

WHAT IS NLP?

The initials stand for Neuro-Linguistic Programming, a branch of applied psychology. Although most people have never heard of it, NLP has a rapidly growing group of practitioners and a body of "clients" whose lives have been changed by a few sessions of coaching or therapy.

Initially developed in the early 1970s, NLP provides a very practical approach to building positive beliefs, removing blocks and phobias, enhancing communication skills and generating more choices in life. This is based on identifying and "reprogramming" patterns of thought and behaviour, using only the subject's ability to remember and to imagine.

A good example of this is the control of "state". We've all felt really positive and confident at various times in our lives, not necessarily at work: playing sport, pursuing hobbies, with the family, on holiday, at school, etc ... How would you like to be able to turn that feeling on, just when you want to, in a new situation? The feeling you need is already inside you and just needs to be recovered.

We already have the resources we need.

The techniques for doing this are surprisingly simple and, with a little practice, will transform the way you deal with negative feelings and how you motivate yourself to produce your best performance in any situation.

There are no unresourceful people, only unresourceful states.

NLP also provides tools for effectively dealing with personal limitations. These may take the form of low confidence or self-esteem, negative beliefs, unwanted behaviours (such as "drying" in front of groups), the effects of trauma or even phobias. Any one of these problems could have profound effects - perhaps blighting a whole life by preventing individual fulfilment. As well as this, they often result in the experience of stress.

When the perceived demands exceed perceived resources, stress is experienced. Perception of the scale of demands can be highly individual. What one person sees as a minor inconvenience or a simple task, another sees as an insurmountable obstacle. Inability to meet certain demands might result in constant criticism that leads, in turn, to stress. Such inability can arise from lack of skills - so, provide the skills and the stress is cured!

Sometimes, a lack of key skills is obvious and easy to deal with. For example, IT skills can be enhanced by standard training courses. Others, the "life skills", are not so easy to instil. These include influencing, self-projection, communication, building rapport and dealing with emotion (in self and others). Now, through NLP, there is a set of tools for rapidly building any of these critical, but elusive, abilities. Using a systematic approach, it is possible to analyse the "strategies" that make one person excellent in some field and then to teach them to someone else. This is a streamlined version of the apprentice studying for years at the master's feet until he becomes just like him.

Other issues for individual effectiveness might be low confidence or self-esteem, negative beliefs, unwanted behaviours, trauma and phobias. A NLP practitioner can guide a person through exercises that eliminate these obstacles very quickly.

Communication

You communicate with your words, with your voice quality, and with your body: postures, gestures, expressions. Even if you say nothing and keep perfectly still, something is communicated.

You cannot not communicate.

But is it what you meant? You know what you intended to convey by your communication, but what the recipient understands by it can be quite different. Therefore:

The meaning of the communication is the response that you get.

This suggests that the only safe approach is to note the response that you get and to keep changing what you do or say until you get the response you want.

Representational Systems

When we think about an experience, we recreate the sights, sounds and feelings that we originally perceived. We also have the ability to create inward sensations that we have never experienced "for real". We can *construct* sights, sounds and feelings.

When a person tends to prefer to use one internal sense most of the time, this is referred to as their primary system. Their use of this system is likely to be more highly developed than that of the others. This preference for a particular way of thinking shows up most clearly in language - especially in the use of sensory-based words or *predicates*, as in the following examples:

Visual: "I see what you mean"
Auditory: "We're on the same wavelength"
Kinesthetic: "I feel it in my bones"
Olfactory: "I smell a rat"
Gustatory: "That's a bitter pill"

Some people prefer "digital" or completely non-sensory language: "The evidence supports the assertion that ..."

You may be aware that matching "body language" (posture, voice tone and tempo etc.) is important in building rapport with someone. However, it is also necessary to be aware of their preferred representational system and to match that as well. If you now notice someone who uses a lot of kinesthetic language, watch their response to a digital type. I can guarantee that their eyes will glaze over and they will be looking for an escape within a few seconds.

Positive Intention

About forty years ago, Eric Burdon and The Animals sang, "I'm just a soul whose intentions are good. Oh Lord, please don't let me be misunderstood." These lines reflect several of NLP's presuppositions:

Every behaviour has a positive intent

Everything anyone does makes sense to them

People make the best choices available to them

People are not their behaviours.

It is invariably more useful to look for the positive intention behind the apparently negative or destructive things that others do rather than simply to judge them. This doesn't mean that the other person necessarily "meant well". They could have been quite malicious, and meant it! However, even

this behaviour has a positive dimension, as seen from the point of view of the person doing it. Seeking to understand the positive intention will help you to respond in the most effective way. For example, you might be able to point out a better way for that individual to realise their positive intention that was also positive for everyone else involved. This is likely to be more useful than merely criticising the original behaviour. (Although, if you want to, you can still make it clear that you disapprove.)

Making Change Happen

We all perceive the world differently. The information we receive through our senses is filtered through our values and beliefs before it is stored as our *representations* of reality. The fact that we have different representations of the world can cause us to do things that seem crazy to others and to avoid doing things that they would regard as being to our advantage. It also means that if we *change the representations* then we have effectively changed "our" reality.

So, it is possible to change negative attitudes, limiting beliefs and unresourceful states without years of analysis or the use of drugs. All that you need is the desire to change and some of the knowledge that has been gathered together under the name NLP.

For things to change, first I must change.

Possible in the world, possible for me, only a question of how.

Dave Rawlings