# NEURONS

# VOLUME IX

# 2025

# NEURONS — 2025

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**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #1**
**January 6, 2025**
*Discipline: The Personality Factor You Love to Hate* series #1

# DISCIPLINE ARE ~~*NOT*~~ US

Some years ago, upon entering the breakfast restaurant of the hotel we were staying in, I headed first for the coffee machine. That's where I overheard some of the participants from our competency based training talking as they ate breakfast. They were at a table on the other side from the coffee station which was out of sight. I could not see them, but I could hear them. One was apparently explaining why the discipline of the training was so rigorous. "Well, that's because Michael is such a disciplined person himself, he reads 30 minutes every single day, writes 30 minutes and exercises 30 minutes." To that one of the participants said, "Wow!" "'Wow?' I thought, but that's hardly what I would call discipline."

Later when I reflected on that short conversation, I realized something about myself, namely, I almost never use the word *discipline* to describe the activity of *doing what needs to be done.* Instead I just call that *life-style.* Yet that's not the first or last time someone said that about me. More recently, when the subject of taking medicine came up, I mentioned that I had been taking tamoxifen as an anti-cancer drug. "For how long?" I said for four-and-a-half years. The person, who was a health coach asked, "How many times have you forgotten to take it?" I said "None, not a single time did I missed taking it. I always take it. It's just what I do." She said, "You're really very disciplined." Again I thought, "Why would I not take my medicine?"

Now with 2025 just beginning, and many people will begin with some New Year Resolutions, I thought it would be good to write about *discipline,* or perhaps more accurately and appealingly, *consistent life-style activities.* After all, if setting new goals in the new year is a way to become more effective, more goal-oriented, and to live more purposefully—then the key will be to get yourself to *do what you intend to do.* After you design a Well-Formed Outcome so that your goals are smart, realistic, and actionable, the next *secret ingredient* for them to transform your life is for you to develop the discipline to be consistent and regular in what you do.

*The Success Factor You Love To Hate* —that was the subject of the ISNS Wisdoms this past November. About that success factor I wrote that discipline is something which you desperately need but which you probably do not want. How about you? To you *want* discipline? Would you attend a training on "How to Become a Highly Disciplined Person"? Many, peryhaps most people, would not. Yet most know that they *need* it, they just do not *want* it. And why not?

A lot of people do not *want* "discipline" because for them it implies all sorts of unpleasant and negative meanings. It implies—

- Being controlled, being forced to do what you don't want to do.
- Being treated like a child again and forced to eat your vegetables, make your bed, and do your homework.

- Losing the freedom to not do what the discipline requires.
- Forfeiting options, alternatives, and losing the right to be spontaneous.
- Having to do what is hard, painful, and unpleasant.
- Being punished for a mistake or bad behavior: sent to the Principal's office, loss of privileges, etc. "Son, I'm going to discipline you; no internet for two weeks."

Wow! If *discipline* means that to a person, no wonder it is thought of and felt as an imposition, a prison, and the last thing in the world that you would ever *want* to do! If you have associated discipline with punishment, pain, doing what's hard, etc., of course you will not *want* it. You will not strive for it! You will not set a goal to become *a disciplined person.* But, of course, that is a misunderstanding of discipline. It does *not* truly define or describe what discipline is. What does the word *discipline* actually mean and refer to?

- Discipline is simply "a course of action."
- Discipline can refer to "a course of study:" the discipline of psychology, math, geometry, etc.
- Discipline is a planned way of operating.
- Discipline is a strategic way to achieve something of value.
- Discipline is a regimen for succeeding in a particular area.

How about that for five reframes on discipline? Which one do you like best? Yet there is another one that I think reframes it even better. Given that the word *discipline* comes from the Latin words, *disciplina, disciplulus* (pupil), discipline refers to not only "a course of study," but *the person* doing the 'studying'— hence, the disciple. The disciplined person is a *disciple to the information and activity*. You could be a disciple of coaching, of Neuro-Semantics, of NLP, of psychology, of self-actualization, of personal development, etc. What or who would you like a to be a 'disciple?'

For me, since discipline is life-style, I am a disciple of learning, of modeling excellence, of my own well-being (health) and fitness, of unleashing human potentials, of the human mystery of 'thinking,' etc. How about you? What are you a disciple of? Some are disciples of 'the path of least resistance.' Some are disciples of goofing off, avoiding responsibility, the superficiality of 'retail therapy,' of living solely for immediate pleasure, etc. Where would you like to direct your discipleship to in 2025?

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #2**
**January 13, 2025**
*Discipline: The Personality*
*Factor You Love to Hate* series #2

# DISCIPLINE IS DISCIPLE-ING

If the word *discipline* arose from the Latin word for *pupil,* then no wonder it is so closely related to another word, a word that is much more positive— *disciple.* That's how I ended the last article. And because both words— discipline/ disciple— are so intimately connected, when you are disciplined, you are a disciple. The only question is, "You are a disciple to what or to whom?" That brings me to Jim Collins' quotation in *Good to Great.*

> *"There is no effectiveness without discipline, and there is no discipline without character."*

Ah, character! It was the actor Michael J. Fox who said, "Discipline is just doing the same thing the right way whether anyone's watching or not." That's another description of *character.* And that implies something critical about discipline—it arises from, and is dependent upon, being self-referent rather than other-referent. If you are always *referring to others* and you are always carrying about what others think, say, and do, then you are living your life to please them, to be on their good side, to not upset them, etc. Do that and you probably will not even know what you want, what you believe in, what you value.

*Character* refers to deeply knowing and living from your own authority—to be the *author* of your own life. This is the *inner discipline* that is required in order to achieve outer discipline. In fact, without this piece, all of your effort for outer discipline will indeed feel hard and forced. It is when you *live from out of your inner beliefs and values,* live from the inside—out, that you can begin to develop the kind of discipline that will carry you through in achieving your goals.

Perhaps this is what Aristotle meant when he said, "Through self-discipline comes freedom" — namely the freedom to truly be yourself. And it was the famous Anonymous who wrote, "Your level of success is determined by your level of discipline and perseverance." The bottom line: *discipline comes from your inside world.* It comes from you being true to you—to your capacities, talents, and potentials. Now you have the character to persist, to commit, and to be resilient.

So, *name your discipline.* What discipline (course of study) do you want to give yourself to? What discipline (course of action) would you like to become *a disciple*? I am a disciple of my own well-being which means health, energy, vitality, and fitness. I have been for a long time. Accordingly, I have read and studied in that area, and that led to writing books in that area (*Games Fit and Slim People Play*), as well as training manuals (*The Neuro-Semantics of Health, Unleashing Vitality*). It led me to get into running in my mid-20s as well as other sports: cross-country skiing, mountain climbing, racquetball, etc. Today I go to the gym five days a week and Geraldine and I hike mountain trails.

Going to the gym for me is at the same time a disciplined way of life (a lifestyle) and a commitment to my understandings, beliefs, values, and decisions. Given that, I never think of it as hard or unpleasant. It's actually the opposite—I look forward to it, I revel when I feel a good healthy exhaustion at the end, I anticipate learning new techniques, I delight in being able to reach some new goals that I set for myself. So yes, I have become a disciple of the gym.

The bottom line is that *discipline requires character* and *your character enables you to become a disciplined person,* a disciple. When your course of study (knowledge) becomes a course of action (implementation), then you have closed the knowing–doing gap. You have used a basic mind-to-muscle process so that what you know, you do. This explains why for any disciplined person, there's no idea of pain or punishment in it at all. Instead it is integrity and integration. It is the freedom of being your best self.

I would not be my best self if I didn't read 2 to 3 hours every day (well, except when I'm engaged in doing a training). Reading extensively activates my mind and my creativity so that I can write, and write a lot. When people ask how I can write 2 or 3 articles every week, plus manuals and books, I usually look at them as if they have asked a really weird question. For me it's like asking "How can you breathe in and out all day; isn't that tiring on your heart and lungs?" I write first of all so that I can learn, and then secondly, to share ideas and insights with others. As some of you have noticed, I never run out of things to write! I find the 'discipline' of reading and writing exciting. How could it not be? I'm a disciple to reading and writing. And when you are a disciple, you have a new degree of freedom as you are liberated from 'work.' Now everything is play and fun. Now you will never again "work" a day in your life again. So, what are you a disciple of?

**For More, see—**

*Inside–Out* (2022). It is a PDF book on the Shop.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #3**
**January 20, 2025**
*Discipline: The Personality Factor You Love to Hate #3*

# DISCIPLINE
# THE SECRET OF EXCELLENCE

Something wonderful happens once you can get over the negative press that surrounds the word *discipline* and reframe it so that you see it as a powerfully positive trait—as a description of *a life-style under your own control.* Suddenly, you discover just how awesome discipline is as an accelerator of success, effectiveness, and productivity.

*How does discipline accelerate your personal effectiveness?* There's many ways it does this. First and foremost, now you can get yourself to do what you know and need to do. As a "course of action" discipline now becomes your *action tendency* and your *strategy* for getting things done. And isn't that the problem when you lack discipline? Without discipline, people utter all kinds of complaints—complaints that highlight that they can't get themselves to take action.

- "I just don't have the discipline or the will power to go to the gym."
- "Why does the skill development of the coaching skills require so much discipline? Isn't there an easier way?"
- "But discipline seems like such an imposition, like someone is forcing me to do something."
- "I'd be okay with discipline, but there's so many procedures and not enough options."

Because what you once considered a discipline is now *a life-style of choice and desire,* you are easily able to get yourself to do what you plan or decide. You are no longer like a child who opts for ease, comfort, and pleasure. That's because discipline is an adult choice wherein you guide yourself by your knowledge and understanding rather than by your emotions. Children are naturally undisciplined. They have not yet *learned* the art of being disciplined.

To accelerate your personal success, you need to *know* what "course of study, course of action" to take and then you need to *act consistently* in doing what needs to be done. That's why discipline is a critical factor for success. It is a consistent practice which enables you to live out your knowledge and your competence. It is the ability to follow-through on what you start.

Discipline is also the inner lifestyle of *valuing your objective.* In the process of setting a goal, you identify *why it is important to you*—its value. And it's in seeing and feeling the value of something that activates your whole mind-body system to go after it. No wonder Roy Smith spoke of discipline as a fire, an inner burning that generates the energy and motivation to make it happen. "Discipline is the *defining fire* by which talent becomes ability."

Discipline accelerates your success because it is inward control. It is a controlling of your mind and controlling of yourself. Now because we call that self-control, no wonder we positively equate 'discipline' and 'self-control.' That's because when you learn to *think in a disciplined*

*way,* you are truly in charge of your mind and therefore of yourself, your person. Two thousand years ago Marcus Aurelius understood this inner power of discipline and how discipline gives you an inner strength from which to operate. *"You have power over your mind, not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength."*

Discipline accelerates your personal success to the extent that you can now so "No" to yourself, to mis-using your time, energy, focus, money, resources, etc. You can say "no" to every temptation that would pull you aside. And with the ability to so "No" comes the ability to say a resounding "Yes" to all that truly matters.

> *"Self-respect is the root of discipline: the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to oneself."* Abraham Joshua Heschel
> *"The price of excellence is discipline. The cost of mediocrity is disappointment."* William Arthur Ward
> *"With self-discipline, most anything is possible."* Theodore Roosevelt

Do you get the picture? As strange as it may sound at first, *discipline creates and accelerates success*. It gives you the inner control, motivation, and structure to make your dreams come true. And it begins inside with your mind. As "a course of study" you first develop a mental discipline, a disciplined way of thinking, and from there it cascades down through the rest of your life. People who lack discipline lack the mental power of focus. And that leads to the sad fact of the undisciplined, namely, *no discipline—no excellence.*

Every Olympic athlete is a living emblem of that principle—each person who becomes a champion does so precisely because of the discipline he or she brings to the sport, and without the discipline to learn, to practice, to consistently practice, to persist, to bounce back from defeat again and again— there would be no excellence. This is true freedom—the freedom to pursue your goals by following the procedures that can dependably take you to the edge of expertise. How about that? *True freedom is inside of discipline!*

> Today is President Trump's Inauguration for his second term ... and if all goes as planned, he and his team will make America great again by bringing discipline to the government and to the rule of law.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #4**
**January 27, 2025**
*Discipline: The Personality Factor You Love to Hate* #4

# THE ART OF DISCIPLINE

There is an art to becoming a disciplined person and achieving your highest goals and visions. Many have learned this art and have walked the pathway to becoming excellent in the things they do and achieve. In this, it is no mystery or rocket science.

1) *Set a Goal for the Knowing-and-Doing Expertise that you want.* What is the discipline that you want to learn? Early in life I wanted to learn how to write. At first it felt overwhelming and frightful and experiences of 'writer's block' threatened to undermine my goal. But I stayed with it through the uncertainty and doubts.

2) *Focus Your Attention on your Desired Discipline.* What kept me going was my focus on my ultimate objective. That's why a strong compelling *why* as in "Why is it important?" informs and activates your focus and attention. How strong is your focus? How well are you able to deal with the things that disrupt your focus? Are you monitoring your discipline as you are learning it? What is the quality of your focus? Do you need to use the Neuro-Semantic "genius" or "flow" pattern to create your own optimal state of focus?

3) *Make a Robust Decision for your Discipline.* If you have not made the decision yet, make sure that you make a robust decision that you will become a discipline of that area that you want to become excellent in. Once I learned about modeling, I made a decision to model resilience. I didn't know it would take me four years to do that. I thought maybe a month or two. It was my decision, and a decision that I made public, that kept me going. I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it and I wanted to demonstrate to others that I could complete the project.

4) *Act today in a Proactive Way that initiates the Momentum.* If you never take the initiative to start, you will never get started. So get started today. Seize the day! Use the 80/20 principle to get the most value out of what you do. Given that 20% of what you do will generate 80% of the value, identify that 20% and then zoom in on it making it your commitment and lifestyle. Nearly everybody knows that the hardest part of any change or resolution is *getting started.* We also know that the more we wait and prepare, the more we will wait and prepare and we may never get started. So *get started!* Do it today. Do it because ...

> "The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small, manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one." Mark Twain

Once you have started, then feed the momentum with effort and nurture the effort with sustainability, make it your life-style. Momentum is built by one small step, one small push, one small action after another. *Count* every small action. Say to yourself, "It counts." No matter

how small and insignificant, "It counts! I have started. The journey has begun."

5) *Resist all Excuses.* Excuses are seductive and tempting and if you don't know the common excuses that will seduce you away from your discipline, you won't be able to mount a resistance. What distracts you from your discipline? What excuses do you commonly use? What tricks you to say, "Well just this one time."? Whatever it is, decide that you will not live a life that honors excuses more than your goals. Decide to blow out all excuses so that you are left excuse-less so that you just have to go after your desired outcomes and be true to yourself.

6) *Talk up and Positively Frame Your Discipline*. What can you say to yourself and to others about choosing to live a disciplined life?

- Discipline in my choice for how to focus and act that achieves the greatest success.
- Discipline is my being true to my values, choices, and potentials.
- Discipline is the habit which allows me to manage my focus on what's truly important.
- Discipline is my strategic means for overcoming obstacles in my way.
- Discipline indicates the degree of control I can now exercise in my life.
- Discipline reveals my integrity; that I do what I say I will do.

7) *Update your Modal Operators.* In life experience, we get into certain *modes of operating* and these *operational modes* show up in how we talk. Linguistically these are called "modal operators." The verbs describing *possibility* are "can, able, possible." The words for *choice* are "choose, decide, select, pick." Those for *desire* are "want, wish, hope, yearn." Those for *necessity* are "need, ought, should, must, have to."

- Use *necessity words* and you will feel helpless, powerless, and like a victim. "I have to read." "I should write a report." "I must go to the gym."
- Use *possibility words* and you will feel hopeful and optimistic. "I can go to the gym." "I am able to write the report." "It's possible for me to eat healthy foods."
- Use *desire words* and you will feel capable and empowered. "I want to work out." "I yearn to run after work."
- Use *choice words* and you will feel hopeful and empowered. "I choose to read for an hour each day." "I have decide to finish cleaning the garage."

Then there is the Maslow *must.* Do you know that one? "A muscian must make music; a poet must write; what a person can do, he must do." That's a self-actualization *must,* it is a *being-value must.* It is not *the must of pressure,* it is *the must of potentiality.* Today know that one, "I must write, I would be less of who I can be and will be if I don't write." Finally, there is this from the Dalai Lama:

*"A disciplined mind leads to happiness, and an undisciplined mind leads to suffering."*

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #5**
**February 3, 2025**
*Discipline: The Personality Factor You Love to Hate #5*

# THE FREEDOM OF DISCIPLINE

At first glance, *freedom* seems like the very opposite of *discipline.* Most people think that way. They assume that if they were to enter into a discipline, it would deprive them of their freedom. Since discipline involves procedures, following procedures, and doing so consistently, and regularly, resiliently, and persistently, that seems to completely eliminate the freedom to choose other alternatives, other options. That's how it seems.

But how it seems is not always the way it is. That's because sometimes what we posit as opposites when we fall into the over-simplicity of either/or thinking blinds us to the more complex reality.

- How much *freedom* do you have when you drive off the road and try to pioneer your own trail across town or across the country?
- How much *freedom* would a train have when it gets off the tracks?
- How much *freedom* does an Olympiad gymnast have when she forgets *the routine* and tries out new options whether on the floor exercise or on the unparallel bars?
- How much *freedom* would you experience if you decided on a new way to tie your shoes every day?

Actually the strange fact is that *the only true freedom is in the art of the discipline*. Doctors spend years learning every fact they can a bout the body, its anatomy, the inter-relationships between different parts, and how different medicines interact with the body's neuro-chemistry. They learn all sorts of procedures that have been developed over the years— procedures that have been practiced thousands of times, refined, streamlined, studied, etc. The doctor's freedom and skill and expertise lies precisely in his ability to do a procedure with precision and accuracy. *The discipline itself enables the doctor the freedom to be successful.*

The more you know "a course of study" and "a course of action" (discipline), the more freedom you have to demonstrate expertise and to be productive. It's that well-trained discipline after years of practice which frees you to understand, to think, to creates, to evolve, to take the procedure to a next level. The order is— *first discipline, then freedom.* If you put freedom before discipline, you are only free to muddle around. First you learn to play the scales, then you can make music. Too many people turn the order around and condemn themselves to incompetence and being unproductive.

What's the difference between a human and a zombie? The human thinks, chooses, and learns a discipline and can now live a creative life. A zombie robotically moves and reacts, he sees but doesn't see. The human is free to think, to create strategies, to figure things out. The zombie has no true freedom, he can only grunt and thirst for blood and walk stiffly into his preordained

future.

Now ultimately, because *you are only as free as you are free in your mind—free to truly think and to do your own thinking,* your ultimate freedom is a disciplined mind. Given that, how free are you, really? The discipline of freedom requires several things:

| **Awareness** | **Power** | **Purpose** | **Flexibility** | **Opportunity** | **= Freedom** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| of what is, capacity of yourself, your thoughts, | Intentional to think, to value feel, speak, act. | to adapt to express what's important | in the context in your environment | **in a Discipline** | |

This is the *discipline* required to be a fully functioning person. It arises from your conscious awareness of things, your developed capacity for functioning, the purpose you set for a compelling outcome in some area of life (the discipline you desire), your flexibility to then adapt in your environment to take advantage of the opportunities around you. True freedom is *a freedom to something,* it is not merely a reaction away from what you don't want. We can also call this *responsible freedom* because you are "able to respond" from your values and beliefs and invent the life you want.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #6**
**February 10, 2025**
*Discipline: The Personality Factor You Love to Hate* #6

# THE STRETCH OF DISCIPLINE

Discipline inherently requires a stretch. It requires that you keep stretching whatever you're dling by taking it up a notch, by increasing the time, the effort, the weight, the distance, etc. In his book on *Flow,* Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described the stretch of discipline in these words.

> *"The best moments usually occur when* ***a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits*** *in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we* ***make*** *happen."* (p. 3)

This describes the design and purpose of a discipline. That's what happens when you learn the art of discipline. Yes, discipline is "a course of study" and "a course of action," a regime that gives you a planned strategy for how to do something, and it is also *a stretch.* Actually, *stretch* defines what we experience as the *effort* within a disciplined action as well as life. When I feel that my reading and research is stretching me, it requires more effort on my part. It's the same with lifting weights. Repeating what I can already do offers no stretch. It's when I push things just a little bit more, when I put in just a little bit more effort, then I feel the stretch.

Without *effort* in whatever you are doing (and in everything that you do), your knowledge and skills will become dormant, taken for granted, and will become stale. Keep that up and the skills will begin to deteriorate. Your mind and your body needs to be challenged so that you stretch your thinking, your competencies, and your body. That's when you grow. That's what makes your life richer and deeper.

> *"The most enjoyable activities are not natural; they demand an effort that initially one is reluctant to make. But once the interaction starts to provide feedback to the person's skills, it usually begins to be intrinsically rewarding."* (*Flow,* 1990, p. 68)

Jack Welch is credited with having invented, or at least popularized, the idea of *stretch goals.* He did that in General Electric; it was his way of bringing challenge, excitement, and engagement into the work place. *Stretch goals* cure boredom. They cure disengagement. They cure depression and discouragement. What stretch goals have you set for yourself this year?

We all get bored. Do the same thing over and over and over and you'll eventually get bored or frustrated. Conversely, stretch goals brings joy back into our lives. They rejuvenate us with a fresh sense of a challenge. When you *disciple* yourself to a discipline, it's always hard at first, and so it should be. It's new, its different, its challenging. To perform it you have to *stretch*. Once you learn the discipline, things become easy. Comfortable. Now you are in danger. Well, unless you add another level of stretch to what you're doing.

The Meaning–Performance Quadrants (which includes within it the Flow Zone) warns that we

should *only incrementally increase* the challenge for a stretch otherwise we create anxiety and enter into the panic zone. It also warns that with every stretch of behavior, be sure to add or stretch to additional meanings so it becomes increasingly significant to you. Otherwise, you will get bored and complacent. The mental discipline of adding meaning provides a stretch for your mind. The physical discipline of adding the next degree of competence to your performance offers you a stretch in your neurology. These are the disciplines of stretching forward so that you move forward in life.

Add to all of this the discipline of refusing to give in to moods, circumstances, or the chaos of everyday life. Exercise the discipline of saying *Yes* to great things by saying *No* to the urgent, noisy, yet irrelevant demands. What kind of *stretch* does your disciplines need to keep you fresh and alive?

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #7**
**February 17, 2025**
*Discipline: The Personality Factor You Love to Hate #7*

# THE COMMITMENT OF DISCIPLINE

When you have studied "a course of study" and from that developed "a course of actions," a regime by which you develop an expertise to the extent that you are recognized as a 'disciple' of that domain, not only have you become a highly disciplined person, but in that experience you have demonstrated a high level commitment. And because you have, you now experientially know the commitment of discipline.

That kind of discipline usually takes a long time. It's not achieve over a weekend training, nor even over a year of specific training. It usually takes several years as Anders Ericckson noted in his longitudinal studies on expertise. And because it does, that explains the need for *a no-matter-what commitment,* a commitment that you make which is not conditional on your moods, emotions, energy, circumstances, etc. It is not, "Yes, I'm all in ... *unless* something more interesting comes up!" It is more of an unconditional commitment, "Yes, I'm all in." Period.

The reason this is important is due to what has been called *the whirlwind of everyday activities.* This is also known, as *the chaos of everyday life.* That which mostly threatens your discipline, your consistency, regularity, and persistence are not the big problems and challenges that arise in life. No, it is the *busyness* of everyday life. And that busyness are all of the things that can so easily accumulate unless you so *No* and unless you take charge of your schedule.

Stephen Covey addressed this in his book on *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* with his now famous Importance / Urgent Quadrants. There he talked about the irrationality of living your life putting out one fire and then another and another and devoting yourself to the things that make the most noise and creates the most sense of urgency. The discipline that handles all of that is a commitment to what is *most important in life.* And that calls for *prioritizing your values* so that you know your highest values. That's the commitment of discipline.

> "Productivity is the vaccination against day-to-day firefighting—the urgent and crisis demands of the day. ... It's possible for a person to have an overwhelming number of things to do and still function productively with a clear head and a positive sense of relaxed control." David Allen *(Getting Things Done,* p. 3)

Now without that commitment, the *chaos and whirlwind of busyness* will dominate. Now you know why we have put so much emphasis on Question-3 of the Well-Formed Outcome questions: *Why is that important to you?* Yet answering that one time is not sufficient. Whatever you start with, you then have to ask it another 5 to 7 times. In that way, you will elicit your own personal *value hierarchy* about the given subject.

But don't stop there. Once you have you two or three highest values that you say is important—

that's your *espoused values.* But do you live them? Do they define and govern and inspire your everyday discipline? To make sure they do, you will want to *integrate* what you *know* into what you *do.* That's where the Mind-to-Muscle pattern comes in to empower you as a practical way to live out the commitment of your discipline. Now you're ready to commitment your time, your money, effort, and mind to that which you say is the most important. To be "all in," do that.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #8**
**February 24, 2025**

# THINKING STRATEGICALLY IS INEVITABLE

If there's any thinking pattern which is inevitable, it is *thinking strategically.* I didn't realize that until I got into the writing of the book on that subject. Suddenly it became clear to me that within almost every form of thinking is strategic thinking. Why is that? For a simple reason—*we think purposefully.* We think to achieve some outcome, some goal, some desired state. In other words, our thinking is by its very nature strategic. You may *think* in order to understand, or to learn, or to create, or to anticipate what's going to happen, etc. In each of these ways, your thinking aims to strategically create an outcome that you want.

Now if thinking by its very nature is strategic, then your know-how to *think strategically* is critical if you are to do effective and productive thinking. Yet now we have a problem. Namely, most people do not think strategically very well. Why do we not think strategically in an effective way? Because we get distracted! We set out to discover something, learn something, understand something, format something, etc., and then our attention turns as we get distracted by something else. In the end, we do not achieve our outcome. Sometime we get distracted by other external things that trigger us. Sometimes we get distracted by our own internal thoughts, memories, needs, desires, etc. Sometimes we get distracted by other additional and/or opposing strategic aims. In the end, our strategic thinking is done poorly and inadequately.

Here's the bottom line. We inevitably think strategically because we want things, we want to achieve goals, we want to fulfill our dreams, we want to step up to reach our potentials, etc. But unless we have taken the time, trouble, and effort to *learn how to effectively think strategically*, our strategic thinking is probably still at a childish level of development. Now that may be inevitable, but it is not automatic. You don't learn it by osmosis. You learn it intentionally by giving yourself to the art of thinking strategically.

