



THE NLP TOOLKIT

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Introduction

*“We don’t get a chance to do that many things, and every one should be really excellent.
Because this is our life.”*
Steve Jobs

Personal excellence is such a broad concept that people often have trouble understanding what it really means. Does excellence mean that you have to abandon all of your old beliefs? Does excellence require the creation of a new identity? What about friends and family, how do they figure into the formula of personal excellence?

So many questions and yet there are only a handful of readily available answers. We don’t normally talk about personal excellence, but it determines the outcomes of so many things in our lives, from how we handle personal relationships to how we perform in the workplace.

Is there a field that centers on personal excellence?

Yes and that field is called neurolinguistic programming, or simply, NLP. For the purpose of simplifying things and getting you up to speed with this exciting field, I’ve prepared two essential definitions of NLP:

NLP is a method of exploring and modifying human thought and behavior through language.

NLP is a set of techniques for modelling personal excellence in every aspect of a person’s life.

Neurolinguistic programming can also be likened to a toolbox that can be used at will to make changes to the human mind. If you’ve ever wondered if there was a way to overcome old beliefs and values to make positive changes in your life, you’ve come to the right place.

The NLP Toolkit

Since NLP has been around for several decades now, it has come to encompass more than one formal field of study. NLP is no longer just about linguistics or language-in-use. It is psychology, sociology, linguistics, and even hypnosis, rolled into one dynamic package.

To facilitate your voyage into this exciting field, *The NLP Toolkit* was created. This volume was designed to give you a vital head start by providing you with the essential concepts and principles that animate this field so that you will become more adequate in your continuing studies of neurolinguistic programming.

Foundational Concepts & Assumptions

It would be impossible to fit all of the concepts that the field of NLP has absorbed throughout the years into one short volume. However, there are some things in this discipline that simply do not change. These are the foundational concepts and assumptions that will form the core of your study of NLP. Here they are in easy to digest, bite-sized pieces:

I. Learning & Personal Change

One of the most important assumptions in NLP is that everyone, regardless of their social background, is capable of utilizing language to learn and achieve personal greatness or excellence.

By “greatness” we refer to personal progression from a current state towards a more desirable one. You don’t need to be Superman to show the world that you’re capable of positive change.

NLP can help you to achieve small and big changes in the way you think, feel and learn. Through these baby steps, you will be able to develop a renewed appreciation of how much control you have over your life. Things are only bound to get better after your initial application of NLP techniques.

II. The Impact of Language

In NLP, everything is accomplished and *can be accomplished* through the use of language. This is the primary presupposition that drives the linguistic component of neurolinguistic programming.

There is nothing in your mind, or in the entirety of human existence and reality, that cannot be expressed and understood through language. This

gives NLP practitioners plenty of control when it comes to tackling issues and formulating solutions for specific problems.

NLP introduces numerous linguistic approaches that are not commonly used by the majority of the population. These approaches often motivate practitioners to go beyond old modes of thinking so that they can gain valuable insights about how their own minds work in certain situations.

III. The Rich World of Our Senses

The VAKOG System presupposes that people have dominant representation systems that they use daily to make sense of reality. VAKOG is an acronym that stands for the major human senses: V – visual, A – auditory, K – kinesthetic, O – olfactory, and G – gustatory. The last two representation systems, olfactory and gustatory, are uncommon, but should still be taken into consideration when practitioners are discovering their dominant representation systems for the first time.

The point of the VAKOG System is that we each have our own unique ways of thinking, expressing and comprehending the world, and we should all take this fact into consideration when communicating with each other.

For example, if the person you're talking to is operating with a dominantly visual representation system, using words and concepts that allude to an auditory representation system will likely slow down progress, and may even cause misunderstanding.

IV. Openness to New Knowledge

NLP only becomes an effective tool for personal change if practitioners are willing to learn new things. This willingness to learn is rooted in the understanding that we don't know all the answers, and that we may have certain values and beliefs that are flawed.

Figuring out which parts of the core system (which is comprised of values and beliefs) are problematic is up to the practitioners themselves. Beliefs or values that work for one person may not work at all for the next person. It is essential for practitioners to sit down and examine the “parts of the whole” to discover what’s been causing the negative outcomes.

V. Subjective Perception versus Objective Reality

Beginning NLP practitioners will progress more swiftly by remembering a maxim: “the mental map is *not* reality itself.” What does this maxim mean? Simple: a person’s representation of reality does not have a direct and faultless correspondence to reality.

