

Chapter 5.1 Principals of NLP

John Grinder and Richard Bandler developed Neurolinguistic Programming. The Structure of Magic Volume I (see References) was their initial publication in 1976. Richard Bandler was a computer programmer and John Grinder was a professor of linguistics. Their approach to studying human interaction was to model excellence rather than study individuals with mental illness. They chose Fritz Perls, Milton Erickson, and Virginia Satir to model as examples of excellence.

It is difficult to summarize NLP; I have listed the principles below that seem most relevant to the work that I do.

1. The brain is not broken and it is functioning very well. It is just that the programs, which the brain is running, may not be useful now. Before treatment, Billy's brain was programmed for him to get anxious whenever he went into a grocery store; never once did he forget to get anxious.
2. Each of our aspects, even the parts that produce symptoms or make our life miserable, has a positive intent. The goal of the part that kept Bill anxious all the time was not to make him miserable but to protect him. That intent needs to be respected, and hopefully better ways can be found to accomplish the protection.
3. The images that you have in your mind's eye and the sound you hear in your mind's ear largely determine your emotional responses. These images and sounds are largely out of your awareness. Once you know the internal images and sounds that you make in a given situation, you can better understand your emotional response. eg... When Billy formerly went into a store he had a mental picture of the people being very large with big eyes looking down on him. The conversations of people became louder, jumbled and incoherent. So one can understand why he was anxious. Once he shrunk the people down to size, he was no longer anxious.
4. Everyone does the best that they can do in their present situation with the resources they have at that time. Sometimes the best one can do is pretty terrible, as it was in Dahmer's case.
5. During times of crisis, particularly when one is a child, the method one uses to cope with that situation establishes a precedence about how to deal with similar situations in the future; the reaction is largely automatic and very resistant to change. One often forms beliefs at those times, which are stated in absolute terms (never, always, must, have to, etc.) and these beliefs may severely limit ones flexibility and ability to cope with different situations. These beliefs and coping strategies can change if one goes back to the original situation and creates a new past by giving resources to oneself and the people one interacted with. One can then make new beliefs and coping strategies.

Virginia Satir believed that people are not broken and that they have the resources within themselves necessary to resolve their problems. This is also a principle of NLP. She believed that people should have the freedom to see, to hear, to feel, to smell, to choose, and to take risks. In order to utilize NLP, a person needs to have the freedom to become aware of internal mental images and conversations, as well as the body sensations and feelings associated with the internal sights and sounds. The principle in NLP is that the internal images and internal conversations or sounds which a person sees and hears determine the emotions, responses, and actions of the person, and that changing the internal images and sounds will alter feelings and emotions.

Thus far I have summarized many of the principles of NLP. I will now give a more thorough and detailed explanation.

Our nervous system including the brain has input through our senses. This information is coded in our brain cells. Just as the map of the United States is not the United States, the coding in our brain does not represent reality; it is our coding of it. There are inaccuracies in making a map. You select some data and eliminate other data. There are distortions—the earth is spherical and the map is flat. Your bias affects what you include and what you leave out. The context in which your brain cells receive the sensory data affects how that information is coded. The same meal will taste different if you are eating it alone or with someone you care about. Some people when angry literally see red, and others when sad see everything with a blue tint. If you were on good terms with a person last week and today he insulted you and you resent him, then the mental image you made of him last week is quite different from the image you will make of him today.

I think that very similar emotions developed in human beings because the specific emotion aided in survival and ability to reproduce. NLP is the study of how the brain is programmed to produce the specific emotion. The way that sensory data was coded in our brain creates the specific emotion. The program that the brain has for creating the emotion is largely out of our awareness. Conscious thought is slower than our unconscious thinking. The main focus of the book *Blink* (see References) by Malcolm Gladwell is the decisions we make in the blinking of an eye. The brain's program for producing emotions occurs in the blinking of an eye.

The fireman who shouted, “get out of this house now and fast”, did not know consciously why he said that. Later he was able to remember that the fire seemed peculiar. It was a kitchen fire but water was not putting it out. There was tremendous heat but very little noise from the fire. The fire was in the basement and the floor collapsed a few seconds after they left the building. We know things that we don't know that we know.

One might say that the brain distorts the sensory data so as to set up a program to produce a certain emotion or behavior. These are some typical distortions.

The program that Billy had for producing panic was to see the people in stores bigger than himself with lots of hair and looking down at him. A program for producing shame often includes people with big eyes looking down at the person. Often a widow will have a program, which creates a feeling of sadness and loss. Thinking of her husband in heaven, she may see him very small, off in the distance and feel the loss of any connection to him. I saw a widower who lost his wife after 60 wonderful years of marriage. I encouraged him to think of his memories of her as a treasure and to enjoy those memories. I asked him to see images of her right in front of him, life-size and in color and to see her move and hear her speak. His loneliness is much less. He plays in a band, and he says every time he plays he can see her in the front row where she has always been.

Sometimes it is not a distortion, but where the mental image is seen which makes the difference. How close or far away? Is the image center or left or right? Is the image eye level or up or down?

Often the auditory data is very significant, particularly tones of voice. All the senses may be involved... often body sensations and even smells and tastes.

It is possible for people to become aware of the programming that previously had been out of awareness. This is difficult for some people. One of the principles of NLP is that each part of a person has a positive intent, and even though the overall result may be detrimental, the intent is positive. Some people have difficulty becoming aware of unconscious processes because they think there is an evil part of themselves that they don't want anything to do with.

I recall again Virginia Satir's beliefs that people should have the freedom to see, to hear, to feel, to smell, to choose, and to take risks. A lot of her efforts went toward freeing people so that a person could feel what s/he feels instead of trying to feel what s/he is suppose to feel. Her philosophy is illustrated beautifully in the following quote, which I have as a poster. It is also in her book *The New Peoplemaking*, pages 28 and 29 (See References)

I am me. In all the world, there is no one exactly like me. Everything that comes out of me is authentically mine because I alone choose it. I own everything about me: my body, my feelings, my mouth, my voice, all my actions, whether they be to others or myself. I own my fantasies, my dreams, my hopes, my fears. I own all my triumphs and successes, all my failures and mistakes. Because I own all of me I can become intimately acquainted with me. By doing so I can love me and be friendly with me in all parts. I know there are aspects about myself that puzzle me, and others that I do not know. But as long as I am friendly and loving to myself, I can courageously and hopefully look for solutions to the puzzles and for ways to find out more about me. However I look

and sound, whatever I say and do, and whatever I think and feel at a given moment in time is authentically me. If later some parts of how I looked, sounded, thought and felt turn out to be unfitting, I can discard that which is unfitting, keep the rest, and invent something new for that which I discarded. I can see, hear, feel, think, say and do. I have the tools to survive, to be close to others, to be productive, and to make sense and order out of the world of people and things outside of me. I own me, and therefore I can engineer me. I am me and I AM OKAY.

In order to utilize NLP, a person must have the freedom to become aware of the internal mental images s/he has, become aware of the internal sounds and conversation, and also be aware of the body sensation and feelings the person has. The principle in NLP is that the internal images and internal conversations or sounds that the person sees or hears determine the emotions, responses, and actions of the person, and that changing the internal images and sounds will alter the feeling response.

I think that emotional conflicts are a part of being human. Surveys to determine the rate of diagnosable mental illness in the general population are quite high. So it is not so much the problems we have, but how we are able to deal with the problems. I think that each person does the best that he or she can do. People try very hard and often this results in much frustration.

The context to which clients are responding is usually composed of about 9 parts internal experience and 1 part external. When what a client does or says doesn't make sense, I assume that it will make sense once I am able to find out what is going on internally. Since most of what goes on internally is out of the client's awareness, it must also be confusing to the client. If it is confusing to me, think how confusing it must be to the client.

I think that when programs were originally created, there was a positive intent in the context in which the program was created. However, once the program is in place, it continues automatically. The issue of whether the program has a negative or positive effect is not relevant to the program. It is there and runs automatically until it is changed. Most depressed persons feel terrible about the effect the depression is having on their family and friends. They feel guilty about being depressed, which only makes them more depressed. Depressed individuals are often motivated to avoid unpleasant or even dire consequences. They may get up in the morning only after thinking, "If I don't get up right now I'll be late for work; if I am late I might get fired; if I am fired how am I going to feed my kids?" They use the same strategy to get over being depressed. S/he might say to himself or herself, "I have to get a grip. I must pull myself out of this. I have to concentrate at work. It is not fair to my spouse. If I don't pull myself together, I am going to lose everything." S/he sees dire consequences as a way

of getting out of the depression; however seeing dire consequences played a part in being depressed in the first place. The person is trying to change the effects of the program, but s/he doesn't consciously know what the program is.

The reader may be thinking, "How can a program that creates depression have a positive intent?" I can give an example. I treated a 14-year-old boy because he had threatened to run away from home rather than go to a new school. I helped him to access feelings of friendliness, courage and adventure and apply those feelings to entering the school. He made new friends and did well in the new school. He had been on antidepressants for years. He said that he would know he was starting to get depressed. He would begin to worry about everything and couldn't stop worrying. I asked him to take that feeling of worrying back in time to the earliest time he remembered having it. He said he was 5 years old. He said that he felt responsible for the family turmoil. He felt he had taken up too much time or had required too much. He felt small and insignificant. He felt all alone like there was no one with him. He felt, "I'm not good enough to be with other kids. No one wants to be here with me."

His Mother was present and told what was going on in the family when her son was 5 years old. She was pregnant, in graduate school, working full time, and her husband had a nervous breakdown, hated his job and quit it even though he had no other job and the family was in dire financial straits.

The boy remembers thinking when he was 5 years old that it was his fault that his mother was so upset. He believed that he had been too demanding of attention and that he shouldn't do anything to cause any problem or create any need. One way to accomplish this was to be depressed. The positive intent was to help out his mother and help out the family.

