

MORPHEUS

VOLUME XII

**GOAL SETTING, SOLUTIONS
AND HYPNOSIS**

2020

MORPHEUS — 2020

1) How Much Better did you Become in 2019?

Goal Setting — 2020 Vision

- 2) Start with *Being* Goals
- 3) *Event*: First 2020 ACMC – Wishing and Hoping
- 4) Coaching to Meaning
- 5) Coaching as Discovery of Meaning
- 6) It's not Only What you Do, it's What you Bring
- 7) Coach as a Placebo
- 8) Funny Ways to Mis-Use the WFO Questions
- 9) The Trance called *A Coaching Conversation*
- 10) Paying Attention to your Client
- 11) The Meta-Coaching System par excellence
- 12) Question #7 is the Key
- 13) When they Finish Before You Do
- 14) What is a Coachable Moment?
- 15) Detecting Coachable and Non-Coachable Moments

Solution Series — Meta-Coaching Solutions

- 16) Meta-Coach Solutions
- 17) Building Solutions via Rapport
- 18) Solution Building via the Way They Think
- 19) Solutions via Accessing Resources
- 20) Solutions via finding Exceptions
- 21) Solutions via Hypothetic Explorations
- 22) Look inside the Problem & Behold — The Solution!
- 23) Solutions via Framing Change as Fluid
- 24) Solutions via Differences
- 25) Solutions via Self-Reflexivity

26) ADHD/ ADD — Curse or Blessing? (26)

Making Coaching Conversations Hypnotic series

- 27) Coaching Conversations: Can they be Hypnotic?
- 28) Detecting the Hypnotic in Coaching Conversations
- 29) Hypnotic Talking
- 30) The Hypnotic Inward Journey
- 31) Meta-Stating is a Hypnotic Induction

Humor: A Funny Thing Happened in the Coaching Room

- 32) Coaching with Humor
- 33) Are you a Humorous Coach?
- 34) Spontaneous Humor in Coaching
- 35) Humor — a Pathway to *Meta*
- 36) Humor: the Ability to Transcend

How Coaching can Go Wrong

- 37) How your Great Coaching Could Go Wrong
- 38) Mis-Diagnoses go Unchallenged
- 39) The Client's Goals do not Develop
- 40) You Stay in La-La Land
- 41) You Induce the Wrong States
- 42) You Reinforce Limiting Beliefs
- 43) You Immunize a Client against Change
- 44) You Fail to Inspire
- 45) You Fail to Challenge
- 46) You Get Caught up in Details

- 47) Inside and Outside the Box
- 48) Humor Coaching
- 49) *Humor*: Comedy or Tragedy: Two Sides of Humor
- 50) Coaching Clients to become Ideal Clients
- 51) Resilience Coaching
- 52) Coaching Smart Decisions
- 53) Well-Formed Decisions
- 54) Live-Able Decisions

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #1
January 1, 2020

HOW MUCH BETTER DID YOU BECOME IN 2019?

It's the end of the year, *the very end*, so question: During 2019— how much better did you become as a coach? As a Meta-Coach? How many more skills did you add to your repertoire of coaching skills? Have you been able to demonstrate a 2.5 coaching competence on a regular basis?

Becoming better at what you do is an integral piece to live an ongoing self-actualizing life. It means you are *actualizing* something, you are increasingly making it more and more real as a present reality in your life. At the end of each ACMC, we always talk about “Where to from here?” and “What to do to become fully competent and proficient as a Meta-Coach?” The answer that I give is something to this effect:

- If your scoring on the skills is at a level 1— you are looking at five to eight weeks of daily practice and supervision. You probably still have some old listening and conversational habits to break and many of the new coaching skills in incorporate into your coaching.
- If your scores are around 1.5— daily practice and supervision for 4 weeks will probably get you to the 2.5 level.
- If you are scoring 2.0 area — 2 weeks or so should get you there.
- If you are scoring above 2.0 — 1 week of daily practice will get you to the 2.5 level.

The key to all of this, however, is *daily practice* as well as practice *under supervision*. If you are not doing at least one proper coaching session every day, your skills will take a lot longer to improve. If you are only doing one a week, your skills could very likely deteriorate. Yes, *deteriorate!* New skills, especially complex communication and coaching skills, need to be repeated over and over until they become so *habituated* that they become programmed in at an unconscious level. Actually, this explains why there are only a select few of the nearly 4,000 Meta-Coaches who have reached PCMC level.

The other piece of the puzzle that I always mention on Day 1 and Day 8 of ACMC is that it is *a matter of your own commitment to yourself*. No one can make you competently skilled at the coaching skills. You can learn about them. But until you yourself mind-to-muscle them into your conversational repertoire, they will be something that you “know” but cannot do. So, how is your own *commitment to yourself*? Are you committed enough to practice every day?

With a commitment to yourself, you can regularly video-tape your coaching session with your iphone and then grab a feedback sheet and benchmark yourself. Watch it for your Listening and Supporting skills. Watch it a second time for your questioning and meta-questioning skills. Watch it a third time for your state-induction skills. If you do that with one or two coaching sessions every week, your integration of the skills will accelerate significantly.

For supervision, get a buddy coach. Ask another Meta-Coach who is working toward the PCMC level to provide you detailed feedback on each of your skills. Then provide the same for that person. That's one way to get the kind of deliberate-feedback that will take your skills to a higher level. Another way— get to a MCF Chapter or start one! You have that right and privilege. Now that would really show your own commitment to yourself ... and beyond yourself to the larger Meta-Coach Community.

Years ago I began setting a goal for my writing, my training, and several other activities. My goal was to become 5% better in the year. To achieve that I aimed to become .8 better each month (0.833). That's not a lot. If you are bench pressing 200 pounds, the goal would be to increase that by 10 pounds by the end of the year— to 210. On a monthly basis that means about 0.8 of a pound per month (8 tenths of a pound). Not a lot. But it accumulates.

It accumulates— and that's the point. You can get better, a whole lot better, little by little. *Perfectionists*— pay attention and notice(!)— you can get a whole lot better by aiming to consistently get just a little bit better month by month. How much better did you get in 2019 as a Meta-Coach? How much better will you be at the end of 2020? The answer lies in your self-commitment and your willingness to practice. Here's to your on-going, continuous development in this new year.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #2
January 8, 2020

START WITH *BEING* GOALS

Inasmuch as a new year has arrived, let's set some 2020 visionary goals. This means setting clear-eyed goals that come from clear thinking and understanding about goals and goal-setting, and about achieving what you truly want to achieve. We all know that all too often New Year Resolutions do not work or do not last. But why? One reason is that they arise from fanciful thinking, unrealistic ideals, and unecological processes.

Yet for all of those things, we can correct things. And that's the purpose of the next set of posts here on Neurons—to address problems in goal-setting and to set some clear-eye 2020 Visionary Goals that will enhance the quality of your life. Let's begin by examining three types of goals: having, doing, and being.

You can see the ineffectiveness of goal-setting by distinguishing these types of goals. I see this in coaching, a profession designed to enable people to achieve their goals. The problem with many of the goals that clients present in coaching is that they are *extrinsic goals*—goals about something external (e.g., career, money, promotion, recognition, leading, managing, etc.). It is not that clients do not also set *intrinsic goals*—changing a belief, developing an emotional resource (persistence, resilience, etc.), understanding something, etc. They do; yet to a lesser degree. So while all goals are important, *goals are not equally important*.

The aspirations that people have which are external are those that fit “the American Dream”—“I want to be wealthy, healthy, famous, good looking, and popular.” “I want a new car, a home in the suburbs, a great job, lots of time for holidays, lots more money, etc.” It is not that these things are bad, it is that they are *superficial*. And contrary to what many people (probably most people) think, these goals will not, in themselves, deliver inner joy, happiness, contentment, resourcefulness, confidence, self-value, etc.

Extrinsic aspirations focus on *having* (receiving) whereas intrinsic aspirations focus on *being* and *doing*. In terms of *being*—human beings want a sense of personal value (self-esteem), confidence, efficacy, autonomy, independence, developing (growth), freedom, connection, relatedness, etc. In terms of *doing*—we want competence, skills, to contribute, make a difference, etc.

An obscure meta-program which we do not often talk about is the *being, doing, having, giving* meta-program which governs the outcomes people focus on. Sequentially, the inside-outside principle organizes things in this way—focuses first on *being* so that a person can *do, give, and then have*. Trying to *have* without being, doing, and giving ignores, or fails to understand, the natural and logical sequence of life. When a person focuses on *being*, then *doing* so that a person can then give, *having* takes care of itself.

Those who over-focus on money, fame, beauty, control, etc. generally display poorer mental health. That judgment comes from the result of research (Deci, 1995, p. 128-129 quoting from *Personality and Social Psychological Bulletin*). This means that one's inner *being* suffers when you prioritize extrinsic goals over intrinsic goals. So there are consequences, significant consequences, to mixing up the order of *being* and *doing*.

“Kasser and Ryan, in their research on life aspirations ... indicate that if people held extrinsic goals very dear, they had tenuous mental health.”

