



NEURO-SEMANTIC NLP

ON

GETTING OVER THE PAST

**Neuron Posts on www.neurosemantics.com
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Articles

The following articles were written as blogs on *Neurons* in 2018.

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GETTING OVER THE PAST

When I first began teaching NLP, I divided the 120 hours of NLP material into four areas—*Communication Excellence*, *Getting Over the Past*, *Love Workshop*, and *Guided Imagination for Resources*. In that way, over 40 weeks (10 weeks for each, 3 hours each week) we covered all of the basic content of the NLP Practitioner course.

- *Communication Excellence*: The first focused on the basic NLP Communication Model (representations, sub-modalities, and the Meta-Model). Many years later this became the book *Communication Magic* (1997/ 2001), *Executive Thinking* (2018).
- *Getting Over the Past*: The second focused on many of the past NLP patterns (Change Personal History, Decision Destroyer, Resourcing with Time-Lines, Movie Rewind, etc.).
- *Love Workshop*: The third focused on the social dimension of NLP (Meta-Programs, Embracing Differences, Conflict Resolution, Anchoring, etc.). Many years later this became the book *Games Great Lovers Play* (2002).
- *Guided Imagination for Resources*: The fourth focused on hypnotic language patterns and the use of the creative imagination for creating new resources (the Milton Model, New Behavior Generator, etc.).

I ran the second section—*getting over the past*—because at the time I had a therapy practice and I referred lots of my clients to that training as a way to understand themselves and their personal development better. I closed that practice in 1996 and took to the road (well, to the skies) as I began training NLP around the country and then around the world.

Now while my focus has shifted from psychotherapy to self-actualization psychology and to applications in business, leadership, wealth creation, expertise, coaching, etc., still “getting over the past” frequently comes up for discussion. And there’s a reason for that. Even psychologically healthy people often have a relationship to the past that does not completely serve their best interests. Sometimes it is because they have not completely finished some past business, sometimes they allow certain aspects of their past to overly influence them; and sometimes because they simply do not know how to let the past go. To that end I thought I’d write a series of posts here on Neurons to address this subject.

Your Experience of Time and Living in the Past

Whenever I speak about *the time dimension* in the Matrix Model, there are several questions that I like to begin with regarding the time dimensions:

“How much of your mental and emotional energy do you spend *in the past*?”

“If you were to divide up the past—the present—and the future into percentages, how much do you devote to each temporal aspect?” “What are your numbers?”

“Are you living *too much* in the past? Are you missing a lot of the Now?”

When I first became aware of this, I drew a circle and separated the three areas in the circle: Past, Present, Future. Then I estimated how much time I had spent that day *mentally and emotionally living in each area*. My numbers were 40, 20, and 40 respectfully. And, I did not like my numbers. Consequently, I decided to change them. I set a goal: I would reduce my *lived time* in the past to 5 to 10% and the future to 10 to 15% — thereby giving me 75 to 85% time in the present.

Then every evening I would review the time I had spent *living in the past, present, and future* that day. At first the numbers stayed pretty much the same. But as I drew the circle each evening and reflected on the time spent in each area, the numbers began shifting— 30 – 35 — 35, then 20 – 50 – 30, then 15– 75 – 10. Eventually I got to where I was spending 80 to 85% of my mental—emotional time *in the now, today, in the present!* And what an incredible difference that made in many aspects of life.

What are your numbers? Would you like to shift your numbers *so that you are more in the here and now?* You can if you so chose. In fact, that is step one—deciding. As a temporal being, it is one of your great capacities, although that capacity is not automatic. You have to develop it. And not surprisingly, you develop your capacity to choose by increasing your awareness— your mindfulness about yourself and your life. Without that, you will live as if *blind* to that possibility. You’ll not even be aware that you could chose. You might even question that ability.

Getting over the past begins then with **a choice** and with **an awareness of yourself** as a temporal being who lives in “time.” Begin with the amount of time (percentage of time) that you live in the three time zones. From there become aware of how you code your *senses of time*. Where do you put your past, your present, and your future?

Take some simple *activity* that you always do (getting up, getting dressed, eating breakfast, brushing your teeth) and think about that activity 10 years ago, 5 years ago, 1 year ago, last week, yesterday, today, tomorrow, next week, next year, five years from now, 10 years from now, etc.

Now step back from all of that, if you were to imagine floating up above yourself and if you were to draw a line from 10 years ago to 10 years from now, what does that line look like? Where is it? Does it go through you (your body) or is it out in front of you?

This is the basic elicitation question and process for discovering your time-line in NLP. It helps to identify if you have past “time” behind you, to your left or right, where you put the future— to your right, or right in front of you? Those who have the line going through themselves are “in” time and so they are frequently lost in time and therefore unaware of time. Those whose line is outside of their body tend to know what time it is, tend to be on time, tend to manage “time” well. There’s a whole dimension in NLP about this called *Time-Lines* and it offers lots of insights. Key among them is having choice so that you have at least *two* time-lines. In that way, you can step in and fully experience the moment and you can step out and plan, schedule, and manage yourself in time.

