

Psychotherapy Guidebook

NEURO LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

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DEFINITION

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a detailed operational model of the processes involved in human behavior and communication. This model is still being rapidly developed, defined, and adapted to specific contexts. NLP is not itself a psychotherapy. Its principles can be used to understand, and make changes in, any realm of human experience and activity. However, it has been applied to therapeutic concerns, and the result is a powerful, rapid, and subtle technology for making extensive and lasting changes in human behavior and capacities. This technology is detailed and explicit, and can be easily taught and learned. A client can learn enough basic skills in a weekend or two to make his therapy much faster and more effective. Of course it takes longer to become fluent and subtle in these skills.

HISTORY

NLP was developed within the last four years by Richard Bandler, John Grinder, Leslie Cameron-Bandler, and Judith DeLozier. Their background includes extensive training in cybernetics, mathematics, and linguistics, and

their specialty is the ability to make models of information-processing systems (linguistics models language, cybernetics models computers, and mathematics models the economy). One of the first systems they chose to model was gestalt therapy, and their first book, *The Structure of Magic*, is a detailed and explicit model of how language can be used to elicit a complete verbal representation of a person's experience. They also show how that complete verbal representation can be used to reevoked the full experience and be instrumental in reevaluating that experience. A second volume, *Magic II*, is a further extension, with substantial theoretical and technical developments.

They next chose to model Virginia Satir's Family Therapy and then Milton H. Erickson's Hypnotherapy. In each case they have modeled the observable communication/behavior processes (verbal and nonverbal) and have abstracted the useful and productive patterns and relationships. They have left behind those parts of the process that are not useful, and also left behind most of the practitioners' own theories about what they do.

Besides their keen observation of other researchers' therapeutic work, they have been exceedingly creative in observing and specifying the patterns of minute observable behavior that constitute the external expression of a person's internal state. For instance, they are able to reliably determine whether a person's moment-to-moment internal experience is visualization,

kinesthesia, or audition from the following observable variables: direction of gaze; pupil dilation; breathing pattern; voice pitch, tonality and tempo, minimal head movements and hand gestures; changes in facial color, tones, and symmetry; lower lip size, etc.

NLP also borrows ideas from neurology, including particular information about hemispheric dominance and specialization of function in the brain.

TECHNIQUE

All internal processing of experiencing can be described as being represented in neurological channels that correspond to the major sensory channels: visual, kinesthetic, auditory, and, to a lesser extent, olfactory and gustatory. Our thinking, deciding, remembering, and all other behavior can be described as a sequence of internal representation (usually partly or entirely outside awareness) that has a pattern as well as a content. Like a program in a computer, this pattern limits the possible ways that any content can be processed and utilized. It is possible to work directly with these patterns. By modifying, redesigning, adding to them, or replacing them, it is possible to give the person more flexibility and new capacities and abilities.

For instance, if you are a good speller, you probably represent a word visually and check this picture with a kinesthetic feeling to know that it is

correct. (To verify this in your own experience, represent a familiar word visually, and notice how your body feels when the word is spelled correctly, compared to how it feels when the word is spelled incorrectly.) If you represent a word auditorially, however, you will have difficulty spelling words that are not spelled the way they sound. A poor speller can become a good speller as soon as he learns the program or pattern of representing visually and checking kinesthetically. This kind of learning is often very rapid, and quickly becomes unconscious. (If you have been a poor speller, you may have become a good one simply by reading this.) Everyone already has lots of stored pictures of words; it's simply a matter of putting them to appropriate use.

Many of the problems that bring people to therapy are as simple, structurally, as the spelling example above. People do have the resources to behave in more satisfying ways; they simply are not using these resources in ways that are appropriate to their needs and the outcomes they want.

In one of the basic processes, called reframing, you can learn to communicate directly with parts of another person (or yourself) that are functioning outside of awareness. Using reframing and other basic processes, it is possible to elicit “deep-trance” phenomena without any hypnotic induction. It is possible, for instance, to utilize unconscious resources to have a person temporarily forget his name using reframing — a cheap trick, but

one that demonstrates the power of this method to elicit responses from parts of the person that are not in awareness. Another basic tool, anchoring, can be used to reconstruct a person's personal history by, for example, connecting a feeling from a pleasant situation to a memory or situation that previously elicited unpleasant feelings. It is even possible to create entirely new episodes of "history" that can serve as personal resources.

An experienced NLP practitioner can deal with most phobias and many other simple problems in a half hour or less. Probably at least half the other symptoms that bring people into therapy can be dealt with in a one-hour session or two. But the NLP practitioner treats more than symptoms: he goes to the functional (not the historical) root of the symptom and makes the changes at that level.

APPLICATIONS

As mentioned previously, NLP can be applied to any area of human behavior and communication. Although NLP can be applied to remedial, psychotherapeutic tasks, it is actually a generative model that specifies what new capacities are possible. It is possible to study a person with an exceptional skill, abstract the pattern of that skill, and give this pattern to someone else so that it functions unconsciously to give him the foundation for the same skill. NLP can also be used to calculate and generate new behavior

and skills, or new combinations of existing ones.

A few of the areas (other than psychotherapy) in which NLP has developed specific applied technologies are: learning languages, learning sports, speed reading, remembering, business management, advertising, medical problems, and education.