

# Introducing NLP

## Uptime and Downtime

So far we have concentrated on the importance of sensory acuity, keeping the senses open and noticing the responses of people around you. This state of tuning the senses to the outside world is known as Uptime in NLP. However, there are also states that take us deeper into our own mind, our own reality. Break off from this text for a moment and remember a time when you were deep in thought....

You probably had to go deep in thought to remember. You would have focused inwards, mentally feeling, seeing and hearing. This is a state we are all familiar with. The more deeply you go in, the less you are aware of outside stimuli; this is known as Downtime in NLP. Accessing cues take you into downtime. Whenever you ask anyone to go inside to visualize, hear sounds and have feelings, you are asking him to go into downtime. Downtime is where you go to daydream, to plan, to fantasize and create possibilities.

In practice we are seldom completely in uptime or downtime; our everyday consciousness is a mixture of partly internal and partly external awareness. We turn the senses outwards or inwards depending on the circumstances we are in.

It is useful to think of mental states as tools for doing different things. Playing a game of chess involves a radically different state of mind to eating. There is no such thing as a wrong state of mind, but there are consequences. These could be catastrophic, if, for example, you try to cross a busy street in the state of mind you use to go to sleep, uptime is the best state for crossing the road! The result can be laughable, for example, if you try to say a tongue twister while in the state of mind brought on by too much alcohol. Often you do not do something well because you are not in the right state. You will not play a good game of tennis if you are in the state of mind you use to play chess.

You can access unconscious resources directly by inducing and using a type of downtime known as trance. In trance you become deeply involved in a limited focus of attention. It is an altered state from your habitual state of consciousness. Everybody's experience of trance will be different, because everybody starts from a different normal state, dominated by their preferred representational systems.

Most of the work on trance and altered states has been done in a psychotherapy setting, for all therapies use trance to some extent. They all access unconscious resources in different ways. Anyone free-associating on an analyst's couch is well into downtime, and so is someone who is role-playing in gestalt therapy. Hypnotherapy uses trance explicitly.

A person goes into therapy because they have run out of conscious resources. They are stuck. They do not know what they needs or where to find it. Trance offers an opportunity to resolve the problem because it bypasses the conscious mind and makes unconscious resources available.

Most changes take place at the unconscious level and work their way up. The conscious mind is not needed to initiate changes and often does not notice them anyway. The ultimate goal of any therapy is for the client to become resourceful again in his or her own right. Everyone has a rich personal history, filled with experience they can draw on. It contains all the material needed to make changes, if only you can get at it.

One of the reasons why we use such a small part of our possible mental capacity may be because our education system places so much emphasis on external testing, standardized achievements and meeting other people's goals. We get little training in utilising our unique internal abilities. Most of our individuality is unconscious. Trance is the ideal state of mind to explore and recover our unique internal resources.

### **The Milton Model**

*"That's a great deal to make one word mean," Alice said in a thoughtful tone.  
"When I make a word do a lot of work like that," said Humpty Dumpty, "I always pay it extra."*

(Alice in Wonderland, by Lewis Carroll)

Gregory Bateson was enthusiastic about The Structure of Magic 1, which contained the Meta Model. He saw great potential in the ideas. He told John and Richard, "There's a strange old guy down in Phoenix, Arizona. A brilliant therapist, but nobody knows what he's doing, or how he does it. Why don't you go and find out?" Bateson had known this "strange old guy", Milton Erickson, for fifteen years, and he set up an appointment for them to meet Erickson.

John and Richard worked with Milton Erickson in 1974 when he was widely regarded as the foremost practitioner of hypnotherapy. He was the founding president of the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis, and travelled extensively giving seminars and lectures as well as working in private practice. He had a world wide reputation as a sensitive and successful therapist, and was famous for his acute observation of non-verbal behaviour. Their study gave rise to two books. Patterns of Hypnotic Techniques of Milton H. Erickson Volume 1 was published by Meta Publications in 1975. Volume 2, co-written with Judith DeLozier, followed in 1977. The books are as much about their perceptual filters as Erickson's methods, although Erickson did say that the books were a far better explanation of his work than he himself could have given. And that was a fine compliment.

