was experiencing the situation with his manager from a dominant 1st position. When James did eventually step into 2nd position – that is, he put himself into his manager's shoes – he experienced a strong feeling of insecurity and perceived the ideas being presented to him as a threat to his position. James (in 1st position) had never realized this possibility and was shocked to appreciate how his manager might be feeling. When James considered the situation objectively from 3rd position, he realized that the more the James in 1st position pushed and initiated new ideas, the more his manager resisted and blocked him. By continuing to do more of the same, he was intensifying the response he received.

And the benefit to James of his manager's behaviour? (Remember, this does not have to be true. He only has to act as if it were.) So the question became – what is this situation and his manager offering him in terms of learning that could benefit him not only in this scenario but in life? By thinking in this way the learning becomes generic and not just a 'fix' for the immediate scenario.

It could be that the unconscious positive intention is for James to:

- learn how to show real empathy towards someone else
- learn how to approach solutions at a slower pace than previously, involving others in his thinking
- prioritize and think through his ideas so he puts over only the ones of the highest importance to everyone
- develop 2nd position thinking!

When James re-evaluated the situation, having experienced it in 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions, he decided to take a different approach to the next meeting. He took more of a back seat initially and supported the ideas his

manager put forward. He waited until his manager asked him for an idea before volunteering any, and explained what support he would need for the idea to work. He introduced his ideas one bit at a time, checking reactions as he went. This way he could be sure of getting a 'yes' each time before explaining the next part of the idea. This is the concept of getting a 'Yes set', which is based on the TOTE mentioned earlier in the book. The principle being to get an agreement to every step of the way before proceeding to the next. He invited his manager to develop the idea further.

Over time, he gained more and more of his manager's support. Eventually, he was able to put forward his ideas without waiting to be asked, and he and his manager worked together more cohesively as a team than they had ever done before. When James's manager was appointed to the position of director of special projects, he invited James to join him in the new department as senior project manager.

Organizational implications

IMPLICATIONS OF COMPANIES OPERATING PRIMARILY FROM ONE POSITION

We can also detect preferences in thinking in company cultures:

- **1st position** There may be a firefighting, crisis management style. The company may jump to conclusions about what the solutions to problems might be without checking that they are the solutions in, say, their customers' minds. The company is more likely to be problem-oriented rather than solution-oriented because it doesn't stand back, take stock and consider situations objectively. Many high-tech companies have sometimes operated in this way as a result of lacking the softer, people understanding skills.

- **2nd position** The company may ‘go overboard’ to do what the customer wants without seeking to influence the solution or the outcome. It would typically make unrealistic promises just to keep the customer happy in the short term. Even though it may ‘jump’ to the customer’s requests, it invariably loses the customer’s respect.
- **3rd position** This company stays emotionally detached. This is characteristic of some large, bureaucratic organizations where there is no ‘personal touch’. Correspondence will be written in the third person, rarely signed by identifiable individuals. It is difficult to attach accountability to anyone in particular. Organizations such as this often handle buyouts ineffectively, with the buyout seen purely as a business acquisition and little or no attention paid to the emotions of the people involved.

The ideal is a company that takes all perceptual positions. This doesn’t guarantee success, but it puts it head and shoulders above most other organizations.

The ideal is a company that takes all perceptual positions

1st position The company has a clear mission statement expressing the vision and mission of the business in a way that provides direction for all its employees. Shareholders in the business participate in the development of the business mission. It has agreed, published values that are upheld and lived out by everyone in the company. Employees’ goals and roles tie in totally with the business strategy and are understood by everyone.

2nd position Employees spend time with their customers (internal and external), finding out their true requirements and collecting regular feedback about how they are doing. They listen to what their customers have to say. The company does whatever it can to ensure the success of its customers no matter what that takes, and does this not only with customers but also with suppliers. The enlightened company takes a systems view of commerce and looks for ways to work with organizations that might once have been its competitors.

3rd position Individuals and teams take time to stand back, take stock and review how they are doing. They pay attention to process as well as content. They learn from experience and in so doing ensure that they are on a track of continuous improvement. They see the impact of their behaviour on others in the system and, equally, the effect of others' behaviour and actions on themselves. They take a strategic overview.

ADOPTING A BALANCED POSITION

Having a balanced perspective gives you the ability to stand up for your

This is a way to increase the chances of a win/win

needs and desires in a way that takes account of other people's needs and desires. This is a process of cooperation that leads to the increased likelihood of a win/win outcome. We know from the principles of outcome thinking, explained in [Chapter 16](#), that dovetailing outcomes in this way increases the chances that you will achieve what you want. So assertion is about balance, balance between yourself and others.

If we manage our thinking, we can achieve balance

Our awareness of the subtleties in our thinking can transform our ability to act in a balanced way. If you are thinking how difficult it will be to negotiate a good deal with your customer, it is unlikely that you will handle the situation confidently.

Your thinking influences the outcome

Dawn's colleagues considered that she behaved aggressively in many everyday situations. Typically, she would promote her own ideas and plans without consulting others. She felt her own ideas were generally more

appropriate and worthwhile compared with the ideas of her colleagues. She often got frustrated with others, but was generally unconcerned.

When Dawn explored the patterns of her thinking about these situations, she realized she was outside herself (dissociated). However, it was as though she was somewhere on the ceiling, looking down on the situation. She also noticed that she was much closer to herself in her imagination than she was to others. Although she could see the others and she could see them moving their lips as if they were speaking, she couldn't hear any words.

Dawn experimented with her thinking. First of all, she changed her position in her thinking so that she was at eye level with the people in her remembered situation. She also made herself equidistant from herself and the other people. She then associated into her picture of herself so that she could see the situation as if from her own eyes, hear it from her own ears, and experience the feelings of being there. Eventually, as Dawn brought this balance into her thinking, she began to notice that she contributed a greater balance to the way she handled situations.

Pauline had felt very stressed for several months. She was concerned about her son, who she believed was being bullied at school. She was also concerned about her mother, who had been ill for some time. She herself had recently taken on a lot more responsibility at work. The result of this was that she was continually feeling tired and depressed.

When Pauline described how she thought about these situations, she invariably saw them either as if she were in the other person's shoes, or, sometimes, if she was dissociated, she would be close to the other person. Even in this dissociated state she experienced feelings and discovered that the feelings were not her own but those of

the other person. There was no place in her thinking where she was free of emotion, and, not surprisingly, she felt unable to think about these situations objectively. She was weighed down with everyone's feelings most of the time.

Pauline discovered that by stepping out of 2nd position and giving back the feelings to the rightful owner, she began to feel more relaxed (more like herself again). She positioned herself so she was equidistant from herself and the other person in her thinking; she effectively started to take a more balanced view of the situation. She began to be able to handle situations more objectively.

Your thinking is the template for your experience. If your thinking about a situation is out of balance, then you will probably find yourself giving one part of the situation or one person a greater priority than others. For example, excessive use of 1st position thinking can result in aggressive behaviour, while excessive use of 2nd position thinking can lead to non- assertive behaviour.

Your thinking is the template for your experience

Similarly, the balance, or lack of it, in your thinking about the situation will influence your level of assertion. If you imagine other people as larger than life with booming voices and yourself as small with a quiet, squeaky voice, it is not surprising to find yourself responding non-assertively.

However, the difference in using NLP techniques to achieve balance in your life compared with more traditional approaches is that by changing your thinking process you will find your own words and phrases. You will discover your own appropriate non-verbal behaviour. NLP gives you the space to discover your own solutions and styles that fit with who you are and who you want to be.

NLP coaches work on the assumption that you already have all the resources you need to achieve what you want. With NLP you

can learn to draw on these resources when and where you want them.

Shortcut to perceptual positions

Think of a situation that involves another person with whom you would like greater choice and understanding.

- 1 Put yourself in your own shoes and identify:
 - a what is happening
 - b what you are seeing
 - c what you are hearing
 - d what you are feeling physically and emotionally.
- 2 Break state.
- 3 Put yourself in the shoes of the other person and identify:
 - a what is happening (now from their perspective)
 - b what they are seeing (as if you are them)
 - c what they are hearing
 - d what they are feeling.
- 4 Break state.
- 5 Put yourself in the shoes of an outsider so that you can see yourself and the other person from a distance and ask yourself:
 - a What is happening in summary, described in 3rd person terms?
 - b What are you seeing and hearing?
 - c How are these two people (you and the other person) maintaining a perfect system by being the way they are being and doing what they are doing?
 - d What is it that the more the 'you' out there does, the more the other person out there does?
 - e What is the positive intention behind what is happening for you (the you out there)? (You could also ask this question

as ‘What is the learning intended for you in this situation that is for life and not just for this specific scenario?’)

6 Go back into your own shoes with this balanced thinking about the situation. What is that like now? How might you now go forward in this situation?

Steps for coaching someone else through the process

The following questions are just a guideline; you can find out what works for you as you coach someone through this process. Your role is to keep the other person clean in the various perceptual positions. Your role is not to offer solutions, nor to explore why they are in this situation, just to take the subject through the experience in a way that makes them consciously aware of what they are doing that has maintained the relationship in the way that it has been. Expect to be alongside them as you take them through this process. Mirror their way of speaking and moving. The more invisible you are the better. This is a non-directive style of coaching.

This is non-directive coaching

- 1 **Getting started** Ask the person to think of a situation that involves one other person and for which they would like some new understanding and choice.
- 2 **Spatial positioning** You might use spatial positions to support this process. For example, you might ask them to change physical places as they move from one position to the next. This helps them to learn the process ‘in the muscle’/in the whole body rather than just relying on their head to remember. It can also help them to change positions in their thinking by changing position in reality.
- 3 **1st position** Invite them to take a seat or stand in a place that represents them in their own shoes. Let us assume that the subject’s name is Pat. ‘So, Pat, what is it like for you in this

situation with this other person?’ Keep the questions clean. Keep them in the present tense, so that the subject is not surmising about what has happened or what might happen in the future, but what it is like right now as they associate into the scenario. And follow up with clean questions: ‘And [their words] in what way?’ ‘Hmm [their words] is there anything else about that?’ Your aim is to get the subject deeply associated into what it is like in their shoes. Finally, summarize what you have heard using only their language so they get to hear the scenario mirrored back to them: ‘So [summary of their words] is there anything else?’ If there is, explore it; if not, get ready to move on to the next stage.

- 4 **Break state** Invite the person to stand up and shake off all the emotions of that 1st position. Do something that distracts them if they are unable to do this for themselves. To be able to break state is a very valuable skill in its own right.
- 5 **2nd position** Ask the subject where they would place the other person in the situation/relationship. If they are seated, move a chair so that they can sit in that position. Before they do so, position the change: ‘I would like to invite you to step into the other person’s shoes now. And as you sit in this chair [indicate the position where they have said the other party would be, maybe opposite where they were sat before], I would like you to put yourself into this other person’s shoes and I will ask you questions as if you are them.’

You might want to establish the name of the other party before you do this. Let’s say that the other person’s name is Paul. Encourage the subject to adopt the physiology of this other person, Paul, as a means of getting into their shoes. ‘So, Paul, what is it like for you being in this situation with Pat?’ Expect to get a perspective on Pat from Paul’s eyes and ears and feelings. Keep the questions clean: ‘And [their words] in what way/like what/whereabouts is that/is there anything else about that?’ Finally, summarize (no ‘Why?’ or ‘What are you going to do about it?’, but only clean questions). ‘So [a summary using their words and the present tense] is there anything else?’

If at any time you are aware that the subject is slipping into any of the other positions, prompt them back to 2nd position with ‘So, Paul, in your position, what is happening?’

- 6 **Break state** Use the same process as before to break state, moving them out of the spatial position that represented 2nd position as you do so.
- 7 **3rd position** This is the position in which you invite them to take an overview (a systems view) of what is happening in the relationship. It is also where you expect them to realize the learning that is available to them here. Remember that it is learning they are after, not what they are going to do! That is significant learning for many people going through this process, especially those who are used to being in a corporate world that encourages task focus and action planning.

Standing can provide a ‘helicopter’ perspective

Expect to ‘chunk up’ for learning. Make sure that they are standing or sitting in a position that is equidistant from both of the original positions. Standing can give them more of a helicopter perspective of what has been happening and can therefore be useful in supporting this 3rd position. So, standing beside them: ‘Describe what is happening here between Pat and Paul.’ Encourage them to use third-party language: ‘So how might you summarize what Pat is doing and what Paul is doing in relation to her?’ ‘What is it that the more she does that, the more he does this?’ In other words, you are inviting them to discover how the two sets of behaviours are completely related. The ‘the more ... the more’ construction is a way of summarizing the total of each person’s behaviour towards the other. You are inviting them to chunk up now rather than repeat what is happening at the same level as when they were in 1st and 2nd positions. For example, the more demanding Pat gets, the more withdrawn Paul becomes. The more withdrawn Paul becomes, the more demanding Pat gets, and so on.

‘The more ... the more’ way of analysing highlights how our behaviours are revealed

Then highlight that, if Pat continues to do what she has done, she will go on getting the same response, and that she is the only one who can change here. (That takes a bit of swallowing for some people who might want the other person to change!) You can apply one of the beliefs of excellence (see [Chapter 15](#)): ‘What might be the unconscious positive intention behind Paul’s behaviour towards Pat? In other words, what learning is available to Pat in this relationship if she chooses to take it?’ Encourage an answer at the level of capabilities and above. You do not want an answer at the level of what Pat can do; that is too low a level to be useful as generic learning.

When you have the answer, you can dry-run the learning for Pat: ‘So this learning [use the learning that Pat has identified for herself], do you think Pat is willing to take it [still considering this from the 3rd position point of view]?’ If the answer is yes, add: ‘And can you imagine Pat with this learning and how that might be?’ When you get the answer yes to that, say: ‘OK, I invite you now to go back into your own shoes with this learning on board and experience what it is like now with this learning in place.’

If the person says no, they are not willing to take the learning, you might leave it at that. But it’s unusual for them to do that. You might say: ‘Is there anything that might make a difference so that Pat could take that learning on board?’ Remember, it is not for you to decide if they accept the learning or not. Usually people do, but it is their choice.

8 Return them to 1st position with the learning on board.

‘So here you are with this learning in place, what is it like for you now?’ You are expecting to see and hear a change in state. That is the greatest indication that learning has taken place. Give the subject some time to appreciate this new perspective with this learning. Expect them to be in a new, resourceful state. The learning is the change in state, and with this they will discover what they can do differently with

the other person when they are next with them. You do not need to know this now. That is how NLP works in real time, not by action planning but by creating learning at a higher level that influences behaviour at the time in a way that is appropriate.

Summary

By developing your ability to experience situations from different perceptual positions, you gain a balanced approach in thinking, not only about outcomes but also about any other situation. In situations where you feel there is little or no understanding or progress, perceptual positions can provide a way of developing understanding and creating new choices. This is a very powerful technique for finding congruent solutions that are likely to transform your experience of the whole situation. Putting yourself in your client's shoes transforms your ability to present yourself and your business in a way that fits for them. It doesn't matter whether that client is someone you know well or someone you have never met, and may never meet, even someone who lives on the other side of the world.

Perceptual positions are an elegant and powerful way of creating choice and understanding in situations that might otherwise be blocked. The ability to take on different positions is a way of stepping beyond the limitations of everyday behaviour and appreciating the different maps of the world from which we all operate. It is a way of understanding situations from others' perspectives. It is also a way of removing yourself from the emotions of a situation when you need to be able to think in a more detached and objective way about what is going on. Furthermore, it is a way of getting in touch with your own feelings and desires.

The balanced use of these positions, either as an individual or as a company, gives you flexibility and an increased chance of achieving a win/win outcome to which all parties are committed. It also supports you so that you can learn from all the situations you experience in life, in a way that is far more generic than merely its application to the immediate scenario.

Thought provokers

- 1 What could be the unconscious positive intention towards you of the following behaviours? (Remember that this does not have to be true!)
 - a Your manager refuses to let you take on the extra responsibility you have requested.
 - b A colleague appears not to listen to what you have to say.
 - c The senior management team in your company reorganizes the structure of the company just as you were beginning to feel settled and secure.
 - d The company you have applied to for a job turns you down.
 - e A colleague in another department fails to respond to your requests for the information you need.
 - f Your partner speaks to you aggressively and judgmentally.
- 2 From which position (1st, 2nd or 3rd) do you think each of these people is operating?
 - a Peter was explaining to his team what he wanted from them. When the team members didn't understand, he became frustrated and started to explain again in more detail. He felt that, although he had put forward ideas that would undoubtedly benefit them in the long term, they were being unreasonable by not appreciating what he meant. He found the whole process depressing and decided to continue with it anyway without consultation, as he knew they would appreciate it in the end.
 - b Jenny was a member of a project team. The success of the project was crucial for the company and the team frequently worked late and intensely to achieve the deadlines. Often the discussion in these late-night sessions would become quite heated. Jenny stayed calm and couldn't always understand why the other members of the team got so upset. Sometimes they would get frustrated with her and accuse her of not caring about the project.

She knew that she did, however, and was often able to help reconcile different points of view within the team.

c Diane was considered to be a caring manager. She always took account of the feelings of her team. She was cautious about change, however, particularly changes that would upset anyone. She was always available to counsel friends and colleagues, but found that she would take on their feelings and often ended the day feeling upset and depressed, even though she knew that she had helped her colleagues by listening to them.

3 From what perspective do you operate primarily with ...

a the person closest to you?

b your colleagues?

c your boss?

d the different members of your family?

4 If you have a website, imagine yourself in the shoes of someone viewing it for the first time. What is that like? How does your experience compare with the 'store from hell' described in this chapter? (Hopefully not at all!)

5 Read through the three most recent emails you sent. From which position did you write them? How might you write them differently now?

6 Read *English Passengers* by Matthew Kneale. Consider what you can learn from the different perspectives and points of view in the novel.

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A father and his son owned a farm. They did not have many animals, but they did own a horse. One day the horse ran away.

'How terrible, what bad luck,' said the neighbours.

'Good luck, bad luck, who knows?' replied the farmer.

Several weeks later the horse returned, bringing with him four wild mares.

'What marvellous luck,' said the neighbours.

'Good luck, bad luck, who knows?' said the farmer.

The son began to learn to ride the wild horses, but one day he was thrown and broke his leg.

'What bad luck,' said the neighbours.

'Good luck, bad luck, who knows?' replied the farmer.

The next week the army came to the village to take all the young men to war. The farmer's son was still disabled with his broken leg, so he was spared. Good luck, bad luck, who knows?

20 Resolving conflict: Parts integration

The conflict we experience without is a reflection of the conflict we experience within.

Anonymous

The issue of boundaries is at the top of most people's agendas right now: the wall between Mexico and the USA, the UK's membership of the European Union, the questions of who has the right to enter another country. It is easy to put it 'out there' and see these as issues that the politicians have to face – although at the time of writing the whole of the UK Parliament is divided in a way that is unprecedented. And yet we are one. It is indisputable – we live on the same planet, walk on the same earth, and some of the latest theories in physics suggest that all the physical elements of the universe are connected (how can they not be?!). It seems crazy to go against all that, but we do!

And 'together' is the key word. Consider the names of many of the world's countries and organizations – the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America and the European Union. Those who are united work towards a common goal and supporting each other. We do have the United Nations, but it takes more than a name for us to feel connected. I suspect that a common language, and a common culture and tradition, do far more to create a bond than the mere term 'united'. When we truly experience being united we are one with each other.

One for all and all for one!

Alexandre Dumas, *The Three Musketeers*

The interpretation of this quote is interesting. With the phrase ‘One for all’ we are saying that each person contributes to the whole. If there is trouble, every single person should do their part to help out. The other phrase, ‘All for one’, means that nobody is left behind: if one person is facing problems, then it’s a problem for the whole community. So, therefore, in plain English it could be stated as ‘The whole of us relies on each of us and each of us can rely on the whole of us.’ And so it is with the parts of each of us.

All of these concepts seem so obvious at first sight, and at subsequent sightings and then with experience we can realize the true depth of what they represent. So, although the process (model) that I explain in this chapter seems like common sense, it has a profound meaning for the whole world ... and if we can resolve our inner conflicts, maybe then we have a chance of resolving the outer ones – though perhaps they are just an expression of what we are experiencing internally?

Being united enables us to work together towards a common goal

In the work situation the issues are not so much to do with the changing environment but with the battles that smoulder between departments or within the individual. And who hasn’t experienced personal relations going through a difficult patch? Conflict exists at every level; it seems to be a symptom of our times. How can we personally influence the strife-torn world we live in and make a positive difference?

Conflict exists at every level

Some of the most innovative business thinkers advocate personal coherence as the only way to navigate the choppy waters of global enterprise. It does indeed make common sense to seek to achieve personal harmony in order to deal with the external world. So the question, as ever, is *how*?

One of the principles I have emphasized throughout this book is that we can influence only by our example. We need to look for a

way forward within; by changing ourselves we influence the systems of which we are a part. This is so easy to say, and yet I know of no one who fully achieves this in practice. I do know of many who would subscribe to the principle of what I am saying, and still continue doing what they are doing in exactly the same way as before. It takes discipline and skill to resolve the conflict within. The question is: how can we find inner peace?

I was amused by friends of mine who decided to encourage their children to have a 'screen-free' holiday, as they were so used to be using their iPads for films, games and learning. And the children did indeed seem to thrive without them. My amusement came, however, from the parents who seemed unable to tear themselves away from their smartphones!

Stress is two forces moving in opposite directions. Be still.

Anonymous



On the one hand ... on the other hand

More often than not, it is the symptoms of inner conflict that grab our attention and energy. Rightly so, as the symptoms are one of the ways our body has of telling us that something is amiss and we need to stop and take stock of how we are. Our body has a wisdom

beyond the capacity of our conscious mind, and we can learn how to listen to what it is seeking to tell us. The chances are that the physical symptoms will increase in volume and intensity until we do.

We have a bodily wisdom that is often ignored

Which of the following have you experienced?

- Moments when you know you are acting in a way that is not being true to what you say is important in life
- Panic and a pull to react to the worst of what you experience in your environment
- Times when what you are doing is at odds with what you are saying
- Decisions when a part of you wants to act and move forward and a part of you – say, a concern or a fear – is holding you back.
- A feeling of going round in circles when what you want to do is move ahead in a straight line towards your goals
- A sense of being under pressure
- An ill-at-ease feeling with a goal you have set yourself or one you have accepted from someone else
- Times when the right hand just does not seem to know what the left hand is doing
- Phases of life when you feel that how you are living and working is not being true to the way you really want to be.

The following were incidents when either I or one of my colleagues was being given signals by our body to which we needed to pay attention:

- A headache when faced with someone who seemed determined to oppose everything that was suggested
- A recurrent illness that seems to be triggered by stress
- An earache when someone close was constantly complaining about the relationship with them
- A frozen shoulder at a time when others' needs were taking precedence over their own

- Sickness when faced with unwelcome change
- A close friend who frequently described herself as being under pressure and then had a severe stroke
- Extreme fatigue whenever they stopped to go on holiday
- A neighbour whose face broke out with a shingles rash every time his mother-in-law came to stay!

There are subtler bodily signals that indicate a lack of coherence:

- An asymmetrical posture
- Indicating an issue on one hand in conflict with an issue on the other hand (the hands used literally to illustrate this)
- A stammer when talking about a particular issue
- A difficulty with vision when unable to focus on a future goal.

I am sure you can add many other examples of conflict within yourself that you may be experiencing or have experienced in the past. The pace of change and the pressures to which we can succumb can lead easily to stress and frustration.

Why bother?

Why is it important to find a way to resolve these forms of stress? Most of us want some form of peace in our lives. However, there are many other reasons for wanting to resolve our inner conflicts. When we have any form of inner conflict, the results may include one or more of the following:

- We operate at less than our true potential so we reduce our effectiveness in whatever work or play we are engaged in.
- We use energy to manage the conflict within, and so we have less energy and ability to concentrate on what is happening around us; we are less able to listen fully to others.
- If we have a goal, then we shut down the filters with which we are able to recognize the opportunities in line with that goal, and so hamper our progress towards it.
- The stress becomes a habit.
- Other people start to shut us out: we get excluded from work opportunities, we are avoided, and we are not consulted on

issues that matter.

- The system of which we are a part fractures.

In contrast:

- People at one with themselves are usually leaders; they attract followers. And we are at a time when we need leaders; good, authentic, environmentally aware leaders
- The state of alignment or coherence is the only state in which we can manage ourselves successfully through the complexities and ever-changing circumstances of life.

We need leaders

Listening to the wisdom of our body

By resolving conflict within, we influence the conflict we experience around us. There were several clues in the list of types of conflict you may have experienced. For example, 'Decisions when a part of you wants to act and move forward and a part of you – say, a concern or a fear – is holding you back.' I refer to 'parts' of us and this is a useful and powerful way of thinking about this. We are not literally in parts, but by considering the differing desires in this way we can act as an arbitrator to our own emotions.



One way to think about this conflict is to imagine that we do have parts, each one with its own identity and characteristics. Imagine that you have an inner team and each part is a player in that team. If the parts are communicating with each other and in harmony, then you have a state of coherence; the chances are you will be more likely to achieve coherent outcomes. If, however, parts of you are in conflict with each other, it is unlikely you are operating at your best – quite the opposite!

For example, have you ever been in a situation where a part of you felt obliged to do what you had been asked to do, but another part felt that you were violating what is important to you? Then, again, have you ever felt that everything about you was saying ‘yes’ to a conclusion you had reached and a plan you had set yourself, and that the motivation to carry out that plan was unstoppable? These are examples of what it is like to be without coherence and what it can be like to have it.

Parts of ourselves often communicate with us through physical symptoms. For instance, you might get a sharp pain above your eyes whenever you think about a particular decision. The part that is giving you the pain might be the part that lacks the courage to say ‘yes’ to the decision you are considering.

We can learn to listen to the wisdom of our body

By learning to communicate with these inner parts, we learn what they want to tell us; we learn to listen to the wisdom of our own body. By listening to these parts, we are learning to listen to our unconscious mind. And by learning how to coach these parts to communicate and work together in harmony, we increasingly create a state of coherence within.

There is a life-force within your soul, seek that life. There is a gem in the mountain of your body, seek that mine. O traveller, if you are in search of that, don't look outside, look inside yourself and seek that.

Rumi

Shortcut to 'pulling yourself together'

You may have heard the advice (often given somewhat aggressively) to 'pull yourself together'. The outcome of the advice, if not the style with which it is given, is sound. To resolve conflict we do need to pull ourselves together, as we do to achieve a state of rapport and resourcefulness. The question is how. By modelling people who are skilled at resolving their inner and consequently their outer conflict, we find that they have a structure for pulling themselves together.

These are the steps to follow:

- 1 Identify the parts that are in conflict with each other. For example, the part that wants to say 'yes' to an offer you have been made and the part that wants to wait – the 'yes' part and the 'waiting' part.
- 2 Take some time to acknowledge these parts in turn. This is the opposite of what many people feel like doing with parts that have been causing conflict. The temptation can be to ignore or delete or get angry with them. The key here is to realize that all parts are working on our behalf and that they do it in their own way, even though we might not at first appreciate that. So thank each part in turn for

communicating with you. Listen and sense how each part communicates with you. Some parts might give you an image or a sound, or they might cause a particular sensation. You may notice nothing at first, but thank the parts nevertheless. It is amazing what cooperation you can get from something or someone to whom you show genuine appreciation.

- 3 Now detach yourself (dissociate) from the emotions of the parts to consider how they can cooperate with each other. Hold your hands out in front of you and use your instinct to decide which part you want to put on your right hand and which part you want to put on your left hand. Imagine that those parts of you are actually in your outspread hands. Hold them out and take a look at both.
- 4 Decide which part you wish to communicate with first. Now consider that part and describe its characteristics and qualities. For example, it might be a part of you that is aggressive and talks to you in terms of what you must do, using language like 'Get on with it' and 'What are you waiting for?' Each part symbolizes some aspect of your life. Explore what each represents for you.

Learn to manage the inner team

- 5 Every part is working on your behalf, even if you have not known consciously how it is doing this. Ask this part what it wants for you: what outcome is it seeking to achieve that is positive for you? Be aware of whatever comes to mind – that is how your unconscious mind communicates with you. Appreciate the answer you get in whatever way you get it.
- 6 Now repeat steps 4 and 5 with the part that you have on the other hand.
- 7 Considering each part in turn, ask yourself what quality or attribute this part has to give the other. For example, identify what gift the first part has that would enhance the other part if it were to accept it. You can explore with the receiving part

in what way it would like to receive this gift in order for it to accept it.

8 Imagine this exchange of gifts. If at first this does not happen, ask each part in what way or what form the other part could give this gift in a way that the receiving part can accept. Now imagine the exchange of gifts.

9 Typically at this point, if the previous two steps have been successful, there will be an automatic drawing together of hands. This physical bringing together is an indication that you are integrating the two parts in your thinking. If this does not happen automatically, you can suggest it by considering how these two parts might integrate with each other and exist together in cooperation and bring your hands together as you do so. If necessary, go back and repeat steps 7 and 8 until this step is successful.

10 Now imagine how these parts together are a part of who you are, and in so doing bring both hands together to the heart of your chest. How has this enhanced who you are and how you can go forward into your future?

In effect, what you are doing is encouraging different parts of yourself to work in harmony. So often when parts are in conflict, our tendency can be to think that we have to go one way or the other, when in fact it is by exploring how we can have both together that we get the breakthrough in our thinking. The effect of this integration is to create a state of rapport with yourself so that you are being fully who you are and who you can be.

If you are witnessing conflict in other people, first go through the process above so that you have resolved the conflict you experience within yourself. If, for example, I see two friends in conflict with each other, there is nothing I can do to resolve their conflict. However, I can resolve the conflict between the parts of myself that are symbolized by those friends. Interestingly, when I have found the resolution within me, my external experience will change too, as will my way of dealing with that external experience. Our experience of people around is reflected by our perceptions of them. To change what we experience externally, we can change our

attitudes and perceptions within. To achieve a change in my circumstances, it helps if I can first of all imagine that change in the way that I truly want things to be.

For the process outlined above to become second nature (so that you are using it unconsciously and in real time, for example while you are in a conversation with someone), it helps to work through it 'offline' first of all. Do this with a situation that you have experienced in the past or one that you anticipate may happen in the future. It is rehearsal and practice that make this an unconscious skill.

I have demonstrations of this process and others on my web. Just check out www.sueknight.com

Summary

We are all connected. We exist in the world and in the universe together. It is futile to choose to believe that we are separate. What we think is what we experience. If we think that there are aliens, terrorists, enemies and conflict, that is what we experience! If, however, we choose to think of ourselves as one, then maybe, just maybe, we will start to experience and influence universal harmony and peace. How about starting now?

Thought provokers

- 1 What parts of yourself do you recognize might be in conflict with each other today?
- 2 What conflict do you experience between people outside of you? How do the people outside of you symbolize parts of you?
- 3 Remember a time when you experienced conflict and you found a way to resolve it within yourself. How did you do that?
- 4 What physical symptoms do you recognize as signals from your unconscious to you? How well do you listen and act on

what your unconscious is telling you?

A mother, annoyed by her son's constant pestering, invented a game for him to play.

She cut up a map of the world and gave him the pieces to put back together again, thinking that it would take him hours, if he ever managed it.

Ten minutes later he returned with the completed map. When she asked him how he had done it so quickly, he said, 'There is a picture of a woman on the back, and when I put her together, the world came together.'

21 Giving and receiving feedback

We pardon as long as we love.
François de La Rochefoucauld

Today I am working in a remote part of France. All of my work contacts are at least 500 miles away and yet I can interact with each of them in seconds. The systems we use are designed increasingly to give us instant feedback on how we are doing. As I type this page, any spelling mistake is immediately underlined and any grammatical error highlighted. Yesterday afternoon I entered the chatroom on my website and was able to share and receive thoughts instantaneously with delegates on my programmes. On my bike I have a bike computer that gives me immediate feedback on my cadence, my current speed, my average speed, how my results compare with previous ones and how they compare with others cycling the same route! The feedback systems to which we have access grow in number and sophistication every day.

We live in a world of feedback

Gone are the days when we were given a month to prepare for our appraisal system so we could hear how we are doing. Although this fast-becoming-archaic management system still exists, we are nevertheless bombarded with instantaneous feedback on our performance in every sphere of our lives. It is by learning to love and thrive on feedback that we can excel in the spontaneity of today's business climate. And by thriving on it we are in the best position to respond with flexibility to whatever arises.

Yet in my experience of working with many different people and organizations, there are very few who have this ability. Most of us

have well-developed mechanisms for doing just the opposite, for keeping feedback at bay. If I were to choose one skill in this book that would put you head and shoulders above most people (not just in business but in life), it is the ability to receive feedback. Receiving feedback is a fundamental precursor to being able (and having the right) to give it.

Receiving feedback is a precursor to giving it

The head of the creative department in a marketing organization wanted to develop the creative team so that they would be open to giving each other feedback and subsequently be increasingly open to feedback from their clients, both within the business and externally. He called a team meeting and told them beforehand that he wanted feedback from them.

In the team meeting he invited them to prepare individually to offer him feedback and gave them time to do this. He asked them to think of something they would like him to do more of, something they would like him to do less of or differently, and something with which they were happy. He then invited them to give him the feedback and he modelled all the principles of how to accept what they were saying with openness and learning. He demonstrated how to live out the beliefs that underpin effective feedback. He was open, accepting and curious about what they had to say. He was not in any way defensive or attacking.

The team members became more and more open, and at the end of the meeting they commented on how valuable they had found that time with him. Each subsequently volunteered that they would like to go through a similar process for themselves. This team has become a model of excellence for the rest of the company.

Learning to give and receive feedback is the core of my work

Learning to receive and give feedback is at the core of the work I do with individuals and teams. No matter whether I am coaching one to one or at an initial meeting with a client, or whether I am working with the board or the key leaders within that company, the ability to immerse oneself in a climate of feedback is what I believe makes the biggest difference to their performance. If they were consistently and skilfully to give each other feedback, my role with them would be redundant; indeed, this is my ultimate aim – for them to do this for themselves without the need for anyone external to the business. I aim to encourage and train people, especially those at the head of the organization, to receive feedback constructively and openly. And then to learn how to give it in a way that strengthens the team and the relationships within it and subsequently encourages improved performance from both the individuals and the business.

There are many books and business models that talk of continuous learning and development, learning organizations, appraisal systems, double-loop learning and much, much more. If we are to be able to achieve any of these, we must first be able to receive and give feedback. Once we can do this. We will be contributing to the business in a way that offers learning from all people and all circumstances.

On my open programmes most of my time is involved in noticing patterns in my participants and helping them to do the same so that I or they can give each other feedback. The awareness of these patterns which will sometimes support them and sometimes hinder them is vital to their learning and growth.

Feedback and modelling

Where there is excellence, there is openness to and a willingness to learn continually from feedback. Feedback is essential to the process of modelling. When we model someone (let's say someone other than ourselves for the moment), we are studying the structure both of what they do and how they do it. To do this without 'contaminating' that structure, we need to be able to accept what they do in exactly the way they do it right now.

On one of my NLP training sessions we invited someone we considered to be a model of excellence for leadership to be modelled by the delegates on the programme. He was someone who had led a programme of immense change in a manufacturing company that had to close half its production sites. This meant that he had to find a way to cut the workforce at one plant by 2,000 people. What was special about this man was that he had done this in a means that gained the support and respect of the employees involved. He had managed an immense cutback and had done so with compassion and support for everyone involved. However, he also realized that there were aspects of this whole process that he could have handled differently if he had to do it again (which he sincerely prayed would never have to happen).

During the modelling process one of the delegates started to offer some thoughts along the lines of 'What if you had done it this way?' and 'Have you thought that maybe you might have or still could ...?'

It is of value to give feedback non-judgmentally

This totally defeats the objective of modelling, which, in the first instance, is to elicit the structure of the subject's experience. It is not to change that structure or to advise or coach the subject to change, just to unpack the structure of how they do what they do. But to do this we have to be able to accept (receive) unconditionally what the other person does. And to determine if what we have elicited fits with the subject's experience of how they do what they do, we need to be able to give feedback completely non-judgmentally.

We need to be an 'empty vessel'

That might sound straightforward, but doing it requires immense skill. It requires us to be totally objective in how we do this: to

accept what others do without influencing it with our own thoughts about what is right and wrong. We need to be an ‘empty vessel’ that is able to learn what is new to us. We need to be able to recognize and, more than that, accept difference.

What happens all too often is that we experience something and within fractions of a second we have made a judgment about it. We hear someone speaking quickly and assume instantly that they are intelligent. We see someone frowning and infer that they are confused. We see someone smiling and decide that they must be a good person. This deductive analysis gets us through life, but it can also get us into trouble and into faulty conclusions.

Early astronomers were mystified when they first looked up at the planet Venus through their primitive telescopes and saw that the planet had no observable surface. Unlike the Moon or Mars, which had visible craters and topography, Venus seemed to be perfectly smooth. How could this be?

‘Perhaps the planet is covered by clouds,’ one astronomer suggested. ‘The clouds would hide the shape of the landscape.’

‘Then the planet would have to have water,’ said another. ‘And it would have to be warm enough for water vapour to form.’

‘That makes sense. After all, Venus is close to the sun.’

To these astronomers, it seemed perfectly logical to conclude that, as Venus was warm, sunny, and cloudy, its surface must be covered by tropical rainforests. It’s true that Venus is covered in clouds, but those clouds are made of sulphuric acid – and the planet’s surface temperature is 900 degrees Fahrenheit!

Beliefs that support feedback

Our beliefs influence our capacity for feedback. A belief that is fundamental to our ability to give and receive feedback constructively is that there is no failure, only feedback; or, to put it in other words, there is only learning. If we truly believe this, the ability to learn from feedback will be second nature to us. It will be fundamental to our existence as a learner in this world. I know few people who truly live this belief.

There is only learning

There are other beliefs that support our ability to give and receive feedback. The first is that everyone's perception is their truth. We only have perception and each person's perception is unique to them. It may be similar to that of other people; it may be significantly different. That does not make it right or wrong, it just makes it true for them. By accepting a perception from someone else, we are accepting that part of ourselves as they experience it. We are also contributing to the self-esteem of the giver of the feedback in acknowledging their map of the world. If we do not accept their feedback, we do not accept that part of who they are and therefore we do not fully accept them as a person.

Everyone's perception is their truth

I was listening to a manager receiving feedback from one of his team. Each time he heard a piece of feedback, he either said 'That's right' if it aligned with what he believed about himself, or he said nothing if it did not. His response indicated that he did not accept that everyone's perception is their truth and he was not at that time open to learning from other people's perceptions. Gradually, his team stopped giving him feedback. He became distanced from what he needed to know in order to run the business.

What we recognize in others is true for ourselves

The second belief is that what we recognize in others is true for ourselves. An extension of this is that the characteristics in others that touch us emotionally are a pointer towards those things being characteristics that we don't want or like to accept in ourselves.

A friend of mine gets frustrated when he is behind a driver that he considers to be dawdling on the road. Just this week he found himself behind several drivers who were proceeding very slowly and holding him up. He commented in exasperation that he would never do that.

Later that day, he was getting some money from a cash machine and, as I approached, I noticed there was a lady behind him, also waiting to use the machine. He had been totally unaware of this person and had been dawdling in using the machine and getting information about his account. When I pointed out that someone had been waiting for some time, he was horrified to feel he had been holding them up in a similar way to how he had been held up by other drivers.

I certainly don't always want to own the traits I see in other people. I am like my friend in the above example, in that I prefer to dissociate myself from the characteristics I don't like in others. Yet I do know that it is typically those traits that are my 'blind spots' and this is where some of the most powerful learning lies for me. If we can recognize a trait in others, then we have that structure in our thinking. This does not mean that we would behave in exactly the same way (my friend was dawdling by the cash machine rather than dawdling in the car), but whatever structure we have in our thinking we have the capability of enacting in some way. How many of us, while condemning the violence in the world around us, are capable of the same or worse in our thinking? It is a small step between thinking something and doing it.

The structure within influences our perception of the external world

This is an essential foundation of NLP: it is the structure we hold within that influences our perception and our feelings towards what we experience outside of ourselves.

I have a new neighbour here in our small community (of just five houses) in France. She has made her presence felt! At the time of her arrival she called at my house to introduce herself and to borrow some milk but did so in a way that suggested she wanted to come inside immediately. I am a very private person (despite all the public work I do). I value my privacy and seclusion, both here in France and wherever I travel. I felt myself bristle and I was abrupt and dismissive with her. She has since dug up a ditch in the road to improve her drainage, put overflowing bin bags in the bins, and had noisy builders working on her house, Sundays included (which is usually a quiet family day here). I have sought to distance myself from her.

Recently, I told one of my colleagues how I felt. He asked me what it was about her behaviour that had bothered me so much (he had been more or less unaware of what had happened). I replied that it was her focus on what she wanted for herself and her insensitivity to the effect of that on others around her that bothered me so much. My colleague then said, 'And how is that true about you, Sue?'

I was quite shocked at first to think that I was like this neighbour. Then I realized that I did have similar attributes: a tendency to go for what I wanted and to do so without sensitivity to those around me. I was really amazed how what I saw in her was what I didn't like in myself.

Eventually, I became quite amused, wondering what aspect of myself she might mirror back to me. My whole attitude towards her changed.

What is important in the context of giving feedback is that, if the neighbour had done something disruptive or disrespectful in the

commune and I had chosen to give her feedback, I would have been doing so from a position of identification with her. If I had given feedback to her prior to recognizing how we were alike, I would have done so in a 'holier than thou' way, which would most certainly have sounded patronizing and not been accepted by her. By identifying with the person to whom we choose to give feedback, we create a connection that increases the likelihood that we will give the feedback in a way that will be accepted.

The attributes we recognize in others mirror the same within ourselves

We recognize attributes in others because we have the structure of those attributes within ourselves. Those traits in others (good and bad) that affect us emotionally are those very same traits in which we have an imbalance in some way. For example, we might be frustrated by what we see as aggression in someone else because we need more of that within ourselves (not to be aggressive, but to be more assertive). And it is our frustration with our previous inability to develop this aspect of ourselves that we project on to this other person who is mirroring our imbalance back to us. It may equally be that we have too much of what we see in the other. This was the case with the delegate in my example. I had too much focus and too little sensitivity in some contexts of my life, for example when I set myself a business goal.

When we change the world changes

To hold this belief – that I recognize in others what I am capable of myself – is to have access to one of the best personal development tools available. I call it the 'Apply to Self' strategy.

Apply to Self

This means that whenever we experience something in someone else that we either admire or that bothers us in some way, we have the key to releasing the equivalent potential within ourselves. Our

acceptance of this feedback enables us to recognize the traits to which we might otherwise have been blind.

To hold this belief fully is to let go of frustration and anger with others and realize that there is only one place to look for the answers to our dissatisfactions: within ourselves. Once we change the perception within ourselves, it is amazing how suddenly the world around us, including those people who may have pushed the most sensitive of buttons, seems to change. Energy directed negatively towards others is wasted, life-draining energy. Energy directed inwards to accept our own inadequacies and our strengths is life giving, not only to ourselves but to the people with whom we come into contact.

Receiving feedback

The sense of recognition of what is similar creates an unspoken connection. This allows for an openness of feedback that might not otherwise be possible. From this belief flows the skill of giving and receiving feedback outlined below.

Feedback isn't absolute truth but it is truth for the person who is delivering it.

Gene Early

I put the skill of receiving feedback first, as I have found that to give it we need first of all to be able to receive it. Our ability to receive feedback is central to continuous learning and growth, as well as being key to healthy, sustainable relationships, both in business and in life.

What can you do to model excellence in the way you receive feedback?

- Get yourself into a resourceful state for receiving the feedback. Anchor a state that has worked well for you in this way in the past. The state could be one of learning, for example, or one of openness, self-confidence, humility or curiosity.
- Remind yourself of the beliefs above.

- Respond in a way that presupposes acceptance, saying things like ‘In what ways do I do this?’ ‘What effect does this have on you?’ (Use present-tense language.)
- Always anticipate feedback and always invite it when appropriate so that feedback is in constant supply to you.
- If the feedback is personally challenging and you find it potentially uncomfortable to take on board, then dissociate for a moment – step back as if you are an observer of yourself. Having dissociated, check out what further personal resources you need to be able to accept the feedback, and then give those resources to yourself before stepping back into your own shoes (associating) in order to accept the feedback for real. If you have not done this before, it helps to do it in your imagination ‘offline’ with feedback that you either anticipate getting and you feel might be challenging, or that was offered to you previously and you found difficult to accept at the time. The more you do this the more you are able to do it ‘online’, whenever you need more resources to accept what is being offered.
- Take full responsibility for building and maintaining rapport with the giver of the feedback, even (and especially) if the giver is not taking any responsibility for this themselves.

Seek to understand the feedback

- Seek fully to understand the feedback by questioning (clean questions work wonderfully in this situation). For example, ask, ‘In what way do I do/am I that?’, ‘What is it that I do that gives you that impression?’, ‘Give me examples of how I do this?’ or ‘Is there anything else about that?’ These are all questions that demonstrate your willingness to accept the giver’s perception and learn from it. (What they don’t do is rationalize, explain, defend or attack in any way whatsoever.)
- If the feedback indicates that you have upset, annoyed or caused any negative emotions in the giver of the feedback, apologize for that, even though you may have been unaware of

the effect at that time. In this way you are taking responsibility for the effects you have on others.

- Check out what it is that you can do instead. Ask, ‘What do I have to do for you to know that I do (whatever the giver is saying you don’t do)?’
- Imagine yourself having taken on board the feedback and now behaving in a way that demonstrates you have done so. Do this in a way that fits not only for the giver but also with the other key people in that context.

The effect of accepting feedback in this way is to encourage the giver to want to give more feedback in the future. You are thus making a significant contribution to creating a climate of learning, whether in a business or a personal relationship.

All feedback is relevant. The feedback that we can least relate to is often the feedback from which we can derive the most learning.

Giving feedback

The bonus of modelling is that, as a result of the process, we have feedback to use for our own development and feedback to give to the person or people we have modelled. However, just having the feedback is not a sufficient qualification for giving it. A number of other factors need to be present before and during the process of offering and delivering the feedback. By giving feedback we can also verify that what we believe we have detected is also recognized by our subject.

Below are some steps that help ensure that the feedback we have to give is received in a way that enhances learning for both the giver and the receiver:

- 1 Check that you are in rapport with the person to whom you propose giving the feedback. If you are not, do whatever it takes to get that rapport before you even start the process.
- 2 Ask yourself, ‘How is this feedback as true about me as it is for the person to whom I am offering it?’ In this way you

will create a connectedness in your thinking and in the way you offer the feedback.

