

What Is NLP?

Neuro-Linguistic-Programming has been called “the art and science of personal excellence” and “the study of the structure of subjective experience”. It helps us understand the difference between what we do that produces mediocre results or failure, and what we do that brings about success, or excellence. It addresses questions like “How do I do what I do well?” “How could I do it better?” “How can I acquire the skills I admire in others?”

Significantly, NLP is not confined to external observable behaviour, but includes the way we think – the mental processes that control all our experience and achievements. It deals with the whole structure of human experience – in effect what makes people tick – attempting to model the thought processes, feelings and beliefs that result in any behaviour. Especially, it is about communication – with yourself as well as others.

So, let’s demystify the name...

“**Neuro**” refers to our thinking, or perception – the brain processes and nervous system which form the basis of any behaviour. Specifically, it refers to the neurological processes of sensing – seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting and smelling.

“**Linguistic**” refers to the language patterns which affect our understanding and upon which much communication is based. It is hard to imagine conscious thought without language – how often do we have conversations with ourselves, give ourselves advice, or a telling off?

“**Programming**” refers to the way we can organise and program our thoughts, including feelings and beliefs, to bring about desired changes in behaviour and outcome – much as we program a computer for specific tasks with appropriate software.

In NLP, success is not measured on the basis of adherence to a script or system, but according to whether what you do works. In any interpersonal communication, this means knowing “where the other person is coming from” – somehow bridging your different perspectives of the world. Understanding how the other person thinks and feels is vital in establishing the rapport upon which successful communication depends. It is a more effective basis for achieving your outcome than the most sophisticated communication system or carefully prepared presentation.

Communication is to do with transferring understanding, from one person’s mind to someone else’s. It starts with you and me rather than “them”. You may first have to communicate with yourself; to know just what you want, and what effect your desired outcome might have on other aspects of your work and life. Then you have to get inside

the other person's mind – see things as they see them – so that your communication will make sense to them. If it doesn't, it is unlikely to succeed, however clever the presentation.

NLP puts the responsibility for the outcome of a communication on the communicator. The first thing the communicator needs to be clear on is the outcome he/she wants. If what he/she does, doesn't work, he/she needs to do something differently rather than blame the other person, by responding with comments such as "I can't make it any clearer", "he can't have been paying attention", "he got the wrong end of the stick".

It is a precept of NLP that *you cannot not communicate*. You can upset someone without saying a word, or seemingly moving a muscle. Have a go at not having an effect on the people around you for an hour or so. You may be quieter than usual, take on a poker face, or cover yourself with a blanket, but you can be sure you will still communicate something to somebody.

Historical Background

NLP started more than twenty years ago at the University of Santa Cruz in the USA. Its founders were John Grinder, who was an assistant professor of linguistics, and Richard Bandler, who was then a student of psychology and mathematics, having a particular interest in psychotherapy. Their research 'modelled' three psychotherapists who were known internationally to achieve outstanding results in their work: Fritz Perls, an innovative psychotherapist and the founder of Gestalt therapy; Virginia Satir, an outstanding family therapist who has been able to bring about resolutions of seemingly insurmountable relationship problems; and Milton Erickson, the world famous hypnotherapist, who has been described as the father of modern hypnotherapy.

Grinder and Bandler's aim was to establish the patterns of communication behaviour used by successful therapists, which could then be passed on to others. Rather than a grand theory, the result of their early work was a model, which can be used for better communication, faster learning and personal achievement in any field. NLP has now advanced rapidly, in discovering patterns of success in outstanding people, and more widely, patterns of excellence in ordinary people in many fields.

Michael O'Brien won the Olympic gold medal in the 1500 metres freestyle swimming by a full six seconds after using simple NLP Processes lasting about 1½ hours. This came about after he had experienced serious mental blocks, and when his ultimate goal had been for a bronze or perhaps silver

medal. In widely differing sports, from golf to rifle shooting and basketball, NLP techniques have resulted in extraordinary successes. At a personal level, NLP has been used to give up smoking and other habits. Managers have overcome lifelong fears of giving stand up presentations or speeches at social occasions, or of conducting one-to one disciplinary interviews. Adopting simple mental

strategies – perhaps for motivation, decision-making, creativity, or communication – can set otherwise ordinary people apart.

The significance for you and me is that such success strategies can be identified and emulated to bring about equivalent results in whatever area we are working. Because skills are transferable, you don't need to depend on luck or the right parents. You can learn the knowledge and skills of personal excellence, just like learning to drive, swim or use a personal computer.

That is the essence of NLP.

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