Think about the game of chess. It's relatively easy to learn how to play chess. There's only a few basic rules for how the 9 distinct pieces move and even a small child of 10 can learn it in just a few minutes. But to think strategically as you play chess—that's an entirely different phenomena, and not one that you learn in an afternoon! So how would you learn to *think strategically when playing chess?*

There are several answers to this. The most obvious one is to learn some of the traditional chess strategies. How to think about opening up the game. Are all opening moves the same? Are some opening moves more valuable in the long-term than others? Then there's the value of the 9 pieces (pawns are 1, knights and bishops are worth 3, rooks are 5, queen 9, etc.) so there's a strategy regarding taking and trading pieces. Actually, with chess, there are a great many

strategies. There's entire books on strategies of the middle game, strategies of the end game, etc.

If you could begin to learn to think strategically playing a simple board game*, then think about the game of life.* Think about all of the strategies needed in order to live a healthy, joyful, and productive life. Where there is an experience that you would like to learn and experience, there's strategy to learn, practice, and integrate. The NLP Strategy model is an explicit description of our basic strategies for learning, motivating ourselves, finding our talents, developing our talents, relating to others, etc. Where there is a desire, a want, a need, a drive, or a hope—you need a strategy for the *how-to*, for the actual process of making it work.

But here's the problem. Knowing that you need a strategy or knowing that you want a strategy is *not* the same thing as *knowing a strategy.* Every profession that you might consider as a profession worth pursuing involves multiple strategies—and that's where thinking strategically comes in. To be a doctor, lawyer, therapist, coach, trainer, teacher, professor, dentist, pilot, etc. requires it's own unique strategy. The bottom line is that thinking strategically is inevitable, but not automatic, and not without disciplined learning. It is inevitable because each of us want to achieve various outcomes. Yet to do it well enough to become a skilled strategist—you'll have to do some mental and emotional work.

[Look for to some of the first presentations of Thinking Strategically in 2026.]

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #9**
**March 3, 2025**

# META-NLP: THE NEW EDITION

As best that I remember, the last time to conducted *NLP Practitioner* (which we call *Meta-NLP* in Neuro-Semantics) was 2004. By that time we had approximately 200 Neuro-Semantics NLP Trainers, so there really was no reason for me to continue running that training. Additionally I thought it inappropriate to compete against those I had trained. It was time to turn over *Meta-NLP* to the trainers so I can focus on Meta-Coach which we were just developing. And that's what I did.

Now it is not the case that I didn't teach the basics of NLP any longer. I did. That's because just about everything we do in Neuro-Semantics is founded on the basic NLP model. In Meta-Coaching everything in NLP that involves rapport, listening, questioning, framing, etc. is fully embedded into Meta-Coaching. When I began the *frame game* series of books and trainings, that also has basic NLP inside it (frames, beliefs, Meta-Model). Similarly in the *self-actualization* series of books and trainings. So while I was not formally training Prac., I continued training all of its pieces in various forms. That especially became evident when I began studying Critical Thinking (2016) because I went through the entire NLP model, especially the Meta-Model, looking at it through the eyes of critical thinking. That resulted in *Executive Thinking* (2016) and the first draft of Brain Camp I.

Later, there was a request to update Prac. which I did in 2012. Later in 2019, due to a reduction in the demand for "NLP Prac," I redesigned Prac. in three modules: Communication Excellence, Linguistic Excellence, and Communication Magic. That formulated Prac. into three modules of three days. In that way trainers could offer shorter 3-day trainings as stand alone modules and those interested in the NLP certification could achieve that in 9 intensive days.

Fast forward to the post-pandemic years, and my wife Geraldine who had been traveling with me since 2018 kept hearing bits and pieces of NLP and saying, "I was not taught NLP that way." I would also frequently concluded, "And that's NLP 101." Yet often people would say, "What? Huh?" That led us to talk about the natural problem in which each generation, the information passed onto the next generation of trainers being reduced to some extent or a different emphasis would arise. In the end, some of the standards and distinctions of the original model would be slowly lost by the 4$^{th}$ or 5$^{th}$ generation. This would be especially true for trainers who did not constantly renew their knowledge by reading the original books, but getting their understanding second-hand or fourth-hand.

Eventually Geraldine encouraged Bruneau, Joyce, and Jameel in Mauritius to urge me to train it "one more time." She urged others. Then she urged Mohamed in Egypt and his team of trainers. "Just one more time, we will record it, and you don't ever have to do it again." Finally I capitulated to them—at first thinking they would forget it. But they didn't.

Now in the meantime I learned something else—something deeper and more profound about NLP. Through all of these years I thought NLP was "A Communication Model." That's what almost everyone in the field had concluded. And it made sense. But digging deeper, I discovered that it is more of *a Thinking Model*. Communication is its application, not its core. And strange enough, the founders partially knew that and would say that "it is all about the kind and quality of thinking." But then they moved on from that and never developed that understanding. One author, Joseph Yeager, even titled his book, *Thinking about Thinking with NLP*. For me, as I realized that NLP is about thinking, that led me into the *thinking series* of books and trainings (now 11 of them).

So now here I am, 21 years later with the prospect of training *Meta-NLP* one last time. What shall I do? How shall I approach it? Here's what I'm planning for August of 2025. There will be three modules of three-days each, each one focusing on the three aspects of NLP. The application will be *personal empowerment.*

Theme: ***Living Personal Empowerment***

> The art of discovering, owning, and developing your innate powers of personality so you can live with energy, vitality, and passion and be as effective and productive was you want to be.

**I. Neurology: The Source of Personal Empowerment.** The core of NLP—sensory systems, states, VAK, rapport, acuity, etc. As it turns out— *Human functioning itself is the source of personal empowerment.* Discover how your mind works, your powers of thinking, the dynamics of your consciousness as you communicate to yourself and others, the art of self-management of your thinking and emoting, and lots of patterns for making this real in your life (Circle of Excellence, Movie Rewind, Detecting states, etc.).

**II: Linguistics: The Expression of Personal Empowerment.** *The magic of words to change minds and lives.* The model of all models, the *Meta*-Model— how your neuro-linguistics work in creating your states and experiences. How to detect words as doorways into your mind, how to de-hypnotize you from dis-empowering trances, the magic of hypnotic thinking and speaking, the art of constructing skills and competencies, how to model excellence, etc. We will use many patterns for learning the patterns of clear thinking, persuasive speaking, and strategic thinking.

**III. Programming: The Hidden Secrets of Personal Empowerment.** The multiple meta-models that govern your thinking, emotions, and responses: the Meta-States Model, the Meta-Programs, the Strategy Model, etc. All of which works mostly unconsciously and via repetitions create your deeper behavioral patterns or programs. We will explore the Meta Domain of your mind (the Meta Place) as the hidden powers of your empowerment. This will give you the ability to call out unconscious programs and update them. And we'll use many patterns to actualize all of this into everyday behaviors (Personal Change History, Reframing, Expanding Meta-Programs, Strategies for living, etc.).

**When and Where:** *Living Personal Empowerment* will be in August in Cairo Egypt at Lucid Trainings. The first module: August 2-4, second: August 6-8, and the third: August 10-12. For details contact Mohamed@lucidtraining.net . Soon there will be a devoted website for this training.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #10**
**March 10, 2025**

# YOUR STRATEGIC THINKING
# YOUR MISSION

An amazing thing happens when you start thinking strategically in an informed and intelligent way—namely, you set yourself on a mission. It may start from something as simple as thinking you'd like to go to a ball game with some friends. So you talk to them about your idea—your vision. Then together you decided, "Yeah, let's go; it will be fun." And with that you have *set a goal for your vision and your decision.* Now you are ready to think strategically.

Thinking strategically means that you start thinking about *how to make your vision or decision actual.* How will we do this? Well there's schedules to coordinate and schedules clear. Then there is the process of buying tickets. Oh, before that someone is designated the person to buy the tickets. Then money is collected from everyone, then the person buys the tickets. Next comes the process of how to get there— going together in a van? Everyone taking his or her own car, etc. Working out the details for *how-to get something done* is why we need strategic thinking.

Yet in that process something else happens. It happens to you and to anyone who is a part of the plan— now *you are on a mission.* Now you have translated a wish or a want into a specific *desire,* and from the desire you created a *vision.* Once you said *yes* to the vision, you made a *decision.* Now you are committed. And now you have purpose, an adventure to experience, a mission to live.

If this strategic thinking process happens with something that simple, imagine the effect of learning to do high quality strategic thinking! Imagine the power and wonder and magic of becoming a highly skilled strategist!

What amazingly glorious and sad about strategic thinking is that it is both simple and yet to do it well requires learning—significant learning. Actually this kind of thinking is not automatic. You do not learn it by osmosis. The only way to learn it and learn it well is to study it. A beginning place for studying it is in NLP #101 when you study the Strategy Model. That study will give you the pieces (the variables and elements) of a strategy and enable you to sequence out the steps in your strategies. After all, you have a strategy for learning, for studying, for getting up in the morning, for choose a career, for handling problems, etc. You have hundreds of strategies.

But not all of your strategies do you good. You may have a strategy for procrastinating, losing your temper, getting depressed, depressing other people, etc. You learned such strategies mostly unconsciously, repeated them until they became habitual, and now the "run your life." Now they have you rather than you having them.

Also, many of our strategies simple do not work at all or not very well. You may have picked up bits and pieces of a strategy to be a leader, to create a new product, to be an entrepreneur, to parent your children, to develop a particular skill ... and you can ... well in part. But if you are not reaching the vision of your desire in terms of its quality or excellence, then something is probably wrong with the strategy.

This is where informed and intelligent *strategic thinking* comes to the rescue. By examining your habits, your skills, your competencies, your visions, etc., you can develop insights about your strategies and how to enhance them so that they serve you. When you become a skilled strategist, you have the tools for *how to figure things out* and improve them. It will begin to make you much more of an efficiency expert and someone who is in charge of the strategies that you have developed.

I was surprised in researching and writing *Thinking Strategically* (2025). My biggest surprise was how pervasive strategic thinking is in our lives. It is in nearly every kind of thinking skill. And it is essential to achieving your highly desired outcomes.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #11**
**March 17, 2025**

# WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO THINK LIKE?

Even though no one specifically *taught* you to think, you have *learned* to think in very specific ways. At first you simply *copied the thinking* of parents, teachers, and peers. Later you learned to think according to the jobs you took, the courses you took, and the books you read. You learned to think by the movies you watched, the games you played, and the hobbies you engaged in. Yet in all of this, you probably never thought, "Now who do I want to think like?" "Whose way of thinking attracts me so much that I want to learn to think like him or her."

On the surface, thinking seems so natural, so inevitable, so unstudied that the idea of *studying hw to think,* or how to think like another person never struck your consciousness. So you just think without considering who you are thinking like. But now let's raise that question. If you were to look around and consider the different way that people think— *Who would you like to think like?*

After all, when it comes to modeling excellence, isn't that what we most essentially do? It seems simple— if you want to be a millionaire, you need to think like a millionaire. If you want to be an entrepreneur—you have to learn to think like an entrepreneur. If you want to excel in area area or profession, you have to think like the best minds in that area. And if you decide to do that, the next question is, "How exactly does millionaires think or how do entrepreneurs think?" In fact, there are books written to those very ends. In each case, *it's the thinking that makes the difference* more than what they do.

So pick your poison. Once you have a career or adventure in mind, your next step is to learn *how to think like those who are best* in that career or adventure— who is the best thinker as a business person, a musician, a lawyer, doctor, I.T. specialist, etc.? A few years ago I got books from Bobby Fisher on playing chess, I wanted to know *how he thought about chess.* In the first month of President Trump, people on both sides of the political aisle were repeatedly astonished by the out-of-the-box ideas he came up with. And no wonder, he does not think as a politician. Instead he thinks as an entrepreneur, a real estate investor, and as an entertainer. No wonder why they can't figure him out, and no wonder they take him literally and miss his humor— he thinks and speaks in very different terms from political.

After I learned NLP I focused my attention Bateson, Korzybski, and later on Maslow. I wanted to know *what* they thought; then I went back to re-read regarding *how* they thought. In fact, I wanted to learn how to think as they thought so I could carry on what they had started. This actually is the deepest modeling as it goes beyond what someone does—their expert level of performance— to how they think that got them there in the first place.

After several decades of doing that, I realized this about the founders of NLP. Bandler modeled Perls and at the beginning began to think like Perls as he began mimicking the tone and tempo of

how Perls spoke. But given that Perls described himself in his biography as "a dirty old man," that tells you a lot about Bandler. He would have been so much better off if he had learn to think like Virginia Satir instead! Grinder's thinking followed Marx (he taught Marxist economics!) and Chomsky (who gave up linguistics to become a socialist left winger politically. Pucelik was the founder who thought like a therapist and ended up opening drug and alcoholic clinics in the USA, Russia, and Ukraine thereby helping thousands of people.

*Who do you want to think like?* Most of us do not answer that question at all. Instead we end up thinking with bits and pieces mixed together from mom and dad, a favorite teacher or author, a spiritual leader, etc. For most of us, our thinking is a mishmash of thoughts and ways-of-thinking from many sources. If you have a career, that career probably plays a big influence on your thinking. If you focus on and care more about family, or your best buds, or membership in a special community—then that highly valued group probably influences your way of thinking.

*Who would you like to learn to think like?* Would you like to think like a change agent, a first responder, like Elon Musk, like a character in a movie, like Neo in The Matrix, like a famous trainer or coach? It's your choice ... and "as you think, so you are." So you will become.

> PS. By the way we have just completed the training, *Thinking Like Humans* here in Mexico ... next time we do that training will be in Brazil in June. Interested? Let me know.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #12**
**March 24, 2025**

# MISUNDERSTANDINGS FROM THE NEUROSCIENCES

In preparation for my next work, *Unconscious Thinking,* I recently read, *The Neuropsychology of the Unconscious*: *Integrating Brain and Mind In Psychotherapy* (2015). Written by a psychoanalyst, Efrat Ginot, she wrote a book attempting to integrate psychoanalysis with the current trends in the neuro-sciences. It seems that she has several objectives in mind as she wrote the book. One was to update psychoanalysis and reframe some of the doctrines of Sigmund Freud to make them more acceptable today. I thought she was creative and insightful in that. Another objective was to integrate some of the new things in psychotherapy such as reframing and narrative therapy. She mentioned a few things outside of traditional psychoanalysis.

There is also her attempt to use the neurosciences as the all-validating source of everything she proposes. But while doing that, she often fails to distinguish some of her guesses with what the neurosciences have actually discovered. While I like what she did with her title by separating "brain" and "mind," in the text itself, she did not separate them. Most of the time she wrote "brain/mind" thereby confusing the two.

Now as if confusing those two phenomena did not contribute enough confusion, she constantly wrote that this or that anatomy of the brain would "think" this, "conclude" that, "figure out" X, "understand" Y, etc. For example, "The amygdala mediates both cognitive appraisal of threats as well as emotions of fear and rage." Here the person cognitively appraises something as a threat which then shows up as fear or rage, but she writes as if the amygdala does it! So where's the person?

That's like saying, "The engine drove us to Susie's house." "The transmission brought us to a standstill at the red light." By confusing *the brain* with *the mind,* this author writes as if she assumes that by knowing the brain parts—thalamus, hypothalamus, prefrontal cortex, medial temporal lobe, etc.—you then know what *the person* is thinking, concluding, believing, etc. But the *brain* is the hardware for the *mind,* and not the mind itself. She writes: "The unconscious systems left to their own devices, they do not 'learn' from reality" (67).

Actually, it is *the person* who thinks, believes, learns, and appraises meaning, not the brain. Certainly it is true that when there's damage in certain parts of the brain, we will not have the necessary neurological resources to do certain things. Damage to the Werke section leads to various linguistic problems, aphasias.

Yet this author pictures things operating within the human person as if it operates only by the neurology processes, and that it does not occur via cognition or linguistics. "Much of what the

brain learns occurs without awareness and without the help of the neocortex." Actually it is not the brain that does the learning, it is *the mind*—the person's mind. It is the person who has a brain that learns, the brain provides the neurological basis for learning.

She quotes Bounomano, a neuro-scientist, "Much of what we learn is absorbed unconsciously as a result of the brain's tendency to link concepts that occur together." (2011, p. 183). Here again the idea is that it is the brain that does this, not the person.

In writing about the neurological basis of thinking, she writes that it is within the lower brain nerve centers in the sub-cortical regions (e.g., brain stem, midbrain, basal ganglia, limbic system, cerebellum, thalamus, hippocampus, amygdala) that thinking begins. Yet this is where she confuses the *information processes* of the brain with what a person does, namely, *thinks.*

There are good sections in the book. She writes that "The amygdala mediates both cognitive appraisal of threats as well as emotions of fear and rage. Affect and cognition always work together. As determined by evolution, the brain's default position is to learn, especially in the service of adaptation and survival." (p. 24). Well, not exactly, the brain *processes information* and because we all *learn* different things and *conclude* different things, the brain only provides the data, you and I interpret it and give it meaning.

What seems today to be the new fad is to accredit "the neurosciences" as substantiating just about anything we wish were true in the human mind and personality. All you have to do is quote some research from "the neurosciences" and that seems to tidy up all questions about legitimacy. But, of course, in truth, it does not. What's often asserted is still just the most current best hypothesis of the writer and give it another six months and all of that may change. It's always good to "test all things, hold fast to that which is good."

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #13**
**March 31, 2025**
*Updating NLP Series #1*

# UPDATING THE NLP MODEL

At the end of February, I announced that I would do one more *NLP Practitioner course* and that would it be. It wasn't my idea—it was a conspiracy led by none other than my wife along with several trainers of whom I had thought very highly. Anyway, feeling myself forced into the position I finally surrender knowing it was a losing battle (now if you didn't catch it, this is a bit of humor). Anyway, since it has been 21 years since I had trained NLP Prac. I knew that I needed to work through the current manual and update it as best as I could. And that's what I've been doing.

Most of the updating I've done to date has been about making the manual more and more *user friendly*—one that will be good for all of the Trainers for the next couple decades. Having come off of several days of training both trainers and coaches on *how to run a pattern,* I have been especially diligent about making sure each of the patterns read well and that a person could easily follow the step-by-step processes.

Coming across some of the original patterns written by the NLP founders I realized that when they created nearly all of the original patterns, they almost never detailed the questions to ask. They only wrote instructions about what to do. "Have the person find a limiting belief. Make sure it is limiting them. Have them identify three most impactful sub-modalities." Reading that with my recent experience I suddenly realized how and why it was that there have been so many ways that NLP trainers could interpret and misinterpret the patterns.

In preparation, I have also given myself to re-reading all of the foundational NLP books, especially those presenting the Prac. Level of NLP. Amazingly (or perhaps not so amazing) I found the same NLP pattern in different books that radically differed from each other. Reading them, I frequently laughed out loud, "My God, no wonder that pattern doesn't work!" I found patterns that were exceedingly convoluted, others where major steps or transitions were left out. What's truly astonishing is the amount of low quality materials that are out in the marketplace.

Then there are the errors. I began making a list of some of the errors that I had noted my 40 years. For some of them I wroten articles about them years ago in *Anchor Point, NLP World* and other journals. Others that I noted were errors that others had caught. I began with a list of five which grew into 16 (I will publish my list in the next *Neurons* newsletter).

That got me thinking. I update my books and training manuals regularly. Some of the books are in the fifth or sixth editions. Some of the training manuals are in the 20th edition. I'm always correcting, updating, adding, and subtracting. I catch things, and many others catch things and when we do—I update the book or manual. But when it comes to the basic NLP books, especially those by the founders— none of those books have been updated. Some are now 50

years old!  And manuals, well there were no original manuals.

Why not?  Why did the founders and most the early trainers (but not all) not keep updating and cleaning up their tests?  Why did they not put out "corrections?"  If there's no such thing as failure, only feedback—where is all 6the feedback from the founders?  The answer is obvious. There has been none.  They never corrected anything.  Were they perfect and never made an error?  I don't think so!  Instead during the 1980s and 1990s they mostly argued and debated about each person's intellectual property— who "owned" it.

Does the NLP Model need updating?  Of course it does!  Everything written 50 years ago needs updating.  Information and knowledge along with experience keeps changing things so that we can stay current as well as recognize when new models and/or new patterns make some of the old ones redundant.

In 2011, I and Shelle Rose Charvet invited nearly 30 NLP trainers, researchers, and writers to collaborate on the book, *Innovations in NLP*.  We identified the new models and patterns that were created during the 1990s and 2000s.  We invited people to identify new approaches, new communities, and new technological innovations.  It was a full book of lots and lots of new things (the book is available from Crown House Publications, www.crownhouse.co.uk).

Now 2011 was 14 years ago.  Has anything new happened in the world or in the field of NLP? Again, *you bet things have.*  So, yes, there are things to update in the NLP model itself and how we train that knowledge.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #14**
**April 7, 2025**
*Updating NLP Series #2*

# FOUR DISASTROUS NLP ERRORS

***Error #1. Most communication is non-verbal*: 55% visual, 38% auditory, and 7% language.**

This is completely false and wrong-headed. You cannot even say, "Dinner is at 6 p.m." with visual facial expressions or auditory tones or tempo. You need *words.* If 93% of communication was non-verbal, why can I not understand the plot and story of a movie in a foreign language? Why do I need it to be translated into my native tongue? The original research that led to these numbers (55%, 38% and 7%) was based on *one word utterances in a study about incongruity.*

Dr. C. E. "Buzz" Johnson wrote an article in *Anchor Point* in 1994— "The 7%, 38%, 55% Myth" I have attached it to this post. Since writing that article I have included that article in our NLP Practitioner manual because it has been such a pervasive myth in the field of NLP and for some strange reason, even to this day, most NLP Trainers don't know about it.

***Error #2. You can depend more on body language than you can words. If there's a difference, trust the body language.***

This is another major error in the field of NLP and it was constantly promoted by John Grinder. But it is wrong and wrong for several reasons. First and foremost is the fact that there is actually no such thing as "body language." If it was a true language, we could create a dictionary of 'body language,' and a syntax for body expressions, as well as establish the meaning of any and every movement, gesture, tonality, muscle tone, etc. of the body. But we cannot.

When you sigh, cross your arms, wrinkle up your nose, look to the left or to the right, etc., *the meaning of that expression* depends entirely on you. It depends on your thinking, emoting, and meaning-making. It depends on the context where you are, who you are with, what you are attempting to do, and so on. "Body language" falsely implies an universally distinct vocabulary, syntax, and established meaning. Now there is such a thing as body movements, gestures, breathing, muscle tone, etc. All of these are a part of our non-verbal system and you have to get acquainted with the person, his culture, her style, etc. in order to understand it.

***Error #3. The unconscious mind is an entity which you should trust implicitly.***

Again, actually there is no such a thing as "the unconscious mind" *as a separate entity* apart from the conscious mind. You and I have *one mind*, and only one mind. Some of that mind is conscious and most of it is outside-of-conscious awareness. Every nervous system that we have, and we have at least 16, is an "intelligence" or mind and most are

outside-of-conscious awareness. Your sympathetic nervous system, your parasympathetic nervous system, your autonomic nervous system, your immune nervous system, etc. are all aspects of your inner "mind" or intelligence. We have a few NLP patterns that can affect them to some extent. But many aspects of neurology lie beyond being affected by the patterns that we have today.

***Error #4. You can't trust your conscious mind.***

Similar to the previous error is this one—an error perpetrated by both Grinder and Bandler over the years. Grinder frequently asserted that "People depend too much on their conscious mind and understanding, they should implicitly trust their unconscious mind." Bandler was more direct and vulgar, "The conscious mind is a dickhead."

What I find really strange about this is that NLP in the early days, especially by Bandler, focused on enabling a person to "run your own brain." One book is titled, *Using Your Brain—for a Change* (1985). What creates choice, personal empowerment, and control in any system depends on making what's unconscious *conscious.* Only then does a person have true choice.

That's four of the errors, more are to come in the next edition of Neurons.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #15**
**April 14, 2025**
*Updating NLP Series #3*

# UNCORRECTED ERRORS OF NLP
## (well until now)

***Error #5. Dissociation: "If you are not associated in an experience, you are dissociated."***

Here is another big misunderstanding that continues to this day in the field of NLP. This either-or format (associated or dissociated) presents the choice you have as one choice or the other. Nothing in-between. Yet you can *step out* and stop associating inside of one state (say 'fear,' 'anger,' 'sadness') by stepping out and into another state (say 'calmness,' 'curiosity,' 'playfulness,' etc.). When you do that you are now associated into something other than, and different from, the first state.

What shall we call this? Let's say that you are now *un-associated* to the first state. To use the term "dissociation" (or disassociation) refers to a psychiatric pathology. And that is *not* what we are referring to. Therefore I recommend that you do not use that term. There are Conferences for the Dissociative Diseases and the DSM-5 are full of descriptions of these. How much simpler is it to say, "*Step out* of X-state and *step into* Y-state." If you use *dissociation*, people from psychiatry and psychotherapy will think that you don't understand what you are saying.

***Error #6. A meta-state is a dissociation and a dissociative state.***

This is an error that I have been battling since 1994 when I introduced the Meta-States Model into the field of NLP. Because of the previous error, many NLP trainers could not even put their heads around the fact that when you access a second state and apply it to the first state, you actually step *into another state—perhaps calmness* about your fear so that now you have *calm fear.* When you do that you *transcend and include* the fear or the anger *inside of* the higher classification of calmness. This gives us *calm* anger, *respectful* anger, *thoughtful* anger, etc.

Those who have not read Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* are at a disadvantage regarding this. After asserting that the map is not the territory, Korzbyski said that for both sanity and science you have to recognize *self-reflexive consciousness* and a Theory of Multi-Ordinality. When you move upward to the next highest state (from 1 to 2, ordinal numbers), you think about your thinking, you feel about your feeling. This meta-state then sets the frame and classification for the first experience: hence *joyful* learning, *playful* seriousness, *curious* openness, etc.

In all of this, you are *more emotional* and *more into a feeling state,* not less. *Fear* of fear is stronger emotionally than just fear. *Joyful* learning is more emotional than just learning. When you *go meta* and apply state to state, you do not have dissociation at all!

**Error #7.** ***You <u>are</u> your favorite representation system and/or meta-program.***

This is an error of sloppiness. It is easy in NLP to identify your favorite representation system and or meta-program. But if it is visual, then it is just sloppy languaging to say that "you *are* a Visual," or if auditory, "you *are* an Auditory," or if feeling (kinesthetic), then "you are a Kino." This falsely identifies a person with a single variable. The truth is that we all have, and use, all of these systems. Many have done the same with Meta-Programs, over-identifying a person with his way of processing information or emotion.

