



# Communicating More Effectively with NLP

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One of the basic tenets of NLP is that excellent communicators do three things: they know their outcome; they develop sensory acuity; they become behaviourally flexible. In this article we examine an NLP Model of Communication to explore the notion of how learning about internal processing can enhance our communication skills . . .

Communication - defined variously by my dictionary as 'conversing together familiarly, to give a share of, to transmit' - is commonly agreed to be the biggest single issue facing all of us in our attempts to manage our relationships effectively.

Examine the relationships that currently affect you - and your friends and loved ones. Yes, all of them: those in your private life and those in the business or businesses you work in. What's your verdict? How well do you and your acquaintances generally 'commune with' others? How good are your communication skills? Where would you rate your current performance on a scale of 1 - 10, when 10 represents excellence? Is achieving a high rating on this subjective scale something you really do believe is worth putting some time and effort into now?

If the answer to the last question is, 'Yes!' then indulge me by journeying with me into the future.

**'The meaning of a communication is the response it elicits . . .'**

Imagine, if you would, a world in which communicating with yourself and others is something you can do exquisitely and elegantly, a world in which you feel totally at home, a world in which you are able to be congruent and express that congruence in the way in which you build rapport with others, in your body language and through the words you are using to influence them to change their minds.

Stand back and enjoy watching yourself behaving like this. Notice how easily you build and maintain rapport with the people around you. Notice how, from a distance like this, your interaction looks like a fluid dance with people, words, voice intonation and pitch moving in harmonious patterns around you, ebbing and flowing easily and naturally, connected and yet separate.

Recognise the non-verbal signals that let you know just how successfully you and the other people involved in this scene are listening to and understanding each other now.



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Notice that there is a direction to the communication going on here. People are getting what they want and are getting it in a way which ensures that everyone in the process is a winner - and, more importantly, feels like a winner. You know this because the responses that you are getting are the ones you intended to create. They sound, feel and look right; they connect with your outcome and with theirs. Everyone is happy with what is going on here.

Ask yourself: 'Is there anything else that you might care to add that will enhance this future of yours?' If there is, just do it now. Add it in and notice the positive effect it has.

Then step back into this future scenario. Experience it in its totality. Be aware of what you're hearing; the words and the patterns of sound containing those words, the way in which all the players are tuning into one another, the sounds which let you know this is a true meeting of minds.

How does it feel, hearing people talking with you like this? What are you seeing as you look at, speak with and converse with them? Be aware of the physiological changes in them and in yourself as you move forward towards achieving your outcomes -together. Above all notice the ease and flexibility with which you can move and change within this 'dance' to align and re-align yourself in the direction of achieving what you and your partners targeted at the outset of this process.

### **'The difference that makes the difference . . .'**

Now you've experienced what you want to achieve in your communication with others, let's unpick some of the individual elements which will make, and have already made, that work for you, now.