- 3 Imagine how by accepting the feedback both you and the other person can improve. Create this as a well-formed outcome in your thinking.
- 4 Frame the feedback first to say how it has come about or what area of performance it relates to, so that you warm up the receiver to what you are going to say next.
- 5 If the other person does not immediately accept the feedback, find another way to give it so they can understand what you are offering them. Their ability to receive the feedback is a measure of your ability to give it.
- 6 Maintain direct eye contact and imagine the receiver of the feedback both accepting and using the feedback constructively as you do so.
- 7 Recognize that the response you get from others is coming from the part with which you are choosing to engage. If you do not understand what I am telling you, it is the 'non-understanding' part with which I am choosing to engage.
- 8 Be an example at all times of the response you want from others.
- 9 Ask the receiver of the feedback to tell you what they are going to do with what you have given them. Sometimes it helps to ask this before you give the feedback, for example 'If I give you this feedback what will you do with it?' (This is useful if you know that the person has a habit of shrugging off or avoiding feedback.)

The ultimate measure of your skill in giving feedback is that, as a result of the process, both you and the person or people to whom you have given the feedback learn from it and deepen your connection with each other.

Today we give each other feedback and we learn from it. What we used to give each other was abuse!

Delegate on an in-company course

Shortcut to developing your ability to receive feedback

- 1 Choose someone from whom you wish to receive feedback. You might even choose someone from whom you think receiving feedback will be challenging. Perhaps start with the first option!
2. Anchor a state that is most conducive to you receiving the feedback with an open heart.
- 3 Tell them why receiving feedback is important from them and invite them to be as specific as they can.
- 3 Position yourself so that you can see and hear them clearly and without distraction.
- 4 Listen and ask clean questions. Even if you think you understand what they are telling you, asking the questions is a way of showing that you are open and curious about the feedback. It is a powerful sign of listening and seeking to understand.
- 5 Stay connected with the belief that there is only learning. Everything you hear is learning; it is not relevant that you may not have had this feedback before – that is very often the most valuable feedback you can hear.
- 6 Maintain your rapport with the other person.
- 7 Try the feedback on; imagine yourself with it in place and check that this is what they mean.
- 8 Step back and imagine yourself as the other person and ensure that what is happening is a win/win. Check it out. Ask the giver, ‘So if I do this, will that demonstrate that I have taken your feedback on board?’ You might even ask for their support going forward.
- 10 Imagine both you and the giver of the feedback learning from the feedback in such a way that you strengthen your relationship in the future.
- 11 What have you learned from this whole process?

Summary

The opportunities for feedback surround us in every medium in which we choose to work. We can learn and grow continuously if we choose, provided that we have the beliefs and skills to give and receive feedback. Feedback is how we can know if what we are doing is working. What could be more important than that?

Thought provokers

1 Identify someone who is significant to you in:

a your personal life

b your work

c our community.

Decide on a time and a way in which you can ask each for feedback on the extent to which you support them in the way they want you to.

2 Identify someone with whom you have some difficulties.

Think of a way in which you can ask them for feedback on what you could do that would make a positive difference between you.

3 Identify someone in your work or your life generally who you wish would be different in some way. Ask yourself how you are not being what you want them to be, and how you can be an example of what you do want them to be.

4 Who is your most important customer? When did you last ask for feedback from them? How might you ask for feedback now? How might you set up a feedback system for your most important customers if you don't have one in place right now?

5 Think of someone to whom you wish to give feedback – it can be congratulatory or feedback that will require them to change something or become aware of something.

From the moment that Janeena arrived in the group, she seemed to be on the brink of a lot of emotion. There were moments when things that were said seemed to bring her very close to tears. However, she indicated that she did not want to discuss what she was experiencing with anybody. I allowed her the space, and if she wished to open up or to invite any response or coaching, then it was down to her.

On the very last day, something once again triggered an emotional response in her. I could see her friend non-verbally encouraging her to explain what was happening, and I sensed that she was very afraid to share what she was feeling with me and others. And yet, she did. At first, all that she could describe was a very violent recurring image that had haunted her for the past 15 years. She kept saying that there was blood, there was blood everywhere.

What emerged very painfully was that her brothers had been held up to ransom by a gang who wanted to extort money from her family, and on their refusal to pay, her brothers were shot at point blank range in the head. And she had witnessed this. Over the years, many people had encouraged her to forgive the killers, saying that that was the way to free herself from the torment that she was experiencing. She carried a photograph of her brothers with her at all times in her wallet, and her husband had been encouraging her to take the photograph out, to move on, and to stop thinking about them. She was adamant, however, that she did not want to forgive or forget.

The business that Janeena and her husband ran was struggling, and because in the past she had turned to her brothers for advice and help, she felt their absence even more this time. While she was speaking, I thought about other people I had met who had witnessed killings and violence, and I realized that

many of them had chosen to turn their pain into purpose, and to either work with those with similar experiences or to work to prevent future violence. I could see that this idea resonated with her, and that it could be a way of honouring her brothers' memory. I suggested that as she considered the way that she wanted to move forward, that she might step into her brothers' shoes, and, as if she were them, offer advice to herself about how she could turn something so devastating into something that might help other people.

Her whole state changed. I could see this was just the beginning of the process, but a sense of peace came over her. She was finding a way to move forward that suited her needs and respected her values and her memories. She had the answer within her, and she was beginning to find it.

22 High-performance coaching

I'm a success today because I had a friend who believed in me and I didn't have the heart to let him down..

Abraham Lincoln

Belief plays a vital role in the context of life and learning and coaching. The term 'coaching' has become overused and means so many different things. And I would certainly not use it in the context of a conversation I once had with a young woman whose sister had tragically and suddenly died in an accident. NLP is renowned for the many techniques that have been discovered over time by modelling people who are able to manage themselves through conflicts, down times, challenges and opportunities. Sometimes, however, it is more important to just stay with what you are feeling and experiencing – to 'walk through the valley of the shadow of death'.

I will elaborate on the conversation that I had with this young woman (Jane) to give a context to what I am saying. First, though, you might wonder why I am starting with such a personal tragic example when so much of my writing has been to explore how we can be the best we can be in our work in particular. And, of course, there is no way that we can be the best in our work if we have big personal issues to resolve. They are the core of who and how we are and they therefore need to be addressed first. Jane was due to start a new job. She knew it was vital that she took time to grieve for her sister before she even contemplated starting her new role.

It was Jane's mother who initially contacted me, having trained with me some years before. She was contacting me on behalf of her eldest daughter who had witnessed the

accidental death of her younger sister just the week before and was unable to get the images of that moment out of her mind. Though there are ways to change our thought patterns – the SWISH, for example (covered in [Chapter 2](#), Thinking patterns) – my instinct suggested that to offer this technique in the context of such a devastating event might seem to trivialize it. When supporting someone who is looking for help, it is important to remember that people have all the resources they need within themselves already. Communicating this belief to them can give them the confidence to trust in what they are realizing and discovering. The metamessage is that they do know how to help themselves and they do not need to rely on you for suggestions and advice. And this was especially apparent with Jane. She was aware of the overwhelming advice that people were giving her, and she knew that not much of it helped. She knew that at the funeral of her sister she had had a strong sense of her sister telling her she was OK. We talked about what was helping and what was not ... and, in the main, others' advice was not. I did ask if there was anyone who might understand – someone who had had a similar experience – and she immediately identified one of her teachers who knew both Jane and her sister and who had not only lost a family member at a young age but whose mother had just died. Even as she named this teacher there was a subtle shift in her state.

So, in essence, to use some of the NLP terms for the moment, I was drawing on the belief that people do have all the resources they need already: Jane did know who would be a resource to her (a model of excellence) – her teacher. And she realised that probably by just being in this person's presence she would find support and understanding. And apart from that I just listened, and if I did ask questions I asked clean ones primarily. More than anything I held the belief that young woman had immense wisdom about how she would not only get through this but would make something remarkable of it in her life.

Those who cope with life-changing events ultimately turn pain into purpose

So often the most powerful and influential interventions are the seemingly simplest. They are, however, based on a deep understanding and skill in the underlying structure. There is an analogy here in the world of art. Originally under the influence of Iberian and African art, as well as the ideas of Cézanne, Picasso began roughening and simplifying the outlines of figures and objects. Masters of their craft are usually people who have found the simplest and most efficient and elegant way of achieving the effect that they want.

I remember my own mentor, Gene Early, whose approach to training and coaching was elegant and minimalist, saying ‘underneath the seemingly simple and unstructured surface was immense structure’.

So what is NLP-based coaching?

The keys to NLP are to be in the present, not knowing and open to feedback. This is very significant in the context of coaching. NLP is not a numbered procedural approach but one that is based on sensitivity to what is working and what is not and the flexibility to keep doing something different till we find what works. NLP, unlike many other coaching methods that are process based, is client based. That is a vital difference.

Most people are familiar with coaching in a sporting context. There are football coaches, tennis coaches, skiing coaches – there aren’t too many sports that don’t have some aspect of coaching associated with them. And what about personal fitness coaches or trainers? It seems that more and more people have someone to support or push them to a state of fitness. One of my colleagues, with the support of a personal coach, trained to run the London Marathon and went from never having run before to completing the marathon in five hours after just eight weeks of training. You may also have heard of the term ‘life coaching’. It is as if there is an

awakening to the value of developing oneself to achieve a state of physical and mental fitness. And since the last edition of this book there has been a boom in online coaching apps in cycling, fitness training, yoga, meditation, cooking, learning a language ... I can't really think of an area for which there isn't an app!

There is an explosion in the investment in self-help and self-development apps

The joy of the shift in business is the realization that business growth comes from personal growth. When I started out in my NLP work over 30 years ago they were considered to be two unconnected areas. Those who attended those early NLP programmes did so 'undercover' in case their business colleagues thought they were a bit 'whacky'! Now it's the people who don't invest in their continued growth and learning who are considered 'whacky'.

David had changed companies three times in the past two years. In each company where he was employed, he was always one of the top salespeople. However, he felt frustrated, as his goal was to lead a team rather than to work as an independent salesperson for the rest of his career. He had been given a few opportunities to prove himself and most recently had been put in charge of a team in his company. Nevertheless, each time he assumed such a role he started having problems in his relationships with some of the key people. The result was usually that he got so frustrated that people didn't cooperate in the way he expected them to that he eventually left and found another sales position. He did this until he worked his way once more to a leadership role. We repeat our patterns unless we learn how to interrupt them.

We repeat our patterns

This is a familiar trend in many companies, and there are many similar examples of people who have ambitions they seem destined not to realize. What is the typical solution? Usually, it is to let the person go. Some companies might invest first in some training, believing that there are techniques of people management that can be learned to resolve the issue. Some companies might invest time in personal appraisal, where someone like David would be given advice as to how best to deal with the person with whom he was having problems. Some companies might just shake their heads and say, 'You always lose a good salesperson when you try to make a manager out of them.' So where does NLP coaching come in?

The aim of NLP-based coaching

The aim of NLP-based coaching is to support people in realizing their true potential. It is based on the premise that most of the limitations to our true potential are not represented by other people, but by unhealthy strategies that we have learned and that are entirely within us.

NLP is the study of the structure of subjective experience

NLP is 'the study of the structure of subjective experience'. In David's case, this means that there is a structure to how David is creating this repeated experience. The fact that it is repeated is a clue. His problems lie not in the other people (he re-experiences the same problems no matter who the people are) but in himself.

What patterns do you repeat? Do you, for example:

- find that you frequently lose key people in your team?
- regularly get stressed with other people?
- invariably end up in conflict with your management?
- often find yourself disagreeing and frustrated with people in authority?
- find it hard to stay in long-term relationships?
- find that you prefer to distance yourself from anyone who gets too close?

- somehow seem to miss achieving your important goals just as you are on the brink of success?
- find that most work is difficult and hard?
- consistently fail to achieve what is important to you in life?
- feel that you are often hard done by?
- experience life as being not fair?
- find that the people in whom you pin your hopes always seem to let you down?
- feel that success is always just round the corner?

On the other hand, are you one of those people who:

- appear easily and almost effortlessly to achieve what you want consistently?
- are frequently surprised by just what a good hand life has dealt you?
- find that you seem to attract good people to support and work with you?
- are surprised by the opportunities that come your way and feel you have been very lucky?
- feel passionate about your work and what you do?
- have a good lasting relationship?
- wake up feeling good about life and the hand that life has dealt you?
- recognize that you are being the best you can be and that you have worked hard to achieve that?

The significance of all of these, good or bad, is that they are learned patterns that we act out in the world, no matter what the quality of the external circumstances. NLP-based coaching is about discovering those patterns, and either coaching ourselves or others so that we can choose whether we keep the patterns, where we use them, how we can develop new ones and to be aware so that we make conscious choices to achieve the results and the effects we want. In essence, the purpose of NLP-based coaching is as follows:

- To discover our own and/or others' patterns (strategies), especially those of our outstanding talents, so that we can reproduce them or transfer them to other contexts. For

example, if you have an outstanding strategy for connecting with people socially but find it challenging to do the same when you are in a business meeting with new contacts, you can learn how to transfer the strategy that works socially into the business context by using NLP.

- To discover the strategies that are leading us to get results we no longer want in our lives. By finding out how we are doing what we are doing, we can reprogram ourselves or coach others to reprogram themselves to make new choices. For example, if you lack sensitivity to the signals another person is giving you and inadvertently sabotage the relationship, you can discover what you are doing and learn a new strategy that works for you.
- To learn how to self-coach yourself through problem issues in your work and life and support others to do the same.
- To support yourself and others to develop the self-confidence and self-esteem to recognize that you already have all the strategies you could ever want in your life. With NLP coaching, you can learn how to build this confidence and tap into these strategies when you choose.
- To enable you to find your own unique brand of excellence so you achieve the success that only you can. In other words, with NLP you can learn how to differentiate yourself with the natural talents you already have.
- To learn how to manage yourself to achieve what you want by influencing yourself from within or coaching others to do the same.
- To develop the ability to learn from every circumstance in your life and coach others to achieve the same level of empowerment.

The principles of NLP-based coaching

NLP coaching is generic. One of its aims is to find the point of greatest leverage for learning – the difference that makes the difference, and to do so in a way that the coachee discovers that they

already have the ‘answers’ so that they enhance their confidence in their ability to coach themselves. This is true for one-to-one coaching, just as it is for group training.

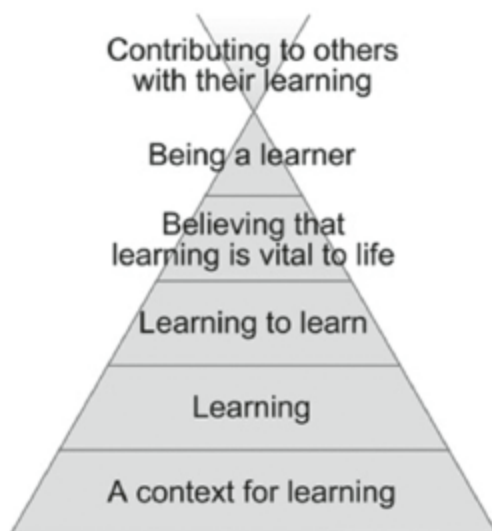
NLP coaching is generic

A theoretical structure for understanding the kinds of learning available to human beings evolved from Bertrand Russell’s theory of logical types and was subsequently described by Gregory Bateson in his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. The principle is that learning takes place on different levels (see the diagram on the following page).

At one level we do things. For example, I did maths at school but didn’t understand what that mathematics was really about. I just did it. A colleague of mine, however, is doing a maths degree and now understands the significance of the maths that he learned previously at school and in his engineering degree, so that he can proceed independently of his tutors to learn more about the subject.