***Error #8. Whatever you have ever experienced is stored away in your memory; you remember everything you have every experienced.***

This came from a conclusion of Penfield made in the 1950s when the neuro-sciences were just beginning. As he prodded the different parts of the brain with an electric prod, people began recalling memories and usually in a highly associated way. From that he drew the conclusion, we remember everything. But by the 1970s, the neuro-sciences reversed that idea, declaring it a false idea, and that it was not sustained by research. The truth is that we humans have a good forgetter! Further everything we experience is not recorded in the first place—we weren't paying attention; we were distracted, we didn't have the brain development to encode everything, etc. and so lots of things, in fact most things, are not attended to and so cannot be remembered.

There are more errors to be mentioned, look for them in the next Neurons.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #16**
**April 21, 2025**
*Updating NLP Series #4*

# MORE NLP ERRORS

NLP needs updating and one aspect of it that needs an upgrade are some of the errors that it has fallen into. In addition to the first eight errors, here are the rest of the ones that I've collected. If you know more, let me know.

***Error #9. Sub-modalities are 'sub-' (under, below) modalities.***

The choice of terminology here is the error and the problem. The qualities of your inner movies (the so-called sub-modalities) are actually the *cinematic features* that you use to *edit* any movie that you're playing in your mind. And given that you edit from a higher perspective, they are actually meta-modalities.

This error was committed by Bandler himself after Todd Epstein had named the cinematic features (close/far; loud/quiet; bright/dim; etc.) *pragmagraphics.* Actually, that would have been a much better word. The cinematic features are the *graphics* of our movies which then lead to specific *pragmatic responses.* But from what I gather, Richard thought *pragmagraphics* was too big of a word, so he invented *sub-modalities,* as if that was better!

The problem is that you cannot *edit your movies* if you do not have a picture or sound in the first place. First, the film that you're play, then the editing. Once you have a film to edit, now you can introduce circus music, put the picture a block away, turn it black-and-white, and on and on. You have to *go meta* to even detect the cinematic features of your movies. "Is it in color or black-and-white?" To find out, a person has to step back and look.

***Error #10. Logical levels are hierarchical.***

Well some levels can be hierarchical, but the mind's logical levels are psycho-logical and operate more as a *holoarchy*. Now Dilts' Neuro-Logical Levels does use the format of a hierarchy: Environment, Behavior, Capacity, Belief, Value, Identity, Purpose (Spirituality), but it is not really a hierarchy. Can you believe about your values? Your identity? Your purpose? The mind is much, much more fluid than a rigid hierarchy. The mind's reflexivity makes that possible.

***Error #11. Logical levels and logical types are different phenomena***.

Both Steve Andreas and John Grinder perpetrated this error and from what I can tell their purpose was to argue against the logical levels that Robert Dilts and that I had introduced into NLP. While they asserted that Bateson made this distinction, Bateson actually used both phrases interchangeably. [See my articles about this with Andreas on the website.]

***Error #12. NLP depends on Transformational Grammar (T.G.) for the Meta-Model.***

NLP began by using the "surface" and the "deep" levels which were in the Transformational Grammar model. But quickly thereafter, almost no NLP book kept quoting the structures of T.G. And no wonder—Chomsky, who founded T.G., repudiated it in 1976. I have written the full story of that in *Communication Magic* (2001). Nor do we need them. The levels and logical levels of Bateson, of Korybzski and meta-cognition is quite sufficient.

**Error #13.** ***Meta-programs are about content***.

This is another error that arose from John Grinder. He declared, without any evidence, that meta-programs are 'content' and therefore not part of NLP. This is patently false. Meta-programs are thinking and filtering patterns that govern *how* you think, not *what* you think. Perhaps because Leslie Cameron and Richard Bandler came up with Meta-Programs, that's why Grinder refused to teach them.

***Error #14. NLP is and should be content free.***

Yet another error from John Grinder and one that is completely wrong-headed. Without some content, you would not know what you are actually doing with a client. If a person says he want to "Yellow" and you don't ask what that refers to, it could be kill someone, embezzle a company, commit suicide, etc. My recommendation is to gather 20% content; and then focus 80% of your attention on the processes.

***Error #15. There is a New Code in NLP.***

Well, yes there was in **1983!** Yet the so-called "New Code" in 2025 is now 42 years old. And that raises the question: When will the additions in 1983 become *old*? Actually, Neuro-Semantics introduced the next level of *newness* to NLP in 1996. Today "new code" is part of classic NLP.

**Error #16.** ***If any expert can do something, anyone could.***

Well, that's not exactly right. No one is going to play basketball like Michael Jordan unless they have some of his genetics and years and years of practice. Every expertise involves not only how the expert thinks, her internal strategy, but also historical context, environment, life's challenges, decisions, inherent talent, neurology, etc.

**Error #17.** ***Eye accessing cues can tell if a person is lying or not.***

This is false through and through and it is *not something that NLP has ever taught,* although people have attributed it to NLP. None of the ofunders believed or said this.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #17**
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*Updating NLP Series #5*

# WHAT IS NLP ALL ABOUT?

There are lots and lots of pieces of NLP. When you speak about NLP, you could be speaking about one of two dozen things. Some years ago a young man told me, "I can't do NLP on myself." To that statement, you could go in one of dozens and dozens of directions. So I asked,, "What part of NLP can you not apply to yourself?" It turned out to be matching a client, but not merely any client, only those of a particular ethnic group.

Speak about NLP and you might be speaking about representation systems, language, sensory awareness, sensory acuity, matching, mirroring, pacing, anchoring, collapsing anchors, transderivational search, the Meta-Model, any one of the linguistic distinctions, sub-modalities in any one of the VAK systems, synesthesias, meta-programs, time-lines, modeling, strategies, and on and on and on.

The bottom line—there are *a lot of pieces or components that go into what we call NLP.* Now the question of the title, "What is NLP all about?" is asking for *how do you tie all of them together*? Yet over the years, there's been numerous answers:

> Communication, linguistics, change, therapy, personal development, psychology, hypnosis, modeling, new age, learning, etc.

Amazingly, whatever a person concludes "What it is all about" that then becomes that person's definition of NLP. It operates as his overall classification. Even the first NLP book's subtitle contribute to the confusion, *"A book about language and therapy."* And even today, you will find different trainers emphasizing these different aspects of NLP which leads to the controversy over *What is it really?*

True enough, NLP arose from the field of therapy. It emerged from studying the language patterns of the therapeutic communications of Perls and Satir. Yet NLP was never thought of or confused with, Gestalt Therapy or Family Systems Therapy. NLP also was built from many of the concepts in Cognitive Psychology (Transformation Grammar, the TOTE model) and from Korzybski's General Semantics, yet it is not and has never been confused with either of these.

Now over the past 50 years, probably 90 percent of the field has come to think of NLP as *primarily a Communication Model.* This is the consistent theme that you will find in books, manuals, videos, podcasts, etc. Accordingly, all of the above components of NLP are positioned as *an aspect of communication*, and they are or at least they can legitimately be framed in that way.

In revising and updating the NLP practitioner course, I began seeing it in terms of something more fundamental, namely, as a model of *thinking* and of *the mind*. After all, what was the most

unique discovery of the founders? It was that *people think in five modes*—they think visually as they make pictures, they think auditorially as they hear sounds, they think kinesthetically as they feel sensations, they also think in terms of smells and tastes, and then they think linguistically as by using words for thinking (the meta-representation system).

Now other psychologists had mentioned and used the sensory systems going all the way back to Tichner, but no one had ever proposed that thinking goes to how we *represent the senses.* That put the power of communicating, changing, therapy, creativity, etc. back to a much simpler mechanism, a mechanism every person has access to.

The result? For one thing it cut out thousands of years of trying to guess what *mind*, *consciousness*, and *personality* is comprised of. As Bateson noted in his *Introduction:*

> "Psychologists accepted all sorts of internal explanatory entities (ego, anxiety, aggression, instinct, conflict, etc.) in a way reminiscent of medieval psycho-theology. ... Psychiatrists dabbled in all these methods of exlanation ... they created statistical samples of morbidity. They wallowed in internal and mythical entities, ids and archetypes." (*The Structure of Magic,* p. ix)

The phenomena of *re-presenting* to ourselves in our *minds* what we see, hear, feel, smell and taste on the outside and then code it in words as we classify things, allowed NLP to create a model of the mind which opened up the fields of change, communication, therapy, linguistics, etc. Yet what the founders failed to recognize, which was much more significant, was *the model of the mind or of thinking* which they had discovered.

Today we know a lot about the brain *and simultaneous we still know very little about the mind.* But we know this—*the mind thinks.* That's what it does. It represents, it edits, it perceives, it attends, it languages, it draws conclusions, it values, it remembers, it imagines, it intends, and on and on. And in my opinion—*that's what NLP is truly all about.* And when you know that— it opens up everything else which the mind creates in human experience—which is the whole world. Additionally and most importantly, *the quality of your thinking is the quality of your life.*

**Neuro-Semantics News**

Come and join us in the upgrading of NLP — NLP 201 in August, in Cairo.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #18**
**May 5, 2025**
*Updating NLP Series #6*

# THE TRUE META OF NLP

If anyone is interested in an updated version of NLP, they need to knwo what happened in 1994. That was the time frame that the *International Association of NLP Trainers* (IANLPT) ran a contest to encourage people to work on new developments in the field of NLP. I first heard about it when I was at the Denver NLP Conference (September 1994).

It was there, at that conference, that I presented for the first time a workshop that I can created on *resilience.* It was actually the culmination of having worked on the subject of *resilience* for nearly four years. I was in my eighth year of intensely studying NLP and I was attempting to identify and present resilience as *a strategy, a step-by-step process* that people could use as a protocol. By then I had interviewed perhaps 35 people who "had been to hell and back" regarding resilience. Then came an opportunity—to present a workshop at the Denver NLP Conference. It was there and then that I discovered the presence of meta-states in the experience of resilience and later I was able to put together the Meta-States Model.

What I discovered in the workshop was that robust and authentic resilience involves so much more than a linear strategy. Looking back on that now, I realize that I was attempting to force 'resilience' into the basic linear Strategy Model. Yet true resilience involves a meta-structure of a state-about-a-state or even a state-about-multiple-states. Deep within true resilience, a person has a higher state of believing and intending. The person optimistically thinks—

> "I will survive this set-back!" "I will get through this set-back; it is just a matter of time." "I will not let this set-back defeat me!" "These are just the stages of grief and recovering, that's all."

Yet the discovery did not come out of the blue. For four years I had been reading and re-reading Gregory Bateson on meta-levels, levels of learning, and systemic structures. For four years I had been reading Korzybski on levels of abstraction, self-reflexivity, and multi-ordinality. Korzybski took me to the field of General Semantics. Then his work on *reflexivity* took me to the field of Meta-Cognition which was good stuff, but 'dry,' academic, and mostly conceptual.

What was more *alive* to me was the NLP focus on *state* as in state-of-mind, state-of-emotion, and state-of-body. That's where we all live. We are always *in a state*—an energy field of thought, emotion, and action. And from *state*, NLP's *Strategy Model* identifies how we get into a state —the step-by-step process. The problem is that the Strategy Model is a basically linear structure which is not how the mind-body system works.

For me the *Aha!* moment came together in a conversation with a volunteer at the workshop. As with the previous interviews, I asked for someone whose life had fallen apart, and who, in spite of everything, refused to be defeated and who eventually *bounced back* with hope, determination,

purpose, and meaning. I was truly fortunate that day because the volunteer was a man who had enough self-awareness (probably from NLP training) that he could answer my meta-questions.

Previously with the others, I had asked, "How did you know that you were in this *stage* of resilience and ready to go to the next stage?" All of the answers up to that point were mostly mundane: "I just know." "It seemed like the next natural step." But this volunteer said, "I *knew* I would get through." He emphasized *knew.* "*What* did you know which enabled you to know *that*?"

I didn't know it at the time that I had just asked a *meta-question.* Nor did I know that he was ready to "go meta." So it was an accidental breakthrough into *the meta realm of consciousness* with a person who could go there in response to a question.

> "I knew that above and beyond all of the steps and stages, I would survive, that's who I am. It's like I have a meta-state about my states."

My *Aha!* at that moment was the realization that *above his state of being in a certain stage, he had other states. He had states about the stages and the states of resilience.* Resilience arises as optimism about persisting in the journey of recovering, as a problem-solving mentality ("it's just a problem to solve") about finding the resources by which to 'bounce back.'

It was that conversation that gave birth to the Meta-States Model. I immediately recognized that this was a model and not just a pattern. It was *not* merely discovering that we can have a *state* about a state (fear of anger; anger at fear, guilt about surviving, joy about learning, etc.), but that we now have a way to track a person's *self-reflexive consciousness up the levels reveals the structure of the thinking mind.* That's the discovery! If you ask a primary question (what, when, where, how), people give you primary sensory-based answers. If however you ask a *meta-question,* you ask a person to go into his or her *meta-domain of unconscious awareness*— what we now call the Meta Place... a systemic description of the mind.

Now **mind** not only thinks and feels, but can think about thinking, feel about feelings, and each time it does, we *construct another higher (meta) level which makes up the layers of our mind.* And because mind has layers, it has frames, categories, and a self-reflexivity which provides a way to manage our mind.

When you recognize that your mind has meta-levels, you have a critical key for understanding how you know what you know (epistemology). You now recognize that what may be linear at the primary level is non-linear at the meta-levels. It's a system and that makes your knowledge *psycho-logical* depending on how you classify and frame things. Now your very *thinking processes* creates your *thinking patterns* (e.g., beliefs, values, identity, memory, imagination, anticipation, intention, etc.). These are *processes* layers thinking and emoting repeatedly to create layers of meta-states that define the content of the meta domain.

"What difference does this make in the field of NLP?" It makes the most difference of all! That's because Meta-States *explains NLP.* Meta-States reveals the back story and the epistemological structuring of mind, consciousness, and personality. NLP without Meta-States is

like a computer without DOS or some operating system. Given that—here is one of the greatest insights of Meta-States:

> *Meta-States is NLP's operating system.* Without it you really do not know, and cannot know, *how NLP actually works.*

That's because the Meta-States Model *models self-reflexivity*—it models how your mind and my mind operates as it reflects on itself creating its next level of framing which then establishes its interpretative schema. For example, when you take a simple one-level meta-state like *joyful learning,* the second state (*joy*) is the frame of reference for the first state (*learning*). It is the *classification* so that 'learning' now is a member of the class of *joyful* things. And because it does this—it does so much more *at the same time.*

> *Joy* defines the learning, governs the learning, determines the learning, and qualifies the learning. It does a lot! And at the same time, the frame of *joy* is also a belief— "I believe I can learn joyfully." A value — "I value learn for the delight it brings me." A decision— "I will learn joyfully." An identity— "I am a joyful learner." An anticipation— "I see myself in the future joyfully learning." An intention— "I intend to have fun learning."

When you understand *the meta-stating process,* you have a description of the epistemology of the "going meta" nature of NLP which makes it all work. While any resourceful state is powerful and important, more important is *the higher state* that the resourceful state is embedded in. The higher state, while usually hidden and invisible and even unconscious, is the actual process that's making things work as they do. And that's the true *meta* of NLP. And that's why we have one day of NLP Practitioner devoted to the Meta-States Model and why we call it **Meta-NLP.**

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #19**
**May 12, 2025**
Updating NLP Series #7

# THE NEW STUFF OF NLP

While I've been working on updating the basic training of NLP, the NLP practitioner course, the question of what to add and what to subtract has taken a front row seat in my mind. After all, there have been lots and lots of models and patterns which have developed in the field of NLP since the 1990s. For the practitioner course, we have added one day about the Meta-States Model because it explains NLP and without it, a person cannot truly explain how NLP works (see #6 in this series).

In 2011, I edited a book, *Innovations of NLP,* along with Shelle Rose Charvet which has contributions from 27 trainers, researchers, and writers. There we highlighted Lucas Derks' *Social Panarama,* James Lawley and Penny Tompkins' *Clean Language and Symbolic Modeling,* two on-line technologies, Arne Maus' *Identity Compass* and Patrick Merlevede's *JobEQ,* Jaap Hollander's IMPA MindSonar. In that book are numerous new patterns, Robert Dilts' *Success Factor Modeling,* Charles Faukner's Modeling Market Wizards, lots of patterns for coaching, meta-programs, dealing with cancer, stuttering, the well-formed problem, overcoming addictions, and on and on.

What shall we take away from all of that? The best thing to conclude is that: *NLP, as a field, has not stood still. There have been many insightful, clever, and transformative models, patterns, and technologies created since NLP was formalized in the 1980s.* All of these things came out of the original NLP model—the basic practitioner and master practitioner courses which was, and still is, the foundational model. And an indication of the richness of any model is the number of things which can arise from it.

As new patterns have been created, some of the old patterns have been made redundant. Even back in 1990 Bandler put the "6-step Reframing" pattern into the Museum of Old NLP Patterns. He said that he and John created it to seduce therapists to use hypnosis in their practice.

"How much of the new stuff is in your updating of NLP?" That's a challenging question because we have limited the practitioner course to 9 days—that means 3 modules of 3-days. And why limit the practitioner course to just 9 days? Primarily because "the times they have 'a changin'" as the song goes. And today, unlike the 1970s and 1980s, holding a training 28 days long is just no longer feasible (my original NLP training was 28 days!). Today what is more doable is a 3-day intensive (i.e., Friday through Sunday). And yet trying to cover the entire practitioner course in 9 days is itself a challenge— a big one.

Now given that there is already *more than enough basics to cover,* I really cannot add any of the new stuff that has been developed. But there is something I can do— I can include a page or two at the end of the manual identifying the key models and patterns that have come to light in recent

years. It is a small way of preparing the next generation of NLP-ers to try to stay current with the developments in the field.

That NLP has always been, and still is, a growing field speaks of the challenge to all of us who practice NLP in some form. What will be some of the new things developed in the coming decades? What expert human experiences will be modeled and then developed into a model for providing an experiential training so that people can learn an expertise?

When you learn and come to know how to be a practitioner of the NLP model, you have just started! There is so much more to learn and to discover. Neuro-Semantics, which is our version of NLP 2.0, discovered Meta-States in 1994, that led to remodeling a lot of NLP which meant the Mind-Lines Model and the Frame Games Model (now *Winning the Inner Game*). And from that the Matrix Model was developed ... which 20 years later gave birth to the Meta Place as a model of the mind and what the mind does.

Along the way we discover that NLP arose as one of the 'children of the Human Potential Movement" (HPM) (something the founders conveniently failed to reveal). They also failed to identify that the presuppositions of NLP which came mostly from Perls and Satir were assumptions that they picked up from Maslow and Rogers. That led us in Neuro-Semantics to the Self-Actualization Quadrants (based on the *meaning* and *performance* axes)—a model which the HPM never had.

This ongoing discovery of *new stuff*, based on the foundational models of NLP, should alert us to keep exploring and digging into NLP. I think we have barely scratched the surface of what can be discovered within NLP.

By way of contrast, those who think of NLP in shallow and superficial ways think they "know it all." They then go off looking for "the next big thing" or the next big sensational thing. Many then try to bring it back to mix it with their superficial understanding of NLP.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #20**
**May 19, 2025**

# THE DAY BANDLER NEEDED CONTENT

The NLP founders drew a very strange conclusion from the fact that information has both *content* (the subject, the what) and *structure* (the form). They concluded that we do not need *content at all,* only structure. So if a person has a problem, you could call it "Yellow" and then work with "Yellow" without every knowing anything about "Yellow." But this is a far too over-generalized notion. We need *at least a little bit of content so we know* ***what*** *we're talking about.* Otherwise a person could be referring to suicide, bombing his place of work, cheating on his wife, etc. *Content does count.* In Neuro-Semantics I have suggested 80/20 as a guideline— 20% content and 80% structure.

In the following dialogue occurred prior to 1984; it is recorded in the NLP book, *Magic in Action* (pp. 171-181), Richard Bandler is working with a woman trying to get her to identify a strong belief that she has about herself which she did not want. But because he has this bias about "no content," and because the woman appears to be very global, vague, and ambiguous ... for more than ten pages the conversation went round and round as Bandler was trying to understand ***what*** she was talking about. At least he had an intuition that he needed some content—a *what.* I suppose that since he did not believe that *content counted,* that's why he didn't stop her and get specifically clarify, *"What is the belief that you didn't want about yourself?"* And ultimately neither he, nor his audience, nor us never found out!

I find it amazing that someone took that transcript and actually printed it in the book. It is certainly not Bandler's best work. ... not at all. He seems to have missed her kinesthetic statements as he assumed that she's got pictures in there somewhere. The dialogue would be comical if it wasn't so sad.

RB: Some beliefs are very, very strong and last for a long time. Now how do you know when you are having a belief? Well, stop and think about a belief that you have. ... If you think about a belief you have, what do you do inside your head when you're thinking about it?

Woman: I feel it. [kinesthetic]

RB: Well, you have a feeling, Now how do you know which belief it is?

W: It's strong. [kinesthetic]

Okay ... now how do you know *what* the subject of the belief is? [The text says tht he said this slowly, one word at a time.]

Because that's the strongest feeling I have. [kinesthetic]

Well, how do you know which ... *which feeling it is?*

I ... hear? [She presents it as a question.]

You hear something. You tell yourself like, *what*? Like *what* do you tell yourself?

I tell myself the belief's there and that it's real.

Okay, now. How do you know *what* to tell yourself? If I ask you to think of a strong

belief, do you go inside and go, 'a strong belief?" And then a voice answers you and names something?

No, I listen to myself ...describe what my basic core is. [She's also global and vague.]

Okay, now, do you have more beliefs than just that one?

Yeah, but that's a simple one.

Okay, now when you think about another belief you have, do you do the same thing?

Yeah.

Okay, how do you know *what* to say? When you're saying *what* the core belief is.

Yeah. I hear myself saying it.

Okay, How do you know *what* to say?

From a host of chemical anonymous past human experience. [This answer really does not make any sense! And Bandler does not even ask or meta-model it!]

... Do you do that auditorily also or do you do that visually?

No, I have a feeling. [kinesthetic]

Okay, well you have the feeling. And there aren't any pictures attached to them?

One.

One for each feeling? Is it a slide or a movie?

No, this is just one at a time. Hangs in this little wall. For this particular belief. [Here Bandler doesn't even inquire, no meta-modeling of her vague language.]

Okay, alright. So you have one. Is it a slide or a movie?

It's just there. It's a slide.

It's just a still picture?

Yes. But it's dimensional. [! Who knows what that means?]

Okay. Holographic. ... *How do you know* you have that belief?

It's not that I have much of a question, and then I go, 'Yeah, well whatever' and then that feels bad so I go look until it feels good.

Okay, but how do you know *what the subject* of it is?

Because then I feel, ... I start feeling. That's all I need... [She is highly kinesthetic, and Bandler never seems to pick up on this. Here he works from his assumption that 'beliefs' are pictures.]

[Richard mimics that this makes sense...] How do you know *what* the need is when you feel it?

Well, if I can't decide, I go, 'Hmm, you know," and I know ... [!! Amazingly she almost never answers his questions!]

...

Now, with a strong belief, when you say it (snap) you have a very solid feeling?

Centered.

Centered feeling. Now when you have the feeling, are you looking at that picture?

No.

Okay, you just have a solid feeling?

Sometimes I can look up and see the picture too. [I would guess that she is also a mismatcher; at least she's skilled at mismatching!]

Well, at least you know what ... what the solid feeling is *about.*

Yeah. [I would have followed up by saying, 'Tell me about that it is.']

Otherwise someone could tell you that it is about buying a car from them. [Finally Bandler introduces 'content,' buy a car, I assume to get her to talk about the content of the belief.]

Got one that doesn't quite match.

Yeah, what doesn't it match?

My picture.

It doesn't match your picture. ... can you look at that picture? Now how is that particular picture different than other pictures that you have? ... You made the slide of, let's say, beer as opposed to wine. If you make a slide of beer, do you have a solid feeling? [here he introduces a little more content— beer, wine.]

No. Little bitty picture.

Little bitty pictures. And the other one is a bigger picture? What happens if you make the picture of the beer just as big?

I don't want to. [Self-Referent]

Does it change the way you feel?

Yeah. But we don't want to replace what I've got up there with beer. [!!]

You don't want to. The question is, can you?

I probably could.

Do you have big pictures up there of beliefs that you have that you wish you didn't have? Wasn't one of the things you did today, to think of things that you believed about yourself that you wish weren't the case?

The conversation continues and Bandler slowly sets up things so he can do a swish— getting her to swish her big picture to a dot (of whatever it was about). Once it was a dot, he asked, "Do you still believe that's true about you?" (181), she said "Yeah, but I can handle it now." And with that, he wrapped things up and left it at that.

*Content does count.* You do need to know what a person is representing and that actually will help you ask about the relevant cinematic features of the picture, sound, words, and/or kinesthetics. Content is also processed through meta-programs and without identifying a person's thinking patterns (meta-programs), you can be lost in terms of understanding what the person is communicating.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #21**
**May 26, 2025**

# DON'T CONFUSE STACKING OF STATES WITH META-STATING

When you first learn NLP, you learn to "stack states." This is most obvious in the *Circle of Excellence* pattern. You identify a positive and resourceful state such as learning, joy, love, calmness, optimism, etc. Next you "stack" other positive states on top of your first state. It's like wildly throwing any positive state that comes to your mind so that you start stacking state upon state. Sounds simple, obvious, and harmless. Right?

That's what I thought. I thought that for years after I learned that and for many years, I never questioned it. I did not even question it in the process of discovering meta-states or in formalizing the Meta-States Model. Why? I don't know. I just did not. Then recently as I have been pouring over many, many NLP books and manuals, I encountered this "stacking" process again. In one book, the author treated this as mana from heaven. It was his baby, his greatest diamond, and he talked about it as "a super Circle of Excellence state."

In one example he took a person formally hooked on drugs, who had gotten clean and he asked him what state would he like to make his circle of excellence. The man choose calmness. After he accessed a calm state of mind and emotion, the trainer asked him to stack onto that state another one, he chose focus. Then add another, he choose decision, then competence, then fun, then confidence, and so it went. As he stacked each state, he was asked to experience it. So in the end, he had an incredibly large amounts of states, one upon the other, that he was experiencing.

So what is the problem? Several things. If you had experienced the Meta-States Training called APG (Accessing Personal Genius), then you have seen the list of 16 interfaces in the back of the manual. These are also in the book *Meta-State* as well as several books. Now *16 different interfaces* means that when you bring one state and apply it to another, there are 16 different kinds of interactions that could occur.

- Apply passion to love, joy to learning, or curiosity to learn and you *increase the intensity of the first state.* So also with fear to fear, anger to fear, fear to anger.
- Apply calmness to anger, mindfulness to fear, play to seriousness and you *reduce the original state's intensity.*
- Apply anger to anger, fear to fear, love to love and you can *distort the original state.*
- Apply doubt to doubt or flexibility to compulsiveness and you can *negate or neutralize* a state.
- Apply anxiety to calmness or humor to seriousness and you can *interrupt a state.*
- Apply silliness to formality to *create confusion.*
- Apply a command ('be X') to something that's spontaneous ('on the spur of the moment, do X) and create *paradox*; namely the 'be spontaneous' paradox.