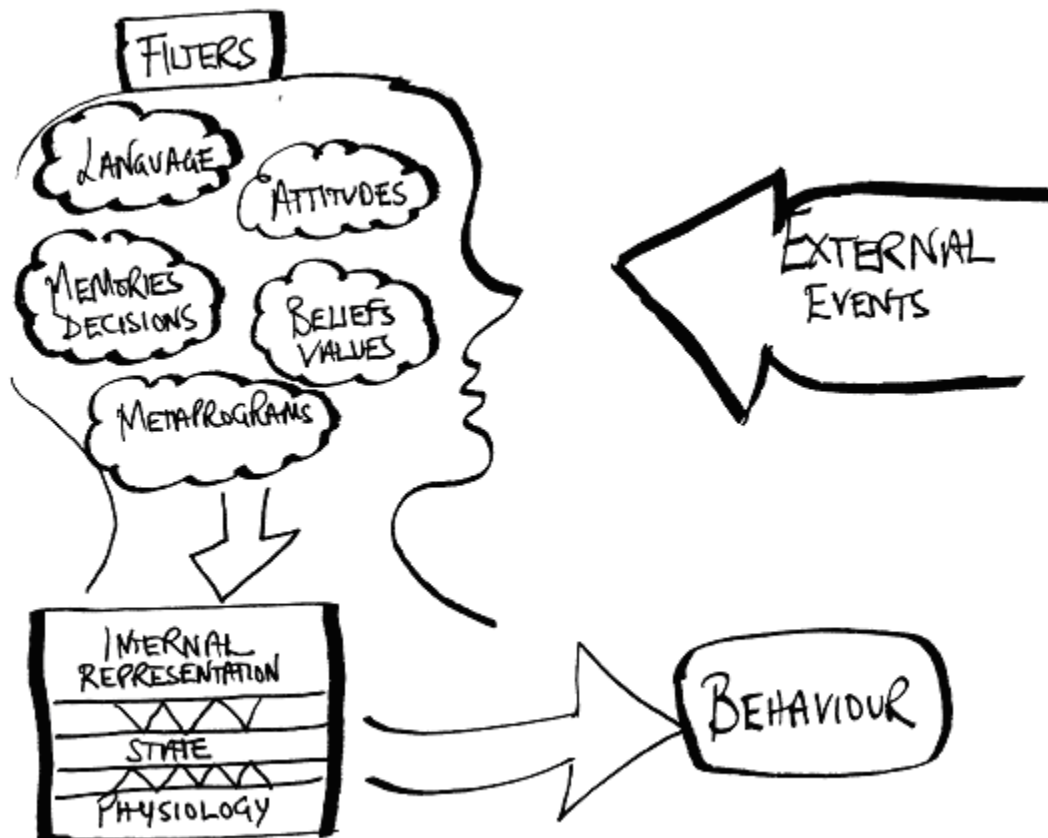
NLP is all about communication. Bandler and Grinder set out all those years ago to model the strategies of excellent communicators and to detect which specific elements of what they did made the difference that created the real difference.

They extended the traditional models of communicating into an in-depth exploration of what happens to an individual's internal processing when s/he is communicating with others. Their outcome: to study the structure of subjective experience.

### **'A map is not the territory . . .'**

Take a look at the following model of communication.





It's one that's fairly commonly represented in the NLP community. And it has always seemed to me to be an important one in terms of enhancing understanding about what is actually going on internally when we communicate either with ourselves or with others. It takes us beyond traditional models which simply examine the notions of encoding and decoding messages and the interference, the noise, which can intervene to distort those processes.

In this model we are considering the ways in which we each individually 'filter' the information coming in to us from the outside world to create our own internal 'maps' of the territory in which we operate. In a sense this model 'maps' our internal noise; those things that interfere with or enhance our communication with others. And it is this map which we, as excellent communicators can learn to listen to and read more effectively - it is interesting to note here, that this is something we already do, more or less well, when we are communicating with others. In the main we do it unconsciously. Bring a little more consciousness to that process now and you will find that you can significantly improve your communicating prowess and, in that state, return it to that area of your experience which we call 'unconscious competence' so that you can use it as elegantly and as appropriately as you will choose to do.



**‘We can’t not communicate . . . ‘**

Let’s explore the model’s component elements . . .

First: all of us experience an on-going stream of information coming to us from the external world.

Second: our bodies and brains are programmed to store it all in different places through a set of in-built processes that filter and sort that information in different ways. Our filters are idiosyncratic, uniquely ours, honed by our experience and, to a great extent, by the experience of the significant others in our lives - our parents, wider family members, role models and so on.

These filters are placed on a continuum ranging from what is conscious to what occurs at an unconscious level. Their functions; generalisation, deletion and distortion; work together to create an effective internal system for operating in the world; the individual ‘programming’ we NLPers observe.

The more conscious filters are those like our language patterns - according to the philosopher Wittgenstein the language we use ‘mirrors’ our world. As such it necessarily limits or de-limits whole areas of our experience. Much of NLP deals with developing our use of language to ensure that the words we choose match the language patterns of and hence help us to build closer rapport with the person or people with whom we are dealing.

Our attitude to life in general operates as a strong filter. It’s the ‘glass half full or half empty’ syndrome which makes the difference here. Our past decisions and memories of events operate in the same way. If what we are faced with resembles something we have met before then we are likely to have developed response strategies that reflect our original experience - whether that was positive or negative.

Our values and beliefs work at a more unconscious level. They come in very fast at appropriate - and sometimes inappropriate - moments and cause us to make judgements about we will or will not tolerate or take account of.

At the most unconscious level we find our ‘metaprograms’. These are the systematic, habitual patterns on which we act. Some NLPers have referred to them as our ‘hard wiring’. They generally work so effectively for us that we rarely question them. Good communicators recognise their own, and others’ metaprogram patterns and can use them to motivate others and stimulate good decision making.



**Putting theory into action . . .**

Some years ago, I came across a situation in education where a newly appointed inspector was attempting to influence her boss, the Chief Inspector, to call a complete halt to his In-Service training plans, retrench and 'confess' to the County Education Committee that his team had so over-extended the monies available to them that the deficit by the end of the financial year would amount to one and a half million pounds. The Chief Inspector's metaprogram profile included the following, that he:

- moved towards goals and was something of a risk taker
- liked having lots of options rather than working to procedures
- operated at big picture, the global, rather than the specific, small-detail level
- sorted by differences rather than similarities.

She had been tackling him over the issue by pointing out that;

- he had no option over this matter - it needed to be sorted
- as they were both relatively new appointments making this disclosure now would be treated favourably by the Committee
- if it only came to light the following April they would both lose their jobs
- she, in particular, was fearing for her job and she thought he should be too.

She changed this script to one more appropriate to his metaprograms saying something like this:

'I've changed my mind. I'm now seeing what I had thought was a huge threat and setback as an even bigger opportunity to change the way we are doing things here. Provided that we inform the Committee about why we're doing it we can choose to change the whole picture and do things in a completely different way from the way they've ever been done before, either in this County or in any other.'

He approached the Chair of the Education Committee that very day, stopped the programme he had inherited from his predecessor and created a successful, highly innovative new strategic plan for teacher development!

**'Mind and body are part of the same system . . .'**

Once the external information has passed through these filters - often in nano-seconds rather than in the lengthy time it's taken you to read this far - it creates some form of internal representation, an image, a script or other auditory input, some level of feeling perhaps. This will help to create a 'state of mind' in response to the original input which will then instantaneously translate into an observable physiological response.



So, for instance, if the internal representation you have created is generally negative, your state will move towards negativity and your body will change physiologically: perhaps some of your muscle groups will become tense, you may clench your jaw - or some other part of your anatomy! And out of this set of responses will come the behaviour you choose to exhibit. You may snap or smile at the other person, rush out of the room slamming the door, give someone a bear hug of welcome, or what you will.

It is also important to be aware that, while each of us is technically able to create internal representations in any one of the sensory systems; visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory; most of us have a predilection for working mainly in one or two of these fairly exclusively. The majority of us have a 'lead' system in one of the senses and a main one in one of the others. Good communicators are more flexible than the rest of us and have the ability to switch representational systems at will.

### **'English as a foreign language . . .'**

Anyone trained to listen and observe can identify which one of these you're operating in very quickly. Your eye movements will give away the lead system while your language will cue the acute listener into your main one.

To make a real difference to your skills, learn to read all these signals; watch for physiological changes, observe behaviour, listen to language patterns for clues about others' maps, stand or sit side by side with them to feel and see what's happening from their point of view.

And having 'observed' all these things use the same skills to experiment with greater flexibility in your behaviour. Match others' patterns, speak in their language - you may think you've always done this, but it's quite possible that to someone else the words you had been using were as alien to them as an unknown foreign language! Utilise what you have gleaned about the ways in which you need to present your arguments, your ideas or suggestions to ensure that they are delivered in way you want them to be.

Then, and only then, when you're speaking their language, using the right 'predicates' to respond to the cues they give you and employing their metaprograms, when you're fully 'in rapport' with them, can you be said to be truly communing with, conversing and sharing familiarly with others.

