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SIMPLY CHANGE: IT IS NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING

Many readers will ask the question, "What is Neuro-Linguistic Programming?" and that is a question worth answering. Of course, the best answer is not a simple definition, but a **simple experience**. For experience gives the reader a reference for putting the principles into action. And using NLP principles successfully will validate it more quickly than discussion about what it is. The second best answer can be found in the descriptions of NLP offered in such books as **Frogs into Princes** and **Trance-Formations** which have a "live" format and give a sense of the breadth NLP offers to the professional communicator whether psychotherapist, consultant, or teacher.

Having offered these two sets of resources to you, I will proceed to give you a more personal description of NLP as I have integrated it into my own communication style and practice. Thus, you may discover as you search through your experience that the principles I describe will begin to organize for you the statement that "NLP is the study of the structure of subjective experience. . ." in which one can discover how a person organizes their reality or map of the world.

Recently I did a workshop in London. As you yourself may know, people come to workshops for two main reasons. At the workshop, people said that personally they wanted to make changes in how they perceived themselves, particularly wanting to remove some self-imposed limitations. The professional reason was to discover how to use the principles of NLP. As I frequently do, I decided to focus participants' attention through asking them to access experiences from their own personal history. So I told them,

"As you are sitting here, listening to what I'm saying, and seeing how I present this material, you may remember other times when you comfortably and easily learned something that was new and useful. It may have been in school, or it may have been with a favorite friend, maybe an aunt or uncle, or some special teacher. In any case, the learning environment was one where you were relaxed and where the information you needed to know was easy to get. I may have a friend who had never water ski-ed, and in one after-

noon developed the beginnings of a skill that to this day is satisfying to her. You might remember a time such as that when you discovered that you were able to quickly and easily use what you had seen and heard and felt, and that you further developed as time went on."

Now I wanted them to begin accessing their experience of learning easily, and unconsciously, and to give them the message that their unconscious does pick up and organize so much more than the conscious mind can. At the same time, their conscious mind would want some structure to make sense out of learning and the principles of NLP offer this.

If I say, "Sit back now, relax, and remember times when you understood and used new learnings", you can go inside by making pictures of your past, hearing the sounds of those experiences and feeling the feelings. By stacking these experiences together, you can establish a receptivity to such learning in the present.

In psychotherapy, it is useful to orient the client to those resources he or she has which make expanding their limitations possible. By establishing firmly this awareness, it may always be used as the reference which reminds, reinforces and convinces the client that they can make the change they want.

Though I never studied with Fritz Perls, I trained with one of his students and so I can appreciate many of his contributions to psychotherapy. One in particular is the hot seat. As you may have found yourself, clients will associate meaning to you as therapist, to your office, to their therapy time. They will also do this with their specific seat. Making use of this natural process, I heighten it by identifying one chair as "the chair in which change occurs". It first evolved for me in a workshop in the Rhön Park, Germany. I was doing a group and there was only one chair open in the circle which was next to me. After the first person worked in it, and made a good change, I turned to the group and said,

"This is obviously a very special chair, and as you consider changing and what you want for yourself, realize that when you sit here you will change. Think seriously about your commitment to the change you want, because when you sit in this chair you will change".

Of course, this associating of change with the particular chair (called anchoring in NLP) is not the truth, but rather the first stage of creating a mind set for change. As each person who sits in the chair does in fact change, the significance and meaning of "the chair in which change occurs" is heightened and becomes a reality in the minds of those observing. Thus, utilizing the natural process of associating a process, that is changing, with an object and position freely uses the structure of one's subjective experience to work with their map of the world.

What occurs after this association or anchor is established, requires other skills from the NLP'er's repertoire of communication and change strategies but participants who have built in this association of change with the chair will often comment on the magic quality of transformation which occurs. Their conscious mind is directed to an external focus, thus freeing their unconscious mind to work cooperatively with me as therapist to actually accomplish the change. Learning the structure of this magic, which includes distracting the conscious mind with illusion, delights most participants. It teaches them that they too can practice and become equally adept at facilitating the changes they once thought magical.

The client has been prepared consciously and unconsciously to believe he or she can change. You might wonder what's next. As you are sitting comfortably reading, you might allow yourself to wander through your own personal history and collect together in your mind positive experiences you've had. "Each of these is a resource that can be generalized to new contexts providing you with the information and processes necessary to successfully meet your tasks". When working with a client, I can say this general statement and they can make sense out of it only by getting specific experiences from their history. As they register each experience, internally, I'll observe the external changes that accompany these internal ones. Their skin colour might change, their muscles react, their breathing vary, or their eyelids flutter, to mention a few. I will use these changes to give me directions as to where we will go in the work. For example, does this person need stronger resources anchored in, are they completely in the situation or putting themselves outside of it, do they need support in further accessing a certain state.

One way to match the client's experience and lead them further is through metaphor. Here the characters, action and relationships revealed in the metaphor parallel the characters, action and

relationships occurring in the individual's life. If I were to give you an example, I would also want to give you a sense of how sensory experience can be matched as in the case of matching the tempo and rhythm of my words and breathing with their breathing rate. You might hear me start with a story where,

*Once upon a time there was a little girl who didn't think she was very pretty or smart because all the people around her would speak about her beautiful sister, or smart brother. And she felt bad about herself, because she knew she **could** be beautiful and smart, but she didn't know how.*

I breathe at the same rate you do, and space my words to match the rhythm of your breathing, and suggest that . . .

As you sit there . . . feeling the chair . . . your feet on the floor . . . your hands resting there . . . breathing comfortably and relaxed . . . you can . . . close your eyes comfortably . . . accessing a time . . . when you felt strong and confident . . . with your own abilities . . .

I can see the muscles in your face softening and relaxing, a faint upturn of your mouth, and a deepening of your breath. I put my three middle fingers of my right hand gently just above your knee as I sit beside you and move them in unison, up . . . and . . . down . . . with the rhythm . . . of your breathing . . . suggesting that . . .

this . . . is a state of consciousness . . . in which . . . you can review . . . your past . . . pleasurably . . . and discover times . . . when you were successful . . . in ways that please . . . and delight you . . .

And because we've established a sense of rapport, you easily enter an altered state of consciousness in which you have access to these resources. As you have found these resources, you feel me removing my hand, and your internal state begins to change, returning you to the present, and I suggest you open your eyes. As you do, I continue,

Now this little girl (you could imagine I'm talking about a little boy) had a friend who lived in the forest not far from her house. And she liked to visit him because whenever she listened to her own voice in his presence, she felt warm inside and saw herself differently. They would talk about

the flowers she loved to pick, or the small birds and animals in the forest, or taking hikes together.

Now . . . as you are sitting . . . in this chair . . . you came up here . . . with a bad feeling . . . in your body . . . and I wonder . . . when you close your eyes . . . how soon . . . you would . . . FEEL THIS FEELING . . . AGAIN . . .

I would be continuing to breathe at the same rate as you . . . sitting there now in a relaxed state . . . ready to find an early experience of this problem feeling, and when you find it . . . placing the three middle fingers of my left hand on your leg further up from your knee . . . and matching the rhythm of your breathing. As you find various examples of this feeling, you might hear me say as I watch your face change color slightly, your breathing alter, and the muscle tension in your face change . . .

That's right . . . and . . . that is a feeling . . . you've had a lot . . . and one that . . . you are wanting to change . . . Even as you are sitting here . . . while being there . . . you can be aware . . . that this feeling . . . can change . . . soon . . .

As this work proceeds easily, I will simply aid you to integrate the resources we've uncovered with the problem state and as I suggest to you that,

*You can now . . . take these resources (simultaneously I place the fingers of my right hand on the anchor of confidence and move both hands with the rhythm of your breathing) . . . into that situation . . . and as you do . . . **discover** that early experience changing . . . in such a way . . . that it looks different . . . sounds different . . . and . . . gives you a different feeling . . . in this early experience . . .*

I watch your face and breathing to see when you have taken the resources in and might ask you, "How is that early experience different now?" And when you've integrated the resources, I might hear, "Well your story about the little girl reminded me of something. I felt dumb in school because I didn't learn as fast as others, particularly in math where I just couldn't get a feel for all those numbers. My parents really wanted me to do very well, and I just didn't understand. What I saw after you put your second hand there on the confident place and I had those

feelings fighting with the bad feelings **was** a discussion I remember. It was between my parents and my grandmother about me, and I remember how she gave them such a hard time about me. I see now how what my parents were saying to me reflects their own fear that they weren't going to be able to give me what I needed to succeed. But now I realize that was them and not me they were really talking about".

At which point I would suggest that you observe other parts of your life where you feel stuck and see and hear and feel how this new learning/awareness changes your perception of how you were and are now different. I would reinforce these new awarenesses as you generate a number of situations where you will now be different. I would see your face appear relaxed with a smile lighting it and a certain animation infusing your voice tone and tempo. I would resume the story which I started with and say,

As this little girl was walking in the forest one day after being with her friend, she heard her own voice say, "I don't know why I haven't thought of this before. I know a lot of things, and my friend likes me, and the birds and animals come to me when I call so I must be pretty enough for them". And the little girl started skipping and singing to herself and her forest friends . . . delighted that she no longer needed to think that she was not pretty or smart because her parents talked about her sister and brother as if they were the only pretty and smart ones. She began using her own eyes, ears, and feelings to let herself know about herself.

Having told you this story and seeing your face responding positively to the idea of the little girl who might be you, I could totally switch the subject, allowing your unconscious mind to process what it has just received.

And that's what I'll do. NLP offers a powerful set of change strategies and basic models for developing new change strategies. These strategies and models are bringing us to the point of actively taking responsibility for the reality we create, for they give us the tools to create our reality. Our limitations, self-imposed and otherwise, are expandable to dimensions we haven't even tapped yet. We can enrich our experience and others. NLP offers a "here's how". I hope that you have enjoyed this taste of NLP which contains even more that will expand our realities, and that you will find ways to use what NLP offers.