For more information: *Time-Line Therapy* (1988) Woodsmall and James.

Adventures in Time (1997) Hall and Bodenhamer.

HOW THE PAST LIVES TODAY AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Now you would think that *getting over the past* would be the simplest thing in the world for a human being. After all, you live in the present and, in fact, that's the only actual realm of time you can live in. You actually can do none other. That's because the past does not exist. It is literally past. Nor does the future exist. *Only the present exists and that's why you can only live there.* What we call "the past" and "the future" are only concepts in our minds—the past is memory and the future is imagination.

Yet "the past" can live within us or shall I say that we can live in "the past"—in our minds and bodies. How does that work? It works in two ways—one neurologically and the other semantically. Neurologically, "the past" lives in us by the things we have learned and the experiences that we have encoded in our bodies. To go through, or have, any experience is to have a neurological encoding as your body registers the event and your neuro-pathways are activated. Do that repeatedly and you create a habit (a program as it were) for that event. Learning to ride a bike, drive a car, make friends, handle criticism, feel bad about an insult, fear public speaking, etc. all of those experiences can now be *encoded in your neurology as a response program that you learned at some time in the past.*

Today that past learning is present in you as a result of what and how you learned or experienced something. That is, *the effect* of the past is still with you as a learning, as a program, a habit. It is in that way that you now live it. You live it *not* because the past still exists, but because a leftover aspect of the past (e.g., a learning) is still active and available to you and in you *today*. This does not mean the past determines your present or future, it only means that what you learned once-upon-a-time you are choosing (consciously or unconsciously) keeping today.

This leads to a very personal question. What are you keeping today in your mind and neurology that arose at some time in your past? What old learnings (e.g., beliefs, understandings, decisions, identities, prohibitions, etc.) did you make once upon a time which you are keeping alive today and living? Is it useful? Does it bring out your best? Does it enhance your life? Does it empower you as a person? Is it time to let it go?

This gives you another secret for *getting over the past*—after you have made a decision to get over it and developed awareness about yourself about how you code something of your past, *run a quality control or ecology check on it.* In NLP "ecology" speaks about your internal environment—the mental and emotional contexts that are governing your mind-body system. The questions in the paragraph above starting with "Question" are all ecology questions. They give you a chance to check things out. Are they good for you? Do they bring out your best? Via these kinds of questions you

can run a *quality control check on your life*, on the way you are living your life.

I find that people often have to do this before they are convinced that they need to let go of the past. They hold on to the past because they think there is some value in holding on. They may even fear letting go or worse, they may not have permission to let go. Of course, fear of letting go, prohibition of letting go, refusal to let go—these are the kinds of attitudes or meta-level frames that will prevent you from getting over the past. And for that very reason, getting clear that “living in the past” is *not* good for you, not healthy for you, and not ecological— is your first step.

Once you are convinced, then comes the know-how processes for getting over the past. And the first of these is *changing the learnings*. If “the past” lives in you and is activated in you due to the old learnings— then that’s what has to change. The next personal question, given this, is: What are the learnings that you made at some previous time that no longer serves you very well? What beliefs, decisions, understandings, prohibitions, identifies, etc.?

There are especially nasty beliefs about the past that need to be released and/or changed. “The past determines the present and future” is one. Believe that and that belief will create a sense of helpless determinism in you. You will then look to certain past events as controlling factors— unchangeable factors. That’s a great way to feel stuck.

“That past event *causes* me to think, feel, act, be the way that I am.” is another nasty belief that will undermine your sense of personal power. The truth is that “that event” was just the time and place when you learned something. Maybe what you learned was valid for that time and place. But now that context is long gone. You are no longer a teenager. You are no longer a child. Whatever you learned may have even helped in some way to get you to where you are today. But that doesn’t mean that you have to keep it or that it is the best learning.

Changing these beliefs are easy—if you know how to change a belief. If you don’t, then these beliefs will do a job on you and will determine your present and future. That’s what beliefs do. As self-fulfilling prophecies, beliefs forecast your future and thereby help to create the very thing that you believe in. That’s one reason to be very cautious even skeptical about what you believe—it can create the very thing that you are afraid will happen.

How do you change a belief? The most direct way is to change the confirmation structure of the belief— disconfirm the thought that you previously confirmed and turned into a belief. The worst thing is to argue against the belief. That is the hard way and it usually doesn’t even work. Use the quality control questions to begin a dis-confirmation of the old belief. If you don’t know how to do that, ask your nearest Neuro-Semanticist!

For more information: See *Secrets of Personal Mastery* (1997)
Sub-Modalities Going Meta (2004)

GETTING OVER YOUR PAST CODES

To get over the past, you need to understand about the concept that we call “time”—what it is, what it is not, what you are actually referring to when you speak about the past (or the future). Since you cannot see it, hear it, feel it, taste it, or smell it—the “time” that you speak of is not empirical. It is not part of sensory reality. It exists not in the external world, but in the internal world. It is an idea—a concept, an understanding.

What then do we have “out there” in the external world that we use to construct the idea of time? Answer: Events. To have “time” you have to have events and you have to *compare events*. That’s what the clock does. The clock compares the revolving of planet earth in relationship to the sun. As the planet faces the sun, we call that “day” time and when it turns away from the sun, we have “night” time. By dividing that event then into hours and minutes and seconds, we end up with what we usually mean by “time.”

Conceptually, time arises in each of our minds as we compare events. That gives us the three time zones (past events, current events, and future events). So what is “the past?” It is the events (activities, actions, experiences) that have already occurred. You keep them by remembering them. And to “hold them in mind” or memory—you *give them lots of meanings*. Conversely, when you remove meaning so they don’t hold any significance to you, when you do not invest significance into them, then you won’t remember them. They will pass on (out of your memory). They will stop affecting you.

This now gives you yet another way to get over the past—namely, *change the meanings*. If it remains a living part of your semantic network today because of how you invest meaning in it, then de-investing meaning in that event or experience will free you from it. This is easier said than done because de-investing means letting go, releasing, forgiving, etc.

Now one way you keep things in mind is to use the previous events as *references*. That is, you *refer* to a previous activity or experience in order to understand current activities that are similar or that remind you of the former. This process describes how you understand anything. You establish a reference, a frame-of-reference, as a template for understanding. We ask, “What are you referring to?” Think about “insult” and you understand that term by relating it to previous references. So with all words.

Past references are good when you use them for resourceful learning, for finding resources for current challenges, and for feeling good. They are not so good or valuable for feeling bad again, for re-traumatizing, for keeping resentments, for feeling bitter, etc. Now when it comes to getting over

the past, it's essential that you make sure that you have *permission* to do that.

Another process is *establishing a strong robust sense of now, that is, of today*. This is what Perls was doing with his mantra statements: "Lose your mind and come to your sense; be here now." What the losing of the mind (the meta-mind) does is break the old trances of the past and their post-hypnotic suggestions. The stronger your grasp is on today, on *the present*, the less of a hold the past will have upon you.

Finally, there's that statement from Richard Bandler, "It's never too late to have a happy childhood." The reason that you can still have "a happy childhood" is because *you can recode your past*. You can "change your personal history" to such an extent that you can find resources today about healthy parenting and induce yourself into that story and make it yours. You can use your imagination, invent an imaginary guided tour to a happy and healthy childhood and experience *in your mind* what you did not actually have. Doing that will give you the references that you did not have in actual history, but now you have in memory.

Then, as you get over the past, you can begin to use your past for more resource things. You can use your past for learning, for finding resources and having useful references, and for feeling good (nostalgia). There is simply no reason or valid use of using your past *to feel bad*. Wasn't once enough? And the purpose of remembering a negative event is to learn from it, not to re-experience it. So to "get over the past"—change your code of the past, especially of those referent events that you have given too much meaning to.

Use the NLP Patterns — Change Personal History; Decision Destroyer.
For time-line patterns — See *Adventures in Time Lines* (1997).

THE ART OF REWINDING OLD TERRIFYING MOVIES

NLP calls it “the phobia cure” pattern and sometimes the “visual kinesthetic dissociation” pattern. There are problems with both of those names, so in Neuro-Semantics we call it by *what occurs* in the pattern, we rewind a movie. Hence, *The Movie Rewind Pattern*. The design of this pattern is to take out the negative emotional charge from an old memory. Doing that with old memories that still trouble you, enables you to get over the past. The memory does not have to be a phobia, just any referent event that disturbs you and undermines your resourcefulness. Here is the pattern.

1) Identify a mental representation that bothers you.

What memory activates strong negative emotions in you? What memory of an unpleasant experience, or even traumatic experience, puts you, as it were, back in that event? When you identify the memory, identify what you see, hear, and sense. What are the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic features of the movie you’re playing in your mind.

- Visually: What do you see? Where? Is it in color or black-and-white?
- Auditorially: What sounds, words from others, words you’re saying to yourself?
- Kinesthetically: What sensations, temperature (cold, warm, hot), pressure, movement, etc.?

2) Step back and observe the old movie.

In your mind, step out of the movie and imagine that you are sitting in a theater where you can watch the movie. As you imagine sitting back in a movie theater, which row would enable you to observe comfortably? The tenth row? The twentieth? Now put up on the screen a black-and white snap-shot picture of the younger you in the situation *15 minutes before* the event occurred. You now have a freeze-framed picture on the screen which represents what occurred 15 minutes prior to the unpleasant event. As you sit back, take a spectator’s position, and watch that younger you from this distance. How delighted are you that you have stepped back?

3) Float back and up into the control booth.

From where you are sitting, imagine floating out of your body and into the projection booth which is behind you and above you. Once you float out of your body and into the control room, put your hands on the plexi-glass window so as you look out, you can see the back of the head of your observing self who is watching the screen. As you take a moment to experience and enjoy this point-of-view take as long as you need to seeing yourself watching your younger you on the screen. You can now see two aspects of you— your observing self sitting in the theater and your younger self in the still picture on the screen. Watching this is often strange the first time, yet you can get use to it quickly by accessing how safe and secure you feel in this control booth.

4) Begin to edit your old moves.

From this observer's point of view, notice how you can play around with how you code the movie.

- *Visually.* Make it in color, then in black-and-white. Let it be a movie, then a snapshot. Shift it from bright to dim. From close to far away. As you play with these distinctions, keep the coding that helps you most to *think comfortably about* that memory, that allows you to stay thoughtful and relaxed. Notice the effect it has on you when you dim the picture of the unpleasant memory.
- *Auditorially.* If there is a sound track, what sounds do you hear? What tones, volume, pitch, etc. In the language system what words do you hear? Who is saying those words?
- *Kinesthetically.* What sensations does the person on the screen have in his/her body? Where is it, what is the intensity, weight, pressure? Shift these so you can *think comfortably about* the old memory.

5) *Playing the old memory for the last time.*

When you are ready, turn on the movie and let it move from the initial snapshot as a black-and-white movie and play it to the end. Watch it from the projection booth from beginning to the end. If, at any time, you feel tempted to step into the movie— *then feel your hands on the plexi-glass so you can stay safe and in control in the control booth.* If at any time, you need to fast-forward the movie, after all, you know what happened, just fast forward it a bit and then play it to the end.

When you have let it play out *beyond* the unpleasant experience, play it a bit further. Let it play it until you see that younger you in a time and place of safety or pleasure. . . . Go to a scene of comfort when you were feeling good about yourself and having fun doing something — at a park, on a beach, with a loved one. . . . When you get to that place of comfort, stop the movie and freeze-frame the picture.

6) *Step into the movie and rewind it from the pleasure scene.*

The next step will occur very, very quick. You will step into the movie at the scene of comfort and rewind it in super-fast speed movement while you are inside it. You have seen movies run backwards, but you probably have never *been inside it when it was rewinding.* That is what you are about to do. You will rewind the movie backwards at a very high speed so that it take two seconds —2 seconds!

So first get **inside** the movie. Float inside the scene of comfort ... be there fully. Feel it. See and hear what you see and hear when you are there—feel the comfort. Now from this vantage point of being *inside* the movie, *rewind it.* Hear the sound of the movie running backward ... the rush and the confusion of sights as everything goes backwards. It's a jumbling of sounds as everything zooms back to the moment 15 minutes prior to the unpleasant movie. When you experience this fast rewinding, all the people and their actions go backwards. They walk and talk backwards. You walk and talk in reverse. Everything happens in reverse, like rewinding a movie.

Ready? Step in ... how much do you feel the comfort? When it is at a level of 7 or more, push the rewind button . . . and experience it rewinding . . . zooooooommmmm. All the way back to the beginning. It only takes a second or two to do that fast rewind . . .

7) Repeat this rewinding process five times.

For good measure — repeat five times. When you arrive back to the snapshot at the beginning, clear the screen in your mind. That is, take a break, open your eyes and look around. Good. Now, immediately go into the scene of comfort at the end, and *as soon as* you step it, feel, see, and hear it fully . . . *rewind the movie even faster*. As you do this over and over your brain will become more and more proficient and the rewind will go faster and faster until the rewind takes only a second each time. Zoommmm!

8) Test the results.

Now break state from this exercise. Then after a minute or two, call up the original memory and see if you can get the feelings back. Try as hard as you can to step into the scene and feel the full weight of the emotions.

Caveat: If you have difficulty running this pattern, then contact a well-trained and qualified NLP practitioner or Neuro-Semanticist who can then facilitate the process with you.

Sources: *Sourcebook of Magic, Volume I*. Also, *Movie Mind*.

FROM THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT

The past posts on Neurons have focused on the subject of *getting over the past*. While this is *not* the theme, purpose, or essence of NLP, it is one of its well-known applications. The relevance of getting over the past is due to how many people are *stuck living in the past*. And when you are stuck in the past, you are not *present in the here and now*. And without being present in the here and now—it is difficult to seize the day, enjoy the moment, and positively prepare for the future.

Given that you know from the previous posts that “the past” is not a thing and not a place, but a concept of the mind, you know where freedom from the past lies. If “living in the past” itself is a *way of thinking* and leads to certain feelings, physiology, and orientation, then moving beyond that involves a *new way of thinking*. How does that work? The first (living in the past) works by *remembering* some event that previously occurred—and remembering it in a certain way. The second (living in the new with an eye on the future) involves releasing, forgiving, and focusing on the now.

The previous posts have emphasized that to *get stuck in the past*, you have to keep entertaining your memory—the internal movie in your mind—of an undesirable event and code it so that *you are inside it* and *re-experiencing it*. Do that and you have a prison. To get beyond that, step out of that memory. Step into the now, step into a more resourceful state of mind-and-emotion, and observe it from a distance. To do that, you may need to release your desire (or ‘need’) to understand the past, figure out “why” it happened as it did—and *decide* “enough is enough, time to move on.”

If you start to adopt this *way of thinking* about what happened, you will learn how to get over the past and then beyond it. There are many other empowering beliefs and understandings that can help.

“The past events are past, experiencing it once was enough, let me learn from it and move on.” “Today will be ‘the past’ next week, next month, next year—I’ll focus today on doing the best I can to create the foundation for the best future that’s possible.”

Now you would think that *getting into the present* would be the simplest and most obvious thing in the world. It is for children and animals. But because you are a meaning-maker and because you need referents with which to make-meaning and because what you have lived through and experience makes up your own personal referents—you *have a bias* to assume that what you lived through and experience is especially real, determining, and controlling. That’s the availability bias at work. You have it available and so you use it. You draw all sorts of conclusions (meanings) from it and you mostly do it with the cognitive distortions.

This means that to create a real mess in your live and to get stuck in the past, all you have to do is *think like a child*— *personalize, over-generalize, awfulize, discount, etc.* And if you want to make things worse for yourself— outframe all of that with some *very limiting beliefs*:

“The past determines the future.”

“People can never get over what happens to them in the past, they will carry it with them for the rest of their lives.”

“To get over the past, you have to go through it over and over and over and that takes years of pain.”

“What your parents did to you or someone else did to you contaminates you forever.”

That’s one choice and even though many people don’t know it, it is a choice that they make. They may not make it consciously, but they make it. Another choice is to *let it go*. It is to *accept* that bad and unpleasant things happen and to then *let them go*. You can make a decision that *what you do today and the referent experiences that you create today will determine your future*. You can decide that what you focus on and the quality of your thinking is yours. Then, if you don’t know how to monitor your thinking, you can decide that that’s the first thing you will begin to do— today.

Now while *living in the present* is a challenge— it is a challenge that you can meet if you so choose. That is, you can “lose your meta-mind of old memories and come to your senses” (to adapt a quote from Fritz Perls). You can learn to “be here now.” Fritz often said that Gestalt is the psychology of the obvious— referring to the obviousness of our senses and the obviousness of learning to really see, really hear, really sense the sensations all about you.

NLP adapted this as it put a renewed emphasis on being able to use *sensory-based language*. Using the language of the senses brings us back to today’s reality— what’s happening right in front of you. It takes you out of the old trances and the old post-hypnotic suggestions that might lock you into the past. It invites you to step into *the now*— into what you see and hear in this present moment.

To read more about this— see *MovieMind* (2002) — a basic NLP book without the jargon. And for sensory based language — *Communication Magic* (2001) and *Executive Thinking* (2018).

FACING PERSONAL TRAGEDY

When it comes to *personal tragedies*—there are a thousand different forms. The tragedy could be a crisis in your finances (debt, bankruptcy, unemployment, etc.), in your health (accidents, disease, etc.), in your career (redundancy, getting fired, under-employed, bureaucracy, etc.), in your family relationships or friendships (conflict, disagreements, abuse, etc.), and so on. Nor is there any escape from personal tragedies. There's no insurance that you can buy to protect you from having to face the many different kinds of personal tragedies that can arise in life. It is inevitable and inescapable. It's an intimate aspect of life regardless of your wealth, health, friends, intelligence, etc.

In the last week here in the US, we have witnessed many, many people facing personal tragedies as hurricane Florence came on shore destroying homes and businesses with winds, waves, and flooding. As a result there was the loss of life, the anxiety of being stranded, the uncertainty of how to put one's life back together, etc. At the same time a typhoon did similar destruction first in the Philippines, then in Hong Kong and mainland China.

Now while none of us have any choice about facing personal tragedies, *we do have choice about how to think about a tragedy*. And of course, how we think determines how we respond. This is precisely where each of us have "personal power" to manage our lives. No one can force us to think about something in a certain way. You and I are free to think about anything in a hundred different ways. Some of those ways of thinking will deepen your misery and pain, will undermine your sense of choice and control, and will put you in a deep pit of depression. Some of those ways of thinking, on the other hand, will build up create an attitude of courage, determination, and resilience within you. *The way you think about tragedy is that critical*.

This gives you a *leverage point* for taking charge of your life and your future, or for forfeiting it. In this, your *way of thinking* is not determined. At any moment you can turn the direction of your emotions and responses and therefore of your life. In terms of facing any and every tragedy, the key is your *way of thinking*.

