



The Changeworks

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Workshops with Thomas Condon

PO Box 5909, Bend, OR 97708

001-541-382-1894 email: changewk@yahoo.com

<http://www.thechangeworks.com>

Ericksonian Hypnosis and the Enneagram About Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP)

NLP is a set of distinctions and techniques for altering the structure of subjective experience. Created in the 1970's by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, NLP is based in linguistics, psychology and communication. Among other things it offers a model of good communication and good rapport. It has had extensive applications in the fields of business, education, training and health, as well as in therapeutic changework.

NLP is based upon the premise that experience has structure, and that by altering the structure, you can alter the experience. NLP helps you analyze how you create your subjective experience through your senses. At any given moment, your internal experience has a visual part - what you see around you or in your mind's eye; an auditory part - hearing the sounds in your environment or listening to internal voices; and a kinesthetic part - your emotions and body feelings. As you experience the world through your five senses, you interpret the information and then act on it.

In broad strokes, NLP helps you recognize your primary sensory modality – whether you are generally visual or auditory or kinesthetic or favor a combination of those primary senses. Nobody is really purely auditory, visual or kinesthetic, but you might find that you have a favorite orientation. Once you've determined your existing sensory bias, NLP offers techniques to expand your experience of your other senses.

NLP is not really therapy but it does study patterns of change that occur in many therapies under different guises. Grinder and Bandler studied the behavior of particularly effective psychotherapists like Virginia Satir, the founder of Family Therapy, hypnotherapist Milton Erickson and Gestalt Therapist Fritz Perls – master therapists with vastly different styles.

Bandler and Grinder analyzed what these experts did rather than what the experts *said* they did. Then the two men determined what these very different therapists all had in common, any consistent patterns that the therapists shared when they produced their “miraculous” results. Grinder and Bandler found many of these “meta” patterns and made them explicit, codifying each of them into learnable techniques. These techniques appear and re-appear in all kinds of therapies.

NLP has implicit roots in the school of psychology called Behaviorism, an approach to change that maintains that problem behavior and painful emotions result from faulty learning. Behavioral therapists are generally directive and aim to help the client relearn more effective

behavior and resolve their unwanted emotions. Behavioristic therapy, like NLP, is usually short-term, issue-focused and more concerned with change than insight.

NLP's strength is also its weakness. While presenting a powerful set of techniques for effecting change, NLP is not a model for representing the complete individual. Behaviorism generally denies the existence of personality and concentrates on altering observable external patterns of behavior. Changework with NLP is powerful but piecemeal because it deliberately takes behavior out of context.

Phobias, for instance, have a reliable sensory structure and NLP offers several clever, effective techniques for eliminating phobias. But the system ignores how the phobia might be tied to deeper personality patterns and issues. A Six with a phobia of snakes and an Eight with a phobia of snakes actually have a different problem, since the phobia has a different meaning in the person's general life script. Some Sixes are phobic *in general* and having uncontrollable fears can be part of how the Six maintains his identity as a weakling. The Eight's snake phobia could express her relationship to her vulnerabilities. Unlike Sixes, Eights suppress their weakness, which can then come out in the form of phobias.

NLP also has a mixed reputation due to the amoral, opportunistic way it is sometimes taught and used. NLP's secrets of communication and persuasion can easily be used for unscrupulous or sociopathic ends and the system is occasionally yoked to goals like selling used cars to people who don't need them. NLP training is also quick and offers no psychological context for the use of its techniques; a structural engineer, ready for a career change, could be certified and practicing NLP in months, blissfully unaware that people are different from bridges.

That said, NLP gets several things right and it has one major use: to analyze the sensory patterns characteristic of each Enneagram style and to use the information to discover how each style creates their subjective reality. Each Enneagram strategy is like a skill and identify the specific steps in the story you tell yourself. It also pinpoints the sensory qualities of your personality defenses that are the most compelling.

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