A name is not the thing named.
Bertrand Russell

Greater flexibility = greater survival strength



Moving up from one learning level to the next allows us to have more choice. In that choice (which is referred to as ‘requisite variety’) we have more survival strength through our greater flexibility to cope with change. Being able to change levels in thought and conversation significantly influences the nature of the interactions of which we are a part.

Friends may do things for us. Coaches support us to do things for ourselves.

True friends do both

We can use this model to learn how to switch levels and how to facilitate others in doing so. Our skill in this affects our ability to set outcomes for ourselves, to handle resistance and objections both externally and internally, and to reframe our experiences so that we can perceive situations differently and thereby manage our emotional state. This model is a powerful tool for managing change, both for us and for others. It is most certainly something we need to be aware of if we are engaged in giving feedback or coaching. The level(s) at which we intervene will be instrumental in the way in which our clients learn.

By intervening at a high level we affect all the levels below

The principle is that by influencing at a higher level we affect all the levels below. For example, if we simply tell someone what to do we are intervening at a low level. If, however, we challenge the way in which they learn or how they identify themselves as a learner, we will have a more far-reaching impact on their development.

If David (the salesperson whom we met earlier in this chapter) were to come to me for coaching, I could concentrate on what is happening in the current situation between him and one of the key people in his team. I could explore with him what he is doing wrong as a leader and what he could do instead. However, if I were to do this, it

might help him fix the problem for a while, but it would not resolve the underlying pattern. That would be an example of a low-level intervention and not particularly effective or sustainable over time.

Alternatively, I could go back to the source of the pattern. It is possible that David experienced difficulties as a child with his father or equivalent and that he was unable to cope emotionally. When children experience overwhelming emotional situations that they cannot deal with in a productive way, they shut them out. Either that or they dissociate from the experience or distort it in some way so that they are able to make sense of something that is beyond their comprehension.

I could adopt any of these approaches, but with NLP what we are interested in is how we make sense of our experience in the present.

David has a structure that he brings to each of the situations he experiences. Changing his place of work or the people with whom he works will not ultimately make a difference. What is important is that he learns how to change the structure of his thinking and behaviour so that it is increasingly in line with the outcomes he really wants.

NLP-based coaching is about the process and not about the content. When we find a way to develop the process of what we are doing, we influence all situations of the same kind.

Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man how to fish, and you feed him for life.

Anonymous

In essence, what we are doing when we coach using NLP is making the person being coached aware of their patterns at many levels. Simply becoming aware of this process creates choice. And standing back and reviewing the structure of that experience and deciding which bits we want to keep and which to develop is life changing.

This is how with NLP we can learn to remove the self-learned barriers and the obstacles to being the best we can be.

At the age of 90, my mother had an intruder break into her home in Liverpool and steal jewellery and money. As you might imagine, the shock of the experience was more potent than the loss of her belongings. The police asked her if she would be willing to help in an identification parade. Despite being an invalid, she immediately began to explore how she might do this. She had very strong principles and wanted to help prevent similar crimes being carried out in the future.

She called me to ask my advice. 'Do you think I should help with this identity parade?'

A part of me wanted her to say 'no' to protect her from the emotions of the experience, but my instinct was to say 'Yes, I believe that is the right thing to do.' That is what I said, and she thanked me for my answer. Her question presupposed the answer.

If any business colleague were to ask me a question with the same format, 'Do you think I should ...' and if my outcome were to support them in finding their self-esteem and confidence, then my principle is usually to say 'Yes'. By saying 'yes' I am confirming the perception they have already formed within themselves. I am confirming that their map of the world is valid. By saying 'yes' I am presupposing that they do have all the resources they need within themselves already. And by saying 'yes' I am acting in a way that is more likely to boost their independence, self-esteem and confidence than if I were to offer a solution of my own.

The role of a coach is to help others realize their true potential

The main role of a coach is to support others in realizing their true potential. I also believe that the fastest and most effective way to do

this is to help them to find the resources they already have within themselves. In the context of coaching, it is often more appropriate to find ways to boost self-esteem and confidence than it is to get the 'right' solution.

I have certainly had some of my most powerful learning experiences through the mistakes I have made. Coaching requires us to be prepared to give others the space to make their own mistakes and realize their successes. They can only do this if we encourage them to do things their way and to learn from doing so.

Ironically, although my mother was very shaken by her experience with the intruder, it also gave her the motivation to ensure that justice was done. In a way, by supporting the identity parade she felt she was making a more significant contribution to society than she had done for years. Who was I to take that away from her to protect my own fears?

When we coach others, it is important to be able to keep our own emotions out of the way. To develop someone's confidence in themselves and therefore in their ability to draw on their own resources, I want to reward and confirm any opportunity when they are indicating that this is what they are doing. If someone has the structure of the answer in their question, my role as a coach is to reinforce that.

The question presupposes the answer

Examples of questions in which the answer presupposed is 'yes' include:

- Do you think I should take the job I have been offered in this new company?
- Do you think I can find the confidence to do this?
- Should I really reconsider that decision?
- Do you think I have poor listening skills? (The question asked of me by the financial adviser referenced in an earlier chapter!)

- Am I being very direct in the way I am saying this? (This last question invites direct feedback: ‘Yes.’ And yet I have witnessed many coaches seeking to reassure the questioner in response to a question like this, rather than confirming the truth that the questioner already knows within themselves – and of course giving and receiving feedback, which is the subject of [Chapter 21](#).)

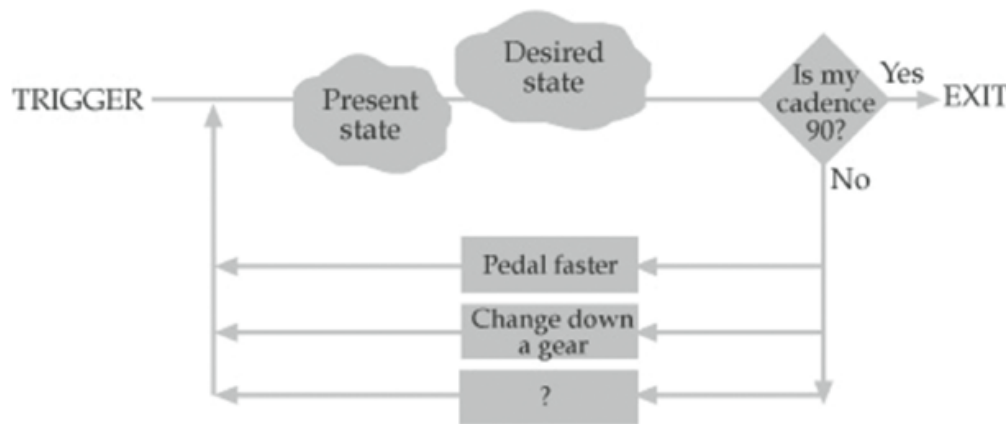
Finding our inner resources

[Chapter 12](#) introduced the TOTE (Test Operate Test Exit) process. This is a flowchart for mapping the strategies we use to get ourselves from our present state to a future desired state.

On my bike I have a mini computer that can track the current speed, the average speed, the distance covered, the top speed and more. One of the measures is cadence – pedalling speed. Learning to manage cadence is one of the ways in which skilled cyclists develop their racing ability. The faster they can turn the pedals, the more efficiently they can use their energy. I aim for a cadence of 90, so as I cycle I watch the feedback on how I am doing. If the cadence drops below that, then I change my pedalling speed. If I am unable to increase my speed, I change down to a lower gear until I reach my target cadence once more. When neither of these strategies works, I explore my inner state to find ways in which I can tolerate a greater level of discomfort to increase my pedalling power.

This process mirrors the elements of the TOTE process. My desired state is a cadence of 90. By watching the bike computer I test to see that it stays at that rate. If the feedback I am getting indicates that I have dropped cadence speed, then I operate by pedalling faster. If that works (the present state matches the desired state) when I test by reading the monitor, then I temporarily exit. If by

operating in that way I do not achieve the desired state, then I carry out another operation by changing gear and test again. The more operations I can carry out, the more likely I am to achieve my desired state and therefore exit the TOTE process.



The person with the most flexibility in the way they think and behave is the person most likely to achieve their outcomes. Once we understand how this works for ourselves, we can use the same process to coach other people.

The person with the most flexibility is the one most likely to achieve their outcome

The belief that ‘We have all the resources we ever need’ is key to the TOTE process. The question is: how do we find them?

Suppose that you are about to make an important business presentation and you fear you will be unable to handle interaction in the presentation because you are so nervous. Your present state is one of nervousness and your desired state is one of ease, especially ease with your ability to deal with questions.



Your present state most certainly does not yet match your desired state. What steps can you take?

- 1 Identify what you believe you need in order to achieve the desired state. What you identify is an emotional state of confidence. The question is how to obtain it.
- 2 On the premise that you have this resource already, the question to ask yourself is: Where in my experience (no matter how fleeting) did I have the kind of confidence I want right now? You can find a situation in your experience, even if it is months or years old.
- 3 Step back into that time (associate) so that you relive it, especially the confidence. To do this it helps to imagine what you were seeing then, what you were hearing and feeling physically, and to do this from your own shoes so that you now re-experience what you were feeling emotionally – that state of confidence.
- 4 Once you have this, anchor it with a touch, a word or an image and bring the state of confidence back to you in the present as you prepare your thinking for the presentation.
- 5 Now test again. Does your present state match your desired state? If yes, you have what you want? if no, ask yourself what else you need to realize your desired state.
- 6 This time you realize that what you need is to build rapport with some of the people who will be at the presentation.
- 7 Explore and plan ways in which you might do this. You can either imagine yourself doing this to test if that is all you need, or you can do it in reality and go through the TOTE process again.



Whatever resource you need, the belief is that somewhere you have it. Examples of emotional resources that we have somewhere in our experience include:

- courage
- peace of mind
- enthusiasm
- motivation
- determination
- fun.

We each have our own representation for each of these kinds of big chunk words. What matters is that we know what we need and we know where in our experience we can find it.

Recognizing a state of high potential

It is not just knowing what our desired state is, it is important to know how to recognize it when we have it. The value of feedback is that it enables us to regulate what we are doing and how we are doing it. If we know the characteristics of the state we want, we have a means of measuring when we have got there. Objective, factual feedback is a potent force for change. If we know what characterizes what we want and we know what we have got (and it is not yet the desired state), then we create a tension between the

two. This tension is what we might call motivation, and it has a momentum of its own that seeks to close the gap between what we have and what we want.

Objective feedback is a potent force for change

We can use this knowledge in coaching. For each of us, our most influential state is congruence. Congruence is a state of total rapport with ourselves, when all aspects of who we are and what we are doing are in alignment. Sportspeople often call this state the flow zone. It comes as a result of much training and discipline and is the culmination of everything, when the sportsperson can achieve their personal best with effortless ease.

In [Chapter 14](#) I introduced the logical levels of influence model. The same model is a way of thinking about how congruent we are.

- 1 Think (just briefly) of a time when you felt uncomfortable with what you were doing and how you were doing it. It might have been a time when you felt emotionally uncomfortable and ill at ease with how you were handling a situation. You might have felt that you were violating something you consider to be important or compromising some deeply held beliefs or values. You will have felt in conflict with yourself and possibly you were having an inner dialogue to that effect, to the point where you were unable to give the kind of attention you would truly have liked to the people or the situation.
- 2 Stand outside of yourself and look and listen to how you were being at that time. What do you notice about your non-verbal behaviour? What is characteristic in how you sound? Can you specify your behaviour at that time so that you would recognize if you were to be in the same state again?
- 3 Think of a time (which might be right now) when you felt that what you were doing and how you were doing it were just right for you – a time when your natural abilities just flowed, everything you wanted to achieve seemed to come

together, and you felt that your body and mind were saying 'yes' to how you were as a person.

- 4 Stand outside of yourself and look and listen to how you were being at that time. What is characteristic of you now? If you were to tell someone else, how they could recognize you in this state? What would you tell them?

As a coach you need to be vigilant to spot the difference

One of the roles of a coach is to give this kind of feedback to the person they are coaching. This involves watching and listening to the person you are coaching to such a degree that you can tell when they are in a state of congruence and when they are not. If someone has come to you because they have been in a problem state for some time, you might only get a fleeting glimpse of their congruent state. However, you need to be sufficiently vigilant to catch it when it happens.

Here is an example of what you might see and hear in someone in an incongruent state:

- tension in the facial muscles
- pale complexion
- glazed, fixed expression
- asymmetrical body posture
- reference to problem people by pointing to them in the air outside of themselves
- use of the words 'must,' 'try' and 'should'
- emphasis on a problem state characterized by vocabulary such as 'don't want', 'not' and 'never'
- hesitancy in the voice
- lack of resonance in the voice.

And in a congruent state:

- relaxed facial muscles
- flushed complexion
- active eye movements
- symmetrical body posture

- consistent gesturing to within themselves
- use of words such as 'want to', 'can' and 'really like'
- nodding of the head
- pauses in the conversation
- use of active language.

This will not be the same for everyone. It is your role as a coach to be able to tell the difference and give precise feedback on the characteristics of each state. This is liberating information: once someone has this information they have choice. They can choose whether they stay in a stuck problem state or whether they choose the congruent state (typically a state of self-fulfilment).

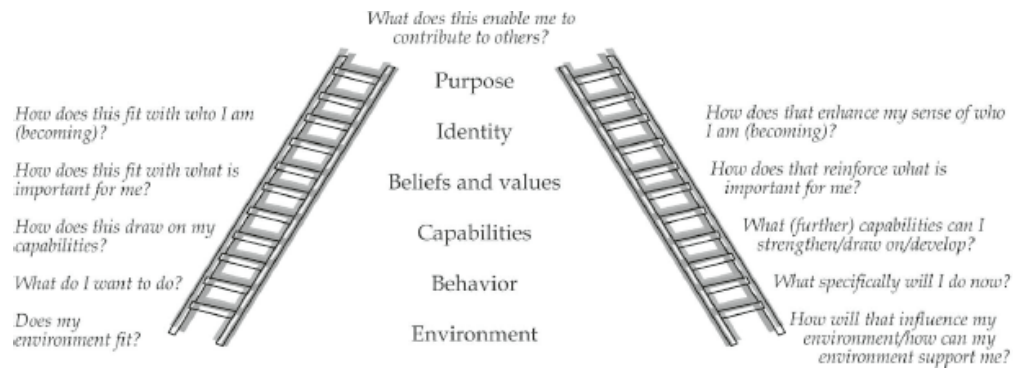
One of the founding principles of NLP is that unique coaches make unique interventions in unique ways at unique times with unique people! They certainly don't follow a procedure!

The ladder to success

What often prompts a desire or a need for coaching is usually a state of incongruence (That said, I am witnessing a shift in people seeking coaching because they want to invest in their ability to continuously learn and grow and not because of any specific problem state. This is a very encouraging shift in the way that coaching is perceived.) Maybe we feel we are working in a way that contradicts what we think is really important. Or maybe we are contemplating a decision that means sacrificing some of our commitments to people who are important to us. Or perhaps we know that we are just not working to the best of our ability. Whatever the situation, any incongruence will mean that we are limiting or even blocking ourselves from realizing our true potential.

Sometimes this incongruence occurs because we choose to delete what we intuitively know is not right and hope that things will sort themselves out over time. Although this might sometimes happen, it is more likely that things will deteriorate. The longer we ignore the issues, the more of a challenge they become to resolve.

One of the simplest and yet sometimes most powerful ways of using the logical levels of influence model is to coach using questions to chunk up and chunk down the levels to recognize in what ways you are (or are not) making a decision that is congruent. The questions to do this with are shown in the following diagram:



Presuppose excellence

One of the biggest influences we have as a coach is our belief in the person with whom we are working. If we cannot imagine the person we are coaching achieving the kinds of outcomes they express, or if we cannot imagine them realizing any kind of higher potential, then we should not be coaching them. If, on the other hand, we can imagine this person being the person they want to be or someone realizing a greater potential, then that is what we communicate to them.