Now as we know in NLP, your *way of thinking* involves a great many sub-variables. Beginning with your representations, we can first of all examine what and how you represent things. As we do, we can then inquire: What is the effect of representing X in this way? Does this bring out your best response? Does this empower you as a person so that you are taking charge of your life? If the answer is 'no,' then you are at a critical choice point in your life. You are at a point where you have a leverage point for positive change. The question is whether you will use it or not.

If the answer is 'no,' then there are these questions: How could you represent X in a way that will enable you to think and feel more resourceful? What would be a better thing to represent? What

else is there to represent that you have left out?

All of this describes the realm of *representational thinking*. And it's powerful. Based on the basic Cognitive-Behavioral Psychology model, it puts a central key to personal power in your hands. Namely, how you think determines how you feel and how you respond.

Some will respond to personal tragedies with self-pity. They will wallow in their misery, deepen their sufferings, try to hook others to rescue them, and live as if a victim of uncontrollable factors. They will become highly skilled in whining, complaining, and making excuses. That will be their way because it is their way of thinking.

Others will respond to a personal tragedy with resilience. They will accept that things often happen that they don't like and don't want. Yet when such things happen, they immediately begin looking around to see what they can do to make things better by taking constructive action. They will examine what went wrong to find out how they contributed to it and how to avoid making that mistake again. They will then rise up with courage as they try again. They think of themselves as responsible agents for what they think, feel, say and do. They are learners and live life bravely as victors rather than as victims.

Representational thinking is one sub-variable, there are many more. There is your cognitive filters (meta-programs), your frames (meta-level references, meta-states) which include meta-level phenomena such as beliefs, decisions, identities, permissions, and a hundred other meta-level phenomena. And each one of these provides yet another leverage point for change, transformation, and renewal. With each one you can alter your *way of thinking* so that you adopt a more empowering way of responding to life in all of its aspects— even tragedies.

ACCUSATIONS AND CRITICAL THINKING

An accusation was made. One person accused another person of doing something unethical and illegal. In human affairs this occurs a lot; it's a regular event between people. And normally once an *accusation* is made, the conversation then moves to hear it out and find evidence that the asserted event did happen. After all, one can make an accusation without there being any actual event. That also happens all of the time. Sometimes it is intentional (someone is just trying to hurt another) and sometimes it is unintentional (someone *thinks* that someone did something or *assumes* it or *jumps to that conclusion*). Saying that something happened is not the same as something actually happening. One is a verbal map, the other is the territory of action. "The map is not the territory."

Now in the case of Judge Brett Kavanaugh, when an accusation surfaced from a Doctor Ford, a great many people on the left politically *assumed* that *the words of accusation* was sufficient as evidence. Many came out and said, "I believe her..." even though there is no evidence of the event *except her words*. They are taking her words (a verbal map) as equivalent to the event and releasing the need for evidence.

Her words *stopped their thinking*—they *stopped questioning* and *stopped looking for evidence*. Normally, when someone accuses someone of an act— we ask for evidence. We ask for details. When, where, how, etc.? We do not assume that the *act of accusing is evidence*. It is not. That's what people did in the dark ages. If someone accused you of being a witch, you were considered guilty of being a witch until you disproved it. That kind of reasoning meant that you have to prove a *not*. When the human race matured, we stopped asking people to prove a *not*. We only ask that you prove what *is*. If you say someone actually *did* something, then we ask you to give evidence of what *is*— what did the person do? When? Where?

Anyone can make an accusation against anyone else. That's the blame frame and people do all the time. Yet when that happens, *thinking people ask questions in order to find out if there's any evidence or truth to the assertion*. That's what you do if you are a *thinker* and know how to do critical thinking. Asking a woman who is making an accusation to give proof is the foundation for all modern legal systems.

After all, who would want to live in a world where any and every accusation is treated as unquestionably true? That would be a nightmare world! In that world you could easily ruin someone's life and reputation by simply making an accusation. If you are not responsible for giving evidence, for proving the accusation, then you could create all sorts of havoc by simply inventing whatever accusations that would darken someone's character. Then the person is guilty until he or she proves himself *not* guilty. Fortunately, all modern justice systems start from the other direction: innocent until proven guilty.

For anyone who is skilled in critical thinking, asking for facts that provides evidence of an event is a basic first step in rational thinking. To *jump to the conclusion* that the accuser is truthful, that you believe him or her, assumes a fundamental illogical prejudice. The irrationality? You have *pre-judged* before you have any evidence. You are privileging an accusation (a verbal map) over an actual event. Now why would anyone do that? Probably to make a point or to achieve a political agenda.

Critical thinking is lacking when someone *jumps to the conclusion* that an accuser is to be believed because *a woman* is claiming sexual aggression. That's *pre-judging* (prejudice) that we must believe her is due to her gender, not the facts. Now it is true that in the past many women have made such claims and have not been believed. Yet because that is about other people in other circumstances, that history is *irrelevant*. Just because something has been the case in the past does not mean that is the case now or always will happen.