For example, if I were to think of an apple, my idea of a red, juicy fruit may be different from what *you* think when you hear the word — perhaps you visualized a bright green apple, or even a technology brand.

Both of our conceptions about what an apple is may be acceptable or false, depending on how we test our assumptions. An apple resting on a table is the objective reality. My idea of the apple, which may involve its texture, taste and color is the map that helps me understand what the object on top of the table is.

The dichotomy between subjective perception and objective reality may seem incredibly simplistic, but it’s vital for your education as a future NLP practitioner.

Throughout your journey of learning and self-discovery, you will encounter many instances where you will be torn between maintaining an old belief and accepting a new solution (and belief) based on what you’ve observed in objective reality. Accepting that your world is much bigger and more dynamic than your mind’s map of reality will allow you to make lasting, positive changes in any domain in your life.

VI. Mental Filters Abound

If we were to agree that people have individual maps of reality, then how do they use these maps? How do people apply their internal representations to the world at large? The answer is: through the use of mental filters. Our mental maps of reality aren't exactly like cartographic maps that we use to find places in an unfamiliar territory.

Generally speaking, a mental map is a complex set of categories that influence a person's decisions and actions in different situations. Mental filters, on the other hand, can be likened to an automatic mechanism that allows a person to make use of the map without having to manually go over the categories.

Reality as we know it has a tendency to bombard people with thousands of different stimuli on a daily basis. If we were to pay attention to everything around us in a mechanical and unthinking fashion, I can assure you that your day will be most unproductive.

Our mental filters are the reason we aren't completely overwhelmed with different kinds of stimuli. Our mind uses these filters to accept, contest and discard different kinds of information. Over time, this process begins to change (and sometimes, unravel), so there is a need to review how your thinking has evolved through time.

VII. Center on Feedback

Feedback is another aspect of the NLP communication model that requires constant emphasis.

Normally when we think of communicating with someone, we focus on what we're going to express, and that's the end of the process for us. In NLP, it's not possible to express anything in a coherent and useful manner without feedback.

In neurolinguistic programming, people will only be able to create meaningful expressions if they truly understand one another. Heightened understanding, which minimizes various types of mental distortions, is the prize of centering on feedback.

The principle of feedback also applies to situations where a person is crafting solutions to existing problems. Feedback is the “raw material” that helps to shed light on problem areas of an existing system. Think of your current thought patterns and modes of action as “systems.” A system is only worth keeping if it helps produce a desirable outcome.

When a system is no longer producing the targeted outcome, it has to be examined, evaluated and changed. NLP allows a practitioner to take apart a system through the use of language.

NLP practitioners will be able to identify problem areas within a system by studying how they think and express themselves. The meaningful examination of specific thought expressions is made possible by the linguistic component of NLP.

VIII. Failure IS an Option

This may sound strange coming from a book about learning and personal excellence... But failure is actually one of the best things that you can experience as an NLP practitioner.

From day one we have been taught to avoid failure as much as possible, so much so that we can become fearful or anxious about learning and trying new things. This is probably one of the reasons why many people find it hard to extricate themselves from negative situations, because they are unable to look beyond the result or outcome in front of them.

What NLP teaches us is that any kind of result, whether positive or negative, is feedback that you can use however way you want. If your actions brought a negative result, *you're* not a failure.

The action simply created a result that wasn't desirable. Instead of thinking along the lines of "this would never work," NLP arms practitioners with the tools to make sense of the negative outcome. What needs to be changed? What is the root of the cycle that continues to create negative outcomes?

Accepting the inevitability of failure in both familiar and unfamiliar situations also opens the practitioner's mind to continuous learning.

When you begin seeing failure as a means of achieving success, you're no longer held back by the "emotional payload" associated with not attaining a goal immediately. Instead, you become more objective and straightforward in dealing with setbacks.

When things don't turn out as planned, you will be able to find takeaways that enhance your knowledge of the problems. These takeaways will make you stronger and more knowledgeable as a problem solver. With further help from NLP tools, the solution-making process becomes faster and more meaningful, too.

IX. The Primacy of Human Intention

One of the core forces that drive words and actions is human intention. Intention is defined as the overall plan behind every word or action.

Proponents of neurolinguistic programming believe that people are always driven by positive intentions, even if the opposite appears to be true. This assumption is based on the fact that humans are reward-driven beings, and positive intentions naturally bring about different kinds of rewards (e.g. mental, emotional, physical, etc.)

Why is this important to NLP practitioners?