Deci writes, “people who are the healthiest focus on developing satisfying personal relationships, growing as individuals, and contributing to their community.” Here then is a great question What primarily occupies your consciousness when you think about goals, your future, or moving forward in life? It's okay to start with extrinsic goals *if they imply and lead you to intrinsic goals*. To facilitate that with yourself and your clients, ask these kinds of coaching questions:

- Is your focus on what you *have* more than what you *are*?
- How much is your focus on external possessions versus internal *being* (who you *are*)?
- What resources do you need inside yourself to be able to *do* what needs to be done? What resources do you need within to eventually achieve or *have* what you want?
- Who do you need to become in order to be who you need to be to achieve your goal?
- What changes do you need to make in your sense of self to *be* the person you want to be?

One of the most serious things that happen when people prioritize extrinsic over intrinsic is that it subtly leads people to frame their self-esteem as contingent—conditional. Focus on what you *have* or even *do* subtly implies that in some unspecified manner, you will be more or better when you succeed. From there it is but a small step to want to do more and have more in order to think of yourself as “more,” and to feel better about yourself. And when that happens, you have put your self-esteem on the line.

The solution? Set *being goals* for this new year. Set goals for becoming the kind of person you want to become. To figure that out, how do you want your friends and loved ones to think about you? What kind of character legacy about yourself do you want to leave?

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #3
January 13, 2020

FIRST ACMC OF 2020 & WISHING AND HOPING

2020 begins with the first ACMC in Bali Indonesia (March 14-21) and as we move into this new year and this new decade, how shall we as Neuro-Semanticists and Meta-Coaches think about the Meta-Coaching System? What new changes and updates will occur? What are some of your hopes and dreams for coaching — for Meta-Coaching and for the field of Neuro-Semantics?

My first hope is that increasingly more and more Meta-Coaches will take to the idea of re-visiting.

No one gets Meta-Coaching the first time, not even three or four times. The packed content of the Meta-Coaching System is equivalent to a three-year Master's Degree at a University and we pack all of that into 8 days. So it requires a lot of *unpacking and integrating* into your practice. If you truly want to be a professional coach and stand out head-and-shoulders above all other coaches—you have to treat it as a discipline, think long-term, and engage in deliberate practice for a decade.

I wish and hope for more Meta-Coaches thinking in terms of continuous learning and development.

When you stop learning and developing, you stagnate. Then after stagnating, you tend to regress so your skill-set becomes weaker and less effective. Once you were able to reach 2.5 but now you can't. Now your skills have deteriorated. Continuous learning is the key for every true professional and experts. Experts continually go back to school, back to the basics, and refresh their learning so that they stay on the cutting-edge. Are you doing that? Will you set that as one of your 2020 goals?

I wish and hope that we can get Meta-Coaches and Neuro-Semanticists to understand the true essence of what we call 'coaching?'

My guess is that most of the three-and-a-half thousand Meta-Coaches really do not know the heart and essence of 'coaching.' From the way I see even most Meta-Coaches *coach*, I don't think that they really know that this is the re-making of meaning (framing and reframing) via a very unique conversation.

You may know or not, that my doctoral dissertation was on psycho-linguistics and that I titled the book *Languaging*. I took the idea that has been in the field of Psychotherapy since the time of Sigmund Freud about the "talking cure" and developed it using the formulations of General Semantics (Korzybski) and looked at "therapeutic approaches" to human problems in NLP, Logotherapy (Frankl), Reality Therapy (Glasser), and Rational-Emotive Therapy (Beck and Ellis). I sub-titled the book — How Language Works Psycho-Therapeutically.

Language— using words and non-verbal expressions— can effect a person psycho-therapeutically

so that one can think in new fresh ways, feel and emote in healthy and appropriate ways, get a new sense of identity, direction, purpose, etc. In this, the words we use are powerful. And in coaching, what you are doing is "communicating" in a way that facilitates a client to create an effective mental map, release their dragons, transform beliefs, and change a personality. In a highly intentional way you are using conversation as a way to deeply affect personality.

When you coach, you are not merely talking or having a regular conversation. No! You are doing so much more and something very different. But when you first learn Meta-Coaching, you are taking on a lot of content and being introduced to the basic tools (skills) of Coaching. It takes repeated times in that content and those skills to truly become a crafts-person in the art of coaching.

When that day comes— you will find every coaching conversation as truly magical and incredible. You will experience it as a journey inward with someone to their inner landscape of meaning construction. And you will be able to "see" and "hear" things that are mostly invisible to you today. And because of that, you will have the expertise to know exactly where to tap that will result in a systemic change. That's what I wish for you and hope for you in this new year.

If you'd like to move to that place— consider revisiting ACMC this year. Consider revisiting at Bali and take a holiday before and/or after the training. We have enough people for the team at this point— so come as a participant and prepare yourself for the PCMC level. Come as a continuous learner, as someone always sharpening your sword and staying sharp.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #4
January 15, 2020

COACHING TO MEANING

As a Meta-Coach, you coach to meaning. Whatever situation your client provides you, whether it is a desired outcome that he is struggling to achieve or whether it is a problem that stands in her way and which needs to be solved—you are dealing with that person's *meanings*. And because of this, as a Neuro-Semanticist, you have a tremendous advantage over other coaches who typically focus on behavior, or emotion, or on techniques. Instead, you focus on *meaning*. You are asking such questions as:

- What *meanings* are informing and creating this person's experiences?
- What *meanings* are missing that this person needs?
- What *meanings* need to be suspended and unlearned because they are either dated (old) or irrelevant (redundant)?

As a Meta-Coach, you know the first four most basic meaning-construction questions. What are they? Can you quote them from memory? Okay, if not, then here they are.

- 1) What is it?
- 2) How does it work?
- 3) What is its significance?
- 4) What are you going to do?

Question one enables you to find out *the identity* of whatever the person is talking about. How does he *identify* it? What is she selecting from all of the information out there in the world to focus on? What does he call it? What language and terminology are being used? How effective is that language and to what extent does that language create the problem? This question gives you the *reference* that the person is using and building meaning from.

Question two enables you to explore the person's understandings and beliefs about how it works. What cause-effect relationship does he see between certain things in the world? This is also a process question and it initiates your ability to model whatever it is that the person is doing and experiencing, wants to experience, or fears experiencing. Whatever the person is referring to (#1), that person has certain beliefs, understandings, and ideas about how it functions. What are those ideas?

Question three brings out the person's values, what the person considers important. Significance also reveals the person's sense of *meaningfulness* regarding what she is referring to. Whatever it is, it holds significance to that person. It may be positive significance—values; it could also be negative significance—dis-values. Whatever it is, that person has constructed meaning around it that now makes up his purpose in life.

Question four goes to *intentionality*. What is the person's intention or purpose in selecting this reference (#1), thinking it operates in this way (#2), and holds this significance (#3)? What will

the person do? What intentionality will activate the person's direction, motivation, and motives.

When you understand this basic meaning-making that's going on in your client, it helps to stabilize that person's constructs. Otherwise you are up against the basic instability of meaning. That's because the words and the language we use in coding meaning is not very dependable. Their meaning depends on who is using the term, to whom, and in what context. (De Shazer, *When Words were Originally Magic*, 1994, p. 9). Language works as it does because the meaning that's encoded is flexible and variable. But the problem this brings along with it is that at times it is also un-decidable. That's why we have to constantly be checking with the person about *how she is using a particular word or phrase*. If someone mentions a "problem," a "solution," "a martial problem," "depression," "loneliness," etc., the meaning of every one of these terms is only general and therefore arbitrary and unstable.

What do you mean when you use X-term? Meaning is not self-evident. Even the dictionary will not solve the instability of meaning. Look up any word and you will find that it can have anywhere from 5 to 30 meanings. It all depends. It depends on the speaker, the listener, the context, etc. Therefore to be an effective communicator, you have to learn how to discover your client's meanings.

Then as a Neuro-Semanticist, when you can discover her meanings, you can then negotiate meaning with your client. The words you use in exchange with your client has no inherent meaning; its meaning is co-created. Meaning is negotiated. And because it is negotiated and co-created in the conversation, as a Meta-Coach you have the ability to negotiate the problem, to negotiate a solution, to negotiate an intervention, etc. That's a lot of power that you have.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #5
January 22, 2020

COACHING AS A DISCOVERY OF MEANING

Because meaning is constantly changing, as I noted in the last post, it is unstable. Being unstable, meaning and the construction of meaning allows you to form, un-form, and reform it. Meaning is co-created between you as a Meta-Coach and your client engages in the coaching conversation. Because of this, you discover it. Yet it is not discovered in the sense that you happen upon it and, *Eureka!* you found it, as if it were a thing. It's not like that. Meaning is discovered in that you and your client discover your meanings and each other's meanings *in the process of the conversation.*

The same thing happens to writers. As a writer I am often discovering meaning— what I mean and the meaning of my own words— in the very act of writing. I discover what I mean by writing and as I write. I know that sounds strange. But sometimes when I am trying to articulate an idea, I begin writing, then in the process I discover another idea, or an idea that had been on the edge of my consciousness, an idea that I had never fully “thought” before. In this, writing for me is often like a living conversation, as I imagine my readers and consider their thinking, perspectives, needs, etc. ideas emerge in the process of writing.

It happens similarly to readers. For the reader, meaning is forever being delayed. You are always waiting for the next word to make sense of the previous. Steve de Shazer wrote that meaning is deferred in reading because *understanding* itself is an emergent property which arises through a cumulative process. As a reader, it is natural and inevitable that I often create misunderstandings in my mind. Read anything new to you, foreign, challenging, and it will happen to you. Yet by embracing your misunderstandings and continue to read, you will slowly find those misunderstandings being corrected and new understandings developing.