John Grinder has said that Erickson was the single most important model that he ever built, because Erickson opened the doorway not just to a different reality, but to a whole different class of realities. His work with trance and altered states was astonishing, and John's thinking underwent a profound rebalancing.

NLP underwent a rebalancing too. The Meta Model was about precise meanings. Erickson used language in artfully vague ways so that his clients could take the meaning that was most appropriate for them. He induced and utilized trance states, enabling

individuals to overcome problems and discover their resources. This way of using language became known as the Milton Model, as a complement and contrast to the exactness of the Meta Model.

The Milton Model is a way of using language to induce and maintain trance in order to contact the hidden resources of our personality. It follows the way the mind works naturally. Trance is a state where you are highly motivated to learn from your unconscious in an inner directed way. It is not a passive state, nor are you under another's influence. There is co-operation between client and therapist, the client's responses letting the therapist know what to do next.

Erickson's work was based on a number of ideas, shared by many sensitive and successful therapists. Many of these have become presuppositions of NLP. He respected the client's unconscious mind. He assumed there was a positive intention behind even the most bizarre behaviour, and that individuals make the best choices available to them at the time. He worked to give them more choices. He also assumed that at some level, individuals already have all the resources they need to make changes. The Milton Model is a way of using language to:

*Pace and lead the person's reality*

*Distract and utilize the conscious mind*

*Access the unconscious and resources*

### **Pacing and Leading**

Milton Erickson was masterful at gaining rapport. He respected and accepted his clients' reality. He assumed that resistance was due to lack of rapport. To him, all responses were valid and could be used. To Erickson, there were no resistant clients, only inflexible therapists.

To pace someone's reality, to tune into their world, all you need do is describe their ongoing sensory experience: what they must be feeling, hearing and seeing. It will be easy and natural for them to follow what you are saying. How you talk is important. You will best induce a peaceful inward state by speaking slowly, using a soft tonality, and pacing your speech to the person's breathing.

Gradually suggestions are introduced to lead them gracefully into downtime by directing their attention inwards. Everything is described in general terms so it accurately reflects the person's experience. You would not say, "Now you will close your eyes and feel comfortable and go into a trance." Instead you might say, "It's easy to close your eyes whenever you wish..... to feel more comfortable.....many people find it easy and comfortable to go into a trance." These sort of general comments cover any response, while gently introducing the trance behaviour.

A loop is set up. As the client's attention is constantly focussed and riveted on a few stimuli, he goes deeper into downtime. His experiences become more subjective, and these are fed back by the therapist to deepen the trance. You do not tell a person what to

do; you draw his attention to what is there. How can you possibly know what a person is thinking? You cannot. There is an art to using language in ways that are vague enough for the client to make an appropriate meaning. It is a case not so much of telling him what to think, but of not distracting him from the trance state.

These sorts of suggestions will be most effective if the transitions between sentences are smooth. For example, you might say something like, "As you see the coloured wallpaper in front of you..... the patterns of light on the walls.....while you become aware of your breathing..... the rise and fall of your chest.....the comfort of the chair.....the weight of your feet on the floor.....and you can hear the sounds of the children playing outside while you listen to the sound of my voice and begin to wonder..... how far you have entered trance.....already

Notice the words 'and', 'while' and 'as' in the example as they smoothly link the flow of suggestions, while you mention something that is occurring (the sound of your voice) and link it to something that you want to occur (going into trance).

Not using transitions makes jumpy sentences. They will be detached from each other. Then they are less effective. I hope this is clear. Writing is like speech. Smooth or staccato. Which do you prefer?

A person in a trance is usually still, the eyes are usually closed, the pulse is slower and the face relaxed. The blinking and swallowing reflexes are normally slower or absent, and the breathing rate is slower. There is a feeling of comfort and relaxation. The therapist will either use a prearranged signal to bring the client out of trance, or lead them out by what he says, or the person may spontaneously return to normal consciousness if his unconscious thinks this is appropriate.

