

NLP and coaching

Jacqui Dove
Behave Yourself

Where did it all start?

It started as an element of curiosity for Richard Bandler, a psychology undergraduate at UCSC in the 1970s. He wanted to understand why different people got different results when they were seemingly doing the same things. His ideas and questions were picked up by John Grinder, a linguistics professor at the same university. Bandler and Grinder worked with an informal group of students and colleagues who became co-developers of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).

Their early studies centred on the work of Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson, both leaders in the field of human change. What really interested them was what actually took place when clients achieved success – what were the behaviours that could be observed, what were their thoughts and what did they feel. The more questions they asked, the more it became clear that excellence had clear structures.

Their study and research is the basis of all NLP applications today.

So, what is NLP?

As a range of people what NLP is and, in my experience, you often get very different explanations and reactions. From the ‘the study of subjective experience’, to ‘powerful, life-changing strategies’, to ‘that touchy feely stuff.’ (This latter response is often when they have come into contact with new, earnest recruits to NLP who are not very experienced.) However, none of these descriptions really leave you any the wiser.

What’s more, the label itself is rather jargonistic and not particularly user-friendly. This can have the effect of masking the very powerful principles that lie behind that term.

Unravel the label and we have ‘Neuro’ relating to our neurology – how our mind and body are linked together. We can experience this quite easily. Think of a lemon and notice how saliva immediately starts to form in your mouth. Our physiology influences our mind and our mind influences our physiology.

‘Linguistic’ refers to the thoughts and words we use – how we influence ourselves and other people.

‘Programming’ is about our repeated patterns of thoughts and behaviours – how we subconsciously go about achieving our goals.

Take the example of twins standing by the edge of the sea. A big wave comes along and knocks them over. One twin is excited and can’t wait for the next wave to roll in. The other twin cries inconsolably. They will give two very different accounts of the same experience. Who is right? Both are. Their memories of the experience will be different, the language they use to describe it will be different and their habitual ways of responding to situations will be different too.

Our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all organised through our brain. NLP appreciates and celebrates that people are different. It gives us models and tools to help us notice, understand and, importantly, respect the different strategies people use to create their experiences and communicate with others. This, in turn, allows us to choose what to do and how to respond.

The Four Pillars of NLP

The principles are known as the four pillars of NLP:

1. Sensory acuity

We take in information, create our experiences and interact with others by using our senses – what we see, hear, feel, smell, taste. NLP tells us that we each have preferences for some senses rather than others and this will have an effect on the words we speak to ourselves and others and what we hear others say. But sensory acuity is more than using the same language as someone else. It is about being curious and alert about the effect of what you do – noticing whether you are getting what you want.

2. Behavioural flexibility

Behavioural flexibility is really about having choices. We often hear people saying things like ‘I’ve no choice ...’ ‘I have to ...’ ‘I must ...’. They feel stuck and get into unhelpful habits. So, when something doesn’t work the tendency is to do more of the same, perhaps louder or more pronounced – and it still doesn’t work. For example, listen to a conversation between two people who don’t speak the same language. When the other person doesn’t understand, it is often the volume and the pace that changes – not the words. Looking at situations from different perceptual positions uncovers more information and gives people more choice about what they do.

3. Rapport

Rapport is about respecting and accepting the other person, not necessarily agreeing with them. It is absolutely essential for good communication and coaching, for without it no progress is made. Rapport is a result of sensory acuity and behavioural flexibility.

4. Outcome orientation

As a rule of thumb we get out of life what we pay attention to. Unfortunately there is a tendency to pay attention to what we don’t want and be surprised when that is exactly what we get. For example, some people set goals such as ‘I don’t want to be in this job for the next five years.’ Five years pass, they are still in the same job and still moaning. Why? Because they haven’t identified what it is that they really want, so how can they achieve it? And, if things do change it is usually because life has happened to them and that may or may not be what they want.

Outcome orientation is about paying attention to what you want, rather than what you don’t want. NLP structures help you become much clearer about the outcome you want to achieve and what might stand in your way.

Some NLP pre-suppositions are:

- People react to their map of reality, not the reality itself. NLP is the art of changing these maps, not the reality.
- People think they are right.
- Behind every negative behaviour is a positive intention.
- People make the best choices they can, given the resources they have at that time.
- Every behaviour is useful in some context.
- Behaviour is a habit and can be changed.
- Modelling successful behaviour leads to excellence.

- If something is not working, do something different, not more the same. People work perfectly. No one is wrong or broken. They just need to find out how they do what they do, so that they can change if they wish.

The purpose of NLP coaching

Although the human brain is complex, NLP principles are straightforward. Our behaviours are a result of our beliefs combined with our own understanding of reality – our programming.

It is very easy when coaching to be seduced by content – to be sucked into a good story, especially if it is something that we can relate to directly. NLP provides structures for change that enable the coach to look behind the content at what actually drives the behaviour and align values and behaviours to ensure any changes made are congruent and therefore easier to maintain.

The way forward

NLP provides a platform for helping people to make changes in their lives. Of course there are other successful approaches to coaching. And, when they work they usually complement and overlap each other. However, when you are coached by someone who is skilful in NLP it is a powerful process. How do you know that person is skilful? It is certainly not when you feel NLP has been done to you. You will know that you are in total rapport with that person and you will notice that you are getting results.

Reference

Jago, W. & McDermott, I. (2001). *The NLP Coach*.
Judy Piatkus (Publishers) Ltd.

Jacqui Dove

Behave Yourself

Email: jacqui@behaveyourself.co.uk

Tel: 07909 824329