And while the ongoing development of meaning happens in both reading and writing, it happens much, much more often in a coaching conversation. Because the conversation is so dynamic and because we both are trying to understand the client's wants, desires, hopes, fears, needs, values, etc., the conversation is a joint search for discovery. The way language works in the conversation is one of experimenting with possibilities, testing out hypothesis, experimenting with another possibility, etc. The questions and answers going back and forth co-create the direction that we go and the areas we explore.

You coach not only *to* meaning, but *for* meaning— to discover and/or to create meaning. The coaching conversation is also both personally intimate and at the same time, a social event. It is inter-communication and inter-action between the players. If as a coach, you momentarily pretend that you are not part of the conversation., what happens to you? What happens to the other

person? Does it not sabotage the entire effort? As a social event, the coaching conversation provides a crucible place where new and exciting meanings can develop in the dialogue. It is from that crucible that meaning emerges. So welcome the exploratory discovering of meaning that you and your client are engaged in. Give up any and all illusions that you are supposed to know all the answers. You don't and you won't. You are an explorer in another's reality. As you have been invited in, you have the privilege of being a co-creator.

We order our phenomenal world of meaning with language in all of its forms (linguistics, gestures, movement, kinesthetics, etc.). That's why we have to look inside, behind, beneath, and within language to discover a person's meanings. Yet in this there is a tricky element. That's because words themselves do not mean, people mean. Words do not have strict and precise meaning definitions. Instead they are mired in and dependent upon contexts. It is context as a semantic field which often determine meaning.

Next time you coach, consider how long it takes you to truly come to understand your client's meanings. Consider also how that the very process of seeking to discover this meaning enables your client to also discover his meaning. Notice how that this discovery process is itself an intervention— even though we don't call it an intervention. Finally, notice how in the discovery process the meaning is or becomes more fluid and unstable and because of that, transformation becomes more likely.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #6
January 29, 2020

IT'S NOT ONLY WHAT YOU DO, IT'S WHAT YOU BRING

When you engage in a coaching conversation, there are a whole range of things that you *do*. This speaks about the skills and your personal competency in handling those skills. In Meta-Coaching, we put a lot of emphasis on this, on the basic competencies, and on all of the 100-plus sub-skills. Yet these are not the only factors involved in effective coaching. In addition to what you *do*, there is the issue of what you bring— who you *are* — your state, your personality, your character.

What are you bringing to the coaching conversation?

Are you bringing any worries or fears?

Are you bringing hope and anticipation?

Are you bringing disgust and anger?

Are you bringing compassion and care?

The fact is, you are bringing something. What you bring is *what you have inside*— your states, your experiences, your current life challenges, your beliefs, your hopes and dreams. Yes, we work hard on getting ourselves *out of the way*. We run the De-Contamination Pattern, we run the Releasing Judgment pattern. We access our genius Coaching State. And yet for all of that, your coaching is still through *you as a person*— *through your personal characteristics and personality*.

Now because your coaching comes through *you*, as you develop as a person, as you unleash more and more of your potentials, as you gain distance from unpleasant memories of the past, you develop your *signature style* for how you best do coaching. And that *style* is to a great extent how you sell yourself as a coach, it's what many clients want and buy— the experience they want to have with you as you facilitate the unleashing of their potentials.

Unlike almost any other profession, *your personality plays a big part in the effectiveness of the coaching*. This is similar to the profession of psychotherapy and there too, the therapist's personality plays a big role in how well he or she is able to facilitate healing. That's why in preparation for the therapeutic profession, a therapist is asked to first get himself or herself right. Therapy for the therapist-to-be is a common requirement. After that, internship with a therapist.

Recently I have been reading just about everything that Milton Erickson wrote and many other books about him. One of the big take-aways from that reading has been Erickson's emphasis on being present to a client, being optimistic and hopeful, and of using one's personality in the process. This is important *if indeed the coaching comes through you*.

If you mismatch, look for differences, and tend to be on the pessimistic side—*and you don't have any flexibility with these ways of operating*— you will more likely than not be very ineffective with people. The coaching process requires that you believe in people and that often you believe

more in a client than that person believes in himself. A lot of the process is your ability to see possibilities and facilitate the same in your clients. It requires creativity and flexibility on your part so that you can frame and reframe. And obviously, it requires compassion and care.

To do this, always have a buddy coach. Always be working on your own issues. No one has it altogether— we are all in the process of updating our understanding, establish excellent beliefs for our best development. And in addition, new challenges are always appearing.

It's also very easy to slip into some bad habits with clients and not even recognize it. That's where honest feedback from another Meta-Coach can be invaluable. It is that kind of feedback which can give you a mirror in real-time which enables us to make regular corrections.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #7
February 5, 2020

THE COACH AS A PLACEBO

Another way to think about *what you bring into the coaching session and conversation* is the idea that, as a professional Coach, you can operate as a placebo. Of course, the problem is that you can also operate as a ‘nocebo.’ And operating in these ways, to the healthful benefit of your client or to your client’s distress mostly occurs unconsciously— outside of your awareness.

Technically, *a placebo* is usually a pill which facilitates a client to respond in a way that brings healing, well-being, energy, and strength in spite of the fact that is not chemically active. It has no chemically active ingredients in it, it is an inert sugar pill, and yet the way a person *responds* to it enables the client to reduce pain, diminish negative symptoms, activate healing processes within the mind and body, etc. One of the absolutely fascinating things about placebos is that every new pill, surgery, and intervention medically is tested against a placebo. That means we have, and we continue to, study the effect of placebos which range from 20 to 70 percent effective.

In studies, experiments, and books on the placebo effect, there have also been many, many studies on *the person* delivering the placebo. As a result one of the things that we know today is this:

“The character, personality, compassion, and authority of the healer are essential to the placebo effect. The doctor/patient, or healer/ill person, relationship is an important determinant of the success of any treatment.” (Thompson, MD, *The Placebo Effect and Health*, 2005, p. 12)

This highlights the fact that *you, your person, your character, the way you carry yourself, etc.* comprise a placebo effect for your clients. Now, while it is true enough that a professional Coach is not in the field of medicine, you are in the field of well-being and health. That means that the manner in which you administer your care in the coaching conversation influences your client’s well-being and self-actualization.

“The doctor who fails to have a placebo effect on his patients should become a pathologist.” (J. N. Blau, 1985)

Thompson notes how that *the quality of the relationship* will have a placebo effect. It results as the product of a successful human interaction. That person must be capable of taking care of the other person— what we call *compassion* in Meta-Coaching.

“Healers and patients must come to share attitudes, needs, knowledge, beliefs, and a sense of empathy that create a healing climate. A skeptical patient or an unfeeling doctor could cancel the placebo effect or even cause a ‘nocebo’ effect.” (Ibid, p. 56)

While this quotation is about physical healing, it applies equally to psychological well-being and highlights the importance that NLP puts on rapport— on supportive care, connection, understanding, trust, etc. Or as we say in Meta-Coaching, *relationship is first*. Clients will not let you facilitate their personal development if they don’t feel that you care about them. After that comes their trust in your competence and their expectation that what you are doing is legitimate

and will work. Here are two more powerful aspects of the placebo effect— truth and expectation. People improve physically when they expect and desire the process to help them— the same is true for mental and emotional well-being. All of these emphasizes the importance of your attitude, your own beliefs, and your capacity to care.

While we don't know exactly what makes it possible for something that has no active ingredient in it to work, *somehow* the person *believes* and *expects* and *hopes* that it will work and so it does. D.E. Moerman has suggested that we cease speaking about placebo effects and instead talk about it as a *meaning response*. That's because when ill, people need some explanation or meaning for their suffering and they feel better when they can attach *meaning* to their experience.

Obviously that precisely fits with Neuro-Semantics. Our basic operational assumption is that we are neuro-semantic beings— persons whose neurology constructs meaning, lives by meaning, thrives by meaning, etc. Meaning is our daily bread— the *elan vital* for our spirit. We experience well-being when we deem our life is meaningful, and we feel less well when our sense of meaning wanes.

So take a moment to consider this radical idea: *You as a placebo* and your relationship with your clients as an enabler of the placebo effect. As you consider it—

- What changes will you make in how you do coaching?
- How will you carry yourself and interact if you want to elicit positive belief and expectation in your clients?
- What will you do differently to convey care, compassion, and presence?

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #8
February 12, 2019

FUNNY WAYS TO MIS-USE THE WFO QUESTIONS

When it comes to doing something right and/or muddling something up, there are many, many more ways to muddle something than there are ways to do something correctly. That's the way reality is set up. Do you understand why it is that way? Gregory Bateson entertained that question from his daughter in one of the metalogues. On that occasion he offered this explanation. There are lots of ways to mess up your bed, there's only one basic way that it is properly "made."

Similarly we can say that it is easier to mess up the Well-Formed Outcome Questions than to ask them correctly. There are many ways to mess them up, and only one or a few ways of asking them correctly. In the following, the proper way to ask the question is in bold. The questions under them are actual attempts at asking the question which I've heard. Some are funny, some are ridiculous, some are redundant, some are boring. While supervising coaching sessions, I have often stopped the coach and asked, "Are you trying to ask question x?" When I get a yes, I said, "And what is that question?" If you ask it wrong, you will probably get wrong or at best, unuseful information.

A common problem is losing track of the subject. You begin with one thing and it slowly shifts to something else so that the later questions are on a different subject. That's failing to *hold the frame*.

I: SUBJECT- THEME

1) What do you want?

Wrong: What do you want to talk about? So, what's up with you these days? What issue would you like to talk about? What's your problem?

2) What will you see or hear when you get what you want? [For tangible objectives]

Wrong: What does that belief look like? What will you hear when you reach that level of fitness? So what will be your emotional state?

3) Why is it important to achieve that?

Wrong: So, why do you want that? Why did you do that? Why are you that way?

II: CONTEXT

4) When do you want to achieve this outcome?

Wrong: When will you start this? When could you begin? When does this occur?

5) Where will this goal occur?

Wrong: Where do you want to be a better parent? When you are at the gym, where do you want to do this? [Redundant].

6) With whom will you do this, if anyone?

Wrong: Who is involved in this? Who will you need to sell this to? Who will your parenting be for? Who can help you with this?

III: ACTIONS

7) What do you have to *do* to get what you want?

Wrong: Do you know how to do this? Can you do that? How will you reach your goal? Client says “I don’t know what to do?” *Wrong next question:* “Okay, so how do you do X?” Do you think you can do that?

IV: POWER

8) Is this goal within your area of control? Can you initiate this action and sustain it?

Wrong: Are you powerful enough to do this? Can you control this? How much control will you need to do this?

If given a “no” answer, “Well, would you like to try it anyway?”

9) Can you? Do you have the skill or the capacity for doing this? If yes, what?

Wrong: What skills will you need to do this?

10) Have you ever done this before or something like it before? If yes, when?

Wrong: When have you done this before? When have you solved this before?

V: PLANNING

11) How many things do you have to do? Are there steps and stages in reaching this goal?

Wrong: How many steps are in your plan? Are you aware that there are 3 steps to X?

12) Do you need or have a plan or strategy? If yes, how do you best like to plan?

Wrong: So what’s your plan? How much of a plan have you got so far?

13) How will you monitor your progress? What milestones will you set up in your plan?

Wrong: Have you ever monitored a plan?

VI: RESOURCING

14) What, if anything, could stop you?

Wrong: What problems do you see with the plan? When would something stop you? What will probably stop you?

15) Do you have the external resources? Do you have the internal resource you need?

Wrong: How many internal or external resources do you have? How do you feel about those resources?

16) Is it ecological, holistic, and realistic?

Wrong: So it’s good for you to do this?

VII: CLOSURE

3) Is it still compelling and attractive?

Wrong: How compelling is your goal from 0 to 10?

17) Are you going to do this? Are you ready to make a commitment to this goal?

Wrong: When will you make a decision about this? How do you feel about that decision?

18) How will you know you have achieved it? What evidence would convinced you’ve of success?”

Wrong: How will you know you’re done? Are we done now? Can I go home now?

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #9
February 19 , 2019

THE TRANCE CALLED A COACHING CONVERSATION

“Any conversation that is really *absorbing* can entrance people without them necessarily recognizing their own trance state.” (*Hypnotic Realities*, Rossi and Erickson, p. 308)

When you coach and when you initiate a *coaching conversation* as a highly focused conversation that engages a client’s focused attention— you have simultaneously initiated a trance state. After all, that’s what *trance* is— a highly focused internal state (inwardly focused). In most trance states, you turn inward to your meanings, beliefs, understandings, expectations and it is to those things that you get lost in. There are some trance states where a person turns outward and like a laser-beam focuses on a single object— playing tennis, climbing a wall, reading a book, etc.

While you may not know that you are doing something very hypnotic, you are. This doesn’t mean that coaching is a form of hypnosis, *it is not hypnosis*. And yet it is hypnotic just as every other communication is hypnotic. If you wonder about that, about how *communication is hypnotic*, then recall what you learned in NLP Practitioner training about both the Meta-Model and Milton Model. Namely, when you use language that is unspecified— a listener will “make sense” of it by going inside to his or her library of references and supply their own references (meanings) onto your words. That is the structure of hypnosis.

To de-hypnotize you do the opposite. You ask a person to specify what he is referring to. You ask her to identify in detail the references she is using. “Specifically who, when, where, which, and how?” As a Meta-Coach you both de-hypnotize and hypnotize, although we very seldom talk about the coaching conversation in those terms. Instead we talk about information gathering and state induction.

Could that be one reason that so many people find it so challenging to perform the skill of *state induction*? It is one possibility. Of course, the *state* that you want to *induce* and *develop* as a coach are the common states of learning, openness, receptivity, trust, and curiosity. When you induce these states around the content subject which your client has given you— you are engaged with your client in a trance state. After all, you are talking about things that are not present— the client’s home life, career, parenting, activity in staying fit, etc.

Consider then that conversation as *a mutual and collaborative trance state*. The client gives you the subject, you take it and through questioning and framing, you develop the conversation so that the client goes there. As that happens, you begin exploring what and how your client has mapped out that experience. Many of your questions will invite your client to step back in and experience that content again — *state induction into a particular trance*. Yet the value is not to leave your

client there, it is to keep coming out to evaluate it. You do that when you ask any form of ecology question. That typically invites you and your client to co-create better ideas, new responses, new possibilities and with that you invite your client back into the experience. In all of this you are mapping and remapping an experience so your client has more choices, better choices, and a fresh way to approach the subject.

Your trance state may be an Exploration Trance, a Decision Trance, a Change Trance, a Motivation Trance, a Problem-Solving Trance, and so on. In this, every kind and form of coaching conversation offers you another trance state. To understand how you do this and how to do it more skillfully, even elegantly, study up on the Milton Model. Among the best books for this is *Trance-Formations* edited by Connaire Andreas. After that *Patterns of the Hypnotic Language of Milton H. Erickson* by Bandler and Grinder. And coming soon will be my book on the subject, *Thinking Hypnotically*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #10
February 26, 2019

PAYING ATTENTION TO YOUR CLIENT

“There’s no substitute for paying exquisite attention to your client.” *Ericksonian Approaches* (1999, p. 48)

“It is tremendously important to pay attention to all of the little things that enter into an investigation of an experience.”
(*Mind-Body Communication in Hypnosis*, 1986, p. 24.)

These two quotations from Milton H. Erickson and the Ericksonian approach to working with people emphasize something that NLP learned from Erickson, namely, the importance of connecting with the person you are working with. Connect, pay exquisite attention, get rapport, and gather the information you need before you begin and as you go. There are many reasons why this approach is so important.

It is important first and foremost because every person you work with is different. And yet, we all tend to assume *sameness*—we tend to have a bias to thinking people are alike and we don’t have to make individual differences. But that’s the trick—everyone is different. Everyone has his or her own unique psycho-logics that makes up how he or she constructs meaning, filters information and it is built out of that person’s learning history, experiential history, natural dispositions, etc.

After reading and re-reading a lot from Erickson, one of things that I’ve learned regarding his approach is how intensely he focused on each client’s person to discover and identify the unique personality before him. In doing that, he then made his approach fit as much as possible to that person’s personality. Now what he called *personality*, we mostly think of as meta-programs along with some orientational styles.

This raises the question that every Meta-Coach faces when beginning to work with a client, namely, How much background information do I need to be effective? There’s no simple answer to this. With some you need more, with others less. This is also one of the reasons to take the time to ask the Well-Formed Outcome questions—when you do, if you are working the answers the person offers you and listening to what’s behind being said and what is not being said, you will learn a lot.

For background information, you need to get enough *context* that you can make a representational picture of the person’s situation. In this way you ground the problem so it is sensory-based. Aim for 20% content details and 80% structural details.

- How does the person *describe* the problem. Is it realistic? Could it be a mis-diagnosis?
- What does the person think would *solve* things? Again, realistic or mis-diagnosis?

- What does the person do for a living? Best talents?
- What does the person do for enjoyment? To rejuvenate? These answers will tell you about hidden resources within the person.
- How much stress is the person under in the various compartments of life? How is the person handling that pressure?
- How does the person think and learn? What thinking patterns seem to dominate (meta-programs) and what learning style does the person show?
- What is the person's basic reality orientation? How does the person seem to approach problems and challenges? Check for the conative meta-programs for this.
- Basic to anyone is that person's sense of self— secure, insecure, valued or conditionally valued, confident, authentic or hiding behind roles, positions, etc.?
- What symptoms are present in the person's life? Check symptoms that have been and what's changed. Check on how the person handles the symptoms.
- Basic to human beings is how we cope with the underlying driving human needs, the D-needs. Check on sleep, eating, exercising, sense of safety, money, relationships, etc.

To bring out the best in a person and to unleash a person to his or her potentials— the coach, consult, therapist, and/or trainer needs to have an understanding of the unique person before you. This requires some background information. Much of it you can attain from a sign-in sheet of demographics and some psycho-graphics. And much of it will emerge in the conversation— especially if you make it safe for the person to get real.

That's where your framing and your presence come in. That's where *the more real and authentic you are in the conversation, the more authenticity you will elicit and receive*. Given that, what frames will you set? How will you start the conversation? How will you use acknowledgments, validations, and empathy statements to make it safe? This is where it all starts. May your conversations always be real.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #11
March 4, 2019

THE META-COACHING STRATEGY PAR EXCELLENCE

Think about coaching a client and what immediately comes to your mind regarding your *strategy*? You are about to coach someone, what *format* will you use? What do you want to know about your client as you begin so you can make a transformational difference in that person's life? Whatever it is, the strategy will determine so much about what will happen in the session.

Recently in Egypt, when I observed and benchmarked several Meta-Coaches, I was struck by how many were actually *mis-using* the Well-Formed Outcome Questions. Instead of using them to do high quality information gathering, several used the questions to search for a topic for intervention. That is, they used them *as if* they were a set of 18 doors to knock on, then when someone answered the door that suggesting a coachable subject, they jumped right in and began working it. Then before I knew it, they were doing an intervention!

That's how *not* to use the WFO questions. Sure, there will be times when you hit upon something that will be useful to the client. In fact, just having someone to listen to them, support them, take them seriously, and ask them questions will be, for most, a healing and generative process. They will get a lot from that and will be grateful. But that's a pretty sloppy way to do "Coaching" and is not the way the Meta-Coaching System presents Coaching.

Think about the 18-questions as *a checklist to quality control the person's outcome*. Ask the questions sequentially and ask all of them unless something indicates that a question is not needed. Think also about getting through the 18-questions in ten to twelve minutes. To supplement your thinking, think in terms of the five basic kinds of coaching conversations. Is this about clarity, decision, planning, experiencing, or change? That will help you *get the subject*.

Now in terms of strategy, think about *the subject* right from the beginning. Frame the coaching as a very unique conversation that's going to have significant consequences for the person.

"As coaching is designed to be life-changing, what do you want to be achieve that will make a big difference in your life when you step out of the coaching chair? What change do you want to experience? How will you be different?"

As you ask this and listen, think in terms of the five basic coaching conversations. The basic Meta-Coaching System *strategy* is *diagnosis first, intervention afterwards*. Use the 18-questions for the diagnosis— for high quality information gathering. Adopt a healthy skepticism about the information you receive so that you *work that information over* with the refining questions (exploration and clarity checks to open things up and then testing and checking to close things down).

Clients who are clear about what they want will be explicit and specific from the beginning and in that situation, you can get through the 18-questions in five minutes. Clients who are not clear about what they want, or what's stopping them from experiencing a fuller and richer life, have to be pushed and challenged as you go through the questions. They need that. They actually want that. They need someone who will wrestle with them to gain the needed clarity. When that becomes obvious to you, and you're a bit hesitant, frame your side of the conversation as "playing devil's advocate."

"So that I can serve you well, and you can get what you really want and need, I'll play devil's advocate and challenge what you're saying so that we can flush out what's behind the things you're saying. Are you in the right state to have that kind of dialogue?"

Now you can do some reality testing and some challenging as you dialogue with your client. Now also you can grab things and make guesses, ask for feedback. You can also *make proposals*.

"Sounds like we could focus on getting your criteria clear and after that check out the decision to change jobs; how does that sound? Would that be worth your time, effort, and money if we spent the session doing that?"

Doing this will be especially important with people who think in very global and abstract terms. They need that kind of direction and specificity from you. Information gathering enables you to start with a basic diagnosis and from there you can move on to intervention. To intervene before you are clear about the situation, the goal, the blocks, etc. It is to give medicine without a diagnosis. That's not a very wise, let alone ecological, choice.

The intervention part is typically the easy part. The work of an effective Meta-Coach lies in cutting through the noise, distractions, and mis-diagnosis to identifying and defining the real issue. When you do that, the work is 90% done. Remember: Diagnosis first, intervention second. Finish the 18-questions, then you will know what to do.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #12
March 11, 2019

QUESTION #7 IS THE KEY

As a Meta-Coach, you ask what your client wants (#1), why it is important (#3), and when the person wants to achieve that outcome (#4). Now comes the critical question: “Do you know what you need to do to get what you want?” (#7).

Most clients will say “Yes, well, somewhat.” Congratulate them and then ask about what they already know. Iterate the question, “And what else do you know that you need to do?” In fact, continue to do that until you get an “I don’t know.” When you get that ... you have just begun to establish *why your client needs you*. “Great! I have a job. That’s what you and I are going to figure out.” You can also say that if the person’s first response is, “I don’t know what I need to do to get what I want.”

Now even though you have spent some time inviting your client to *download everything she knows* about what to do ... expect that more things will emerge as you continue asking the rest of the 18-questions. I find that 90% of the time, more items will arise. And each time, *grab it and collect it*. “Ah, that’s another thing you have to do to get what you want. Now we have three things.” “Now we have five things.”

This is information gathering. In the dialogue back and forth, anticipate that your client knows more than he can say and that it’s through the exchange that additional things will come to his mind. Your job at that point— *grab it, highlight it, and put it into the collection* of the things to be done. And, as you do, season your questions with just the right amount of skepticism so that you underscore your client’s need for resources, for a strategy, for monitoring the process, etc.

By asking all of the 18-questions in your exploration of what your client needs to do to achieve her highly desired outcome— suspect that with any question more may arise. I have found additional *actions* have arisen with the resource questions, the interference question, even the decision question, and at times even with the convincer question. How does this work? It works because *you are enabling the person to think through the achieving process*— what’s going to be involved and as the person follows your questions, his unconscious remembers more and releases more.

“What do you have to do to achieve what you want?” is the key because whatever the desired outcome is— *the person has to exercise her intentions, actions, states, performances, etc.* to make it happen. The goal will not just happen. The goal will not magically appear without effort, planning, process, time, etc. That’s why you need to ask the following questions (#8 through 18). These are the questions that will enable you to find out more about your client— how realistic the goal, how prepared the person, how long the process, the resources required, the interferences to be prepared for, etc.

The *power questions* (#8 to 10) lets you know if the goal is within the person's jurisdiction or not. If not, is it partly in his area of control? In that case, you will want to find out about the probability. You will want to find out if the person has the capacity and the skill or if he will have to develop the required competencies. You will find out if the person has any prior experience that could be applicable.

The *planning questions* (#11 to 13) lets you know if the person needs a strategy, what aspects of the strategy the person already has in mind, what is not even conceptualized yet, what kind of plan the person needs, the way he likes to plan and if that fits this particular goal, how the person will keep track of progress, how open to feedback the person is, and much more.

The *resource questions* (#14 to 16) lets you know how many resources, assets, Plan Bs, etc. are to be anticipated. How rough, difficult, or challenging will the journey be and how prepared is the person for it? For long-term challenging goals, she may have to develop lots of sub-steps and sub-strategies.

The final *checking questions* (#16 to 18) check the meta-levels of the person to make sure that at the higher hidden levels of the mind the person is realistic, appropriate, ready, decisive, committed, and knows when she will be convinced.

All of these following questions are questions that fill-out the details of Question #7 and explains why it is *the key to effective information gathering and contracting with a client*. When will Question-7 be fully answered? Sometimes not until Question-18. So you have to be constantly ready to hear Question-7 answers.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #13
March 18, 2019

WHEN THEY FINISH BEFORE YOU

Sometimes in your facilitation, a client completes whatever he or she was working on before you finish gathering your initial information via the 18-questions. It happens. Not often, but it happens, I would guess maybe 5 to 10% of the time. Whatever was going on with the person, she has an insight; he has made a decision; she connects with a resource; he makes a change. At that point, it is game over.

Now because it can happen in a mere second or two— really fast— you have to be calibrating or you will not even recognize it. For that matter, your client could also miss it. The client may be so involved in his or her own inner thoughts, that it doesn't dawn on the person that something significant just happened. The client is caught up in the content and doesn't have meta-awareness *about* it. Or perhaps your client is compliant and doesn't want to tell you what just happened because he doesn't want you to feel bad because he just completed a process, especially if he senses that it's important for you to succeed with him. So many tanglements of thoughts!

Another ending could be one of those effervescent “coachable moments” where something deeply and significantly happens in the client. That's *not* a time to stop to do an intervention, yet it is a time to stop — this time to capture the moment, highlight it, perhaps cultivate it for a moment, and then set it aside for later use.

A coachable moment occurred in one of the sessions I was benchmarking in Cairo Egypt in February. It was very, very subtle. There were no external signs of it in the client. The client did not have an great “Aha!” moment, there was no significant emotional signal, there were only three words that she said in a matter-of-fact tone, “Now I can.” When asked if she knew what she needed to do to get her outcome, she listed two or three items, there was a bit of discussion, and then when asked, “Can you do it?” (Question #9), she said, “Now I can.”

Bingo! That was it. Something just happened and when the coach checked, the client had made a change within... quiet as a mouse yet as deep as an underground lake gently pushing up fresh cold water from deep within the earth. The client herself was typically soft-spoken and this perfectly fit her style, her “way of being” in the world. It would have been out of character for her to have emphasized, “*NOW I can!*”

The content also predicted this style. She had been really down and discouraged, not exercising, not playing the sport she loved, and yet as she described her “depression” she did so in a way that was quiet, gentle, matter-of-fact —the words she used indicated some pretty deep despair, but none of that showed up in her outward expressions. I was actually surprised and a bit taken back by the description because I had not seen that in her. Did she know what she needed to do? Yes, *accept and let go...* Two more quiet and gentle responses.

People generally respond according to their characteristic way of thinking, feeling, speaking, acting, and relating (their “character”). They respond as is their style and “way of being.” Some are very loud and active and verbose, others are quiet and passive and non-verbal. That’s why an “Aha!” moment will be expressed in very different ways by different people and why the coach’s skill of calibration is so critical.

It is not uncommon for wonderful things to happen while you are in the process of orienting yourself to your client, gathering information and trying to understand what the person wants. It is not uncommon for the person to go through a transformation in those moments. Some clients are fully ready for that. They have prepared themselves prior to coming to the coaching session and all they need are some quiet moments with someone who is caring and listening. So if a client finishes before you— catch it. Delight in it! Rejoice with them in what they found or experienced, remind them (and yourself) that they do all the work— you are the facilitator.

All of this emphasizes a central principle in coaching— it is all about the client. It is not about you. Certainly you have a process— for example, information gathering with the WFO questions. Yet even while you are doing that— the client is focusing on his or her *what, why, and how*. If you have a coaching presence that elicits trust and safety—clients will go into processing mode with you. They may even start self-coaching. If one did— would you notice? Internal processors may go into numerous states and have various experiences— would you notice?

Your job— *stay with your client*. Do go slower than your client needs to go. Don’t go faster. Stay with your client by acknowledging, checking, testing, exploring. Call for a meta-moment from time to time. And notice if she finishes before you. [Next post– “Coachable Moments.”]

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #14
March 25, 2019
The following is a reprint
from May 27, 2015

WHAT IS A COACHABLE MOMENT AND HOW DO YOU CATCH IT?

There are moments when you are coaching when the client will be highly coachable. We call those moments— *coachable moments*. And the skill you need is to be able to recognize them, catch them, and respond to them effectively. Do you know how to do that? Are you able to recognize them *in the moment* rather than recognize them later when you are reflecting on the coaching conversation?

The obvious moment is the where the client has a sudden *Aha!* and in that peak experience shouts *Eureka! Now I Understand!* That's obvious. Immediately ask them, "What do you have? What are you just now aware of?" And when you do, be as excited as your client, match her energy and enthusiasm (otherwise you might kill it) and be ready to celebrate the insight with the person.

The not-so-obvious moment may be a *moment of tension and pressure*. When you notice that a client is struggling to say something or struggling with some bodily tension and pressure— get ready to step into an anticipation state and to wonder, really wonder, about what's happening. In a significant conversation, there will be the tension of the person's energy as mentally and emotionally he is experiencing something and perhaps attempting to express what he is experiencing. And the tension that then shows up in the body could be either positive or negative. It could be anger, frustration, uncertainty, stress, confusion, joy, delight, anticipation, etc. Whatever it is, let it arise and just be with it.

Just being with the client's state, whatever it is, gives space to allow it to be. This is what we call creating and holding a crucible space. You become a crucible for your client. Then whatever she needs to bring to the table, she can. Then whatever he needs to express and deal with, he can. At this point, you, in fact, may say nothing. You may just hold the space in silence while you hold eye contact and nod and indicate with your countenance that it is okay and you are there. Present.

Now if you want to spoil this moment, feel anxious that you need to fix it. That's a great way to mess it up and miss the moment. Remind yourself that whatever your client is experiencing, positive or negative, is *just human stuff*. And it is not only okay, it is great. It is a *human experience* and if it is present—it could be the very thing that most of all needs to be addressed. So put yourself into a state of care and compassion, a state of wonder and curiosity, a state of assuming nothing, and then just offer yourself and your presence to your client. This is the time, most of all, for sacred listening.

Now the tension that you are picking up and/or that the client is experiencing could be emotional tension, physical tension, mental tension or a combination. It indicates that the person's system (mind-body-emotion system) is activated and that some meaning has mobilized it. But what meaning? How much mobilization? What has been activated? What does the client feel like doing? All of these curious questions enable you, as the coach, to begin exploring with the client for discovering the frames about the activation, the context, the triggers, and how the system is constructed. Now you are at the place of *the coachable moment*.

Tension then is a client's system calling to you. What you need is the skill for *listening for the tension*. At that moment, begin exploring:

What tension or stress are you feeling? Where is it in your body or mind? How intense is it? What's creating it? What are the contributing factors? Is this familiar? Have you felt this before? When and where? What do you believe that's activating this? Let's say that's true, so what? What would that mean to you? What else are you aware of? What's the worst case scenario? What's the best case?

One characteristic of a coachable moment is that the client suddenly becomes aware and open to himself. He notices something and as you does, he becomes transparent. He, as it were, steps out from behind his personas, masks, roles, etc. and becomes real. Suddenly, *the real person appears*. Now this often will actually frighten the person especially if *being real* is not a common experience for the client. She will fear it. He might even despise it. This is where holding the crucible space becomes even more critical:

"Thank you for this disclosure. I mean it, now you are becoming real. So thank you. And I want you to know that the disclosure is safe with me and confidential here in this coaching session. ... [pause] So how are you going? What else are you experiencing?"

Holding the space obviously means using silence and being in a state of care and compassion, yet it involves more. It also means setting frames with and for the client to validate his experience.

"Opening up to this means that you are a real live human being and this is a very important step toward actualizing your highest values and meanings and your best performances.

You may be tempted to think of this as a weakness or a problem, it is actually your strength, it makes you human. It's nothing to be ashamed of, it is just something to accept (or appreciate)."

"Thank you for these tears, we have touched something real and something significant, so thank you. This means we are close to an issue that needs addressing. Tell me, what kind of tears are these? Tears of sadness, or joy, or discovery, or relief, or what?"

When we coach, coaching becomes real and powerful when we have those coaching moments when suddenly *the human being shows up*. When they do, the coaching conversation gets deep and significant. Then you get to see transformation in the raw. May you see and enjoy many coachable moments in your coaching.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #15
April 1, 2020

COACHABLE & NON-COACHABLE MOMENTS How Do You Detect Them?

To detect a *coachable moment* also requires that you also know how to detect when a moment is *not* a coachable moment. If a person is *most coachable* in moments of self-awareness, openness to one's own vulnerability and fallibility— then obviously a person is *least* coachable when defensive and unable to own one's humanness.

I was recently asked if detecting a cognitive distortion indicates a coachable moment? The answer is generally, “No.” Most people engaged in cognitive distortions do so because they are feeling insecure and defensive. If you help the person catch it and *if the person* can step out of that state, reflect on it, and realize that he or she does not have to be defensive, that one's self-esteem is *not* on the line— then a person may move to a state of mind and emotion of being open to learning more about themselves.

Being coachable and having a coachable moment obviously depends on having enough internal security to face whatever needs to be addressed or challenged. Sometimes that *security* is the security that you, as the coach, provide. By creating a safe place and by constantly separating person from behavior and offering an unconditional positive regard— you create a crucible space wherein a client can have the safety to have coachable moments.

It is all a matter of degree— the degree to which any client is *open* to self-discovery, to going inside to one's inner thinking and feeling, to meanings that have defined the person's orientation to reality, and to one's inner sense of self. It is always a matter of degree. Some people are very open, others are only open to a small degree. Some are somewhat closed. Yet to whatever degree a person is open— it is your ability to gain rapport, set the frames, and then initiate the conversation that allows a coachable moment to arise.

If they do not— and many “coaching conversations” lack it— there is a problem in how you have set up the coaching conversation and/or a problem with you. Are *you* ready and able to invite a person to go there? If you do not know how to go there and if you do not go there with your peers and colleagues—then the problem may lie with you, your own authenticity.

I say that because in any coaching conversation which is *intense and personal*, there are typically at least a few moments where a person will suddenly and briefly *open up*. That's a “coachable moment.” Now being able to recognize it in the moment and respond to it ... ah, that's the art of this skill.

Are you facilitating an *intensely personal conversation*? Are you asking those questions that's

getting to the heart of things? Remember, the *heart of things* is the person's meanings—not the surface meanings which may be part of their public relations image—but the deeper meanings which is actually driving the experience. Are you asking questions that you may feel are too personal, too intimate, too embarrassing and so you are holding back? Are you providing ongoing feedback in the session so the person gets a mirror-image sense of him or herself? Are you providing inspirational challenges and asking the person to face some fears and not sell himself short?

These are coaching exchanges that can set up a coachable moment. Whenever the conversation becomes boring and seems to be going nowhere— that's a good time to invite a step back, a meta-moment and ask the person what's going on. When the person repeatedly “doesn't know,” “can't think of anything,” that's another time to stir things up with a challenge, even a confrontation.

When your client experiences a coachable moment— that's just the beginning. While there may be a time when it is completed in just a few seconds, more commonly, it is the time for you to hold the space and take the person fully into the experience.

- If it is a moment of sadness— you might ask, “Have you had a good cry and grieved that loss?”
- If it is a moment of anger—you might ask, “Have you raged and allowed yourself to feel that violation of your values?”
- If it is a moment of discovery—you might ask, “What did you just discover? How is that going to transform things specifically for you? What will be different in your relationship? How will you translate that into your behavior?”

Coachable moments are intense. Typically when I client experiences it and you *take them there*, it involves a lot of mental and emotional work. That's where you earn your keep as a Meta-Coach!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #16
April 8, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#1)

META-COACH SOLUTIONS

The intended design of Meta-Coaching is to *co-create, with a client, solutions* for your client. These solutions are designed to create *solutions* to problems, *solutions* for reaching desired outcomes, *solutions* for becoming more of who a person can become, *solutions* for becoming more resourceful in a given context, *solutions* for becoming more effective and productive, etc. What stand out in all of this? *Coaching is all about solutions.*

What clients want are solutions and if coaching is all about solutions— so you must be also. As a Meta-Coach, you must be able to identify solutions which may already be in the person’s life, construct solutions from resources that the person has, facilitate the person to be able access the states wherein solutions will emerge, inspire the person to use a created solution, and so on. From the beginning, Meta-Coaching has been designed as a solution-focused approach, in contrast to a problem-focused approach. We do not start out asking about problems. We begin by asking about outcomes and what needs to happen in order to reach those outcomes. As a Meta-Coach, can you answer these basic questions about solutions?

- What *processes* can you use to co-create a solution with your client?
- How can you best *think* about co-creating solutions?
- What *skills* do you need to become fully *solution-focused*?
- What *premises* (assumptions, presuppositions) does a solution-focus approach require?

Solution Oriented Premises

For you as a Meta-Coach, the best premises are the presuppositions that inform NLP and Neuro-Semantics. If NLP is a communication model and informs how we send and receive messages, how we code and experience information, Neuro-Semantics is a model of meaning-making. Neuro-Semantics informs us how we make meaning out of the information codes and translate into our neurology.

1. Solutions are answers to designed outcomes and highest intentionality.
2. Solutions are best built when the client feels safe, trusted, and valued.
3. Solutions are functions of our mental-emotional maps.
4. Solutions are constructed from thinking, meaning-making, and integrating.
5. Solutions are built out of the resources people have within.
6. Solutions are often implied in the “problem.”
7. Solutions can often be built out of “exceptions” to the problem.
8. Solutions can often be constructed from hypothetical mapping (as if framing).
9. Solutions can be built by framing change as an ongoing, inevitable process.
10. Solutions are best created when the coach *believes* in the client and the possibility of solutions.
11. Solutions are changes that transform life at various levels: behavioral, personal, direction.

12. Solutions are created by reframing.

Building Solutions with Your Clients

As you understand the processes for creating solutions, you can then co-create with your client the needed solutions. First and foremost, you *co-create with your client*. You do *not* create the solution by yourself and then hand it over to your client. The onus for the solution does *not* rest exclusively on you— it is a *collaboration between you and your client*. The resources are within the client, the motivational energy to act on the solution is in your client. That's why your primary role is to *facilitate*. That's why *rapport* with your client and entering into your client's world and using your client's words and meta-programs are so essential in coaching.

This also explains why *you do your best work when you stick with the well-formed outcome questions until you co-create a desired outcome*. That's premise #1. Don't attempt to do anything until you finish that. After all, the outcome —when it is well-designed and absolutely fitting for your client— informs you about the solution. Obviously, the solution must fit the outcome. And if you only have a vague idea of the outcome, or why it's so important, or what the person has to actually do to achieve it— then you will not be able to co-create an effective solution.

By starting with the client's outcome and getting that clearly defined also clears out many of the client's obstacles, mis-understandings, mis-diagnosis, etc. that block the development of a solution. That's why *sometimes*, not always, but sometimes, just asking the well-formed outcome questions flushes out the real issues and exposes the solution.

The key for finding the solution occurs in question seven: “What do you have to *do* to get what you want?” The answer to that question puts the client in the *here-and-now* and invites him to talk in *process terms* about things in his control. That's where *the solution* is. That will *solve* the gap between now and then. The next key question is question fourteen, “What could stop you from getting what you want?” That is the problem question. “What is *thrown in the way* (Greek, pro-blemo) that prevents you from getting what you want? The answers to that question then *solve* the barrier or interference question.

As a Meta-Coach, *you are a creator and designer of solutions in collaboration with your client*. Together you create customized solutions that improve your client's life. Obviously, you need skills of creativity, skills of facilitation, skills of rapport, skills of questions, and critically— skills of collaboration. In this series of articles, I will develop the solution premises and if you read carefully, you'll gain a whole set of *solution focus questions* that you'll be able to ask your clients.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #17
April 15, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#2)

SOLUTION BUILDING VIA RAPPORT

When you co-create solutions with your client, you develop an unique way of conversing— *an interactive solution focused dialogue*. We call that conversation— “coaching.” To be truly solution focused in your coaching, you have to adopt an unique way of thinking. Since you are not a consultant or a teacher, it is *not* your role to figure out the solution and hand it to your client. Instead you have a much tougher job. This is what premise #2 suggests: Solutions are best built when the client feels safe, trusted, and valued.

The challenge is to co-create with your client. And to do that, you have to gain rapport, facilitate your client’s inner powers, and enable your client to work together with you collaboratively. Once you do that you have to enter into that person’s matrix— so that you can discover how that person thinks, values, filters (meta-programs), and changes. After all, you are not the one who needs the solution. And you are not the one who will be applying the solution. So if the solution will work for that person, it has to fit for that person and her situation. It is for this reason that the solution will be uniquely customized so that it makes sense (meaningful) and fits your client’s context.

Rapport is first and foremost for yet another reason. Rapport enables the client to cooperate with you. For this, you go first. You start by cooperating with your client— matching physiology, matching words, matching beliefs, understandings, etc. You acknowledge, you validate, you compliment. In all of these ways, you communicate that you are there *for your client*. Then, out of that safety and atmosphere of trust, the client allows himself to cooperate with you.

Isn’t that funny? A client comes to you, wants your help, pays you money, invests time and energy and then holds back. Some will actively resist! Why in the world would someone do that? Usually it’s because there’s not enough rapport and the person is testing you to see if you are really there on his behalf or not. Sometimes the resistance is the person’s way of operating in the world— her meta-program. She mismatches. It’s just his way of thinking. Sometimes the person is strongwill in temperament and does not know how to be compliant.

Whatever the reason— the push-and-tug, the back-and-forth between coach and client (what is labeled as “resistance”) prevents a mutual collaborative co-creating of solutions. In these instances, you ask questions and the client doesn’t answer them. Sometimes the client may distract you to problems and complaints. Sometimes the client may distract to wishes, hopes, desires, but not goals.

Meta-Coach: What is your goal?

Client: I am so sick of procrastinating. I just feel like I’m wasting my life. Sometimes I get depressed and sometimes I get so angry ... I don’t know what to do.

MC: So what would you like to change about that?

C: My wife is also on my case about procrastinating. And I want to do better, I do. But after I make a resolution, things don't get better.

MC: When we finish the coaching, how would you like to be acting instead of procrastination?

In all of these responses, the client is actually cooperating. The problem is that *he is not cooperating in the way we typically want cooperation* and not in a way that seems like cooperating. It may even seem like resisting or distracting. Yet framing it as “resistance” is not productive and actually makes your work harder. Instead assume that this is his way of cooperating. When you do then you'll discover that he is telling you a lot about himself, how he operates, how he thinks, and the matrix he lives within. How do you take the first step with such a client to co-create a solution? Acknowledge what you hear and then give either a validation or a compliment.

Acknowledgment: What I have heard you say is that you are so sick of procrastinating. That procrastination makes you feel like you're wasting your life. And that it sometimes leads you to get depressed and sometimes to get angry.

Compliment: I'm impressed at how aware you have become about how procrastination undermines your highest and best and how you have begin taking the first steps to deal with it.

Leading: So I'm guessing you are ready to give up procrastinating for taking effective action, is that right?

By acknowledging and complimenting in this way, *you are creating rapport and building up a supportive relationship*. Now your solution focused questions will be more like to invite a co-creation with your client.

Solution focused questions: When you're not procrastinating and not wasting your life and no longer depressed or angry, what will you be *doing* and how will that enable you to feel?

If you're ready to become a solution focused Meta-Coach— start with rapport, deep rapport as you enter fully into your client's world. Accept and appreciate *whatever* your client brings to the session and begin to co-develop the solution.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #18
April 22, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#3)

SOLUTION BUILDING VIA THE WAY THEY THINK

Let us start with the next two premises (from that original list of premises) that define and describe solution focused Meta-Coaching:

#3. Solutions are functions of our mental-emotional maps.

#4. Solutions are constructed from thinking, meaning-making, and integrating.

From these solution principles, the solution will be constructed from the person's thinking patterns. After all, if they can't *think* the solution, they won't be able to *do* the solution. Ultimately they have to represent it and frame it. That gives you several areas to explore with your client.

- What are the person's thinking patterns (meta-programs)?
- What cognitive distortions and/or fallacies do you detect in the person's thinking?
- What cognitive biases are evident in the person's talking and thinking?
- As you step back and infer what's implied in the person's talk, what assumptions are being made?

To co-create a solution— use *acknowledgments* whenever you hear a piece of thinking that strikes you as particularly significant. It might strike you as the solution, it might strike you as the problem. Acknowledge any piece of thinking that might indicate a meta-program, a cognitive bias or cognitive distortion. Acknowledge the good, the bad, the ugly. Just ask. At this point, do not challenge it, not at first. First simply draw attention to the thinking. Often clients will immediately react to your acknowledgment. They will be surprised, even shocked, when they hear their words externalized.

- “I said that?!”
- “That sounds silly when you say it.”
- “Well, not really, I should have said ...”

When you acknowledge, you often bring what may be barely conscious, even unconscious, into full consciousness. It is often a wake up call for your client. It may bring an old post-hypnotic suggestion to light and break that old trance. It may de-hypnotize! What you are doing is *making the thinking visible*.

Here's another solution focus dynamic and skill. Most of our thinking is invisible—even to us. After all, you and I can think so fast and so unconsciously, far faster than we can turn all of the thoughts into words. So when you ask questions and get a client to speak, you are helping that person to make her thoughts visible— visible not only to you, but even to them. This expands

self-awareness and with that inner awareness comes choice.