I often talk about ‘holding space’ for my delegates and the people I coach. What this means is that I spot their patterns. In particular, I notice patterns that are hindering them or, if used exclusively as a habit, will hinder them. And through their patterns I spot their talents, very often ones that they take for granted. And I imagine them using those talents to the full. In holding this outcome for them and in believing that they can rise far above the level at which they might be operating now, I am holding space.

*Beyond the world of right doings and wrongdoings is a field.
I'll meet you there.*

Rumi

I see the confident part of you – and that is the part of you with which I engage

If I think of you as incompetent, I will engage with the ‘incompetent’ part of you. If I think of you as stubborn, that is what I am going to encourage and experience in my dealings with you. If, however, I can see the talented part of you, my interactions with you invite that part of you to emerge. If I can see, hear and feel you letting go of any limiting patterns and being fully and congruently who you are, then that is the ‘you’ that can increasingly emerge.

Suppose you have a colleague, a member of your family or an associate with whom you feel frustrated. Maybe you feel that they could be achieving more than they currently are. It may be that this person has not excelled in what they have done to date, but coaching is not about facts, it is about processes and beliefs.

Maybe you can recall someone who, irrespective of the facts of the situation, demonstrated a belief in you at a key point in your life to the degree that it inspired you to achieve something beyond anything you had done previously. Perhaps it was a teacher who took a special interest in your emerging talent. Maybe it was a boss who showed a trust in your capabilities. Or maybe it was your parents who stuck by their belief in you no matter what happened. This is the foundation of great coaching.

It is your responsibility to believe in the people you are coaching

We influence others by the beliefs we hold in them, irrespective of the facts or the circumstances. Coaching is an emotional process. Think of your children, your family, your colleagues and your associates. Is there any one of them in whom you show this outstanding belief? And is there any one of them about whom you hold any doubt? Your belief can strengthen their belief. Your doubt potentially deepens their doubt. It is your responsibility as a coach

to believe in the people you are coaching, whether they are members of your family or people with whom you work.

How do you strengthen belief? Belief comes from our ability to imagine either ourselves or other people achieving outcomes. If we can see, hear and emotionally experience them realizing their dreams, that translates itself into a belief and we communicate this to them whatever we do and say. Imagine this person realizing a potential beyond the level at which they are currently operating.

One of my colleagues is exceptional in her ability to advise people on issues relating to their image. She sees beauty in everyone she meets.

Who is coaching whom?

When someone comes to me for a coaching session for the first time and tells me their issue, one of my first reactions is to ask myself, 'Do I want to deal with this issue in my life right now?' Coaching is a mutual process. I can only offer the structure of what I have managed for myself or what I am managing for myself in my life at this time.

Coaching as a mutual process

In essence, when we interact with another person we are one system. We are not 'doing coaching' to others, we are part of a coaching system. What we offer is what we receive and what we receive and accept for ourselves is what we can give.

With the people we are coaching, we bring out and engage with those parts of ourselves that we need to resolve or that we have resolved and for which we can now be an example.

We teach what we need the most

We teach what we need the most. I may not behave in exactly the same way as the people I am coaching, but I will have a parallel structure or capability in my experience. This is what I refer to as the ‘Apply to Self’ strategy (see [Chapter 21](#), Giving and receiving feedback) – one of the most available and powerful self-development tools you can use. For example:

What I experience in the other person	What I am doing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are dismissive in the way they speak to colleagues. • They avoid making a commitment to change. • They are aggressively focused on what they want and insensitive to the needs of others in the way they behave in a meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am dismissive in the way I speak to my family. • I avoid commitment to one of my stated outcomes. • I am single-mindedly aggressive in my focus on my work goals and oblivious to the effect on my friends and family.

However, while I am resolving issues for myself, I begin to recognize and consequently reinforce these kinds of issues in others. For example:

Issues you might deal with personally	Issues you might support in others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your willingness to let go of something of material importance to you. • Your ability to tell someone close to you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their ability to let go of patterns, people or material possessions that are familiar and comfortable yet limiting.

<p>how much you care for/love them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A decision to reinvent yourself and move on to new approaches or new business. • Your ability to let go of trying to control others (family members or work colleagues) and let them find their own solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their ability to forgive and let go of past judgments and be intimate. • Their ability to develop and strengthen new patterns that support them in making new decisions • Their ability truly to delegate and give people the space to find their own motivation.
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Shortcut to coaching

The best coaching is the simplest coaching. NLP is a state of interest and curiosity. Applying these two principles, here is a shortcut to coaching:

- 1 Invite someone to tell you an issue for which they would like new choices or increased understanding.
- 2 Get into a state of curiosity and acceptance.
- 3 Get yourself into a similar posture and way of moving as the other person. This is approximate – you don't have to mimic. Think of yourself as being connected to them.
- 4 Listen intently to what they are telling you. Mentally note the words they are using and the gestures they are making.
- 5 Ask them clean questions (see [Chapter 6](#)), using only the words they give you. Don't in any way try to give suggestions or make changes to what they are saying, just be curious to the degree that you understand fully what they are

saying, only exploring those aspects of the situation that they are giving you.

- 6 Summarize back to them from time to time, using their language. Keep to their vocabulary and use their non-verbal style of communicating when you do this summary.
- 7 While they are talking, identify how you have the structure of this issue within yourself, too, and how you either have dealt with or are dealing with it in your life.
- 8 Imagine the other person achieving what they really want. See, hear and feel it until you believe that they are capable of a greater potential than they have demonstrated to date, either with respect to this issue or in their life as a whole. Think this as you speak to them (keep this vision to yourself).
- 9 Give them feedback on the distinctions between what you experience as their incongruent and then their congruent state.
- 10 Recognize that the person is bringing this issue to you so that you can learn, too.
- 11 Reinforce their learning by running it through the levels of influence with them.
- 12 Summarize what you have heard and what you believe the other person is feeling.
- 13 Ask them if there is anything else they want to talk about.

Summary

NLP high-performance coaching is founded on the study of subjective experience. By discovering how we structure our memories, our imagination and our thoughts, we can find out how we are making our work and our life exactly what they are.

When you know what you are doing you can do what you want.
Moshe Feldenkrais

Thought provokers

1 Ask a colleague or friend if they will take part in an exercise with you. Tell them you are going to talk with them about their goals. Ask them to tell you about their progress towards their goals. For the first few minutes (no more than that), think about how unlikely it is that they will achieve their goals. Think of the difficulties and the impossibility of what they are saying. You do not have to say what you are thinking, but do engage in some interaction with them as they are speaking.

After a few minutes, change your thinking so that you are imagining them achieving all they are saying and more. Picture what they are doing and hear how they sound in this future desired state. Notice how you feel towards them as you do this and engage with them as they continue to tell you about these goals. Do this for a few minutes or more. At the end of this time, ask your colleague how they felt during the conversation. Did they notice or experience any differences in how you were towards them or even how they felt about themselves? Did you notice any changes in their responses to you as you changed your inner thinking? What were they?

2 Think of someone with whom you find it difficult to work. Ask yourself about the image of this person that you have had prior to and during each interaction you have experienced as difficult. Now think of someone you find easy and a pleasure to deal with. What is in your mind before and during your interactions with them?

3 Think of an outcome that you want to achieve in your life or your work right now. What is your desired state? What is your present state? What quality do you need to find in yourself to begin to bridge the gap between the two? How might you re-experience that quality so that you can bring it to bear on the outcome that you want to achieve today?

- 4 Think of someone in your work, your personal life and your community you don't get on with as well as you might. What is it about each of them that you feel is the cause of the difficulty? How is the aspect of each that you have identified true about you?
- 5 Think of someone in your work, your personal life and your community you do get on well with. What is it about each of them that you admire? How is that aspect of each true about you?
- 6 Who are the people who have believed in you during your life? What effect did they have on you?

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A young boy who had been categorized as learning disabled was brought to the NLP coach Robert Dilts to see if Robert could help him progress with his learning. The boy was 11 years old and was believed to be unable to spell.

Robert and he got talking and it emerged that the boy loved watching films. Robert asked him what his favourite film was.

'*Star Wars*,' he replied.

He then asked the boy who was his favourite character in the film and he said it was the Wookie (a large, bear-like creature).

Robert asked the boy if he would be willing to play a game and he agreed. He asked the boy if he could see the Wookie now and the boy looked up momentarily

and said he could. Robert asked him if he could make the Wookiee put his arms out horizontally by his sides (he demonstrated this) and the boy (looking up again) said yes.

‘Now,’ said Robert, ‘I want you to hang some letters underneath the Wookiee’s arm – put a P, now an H and then an E underneath his arm side by side.’ He paused between each one. ‘Have you done that?’

The boy nodded.

‘Can you make the Wookiee open his mouth?’

Again, the boy nodded.

‘I want you to see the Wookiee open his mouth and you will see some letters come out. The first letter is N. Can you do that?’

Once again a nod.

‘Now see the Wookiee open his mouth again and this time the letter that comes out is an O. And again and this time the letter is M and finally as the Wookiee opens his mouth again an M comes out. And now an E. Have you done that?’

‘Yes,’ said the boy, although Robert already knew the answer.

‘Finally I want you to hang some more letters under the Wookiee’s other arm. First an N now an O and now an N.’

When the boy indicated that he had done all of that, Robert said to him, ‘Now tell me what letters are hanging under the Wookiee’s right arm’ (he indicated which arm he meant).

The boy said without hesitation, ‘P, H, E.’

‘And now the Wookiee is opening his mouth and the letters are coming out again – what are they?’

‘N, O, M, E,’ the boy replied.

‘And now tell me the letters hanging under the Wookie’s left arm.’

‘N, O, N,’ said the boy, who had just spelled (without hesitation) PHENOMENON.

23 Coaching with humour (Provocative Coaching)

*If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh,
otherwise they'll kill you.*

George Bernard Shaw

What does laughter have to do with excellence? Surely excellence is a serious affair and no laughing matter? Well, I am about to dispel that myth. The ability to stand back and laugh at ourselves has to be one of the surest ways of cutting through the web of tangled myths we create.

Something happens in our brain when we laugh

Something happens in our brain when we laugh. Change happens. We hotwire the lifeless engine in our mind that has become stuck with too much serious deliberation to the source of energy that can spark us into life again. Being able to laugh at ourselves implies that we can stand back to see and hear ourselves, and that is part of the remedy. When we are stuck in only our own perception of a scenario, we have limited choice. Standing back enables us to discover a horizon far beyond the old boundary fence with which we have hemmed ourselves in.

Provocative = to provoke a healing response

Think of the people you admire, people you hold up as models of excellence. I would be prepared to wager that many of them have the ability to laugh at themselves, to laugh with others and to generate humour. Humour has always been a part of NLP in the way it is taught. When Richard Bandler and John Grinder began their

research into excellence, one of the first people they modelled was Frank Farrelly, already famous for his Provocative Therapy. Provocative can mean many things and in the context of the way Frank worked it meant to provoke a healing response – part of that healing takes place through laughter.

Research has shown that the ability to laugh at the same things is one of the ingredients for a successful relationship, and that incompatibility in what we find amusing can be the deciding factor in whether or not two people stay together. It is also now believed that humour has played a key role in the development of human beings as the species that we are today (good and bad!). What we do know is that when we laugh we lower our stress levels and boost our immunity and human growth hormones. Simultaneously, we lower the incidence of those hormones that cause obstructions in our arteries and we decrease our blood pressure.

When we laugh we decrease our blood pressure

Laughter is a mechanism for change and healing, and is present in most models of excellence. So it is surprising that so many coaches expect to be serious in their interactions with their clients!

The key to excellence lies in the things we take for granted

There are many books on NLP, but few that describe the use of humour and its power to heal, to strip away the patterns of sabotage to get to the truth and to build instant and powerful rapport. It is often the way that the piece that makes the difference is omitted. The key to our excellence often lies in the very things that we take for granted and consciously delete.

The whole approach that is Provocative Coaching or Therapy is too big a subject to be covered here, but I will outline some of the key elements and hope that whets your appetite to find out more. See the end of the chapter for further references.

What I do offer in this chapter is how, as a coach or just as someone who wants to connect quickly and powerfully at a deep

level with others, you can access this liberating humour. The elements here are based on my years of modelling Frank Farrelly in action and observing humour at work in everyday work and personal contexts. Humour has become increasingly a part of my style of training.

Frank Farrelly died in 2013. I had had the privilege of working and being with him over a period of 20 years. He changed my life. Humour had always been a part of my heritage, coming as I do from Liverpool where they say you have to be a comic to survive! With Frank I learned how to use that humour to bring about healing and learning. And thank God I recorded many of the sessions that he did to demonstrate the concept. He insisted that I did and insisted that those who had one-on-one sessions with him watch the recordings over and over again. And I watch them. The depth and complexity of the way he worked was remarkable. Each time I watch I learn something new. I am often asked if I will put these recordings online but they are very personal to the people who were being coached. What I do, however, is (with the subject's permission and often with them present) show them and study them in my trainings. I find that those people who are experienced in NLP are the ones who are able to unpack what is happening ... and see the magic unfold.

How does humour work?

Laughter affects the way we think

Humour changes the way we experience our issues. Laughter affects our physiology, our muscle tension, the way we think. When we are immersed in our issues and overwhelmed with the emotions that accompany them, it is just about impossible to engage in objective

thought. When we get absorbed into a problem we tend to think about it more and more. And the more we think about it, the more intellectually absorbing it becomes. We cut the grooves deeper that take us down that old familiar path. Thinking about the issue in the way we have always thought about it doesn't get us any nearer to our ideal state. We need to find a way to break out of this self-defeating spiral.

Humour does just that. When we can laugh at ourselves and our situation, we have detached ourselves from the original debilitating emotions. The moment we detach we bring a new, healthier perspective to what we have been experiencing.

I do emphasize, though, that being provocative does not mean that humour is the be all and end all. Being provocative in the way that is intended here is many things and can include some very serious feedback. It is the contrast between the different styles that has the impact.

Charles was in a coaching session, and Frank made a complex comment to him. 'You lost me there,' said Charles. 'You lost your way a long, long time ago, Charles,' replied Frank, looking him steadily in the eyes and with a very serious expression, touching his arm as he did so.

Being provocative also includes, among many other things, speaking the truth objectively, directly, seriously and with love. This often includes saying the things that others might be thinking but are too afraid or concerned or embarrassed to put into words. And that is why it is so important not to need to be liked as a Provocative Coach. This does not mean you won't be liked (in fact, eventually most people will come to love you for what you give them that others did not), but if you are attached to being liked it is unlikely that you will say those things that, although truthful, will be confronting for the receiver.

What kind of humour?

Humour takes many forms: laughing at a joke, for example, or being able to tell a funny story. There are stand-up comedians who can recite strings of jokes; there are those like Billy Connolly, Jack Dee and Eddie Izzard who can talk about everyday life in a way that makes others laugh. Their observation and outrageous translation of events, together with their timing, can change everyday situations into something extraordinarily entertaining.

Often those who can ‘see the funny side of things’ are those who can laugh at themselves. There is something important in that expression. It presupposes that they are looking at themselves and therefore dissociated. They have an ability to view themselves and others in a detached way and at the same time remain connected with people and events. Often this ability goes hand in hand with the ability to love themselves and others.

In [Chapter 19](#) I referred to the concept of narcissism, a label which has achieved notoriety of late on social media sites. And one of the characteristics of someone who fits the profile is that they do not (cannot?) laugh at themselves. This does not necessarily work in reverse – that is, that someone who can’t laugh at themselves is necessarily a narcissist!*

The consequence of being able to perceive life in this provocative way is that anyone who can do so not only has the facility to help themselves take a healthy perspective on life and its events, they can also facilitate and coach that in others.