If you're applying NLP techniques to improve how you communicate with others, you need to have certain assumptions in place so that you will

become more adaptive or flexible. This is one particular assumption that will help you deal with difficult individuals, whether they be family, friends or even office mates.

While the positive intentions may not benefit you or other people, a positive intention that benefits the subject will always exist side-by-side with words spoken and actions committed. Getting to the heart of the matter and discovering concealed intentions is one of the biggest challenges that you will face as a practitioner of neurolinguistic programming.

X. A Single Part is Not the Whole

Another flawed type of logic that many people subscribe to is the idea that once a person does something bad or unacceptable, that person is forever defined or characterized by that single action or event. In neurolinguistic programming, the paradigm is placed on its head: a single event is never the basis for a person's whole identity, or what the person can achieve or accomplish in the future.

This particular assumption is incredibly useful when you're dealing with individuals that have been branded as troublesome or even "hopeless." NLP practitioners are often tasked with attempting to inculcate positive change in individuals that need them the most. These are usually people who have already been branded negatively by others because of past behaviors.

Behavioral issues can be remedied through NLP, but the practitioner has to believe that everyone, even the most "hopeless" of individuals, can be capable of positive change.

Developing a positive and accommodating mindset is essential for your success as a new NLP practitioner. You can read a lot of manuals and technical information about the intricacies of NLP, but actually applying this knowledge to make your life or someone else's life better requires the

right mindset. Don't worry: your mindset will gradually evolve as you continue learning about neurolinguistic programming.

XI. Movement is Essential

Being able to move from one state to another prevents an NLP practitioner from getting stuck in a negative state of mind.

One clear way to ensure that you're never stuck in any negative state is by allowing yourself to see and accept different choices and positions. Condition yourself in such a way that you constantly make proposals to yourself when you find yourself stagnating or reeling from unacceptable outcomes. Never say "*this is it, I'm done.*"

As long as you're thinking and breathing, countless avenues of change remain open to you.

The very same avenues are also available to everyone that you are working with as a professional NLP practitioner. Of course, you will need additional training before you attain this level of expertise, but once you do attain professional-level knowledge, you're ready to help others attain personal excellence in different parts of their lives.

XII. The Dichotomy of the Mind

The human mind is split into two regions: the conscious mind and the subconscious mind. The conscious mind is responsible for employing logical processes in day to day activities.

When you perform mathematical computations or when you break down a problem to its constituent parts, that's your conscious mind working. This region of the mind is also responsible for enforcing laws, rules, mores and ethos in people's lives. When you wake up in the morning, your conscious mind is activated, making you aware of your surroundings and what activities you should be doing next.

The subconscious mind, on the other hand, is responsible for processing stimuli, memories and whole life experiences. It stores and files life information so that you can make use of your memories whenever the need arises. The subconscious mind is influenced by a person's identity, education and social background.

Another important function of the subconscious mind is that it allows a person to formulate solutions using the imagination. The conscious mind dissects a problem and targets problematic areas, but it is the subconscious mind that applies creativity to the current situation. Without the subconscious mind's intervention, you would continually run into obstacles because of the limited way in which the logical mind deals with elements and variables of a given problem.

XIII. The Reticular Activating System (RAS)

The human brain is a highly complex organ, and it's certainly powerful enough to perform mental processes that would defy the capability of many man-made computers.

However, it still remains that the human brain has a normal or average degree of operation, and it does everything in its power to conserve energy and cognitive resources. One of the ways that the brain is able to conserve its limited resources is by using the reticular activating system.

The RAS exists to help minimize useless "noise" in the environment so that a person can easily pay attention to more important information or stimuli. The RAS refocuses the mind when stimuli or information coming in from the environment is new, has emotional impact, or is related to the survival of the person.

Information or stimuli doesn't have to have all three characteristics or traits. Having just one of the three major markers is enough for the RAS.

In neurolinguistic programming, the ability of the RAS to refocus the mind is maximized by using the key markers: survival, emotion and newness. When you're creating new programs or models for yourself or an NLP client, you would do well to remember what the RAS is looking for in new information. Otherwise, there's a risk that the RAS would simply discard it.

XIV. The Power of Personal Values

A person's values are there for one major function alone: to tell the person if their actions were acceptable or not. Values influence the formation of new beliefs. For example, if a person values financial gain above all else, they would likely have a large set of beliefs that justify their desire for material wealth. People prioritize different values depending on their current situation in life.

In neurolinguistic programming, an examination of a person's current set of values is necessary if one wishes to move forward with making positive behavioral changes. The simplest way to rediscover your own values is by identifying one domain in your life that needs work.

