

**“You are today where your thoughts have brought you.
You will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you”**

James Allen

Perception is Reality

by Suellen Raven

A VILLAGER in a war-torn country discovered, one morning, that his horse had disappeared. His friends shook their heads and said how unlucky this was but the villager replied, “Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t”. The next day his horse returned, accompanied by several others. The man’s friends said how lucky this was but the villager’s response was “Maybe so, maybe not”. Some days later the man’s son broke his leg and the villagers commiserated saying how unfortunate he was but the man just shrugged and said, “Perhaps so, perhaps not”. The following day soldiers came to the village and took away all the fit young men but the man’s son was left behind and the people told the villager just how lucky he was. The point of this story is to illustrate that it is our perception of events that creates our reality. We have the freedom to choose how we see, feel and are affected by events in life but many of us respond to situations in the way we have been pre-programmed to. We are emotionally hi-jacked by situations and events, without knowing why. The good news is that we can change old ways of reacting and patterns of behaviour that cause us pain.

In the mid-’70s Richard Bandler and John Grinder developed Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) by creating a model of human behaviour that combined their expertise in linguistics, computer science and mathematics. They examined the work

of three highly respected therapists, Milton Erickson, one of the greatest hypnotherapists of modern times; Virginia Satir, the founder of family therapy in the US; and Fritz Perls, the developer of Gestalt therapy. By observing, eliciting and modelling how these influential therapists achieved their results Grinder and Bandler formed the basis of NLP.

NLP gives us a highly practical approach to understanding mental processes. Some describe it as a set of tools that shows you how to direct your mind and gain greater control over your life. It helps you to make lasting change and overcome fears and obstacles that may be standing in your way. It shows you how you can choose to see everything that happens to you in a different light.

We are born with unlimited potential but often lose confidence during our formative years. Many of our personality traits or patterns are ‘learned’ at an early age. Once they are in place we tend to attract to ourselves experiences that confirm our negative beliefs about ourselves. Sometimes we know the cause of a problem but more typically,

we respond to events or other people’s behaviour with a ‘knee jerk’ reaction without even knowing why. It might be the tone of voice someone uses or a certain look. If, for example, someone turns away from you while you’re speaking it may trigger anger in one person and humiliation in another, while someone with confidence probably won’t get upset. The good news is that just as we ‘programme’ our minds to have limiting beliefs we can change those beliefs and negative patterns.

We cannot change other people, but we can change the way we react to their behaviour. When we feel hurt or offended the feeling is entirely a matter of our own response. In fact, the feeling is our response, and it is our responses that we should be concerned about, not those of others.

Stored inside our bodies are physical and emotional blocks resulting from un-resourceful patterns of behaviour that are linked to unresolved painful memories. Memories, especially traumatic ones, are stored at a cellular level. The effect this has is that our bodies ‘remember’ everything that has ever happened to us on a physical level – the time we scraped our knees or got stung by a bee. Our minds remember everything else, though much of it is stored in our unconscious. Everything you’ve ever seen, heard, touched, smelled or tasted is filed in your brain.

Masuro Emoto, in his fascinating study into the power of thought and intention on

water shows, through his beautiful photographs of water crystals, the effects negativity and hostility or alternatively love and blessings have on samples of water. If our thoughts can affect the molecules in water how much more so might they affect our bodies' molecules and cells? After all, water constitutes 70% of our bodies.

NLP is so multi faceted that it is only possible to scratch the surface in this article so, rather than explain what it's about, I'd like to touch on some of its uses which newcomers to the subject may find helpful. There are many excellent books and courses available on the subject for those who wish to learn more.

When we feel an emotion it has a specific physiology attached to it. Depressed people, for example, look down (literally as well as metaphorically), their head and shoulders droop, their breathing is shallow and their face tends to sag. Happy people, on the other hand, look up, with their shoulders back, their head high and their breathing much fuller. By changing our physiology we can produce the emotional states we desire. Emotion is created by motion, so if you stand the way you would stand and breathe the way you would breathe in a 'desired' state (confidence for example) you can change a negative feeling into a positive one.

Socially, we tend to get on best with those who see the world through our eyes and NLP looks at the way different individuals see, hear or feel things. In therapy this helps practitioners to build rapport with clients. Visual people tend to respond to words connected to that 'sense'. They relate to being described as 'bright', and they might agree with someone by saying, "I see what you mean". Auditory people are more likely to be 'in tune' with one another, think that an idea 'sounds' great, and agree with others by saying, "I hear what you say". Kinaesthetic people are the ones who relate to their feelings. A situation will 'feel' right for them, they get 'gut instincts', they 'warm' to a situation, and they 'feel' the same way as you when you're

in agreement. In therapy, it is essential to build rapport with a client, in business the same knowledge can be used to manipulate!

Our beliefs have a powerful effect on us and determine what we accomplish or fail to accomplish in life. If you believe your parents loved your older brother more than you, your mind will notice only the occasions when they are paying him attention. You will unconsciously fail to notice the times when they are showing you love and affection or telling you how clever you are.

It is the meaning we attach to events that results in feelings of pain or pleasure. I remember being with a friend who had recently split with her partner and was feeling hurt and rejected. He came over and was friendly to everyone but as soon as he left she turned and said, "You see how he ignored me completely". We were all amazed at her reaction. Her belief around his rejection of her caused her to 'not notice' what really happened

A favourite maxim in NLP is "There is no failure, only feedback". Every experience provides something of value or some useful

wise to learn from our mistakes and try a different approach.

Many of us are guilty of negative self-talk. It is amazing how hard we are on ourselves and, unfortunately for us, our unconscious mind takes what we say and think literally! How often do we ask ourselves "Why am I such an idiot" or "Why can I never get things right"? If we ask our brain a question it seeks to provide an answer and such questions will invoke answers we don't really want to hear.. If we ask ourselves, "Why do I always end up with the wrong partner?" we have effectively told our brains to search for a negative response. If, instead, we ask, "How can I attract the right partner?" our minds will search for answers that enable us to take positive action. It is important to seek positive responses from our minds by asking the right questions.

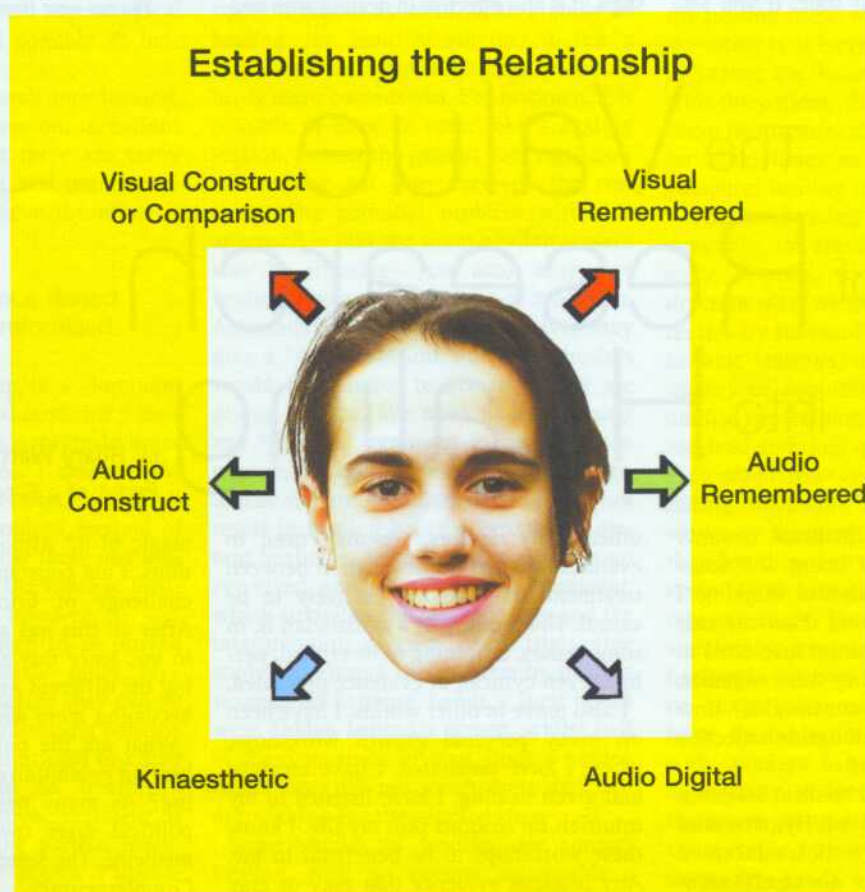
On the subject of negative self-talk, next time you catch yourself in the throes of criticising yourself pay attention to where that critical voice is focussed. Maybe it's in your left ear or at the back of your head. Maybe it's loud and harsh using a critical tone. Try changing its location in your head, slowing

the voice down (or speeding it up), making it sound soothing or ridiculous like that of a cartoon character. As you change the sub-modalities of your inner critical voice you will notice that its effect on you lessens.

Is there someone who scares, upsets or makes you angry? Try imagining them with silly, exaggerated features. If they loom large in your mind and are in colour try making them look small, at a distance and in black and white. Use your imagination to alter the effects they have on you by 'playing' with the way you see and hear them. Have fun doing this; pretend you're a child making someone sound and look silly.

You'll soon find you no longer have such an adverse reaction to that person.

There appears to be a link between how we think and the way our eyes move. Most of us have a set pattern of eye movements when we are asked to visualize, recall or



lesson if we look for it. We all make mistakes but we are not our mistakes. If we do the same thing over and over we must expect to get the same results and we would be silly to expect otherwise. When we don't get the results we want it would be

create sounds internally, or feel an emotion. In fact we store memories in different areas of our visual field. Generally, we defocus or look upwards when we visualize, look sideways to the left or right when recalling sounds internally, and look down to our right when associating to feelings. When we look down to our left we are usually having an internal dialogue (left handed people may reverse their cues). When you become familiar with eye accessing cues you can find out how others are thinking. It can be fun to watch politicians being interviewed if they haven't yet been trained to 'disguise their lies'. When they're avoiding the truth their eyes will go to 'visual construct' to create what they want us to believe is the truth as opposed to 'recalling' what actually happened.

There are a number of benefits to using eye accessing cues apart from tuning in to how others are thinking. You can use them to help yourself think more precisely and clearly in a particular way. Look up when you need to visualize, sideways for auditory access and down for feelings or internal dialogue. If you find yourself feeling 'down' look up to change your state. If you also

make a point of standing upright and breathing more deeply, you'll soon notice a difference in how you feel!

When clients find it hard to shift a negative emotion I sometimes interrupt their state by asking them to recall a time when they were really happy, confident, successful or in the desired positive state. I then ask them to keep their eyes in the 'positive' position and get them to go back to their negative feelings. It's amazing how often they are unable to access their 'un-resourceful' state while their eyes remain fixed in the 'positive' position.

Our unconscious mind controls around 90% of our behaviour so, for the most part, however hard we try to break a pattern or habit, our inner saboteur just keeps us on track. If we compare our brains to computer hardware and our limiting beliefs, behaviours and reactions to outmoded software then NLP sets out to delete the old programmes we run and install more resourceful and helpful ones. It can empower you to gain confidence, lose weight, stop smoking, change bad habits, conquer phobias and release limiting behaviours in your relationships. It is also effective in dealing with neg-

ative emotions like anger, fear, grief, hurt, anxiety, addiction and long-standing emotional blocks. NLP has many uses and can achieve desired results with surprising rapidity using a whole range of interventions.

According to Abraham Lincoln "Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be". How happy do you want to be since you, alone, have the power to choose your thoughts? ●

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