### **The Search For Meaning**

The Meta Model keeps you in uptime. You do not have to go inside your mind searching for the meaning of what you hear, you ask the speaker to spell it out specifically. The Meta Model recovers information that has been deleted, distorted or generalised. The Milton Model is the mirror image of the Meta Model, it is a way of constructing sentences rife with deletions, distortions and generalisations. The listener must fill in the details and actively search for the meaning of what they hear from their own experience. In other words you provide context with as little content as possible. You give them the frame and leave them to choose the picture to put in it. When the listener provides the content, this ensures they make the most relevant and immediate meaning from what you say.

Imagine being told that in the past, you have had an important experience. You are not told what it was; you must search back through time and select an experience that seems most relevant to you now. This is done at an unconscious level; our conscious mind is much too slow for the task.

So a sentence like, 'People can make learnings' is going to evoke ideas about what specific learnings I can make, and if I am working on a particular problem those learnings are bound to relate to questions I am pondering. We make this kind of search all the time to make sense of what others tell us, and it is utilized to the full in trance. All that matters is the meaning that the client makes, the therapist need not know.

It is easy to make up artfully vague instructions so that a person can pick an appropriate experience and learn from it. Ask him to pick some important experience in their past, and go through it again in all internal senses to learn something new from it. Then ask their unconscious to use this learning in future contexts where it could be useful.

### **Distraction and Utilization of the Conscious Mind**

An important part of the Milton Model is leaving out information, and so keep the conscious mind busy filling the gaps from its store of memories. Have you ever had the experience of hearing a vague statement and trying to work out what it could mean?

Nominalisations delete a great deal of information. As you sit with a feeling of ease and comfort, your understanding of the potential of this sort of language is growing, for every Nominalisation in this sentence is in italics. The less that is mentioned specifically, the less risk of a clash with the other person's experience.

Verbs are left unspecified. As you think of the last time you heard someone communicate using unspecified verbs, you might remember the feeling of confusion you experienced, and how you have to search for your own meaning to make sense of this sentence.

In the same way noun phrases can be generalised or left out completely. It is well known that people can read books and make changes. (Well known by whom? Which people, what books and how will they make these changes? And what will they change from, and what will they change to?)

Judgements can be used.

"It is really good to see how relaxed you are."

Comparisons also have deletions.

"It is better to go into a deeper trance"

Both comparisons and judgements are good ways of delivering presuppositions. These are powerful ways of inducing and utilising trance. You presuppose what you do not want questioned. For example:

"You may wonder when you will go into a trance"

Or, "Would you like to enter trance now or later?"

(You will go into a trance, the only question is when)

"I wonder if you realise how relaxed you are?" (You are relaxed)

"When your hand rises that will be the signal you have been waiting for." (Your hand will rise and you are waiting for a signal)

"You can relax while your unconscious learns." (Your unconscious is learning)

"Can you enjoy relaxing and not having to remember?" (You are relaxed and will not remember)

Transitions (and, as, when, during, while) to link statements are a mild form of cause and effect. A stronger form is to use the word 'make', e.g. "Looking at that picture will make you go into a trance."

I am sure you are curious to know how mind reading can be woven into this model of using language. It must not be too specific, or it may not fit. General statements about what the person may be thinking pace and then lead their experience. For example, "You might wonder what trance will be like", or, "You are beginning to wonder about some of the things I am saying to you".

Universal quantifiers are used too. Examples are, "You can learn from every situation." and, "Don't you realise the unconscious always has a purpose?"

Modal operators of possibility are useful.

"You can't understand how looking at that light puts you deeper into trance."

This also presupposes that looking at the light does deepen the trance.

"You can't open your eyes" would be too direct a suggestion, and invites the person to disprove the statement.

"You can relax easily in that chair" is a different example. To say you can do something gives permission without forcing any action. Typically people will respond to the suggestion by doing the permitted behaviour. At the very least, they will have to think about it.

© 1990 Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour