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Inspiring Yourself And Other People:

Leadership Lessons Using NLP

The Chief Executives' Forum
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What is NLP?

NLP is a practical set of skills, techniques and attitudes for becoming more effective in life, both personally and professionally.

NLP studies how our habitual patterns of thinking (Neuro), communication (Linguistics) and behaviour (programming) shape our unique experience of life and our interactions with other people.

By becoming more aware of your own habitual patterns and learning where, when and how to make small changes, you can begin to improve your results in whatever area of your life, career or relationships that you choose.

By becoming more aware of these patterns in other people, you can also increase your ability to understand, influence and effectively engage with them.

In a rapidly changing world, where time seems ever shorter and stresses ever greater, the ability to manage both ourselves and our relationships with other people is becoming more and more crucial.

A Brief Overview of NLP

Neuro-Linguistic Programming or NLP, has been defined as

'the study of the structure of subjective experience' and *'the study of excellence'.*

NLP is essentially a model for human experience that gives us a useful perspective on how people (and also organisations) get the results they are currently getting and then allows us to either change these results, enhance them or train others to achieve them, too.

While its roots lie in Communication Theory, Psychology; Systems Thinking and Linguistics, 'NLP' was originally developed in the 1970s at the University of California, Santa Cruz by Dr John Grinder, Richard Bandler, Frank Pucelik and others, as they sought to investigate the mystery of how giants in the world of therapy such as Virginia Satir, Fritz Perls and Milton Erickson could achieve excellent results with their clients with a consistency that their peers considered almost magical.

The originality of their approach lay in developing a framework or ‘model’ for human subjective experience that examined habitual patterns of thinking (Neuro), communication (Linguistic) and behaviour (Programming), which enabled them to unpack and describe these seemingly magical skills and then effectively teach these skills to others.

Thanks to the work of many further innovators, NLP has been developed and refined over the past 30 years to become the study of excellence in a huge variety of fields and NLP skills and methodologies are now widely used to improve outcomes in areas as diverse as Business, Health, Education, Politics, Community Development & Sport and NLP principles are at the heart of the proposed Northern Ireland Programme for Government.

Learning NLP has now become an essential part of the toolkit for Leaders and Managers and for many Life, Executive and Leadership Coaches, Trainers and Consultants.

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The Three Skills of NLP

To produce more of the results you want, you need only master the following three skills:

1. **Outcomes** - know what you *want*, (not what you *don't* want).
2. **Awareness** of feedback - Sensory Acuity - notice the results that you are getting.
3. **Flexibility** of thought and behaviour - keep changing what you are doing, using feedback, to guide you until you achieve the results that you want.

Using these skills in conjunction with the '**Presuppositions**' or **Operating Principles** of NLP and adopting an attitude of real **curiosity** forms a very powerful model for learning and change.

The rest of NLP gives more practical skills related to every aspect of this powerful model.

Skills Learning Model

All NLP skills are just that: **skills**. Skills only develop with practice, so if you want more communication skills, **practice.**

This is a useful model of the key stages of learning any new skill:

1. **Unconscious Incompetence**	Don't know that you don't know.
2. **Conscious Incompetence**	Mistakes, uncomfortable, but **learning**.
3. **Conscious Competence**	Can do, but still need to pay attention.
4. **Unconscious Competence**	Skill mastered and automatically available.

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NLP Operating Principles

The art and science of NLP consists of many skills and a set of operating principles and assumptions. The operating principles, whilst not being the 'truth', do provide a potent context for acting effectively and creating results.

1 **We do not operate directly on the world. We create maps from our sensory experiences, then operate and communicate from our maps. However, the map is not the territory.** Most human problems are caused by the maps in our heads. It is easier to change the map than the territory.

2 **If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got, so if what you're doing isn't working, do anything else!** It is easier to change your own behaviour than other people's.

3 **There is no failure, only feedback; no mistakes, only results, no errors, only learning.** Every experience may be viewed as an unprecedented opportunity to learn.

4 **The individual with the greatest flexibility of thought and behaviour can (and generally will) control the outcome of any interaction.** Excellence comes from having many choices. Wisdom comes from having multiple perspectives.

5 **It is not what happens to you that makes the difference; it's what you do with what happens to you.**

6 **You cannot not communicate; you can only choose to do so unconsciously, or else to be conscious of the effects you create.** The majority of human communication is nonverbal.

7 **The meaning of your communication is the response you get, which may be different to the one you intended.** There is no such thing as a resistant person, only an inflexible communicator.

8 **There is a positive intention behind all human behaviour. To believe otherwise is to create it so.** With others, seek the positive intention. With yourself, remember that you are not your behaviour. There is a distinction between self, intention and behaviour.

9 **All human beings share the same neurology, so what's possible for one is possible for anyone. The only question is, 'How specifically?'** If anyone else has ever done it, then it is possible for me to learn how to do it.

10 **Memory and imagination use the same neurological circuits and potentially have the same impact.** Each of us already has, or can create, the resources we need.

NB. None of this is true; it does, however, have profound consequences ...

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Rapport

The skill of building co-operative relationships

Rapport skills enable you quickly to put others at ease and create trust. Mastering the skill of building physical rapport requires sensory acuity and behavioural flexibility on your part. The main limits to your ability to produce results in this area are the degree to which you can perceive other people's postures, gestures and speech patterns; the elegance with which you can match them in the dance of rapport; how aware you are of the other person's inner reality.

1 Matching

Some key things to notice and match:

Body Language
- posture
- orientation
- weight distribution
- gestures: arms and hands, legs and feet
- facial expression
- eye contact
- breathing rate

Voice Quality
- volume
- tone
- pitch
- tempo
- sounds

2 Leading

Changes the other person's behaviour by getting them to follow your lead (e.g. leading them from slumping into a more upright posture, or leading them from speaking quietly to speaking more loudly). This is one way to test that you do indeed have rapport. Having rapport, and hence being able to lead others, makes it easier to achieve mutually desired outcomes (e.g. reaching agreement!). It also allows you to take responsibility for the outcome of all your interactions. It is, however, **a choice**. There may be some people with whom you would not choose to be in rapport. In this case, you can choose to use...

3 Mismatching (*Warning! Mismatching can seriously damage relationships - use only when direct requests fail!)*

Allows you to break rapport, to interrupt or to avoid communicating. To mismatch, simply alter your body language and/or voice to make them different from the other person's. This will subtly and unconsciously interrupt the flow of communication, giving you the opportunity to redirect the interaction. (N.B. if rapport is well established, you may find that the other person follows your behaviour as you mismatch, i.e. you are effectively leading them; you'll then have to keep changing your behaviour until they cease to follow you and you achieve a conclusive mismatch.)

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Outcomes

To improve results, outcome thinking is the most useful skill and habit to develop. If you don't know where you're going, it makes it hard to get there. You need to consciously decide what you want, because what you think determines what you get.

To produce the kind of results that you want, you need to know *what* you want. So, the first step is to choose. There are, however, some key principles to choosing effectively. That's why it is important to develop the skill of choosing well-formed outcomes.

Well-formedness Criteria *Underneath each is an example that's **ill-formed.***

Positive **Q: "What would you rather have?"**
Think of what you want rather than what you don't want. E.g. "I want to deliver this project on budget to the best of my ability and on time"
*rather than "I don't want to miss the deadline" which is **stated negatively.***

Ecology **Q: "If you could have it, would you take it?"**
Check that you will get only the consequences that you want by asking yourself the above question and noticing any doubts. They usually start "Yes, but …" or a "yes" said with hesitation. After noticing the response, recycle any considerations and add them on to the original outcome until you reach a new, well-formed outcome.
rather than overriding a consideration and regretting the consequences.

Specificity **Q: "Who, where, when, what, how, specifically?"**
Think of your outcome as specifically as you can. Imagine the situation and describe it verbally in terms of who-where-when-what-how. E.g. "By 3rd April 2017, I will have submitted a completed project report that I can feel fully satisfied with."
*rather than "I'll get something done for it", in which the **outcome is too vague.***

Evidence **Q: "What will you see, hear and feel inside and outside you?"**
Think what the sensory-based evidence is that will let you know you've got what you want. Imagine it as though you see, hear and feel it now. E.g. "I'll see a completed project report; As I read it, I'll see clear logical points with well argued rationales and recommendations; and I'll feel a sense of achievement."
*rather than ""I'll just know", in which <u>how</u> you know is unclear, the **evidence is unspecified.***

Own Part **Q: "What will you be doing to achieve your outcome?"**
Think of your own part in the outcome so that it's within your control. E.g. "I will make time in my diary a priority for this to do my work justice and I'll create a clear plan for achieving it."
*rather than "It all depends what demands other people make on my time", which is **out of your control.***

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Outcomes (continued)

The main areas to be mindful of when setting an Outcome are:

Positive vs negative: Be sure to write down your outcome in the **positive** - in other words, the emphasis is on what you *want*, rather than want you *don't* want. E.g.:

Positive statement	rather than	Negative statement
"I want to be confident"		"I don't want to be anxious"
"I would like financial security"		"I want to avoid debt"
"I want to be fit and healthy"		"I want to lose weight""
"I want healthy lungs"		"I want to stop smoking"

Size: The size of the outcome is important. If your outcome is not the right **size** for you, you will notice that the outcome doesn't happen!