Whole-body wisdom

Logic and reason may work with scientific and technical problems, but with the challenges life throws at us we need to be able to engage our intuitive, whole-body wisdom. In some instances, intellectual reasoning can take us deeper into the issue and may even be the source of it. In these instances, we need to find a way to experience the issue differently.

We cannot think and laugh at the same time

An interesting phenomenon is that we cannot think and laugh at the same time. Laughter creates a multitude of changes: our muscles lose their tension ('we go weak with laughter'), our bodies shake, we lose the ability to hold on to things tightly (and that is an interesting metaphor for change), and we seem to create the ability to create new connections in our brain so that we perceive situations differently. The submodalities of the way we represent a situation change when we laugh and therefore our experience of the issue changes with that.

First amuse yourself

The starting place is you. How can we ever hope to trigger humour in others and encourage them to take a humorous stance on life if we are unable to do so ourselves? Each of us has a unique sense of humour; I'm not just talking about laughing at funny incidents but taking a humorous perspective on life.

Begin by asking yourself some questions:

- 1 When did you last laugh at yourself?
- 2 When did you laugh at yourself in the most intense way?
- 3 Whereabouts were you?
- 4 What was happening?
- 5 In what way were you laughing? What is it like to laugh like this?
- 6 What happened just before you started to laugh – what was the trigger?
- 7 What happens in you as you laugh?
8. What else is there about the way you laugh?
- 9 Is there anyone who triggers your ability to laugh at yourself?

If so, how do they do this?

What have you learned about your humour by answering these questions? I suppose there is another possibility: you don't laugh! If that is the case, you might just skip the rest of this chapter and concentrate on the other stuff in the book. Not everyone can find insights in life in this way. Or maybe it is time for you to experiment with what might work for you and therefore this chapter really is for you!

How might you now use the learning you have from answering these questions? For example, now you know what triggers your laughter, how might you trigger this for yourself? Do it now:

- 1 Think of a situation for which you would like a breakthrough or some insight and a way forward.
- 2 Identify the trigger that precedes moments when you find a way to laugh at yourself (that you identified in the previous set of questions).
- 3 Apply that trigger now.
- 4 Remember your physiology when you laugh. Adopt that physiology if you have not already done so.
- 5 Identify that person who triggers laughter for you. Imagine that they are doing that now for you in this situation.
- 6 What is happening?
- 7 How are you experiencing the situation?

What have you learned by applying these questions to yourself?

Linda realized that the occasions when she laughed at herself were when she stood back and saw and heard herself as if she were an outsider. She assumed the style of her mother, who had invariably been able to see the funny side to a situation. She realized that when she did this she often created an absurdly metaphorical way of seeing the situation and that, when she exaggerated that, her whole perspective on situations changed. When she did this she was also aware that, instead of holding her shoulders in a hunched, tense way, she let them drop and relaxed her jaw

and face muscles. It was like letting go of a burden she had been carrying.

She had recently been feeling very frustrated by the lack of support from the rest of her family in the care of her elderly parents, and she realized that she was getting more and more frustrated as time went on. She remembered her way of breaking out of such negative patterns and she imagined herself standing back and seeing herself, her parents and the rest of the family. She relaxed her shoulders and stretched. She acknowledged that she had put herself into the role of martyr, and she imagined herself sitting in this huge chair with 'martyr' written on the back of it. She also appreciated that this chair was one of her own choosing and it was getting bigger day by day. It wasn't an interior design that she liked, so she rearranged the furniture and threw out the martyr chair. As she did so in her imagination she found herself amused by the whole situation. Coincidentally, she subsequently talked to her family about the care that was needed and enlisted their help. She lost her feelings of frustration.

We can only facilitate in others what we have the structure for in ourselves. So finding the ability to laugh at ourselves really is the starting point.

Humour: the antidote to rescue

There is little success where there is little laughter.

Andrew Carnegie

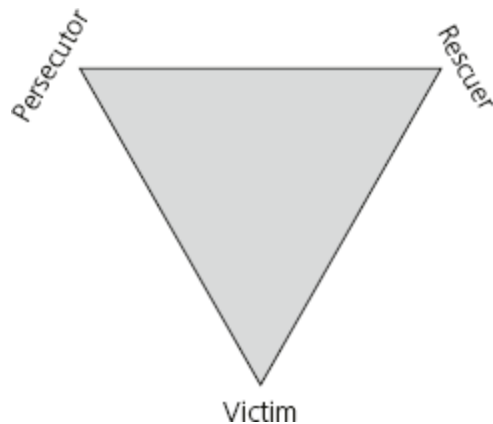
As a coach, trainer, manager or friend, we are often faced with people with 'issues'. It may be that someone is not performing in their job in the way that we would expect. It might be that we have a 'tricky' delegate who does not seem to get closure on their issues, or it might be a friend who is airing some of their problems. It may be

a genuine request for help, in which case we might coach the person; but it might not, and it is important to recognize this. Humour can be the way to avoid the trap that awaits us.

One of the greatest temptations for a new coach or therapist is to sympathize with and want to help the client. It is a natural reaction and at the same time can be one of the most unhelpful things we can do.

When I first learned to coach I thought I was God's gift to the coaching world. If someone presented just the hint of a problem, I was in there feet first, offering to coach and sometimes not even offering, just getting stuck in. I cringe when I think about it now.

The drama triangle



The temptation to help when uninvited drops you straight into the role of rescuer and into the unhealthy dynamic of the Drama Triangle. The Drama Triangle is a game (you can read more about games in Eric Berne's work; see the reference at the end of the chapter). Games are familiar patterns of behaviour that we find ourselves repeating out of habit and that result in a lose/lose outcome. There are no winners in these kinds of games. The only

win is that we prove to ourselves that we were right all along not to trust, not to believe, not to respect! Not a recipe for excellence.

There are no winners in these kinds of games

Once we engage in the game, we are destined not only to fulfil the role of rescuer, but to find ourselves moving to the other roles of victim and persecutor, too. I give uninvited help. The person on the receiving end persecutes me for not actually helping and blames me for the outcome. I move to persecute them by criticizing them for not valuing my help and for being so ungrateful. And so it continues.

This game can emerge anywhere in any context, but it finds a fertile feeding ground in training programmes and coaching sessions.

Ironically, you can use these positions in the Drama Triangle in an exaggerated way to avoid it. So, for example, the temptation can be to rescue someone who has an issue so instead of rescuing in the traditional sense you can feign rescue by giving crazy suggestions. And using the Persecutor position you can blame others for the person's issue – the government, men, women, the weather, the time of life ... it doesn't matter what ... It is about making the concept of it being the fault of another ridiculous. And you can play the victim theatrically by pretending to be frightened if they seem oppressive in their style, for example.

The structure of humour

In studying all forms of humour we discover that there is a structure. We are amused when the brain experiences something that surprises it. This is apparent even in very young children; hence the success of games like peek-a-boo that rely on timing and surprise to trigger laughter.

Ken, who rarely showed public appreciation for his wife, was commenting on her cooking (which was outstanding): 'With a wife who cooks like that you would think ...' Before he could finish his sentence with 'you would be fat!' this was drowned out by an interruption from one of the guests: 'you would be on your knees worshipping her!'

The tactic of interrupt and surprise is a hypnotic strategy. When our expected process is interrupted we go into trance. This is an opportunity both to trigger laughter and change simultaneously. It is a powerful and rapid agent for change.

When I was travelling on an airline recently, the steward made the usual announcement: 'Please remember that it is not permitted to smoke until you have left the airport premises. And If I may be allowed to add a bit of personal advice, for your own health I would advise you not to smoke at all!' The passengers laughed, and most thanked and joked with this steward as they left the plane.

The ability to recognize patterns, which we do unconsciously, sets us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. To be called 'quick-witted' is considered a compliment in most cultures. The necessary element of surprise in humour means that our attention is drawn to the aspects of the exchange that are novel and unexpected.

After starting a new diet I altered my drive to work to avoid passing my favorite bakery. I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning, and as I approached, there in the windows were a host of goodies. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, 'Lord, it's up to you, if you want me to have any of those delicious goodies, create a parking place for me directly in front of the bakery.' And sure enough, on the eighth time around the block,

there it was! God is so good!

‘Wait upon the Lord’, courtesy of Frank Farrelly

Facilitating humour for others

How can we find a way for others to take a humorous perspective on themselves and others? The objective is to get them to laugh at themselves and to see the absurdity in continuing to experience the issue as they have been doing. In other words, the objective is to facilitate a shift in the way they experience a situation so that they free up all the resources they ideally have at their fingertips.

There are many books that explore examples of humour and people who are able to generate laughter, but few that explain how to do it.

Just this morning we were in the café in the local village. The owner of this café, Jean-Christophe, is renowned for keeping all of his customers in a constant state of amusement. There is always laughter and smiles, and the café is usually full.

I watched Jean-Christophe as he greeted and served his customers. He always has a twinkle in his eye; he appears to be waiting for the opportunity to laugh and create laughter. There is always the beginning of a smile on his face. Something signals that he expects humour to be present at any time, and if he sees an opportunity (which he does most of the time) then he makes it happen. He gives full attention to everyone and is often ‘playing the audience’ so that he has the whole of the café in his sights. He pauses before he responds and in that pause makes an exaggerated gesture of some kind. It might be hand on hips if he is exaggerating surprise, or he might tilt his head back with an astonished look on his face. His movements are marked and his expectation of humour triggers them.

His café is a great place to start the day. And many people do just that ...

When facilitating humour in another person, ask yourself the following questions to help you:

- 1 What is their kind of humor? What sorts of things amuse them?
- 2 In what circumstances do they take a humorous perspective on life?
- 3 In what contexts does this happen?
- 4 What naturally triggers this state: what happens just before?
- 5 What anchors work for them most readily, so that you know how to anchor the state and trigger it again?
- 6 How do you communicate to them in a way that they recognize that you care about them and have their best interests at heart?
- 7 Where are their areas of vulnerability, where do they defend themselves?

You might have learned this about the person over time and therefore you know how to trigger humour in them. But let us suppose that you are meeting someone for the first time and you know very little about them. What then?

- 1 **Choose a state of connectedness.** First and foremost, check your own state. It is important that you are in a state of care and connectedness with the other person, a state of rapport. You don't have to know someone to have this state; you can assume it. Remind yourself of a time when you have been in this state with others: maybe out socially, at ease with close friends, when you could tease each other and yet be speaking truths and knowing that it was all done in love. This is the state you want. Take yourself back to this time and anchor this state (see [Chapter 13](#) on anchoring). With this state in place, now consider the person you are about to meet or have just met and assume this rapport with them.

2 **Be sensitive.** Ensure that you are also in a state of high sensitivity to the other person, what they do and how they respond to you. Note especially their non-verbal behaviour. Notice muscle tension, skin flushing, repeated mannerisms and, if they change, any exclamations, eye movements or internal processing. Calibrate to their different states so that you begin to know when they are in their head answering intellectually and when they are off guard, taken by surprise. Note especially when they have let down every barrier and are just laughing and going with the flow, not seeking to control or defend anything. This latter state is the one you are after. This state presupposes that the other person trusts you and themselves to enjoy and learn in the moment.

The three main topics that lend themselves to Provocative Questions are money, sex and death!

Frank Farrelly

A classic Provocative Question and an eye-opening one is ‘How many good years do you think you’ve got left?’ In one coaching session with Lara, the subject, the following exchange ensued:

LARA Oh, quite a few – my father lived to a good old age.

COACH What about your mother?

LARA She died much younger – when she was 64.

COACH Ah, that’s the one that counts – they say that we are likely to die about the same age as the parent of the same sex.

LARA Ah, but she smoked.

COACH Doesn’t matter – that’s the age to be aware of, so how old did you say you were?!

The temptation for many coaches and friends is to want to rescue the person and reassure them, when by ‘playing the devil’s

advocate' you push them farther down the road they are already taking them till they find the place of truth for themselves.

Rescuing people takes away the need for them to rescue themselves.

Rescuing people takes away the need for them to rescue themselves

Create a state of laughter

The meaning of the communication is the effect. What works? Explore how you create a state of humour in someone else and build on it. Pay attention to what it is that is creating that state and, just as you might build on a 'yes' state in hypnosis, build on the state of laughter or humour.

1 Pay attention to how the other person behaves and mirror that in an exaggerated way. Pay little attention to what they say. Pay most attention to how they behave and how they present themselves. You can encourage the humorous perspective by highlighting how the way they respond to people and situations is crazy or ridiculous. Rather than tell them, show them.

One way of testing what changes their state is to mirror back to them their behaviour in an exaggerated way. If they are tense, you tense up even more, but do so with a mannerism that signals humour. This might be a slight smile. The overemphasis of the behaviour itself usually acts as a signal. This mirroring back or caricaturing is one of the most naturally occurring sources of humour that I witness. Rather than mirror, you might play the counter hand. So, if someone is being firm and aggressive, you might feign fear. Or, if they are being aggrieved, you might act even more aggrieved at the situation but in an amateurish, actorish way. Remember to keep checking the state of connectedness with the other person. Maintain rapport. If at any time you sense you might be losing that, go back and restore it.

- 2 **Agree with the problem.** Agree with whatever they say, especially the problem. If they say there is no hope for them in their work, agree with them in a ‘tongue in cheek’ way that signals humour. This can provoke a healthy defensive state in which they come back and disagree with you (and thus, of course, with the way they originally presented the issue).
-

In a talk I was giving about the diverse cultural applications of NLP, I was challenged by a member of the audience to prove how NLP could be used in their country (as they didn’t believe it could be applied there). I agreed with them and replied that they were probably right – it could be applied in most countries but, now that they mention it, maybe not theirs. I said this with a wry smile. They immediately came back with a challenging: ‘Why not?’

- 3 **Exaggerate the problem state with wild generalizations:**

‘Well, all men are like that!’ ‘No one ever believes a word we say!’ ‘All children are brats!’ ‘What can you expect, you are young and good looking, no one is going to take you seriously!’ Always with a twinkle in your eye and a smile.

- 4 **Give outrageous reasons for the person keeping the**

problem state. In the previous example I suggested it would be good for the world to have an NLP-free zone – a zone that could be free of any awareness of excellence – and that their country could be the prime candidate for that. When you do this, when you don’t cooperate with their ‘victim’ role, you signal something very important: that you are not going to collude with the unconscious negative game they are playing with themselves.

- 5 **Make insane suggestions.** Give the wildest suggestions for how to overcome the issue. The bizarre often triggers humour. Offering outrageous suggestions is more likely to prompt the other person to start coming up with their own, ‘more practical’ ideas. You playing the fool helps them to

realize that they must be able to come up with something better than this!

6 Exaggerate the symptoms and invite the other person to do the same. Ask them just how stressed, frustrated, depressed or angry they can get. If they can exaggerate the symptoms and be amused at their skill, they can also diminish them.

7. Interrupt their story with unrelated questions.

Interrupting serves as a surprise and creates a state of uncertainty and instability. That is a place where change and learning can take place.

These are all possibilities, and you will be able to find your own strategies for taking a humorous perspective on life, too. The key is to try different strategies till you find what works and, when you have that, play with it. Make it conscious and enjoy the change!

The aim in all of this is to make the person aware of the patterns and especially how ridiculous they can be. You show them what they are doing so that they then have a choice. Remember, it doesn't all have to be humorous ... but it is provocative

There is something about noticing patterns that I find amusing and it is at the heart of what makes something funny. Keep that state of mind along with a loving attitude and the intention of creating learning and a state of acceptance and presence. If you do not have this state, my advice is don't do any of this. Your state is a huge influence. Your freedom becomes their freedom.