It is also true that many accusations used to be dismissed because a woman uttered them. But again, that does not mean "all women who make accusations always tell the truth." That's an over-generalization. That over-simplifies a complex situation. Women lie and make things up just as men do. The gender of being female does not prevent one from misrepresenting things, being confused, having agendas, or outright lying. The issue is not about gender.

In the case with Judge Brett Kavanaugh, several factors make the facts of this particular accusation very weak.

- 1) The fact that there was no report or statement that anything happened for 30 years (1982 to 2012). For 30 years there was no indication of a trauma.
- 2) The fact that the accusation arose as a "recovered memory" in therapy. Once in psychology, the idea of "recovered memories" prevailed. Then Dr. Ellen Langer of Harvard showed how easy it was to "install false memories." Also there were repeated cases where DNA evidence proved the innocence of persons who had been convicted of rape based on the so-called "recovered memory."
- 3) Every person who was supposed to have been a witness to the event has sworn that they were not there or that the event didn't happen, so there's not a single witness to corroborate the story.
- 4) The accusation arose in a social, political *context* wherein the Democrats have been trying hard to stop the confirmation of Judge Kavanaugh. It arose as last minute leaks from a Democrat Senator, Dianne Feinstein. Though she had the accusation in a letter for two months, she never brought it up during the formal Senate process. So the context and timing of the accusation seems suspiciously political.

Next time you are accused of something— let's hope that everyone involved can do some solid critical thinking! That is, "disciplined thinking that's clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence" and that they can also think-about-their-thinking. That's what *Executive Thinking* (2018) is all about.

DID SHE OR DID SHE *NOT* GET OVER THE PAST?

Recently I wrote a series of articles on *Getting Over the Past*. Then yesterday while I watched the testimony of Christine Blasey Ford in the Kavanaugh confirmation at first I thought I was watching someone who had *not* gotten over the past. That was my first impression, it also seems to be the impression she wanted to create, and the impression that most people took from it. But then I began to wonder. Really?

Speaking in a quavering voice, and a “small” weak voice, certainly not the voice of a University Professor(!), Ford presented herself as a victim. But not a victim of a rape, but of an event that she “thought” someone *could have possibly* have raped her. But that, of course, did not happen. My wonder about it focuses on two contradictory pieces — she fully presented herself as a victim *and yet* none of the rest of her life corresponds to that. In every other way she has seemed to have lived a competent life— successfully completed graduate degrees, wrote “scientific” papers, married, had children, travel extensively, etc.

From what we know, for the past 30 years she has “moved on” and lived life in a way that most of us would describe as *a fully and successfully life*. Only one small sign of being a victim came up— she testified that she was afraid of flying. Yet it was discovered that she had flown to many vacation places for many years as well as flying for her work. She has flown many times over the years to Hawaii. So is she or is she not a victim?

Another contradiction. What also struck me is that when she described the event wherein she feared she could have been raped, she told it *as if she was still experiencing it*. That is the *associated position* in NLP. So 36 years after one event (when she was 15 years old), and as someone trained in psychology— she seems to be unaware of *how to get over the past*. How could that be? Had she never applied any aspect of psychology to herself?

For most people a highly undesired event four-decades old *usually* and *typically* lose most of its emotional intensity. Most people “move on.” And if it happened when you were 15, you also grow up. Your thinking and feeling as a teenager *usually* grows up so that when you look back on some of the stupid things that happened back then— you put the events into a different frame. But not Ford. Her *emotional testimony* in this sense struck me as very strange— 1) either she is a very fragile and low ego-strength person, 2) or in spite of her studies in psychology, never applied trauma recovery to herself, 3) or she has been coached to be a victim, 4) or something else.

Another contradiction. She asked for confidentiality. She asked that her name never be used. Then

someone mysteriously leaked the information about who it was(!) and suddenly the media was at her door. The committee offered that she could make her statement privately, but no. She did not choose that. She chose to make it publically before the whole nation. So why was that? Why would a highly private person want to do that?

Perhaps *the context* can help explain things. All of this was obviously in the context of a political drama being carried out in Washington DC. and it seems to me to be a last-ditch effort of the Democrats to stop a confirmation. As many noted, why else would the person who knew about Ford 60 days ago hold the letter, never mention it, never confront him about it, never ask for a FBI investigation, and only reveal it *after* the confirmation hearings? Seems very suspicious to me. It strikes me as the kind of political theater that gives politics a bad name.

Whether Ford was “almost” raped is still an open question. It’s certainly believable she could have had some experience. Whether the Kavanaugh had anything to do with it is much less certain since there was no corroboration at all from any witness. In fact, all four persons she said were alleged witnesses denied any memory of it or said definitively that it did not happen. And in spite of how impossible it is to prove a negative (“I was *not* there”), Kavanaugh did present evidence (his calendars from 1982) to indicate that he was busy every day with other activities.