I had him create an alternate past. In the fantasized past, his mother had the ability even briefly to give full attention to each of her three children. The boy was given the resource of self-confidence and the ability to ask to be seen and heard. He was able to change his old belief to "I am good enough. Someone does want to be with me." I had him bring that belief forward in time and note how, if he had had that belief, it would have made a difference at crucial times. I asked him to feel how that belief would be affecting his future and to see the freedom that it would be giving him. I asked him to make a representation of that belief and he chose the color yellow. I asked him to see that shade of yellow in his future. I wish I could give you some follow-up, but I saw him only twice, and then the family moved to another state.

NLP emphasizes the positive. One presupposition is that there is no failure, there is only information. Another is that anything worth doing is worth doing poorly at first. Another is that NLP does not exclude any behavior; it adds options. When I do a procedure with a client and it doesn't work, then I feel challenged to find out what part of that person had an objection to the change.

Then dealing with that objection is often more useful than the original procedure.

Often what clients ask for is a change in someone else. You can only change someone else through a change you make in yourself. If you change your part of a pattern of behavior you have with another person, then the other person will not be able to continue as before. However, you don't have control over how or in what way s/he will change. You can only control how you change. The criteria for a well-formed goal are (1) that it is stated in positive terms. If you don't want something or some feeling or behavior, what do you want instead? (2) The goal is achievable through your own efforts. To have control of your life, it is necessary to have control over the success or failure of your goals. (3) The goal needs to be the right size—large enough to be significant and small enough to be achieved in a reasonable amount of time. (4) It is important to consider ecological factors. How is achieving your goal going to affect your relationships? If your goal is to speak up and voice your opinions and you are married to a man with a violent temper, then you need to consider the possibility of getting hit. If you would like to read more about how changing one element in an interacting system can result in unexpected and undesired consequences, read Dietrich Dorner's book, *The Logic of Failure: Recognizing and Avoiding Error in Complex Situations*.

One principle of NLP is that each person is unique and that intervention should be tailored to meet each person's need. In studying Virginia Satir, Bandler and Grinder noticed that Virginia matched her predicates to the predicates of the person she was seeing. People differ in that one person may be primarily visual, another primarily auditory and another primarily kinesthetic. A primarily visual person uses verbs that involve the visual sensations. "I can see my way clear." "Do you see what I mean?" "The world looks rosy." Visual people usually talk fast. They often see an outline of things in their mind and like to go from start to finish. They look up to access visual images. Kinesthetic individuals talk about how they feel. "I need to hold on and get a grip on things." "I feel so happy like I am floating on air, but I need to come down to earth." It takes kinesthetic persons a while to figure out how s/he feels about something. (After reading this, my wife said, "I learned why it takes you so long to answer. I just thought you were slow." We both had a good laugh.)

A common scenario between a couple is that a primarily visual wife will ask her kinesthetic husband a question. He looks down and to the right to get a feel for the question and to decide how to respond. The wife does not wait for his answer but assumes he is not listening and becomes critical. The husband could say something like "Wait a minute and give me time to grasp your meaning." However, he seldom does. A primarily auditory person usually hears a lot of internal dialogue. S/he might say, "it doesn't sound right to me. Hear me out. I hear you. Tone it down." When hearing internal dialogue, s/he will move his/her eyes laterally at eye level. One of the principles of NLP is to use the sensory verbs that the client uses. It is also important to use the specific metaphors or

adjectives that the client uses. For example, there are many ways to describe nausea—"I feel sick to my stomach, I can't stomach that, I have butterflies in my stomach, I feel bloated, I can't swallow that, that leaves a bitter taste, I feel queasy." The internal process that the person went through to create each of those sensations is unique to that person and to that feeling of nausea. So I need to remember and use the exact words. That is one of the main reasons that I take notes—to remember the specific words.

In NLP each action of a person is thought to have a positive intent even though this overall action may be destructive or detrimental to the person as a whole. This would be true of the parts that cause physical illness such as cancer. If a person is attempting to change a behavior through willpower, this involves one part keeping another part under control and suppressing it. The longer this goes on, the more the part that is being kept down builds up until there is a flip. Thus, when there is willpower needed to change a behavior, it is because the person is trying to suppress one particular part. The goal in NLP is to find out the positive intention of that part and to figure out how that positive intention can be realized in a more effective way, in a way that is less detrimental to the whole organism. For example, a person may want to quit smoking but there is a part of this person that wants to keep smoking. The positive intent of smoking may be to allow this very driven person to have a break and be able to relax. The goal would then be for the person to find another way to take a break and relax, a way that is even more effective.

The reader may be thinking, "What can I do to be aware of these unconscious programs?" One way to start is to compare a problem state with a resource state; for example, if the problem is loss of temper, then remember a time when you lost your temper. This is the problem situation. Then think of a time when something similar happened and you did not lose your temper. This is the resource state. Write down on the left side of the paper as many details as you can about the mental image you saw when the temper first flared up. Where did you see the image? How big are the people? How close is the image? Is it above or below—to the right or the left or center? Is it in color or black & white? Is it a movie or a still? Is it in focus? Next be aware of sounds, particularly conversation. What was the tone of voice-- the rhythm, how loud is it? Where does the sound come from? Next, write down on the right side of the paper the answers to the same questions about the resource state.

Then you can see what the differences are. Go ahead and experiment. Feel what happens as you gradually make the problem state to be more like the resource state.