- Apply observing to anxiety, or distance to a pain and create *dissociation.*
- Apply courage to have courage, willingness to being willing and create *a response potential.*
- Apply calm to anger or appreciation to shame and *radically shift attention.*
- Apply nominalizations and non-referring nouns and *create a state of trance.*
- Apply three or more states and create *gestalt state* such as 'seeing opportunities.'
- Apply any state that radically and incongruously jars with a first state that is not threatening, and create *humor.*
- Apply joy to learning, charming to lying, ruthless to compassion and *texture the original state*.
- Apply belief to a thought, identity to an idea and *solidify or strengthen a state.*
- Apply doubt to a belief, humor to a commitment and *loosen a state.*

The problem with *stacking states* is the problem of *relationship.* A state (which is comprised of thinking, feeling, kinesthetic registering) inevitably sets up a relationship with another state. If you are feeling anger (there are also thoughts and kinesthetic sensations abreast) so when you apply respect (which has its own set of thoughts and kinesthetics) —the interface of *respect* with *anger* will create a texturing of the original anger state. That builds up a new potential. But if you then apply *doubt and questioning* to the respectful anger, you then reverse things. You tear down or loosen when you just created.

So the idea of "stacking" states can do a lot of damage if you are not careful. It is actually reckless to just throw a bunch of positive states in a circle of excellence. In the end, you may not have excellence at all.

Can a positive state negate or distort a positive state? Certainly! Apply love to power and depending on the internal thoughts and kinesthetics of these states, you may create a dictator. Apply pride to confidence and you may get a know-it-all who can't learn from others.

While applying one state to another state sounds simple, and something anyone can do— to do this meta-stating properly and ecologically, you need to think in terms of the interfaces between the states.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #22**
**June 2, 2025**

# LET FRUSTRATION BE YOUR TEACHER

While there are very few things that we humans can predict about the future because the future is unknown, there is one thing I can predict. So here's my prediction. In the future, both the near future and the distant future— *you will experience frustration.*

Like death and taxes, this is an easy one to predict. It is built into human nature, human experience, and human psychology. Now just how much *frustration* you will experience—that's an entirely different matter. So is *how you handle* the frustration—with grace and composure or with an inner rage and demandingness that reality change and be more agreeable with your plans.

Predicting that you and I will experience frustration is an easy one because whenever you set a goal, you set yourself up for frustration. So also whenever you let your wishes, wants, needs, and desires become conscious— you are preparing yourself for frustration. After all, *frustration is simply an obstacle that you have to deal with to get what you want.* In the NLP formula for success, after you identify what you want (set a goal), identify what you have to do to get what you want (the action steps of your strategy), you notice what results you get (feedback from your actions), and then adjust your skills, time-frame, criteria, etc. As we do that, we also ask the obstacle question, "What stops you?"

We ask this question in different ways, "What stop you?" or "What gets in your way?" Or "What problem do you need to solve?" In order to understand *what is frustrating you on your pathway to your objective.* Now comes the part I cannot predict. I cannot predict *how you will respond to frustration.*

If you hate frustration, are intolerant of frustration, refuse to accept the fact of frustration—then *frustration* will defeat you. If you hold a negative attitude about frustration thinking it is bad, thinking it is catastrophic, and "the end of the world," then *frustration* will defeat you. If you respond to frustration by letting it wipe out your self-discipline, your persistence, your resilience, your passion for your goal, etc., then *frustration* will defeat you. Ah, so many ways in which *frustration* may defeat you!

The way to success is to *let frustration be your teacher.* Do you know what that means? I think it was Anthony Robbins who said, "The key to success is massive frustration." He said that was one of the learnings he made from modeling a lot of people who were incredibly successful in going after their goals and making them real. How could that be? The most obvious answer is that the larger and more bold your goal, the more massive will be your frustration—there will be more things in the way that you have to handle and overcome.

For *frustration to be your teacher,* embrace it. "There will be frustration and it's okay." Now reframe it, "Frustration speaks about the size of my vision and my mission." Next, by embracing

it, figure out if the block, the obstacle, and/or the problem is *inside you* or *outside in the world.* If the block that you have to handle is outside, identify a winning strategy. Who has already learned to handle that particular problem? What did they do? What strategy did they develop? What distinctions can you make about the obstacle that will help you overcome it?

If the obstacle is *inside you,* what is the representation that you need to change, the belief you need to upgrade, the strategy for your own commitment, perseverance, resilience, etc. that you need to develop? What knowledge do you need to attain? What are the skills that you need to develop?

*With frustration tolerance power you can transform frustration into persistence, into commitment, and into a visionary intention that will empower you.* Then you can plow through the challenges, keep learning as you go, and flexibly adjust your strategies until the right ones bring you to achieving your goals.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #23**
**June 9, 2025**

# THE PROBLEM WITH THE HUMAN RACE

There's no question that there's something wrong with the human race. But what? Why so many fights, conflicts, wars, and poverty? Why so much competition, prejudice, hate, and fear? What's gone wrong? Some think that it is inherent in human nature, that it's genetics. They assume we are essentially animals so when we act like wild beasts, it is because society, civilization, morals, collaboration, love, etc. goes against our nature. I don't believe that at all.

Maslow also did not believe that. Even though he started out as a Behaviorist and an atheist, he shifted and created a psychological model of the *healthy and bright side of human nature.* Along the way, he wrote extensively on the presence of 'evil,' its origin and source. His explanation? It arises from deficiency of basic needs; it arises from cognitive errors; it arises from failure of groups to move beyond the biological needs to the human needs. Maslow wrote, "The neurotic is not sick, he is cognitively wrong." Bateson similarlyi wrote—the problem is "a defect in the ideational system" (1972, p. 194).

So what is the problem with the human race? *Thinking.* Ultimately, it goes to wrong thinking, distorted thinking, prejudicial thinking, childish thinking, primitive thinking, etc. And because *everything human goes to the quality of thinking*— things go right when people think clearly, precisely, and accurately. Things go right when people think critically and creatively. And things that go wrong can be made right by *thinking about our thinking* and quality controlling our thinking for accuracy and a search for the facts.

This is true at the individual level, the group level, the organizational level, and the national level. Where *distorted thinking* leads limiting beliefs, toxic prejudices, competitive win/lose decisions, ego-centric biases, etc. there human nature and human relationships go wrong. All this is actually good news. How is that? Because if the problem goes to being *cognitively wrong,* then the solution is to *straighten out the thinking.*

The solution is to learn to think—to truly *think*. I say *truly* think because there are many ways to think wrong and there are *seven kinds of pseudo-thinking* that we humans tend to opt for in an effort to avoid the work of thinking. What are those?

- *Reactionary thinking.* Reacting out of fear and anger, guilt and shame, etc. Sympathetic nervous system thinking that focuses on threat, danger, stress, and/or overload thereafter leading to reactive fight/flight behaviors.
- *Automatic thinking.* The thinking that is now at the unconscious level of habit which saves us the effort of doing fresh thinking or staying conscious so we act without thinking.
- *Borrowed thinking.* The kind of thinking we all experienced in our first 20 years as we

learned *what to think* from others. The thinking we do as we accept the bullet points we hear from the media, parents, teachers, etc. It's the thinking we do when we quote what we have not studied ourselves.

- *Shallow thinking.* This is the thinking we do when we engage in small talk, friendly chit-chat with friends, often to rest our brains, but sometimes to avoid delving into serious or difficult subjects. We flee from unpleasant truths, avoiding them, repressing them.
- *Agenda thinking.* When you have made up your mind and have an agenda that you are pushing, your so-called thinking is actually pseudo-thinking because you are not truly open to conflicting information. You have an outcome to reach, a point to make, an idea to sell, etc. Your agenda controls your thinking by closing down any information that conflicts with it.
- *Certainty.* When you are certain, when you are 'sure,' when you 'know' and are confident, your state of being 'certain' closes the subject and you cannot actually reconsider things. Other points of view are excluded from entering your mind.
- *Expectation.* This form of pseudo-thinking distorts the healthy thinking forms of anticipation, imagination, forecasting, guessing, etc. In expecting, you *demand* that your future predictions come true. They pseudo-thinking sets you up for disappointments.

Amazing, isn't it? As a species we have invented seven kinds of pseudo-thinking patterns which allows us to avoid the most critical thing a human being does in surviving and thriving in life—*think.* Now we know how to upgrade the human experience. Now we know how to secure our future and create the kind of world that's truly human and meaningful— *upgrade every person's thinking skills.*

Change the thinking and communication changes, relationships change, performance changes, science improves, sanity spreads, people become effective, efficient, and productive, businesses thrive, enjoyment deepens, etc. *Thinking is the key and thinking-about-your-thinking is the strategy.*

**Ready for Training?** Get to one of the presentations of *Thinking for Humans.*

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #24**
**June 16, 2025**

# YOU CAN'T LIVE ANY BETTER THAN YOU THINK

One of our oft-repeated phrases in Neuro-Semantics is—*the quality of your thinking is the quality of your life.* It also determines the quality of your communications, the quality of your relationships, your health and well-being, your productivity, and a thousand other things. Thinking lies at the core of all things human. Yet most people don't know that. Many suspect it. Those who have read in the positive thinking books or books about inspiration strongly suspect it, they may even believe it. Yet most people do not *live as if thinking governs the quality of life.*

Consequently if you do not understand and believe this, you will not focus on *training your thinking skills.* Why would you? Is it because, "Anyone can think. Everyone thinks."? And that's true, but not everyone thinks equally well. That's not a statement about intelligence. It is a statement about how to entertain an idea and work it over in your mind. It's a statement about *the process of thinking* rather than the end-product of what you think.

When we run the training, *Thinking for Humans*, which is our first Brain Camp (there are two others), people are amazed right from day one about what true authentic thinking is and how little they actually do. They are also delighted to discover *how to think.* They often say, "No one ever taught me *how* to think, only *what* to think."

Our task in Neuro-Semantics is *not* to teach or train you in *what* to think. We do not do that in coaching, consulting, or therapy. *What* to think is your privilege and responsibility. We focus on the process of thinking— how to think and how to think about thinking. And ultimately, it is your meta-thinking that gives you control over your mind, your emotions, your speech, your behaviors, your relationships, and everything else. How are your meta-thinking skills? When was the last time you trained them?

You can clear out a lot of health problems by changing and upgrading your thinking. How is that? Well, if you can think yourself unwell, stressed out, and think yourself in all sorts of psycho-somatic illnesses, you can unthink that and set out for a more healthy way to think about your body and its multiple relationships in the world—to food, sleep, activity, etc. If people can worry themselves into headaches, neckaches, ulcers, etc., if people can use stress-thinking to create strain on their heart and lungs and damage their cardio-vascular system—then people can unlearn those thinking patterns and learn new and better ones.

Then there is joy, the basic and essential joy of life, of being alive, of breathing and being a sentient being. If you stepped on your Joy Meter in your bathroom, what would it register? Are you getting a lot of joy out of life? Are you getting a minimum of joy? Are you stressing yourself out about things? The secret of joy also goes to thinking. You can have money, wealth,

status, a great job, friends, etc., *and be miserable.* Lots of people run that pattern! Joy is independent of all of that. *Joy is a function of the way you think and the quality of your thinking.* Many pursue 'happiness' via things, wealth, social importance, degrees, beauty, entertainment, etc. and completely overlook the inside–out process of true joy.

Thinking is so much deeper, so much more profound, and so much more enlivening than most people think. Thinking is enlivening? How can that be? Isn't thinking an instrumental process for getting things or surviving? Yes, and it is also much more. When you truly and deeply think, your brain comes alive. And with that, your body becomes more dynamic, healthier, and a ble to provide you more energy for your goals.

Conversely, failure to do good quality thinking lies at the heart of all mental illnesses, emotional misery, and basic ineffectiveness. If you are unproductive, or worse counter-productive, something is wrong in your thinking. If you cannot achieve your goals, the problem is more than likely in your thinking. Are you ready for a *Thinking Make-Over*? That's what Brain Camp I is all about. Check it out.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #25**
**June 23, 2025**
*Phenomenology Series #1*

# NLP AS PHENOMENOLOGY

Here's a secret that has been hidden from most people who study NLP, a secret that most people simply do not know. It is a secret that helps us define NLP. The secret? *NLP is a phenomenology.* We actually acknowledge this every time we describe it as "the study of the structure of subjective experience," (subtitle of *NLP: Volume I)*. That phrase precisely describes *phenomenology*— the *phenomena* that we *experience* within ourselves as subjects of any and every experience. This phenomena is *not* the territory, it is our map *of* the territory as we subjectively map it in our neurology. This article begins a series on this subject.

Over the years I've been asked about this repeatedly, "Is NLP Phenomenology?" "Is NLP connected to the history of Phenomenology?" The answer to both question is *no.* NLP arose completely independent of Phenomenology as a movement, *and yet it is a phenomenology.*

When Phenomenology began as a philosophical movement in the 20th century its primary objective was to directly investigate and describe human *phenomena* as a person consciously experienced it. Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger were the first developers. Their design was to encounter *experience as such* apart from theories about it. The early phenomologists wanted to do so without causal explanations, theories about origins or even meaning. They wanted to freely examine experience apart from preconceptions and presuppositions.

Husserl viewed empathy as something done as a sort of apperception built upon the experiences of one's own *lived body*. The "lived body" is your body as you experience it by yourself from within. Your body manifests itself mainly as how you act in the world. For example, your body is what enables you reach out and grab something. From your body, you have your point of view. Noticing this, you can begin to differentiate things as you move a thing around and see new aspects of it. Here you make the absent present and the present absent. You experience your body as a duality—as object (e.g., you can touch your own hand) and as your subjectivity (the sense of being touched).

Key concepts in Phenomenology focus on Self, on Others (inter-subjectivity), on the World (the constitution of your life-world), on Intentionality, Time, Experience (state, emotions), Language, Perception, etc. if that sounds similar to the Matrix Model, it is. Inter-subjectivity constitutes objectivity (i.e., what you experience also as objective is experienced as being inter-subjectively available). Yet this does not imply that objectivity is reduced to subjectivity. In the experience of inter-subjectivity, you experience yourself as being a subject among other subjects, and you experience yourself as existing objectively for these Others.

The life-world (German, *Lebenswelt*) is the World we live in. It's the background or horizon of our experience. It is that on which each object stands out as itself (as different) and with the

meaning it can only hold for us. This also led Phenomenology to be recognized as an embodied constructivism.

At the core of Jean Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is a sustained argument for the foundational role that perception plays in the human experience of the world. Merleau-Ponty understands perception to be an ongoing dialogue between one's lived body and the world which it perceives, in which perceivers passively and actively strive to express the perceived world in concert with others. His writings became influential in the project of naturalizing phenomenology so that phenomenologists used the results of psychology and cognitive science.

Husserl's phenomenology highlighted that "all consciousness is consciousness of something." This implies a distinction between "acts of thought" (the noesis) and "intentional objects of thought" (the noema). Thus, the correlation between noesis (*thinking*) and noema (*what you're thinking*) becomes the first step in the constitution of analyses of consciousness.

Taking perception as his point of departure, Merleau-Ponty recognized that the body is not only a thing or object for study, but also a permanent condition of experience. The body is a constituent of the perceptual openness to the world. The primacy of perception signifies a primacy of experience as perception is an active and constitutive dimension.

Merleau-Ponty demonstrates a corporeity of consciousness (embodiment) is an intentionality of the body, and contrasts with the dualist ontology of mind and body. "Insofar as I have hands, feet, a body, I sustain around me intentions which are not dependent on my decisions and which affect my surroundings in a way that I do not choose" (1962, p. 440).

If all of that sounds a lot like NLP, it is. Bot h disciplines study subjectivity—the inner world. Both attempt to deal with and map the inner world as cleanly and clearly as possible by eliminating bias and distortion. Both recognize that the key 'structures' (or more accurately, the structuring) on the inside goes to many of the same categories— meaning, intention, state, self, power, others, time, world, etc. Accordingly, when both disciplines understand each other, they can enrich each other. More to come.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #26**
**June 30, 2025**
*Phenomenology Series #2*

# PHENOMENOLOGY'S FOCUS ON EXPERIENCE

I actually began reading in the field of Phenomenology prior to becoming aware of NLP. Later I more formally studied it as I prepared to write my dissertation. But Phenomenology did not capture y attention as NLP did. While both focused on "lived experience" of the subjective inner world, Phenomenology's approach was philosophical while NLP's approach was practical with immediate applications.

What does Phenomenology have in common with NLP? Ask any typical NLP practitioner about the relationship between Phenomenology and NLP and you'll probably induce a deep speechless trance. Not only will the he not know, he will not be familiar with Phenomenology, or if he is, he will not be very conversant about it. Yet both NLP and Phenemenology have a lot in common. In fact, they have so much in common.

**Focused on The Structure of Experience**
Let's then begin with Phenemenology and compare it to NLP. In the beginning, Edmund Husserl created Phenomenology "to study the mystery of subjectivity." He thought of it as a bold and radically new way of *doing philosophy*. His focus was to study and understand *subjective experience* on its own terms. He sought to get back to *the thing* itself—to concrete living experience. So he began studying consciousness which resulted in his investigations of our awareness of time, history, and the life-world. Husserl wanted to grasp "the very essence of subjectivity as the source of all meaning and being." (Dermot, 2000, p. 187).

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? It should. That's because NLP is "the study of the structure of subjective experience," the subtitle of *NLP, Volume I* (Dilts, et. al, 1980). The founders of NLP also wanted to get back to the essential structure of experience in order to understand how it worked.

**Definition of Phenomenology**
Derived from the term *phenomenon,* Phenomenology focuses on returning to *the phenomena of experience.* It is the study of human experience, a study of the way things present themselves to us. In NLP we seek to get back to the sensory description apart from all evaluations, which is why we "meta-model" language to bring unspecified terms and phrases back to sensory terms.

Furthermore, because as we *think* about the things given to us, we also understand *ourselves* as those who think about the things given. So Phenomenology entails this reflexive understanding. Robert Sokolowski in *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2008) says that "phenomenology is reason's self-discovery in the presence of intelligible objects." In NLP we have this reflexivity

minimally in "the meta move" in the Strategy Model and we have it fully in the Meta-States Model which models the structure of self-reflexive consciousness. Since we cannot directly observe our mental acts while occupying them, we grasp them reflexively.

**As a Human Science**

Husserl launched Phenomenology to create the foundation for "the *human* sciences"—psychology, sociology, anthropology, ethics, politics, etc. Intentionality, as Husserl's theory of consciousness, was designed to be the "science of experience."

> "The aim of science is so to objectify experience that it no longer contains any historical element. Scientific experiment does this by its methodical procedure. The historico-critical method does something similar in the human sciences. Through the objectivity of their approach, both methods are concerned to guarantee that these basic experiences can be repeated by anyone. Just as in the natural sciences experiments must be verifiable, so also must the whole process be capable of being checked in the human sciences. There can be no place for the historicity of experience in science." (Gadmer, 342)

Similar to NLP, Phenomenology does not focus on *causal* explanations about things (the why q question), but a *description* of lived experience of the life-world (*Lebanswelt*). The aim is to create a science of pure description. Husserl said he wanted to describe "the contours of the phenomenon." He made it his aim to understand the life of the living human subject, to understand it in the manner in which *it is given* to the person as meaningful life, to the person as meaningfully lived. His reason? So we live more authentically.

Now because we cannot observe our mental acts while occupying them, we have to reflectively grasp them. In Phenemenology we do that by *bracketing them off* from our assumptions (this is the *epoche,* a cessation, suspension). The NLP approach to this is to "stop the world" and follow the Gestalt principle, "Lose your mind and come to your senses." We can then carefully describe the phenomena. In Phenomenology we go to the person (Self) *being* in the world and the acts of consciousness (Meaning) and to its intending objects (Intention) in a particular moment of time (Time).

> The *epoche* in phenomenology is simply the neutralizing of natural intentions. Bracketing the world and all the things in the world means we put the world "into brackets" or "into parentheses" (Soko, p. 49) so that the experience can be explored more deeply.

Husserl took Brentano's account of *intentionality* as the key concept of consciousness. To reflectively grasp your inner mental states— you have to catch them reflectively. In Meta-States we *step back* from an experience to observe as cleanly as possible. In NLP we step out of first perceptual position and into second and third perceptual positions to gain a larger, system-wide perspective.

Like NLP, Phenomenology focuses on subjective experience and arrives at many of the same concepts—only they are coded in different terminology.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #27**
**July 7, 2025**
*Phenomenology Series #3*

# GETTING TO THE HEART OF EXPERIENCE

If you ask, "What is Phenomenology?" Widipedia gives you this answer:

> Phenomenology (Greek *phainómenon* "that which appears" and *lógos* "study") is the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness. As a philosophical movement it was founded in the early years of the 1900s by Edmund Husserl, then expanded by his followers at various universities in Germany, then France, United States, etc. Philosophically, phenomenology lacks a thematic focus and is primarily a style of thought, a method, an open and ever-renewed experience.
>
> As an ontology (study of reality), Phenomenology is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection on and study of the structures of consciousness and the phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness. Husserl's conception of phenomenology has been developed by Edith Stein (a student), Martin Heidegger (a hermeneutic philosopher), Nicolai Hartmann, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, etc. (existentialists), etc.

**Studying Subjective Experience**

Phenomenology creates conditions for the *objective* study of topics usually regarded as *subjective:* consciousness and the content of conscious experiences—judgments, perceptions, and emotions. Phenomenology seeks to be scientific not from the perspective of clinical psychology or neurology, but through systematic reflection to determine the essential properties and structures of experience.

Phenomenology begins by rejecting the concept of objective research and grouping assumptions through a process called *phenomenological epoche.* This focuses on analyzing daily human behavior to gain a greater understanding. Persons are understood through the unique ways they reflect the societies they live in. Phenomenologists gather conscious experience as data using methods that are far less restricting than in other sciences.

Central to phenomenology is *intentionality* ("aboutness") and the idea that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. The object of consciousness is called the *intentional object*, and this object is constituted for consciousness in many different ways, i.e., through perception, memory, retention and protention, signification, etc. Throughout these different intentionalities, though they have different structures and different ways of being "about" the object, an object is still constituted as the identical object. Consciousness is directed at the same intentional object in direct perception as it is in the immediately following retention of this object and the eventual remembering of it.

**Non-Reductionist**

Though many phenomenological methods involve reductions, *phenomenology is anti-reductionistic;* the reductions are mere tools to better understand and describe the workings of consciousness, not to reduce any phenomenon to a description. When a reference is made to a

thing's *essence* or *idea*, or when one details the constitution of an identical coherent thing by describing what one "really" sees as being only these sides and aspects, it does not mean that the thing is only and exclusively what is described. The ultimate goal of these reductions is to understand *how* these different aspects are constituted into the actual thing as experienced by the experiencing person.

Husserl envisioned phenomenology as a method of philosophical inquiry that rejects the rationalist bias of Western thought in favor of a method of reflective attentiveness that discloses the individual's "lived experience." Husserl's method entails the suspension of judgment while relying on the intuitive grasp of knowledge, free of presuppositions and intellectualizing similar to NLP's emphasis on denominalizing and sensory acuity.

Intentionality represents an alternative to the representational theory of consciousness, which holds that reality cannot be grasped directly because it is available only through perceptions of reality. The map is not the territory. Husserl countered that consciousness is not "in" the mind but rather conscious of something other than itself (the intentional object), whether the object is a substance or a figment of imagination (i.e., the real processes associated with and underlying the figment). The phenomenological method relies on the description of phenomena as they are given to consciousness, in their immediacy.

**Back to Experience**

In practice, it entails an unusual combination: discipline and detachment to suspend or bracket, theoretical explanations and second-hand information while determining one's "naive" experience of the matter. The phenomenological method serves to momentarily erase the world of speculation by returning the subject to her primordial experience—to a feeling, idea, or perception or as we would say *to sensory awareness.*

Martin Heidegger modified Husserl's subjectivist tendencies. Whereas Husserl conceived humans as having been constituted by states of consciousness, Heidegger countered that consciousness is peripheral to the primacy of existence (i.e., the mode of being or *Dasein*), which cannot be reduced to consciousness. One's state of mind is an "effect" rather than what determines existence, including those aspects that are unconscious. By shifting the center of gravity from consciousness (psychology) to existence (ontology), Heidegger altered the subsequent direction of phenomenology. Consequently phenomenology became increasingly relevant to psychoanalysis. Similarly NLP shifted more and more to the unconscious whereas Neuro-Semantics has stayed with the focus on consciousness.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #28**
**July 11, 2025**
*A Promotion of the New*
*NLP Training*

# EMPOWERMENT
# IN A CHAOTIC WORLD

*What was Fritz Perls and Virginia Satir after* as each of them took a different route to actualizing one's authentic self? Both were second generation leaders in the 1960s/ 1970s Human Potential Movement which was launched through the discoveries of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. *And what was Maslow and Rogers after?* How did they conceptualize the abstract idea of 'self-acutalization?' The answer is actually pretty simple. They envisioned people becoming "fully functioning" (Rogers) or "full alive, fully human" (Maslow).

Maslow and Rogers believed that there is within every person *the power to understand life and to live fully by tapping into that power and unleashing it.* So did Perls and Satir. If the NLP founders and developers modeled Perls and Satir, then is it any wonder then that NLP became a model of unleashing human potential and power? I think not. And that's why in updating the NLP Model I've put *empowerment* as the first and primary application.

Because the world as we know it is chaotic having so many factors and so many players, no wonder we can never know the future or predict the future. Given all of the variables, who knows what is going to happen? And when you don't know what the future holds or what will happen—feeling safe in a stable environment is difficult. It is especially difficult *if you are looking for safety and stability outside!*

But what if you were to *look inside*? What if a true sense of safety and the way to stabilize your life comes from the inside and is inside–out? Not surprisingly, this is what NLP offers. Via your *neurology* and your *linguistics,* you can *program* your thinking, emoting, speaking, and acting in such a way as to create an inner sense of power and stability. And that, in fact, is how the updated version of NLP will be presented.

The presentation has been designed so that you will begin to experience *the power of your* ***neurology*** to access and unleash your inner hidden powers (potentials) as a human being. Then with *the power of your* ***linguistics,*** you will experience the power of ordering your inner world with clarity and precision unleashing your linguistic capacities. Then together, you will experience how to use your linguistics and neurology *to establish powerful* ***programs*** so that you can be effective and efficient at what you do consider important.

*Personal Empowerment* effectively summarizes the essence of NLP and its focus. It is focused on empowering you to finally achieve what the old Human Potential Movement sought but never found— *how to unleash a person's powers.* When you discover this, you can then *live your life productively and joyfully.* Interested? Check out the brand new and fully updated **Meta-Neuro-**

**Linguistic Programming Training (**Meta-NLP).

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #29**
**July 14, 2025**
*Phenomenology Series #4*

# PHENOMENOLOGY & THE MATRIX MODEL

I originally put the Matrix Model together in 2001 after publishing *Frame Games* (1999). When I did, I chose three aspects of Cognitive Psychology (state, meaning, intention) and five aspects from Developmental Psychology (self, power, others, time, and world). Yet without being fully cognizant of it, I unintentionally used the key categories of both Phenomenology. I'll begin with the Process Matrices of the Matrix Model. Via the three process matrices, we create and experience our sense of reality. It results in our model of the world which we experience as a subjective experience. These three matrices make up the basic content of NLP.

**Intentionality**
Intention came originally from the idea of "to stretch out." Webster says that the first meaning comes from the verb *intend*, meaning "to mean or to signify." "I intend to do something," and so it secondarily carries the meaning of purpose or design. Within "intention" is the root word *tend* which refers to "movement toward something, tend toward, tendency." Because intentionality refers to stretching forward, to *tendency,* it has within it the idea of *tension.* The Latin stem is *intendeze* literally means "to stretch." From this we get our word "tension." Intention then is a "stretching" toward something.

Heidegger notes that *care is the source of will.* If I care about *being,* I will shepherd it with attention to its welfare.

> "Care is a particular type of intentionality ... 'intentionality' and 'care' lies in the literal term 'tend,' which is both the root of intentionality and the meaning of care. Tend means a tendency, in inclination, a throwing of one's weight on a given side..." (Rolla May, *Love and Will,* p. 289)

In Phenemenology. *intentionality* is the key defining characteristic of all lived experiences.

> "Intentionality as *directedness* and specifically as self-directedness, the manner in which we direct ourselves toward things." (Dermot, 231).

Consciousness is always consciousness *about* something and intentionality involves directedness. It means directing yourself toward something. As every mental act is related to some object, it *intends* to something beyond itself. Paul Tillich (*The Courage to Be*) wrote, "Man's vitality is as great as his intentionality; they are interdependent. This makes man the most vital of all beings." Intentionality is being directed toward meaningful contents— what you focus on in the world. Your essential intentionality is to get your life together, collect yourself, be whole, be authentic.

Regarding the intentions of others, Phenomenology starts by seeking to understand the other person from his perspective. It begins with the question, "How could what he says be right?" (Gadmer, p. 292). Similarly, in NLP we begin by assuming *positive intentions,* people are trying to do something of value and benefit for themselves even when they end up doing hurtful and

evil things.

**Meaning**

*Intentionality* is an aspect of *meaning.* We frequently uses these terms synonymously, "I mean to get that report done by the end of the day." Translation, that's my intention. That's what I'm seeing to do. It's my orientation and direction for this day.

Heidegger famouly wrote, "Language is the house of being." How you language things is how you create your *world.* In both NLP and Phenomenology, "all meanings are constituted in and by consciousness" (Dermot, 166). No wonder *meaning* is central. "Human existence is preoccupied with meaning." A central task for us then is to understand the world.

> "We are historically situated in the task of understanding the world, a world encountered and inhabited in and through language. Language is the medium of the hermeneutic experience." (Dormet, 248)

This explains why the entire human *world* is linguistic by nature and why understanding is interpretation from the start. Human experience is hermeneutical inside-out. Hermeneutics is everywhere, in all aspects of human life. Hermeneutics recognizes that understanding is a prerequisite of human life. All understanding is historically conditioned, is partial, and always comes from a point of view. Understanding takes place within the finite boundaries of essentially limited and historically conditioned human living. (Dormet, 251). Conversely, we are separated from others by different horizons of understanding.

> "The attempt to understand the other must begin with the recognition that we are separated by different horizons of understanding, and that mutual understanding comes through overlapping consensus, merging of horizons, rather than through the abandonment by one of the interlocutors of his or her initial horizon." (Dormet, 252)

In Phenomenology *the hermeneutic circle* and highlights the fact that all conversation is dialectic by nature. By dialogue we co-create our realities and then our shared realities can become our "culture." If then meaning is a function of context, then a text is the conversation that we have with ourselves and/or others. Via questions and dialogue we construct *meaning.*

When we ask a question, the question places what is questioned in a particular perspective. It enables us to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic dialogue.

> "To someone who engages in dialogue only to prove himself right and not to gain insight, asking questions will indeed seem easier than answering them. There is no risk that he will be unable to answer a question." (Gadmer, 356)

This is another aspect of reflexivity. Gadmer writes that, "The structure of reflexivity is fundamentally given with all consciousness." (p. 337). We inevitably *think* about our thinking and *feel* about our feelings, and do so in an infinite process that has no end.

**State**

With *meaning* and *intention* we induce ourselves into a *state of being.* We thereby put ourselves in our *world* of experience engaged with the phenomena of our lives. In Neuro-Semantics we speak about state the grounding of the Matrix. Everything in the Matrix shows up and is

manifested in one's *state.*

This term *state* refers to where we are and what we are experiencing (mentally, emotionally, physically, interpersonally, etc.). A *state* is a state of mind, state of body, and state of emotion. It is what we experience in our life-world. It is our condition in the world. In Phenomenology *state* is referred to by the term *being* and "body." *Being* refers to the essence of human existence as such. "The body brings me into a spatial world."

State also highlights that our nature is not fixed or permanent, it is conditional. It is dependent upon many of the conditions which it comes into contact which is why our *states* are constantly changing. Rollo May in *Courage to be,* says that "Being, as being, transcends objectivity as well as subjectivity." (p. *25*).

**Conclusion**

By exploring the phenemenology of the Matrix Model, you can see the close connection which the two fields share.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #30**
**July 21, 2025**
*Phenomenology Series #5*

# THE CONTENT DIMENSIONS & PHENOMENOLOGY

Now for the five Content dimensions of the Matrix Model. I originally took these from Developmental Psychology as categories of experience. Each of these reveals different aspects of *self.* The self-*world* refers to one's domain, realm, invented universe of meaning where you live. The term *self* refers to your sense of value and worth, your importance or what we call "self-esteem." *Others* refers to the social self, you as sensed by and responded to by others. *Power* refers to what you can do, achieve, and accomplish and hence, you self-confidence. *Time* refers to you temporal self, self in time and how you experience your journey through time.

**The World**

The *world* in Phenomenology is a context, environment, a set of references. Yet it is more. Gadmer said "man has both an environment and a world." (p. 440). Actually, the concept of *world* stands opposed to the concept of *environment*. "All living beings in the world possess" an environment, but only man has a *world* (Gadmer, pp. 440-1). This is called *the life-world* that we inhabit. Arendt writes:

> "It is through work that humans come to find themselves in a *world*; "the human condition of work is worldliness" "within its borders each individual life is housed." *Work* creates a human world as opposed to *labor* which struggles with nature. Work leads to reification and the instrumentalization of the world." (311, italics added)

How then do we have *a world* in addition to an environment? In Neuro-Semantics, *world* stands for all of "the universes of meaning" we live in. And as human beings, there are so many worlds: the world of business, medicine, law, psychology, coaching, NLP, etc.

> "The world as *world* exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature." (Gadmer, 440)

That any of the thousands of *worlds,* that we can know and live in, identifies the role of language in experience. Language is not just one of our possessions, the *world* we have is dependent on language. Phenomenology says, "Man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic. It is a product of a constituting ego" (Husserl, p. 166). Language as a world-creating mechanism (283). No wonder Heidegger wrote, "Language is the house of being."

**Self**

Another central theme in Phenomenology is *self.* Paul Tillich, theologian and existential philosopher, writes that "The self is a zero point." It is "a centre of reference and orientation." (*Ideas II,* paragraph 41).

The *self* is a part of the world and simultaneously it also has itself as a world. The self is *self* only because it has a world, a structured universe, to which it belongs and from which it is separated at the same time. Self and world are correlated, and so are individualization and participation. For this is just what "participation" means: being a part of something from which one is, at the same time, separated" (p. 88, Tillich).

**Power**

Part of our experience of ourselves given our meanings and intentions lies in our sense of what we can and cannot do— in other words, our essential *powers.* The *power* of one's self is the power and vitality of living and responding. The self, as an ego, has a set of abilities, a sense of "I can..."

When we can do something, we experience *confidence* in ourselves to *do,* to achieve, and to accomplish. This is what we mean by "self-confidence." Together this power-to-respond generates the gestalt state of *responsibility* which, in turn, distinguishes us as self-directed beings who can choose our "way of being" in the world.

**Others**

We are also *social beings.* We are who we are, and experiences ourselves as we do, due to the way we represent and experience *others.* So not only do we have a *self* in the world, but in the world, there is the *other.* Our natural life is a life in community with others which, in turn, enables us to have shared language and shared meanings. Having that, we now have a community, a culture, a society. It also gives us a consciousness of the Other:

> "How does the other enter into my consciousness?" "The experience of the other is a natural and inextricable part of my consciousness." (Dermot, 176)

The existence of others creates a context for all of us to respond — we respond to the other and from that arises society. In Phenomenology, the basic structure of life with others is *caring* (storge) (Dormet, p. 226). This also is the essential meaning of *dasein* (being). To be is to care. From that comes openness to the other which means listening to the other on the other's terms.

**Time**

We are *time* or *temporal* beings so much so that human existence occurs in time— in lived time between birth and death. So our consciousness which is the basis of all experience is inextricably linked to time. Our consciousness is *a time consciousness.* In fact, Heidegger's thesis was that *being* itself is time, the theme of his book, *Time and Being* (*Gadmer,* Truth and Method, p. 248).

> "Since consciousness is *presupposed* in all science and knowledge, then the proper approach to *the study of consciousness itself* must be a *transcendental* one, one which focuses on the conditions for the possibility of knowledge." (144)

Our time consciousness makes us historical beings. We are oriented teleologically (Dermot, p. 179) to the end of things. So we run ahead (in time) in expectation, anticipation, worry, etc. Regarding future time, we also make promises in order "to create islands of security in the ocean of future uncertainty."

> "We live constantly in the future and in the past, in the distant and the transcendent, in the

> unknown and the suspected, we do not live only in the world around us as it is given to the five senses." (Soko, p. 37)

Similarly, our time consciousness orients us to the past. With the past, we can linger behind in memory. There is a historicity of our understanding so that we bring from our past experiences, learnings, ideas, understandings, etc. into our present. But the past is not all-determining. After all, we can forgive ourselves and others as a way to undo deeds of the past and stop them from influencing us now and in the future.

In Phenomenology, our singularity in time as a temporal being creates the contingent nature of human existence. In other words, we are limited in time. We are here now, later we will be not-here. Running ahead in time, we can anticipate an experience of non-being.

There are many kinds of *times.* An important experience of time is *kairos* which refers to the transfiguring moment, the "pregnant moment," the moment of meaning and meaningfulness. As when "a woman's time has come" to deliver a child, regardless of when that is (chronos), that moment is a kairos for her and the child.

**Conclusion: Phenomenology and NLP**

Phenomenology informs NLP. While it was not directly quoted, it was in the background. For example, it informed Fritz Perls in his work of gestalt therapy. In *The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy*, Perls describes working on "the hot seat" as working "on the phenomenological basis." (p. 128). This was the book that Bandler edited from the tapes of Perls. NLP is phenomenological in nature as it shares many of the same features with Phenomenology. And over the years, several trainers in NLP have describe NLP as a phenomenology. Both focus on and study the structure of experience although in vastly different ways. Yet each can enrich the other.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #31**
**July 28, 2025**

# BELIEFS AND THE HOUSE OF MEANING

A long, long time ago in a century before this one, Bob and I worked out the actual structure of beliefs and we discover something stupendous for the field of NLP. Namely, *the structure of beliefs is not based in sub-modalities.* In spite of what almost every one in NLP believes and teaches, *beliefs are **not** made out of the editorial features of your movies.*

This is in spite of Bandlers straw-man argument about " believing the sun will rise tomorrow." The reason that represents a false argument is that when there is a belief —there is also the possibility of a *belief's reverse.* If you believe, "I can't learn something complex,' the opposite belief is "I can learn something complex." What would be the opposite of believing the sun will rise tomorrow? The sun will not rise? And who believes that? No one! And that's why it is a pseudo-example.

Further Bandler got it wrong when he said that beliefs can be single images. *Beliefs are statements— sentences that assert something.* Accordingly we have beliefs that assert all sorts of things:

- Identity beliefs: "I believe that I am a wealth creator." [These are also complex-equivalence beliefs: "I believe that rolling your eyes backwards means you think X is ridiculous."]
- Quality beliefs: "I believe I am thoughtful and charming."
- Capacity beliefs: "I believe I can resiliently bounce back from a set-back."
- Causation beliefs: "I believe that rejection causes me to feel upset."
- Time beliefs: "I believe there's never enough time."
- Existence beliefs: "I believe that fairies really exist."

Notice that these *sentences are asserting something about some aspect of reality.* That's what a belief is. It is not just a single image like the run rising. In *Sub-Modalities Going Meta* (1997/ 2005) Bob and I illustrated by using Hitler. "Do you believe that Hitler was a good person?" I hope you emphatically say "No, hell no." Bandler's approach would be to upgrade your visual image of Hitler changing the sub-modalities so that they represent how you represent what's real. Make the picture bigger, brighter, put a smile on Aldoph's face, erase the moustache, etc. Now is there anything you can do to your pictures and sounds so that you actually start to believe that he is a good man? Of course, the answer is no. That's because no matter how good you make him look, in the back of your mind you say, "No, he murdered millions of people."

What Bob and I worked out was that *the structure of a belief involves confirming your first thought.* We identified that it is *the confirming process itself* that transforms a thought or idea into a 'belief.' And how do we confirm? What evidence is required to confirm? The answer to that question is almost any evidence that a person so chooses to use. He may use authority, repetition, emotion, experience, reading it in a book, hearing it from someone he respects, etc. The confirming process involves essentially saying that the original thought or idea is right,

good, actual, and/or real. Do that and your second thought which confirms *transforms* the first thought into a belief.

Today *that structure* lies at the heart of the Meta-State Belief Change pattern using "yes" and "no" as the summary expressions that confirm or dis-confirm a thought. Yet that explanation, by itself, is only a basic description. Today as we make a much deeper dive into the structure of a belief, we recognize that a belief is a two-or-more-layered structure, first a primary level thought then a meta-thought *about* it. The second thought is a conclusion drawn *about* the first.

*Meta-Thought:* Doing my best is how I create self-worth.
*Thought:* I believe I need to be the best to get approval.

*You can confirm a thought (or idea) in so many ways.* When you think any second thought *about* the first, it confirms it by treating it as real. For example, you an confirm its value, your memory of it, what you anticipate from the statement, what you understand, your identity, decision, intention, etc. While we can view each of these as additional meta-levels, we can also recognize them as *beliefs.* A *value* is what you believe is important. A *memory* is what you believe that you recall. An *anticipation* is what you believe you can forecast will happen in the future. A *decision* is what you believe is the best choice, and so on. *It's beliefs all the way up.* Everything in the Meta Place and every possible higher logical level or meta-level is a belief.

In this way, you confirm any multi-layered idea as a belief. For you, it is true, actual, and real. It certainly seems real because your experience seems to validate it. As you think in this way so you believe and your belief then functions as if a program informing your nervous systems how to live it. In this, *you live your beliefs because you embody them.* You feel this and you act from this, you 'see' (perceive') frm this (which creates your meta-programs). In this way your belief becomes self-reinforcing— a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Each belief becomes *a house of meaning* which you then live in. Now you can ask a series of questions to test a belief and/or develop a belief. Do that with the thought above, "I believe I need to be the best to get approval."

- So you believe this? For how long have you believed this?
- What are the results from believing this?
- Do you want to believe this? If you did not believe this, what would be the reverse that you'd like to believe?

It's beliefs all the way up. These multi-layered ideas may or may not be true. What matter is that you *treat it as if it were true* and it determinates your behavior. It generates results in your emotions and actions. Ask, "What difference does the belief make in your actions?" If there is no difference, then there is no meaning, it is merely academic. If there is a difference, then what difference?

- Is that what you want to do? What would you rather do instead of that?
- What do you need to believe so that you can do that?

**References**

1. See the articles on Beliefs in the Neurons Series 2011, "Beliefs as Sentences," "Belief Structures," "Sentences You Feel as Convictions," and "Sentences Systemic in Nature."

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #32**
**August 4, 2025**
*NLP as Epistemology #1*

# NLP AS AN EPISTEMOLOGY

One day in 1997 at the *Visionary Leadership Conference* in Santa Cruz California, I joined one of the small focused groups. These small groups were used as a way for the 200 NLP leaders to work together with each other on specialized projects. I choose *Epistemology* and in that group were several well known NLP trainers among them John McWirton, Joseph O'Connor, Wyatt Woodsmall, Bert Feustel, Marvin Oka. When we first met, and almost before we had time to say hi to each other, Wyatt speak up and said, "Let's begin from the premise that NLP is an epistemology."

I was good with that assertion and wanted to hear more from Wyatt, but before he finished the others began drilling him. "What kind of epistemology are you proposing that NLP is?" "If it's an epistemology, what specifically is the epistemology?" "Are you sure it is an epistemology? Maybe you are imposing that on NLP." And so the debate began. I say 'debate' because what followed was not really a conversation, much less a dialogue, it was people with very strong opinions to battle for superiority and because of that, I began wishing I had chosen another group. Shortly thereafter I went to the Research group.*1

Some years later, after studying and re-studying Gregory Bateson's works, and writing numerous articles about Bateson in *Anchor Point* and *NLP World,* I eventually published, *The Bateson Report* (2001). I say 're-studying' Bateson because you cannot read Bateson only once [I have recently finished my 10th reading of *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*]. As one of the geniuses of the 20th century, Bateson's writings are far too rich and intricate to understand him on a single reading. Since then, with each re-reading of his books, I have continued to write additional articles about him. I bring all of this up because *Bateson is the person in NLP who had the most to say about Epistemology.*

Okay, so what is *epistemology?* In short, it is the study of knowledge (*Greek, episteme*, knowledge). It is the study of *how we know what we know*. And since *knowing* is the primary purpose and intention of thinking, epistemology seeks to understand thinking, how thinking enables us to 'know' things, and *how we think about our thinking which leads to knowing.* Given this, *epistemology is your unconscious assumptions about how to think and reach the state of knowing.*

This explains in part Bateson's focus on *mind* and *thinking.* Hence, *Steps to an Ecology of* ***Mind; Mind*** *and Nature, Angels Fear: Toward an* ***Epistemology*** *of the Sacred; A Sacred Unity: Further Steps to an Ecology of* ***Mind.*** In *Steps* Bateson said that he wrote to present "a new way of thinking about ideas and about those aggregates of ideas which I call minds." His aim was to create a "science of mind." He kept asking, "How do ideas interact?" His methodology involved using a double or multiple description and to identify the economics of

patterning. It was from all of this rich content that I began modeling *mind* using foundational concepts in NLP and Neuro-Semantics.

Now in Bateson's day (1920s through 1970s), he worked in multiple disciplines, first as a biologist, then as an anthropologist, he was present at the beginning of the systems (cybernetics revolution), worked in mental hospitals, led the Mental Research Institute, developed the double-bind theory of schizophrenia, etc. But the *kind of thinking* which dominated at that time was linear (rather than systemic), single level (rather than multi-levels, hierarchical), focused on typology (using "heuristic fallacies") (rather than thinking in terms of relationships and interactions. So about *the thinking of that time* he wrote:

> "... the problems of psychiatry are often all shot through with epistemological difficulties" (*Sacred Unity,* 1990, p. 51)

In saying this, he did not limit it to psychiatry, but to anthropology, psychology, medicine, and to all other disciplines. Now in targeting *epistemological difficulties and errors* Bateson was identifying the harmful *ways of thinking* which we use to decide *how we know what we know.*

Primarily he criticized the "misplaced concreteness" (Whitehead) that we give to words assuming that nominalizations and adjectives are referring to things, 'traits,' or 'character structures.' He also criticized the unthinking and muddled way we think about the "forms" that "things" take. We do that because we forget that we actually referring to processes and processes at multiple levels. From this NLP learned to focus on *processes* over content, on *de-nominalizing,* and on getting back to sensory-based information.

He criticized how we fuse together (con-fuse) learning a new association (first level) with learning-to-learn about the context of an association (the next higher level). He called the higher level "deutro-learning" and used Russell and Whiteheads logical levels to distinguish the *levels of learning and change.* Dilts turned this into his Neuro Logical Levels model and I used it to inform the Meta-States Model of Reflexivity.

In all of this, *NLP arose as a new way of thinking—a new epistemology.* It fulfilled both Bateson's and Korzybski's visions of creating a more accurate language for knowing and understanding. But (and this is a *big but*) then NLP got lost. It got lost in the sensational techniques that were developed and in the sensationalism of hypnosis. Because both were and are *sensational,* they captured the imagination of people.

In the meantime, *NLP as an epistemology, as a new way of thinking— as a Thinking Model* got lost in the process, trainers stopped teaching the Meta-Model or reduced it to a list of distinctions they cover in an hour or two. Yet as a way of thinking, as a set of thinking patterns—your epistemology and mind—are key to how we understand things. And when you address this directly, you have a direct route to "the heart of things" how we create rich, empowering, and productive meanings. That's why Neuro-Semantics are recovering and expanding that thinking model.

1. I'm glad I did because when the group produced their 'summary report,' they never even defined epistemology, never mentioned Bateson or Korzybski and thought that the "current NLP epistemology" was flawed although they never specified what that meant.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #33**
**August 11, 2025**
*NLP as Epistemology #2*

# UPDATING YOUR EPISTEMOLOGY

In the previous article, I introduced the subject of epistemology. *An epistemology is a way of thinking in order to effectively 'know' what you know*. An epistemology is also inevitable and unconscious. You already have an epistemology just as I do. Everyone does even though most people who be hard pressed to consciously identify and define their epistemology. Further, there are good epistemologies and there are poor epistemologies.

> "Today ... mind/body is an *epistemology* and no longer a branch of philosophy. It has become ... a branch of experimental and observational science." (*A Sacred Unity,* Bateson, 1990, p. 90)

Bateson criticized the *old ways of thinking* that were prevalent in the 20th century and argued for new and updated *ways of thinking and knowing.* He argued that the *new ways of knowing* needed to be based on the following:

- Everything in reality is a process—a process of actions and change that evolves.
- There are no "things" in the "mind," only processes.
- Our thing-language creates confusing muddles which need to be denominalized.
- There are therefore no "things" only patterns.
- Everything exists in a system and each system lies within larger systems.
- When ideas interact with ideas the resulting patterning sets up ways of being in those contexts.
- A "difference that makes a difference" is an idea (information) and the only thing that gets into the mind.

Freud had an epistemology. For him, to *know* anything meant digging into one's origins. How did he think? He thought historically. Archeology was his favorite way to think. Why? He loved archeology, he loved ancient Greek and Roman stories and myths, and originally wanted to be an archeologist. As a result, that *colored* his thinking and knowing about people. He would *explain* why and how a person is the way one is due to early life experiences. So psychoanalysis became a form of psycho-archeology and continues that way today. The premise in that way of childhood thinking— *your past determines who you are and how you are.*

That's an example of what I consider an unhealthy, dysfunctional, and even toxic epistemology. If you *think that way,* you will think and feel that your life is determined (fated), that there is little you can do except 'understand' how you got that way, and that if you don't 'know' what happened in the past, there's no hope for the future. As a psychotherapist, I would *not* recommend that *way of thinking about yourself and your life.* In Neuro-Semantics we take a very different way of thinking.

What is your epistemology? It is your *way of thinking and knowing about* yourself, your mind, your unconscious, your purpose in life, your abilities and skills, your capacities for developing, your potentials for unleashing, about leadership, about money and wealth creation, about health

and well-being, and on and on. You have *a way of thinking* about these things. You have an unconscious *way of knowing* regarding each. Whatever is your *way of thinking and knowing*—that is your epistemology.

Now we can ask an even more personal question: How well does your *way of thinking* work for you? Ultimately, you think for a living. We all do. That's because your *thinking* determines the quality of your life, the way you see things, your assumptions.

Let's now map out an epistemology. As an example, let's create an epistemology about health. Let's say that one of your goals is *well-being and health.* Let's say that you want to be fit with the energy and vitality to live and do the things you want to. We can now ask: *What* do you think about health? *How* do you think about health? *How* do you think about your thinking?

- Do you know *what* to do to be healthy? What do you know that you need to do in terms of eating, exercising, sleeping, etc.? Are you able to be specific about foods to eat and foods not to eat? What exercises to do, how long, how often, when and where?
- Do you know *how* to do the things that are required if you are to be healthy and energetic? Do you have a daily schedule for exercising? Do you have a nighttime ritual for slowing down and preparing yourself for 8 hours of good sleep? Do you actually *do* these things?
- Do you know *how to think about doing the things* which are required? Do you know the best way to think about those things? What is the best way to think about them? Do you know how those who are most successful at these things *think*? How do they think about food, diets, junk food, sugar, etc.? How do they think about moving their bodies, stretching, doing cardio-vascular exercises, about muscle strength exercises, etc.?

You already have an epistemology about health and fitness. Did you discover yours? When you discover *the way you think and know* about these things, you can then begin to update and upgrade what and how you 'know.' The bottom line: Your thinking—your epistemology. Your epistemology—your experiences.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #34**
**August 18, 2025**
*NLP as Epistemology #3*

# YOUR EPISTEMOLOGY/ YOUR EMBODIMENT

Because the word "epistemology" sounds academic, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that epistemology, and specifically your epistemology about anything in particular, is merely intellectual or academic. Yet in reality it is not! *Instead, your epistemology determines how you experience life in your body.*

Why is that? Because when you *think,* you think *ideas*, and your *ideas* inevitably get located in your body. This ideo-dynamic or ideo-motor aspect of your mind-body system describes how you are a neuro-semantic and neuro-linguistic being. That means that "as you think, so you feel." As you think, so you activate the motor cortex in your brain which then sends messages to your body. In the end, you *embody those ideas and experience them kinesthetically.*

Nor is this new. You already know that *depending on what you're thinking, and how you're thinking, so you will feel and experience.* That's why you can think about all sorts of problems that could happen in the future (otherwise called 'worrying') and if you do it long enough and with enough intensity—you can make yourself sick with worry. You can create headaches, migrains, upset stomach, even ulcers. Isn't that amazing? You have the ability to *embody your worrying thoughts* so your body bears the blunt of those thoughts.