In 1991 when Anita Hill testified in the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearing, some said that the problem was that she did not look or talk like a victim. She presented herself as an intelligent, competent, and educated woman, not as a victim. I wonder— is that what Ford’s attorney was trying to do? Did her lawyers coach her on how to be a victim? Is that why it took so long?

While every commentator that I’ve heard grants that Ford was credible, my doubts about these contradictions makes me wonder. Several things do not add up:

- As a highly successful woman in every way— is she really a victim who has not gotten over the trauma?
- As a highly educated woman who knows human psychology, does she really take her teenage 15-year old fears about what might have happened and live in fear all her life?
- As a highly private person does she hire an extremely leftist lawyer who puts her on the world’s stage in the most public way possible?

Obviously, none of us know what really happened, but I do have a lot of questions that makes me wonder about things.

From: L. Michael Hall

FACING UNCERTAINTY

*“In my opinion ... As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain;
and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.”*
Albert Einstein

Life is uncertain. Now while for many of us, that’s obvious, amazing as it may seem, there are many, many people who disagree. They *think* about things in such a way and sort for things in such a way, that they actually *believe* that things are certain and that they can be certain. And they *want* certainty. They want assurances, securities, and guarantees. Some of those who think this way are the people who we say are risk-averse, late adapters of new things, and/or oriented toward the past. But not all of them. Many are the “average” people who you meet everyday.

Yet the truth be known, *just about everything in life is uncertain.* Your health is uncertain— you could suffer from an accident or disease at nearly any time. Your finances are uncertain— the economy could take a hit, your job could be made redundant, slander could arise to jeopardize your career, the currency could plummet. Just about everything is uncertain. You and I fool ourselves whenever we start thinking about things *as if* we know what’s going to happen. I think it was Mark Twain who said that only death and taxes are certain.

Why are things uncertain? Well that one is easy— *change.* Everything is constantly changing. We live in a process universe that at the most fundamental level is comprised of “a dance of electrons.” So the things that seem most stable and certain and unchanging, the mountains and continents are themselves in a constant state of change.

There’s also something else— *knowledge.* What we know is constantly changing. This is the primary source of uncertainty for us humans— there is very little that we can *know with certainty.* After all, all of our mental models of the world are but simulations, maps, and ideas and they are plagued with fallible and limited human thinking. What you *think* you know inevitably and inescapably suffers from the limitations of knowledge itself. It is forever influenced by your cognitive distortions, biases, and fallacies. And given that you do not even know all of your cognitive limitations and biases, what you think you are certain of is more than likely contaminated in numerous ways.

This leads to one of the inevitable challenges of being human— facing your everyday life and your decisions about your future which is honeycombed with multiple uncertainties. Whether you realize it or not, everyday you face an unknown future. Everyday you face multiple decisions involving all sorts of unknown factors regarding which you have no guarantees and no certainties about how it will pan out. All of this raises certain questions:

- How do you face such uncertainties?

- How do you handle the limitations of your knowledge in the face of uncertainty?
- How do you solve thorny problems or make good sound judgments without full knowledge or understanding of something?

While uncertainty is a challenge and is here to stay, not all uncertainty is the same. There are degrees of uncertainty. In NLP we start from the premise that “the map is *not* the territory”—but there is a territory “out there,” and much of it can be discovered and mapped so that we can navigate the territory successfully. That’s the value of any map— to guide our thinking, feeling, and actions. And the better the mapping, the better we can adapt, adjust, face, and deal with a given reality. Nor does a map have to be “true” in any absolute sense, we only ask that it be *useful*. That it works. That we can use it to guide our responses so that we can achieve what’s important.

Now the process of mentally mapping things is the essence of *thinking*. We “map” things with ideas that we construct in our minds as representations of the world. Yet doing this involves a lot of uncertainty. How accurately are you representing things? How useful are your ideas? Do they lead you to be able to function effectively in a given territory?

And the essence of *thinking* shows up in how we *language* things. That’s because we mostly think in language as we use words and statements to encode our thinking. So to the degree that you are thinking effectively and being able to articulate in an effective language your ideas and understandings— to that extent you will be able to construct effective mental models. This is where we are all fundamentally challenged. NLP defines this challenge as that of the inherent challenge of map-making or modeling. Namely, when you create a map, you leave elements out (deletions), you generalize and over-generalize things (generalizations) and you change, alter, and transform things (distortions).

It’s not easy to create accurate and useful mental maps about the territory. How you *think* and *language* and *reason* determines the quality of the blueprints that you construct. And these cognitive processes involve not only the modeling limitations (deletions, generalizations, and distortions), but other cognitive distortions (the childish thinking patterns that we learn as we learned to think), the cognitive fallacies that we inherit from our families and cultures, and the cognitive biases (that offer us shortcuts in thinking).

Yes, life is uncertain— that much is certain. And there are tools by which you can handle all of the uncertainty in a healthy and effective way. Once you *accept* this inevitability— then set out to learn how to do high quality executive thinking.