If the outcome is not motivating to you it could be that it is **too small**.
Ask yourself, "*If I got this outcome what would it do for me?"*
Move up until you relate to it as an outcome that is sufficiently large and motivating. E.g. "I want to go on a course" may become "I want to learn skills that will help me to run this department the way I want to".

If the outcome seems overwhelming and unachievable it may be **too large**.
Ask yourself, "*What prevents me from getting this?"*
Turn the problem into smaller outcomes that you feel are more achievable whilst still motivating. E.g. "I want this project to make £150,000" may become "I want to begin by breaking this down into smaller milestones and planning events to reach these and to build some momentum".

Personal Ecology: Personal ecology is about your relationship with yourself and others. Sometimes, at an unconscious level, 'part' of you objects to the outcome you are setting, causing self-sabotage.

It is useful to ask yourself, "*If I could have 'x' would I take it?"* and notice if you answer "*yes – but …"* (either in words or as hesitancy in your voice tone). This surfaces any unconscious objections that may get in the way of your achieving your outcome. Once you have surfaced the objection decide what you would rather have. State it in the positive (as above) and add it on to the original outcome. E.g.:

Outcome: "I want to be successful in my work" (stated in the positive).
Q: "*If I could have success at work, would I take it?"*
A: "Yes – but my family time might suffer". (Negative ecology).
Q: "What would I prefer for my family?"
A: "For me to make time with them." (Stated in the positive).

New Outcome: "I want to be successful in my work and make time with my family."
Q:"If I could be successful in my work and also make time my family, would I take that?"
A: "YES!"

You are far more likely to achieve the new outcome, as it is aligned with your personal ecology.

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Feedback Format

The Feedback Sandwich has been a staple of communication training for many years. The principle is to make giving feedback to another person easier by 'sandwiching' an issue that needs to be addressed with two positive observations.

Unfortunately, the pattern can lead to negative consequences for both you and the person you are delivering the sandwich to.

As a simple (and much overused) pattern, it doesn't take long for people to recognise that when you give them positive feedback, there is a 'but' coming. It also explicitly associates praise with criticism, which can devalue any genuinely positive comments that you may wish to make and in the process, can undermine your credibility with the person you are giving feedback to.

A more effective alternative feedback format has been developed by the NLP Trainer, Shelle Rose Charvet, building on the principles of the Well Formed Outcome.

When you identify an issue that needs to be addressed, turn this issue into a positive suggestion that you can make to the other person by asking yourself

"What do I *want* to happen in this situation, instead?"

Once you have a suggestion framed in positive terms, (i.e. what you *want* to happen rather than what you *don't* want to happen), then you can provide feedback using the following format:

1. **"When you..."** (Identify the specific context)

2. **"Can I suggest..."** (Make your suggestion)

3. **"Because that will get you..."** (Positive Benefits)
   (Toward)

4. **"And avoid..."**
   (Away from) (Negative Consequences)

5. **"Overall..."** (Positive)
   (*Honest encouragement*)

With thanks and acknowledgement to Shelle Rose Charvet

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Some Useful Resources For NLP

Useful Books:

O'Connor, J. & Seymour, J. (1994). '*Introducing NLP'.* (2nd ed.) London: Thorsons.

Roberts, Martin (2006). '*Change Management Excellence: Putting NLP To Work'.* Crown House Publishing Ltd

Doherty, C and Thompson, J.E. (2010) *'Be A Better Leader'.* 1st ed. Teach Yourself.

Dilts, R.B. (1996). '*Visionary Leadership Skills'.* Capitola, CA: Meta.

Molden, David (2007). '*NLP Business Masterclass'*. 2nd ed. London: Pearson Education

The Association For Neuro-Linguistic Programming (ANLP) is the UK based independent body for NLP Professionals and their website is also a good resource for recent research:

www.anlp.org

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ABOUT US:

OUR LEAD TRAINER & CONSULTANT:

Michael Dunlop is a (twice) certified NLP Trainer and Master Practitioner. In addition to his Coaching and Professional Consultancy work, Michael is also a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Ulster on 'Developing Leadership Competencies' at Masters Degree Level and has worked with some of NI's most recognisable organisations in the Public, Private and 3rd Sectors.

Michael is also the NI Ambassador for the Association For Neuro-Linguistic Programming (ANLP), the Association for NLP Professionals.

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OR Training & Personal Development Ltd,
Registered Address:50 Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7FW
Tel: 07833230136
Email: info@liveitorleadit.com
Company No: NI616152

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