The principle that I'm getting at is this: *As you think, and the way you know what you know, determine the emotional states and the physiological states you experience.* Your epistemology —your embodiment. Your epistemology—your emotions.

Now let's get personal. What are *you* embodying? What is deceptive about this process is that it takes time. The feedback from your body regarding *the way you're thinking* does not happen immediately although you can speed it up. Add a lot of very intense emotions (fear, anger, sadness, etc.) to an idea and you can more quickly get yourself into a physiological state. Robbins does this in his fire walks. He adds massive desire, passion, and excitement to get people into physiological states where they walk on hot coals.

But normally, it takes weeks, months, even years for your way of thinking to result in psycho-somatic illnesses and diseases. This is what makes the process deceptive and what prevents us from gaining awareness of what we are doing to ourselves via our thoughts. Yet embodiment, as a process, is inevitable. It is what the body does. Your body, and mine, takes thoughts and translates them into a kinesthetic code. What results are our emotions, emotional states, attitudes (disposition of body), and the well-being or the ill-being in terms of our body functions.

Here is something that I think should cause all of us to pause and deeply consider what we are doing to ourselves via our thoughts. Ultimately, the way you think and know (your epistemology) becomes incorporated in your body.

- To what extent do you think fearful, apprehensive, dreadful thoughts?
- To what extent do you think angry and aggressive thoughts during the day?
- To what extent do you think sad, depressive, and fatalistic thoughts?
- To what extent do you think in terms of competition, win and lose?
- To what extent do you think in terms of envy and jealous of others?

Another subtle factor of our thinking that leads to undesirable embodiment is *the kind of thinking you do all day*. Years ago I did a public demonstration of coaching with a person who had been brought in from the outside, who knew nothing of NLP or Meta-Coaching. I began by asking what he wanted to accomplish which was important to him and he told me what he did not want. I asked, "When you don't have X, what will you have?" He again told me more of what he did not want. That repeated 4 or 5 times. Ah, a pattern! I asked, "What is your job or career?" It turned out he did quality control on airplanes.

> "So all day long the kind of thinking you do is *looking for what's wrong, what you don't want, what should not be there.* Is that right?"

"Yes, that's right."

> "Well, now I know your problem and the solution. ... [long pause during which he began to look increasingly interested] It is your best day-time thinking that is now preventing you from enjoying your life. Your *looking for what you don't want* has been so strong, so embodied, that you feel stuck and unable to change it. If you'd like to change that—that would be your solution."

What does this mean for you and me? It means that *the way you think all day* (or a good part of the day) can become *a thinking habit* which prevents you from doing other kinds of thinking. The solution is becoming aware of your thinking habit and then *thinking-about-your-thinking* chose when it is useful and when it is not. All that requires is just some basic "mind" training.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #35**
**August 25, 2025**
*NLP as Epistemology #4*

# EPISTEMOLOGICAL ERRORS

*When you find an epistemological error, scream bloody murder.* Okay, you don't do that, but do be warned that you are in the presence of something which undermines your ability to think straight and clear and which will lead to all sorts of confusions. In the first article in this series, I quoted this from Gregory Bateson:

> "... the problems of psychiatry are often all shot through with epistemological difficulties" (*A Sacred Unity,* 1990, p. 51)

There is such a thing as an *epistemological error.* There actually lots of them. So wherever you find one, that error is not a good thing. In fact, it is a bad thing. In his search for clarity rather than muddled thinking, Bateson looked for and identified epistemological errors. He found that in psychotherapy, people were making many of these errors. He wrote extensive about these errors in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind.* What psychiatrists and others thought that they *knew* about schizophrenia was an epistemological error. How therapists thought about the underlying problem in alcoholism was another epistemological error.

What is the error in schizophrenia or in alcoholism? First of all, these terms sound like 'things,' 'traits,' or 'characteristics' inside of a person. Actually they are *words for one end of a relationship.* Like the term "dependency," this is not a thing that you can find *in* a person. It is a relationship between that person and other persons. The term refers to a regularity of external behavior vis-a-vis other persons. Bateson explains:

> "One form of habitual error can be pilloried. This is the trick of drawing a generalization from the world of external observation, giving it a fancy name, and then asserting that this named abstraction exists *inside* the organism as an explanatory principle. Instinct theory commonly takes this monstrous form. To say that opium contains a dormitive principle is no explanation of how it puts people to sleep." (*A Sacred Unity,* 1990, p. 76)

In other words, the error is that these words (schizophrenia, alcoholism, dependency, etc.) are fancy-name generalizations that someone invented for certain external behaviors. They invented them to *explain* experiences. As they erroneously *thought about the experience*, they generalized, they deleted the rest of the relationship, and thereby distorted a system making it linear as they encoded the problem into a single word.

If *epistemology* is the process by which you *know what you know,* a process which describes how *your way of thinking* leads to what you know (your knowledge), then an *epistemological error* is a way of thinking and knowing that leads to false conclusions, confusions, and misunderstandings. The problem? The way a person thinks as he reasons and builds up his knowledge and the way he codes the thought into words.

What held back the social and the psychological sciences for centuries? The *epistemological errors*, to wit, the way people thought. To think about the psychological processes as 'things,' 'traits,' 'types, etc. and to think that these 'things' work in a linear way (not systemically) is the first epistemological error. To think that psychological problems are 'caused' by history, by what happened in the past, is the next epistemological error. Bateson again:

> "Nor will I agree to the monstrous premise of medieval epistemology which would separate 'mind' from 'body.'" (*A Sacred Unity,* p. 149)

Ah yes, "medieval epistemology" the old ways of thinking especially the dichotomous thinking of either/or, black-or-white which polarizes things in over-simplistic ways such as "mind" and "body" as it they are separate or can be separated. It was Maslow who repeatedly wrote, "To dichomize is to pathologize." In this kind of dualistic thinking, you are splitting a system apart, a system that cannot operate apart. In this I hope you are gaining a new appreciation for the value of the Meta-Model.

While Bateson called these *erroneous ways of thinking epistemological errors,* it is probably easier to think about them as cognitive biases, distortions, and fallacies. These errors in *how we think* lead to what we 'know,' or think we know, and creates all kinds of problems. The solution is simple enough: clear our those distortions and learn to think clearly and accurate —the subject of the next article.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #36**
**September 1, 2025**
*NLP as Epistemology #5*

# EPISTEMOLOGICAL CLARITY

Given all that I've written about epistemology as the way we think about our thinking which then creates how we know what we know, it's time to speak about cleaning up our epistemological errors. It's time we identify how to *think effectively so that we can be ecological and productive in our knowing.* To do that, the bottom line is this: *Where there is epistemological error—let there be epistemological clarity*.

How do we create epistemological clarity for ourselves and others? Obviously, first of all *learn to detect epistemological errors.* Plant the question in your mind, "Is this way of thinking, this way of knowing what I know, legitimate?" "Have I used any cognitive biases, distortions, or biases in coming to my conclusions?" As you ask yourself these questions, take a little bit of time to *linger on the epistemological twists and/or symptoms.*

Next, take time to consider possible *thinking/ knowing symptoms* that you might be experiencing. "Of the symptoms that I repeatedly experience in everyday life, could any of these symptoms be the result of some epistemological error?" "Could what I think or know (or think I know) actually be the source of these symptoms?"

With the detection and considering, *do some critical analysis of your thinking/ knowing.* Run your experience through the essential critical thinking skills (considering, questioning, doubting, detailing, and distinguishing). As skills for critical thinking, these will enable you to test your thinking for its quality and credibility. So also the Meta-Model—a model that focuses on words and language and how the way you language something can create all sorts of problems if the languaging is not well-formed.

Seeking to clarify your thinking so it is more precise and accurate involves making sure that you are using the right kind of thinking for the knowledge domain you are working in. Thinking like a physicist works great when you are working in the domain of the hard sciences. This domain is all about quantity, dimensions, time, space, energy, forces, impacts, etc. If however you a working in the domain of consciousness (mind, emotions, beliefs, memories, imaginations, etc.), you need to shift to think like a psychologist.

What domain of knowledge are you thinking about? Biology, mathematics, archeology, sociology, chemistry, etc.? Each requires a different epistemology. It's when we mix these that we create epistemological errors. That's what the field of Behaviorism did in the early to middle part of the 20$^{th}$ century. They thought that the hard-science world should be a part of the mental world and so they eliminated 'mind' altogether and tried to build a psychology based entirely on physics thinking. In the long-run, it did not work.

Similarly Freud and psychoanalysis used archeological thinking and causational thinking in trying to understand human psychology. Thinking in terms of etiology, they asked, "Why are you this way? Or, how did you get this way?" That way of thinking implies that the past is deterministic. By way of contrast, in Neuro-Semantics (a cognitive psychology approach) we ask, "What ideas and patterns of ideas have you learned or adopted that has led you to experience what you're experiencing?" "Are you ready for some new ideas?"

Finally, as you learn to recognize your basic epistemology, question it and then move to create a meta-epistemology. Bateson noted that "you cannot claim to have no epistemology" (Ibid, p. 178). To think is to come to 'know' whatever it is that you know and that's your epistemology. Then he encouraged that we move to the next level up.

> "You have an epistemology and I have one, but they are not necessarily the same. A study of the difference between them moves up another level to the science of meta-epistemology." (Bateson, 1990 pp. 155-6)

Why this? Because as Bateson noted, your epistemology will be enormously increased when you realize that ideas occur in layers, that you inevitably generate ideas about ideas, knowledge about knowledge. Bateson realized this through reading Russell and Whitehead's work on logical types in mathematics. He translated that to 'mind' and came up with the levels of learning and with the understanding of the hierarchy of ideas—how we generate ideas about ideas. These meta-levels which make up your Meta Place (or 'mind') establish multiple levels of thoughts and define your personal epistemology.

You can clean up your epistemological errors. When you do you learn to think with greater clarity and accuracy. And that changes everything—from how you experience your emotions, to your effectiveness in what you do and how you relate, to the quality of your life.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #37**
**September 8, 2025**
*NLP as Epistemology #6*

# YOUR BELIEFS/ YOUR EPISTEMOLOGY

Here's something new that I've learned recently from my studies in *thinking.* When you engage in *representational thinking,* and even when you engage in the next higher level of thinking, *editorial thinking*— your thinking is direct and immediate. You are in a primary state of thinking and perceiving. What you immediately perceive—you track to the movie you play in your mind. This thinking is straight-forward, natural, and simple. And you really cannot do any semantic damage to yourself with it.

What comes after that? Once you *think* and create a mental movie of what you have seen, heard, and felt—*then you draw a conclusion.* You like it or you don't. You think it is good and valid or you think it is not-so-good, even bad, and want none of it. In other words, after your first-level thinking, you think-about-your-thinking. This is your self-reflexive consciousness at work. It is what uniquely makes you human. It is also your glory and your agony.

*In this second thinking,* as you draw a conclusion—whatever that conclusion is—*is a belief.* You believe something. And you create all sorts of beliefs—beliefs about what a thing is (identity), how it works (cause-effect), its significance in your life (value or disvalue), its source (history, development), what you should do (purpose, intention), etc. And here's the thing—you cannot *not* believe. Whenever you think about your primary experience in the world—you have moved to a meta-level and you are beginning to create a whole inner world of beliefs, beliefs that define you and that determine the quality of your life.

Wow! No wonder beliefs are important! No wonder *what you believe* is one of the most, if not the most, important factors of your life. Take any particular item that you have to deal with in life— work, relationships, money, budgeting, time, scheduling, working for someone, taking orders, paying taxes, exercising, eating healthily, etc.—and you have all sorts of beliefs about these things. Some are empowering beliefs—they inspire you, they energize you, they make your life enjoyable. Some are limiting beliefs—they constrain you, they hold you back, they create inner conflict, they disempower you.

This means that *everything in your mind beyond the movie is a belief.* Everything in your Meta Place (values, memories, anticipations, imaginations, identity, metaphor, permissions, prohibitions, decisions, intentions, etc.)—is a belief of some sort. Each offers a different kind of belief.

Believing then is your way of thinking about your experiences. When you believe, you are moving beyond the sensory world, building your own personal "model of the world" as your map

for finding your way around. And whatever you believe is your epistemology—your way of knowing and understanding what you know and understand. If you believe that people are essentially bad or evil—that's your epistemology. If you believe you'll never truly succeed—that is your epistemology. Your belief establishes how you *know what you know.* Your belief determines and governs your *way of knowing things.*

No wonder then that your beliefs operate as self-fulfilling prophecies. No wonder also that most people are *stuck in their beliefs.* While they need to step out of the kind of thinking that created their limitations and stuckness, when they attempt to do so, they *use they same kind of thinking that created the limited belief.* That puts them in a loop. They now go round and round, yet they are in a loop with no escape.

How then can they escape their own thinking? How can they gain freedom from their own limiting and negative beliefs? *They need to think again.* Only by re-thinking their original limiting belief, can they establish new empowering beliefs. And to do that, they have to claim, probably for the first time in their lives, their self-reflexive consciousness. This is their ability to engage in *meta-thinking* for only in that way can they *take charge of their thinking.*

Now *thinking-about-your-thinking is the essence of meta-stating.* Start with your movie. Intentionally "lose your meta-mind" about the movie so that you can start over, start afresh. Just observe the movie as a witness— see and see, hear and hear, feel and feel. Now bring a state of *acceptance* to it, *curiosity, playfulness, learning,* and *optimism.* Doing this meta-states your original thought (the movie) with one of these higher level frames. Now you can truly re-think. You can run an ecology check on your other thinking and begin to take control of your mind. And when you do— you know what Meta-States and Neuro-Semantics is all about.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #38**
**September 15, 2025**

# WHEN AN ASSASSINATION CHANGES A NATION

I was only 18 when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis in 1968, a couple months later, I moved to Memphis to begin my schooling. There I began to see the after-effects of King's Civil Rights Movement. Later I took a church in Mississippi and there I joined the AACP, I was the only white person. I tried to step up by preaching *equality of all people.* For that I was fired. My part was very tiny. It was the dream of Martin Luther King Jr., then his assassination that touched me and that began to change a nation. King had a dream and today we recognize as a fabulous and wonderful vision of humanity—that we see each other and treat each other, not by the color of our skin, but by the character of our heart.

This past Wednesday, the assassination of Charlie Kirk may turn out to be a similar national change. Charlie's presentations and debates on college campuses was for the *human rights of all people*—the right of free speech, free debate, the right to *thinking* and arguing your case with others with respect and dignity. That was his theme and that is what got him murdered.

He lived what he preached. He debated with intelligence, good reason, common sense, and respect. When someone on the opposite side of a debate made a good point, he acknowledge it, "fair point, well stated." He never operated from a win/lose perspective. It was always *how can we together search for truth.* For him the idea that "words are violence" was non-senses and at the heart of the problem of irrational political violence. Korzybski noted that words are but mental maps, symbols of something other than themselves. As symbols, whe word 'cat' cannot scratch you. The word 'dog' cannot bite you.

For Kirk, if there was still disagreement after the debate, he respected that. He knew that he could not 'change' someone mind. Only each of us can do that. But he could engage in a dialogue and a respectful conversation that would stimulate people to *think.*

That was his focus: *getting people to think* and stop parroting someone else's PC (politically correct dogma). Those who hated him accused him of all kinds of things (being hateful, being a fascist, etc.) just as a previous generation accused Dr. King of terrible things (being a communist' was the curse language of the 1960s).

Yet here's the amazing thing with Kirk. When a person knows himself or herself and knows the truth about themselves, they aren't disturbed by lies, slanders, false accusations, or insults. They dismiss them gently and graciously. In this they are un-insultable. That's because they are highly focused. Dr. King was focused on the American Dream— "all are endowed by their creator with life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" and with "justice for all." Kirk was also focused on the American Dream —the freedom of speech, of religion, of assembly, etc. He

wanted the right to disagree, to debate, and to talk out differences with respect and honor.

Will this recently tragic assassination change a nation? Only time will tell. That was true in 1968, only time would tell. Who would have guessed at the time of King's assassination that years later we would have African American Senators, Congressmen, Judges, Governs, and a President?

Will this be a wake up call to *think more respectfully* and to end the polarized thinking that turns those who disagree into enemies or villains? Will this be a wake up call to cut out the over-generalization labeling, name-calling, and insulting just because someone doesn't see things the same? Will those who have already used the murder as something to celebrate and cheer come to their senses and *think humanly* about a life lost, a husband and father taken?

With the assassination of Dr. King, a nation began to rally around his dream and over the years Civil Rights legislation was passed that created an equal playing field. I hope something similar will happen in the near future that will bring conflicting ideologies back to *the conversation table.* It is always a sad day for people when those who differ cannot sit down and talk. When they cannot even respectfully listen to each other. When they cannot *think* together.

Finally to end on a positive note. On Friday even the liberal *New York Times* which certainly did not agree with his opinions, did recognize the way he lived. They used this headline, "Charlie Kirk Practiced Politics the Right Way."

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #39**
**September 15, 2025**
*NLP as Epistemology #7*

# A FINAL WORD ABOUT EPISTEMOLOGY

Not long before his death, Gregory Bateson flew to London to give a lecture. He titled it, "Last Lecture" and in it he said "I want to offer you *the thinking* which I have done" over all these years. As his going-away speech, and as a way to summarize his life, his discoveries, all of the ideas and models that he created, he thought that central to everything was his *thinking.* It was the greatest gift.

In that speech, he spoke about *different kinds of thinking* that he discovered which had been the focus of his career. He spoke about *holistic thinking*—thinking about mind-body as one phenomenon and not 'mind' and 'body.' He spoke about *relational thinking*—how everything is related to everything else and that *thingish thinking* misdirects us. He spoke about the heart of thinking —ideas or information as "the difference that makes a difference" and that the only thing that gets onto the map (in the mind) is "news of difference." He spoke about *hierarchical thinking* since we have "ideas about ideas."

> "Viewing the world in terms of *things* is a distortion supported by language ... the correct view of he world in in terms of dynamic relations." (1990, p. 311)
> "The bridge between map and territory is *difference.* It is only *news of difference* that can get from the territory to the map, and this fact is the basic epistemological statement about the relationship between all reality out there and all perception in here; that the bridge must always be in the form of difference." (1990, p. 218)
> "Our epistemology is structured in hierarchic form." (Ibid., 220)
> "In thought what we have are ideas. There are no pigs, no coconut palms, no people, no books ... nothing. There are only ideas of pigs and coconut palms and people and whatever. Only ideas, names, and things like that. This lands you in a world which is totally strange." (Ibid., p. 237)

The bottom line in this: *Epistemology* is a fancy word for "thinking," for *your way of thinking,* for how you organize your understanding and your processes for knowing which then shape and limit what gets from 'outside' through your sense organs. And because NLP is a process for "running your own brain," NLP is essentially this new epistemology from Bateson. And as we update the NLP model in Neuro-Semantics, that means that—

> *Neuro-Semantics as an epistemology—is a way of thinking and a habit of mind for paying attention in specific ways which allow us to manage our minds and emotions, our behaviors and speech more effectively.*

To the extent that we are actualizing *the kinds of thinking and the thinking patterns* that Bateson described, I think Bateson would have been thrilled with what we are doing in Neuro-Semantics. This is, to a big extent, *Neuro-Semantics has been upgrading NLP.* Accordingly, using the reflexivity of both the mind and language, we have mapped out how the logical levels work thereby understanding how our beliefs, concepts, values, and all of the other meta-level terms

work.

> "If we have wrong ideas of how our abstractions are built—if in a word, we have *poor epistemological hab its*—we shall be in trouble —and we are." (Ibid., p. 233)

We have also been mapping out *the structure of thinking itself.* This has enabled us to specific the many different *kinds* of thinking and 'thinking' as a system. To this Bateson has contributed a lot. He has taught us how to —

- Think systemically and in terms of relationships.
- Think directionally. Where is your thinking taking you? Is that where you want to go? When thinking is *too* purposeful, then we make the epistemological error of "the ends justify the means" and that is not only immoral, but unecological for the system.
- Think in terms of self-corrective systems. Ecological thinking needs ongoing feedback as it operates so as to check itself and not become a runaway system.
- Think hierarchically regarding the levels of ideas. This avoids the confusion of levels that creates the epistemological errors of paradox and schizophrenia.
- Think in terms of dynamic change. This process thinking of seeing interactions then solves the medieval thinking of 'things' (nominalizations, adjectives).

In the end, *it is all about thinking.* And while that may seem so simple and obvious, it is not. As it turns out—thinking is ultimately the most challenging thing you will ever do. That's because you have to use your thinking to become aware of your thinking and to then keep updating your thinking. All of this requires meta-thinking.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #40**
**September 22, 2025**

# THINK NLP 3.0

A long time ago (1997), I added *Meta-States* to the classical NLP training and suddenly, **Meta-NLP** was invented. That became the basic NLP practitioner course for the next three decades. Given that Grinder and DeLozier upgraded the classic NLP model in 1983 with "new code" and Dilts updated it further in 1986 with "logical levels," you could think of that as NLP 2.0. Considering that, *Neuro-Semantics is NLP 3.0.* And that answers the questions that many have, "Is Neuro-Semantics NLP?" Yes, of course it is.

Sometimes that raises the next question, "What is the difference between NLP and Neuro-Semantics?" While the difference goes to the heart of what the Meta-States Model *models,* namely, *self-reflexive consciousness,* that opens up a whole range of things— mostly the meta-levels as a model of the mind itself. It expands the Meta-Model introducing linguistic distinctions from Korzybski. It enables meta-strategy work as it identifies the hidden unconscious frames that govern complex states like leadership, self-esteem, resilience, etc. (See the article about the Neuro-Semantic differences on the website.)

Others ask, "If I know NLP, what will Neuro-Semantic add to it that makes it an *advanced form of NLP*?" A far more extensive focus on *structure,* especially meta-structure, a model of how the 'mind' actually works (e.g., thinking), the Meta Place as a model for activating the full mind, an extended understanding of the unconscious, and much more.

Both versions, *Meta-NLP* and *Advanced NLP* offer an upgrade of the NLP model uncontaminated by the myths and manipulations of the first model. It is an advanced NLP that has kept developing from the original premises and the keeps testing its effectiveness in everyday life. As NLP 2.0 re-introduced the implications of Bateson's work, NLP 3.0 goes further in giving Bateson's work far more preeminence with a focus on framing, meta-levels, epistemology, etc.

NLP did not begin as a fully developed model. In the 1970s it began as gestalt classes— two dozen college students practicing the processes that Fritz Perls used in his Gestalt Therapy work. They copied how he communicated *experiential instructions* which had the effect of enabling people to become real, to transform in their thinking, feeling, and acting, to take charge of their own lives, to break free of old constraints, etc. Perls, as one of the second-generation of leaders in the Human Potential Movement at Esalen, along with Virginia Satir, sought to empower people to live a self-actualizing life.

It was his emphasis on what was important in gestalt that revolutionized the gestalt classes and turned them into what Frank Pucelik called "the meta people." *"Meta"* was the name of the NLP movement (1972–1975) before the phrase NLP was invented in 1976. From the Gestalt book that Richard Bandler edited from Perls, the following comprised much of Perl's focus:

- Come into the here-and-now, be present.

- Realize that all problems exist in the here-and-now.
- Get out of your chattering head and see-and-see, hear-and-hear.
- Learn to come into sensory-awareness; stop hallucinating.
- Stop the chattering and clutter in your mind.
- Stop asking *why* and learn to ask *how.*
- Stop introjecting large chunk of generalizations.
- Break introjects down into pieces.
- Refuse the Either/Or split and think of the whole field, the gestalt.
- Embrace response-ability.
- Be aware that everything you do is *your* expression; it comes from you.
- Ask more questions and become aware of the obvious.
- What you dream, fantasize about, repeat deliberately to own it.
- Learn meanings by relating foreground to background.
- Etc.

Now because the Meta People on Kresge campus at the University of California at Santa Cruz were practicing sensory awareness, being direct, practical, experiential, interactional, etc., they were *the first NLP group* before anyone had thought up the term NLP. And when NLP was given birth in 1975 by the books, *The Structure of Magic,* NLP was a linguistic model (e.g., the Meta-Model) that governed one's neurological state. That began the adventure, the excitement, and the revolutionary approach.

*"What is NLP?"* The answer depends on *when* you learned it and *from whom* did you learn it. In the 1970s NLP was mostly a *Therapeutic Model for Personal Development.* By the 1980s the NLP model expanded beyond 'practitioner' and included sub-modalities, meta-programs, time-lines, etc. NLP was then focused on *Modeling Expertise.* But at the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, NLP was in *Self-Destruct Mode.* It divided into five 'camps' and the lawsuits by the founders led to its collapse in the United States. By the 2000s and 2010s, NLP was thriving around the world (but not in the USA) and renewing itself in terms of Conferences, Research, and a longing for unity (i.e., The NLP Leadership Summit). Then the Pandemic hit (2020) and with the world-wide shut-down, a great majority of NLP also shut-down. What will come next? Will NLP survive? Will it experience a resurgence in the 2020s or 2030s?

Will it go the way of the Human Potential Movement? It's hard to say from this vantage point. What I can say is that we in Neuro-Semantics have a clean, fresh, and thorough presentation of NLP— *Advanced NLP*— which will continue to be foundational in Neuro-Semantics.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #41**
**October 6, 2025**

# WHY DID BATESON STOP SUPPORTING NLP?

Here is an odd and strange fact of history. In 1974, Gregory Bateson read the manuscript of *The Structure of Magic* and was unduly impressed. So impressed was he that he wrote the Introduction and Virginia Satir wrote the Foreword. In his Introduction he spoke about himself, the founders, and NLP's "modes of communication" (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.).

> "It is a strange pleasure to write an introduction to this book because Grinder and Bandler have done something similar to what my colleagues and I attempted fifteen years ago. ... They have succeeded in making linguistics into a base for theory and simultaneously into a tool for therapy. ... We did not see that these various ways of coding—visual, auditory, etc.—are so far apart, so mutually different even in neuro-physiological representation, that no material in one mode can ever be of the same logical type as any material in any other mode. This discovery seems obvious when the argument starts from linguistics..."

Gregory not only praised them for what they did, he was the deciding voice who convinced Robert Spitzer of *Science and Behavior Books* to publish the book. Without his influence, it might have never been published. That was 1974. That same year he introduced the founders to Milton H. Erickson and commented that trance epistemology was bad epistemology. Then after that— *nothing is heard from Bateson* about NLP ever again. He never wrote a single word to support it; he never appeared at any Conference. Why not? *What explains this very strange historical fact.* What happened?

After 1975 he essentially disappeared from the scene. Well, not exactly, he disappeared only from the NLP scene. Actually he kept writing and presenting at Conferences and was very prolific. In 1979 he published *Mind and Nature* which was made from numerous articles. He quoted "The map is not the territory" (p. 30, 117) but never mentioned NLP. He wrote about all of the themes that dominate in NLP: epistemology, mind, logical levels, meta-classifications, differences, contexts, neurons, recursiveness, learning, epigenesis—all without a mention of NLP, not even in the footnotes. Yet most of all he focus on *thinking.*

> "In Chapter 2, the reader was given almost didactic advice about *how to think,* and in Chapter 3, he or she was given clues to how *thoughts come together.* This is the beginning of a study of *how to think about thinking."* (*Mind and Nature,* p. 98) "I am concerned at this moment only with understanding how mind and mental process must *necessarily* work. ... Information consists of differences that make a difference." (Ibid., p. 105)

In his last years, he moved to Esalen and lived there on the grounds as the Scholar in Residence. There also he got sick and eventually died (1980). But his writings continued. What he started in 1977, his daughter Mary Catherine Bateson finished. It was published in his name,*Angels Fear* (1979/1987). Here he continued to focus on mind and thinking.

> "Thinking is my job in life." (p. 70). "What is it to *think*? What is it to *be*?" (p. 94). "Consciousness means that *you know that you know.*" (p. 100). And the book ends with "I kept trying to get people to *think straight,* to clean up their premises." (204)

Nor did that end things. In 1991 Rodney Donaldson publish yet more of Bateson's articles in his book, *A Sacred Unity: Further Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1991). Bateson himself said that *Steps* was "a new way of *thinking* about *ideas..."*

> "Bateson's work is unique." He provided "a solid foundation for understanding what is wrong with current ways of thinking about humankind and nature. Since he spent his entire life explicating *how to think* about mental process of whatever sort, Bateson's work is of value to scholars in virtually every field..." (p. xi)

Here he continues writing about thinking, learning, the meta-move, logical levels, frames and framing, paradox, epistemology, etc. With regard to language, he was forever de-nominalizing terms (although he never uses the NLP term, nominalization). Instead he speaks about "misplaced concreteness," "thingishness," and the "dormitive principle." In "the world of mind" "difference makes a difference." "A difference is an elementary idea. It is the stuff of which minds are made." (p. 162). The way you think matters.

> "The way to phrase scientific questions is with the word 'how' and not with the word 'why.'" (196). "When I was preparing the Korzybski Lecture, when I suddenly realized that of course the bridge between map and territory is *difference.* It is only *news of difference* that can get from the territory to the map, and this fact is the basic epistemological statement about the relationship between all reality out there and all perception in here: that bridge must always be in the form of difference." (218)

> "Thinking is mental variation" (236). "In thought what we have are ideas. There are no pigs, no coconut palms, no people, no books, no pins, no ... you know? Nothing. There are only ideas of pigs and coconut palms and people and whatever." (327). "The view of the world in terms of *things* is a distortion supported by language, and that the correct view of the world is in terms of the dynamic relationship which are the governors of growth." (311).

What should we make of all of this? What is most obvious from all of Bateson's books and articles is that he was focused on *how we think and how we construct meaning.* NLP seemed to have gone in another direction. Given that Bateson was so excited about NLP at the beginning and that afterward, in all of Bateson's books and articles after 1975, he never mentions NLP even once— the conclusion seems compelling, namely, he did not see that NLP was going to pursue its essential essence as a *thinking model.*

Now if Bateson, as the grandfather of NLP, and to whom the NLP world owes so much, if Bateson was focused on "a new way of thinking about ideas" (the theme of *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*), perhaps we should explore that theme as well. He apparently saw that as the direction that the future needed. I think we should also.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #42**
**October 13, 2025**

# BELIEF THINKING

After you first begin to think about something, representing whatever you are referring to, you next do *belief thinking*. Now you are taking something on faith. Yet actually, everything you think is an act of faith. Even in perceiving, you are trusting (believing) in your eyes, ears, skin, etc. and assuming that you are not suffering from a visual illusion or any other kind.

Yet above perception, not only does *taking things on faith* is the governing principle of human information process, every second thought is a belief. In Neuro-Semantics since 1996 we have identified the structure of a belief as a confirmed thought about your first thought. What I'm here revealing that is new is this: every multi-level thought structurally is a belief. Take any initial thought or idea, then think something else about it. Now you have a second thought— a thought about your first thought. Accordingly, as the second thought *accepts the first as given*, it thereby creates a belief. It creates one of a great many different kinds of beliefs.

As the second thought reflects on the first thought, it thereby assumes its reality as it brings additional understandings to it. This creates what we call *meta-levels*— values, identity, decision, understanding, memory, imagination, etc. You may value it. You may permit it. You may remember things that support it. Whatever response you make to the initial thought, the implication is that you are assuming that the first thought is true or real. A decision is a belief about what to chose. A value is a belief about what you think is important. A permission is a belief that the thought is acceptable.

What does this mean? It means that *believing* is a rich multi-layer thought that includes a primary thought and at least one higher thought. In that way, every belief we create makes our thinking about something richer and fuller conceptually. We can also create a belief system —a system of beliefs in which the next higher belief holds the previous levels in place. When this is fully developed, we construct a concept or philosophy— a philosophical understanding of something— of life, of yourself as a person, of your purpose, of your career, etc.

You can now also realize that believing is what you *do* with and to your perceptions. Primary thoughts are the data; believing is what you do with that data. Beliefs turn data into what you know, into *knowledge*—and what you know defines what you can do and how you experience yourself. In believing you enrich your perceptions and as a result, you can thereafter literally *see your beliefs in the external world.* This also means that everything that in the Meta Place is actually a belief.

Beliefs—because we treat them as true— we then respond to our beliefs as *rules to live by,* as our *governing principles, as explanatory frames* about life. What you believe operates as your personal the rules of life that you live by. Every area of life operates by beliefs.

To only or merely think—your consciousness would be a continue stream without ever holding anything in mind. To hold anything in mind, you have to classify it with a second thought. At the first level, thinking is *passive*. Only at the second level does thinking become *active.*

By thinking about your thinking —you classify it—give it meaning, to wit, you confirm it as a thought to keep. Saying "yes this thought is..." some meta-level classification, a value, a decision, a memory, a permission, etc. you confirm it as *special* as something to hang on to. In so keeping your thought, *you build up a collection of kept thoughts* which then make up your inner world, your map of the world, the way you understand the world.

This also describes your belief hierarchy. At the first level of the hierarchy your belief is conscious. At the second and the levels above it—your beliefs will be mostly unconscious. They reside in your hidden (unconscious) mind. These include every kind of belief: Identity beliefs, cultural beliefs, business beliefs, conceptual beliefs, metaphorical beliefs, philosophical beliefs, explanation belief (understanding), and the list goes on and on.

**It's Beliefs all the Way Up**

We now know what is inside your mind— *beliefs.* You are a believer and the beliefs you believe —*you* determine that. The bottom line: you have two kinds of thoughts. You have primary level thoughts (perceptions) and secondary level thoughts (beliefs). Now the nature of a belief is that it is self-fulfilling. What you believe is basically what you get. Beliefs are self-sealing. To do that your belief relies on the confirmation bias so that what you believe, you will find or invent evidence for it. That normally makes beliefs difficult to change. But now that you know this structure of beliefs (this meta-structure), you have a heads up on several great belief changing techniques.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #43**
**October 20, 2025**

# THE MYSTERY OF OVER-THINKING

There is a lot of talk these days about *over-thinking.* The problem is that there are numerous different meanings given to this term. Whenever someone starts with this as their problem, I always follow up by ask, "What are you referring to when you use this term? In what way are you over-thinking? And what are you over-thinking?"

One thing called over-thinking which is actually *not* over-thinking is actually *real thinking.* That is defined as "working an idea over in your mind to achieve an outcome." Now sometimes, you have to keep *working an idea over* in your mind until you get it. Quit too soon because you have not come to an understanding is not a solution. Sometimes problem solving and/or creativity requires that you live with the uncertainty and/or ambiguity.

Other than that, there are several kinds of thinking patterns which we call over-thinking. Given that, how can we respond to these different kinds of over-thinking effectively?

First, *obsessive thinking.* This often occurs in childhood when a small child becomes obsessive about one or more things which captures her attention. One child might want to have the same story read to him every single night. Another child might become obsessed by ants or bugs or birds, or some other animal. Such obsessions are usually part of the learning process, and once well learned, the obsession vanishes and the child moves on. This is perfectly normal.

But some people never move on. And why not? Usually because there's a strong irrational fear which is driving the obsession. Consequently, this leads to obsessive–compulsive disorders and the range of obsessions are as wide as human interests. What kind of fears are we talking about? A person could be obsessed with fears, dangers, what others think about them, being right, being safe, etc. This kind of obsessing is sometimes called *over-thinking*—going over and over a thought and never finishing it, never getting closure on it. Here a person may go in circles so that he thinks the same thing over and over.

Second, *re-thinking.* A person thinks in a haphazard manner and because of that, never gets to closure. So he comes back to re-think the subject again and again. He continually attempts to bring closure on a position or decision, but never completes it. Consequently, she never really gets clear about her thoughts and so feels the need to keep re-processing things. If you use the same references over and over again trying to come to a different conclusion, you will never bring the thinking to an end. To break out of that kind of looping requires using different references, resources, and perspectives. First acknowledge that if you keep thinking about something in the same way, you will get the same result. Accept and search for a different way of thinking about it.

Third, *intensional orientation.* This kind of intension is not to be confused with intention. Here

I'm referring to *intensional* with a **s,** not with a **t**. The difference? Intention refers to what you are thinking about doing. Intension refers to your internal thinking which defines things in terms of other words and definitions. The contrast is with extensional thinking by which you get out of your head and *extend* things out into the real world. Intensional thinking keeps you *going round and round a self-invented definition in your head* which is unrelated to the outside. This becomes especially vicious if one intensional level is embedded inside of another intensional level. As you try to figure out the meaning of one level, you loop into the other level. Round and round you go. While you think you are simply trying to figure something out, you are looping between meta-levels. Solution? Do an *extensional check.* Get out of your head and ask for sensory specific details that you can see, hear, and feel.

Fourth, *double-bind looping*. You get caught into a loop that goes round and round because a higher frame (a belief, decision, prohibition, etc.) keeps you from stepping back to see the bind (the statement that binds).

> First bind or command: "Try not to make a mistake."
> The second bind: "Don't be aware of making a mistake."
> The third bind: "Don't be aware of the second bind."

Now if you could "go meta" to all of this thinking and experiencing, you could recognize that you are doomed to stay in the experience of making a mistake. As a fallible human being, you will make mistakes. But if you do *and* you are forbidden to be aware of it, you will spin around in that experience. *As such it becomes an experience with no exit.* If only you could see that you have been forbidden to *go meta,* that awareness would expose the double-bind nature of these injunctions and you'd would be free.

Be careful with this over-used term. When you hear it, ask for a clarity check so that the person describes when and where it occurs and how they have decided it is over-thinking. Sometimes it is, sometimes it is not. Wherever there's loose language, clear and precise thinking becomes difficult and yet, at the same time, all that more important.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #44**
**October 27, 2025**

# THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY AND THE FOUNDER'S SELF-PROMOTIONS

Last week both John Grinder and Richard Bandler held a joint web-presentation celebrating the 50th Anniversary of NLP. But that's a bit deceptive. They did not actually get together and hold the celebration of 50 years. Instead each of them separately recorded a 30 minute presentation in which they were asked a few questions. Supposedly they were to answer questions that the audience asked, but in the end all of the questions were softball questions. Actually, extremely softball questions! None were challenging in the least. The questions, in fact, were such that the questions allowed each one to boast and glory in himself. I had submitted two questions that would have been challenging, but they were obviously not mentioned as were many others that I knew about.

If you listen to the presentations what you will learn is that each man thinks that what he did was absolutely spectator. And both of them think they created the NLP model completely between themselves! They had no help and needed no help. They congratulate each other, but no one else! They seem to have totally forgotten the role of Frank Pucelik and the way Robert Dilts formulated nearly all of the original NLP model. John seems now to dismiss the role of Frank saying he only *imitates*(!), a very different story from his book that introduced Frank as "The Third Man."

They also had amnesia about the many different Gestalt and Meta Groups which in *The Structure of Magic* they described as "therapists groups." What a complete forgetting! It was as if none of them existed and none of them were co-founders. I addressed this in the book, *NLP Secrets: Untold Stories* (2018). And still, 50 years later, the stories are still untold ... at least by Richard and John.

Richard tried to emphasize that he gave credit to others, but only to the obvious— Virginal Satir, Milton Erickson, Noam Chomsky, somehow he forgot Fritz! He also magically forgot to mention Frank, Robert, Leslie, Judith, or many other key people who actually turned the first discoveries into what became known as the NLP Communication Model.

He also engaged in a good bit of "change personal history" inasmuch as what he is saying now does not correspond to what he has said over the years in books and videos. He now claims that he got things from various people even though there is no historical record of those people. An example he now credits Dorothy Kimura for eye accessing cue although she was *never* mentioned in any previous NLP book. Neither Richard nor John ever mentioned her regarding eye accessing cues! Paul Bach-y-Rita was mentioned once, but only a brief reference. Not exactly a big source for NLP. Moshe Feldenkrais was also only briefly mentioned a few times. He was primarily referred to in a training Richard did in London in 1990 *Neuro-Dynamics* (a

training that I transcribed at Richard's request and turned into a book—a book which has not been published).

The biggest elephant in the room from this 50th year anniversary is that they did not speak at all about their lawsuits with each other, with the divisions they created in the field, or with the $90,000,000 lawsuit that essentially destroyed NLP in the United States. Nothing at all about that! Another nice thing to be amnesic about.

Not a word was said about the fact that neither has supported the field in recommending any of the leaders who have arisen who have made NLP what it is. I'm thinking specifically of Robert Dilts and Steve Andreas. If it were not for Robert and Steve and Connaire, NLP would have never achieved its recognition in the 1970s and 1980s that it did. They did far more than Richard or John in those years to formalize and promote NLP. If not for them, there very well could be no NLP.

Over the years, neither John or Richard ever came to any of the NLP Conferences around the world to support the field. They never wrote articles for the many Journals that we had in the 1980s and 1990s (except when someone wrote an article about them). Instead each worked to keep his 'camp' going and refused to acknowledge each other or anyone else. That's not exactly what we think of leaders.

Given that, I would say that they were only founders, but not leaders. They never groomed others to step up to lead the field. They never gave credit to people making contributions to the field. When I took my training with Richard, there were no patterns from Dilts or Grinder—none. I walked out of Master Practitioner never hearing one word about what they offered to NLP.

Over the years many of us tried to get both of the founders to participate. We asked them in 1997 to come to the *Visionary Leadership Conference*. Neither did. Although Richard sent his lawyer (!) who met some of us out on "the green grass." They following day John showed up on "the green grass" to present his side of the 90 million dollar lawsuit. We asked them to show up at the *Millennial Project* (2000), neither did. We asked them to come to the *40th Anniversary*; they did not. Richard sent a two minute video. What's amazing to me is that while we asked them to be leaders—and they refused.

Then last year (2024) some years after Frank Pucelik and I started the *NLP Leadership Summit* (2011), we held the Summit in Santa Cruz California where John still lives. Did he show up? No, of course not. But Judith DeLozier did. Then she and Robert gave the group of 70 plus NLP leaders a tour of Kresge College and the University of Southern California.

My view? The founders are bold in taking credit for what they partially founded, something which they did not grow. They contributed a lot of the first intellectual structures, but were unable to contribute any kind of true leadership over the decades. *NLP Leadership* fell to those who created the Conferences, the Associations, the Journals, the Research Conference, who developed new models, new patterns, and new communities (as indicated in *Innovations in NLP,* 2012).

**References**

I wrote *NLP Secrets: The Untold Stories* as a journalistic investigation researching it via reading countless books on the origins of NLP, collecting sources, cross-referencing, and relying on numerous personal experiences with those who were there. There I emphasized that NLP's origins were the result of a *community effort*. It was not accomplished by any one or two individuals. To create NLP, it took Robert Spitzer introducing Perls' works and to Satir herself. It took Bateson send them to Erickson. It took all of the individuals in the original groups for the collective contribution they made including David Gordon, Stephen Gilligan, Terry McClendon, and many, many more.
https://www.neurosemantics.com/shop/page/7/

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #45**
**November 3, 2025**

# WHEN FACING DIFFICULTIES

What happens inside you—in your mind, emotions, and body when you face difficulties? Regardless of the difficulty, whether it is physical like a sport or at the gym, or if it is mental difficulty which you are trying to understand, or emotional or inter-personal, or at work in your career—how do you face and deal with difficulties? After all, *difficulties is a fact of life that none of us can escape.* You cannot buy insurance against it. There's no place on this planet where you can move to avoid difficulties. Wherever you go—there will be difficulties. Geography is not the answer.

Thinking is the answer. So now for this critical and inevitable question—*How do you face difficulties?* It determines how you will experience your life, yourself, your relationships, your future, just about everything. This question speaks about your inner resources and how you generally cope with life, especially when something becomes tough. *How do you face and deal with difficulties?*

Here are two polar choices with lots of positions in-between the two. Each describes a way of thinking about difficulties which leads to how you then feel about difficulties which, in turn, leads to how you respond to them.

| Pessimistic Side | Optimistic Side |
|---|---|
| Quit, do something else | Laugh and Learn |

1) *Difficulties mean you should quit and do something else.* On one side is this attitude: When a difficulty arises my first assumption is that if something is difficult it means "I'm not good at this." "It means I can't become good at it, that it is not for me." Therefore, in the face of difficulties, we can predict what you will do and feel. You will almost immediately feel discouraged and more than likely you will give up.

You will think that putting effort into trying to deal with, or overcome, the difficulty will not work or be worth it. From the start you are convinced that you are not good at it and won't be good. This is the *fixed mindset* that Carol Dwerk speaks about which refers to assuming that everything is fixed, fated, and determined from the beginning, so why try? You also assume that your performance in struggling with something difficult reflects on you as a person. So if you struggle, you interpret that struggle as it is a reflection on your and on your inadequacy as a person. Consequently that's why you do not struggle with it, and will not struggle with it. For you it is an existential threat.

2) *Difficulties means jump in, go for it, find out what's possible.* If, however, you assume that when a difficulty arises, it means, "Here is something to learn, something to discover," then you will actually be excited by the difficulty. You will think in a more optimistic way, "My ability can grow incrementally when I devote myself to learning this and taking it on."

We can now predict how you will think, feel, and act. The effect that this will have is that you will actually be challenged and delighted by the difficulty. You will step up to take it on. You will think, "Effort is the road to improvement." "Frustration is simply a challenge" so you will keep trying and

learning.

How about you? To which side of the continuum do you lean? When it comes to difficulties in life and facing them, do you tend toward the pessimistic side or the optimistic side?

Here's another reframe. Difficulties means that life is real and serious. Difficulties say that how you live and what you do counts. So take on difficulties with curiosity and without judgment. The curiosity will enable you to understand how things work, what's going on, and what solutions you can create. The 'no judgment' about your performance frees you up so that instead of judging things and feeling bad, you look for solutions and feel good that you are engaged in the adventure of life. Think this way and you can learn to laugh at difficulties.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #46**
**November 10, 2025**

# WHAT DO GREAT TEAMS LOOK LIKE?

If you want to know what makes for a great team, *you do not have to do research, interviewing, or modeling.* That's already been done. Jon Katzenbach, and Douglas Smith did that and reported their findings in their 1993 book, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High - Performance Organization.* In that book they suggest the following five qualities or vital ingredients.

1) Trust —team members trusting each other.
2) Effective conflicting — able to work through differences.
3) Commitment — willing to make a commitment to each other.
4) Accountability — willing for all to hold each one accountable.
5) Attention to results — caring about the ultimate goal, results.

It begins with trust because trusting yourself to come through on what you say and trusting others is the foundation of any relationship and that remains equally true for leadership teams and any kind of cohesive working group which is seeking to achieve peak performance. Trust includes trusting that we can work through differences and disagreements, we can conflict about ideas, debate them, dialogue about choices, and come to a mutual understanding.

When a group of people can do that, then they are ready to make a commitment to each other and to the group as a whole. In business, we call this *buy-in.* This is the very thing which makes a group a team. That's because once we are committed to our performance goals, we are willing to accept accountability and to hold each other accountable to our promises. And now, because we have gotten the individual ego out of the way and are committed to each other, we can attend to the group result rather than worry about getting enough credit.

After modeling these five key ingredients as the qualities of a great team, Patrick Lencioni went on to write another book, *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2005). In this work, he focused on the same five qualities, but now in reverse. What if you don't have them? His description of these five dysfunctions is so well written, that I have quoted him verbatim:

> **"Absence of trust:** members of great teams trust one another on a fundamental, emotional level, and they are comfortable being vulnerable with each other about their weaknesses, mistakes, fears, and behaviors. They get to a point where they can be completely open with one another. This is essential because ...
>
> **Fear of Conflict:** teams that trust one another are not afraid to engage in passionate dialogue around issues and decisions that are key to the organization's success. They do not hesitate to disagree with, challenge, and question one another, all in the spirit of finding the best answers, discovering the truth, and making great decisions. This is important because...

**Lack of Commitment:** teams that engage in unfiltered conflict are able to achieve genuine buy-in around important decisions, even when various members of the team initially disagree. That's because they ensure that all opinions and ideas are put on the table and considered, giving confidence to team members that no stone has been left unturned. This is critical because ...

**Avoidance of Accountability:** teams that commit to decisions and standards of performance to not hesitate to hold one another accountable for adhering to those decisions and standards. They don't rely on the team leader as the primary source of accountability; they go directly to their peers. This matters because ...

**Inattention to results:** tams that trust one another engage in conflict, commit to decisions, and hold one another accountable are very likely to set aside their individual needs and agendas and focus almost exclusively on what is best for the team. They do not give in to the temptation to place their departments, career aspirations, or ego-drive status ahead of the collective results that define team success." (page 7)

If you coach, train, or consult with groups and teams, and if you want to create some highly effective teams, these five features of teams gives you a great place to start.

**Meta-Coaching News**

- *Group & Team Meta-Coaching* (GTMC) will occur in Hong Kong in December.

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**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #47**
**November 17, 2025**

# WHY GROUP & TEAM COACHING?

Why would organizations be interested in Group and Team Coaching training? What's in it for a business, an association, or a government? What will be the benefits and return on investment? When you consider the possibility of being a *Group and Team Coach* and employing the *Meta-Coaching System* to resolve conflicts in groups and to enable the functioning of a group, there are numerous values and benefits.

***1) Effective and Productive Groups***

The first and most important reason for *Group & Team Coaching* training in an organization is that most groups are dysfunctional. They do not work very well. They not only are not very effective or productive, they are all too often, positively hurtful to the organization. They undermine the effectiveness of the business.

Yet managers and business owners hire people for their talents and skills to improve the quality and quantity of products and services. Yet the essence of business is the ability to work *with others* and *through others.* That's what we do in business. The people we hire have to be able to create products, services, and information for clients by working in a coordinated, cooperative, and collaborative way. If people in an organization are not communicating well, are not coordinating their efforts, clarifying their communications, understanding each other, understanding what the customers are asking for, and getting information in plenty of time, then we know that the business will be putting along at half speed.

*Group & Team Coaching* works to solve these problems. It works to enable people to appreciae the importance of cooperation and develop the required skills. Otherwise there will be a great waste of human capital of intelligence and creativity. This is where a Group Coach can interactively facilitate a group to learn how to communicate with each other so that there is precision and clarity. This is not easy, that's why a well-trained Coach is needed.

***2) Reduction of Conflict and Dysfunction***

In addition to straightening out and cleaning up the language of people, a Group Coach also facilitates the ability of a group to face and work through conflicts in a respectful and effective way. This also is not easy and can be quite demanding. Yet if a manager spends a lot of time settling conflicts and misunderstandings, and have to deal with the political maneuvers of keeping secrets, undermine another's success or reputation, gossiping, playing favorites, etc., then you also know that the group will not be operating at its optimal best.

When we consider all of the ways that people in groups can be ineffective and can create stress and problems for each other, it's a wonder that any group is very effective. *Group & Team Coaching* offers business the chance to enable people to work more effectively with each other by confronting the issues, by talking about "the 500 pound guerilla" that's in the room, and

working through the differences. This typically means facilitating people to change their neuro-semantics about "conflict" and "differences" and then develop the skills for being curious, respectful, responsible, and open to correction. Only then can a group become truly effective and productive in getting results. Isn't that what companies are in business for?

***3) United Efforts***

As there are many different kinds of groups—there will be differences in group coaching. Seven different kinds of groups are listed in the book *Group and Team Coaching* (2012). At the highest level is the executive team. Yet most often the term "team" is more of a label rather than a description. Take each of the individual senior managers apart and ask them about the vision and values of the group, and you'll probably get as many answers as you have individuals. Is it any wonder then that the overall group isn't aligned, focused, and integrated? Then there are all sorts of department groups and inter-department groups. And are they any more unified?

There are also work groups—projects, committees, quality control circles, etc. These are groups which have been commissioned to accomplish a specific outcome, to get a specific result. And again, the inner fighting, politicking, and vying for either control, influence, status, budget, resources, etc. is a frequent occurrence.

***4) Unleashing Group & Team Potentials***

When groups work effectively together, they can achieve great things—achievements greater than what any individual can do alone or apart. An effective thinking and learning team will be smarter than the most intelligent individual. By such collective thinking, learning, and deciding, we not only unleash potentials but attain a higher intelligence. To facilitate this, groups need to be safe, inclusive, empowering of members, respectful, fun, effective, and unleashing the highest and best in all.

This is especially critical for a Meta-Coach because he or she does self-actualization coaching. The Meta-Coach operates from a deeper understanding of Self-Actualization Psychology than other coaches. They know the processes of unleashing, for holding the space for a crucible experience, for unleashing self-actualizing leaders and companies, etc.

***5) Create a Warm and Welcoming Social Context***

Groups in organizations, associations, government, and everywhere are social entities and the quality, feel, and mood of the group establish the group's culture. *Group Coaching* is an excellent methodology for renewing, rejuvenating, and empowering an organization's culture. When there is a warm and welcoming culture wherein people work—people will want to be there, want to be a part, take more personal responsibility, and enjoy the experience. That will improve their learning and development, create team-spirit, and that will improve retention of the best people in the organization. And all of that will improve the bottom-line of the business.

***6) Unleash greater Creativity and Innovation***

To stay current in today's market, every organization that wants to be on the cutting-edge has to be a learning organization and that means that the communication system within the business has to be fluid, quick, and accurate. That enables people to be "in the know" and trusted to handle

the information and activities in the organization.  In this way *Group & Team Coaching* improves the groups within a business to be more creative and then more effective in innovating new products and services.

Now you know *why* Group & Team Coaching can be transformative in an organization enabling it to not only be profitable but create a culture where people are engaged and find meaning in their work.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #48**
**November 24, 2025**

# WHAT WILL YOU LEARN IN GROUP AND TEAM COACHING?

Soon we will be doing *Group & Team Coaching,* it will be the first time since the pandemic for me. As we have been promoting the training, people are asking, "What will I learn in this training?" "What will I be able to take away from the training?"

Well, a lot of things. First and foremost, you will learn how groups work both informationally and experientially. Our focus will start with the *dynamics* inside of the individuals of the group and then the *dynamics* which make up the group itself. This makes any and every group full of dynamic energy, an energy the group coach has to manage.

As a participant, you will experience being in different group 15 times over the four days. That is a lot! Over and over you will experience all sorts of group dynamics first hand and experientially. You will experience how to achieve group objectives, how to design outcomes, solve group problems, plan group activities, deal with conflict in a group, and much more.

Now while *Group and Team Coaching* is already a major area in the field of Coaching, and while everything that I see indicates that it is going to become a bigger and bigger area in the coming years, most groups do not work all that well. And some groups do not work very well at all! That's why there has begun to be a big demand for it. There's lots of reasons for that. Perhaps the most obvious is that most groups in organizations are not run effectively and in a humanistic way. Consequently organizations waste so much of the potential that groups could provide. There's still far too much rugged individualism, too little skill in being a good team player, and too much ineffective leadership in the groups. Boards are like that. Senior management teams are like that. And they need help. What will you learn? How groups are not effective, what causes that, and what to do to make them effective.

You will also make an amazing discovery in distinguishing how *Group and Team Coaching* is so different from individual coaching. The presence of group dynamics introduces many new factors that a coach doesn't have to deal with in individual coaching. As a coach, you will often be coaching the group itself how to coach itself, how to learn how its functioning, and how to step up to more effectiveness.

In *Group & Team Coaching* You will learning that there are additional "Conversations" in a group to the first seven conversations that we identify in individual coaching. There is the Rounds conversation, the Meta conversation, Collective Learning, Problem-Solving, Mediation, Productive Conflict, etc. The details of these conversations are in the book on Group and Team Coaching and the conversations that we practice in the training.

You will also learn that about the need to distinguish different kinds of groups. That is, all grops are not the same. There are intact versus ad hoc groups, groups with leaders versus groups in which the coach will lead, work groups versus learning or study groups, etc.

And most importantly, you will learn about the skills which are required for coaching a group and/or a team. In setting up the feedback form for this level, I kept the basic format that Meta-Coaches are already familiar with. And to them, there are now some new sub-skills inside of them. One difference in group coaching is that we start with *Framing.* There is then *Group Support, Group Listening, Group Questioning, Group Feedback, and Group State Induction.* Three additional skills that we focus are: *Group Functioning, Group Leadership / Governance;* and *Group Closure.*

Groups that are managed well can become teams and that's yet another learning, how that works and what's required. You will learn about the Trust Spiral and how to build trust between yourself and the group, and between the members of the group. There's a lot to learn, a lot of experiential practices to develop the skills, and then two days to see someone one stage take a group and a group problem and coach that group to a resolution. That live demonstration is the peak of the training because that is where the rubber hits the road. Can the person who steps up to do that—can that person coach that group? All I can say is, *Come and see!*

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #49**
**December 1, 2025**

# GROUP & TEAM COACHING

There is now a growing demand for *Group & Team Coaching* in organizations and that demand will be increasing in the coming years. Given that, if you want to create this as your coaching focus or add it to your focus, how do you do that? How do you build up a "Group and Team Coaching" business? How do you sell it?

When it comes to any kind of selling of yourself as a Meta-Coach and/or your Coaching Practice, it is always best to develop a focused niche with an unique speciality. What's much harder to sell and even to describe is the generalist approach.

> "But what if I don't know my niche? What if I have not enough experience to even know what to make my speciality?"

Then pick something that you *would like to make a speciality or that could possibly become a speciality.* Just pick something! By doing that, you at least have a place to start. From there, begin to format your "ideal client" and the unique contribution and value that you would add to that person's life. It's a beginning. That's the important thing. Then study that speciality. Read books on it, interview people who have made that their speciality, search the internet for those who focus on that area. Collect ideas about what they offer, how they make their offer, how they frame their unique proposition of value, how they think about the needs, problems, and challenges of those people, their personality distinctions (meta-programs, perceptions, beliefs, etc.).

Starting there doesn't mean that you will only be dealing with that area. You won't. You probably will be a generalist and take on just about anyone who is a legitimate coaching client. The difference is that you *have in mind where you are going in terms of your niche.* Of course, as you study and interview and get experience, you may very well change your mind about your speciality. The reason for the decision is not that you will carve it in stone, but that you have a place to begin focusing.

Next, begin thinking about how you want to package your offerings and how you want to develop your "coaching package." Depending on your other talents and skills— you will be a Trainer/Coach; Consult/Coach; Mentor/Coach; Coach/Trainer, etc. Some use training to get in, others use some consulting expertise to get in— what will you use to *get in*? At first, you will probably use connections. Who do you know that's in business? In management? In H.R.? Begin there. Most business, and especially coaching and training business, operates from who you know and your skills in making connections.

Nor do you go in seeking to get in, go in seeking to add value with any and every conversation you have. Go in *interviewing people.* Ask for their help—their insights and advice. Now that doesn't mean you don't do your own homework. Do! Learn the terminology of the industry,

learn the vision and values of the business, learn as much as you can about the structure and who's who in the organization.

Now when you meet with people in organizations, interview them about the quality of their groups and teams. As they how much the groups are learning teams, effective teams in terms of productivity, tapping human intelligence and creativity, generating a sense of belongingness, recognition, appreciation, etc. And, if you really want to *sell this understanding* to get into organizations, give out copies of Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.* It tells a story and so is an easy read for people who do not read self-help or non-fiction books.

> [As an aside, not too long ago a former Meta-Coach used the following dysfunctions of a team and presented it as if it was his own discovery, doing that kind of thing is plagerism and unethical. You show yourself professional and scholarly when you give credit to your sources!]

Here is Lencioni's description of **The Five Dysfunctions** in his own words and a good description of why businesses need Group and Team Coaching:

- **Absence of trust:**
  Members of great teams trust one another on a fundamental, emotional level, and they are comfortable being vulnerable with each other about their weaknesses, mistakes, fears, and behaviors. They get to a point where they can be completely open with one another. This is essential because ...

- **Fear of Conflict:**
  Teams that trust one another are not afraid to engage in passionate dialogue around issues and decisions that are key to the organization's success. They do not hesitate to disagree with, challenge, and question one another, all in the spirit of finding the best answers, discovering the truth, and making great decisions. This is important because...

- **Lack of Commitment:**
  Teams that engage in unfiltered conflict are able to achieve genuine buy-in around important decisions, even when various members of the team initially disagree. That's because they ensure that all opinions and ideas are put on the table and considered, giving confidence to team members that no stone has been left unturned. This is critical because ...

- **Avoidance of Accountability:**
  Teams that commit to decisions and standards of performance to not hesitate to hold one another accountable for adhering to those decisions and standards. They don't rely on the team leader as the primary source of accountability; they go directly to their peers. This matters because ...

- **Inattention to Results:**
  Teams that trust one another engage in conflict, commit to decisions, and hold one another accountable are very likely to set aside their individual needs and agendas and focus almost exclusively on what is best for the team. They do not give in to the temptation to place their departments, career aspirations, or ego-drive status ahead of the collective results that define team success. (p. 7)

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #50**
**December 8, 2025**

# THE FAST TRAIN TO MEANING

As a Trainer, you know that Neuro-Semantics centers on *the construct of meaning.* Meaning is central to what we are all about—it is even in our name, Semantics. And *semantics governs everything!* "Everything?" You ask. Yes, everything human and everything that matters. And that's because without a person *constructing meaning* in his or her mind, there is no meaning. After all, meaning does not exist apart from a meaning-maker. It takes the brain and the nervous systems of a meaning-maker to construct meaning.

This has several very serious consequences:

- Whatever you think something means—that is what it means *to you.* It is your meaning and *you created it.* Wow! Talk about the semantic foundation of agency and responsibility. Each person's experience of meaning is uniquely that person's. It belongs to him and it will govern his life.
- *The quality of your life is the quality of your meanings.* What upgrades life, or any particular experience, is actually *not* the external things that you have—but what they mean to you. That's why a poor person can have a *high quality life* and a rich person can have a *poor quality life.* The quality isn't about stuff, it is about the person's semantics. Now isn't that amazing? Now having things as good, and having high standard of living, all that is good, and something we want to promote, but it is not the key to high quality living. How many very, very rich people are utterly miserable on the inside?
- Life and everything you and I can do or experience in life is governed by our meanings. Ultimately, *life is lived inside—out,* not outside—in. Although we are all taught to think and operate outside—in. But everything human is inside—out. Communication is inside–out; happiness is inside–out; love is inside–out; content, peace of mind, and serenity is inside–out. A sense of wealth and inner richness is inside–out.
- *Meaning is constructed by thinking.* This is the newest and most radical understanding that we have developed in Neuro-Semantics in recent years. Ultimately, it is all about *thinking.* Therefore, the quality of your thinking determines the quality of your meanings which determines the quality of your life.
- Thinking is inevitable, *quality thinking is not.* You cannot *not* think. It's what your brain elicits your mind to do. Your brain is like the hardware and your mind is like the software. Your brain does *not* determine the quality of your thinking. Take a moment to reflect on that one! Your brain has all kinds of potentials for intelligence and excellences but you have to learn it, develop it, nurture it, etc. That's why many highly intelligent people think and act in stupid ways.
- Quality thinking starts with critical thinking, steps up to creative thinking, and graduates into executive thinking. If you can't think clearly, precisely, and accurately (critical thinking), you will be (and are) severely handicapped in life. The very ways that you think will sabotage you and what you do so you will not be effective or productive. [By

the way these are the three levels of thinking skills we teach in *Thinking for Humans.*]

- Your thinking shows up in how you talk. The way you language things—yourself, others, work, exercise, food, and everything else—determines the meanings you construct and then the life you live. If your language is wrong, so will be everything else. That's why we have to get our speech right—the very purpose of the Meta-Model.
- *Meaning hides.* It is intangible because it is what your mind does. Yet your meanings, and mine, show up and are expressed by the way you talk, act, gesture, move, etc. Therefore by paying deep attention to language, thinking patterns, neurological habits, etc. you can detect and flush out your semantics or those of another person. It's easy to forget that behind the see-hear-feel expressions is a *world of meaning* which each of us has inherited and created.
- The quicker you can detect meaning and identify meaning, the quicker you can get to the ultimate source of problems and solutions. So we learn to *go meta.* We learn how to step back from the expressions of meaning to identify *the meaning itself and the thinking that creates the meaning.* When we do that we can then identify the interpretation behind the problem ... behind the solution. Learning to ride the fast train to meaning enables you to avoid all of the usual psychological noise, defenses, and side-trips. When you can go directly to the Source, you can check the ecology of the meaning and then know what needs to be done. Do you need to update the meaning, reframe it, or outframe it?

All of this is what enables a person to have a 5-minute problem-solving conversation. All of this allows you to have a highly focused conversation that gets to the heart of things (the meaning) so that you can more quickly solve problems and/or invent new solutions that can change the world. Therefore if you would want to learn to initiate and conduct a 5-minute conversation, we welcome to Neuro-Semantics— the fast train to meaning.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #51**
**December 15, 2025**

# WHO WANTS TO BE A VISIONARY LEADER?

In NLP and in Neuro-Semantics, we need more leaders and better leaders. When you are a trainer, *you are a leader*—after all, you are leading people to learn about Neuro-Semantics, Meta-States, Meta-Coaching, Self-Actualization, or any of the 50 gateway trainings. When you are a Meta-Coach, *you are a leader*—now you are leading the minds, hearts, and behaviors of individuals to achieve their goals, solve their problems, and unleash their potentials.

There are many kinds of leaders, there are trainer leaders, coaching leaders, administrative leaders, project leaders, thought leaders, technical leaders, managerial leaders, and on and on. Then there are *visionary leaders.* These are the leaders who stand out from everyone else, even the other leaders, and who invite people to come follow him or her as they pioneer a new direction. Now we have lots of leaders in Neuro-Semantics, but I don't think we have a sufficient number of visionary leaders. As I've traveled to many countries all around the planet, a hypothesis that I've come to is this: The Institutes survive or thrive, or fail according to the visionary leaders that are present. And if that's the case, the question now arises, *How do we develop more visionary leaders?*

Thinking about this, here are the six *most important meta-programs that characterizes a visionary leader.* As you read these, reflect on the degree that your meta-programs enables or disables you to be a visionary leader. Then, *if* you want to become a visionary leader, consider what you need to do to expand your meta-programs and what behavioral skills each implies.

1) *An active meta-program* (#27). When you think about something, do you feel an urge to take action as soon as possible? Or is your urge to reflect, think about it, chew it over? Visionary leaders tend to have a very active meta-program. If they have a flaw, it is that they tend to *jump into things* and are ready to act even before they have a well-developed plan. Embrace this energy and temper it with your calibration skills and an appropriateness frame.

2) *A strong authority meta-program* (#23). When you think about the right or authority to take action, do you automatically assume that you can do it or do you consider the context and who has the authority and they will grant you the right to do it or if it is okay for you to do it? Visionary leaders operate from within and hardly ever ask if it's okay. They assume it is until they learn that they are not to do something. Embrace this energy *and temper it* with "an external check," as well as a choice, not an automatic compulsion.

3) *A strong ego (high ego-strength* (#54). When you think about facing challenges in the world, whether dealing with other people, finances, planning things, solving problems, etc., do you have a 'sense of self' that's strong, robust, and ready to go? Or do you question whether you will be

able to handle things? Visionary leaders function from robust and stable ego with a high sense of efficacy. Embrace this energy and release any need to 'care about' (worry) about your reputation or what people will think of you.

4) *A high others-attention meta-program* (#24). When you think about the group or are in a group situation, do you automatically focus on attending to the needs and wants of the people in the group? Of do you think about getting your own needs met? Visionary leaders have a strong attention on others—to serve others, to help others, to teach, coach, support, etc. Embrace this energy and sacrilize it—so you do not 'have' to do this or 'need' to do this, but you consider it a privilege to do it.

5) *A strong risk-embracer meta-program* (#46). When you are in the presence of risking something (time, money, effort, energy, reputation, etc.), do you easily and quickly embrace the risk? Are do you tend to be aversive to risk? Do you have a strong need for safety and security? Visionary leaders are risk-embracers. They automatically focus on the opportunities rather than the risks. Embrace this energy and be sure to set up some continency plans in the back of your mind if things go south.

6) *A strong toward motivation meta-program* (#35). What activates your motivation strategy, what you want and desire? What you hope for and envision? Or what you want to avoid and make sure doesn't happen? Visionary leaders have a strong *toward* motivation. Embrace this energy *and* welcome an awareness of what you are moving away from so it is ecological and wise.

While that's the formula for a visionary leader, there are other meta-programs that can enhance and enrich it. They will be *optimizers*, not perfectionists (#40), *collaborative,* not competitive (#43, #45), they will be *bold,* not cautious in decision making (#47), and *responsible,* not over- or under-responsible (#53).

**Your Program for Developing as a Visionary Leader**

I hope that many reading this will want to set this as a new personal and experiential goal—to become a visionary leader. This is just as important among us in this community as it is when you are developing visionary leaders in organizations.

1) Intention aim to *expand* your meta-programs so that you can operate from the above six meta-programs.
2) Identify the *beliefs* and *values* that correspond to the meta-programs and intentionally change your beliefs and re-prioritize your values.
3) Give yourself permission to shift your personal identity to that of a visionary leader. Flush out and reframe any and every objection.
4) Take your visionary leader goal and ask all of the well-formed outcome questions about it.
5) Take your visionary leader goal and do a kinesthetic walk through your Meta Place.
6) Address any and every objection so that you can make it fit with your beliefs and values.

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #52**
**December 22, 2025**
*Problem Solving #1*

# THE STRUCTURE OF A PROBLEM

What is the actual *structure* of a problem? I recently discovered that I had assumed that I knew when actually I did not. That recent discovery occurred *after* I did the *5-Minute Manager* training in Hong Kong. I took the days after the training to reflect on it, update the manual, and in the process I learned *a lot of things* that I did not know during the training. Amazing how that works!

Many decades ago Robert Martin wrote a fascinating book, *Change Management Excellence* (1999). It was there that he used the Well-Formed Outcome as his guide for creating a Well-Formed Problem. Later I expanded and develop it further in *Creative Solutions* (2017). After having studied the sequence of problems for decades in the context of therapy, I unwittingly assumed that *the sequence* itself was the structure. But I was wrong. It is not.

Working with that Martin's model (and many others over the years) when I expanded the Well-Formed Problem, what resulted was an extensive process for problem-solving. At that time, I really thought that it was *the structure* of a problem. However I was confusing the sequence of factors that one could use in gathering information about the problem as the same thing as the actual structure of a problem. Only recently have I become aware of that confusion.

What I had was a model of the information processes about a problem so that we could clearly and precisely define it—create a *well-defined problem.* We do that so that we can then be clear on *what* it is to solve. Yet that is not the same as knowing *the structure of a problem.* To identify the difference, consider this question:

> Do you have a mental model in your mind of a problem which allows you to see it, to see the problem? What does it looks like? What are its component parts? Does that supply you with a strategy for how to quickly get to the heart of the problem?

While the well-formed problem certain provides a lot of clarity and focus, it does not give us a picture of a problem. That's the difference. So I really did not have a model of the structure. Realizing that enabled me to begin to consider that.

Now one problem with the well-formed problem process is this: It is not quick. In fact, because the processes are thorough and extensive, the process is actually quite time-consuming. And inasmuch as the process does not include *a problem's structure,* it only provides a step-by-step process for gathering high quality information and then generating a description of a well-formed problem. That was a glaring absence in the first edition of the 5-Minute Manager.

What I find amazing is that I only discovered that a week ago! In all of the preparation leading up to the *5-Minute Manager* training, I did not consider that I did not know the structure of a problem. And as I contemplate the scores and scores of books and articles on problem-solving I've read over the years, I would say that I don't think anyone else has ever specified a problem's *actual structure.* Amazing, right?

The day after the training, *The 5-Minute Manager* in Hong Kong, I spent several hours reflecting on the

training and what I learned. That's when *I discovered the missing piece*— the very *structure* of a problem. Realizing I only had a process for clarity of definition, I asked myself, "What is the actual structure of a problem?" I did not know. In the training I had generated a process of *7 problem-solving questions* that would lead a person to clearly defining 'the real problem' so it could be solved. But that was the *how-to* not a description of the structure.

Now to identify the structure of any experience, we generally begin with all of the variables, ask about how they are sequenced, how they are put together, how they interact with each other, and how they show up in real life. This is what we have been doing in NLP since the beginning. It is what I began doing with *resilience* in my modeling of that from 1990 to 1994. So what is the structure of a problem?

**First, a Trigger**

Overall, a problem has a trigger, something to which a person responds. That trigger tells the person when to have the problem; it tells the person the place (environment, area, domain, context) where he can be triggered to have a problem. The trigger then activates the person. It works *as if* it were a Stimulus—Response pattern (S-R). It is not, but it *seems* that way because things get connected. This is the power of association.

> Tommy calls us 'stupid,' we feel insulted, rejected, or attacked. We associate a bodily feeling (shame and embarrassment) and respond to the trigger with yelling at Tommy or running away. *It seems* that the trigger (the words) sets off the emotional problem of the symptom (feeling criticized). But actually the emotions are but symptoms of the problem and not the actual problem.

**Next, a Stimulus—Response Connection**

Once we have a S-R association, we easily anticipate that if something isn't done, things are going to get worse. So we worry and fret as we imaginatively anticipate the consequences of the problem (e.g., more and more insults and rejection). Yet once again, the consequences are not the actual problem. They are additional results of the problem like the emotional symptoms. Yet the S-R association doesn't work all the time or everywhere, only in certain contexts (when we think Tommy means it). In other contexts, it doesn't generate the problem (when we are joking about the word 'stupid'). So the context is not the problem.

**After Four Variables, Then the Problem!**

What then is the problem if not these four variables? How is a problem actually structured? First, in the structure of a problem there is first *a want* (or a not-want). "I want to be respected by Tommy and called his friend." And its opposite: "I don't want to be called 'stupid.'" There is what I don't want—the name calling. The name calling blocks me from getting want I want. It is an obstacle that interferes with what I want.

Next, there are *the meanings* that I give to the name-calling (e.g., if he calls me stupid, I must be stupid; if he calls me that, he is hating and rejecting me which means the end of the friendship; if Tommy does this, everyone will do this all of my life forever; I'll never be accepted; I'm flawed and worthless, etc.).

With this we now have identified the beginning of the structure of a problem. Problems typically involve the world you live in. You take something, set a desire for something other than that and now you have a gap between where you are today and where you want to be in the future. That *mental gap* is the beginning of a problem. It is not yet a problem. To that gap you may think, "This is great, I will apply one or more resources, bridge the gap and achieve what I want." So what is that? You could call it excitement, passion, taking up a challenge, unleashing your potentials, etc.

To have a problem, to that mental gap, you need some negative thinking. "Why can't I have want I ant when I want it?" "It's going to take time and effort." "I don't know how to bridge this gap." "No one could ever get over that gap; it's too big." Add whatever are your favorite lines of negative thinking and now you have a problem. You hare *in your mind* an obstacle that blocks you from getting what you want. You have "thrown" (*blemo*) in front of you (*pro-*) an obstacle— you have created a problem.

All problems are inside our minds. There are no problems "out there" beyond your cortex! Out there are only *conditions that we find in the world.* Out there is what exists. *Inside your mind is how you think about what exists.* As the meaning-maker, you are also the problem creator. The structure of the problem lies in *how* you think about something, *what* you think, and what you think about your thinking. That's because problems are multi-level layers of thoughts.

Ah, now we are getting close to having a picture of the structure of a problem. Do you want a picture? You can now use *the Meta Place* diagram to sketch out its structure. And with that we can begin to understand what a problem is and how a problem works. We can specify our unique strategy for creating any one of our problems. [More in the next posts]

**From: L. Michael Hall**
**2025 Neurons #53**
**December 29, 2025**
*Problem Solving #2*
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# THE ART OF CREATING GOOD AND BAD PROBLEMS

In the last post, I described *the structure* of a problem. A problem is primed by something in the outside world, some *condition* that you want to change. Whatever it is that exists 'out there,' you want it to be more than, or different from, what it is. In this way, you create *a gap* in your mind. If the gap is a positive one for you, you are excited and delighted. If the gap is a negative one, you are upset, stressed, angry, fearful, etc. You are probably grumpy and not in a good state of mind.

This gives an understanding of what a problem is. *A problem is your layers of thinking* about something 'out there.' You represent that thing in your mind, you language it, you create beliefs about it, about yourself in dealing with it, about the resources needed to address it, you create a strategy for the *how-to* of dealing with it (or the lack of a strategy), you create thoughts about what it means about you, assumptions about the world, and on and on. This is *the structure* of a problem. This is how you *structure a problem in your mind and body.*

The good news: Problems do not exist 'out there' in the world. You cannot take a picture of a problem; put it on a scale and weigh it; you cannot take it in your hands to feel it. Problems are not empirical, they are mental constructs of your understanding about something that you're dealing with—a person, an event, a thing, etc. The word 'problem' is a nominalization which means it is a false noun. It sounds like a *thing,* but it is not a thing. It involves a set of actions or processes— processes in your mind as your construe what it is, how it works, its significance, and what you should do. Ultimately, you are the problem creator. And if the creator, you are the one to be the problem solver.

**The Art of Creating a Bad Problem**
Suppose you want to create a really *bad* problem, how would you do it. First, to have a problem you have to pick some *condition* in the world to which you respond.

1) *Identify a trigger.* Start with anything that can serve as a trigger: Anything a person can respond to.
2) *Associate a strong negative emotion* to the trigger. Let your neurons fire and wire together thereby creating some somatic symptoms in your body.
3) *Forecast it into your future.* Imagine this S-R going out into your future darkening everything. Exaggerate to awfulize it. Now you have consequences that you can fear, worry about and fret yourself over.
4) *Make it pervasive.* Assume this will occur everywhere in your life, in all contexts.
5) *Negatively appraise it.* Appraise all of this with some negative meanings so that you feel upset or distressed.

6) *Negatively meta-think it.* As you then think about those negative meanings, develop limiting or flawed beliefs, understandings, identities, etc. about them. Personalize it so that you make it about you—that you are flawed and inadequate.
7) *Assume the worst.* Allow your mind to make unconscious assumptions on the order of —this is inevitable, you can do nothing about it, everybody see how weak and pathetic you are.

Do all of that and bingo! You can thereby generate a deep and thorough-going problem that will stop you in your tracks preventing you from being effective or successful in life. And if you can do this with the simplest things in life, imagine the misery, dysfunction, and unproductiveness you can create by inventing other problems. This is the structure of a bad problem.

**Now for Creating Good Problems**

Enough of that. What's the structure of a good problem? Let's now look at how to structure yourself for a good problem. Good problems are those problem that you want. You want to work with it and solve it. It challenges you and in solving it you develop your intelligence and skills and you do something productive.

1) *Chose your trigger.* Start with anything that can serve as a trigger: something anything a person can respond to (a puzzle, a internet game, an athletic challenge, etc.).
2) Associate a strong positive emotion to the trigger. Let your neurons fire and wire together. This is fun, an adventure, a way to develop and unleash my potentials, etc.
3) *Forecast a bright future.* Imagine this S-R going out into your future brightening everything, that it will solve additional problems and opens up new areas for exploration.
4) *Contextualize appropriately.* Assume this will occur in a great many places in life especially in areas that are important to you. What I learn in sports applies to business, and family, and health, etc.
5) *Positively appraise it.* Give it not only positive meanings, but meanings that empower you as a person. Declare that this problem is a challenge, important to solve, requires a disciplined mind.
6) *Positively meta-think it.* Then appraise it as having more diverse positive meanings in terms of your beliefs, values, decisions, identity, etc. Meta-state yourself with resources for solving the problems—critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, executive thinking skills, etc.
7) *Assume the best.* Make assumptions that bring out your best and put you into a place of creativity and passion: this is a learning that will implies even more solutions; this can be applied across many disciplines.

How about that? *Good and bad problems ultimate lie in your hands*—or more accurately, in your mind. It lies in how you think, how you construct meaning, the quality of the meanings that you make, and the resources that you unleash. Here's to being a great meaning-maker, problem-solver in the next year! May you have many good problems! Good problems are challenges to take on to see what you can do with them. These are problems that give you purpose and passion; the are problems that make you come alive, problems that develop your thinking, intelligence, creativity, humanity. May your new year be full of really good problems!