Provoke with the language patterns

When someone has an issue they will invariably be using one of the language patterns described in [Chapter 8](#) on precision questions.

Diane had booked a session with Frank Farrelly. 'What's your issue?' She explained that she lacked confidence as a singer: although she felt at ease when she was singing informally with friends, she became nervous to the point of

sounding 'screechy' when she had to perform at a concert. She explained that her voice teacher had told her what she 'must' to do to improve. Using this kind of driven language was a pattern for Diane. 'And what else did your teacher tell you you "had", "needed" and "ought" to do?' Frank emphasized her reliance on another's advice which had been given and/or received in the form of limiting statements. He emphasized it by making it even more extreme than the form in which she already had it coded. All this was said with a twinkle in his eye.

One of the main goals in being provocative is to give the person being coached an awareness of the patterns that they are habitually using that underpin their issue. If you read the chapter on precision questions ([Chapter 8](#)), you will find the questions you can use to challenge the various patterns. The goal is the same with this approach; it is the means of getting there that is different. So to raise awareness of the pattern as in the example with Diane above you can mirror the pattern back in an even more extreme, exaggerated and comic way. You can also use these language patterns as a way of provocatively suggesting crazy reasons for having the problem state or giving outrageous suggestions ... all to raise awareness and provoke a balanced (healing) response.

Here are some examples of this:

- 'So everyone has it in for you?!' (Generalization)
- 'All men can't be trusted.' (Generalization)
- 'Well, it is probably the fact that it is a full moon at the moment.' (Cause-effect)
- 'Well, some people (people like you) shouldn't work for themselves.' (Generalization and limiter)
- 'A woman's major erogenous zone is in her ear!' (Lost performative – i.e. opinion expressed as fact but much, much more than just that!)
- 'Women need a reason to have sex; men just need a place!' (Opinion – a provocative one – expressed as a generalized fact!)

One of my delegates was explaining how she had lost her motivation for work having had six months off for maternity leave. The other delegates around her in the coffee break were suggesting all sorts of things she might do or learn and her response to all of them was 'Yes but ...' She had a reason for not accepting any of them. This is a pattern ('Yes but' is a classic unhealthy game that some people play). She asked me what I thought. 'Well,' I said, 'I am not sure that anything is going to make a difference now. I think you might just have to be resigned to making jelly and cupcakes for children's parties for the foreseeable future!' She looked stunned. She changed state. 'Absolutely not!' she replied. 'I am going to get back to work!'

Summary

Humour is a fast track to rapport, to influence and to change. Everyone has a unique sense of humour, and we are usually unaware of how significant a role it plays in our everyday life and work. Humour is rarely taught in the halls of persuasion, negotiation, coaching and leadership – it is so vital, yet we often overlook it as something worthy of study and attention. Humour plays an important role in Provocative Coaching. Introduced along with all the other approaches and the preparedness to speak the truth – to talk about the 'elephant in the room' – it is a very powerful way of triggering change.

If God is watching, the least we can do is be entertaining!

Anonymous

Thought provokers

- 1 Think of a time when you had this kind of rapport with someone who brought a personal problem to you, a time

when you both found a way to laugh at what had been happening. What was that like as you remember it? How might you access that state again when you choose?

- 2 Identify someone you know either personally or remotely who uses an approach like this successfully. What characteristics do you think make the difference? Which of those characteristics might you adopt in order to experiment?
- 3 Choose one or two of the tactics and plan how you might experiment with them in a safe environment – perhaps by asking a friend if they would cooperate with you as you learn.
- 4 Attend a training programme for Provocative Coaching.

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A store that sells husbands has just opened in New York City, where a woman may go to choose a husband. Among the instructions at the entrance is a description of how the store operates: You may visit the store ONLY ONCE!

There are six floors and the attributes of the men increase as the shopper ascends the flights. There is, however, a catch. You may choose any man from a particular floor, or you may choose to go up a floor, but you cannot go back down except to exit the building!

So, a woman goes to the Husband Store to find a husband. On the first floor the sign on the door reads: Floor 1 – These men have jobs and love the Lord.

The second floor sign reads: Floor 2 – These men have jobs, love the Lord, and love kids.

The third floor sign reads: Floor 3 – These men have jobs, love the Lord, love kids, and are extremely good looking.

‘Wow,’ she thinks, but feels compelled to keep going.

She goes to the fourth floor and the sign reads: Floor 4 – These men have jobs, love the Lord, love kids, are drop-dead good looking and help with the housework.

‘Oh, mercy me!’ she exclaims, ‘I can hardly stand it!’ Still, she goes to the fifth floor and the sign reads: Floor 5 – These men have jobs, love the Lord, love kids, are drop-dead gorgeous, help with the housework, and have a strong romantic streak.

She is so tempted to stay, but she goes to the sixth floor and the sign reads: Floor 6 – You are visitor 4,363,012 to this floor. There are no men on this floor. This floor exists solely as proof that women are impossible to please. Thank you for shopping at the Husband Store. Watch your step as you exit the building, and have a nice day!

This is for all men for a good laugh and to all the women who can handle the truth!

Frank Farrelly, ‘Husband Store’

* Narcissistic personality disorder – one of several types of personality disorder – is a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others.

Glossary

ANCHORING The process of making associations that work through conscious choice so that you can re-access your own or trigger others' chosen state when appropriate.

ASSOCIATION The state of being inside your skin, seeing the world from your own eyes, hearing the world from your own ears, and feeling the emotions of the situation, whether current, remembered or imagined.

BELIEFS Emotionally held opinions treated as facts and the basis of our everyday decisions, skills and behaviours.

CLEAN QUESTIONS A non-directive tool for facilitating people to explore their experience and how it is structured in their own way. In particular, a means for exploring the metaphors by which people live their lives.

CONGRUENCE Having all parts of yourself working in harmony, without conflict.

CRITERIA The values and standards used as the basis for decisions.

DISSOCIATION The state of observing yourself as if you were an outsider. Seeing and hearing yourself from the outside, i.e. you can see you in your entirety, not the way you see yourself from within your own body. The effect of dissociation is to disconnect from emotion.

EYE ACCESSING CUES Movements of a person's eyes that indicate visual, auditory or feelings thinking.

FILTERS Levels of thinking that determine where you put your attention, how you make your perception what it is, and what defines how you respond to situations and people.

LINGUISTIC The study of language and, in the context of NLP, the patterns in language that communicate your thinking

strategies.

LOGICAL LEVELS OF CHANGE A form of personal and organizational hierarchy that affects change and how effectively you bring about change for yourself or for others, consisting of environment, behaviour, capabilities, values, beliefs, identity and spirituality.

METAPHOR A parallel means of describing or observing. Metaphors can be parables, stories, analogies, pictures and actions.

MODELLING The process of unpacking your own and others' conscious and especially unconscious strategies in order to duplicate the results.

NEURO The way you use your brain.

NEURO LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING Defined as the study of the structure of subjective experience. The concept was developed by John Grinder and Richard Bandler in 1975. It is a process of modelling, and increasingly the term is used to encompass the techniques and skills uncovered as a result of this process.

OUTCOME (WELL-FORMED) A goal that is characteristic of someone who consistently achieves what they want in ways that are a win for others as well as themselves. Different from traditional methods of goal setting in that it involves the use of all the senses, including emotion.

PACING Respecting the values, needs and style of another person in a way that leads to rapport. Going along with aspects of what is important to another person and yourself.

PERCEPTUAL POSITIONS The mental strategy used by skilful negotiators, involving moving mentally between being in your own shoes, the shoes of the other person and an outside detached position. There is an old Indian saying, 'You must first walk two moons in a man's moccasins before you can understand him.'

PROGRAMMING Not the computer kind, but similar in that it is to do with the sequences of thinking and behaviour

patterns that constitute your strategies for achieving the results you do.

PROVOCATIVE COACHING (THERAPY) A system of psychotherapy/coaching in which the therapist plays devil's advocate, siding with the negative half of the client's ambivalence towards their life's goals, their relationships, their work and the structures within which they live. The approach, based on Frank Farrelly's life's work, is designed to provoke a healing response through humour and love.

RAPPORT The ability to relate to yourself and others in ways that create a climate of respect, trust and cooperation.

REFRAMING The ability to make meanings for events in ways that work for you and create desirable emotional states.

STATE The mental, physical and emotional condition of a person.

STRATEGIES A set of thinking and behavioural steps to achieve a result.

SWISH A means of replacing a negative self-image with a positive one

TOTE Test → operate → test → exit, the feedback loop used to guide behaviour.

WELL-FORMED OUTCOMES See Outcomes.

Acknowledgments

The following acknowledgments are intended provocatively, of course!

To my eldest son and his family without whom this book would have been finished by the deadline – they will always be my priority!

To both of my sons – everything I do is for them (that was until my grandkids arrived on the scene!).

I am eternally grateful to the old bugger of a neighbour who brings me endless eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms and lettuce and who continuously shouts at his dog Cartouche who is as deaf as he is. When I am engrossed in my writing, they remind me that there are other people in the world who probably couldn't give a toss about NLP.

To my Indian students who know how to worship a teacher – God, I wish that were the case the world over! Nearly beats the time when I was crowned Rose Queen of Knotty Ash. I know they will all say they love this book even if they don't!

To my teachers who refused to make me a prefect and who labelled me as a rebel. Thank you. I took the advice you inadvertently and unconsciously gave me!

And to my beautiful grandchildren who can out-provoke me any day of the week and whose ability to speak the truth is disarming and invigorating and for whom I wish lifelong learning and love.

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Taking your learning further

I provide in-house training and open programmes leading to recognized certification in NLP. Open programmes leading to certification in NLP follow these stages:

- **Stage 1 – Business Practitioner training**, leading to certification in NLP. This programme covers the material that is included in this book. You can, if you wish, do the first few days of this programme if you want a taster before committing to the full Practitioner training.
- **Stage2 – Master Practitioner training**, advanced programme leading to certification, concentrating on the skills of modelling and centred around delegates' modelling projects.
- **Stage 3 – Trainer training**, not only for trainers but for anyone who wishes to learn how to communicate and train or coach others in the principles of NLP. Successful completion of this programme gives you the authority to issue NLP certification to others on acceptance by the Association for NLP.
- **Stage4 – Masterclasses.**

Visit my website: www.sueknight.com

At the time of writing, I am running these programmes in the UK, France, India, Greece, South Africa, New Zealand, Oman, Qatar and Turkey. My aim is to build networks of like-minded people and centres around the world. Examples of these centres are listed below.

If you would like to discuss future collaboration and inclusion in this list, please contact me directly by going to my website www.sueknight.com From time to time I take on apprentices. Let me know if you are interested.

INDIA

Shinota Consulting

Shinota Consulting, founded by Ashok Subramanian in 2001, is one of the oldest and longest-serving NLP training companies in India. Shinota partnered with Sue Knight to launch Sue's courses in India during 2001–9, attracting participants from all over the world. Having trained with Sue and mentored by her since his college days, Ashok has spearheaded the spread of NLP in India during the last 20 years and is today considered as one of the NLP pioneers in India for his NLP work with varied fields such as Creative Movement Therapy, Ayurveda, Sociocracy 3.0, hypnosis, emotional intelligence and so on. Ashok is especially known for blending international NLP concepts with ancient Indian wisdom modelled from Indian monks and today works extensively with corporate and public sector organizations, educational institutions and families in helping them grow their excellence using NLP.

Shinota Consulting offers online NLP modules along with residential NLP Practitioner/Master/Practitioner/Trainer training courses all over India. Ashok lives on a farm near Bangalore and runs regular NLP workshops at his home with his family.

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Onefluencer

Onefluencer is an NLP training and coaching company that empowers people in their journey towards becoming powerful change agents using the versatile tools available through NLP. The company is run by R. Ramesh Prasad, whose journey into NLP began about 12 years ago. During that time he was trained, coached and mentored by Sue Knight.

Onefluencer provides all levels of NLP training in the major cities of India and Sri Lanka. And every year during the month of January and February Onefluencer partners with Sue Knight to run NLP Intensive programmes in Cherai Beach, Kerala. Ramesh also assists/co-trains with Sue at some of her programmes around the world.

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Master Yourself Academy

Master Yourself Academy (MYA) was founded by Arul Subramaniam and Narmada Rao.

Arul has closely worked with Sue Knight for more than 15 years. He also runs an organization called Brainobrain which has a presence in 42 countries (www.brainobrain.com), imparting Abacus, NLP and life skills to children. Narmada is a psychologist, NLP trainer, coach and author.

MYA conducts NLP training and corporate programmes in India as well as other countries. It also provides counselling and coaching sessions. It believes that 'Everyone has immense potential which is yet to be tapped'. And through its programmes, it enables people to discover their true potential. It trains teenagers and adults from all

walks of life. It works with corporates, educational institutions, the teaching fraternity, the student community and so on.

MYA is expert in offering NLP training in an experiential way so that the 'learning and its integration' happen right inside the training hall.

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GREECE

Re:Frame

Re:Frame is an international training company based in Athens, Greece, founded by Isidora Karadimitriou. Isidora was trained by Sue, with whom she partners in her programmes in Greece. Isidora is a neuro-researcher, a neuro sales trainer and an international keynote speaker, who combines neuroscience and NLP in her training. Re:Frame's programmes trigger a better perception of the function of the subconscious and the creation of new healthier mental strategies. Its innovative training approach has led to sales growth and a deeper understanding of customer psychology and decision making. It enables professionals to reach their performance peak and organizations to be more productive and profitable.

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SOUTH AFRICA

The Trust Connection

The Trust Connection was set up by Christine Downton and Charles Ainslie, who have both trained extensively with Sue Knight. It works both in partnership with visiting international NLP trainers, and as a South African leadership and personal development service provider to individuals and organizations.

The Trust Connection provides transformative leadership training and coaching services using NLP throughout the major cities of South Africa. The organization is dedicated to transforming South African society and, in the words of Nelson Mandela, achieve nation-building outcomes that improve the lives of all South Africans. The Trust Connection creates innovative solutions to help individuals and organizations find new ways of building sustainable connections and trust.

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UAE

Empower World

Empower World was founded in 2012 in Qatar by Jeanine Bailey and Marie Quigley, who are Master Certified Coaches and NLP

Practitioners (and have both studied with Sue Knight), to support clients in their desire to create empowering change. Empower World's vision is to make a significant and sustainable difference to support people and organizations to make the positive change they truly desire as well as understanding their purpose, values and what really matters in their personal and professional lives.

Empower World offers executive and leadership coaching, ICF-approved coach training, coach mentoring and supervision, as well as a variety of other programmes. This includes workshops, bespoke training and webinars for corporates and the public in addition to coaching for individuals. Throughout their offerings, Empower World utilizes powerful NLP principles, ideas and modelling to support individuals and teams in creating the change they want.

From its beginnings as one of the pioneers of coaching in Qatar, Empower World has expanded and now offers programmes in Australia and New Zealand. In partnership with Sue Knight, Empower World has offered NLP training in Qatar. The Empower World philosophy is to support individuals and organizations to bring out the best in themselves aligned with their purpose, values and personal truth. Over the years, the organization has had thousands of people complete its programmes and go on to transform their lives.

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UK

James Knight

James Knight is a former Royal Marines Commando Officer with over 16 years of leadership experience. Throughout his time in the Marines he travelled extensively and operated in some of the most challenging environments on earth. He has had the distinct privilege

of commanding men and women on combat operations, and it is as a result of these experiences that he is able to offer a wealth of lessons that he has learned. He subscribes to the values of honesty, integrity, learning and humility.

As a consultant James Knight regularly speaks and advises on the following topics: leadership, team building, realities of conflict, cultural change, developing leaders, communication, and leading by example, focusing on success, overcoming adversity and maintaining state in extreme conditions.

He has studied with Sue Knight all his life!

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