List down negative and positive concepts that you attribute to this domain. All the words that you will be writing down will be directly associated with the major values that influence this life domain. By working backwards, you will be able to trace the evolution of your own values as they manifest in your thoughts, words and actions.

XV. Framing & Reframing

This is one NLP concept that has been in use long enough to be picked up by popular culture. When people say they are in a particular "frame of mind," they are actually referring to the amount of attention or focus they are giving to an idea, plan or outcome.

A person's mental focus is so powerful that it can change their entire perspective about a subject or situation. That's why it's so important for

NLP practitioners to become self-aware when it comes to their own mental frames.

For example, if a person wishes to land a better job to further their career, the present mental frame regarding what a good career should be will guide the person to the perfect job. However, if the person doesn't know what an ideal job looks like and they believe that their current skillset doesn't fit anywhere else, they will be unable to move forward.

Making a positive change in one's life requires having a vision of an ideal outcome and a plan to attain the desired change. None of these would be possible without a proper mental frame. Sure, you can attempt to move forward even if you have a super negative and unhelpful mindset in tow. But how much energy would you be expending just to get from point A to point B?

Having the right mental frame ensures that you are focused on the right elements in the broader picture. It also keeps you balanced and attentive as to which decisions will best suit your goals. Everyone has positive and negative mental frames. The ultimate goal of an NLP practitioner is to be able to zero in on all the negative frames and modify them so that they won't cause any more trouble.

XVI. Goal-Setting Redefined

To many people, setting a goal is similar to making a laundry list: I have to do this, accomplish that, etc. If you create goals like these, you probably have noticed that they don't serve their purpose very well. To a degree, you know what you want, but at the same time the motivation to move forward just isn't there. The reason for this "stuck" state is that the goals were simply written down – there wasn't any process involved that made them comprehensible to the mind.

Neurolinguistic programming takes away this difficulty by introducing a more intelligent way of creating goals. Instead of just writing down things

that you want to accomplish, you will be taking baby steps to identify the nature of the goal, the resources needed to accomplish it, the context of your plans, etc. In short, you're going to historicize the goal-setting process so that it becomes a perfect fit with your past life experience, current capabilities and future plans.

There will no longer be any guesswork as to what exactly you need to do to make your goals a reality. And we're not just talking about big and lofty goals.

The same NLP approach can be used to make small goals that ultimately benefit you by modifying existing beliefs and values about certain things. Remember: while a part is not the whole, the sum of the parts constitutes you as a person. If you work on life domains that have been neglected or are “malfunctioning” at the present time, you're bound to succeed.

XVII. Playing with Perspectives

Communicating with others can reveal a lot about ourselves as much as it can uncover distinct knowledge about our subjects. As we have already discussed, communication is more effective and useful if it is centered on feedback. However, there will be instances when the feedback that you get is muddled or incomprehensible. What can you do?

One NLP strategy that you can use to improve your understanding of feedback is “playing with perspectives.” Normally when we communicate with others we tend to stick to the “I” perspective, or the self-reflective position that splits the subject and speaker. From this angle you can learn plenty of things from your subject — until the subject decides to conceal their intentions and inner responses to what you're saying.

When communication begins to break down, it's time to shift your perspective from first person to second person or third person. When you shift to the second person perspective, you are assuming the role of the subject. From that angle you can begin asking the vital questions: what is

the intention? What is the purpose of the current stance? What motivated the subject to say those things?

If the second perceptual position fails to illuminate what went wrong with the exchange, a third objective position is still available. From the third person position, it's possible to analyze what you have been saying and doing as well as what feedback your subject has been giving since the beginning of the interaction.

XVIII. Meta Programs

Meta programs are habits or patterns of thought that govern how we communicate, act and make decisions in different situations. Each meta program is a map with specific ends that is influenced by our own life experiences.

In the early days of NLP it was thought that meta programs were unchangeable or unmodifiable because they seem to be associated with instinctual rather than learned responses. But as work progressed in the eighties and nineties, dedicated NLP academics discovered that meta programs, like mental filters and frames, could be modified through neurolinguistic programming.

One example of a meta program is the basic “towards/away from” formula that people use to determine what path they should take when faced with an “and/or” situation. It is believed that people work tirelessly *towards* certain outcomes and as they do, they move *away from* specific conditions or outcomes as well.

For example, a workaholic who has been sacrificing time with their family may well be working towards a semblance of financial stability, because the workaholic wishes to move away from any signs of poverty. The fear of poverty may have been the result of past childhood experiences that have ingrained certain beliefs in the person.

XIX. Anchoring New Behavior

An “anchor” is any kind of stimuli that produces a mental or emotional state in a person. NLP practitioners are known for creating and “dropping” anchors to modify a person’s behavior, with the assumption that the carefully built anchor would have a more positive effect on the subject or person receiving/using it. If the concept is confusing to you, just think of someone who has a phobia of spiders. Phobias are irrational fears of objects, people and places. The anchor is the cause of fear and panic.

When a person with arachnophobia sees a spider, they may experience a variety of negative emotional responses that are not common to the rest of the populace.

Sweaty palms, racing heartbeat – all these signs point to a deep-seated fear of something that doesn’t quite frighten the average person. Winding back to the concept of anchors, you can create different emotional or mental responses in a person by associating such responses to certain stimuli. A stimuli can be physical, verbal or even imaginary, such as a mental image.

Anchors are not exotic in the sense that you have to dig up a bunch of old NLP books to get your head around them. Anchors surround us on a daily basis. Your car beeps when one of the seatbelts haven’t been worn.

A burning smell in the kitchen immediately signals a cooking-related emergency. Weird rustling and crunching noises in the yard at night brings about a response reserved for a possible burglar in the dead of the night. We have specific responses to different types of anchors. NLP takes the natural mental process that occurs in the formation of anchors and uses it in a very conscious manner.

XX. Re-experiencing Memories

Our memories are the mirrors of our subjective experiences of life. In Plato's classical philosophy, memories can be likened to a very faint copy of the ideal – a second level approximation of objective reality. As such, there are many instances when your memories do not provide the best reference while working on changing a belief or behavior. One way to critique old memories is by consciously re-experiencing them through NLP exercises.

A person's degree of association to a memory can be gauged by how they see the "world" of the memory. If the memory is playing out in first person perspective, then the person is fully immersed and associated with everything that is taking place. On the other hand, if the person can see themselves in the memory, along with what is taking place, we can say that the person is dissociated.

Association and dissociation can be used interchangeably during NLP exercises, depending on the aim of the exercise, and what's taking place in the person's mind when certain memories are triggered or "called" to the surface of their consciousness.

XXI. Submodalities

Submodalities are products of our dominant representation systems and can be studied extensively by simply paying attention to how your mind codes and represents lived experiences. Submodalities are directly connected to meta programs and are also useful when crafting and dropping new anchors.

When a person is re-experiencing a memory with the aid of an NLP exercise, they will likely be asked to pay close attention to the sounds, smells and sights present in the memory. These recorded and recoded

aspects of the lived experience can then be analyzed to find out how a person learns and comprehends the world around them.

We normally do not do this because we tend to “skip” many parts of a memory to arrive at a segment that is most useful or memorable to us. For example, if you ate out with some friends at a newly opened restaurant, the most memorable aspect of that experience may be the smells and flavors of the beef dish that you ordered.

The person who was sitting next to you, who happened to have a crush on one of your friends, will likely remember that event differently. Everyone has their own way of coding the world to make individual experiences meaningful. It is the NLP practitioner’s job to jump into the middle of these mental processes with the main intent of bringing change wherever it is needed.

XXII. Logical Levels

Logical levels are the objective layers of an experience or issue. This concept is often employed in conflict management/resolution where two or more parties are unable to reach a peaceful resolution to their problems.

The fundamental assumption here is that problems or conflicts tend to arise because of misalignments between existing logical levels. There are two major steps that must be taken in order to bring these levels back into alignment: first, the logical levels must be fully identified and brought to light. Second, the logical levels must be compared and analyzed.

Often, the re-alignment of logical levels is possible through compromise. When this isn’t possible, alternative modes of resolution are encouraged. What’s important is that the mere use of the concept encourages people to work in “problem solving mode,” instead of resorting to hostility and other negative responses that do not address the existing issues at all.

The NLP Toolkit

This is but a short review of the fundamental concepts of neurolinguistic programming. The volume may be short and sweet, but it is adequate for anyone who is planning to learn more of this exciting and dynamic field that combines several sciences with the art of human learning.

Many more adventures await the budding NLP practitioner, and this volume is merely the door that leads to the many roads of success and personal excellence. My only advice to those who truly want to progress in this field is: *never stop learning*. Learn from the best and move out immediately into the real world to test your newfound knowledge.

Remember: there is no such thing as failure – only feedback.