Now once you have made *the person's thinking visible*, you are in a position to determine if “the thinking itself” is the problem and needs a solution. This is often the case. The *frame of thinking* is the problem, not the person. The person is using a way of thinking that creates the blocks and interferences. This is where the Meta-Programs Model and the Meta-Model Questions become some of your very best coaching tools. Now you can expand meta-programs or ask questions that presuppose the opposite meta-program. Now you can ask specificity questions to enable the person to re-map the conclusions which the person has made. All of this is because *Solutions are functions of our mental-emotional maps*. So when you help the person re-map, your client can begin to create a mental and emotional map that will work.

The fourth premise similarly describes the solution focus process: *Solutions are constructed from thinking, meaning-making, and integrating*. As you make the person's thinking visible, you can then tell if is *the meaning* that's the problem or *the kind of meaning-making* that created the problem. And with that, you can move to belief change, reframing, mind-to-muscling, and other patterns for intervention.

Ultimately, solutions are ideas, suggestions, or even full fledged strategies. We solve things by thinking in new and different ways. We solve things by framing things in a new way. To be a solution focused Meta-Coach— work to make your client's thinking visible. Then both of you will have a pretty good idea about how to develop a solution.

Want more about solutions? See *Creative Solutions* (2017) as well as *Executive Thinking* (2018).

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #19
April 29, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#4)

SOLUTION BUILDING VIA FINDING RESOURCES

Finding, building, developing, and applying *resources* to a problem or the person is perhaps NLP's par excellence contribution for creating solutions. That makes it inherently a solution focus approach as a Meta-Coach. When you learn NLP, you learn from day one to begin asking the resource question, "What resource do you need so that you can handle that?" The resource question is built into the SCORE model— "R" in that model stands for *resources*. Resources is what enables a person to move from today to tomorrow.

What is a resource? It could be something external— time, money, personnel, friends, network, books, library, a computer, iphone, and on and on. It could be something internal— an idea, a belief, a decision, an understanding, a strategy, a state, and on and on. The word itself, *re-source*, speaks about getting back to your source— what you're about, what you're trying to do, your purpose, your center. Whatever it is, a resource enables you to function more effectively and productively. You are able to achieve your goals, actualize your intentions, and take effective action.

For all of those reasons, we all want to feel resourceful— capable and able to *do*, to perform, to achieve what's important to us. To feel unresourceful is to feel incapable, to be confused, to not know what to do, etc. Being unresourceful is a problem that needs solving. So often in co-creating a solution with a client— the objective is to enable the person to gain a sense of internal resourcefulness. And often that is a state— confident, resilient, persistent, courageous, loving, compassionate, firm, etc. To co-create solutions, ask about your client's life. What are her hobbies, interests, strengths, talents, etc. What is he really good at?

Solution premise #5: *Solutions are built out of the resources people have within*, therefore provides a basic solution orientation for you as a coach. Help your client become resourceful. Accordingly, this is one of the first things that you will always want to check on and work on with your clients.

Is she resourceful? How resourceful? How much more resourceful does he need to be?
What resources does she need? What's preventing him from being resourceful?

An important implication from this premise is another basic NLP presupposition, namely, *People have all the resources that they need*. This does *not* mean that they have the skills, in fact, they do not. But they do have the basic ingredients for the required skills. What are these resources? This is a contribution that Neuro-Semantics has made and what you learned when you learned the Meta-States Model. We have identified them as the four basic powers (or responses): thinking,

emoting, speaking, and acting. These form the internal structure of every skill on Planet Earth. From these arise all of the ways that we act to take effective action to achieve our objectives. From these arise our secondary powers— initiative, proactivity, responsibility, relating, creating, innovating, and on and on.

The essential *resources* that every client has begins with the four inescapable *responses* of thinking, emoting, speaking, and acting. And these can be put together to construct all sorts of strategies. Here the NLP Strategy Model and the advanced listening skill of listening, detecting, exploring, and eliciting strategies enables you as a coach to co-create with your client *the customized strategy* your client needs to achieve the realistic goals that he or she sets.

Strategies speak about how a person has ordered his responses to achieve a particular state and/or behavior. If it doesn't work, then the strategy— as a mental map— is inadequate and needs to be updated. If it works, but is inelegant, the strategy needs to be streamlined and made more elegant. Here, as a co-creator with your client, you find out what strategies the person has and what strategies the person needs.

- Do they need a decision-making strategy?
- Do they need an inside-out persuasion strategy?
- Do they need an inside-out wealth strategy?
- Do they need a resilience strategy?

Whatever strategy they need, if the objective is realistic, actionable, and compelling, then you can coach your client to develop the strategy that will be *the solution* for their life situation. If the resource is a state, you can facilitate your client accessing, developing, and anchoring the best state for whatever task lies before them.

To co-create solutions with your clients, think of this as a formula:

Identify the situation, find gap between now and then, ask “What resource is needed?”
access that resource, apply the resource.

In solution development you do not inherently need to know the person's history. Where it came from is not a requirement of the resources needed to achieve one's goals. As a solution focused Meta-Coach, you don't need to know the *why*, you only needed to know the *what* and the *how*.

The Newest Book for Meta-Coaches — *Hypnotic Thinking*.

Click on <https://www.neurosemantics.com/pay-a-statement/> Accepts any credit card.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #20
May 6, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#5)

SOLUTION BUILDING VIA FINDING EXCEPTIONS

Another way, and a great way, to co-create a solution with a client is to engage in an exploration of *exceptions*. When you hold an *Exceptions Conversation*, you are tapping into the sixth premise: *Solutions can often be built out of 'exceptions' to the problem.*

When it comes to problems, there are often (and usually) exceptions. That is, there are times when the problem does not occur. At such times, since the problem isn't occurring, something else is, and that something else may be an aspect of the solution or something that could be used to create a solution. An astonishing thing about exceptions is that they are most often *not even recognized*. More often than not, they are discounted, trivialized, and viewed as a "nothing."

Therefore the process of searching out an exception is itself a skill and requires an optimistic attitude, a belief in the value of exceptions, and the ability to keep exploring to "develop" the exception. Then, once you have an exception, you will probably need to highlight its significance in order to build on it. This will be especially true of perfectionists and others who have a pattern of discounting. It is the process of discounting that blinds one from seeing how an exception can be built into a solution.

The Exceptions Conversation Questions

- When does the problem occur? When are you blocked? When are you stopped?
- When does the problem *not* occur? When are you *not* stopped or blocked?
- How is the solution (or an aspect of the solution) occurring, at least a little bit, even now?
- Does the *not*-problem occur deliberately or spontaneously? How does it come about?
- When or where are you already doing some of what you want?
- What is different about those times? What are you doing differently?
- How are you thinking differently?

Suppose your client complains about getting upset and angry and then saying what he should not say (e.g., he yells at someone, he calls names, he threatens, etc.).

MC: When does this problem *not* occur?

C: It occurs every time I am around my brother.

MC: So it occurs every single time you are around your brother?

C: Yes, well not if we are in a formal setting like a wedding or funeral.

MC: So is it that you don't get angry at that time or that you manage your anger?

C: Well sometimes I do get angry at him, but I don't yell at him.

MC: That's great! I'm impressed that you can, at times, manage your anger. How do you

do that?

C: I don't know, I just don't yell or curse, especially if I'm in a church. Only an idiot would do that.

MC: So you have some frames about being in a formal setting or in a church that helps you control how you manage your anger?

C: Yeah, I guess.

MC: So I'm wondering about your beliefs and values that enables your self-control?

Exploring an exception enables you to mine internal resources that the client has, but does not recognize, does not apply to the situation, does not see as a solution, etc. This taps into Solution Premise #5: *Solutions are built out of the resources people have within*. When you explore an exception, you are inviting your client to look at the other side of the problem. That's often difficult for the client, especially if the problem is creating a lot of stress and pressure, because the more stress, the more likely that the client will over-generalize things. "The problem is pervasive, all the time, and everywhere." Over-generalizing then blinds the person to exceptions.

MC: So you say you always take things personal and it makes your life miserable, that you always have, and that you can't not take an insult or criticism personal.

C: Yes, I hear that some people don't take an criticism personal, I guess I'm just a sensitive person.

MC: When do you *not* take a criticism personal?

C: Well, I always do. I have never been able to not take it personal.

MC: When you were in grammar school, did you take the comments of other kids personal?

C: Yeah.

MC: What kind of things did the other kids say that you took personal?

C: Well they would call names mostly, say I was a loser or fat.

MC: How old does a criticism have to be so you don't take it personal?

C: How old? What do you mean? I don't understand.

MC: Well when you now think about one of those kids saying you are a loser or fat, do you still take it personally?

C: (laughing) No, of course not.

MC: That's great! How do you *not* take it personal when once you did?

C: Well, I know it doesn't fit.

It is this *development of the exception*, working it, exploring it, discovering what is within the exception that you can then use to build up a solution. So look for exceptions— ask about them— you will be on your way to being a solution focused Meta-Coach.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #21
May 12, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#6)

SOLUTION BUILDING VIA HYPOTHETICAL EXPLORATIONS

You know the “as if” frame in NLP. That’s the frame wherein you act *as if* you already are want you want— confident, resilient, curious, playful, etc. Do that and the amazing thing is— you begin to feel and experience that state. Imagine *as if* you were experiencing your goal, and you begin to take on some of the attitude and actions that will enable you to make it real. When you do this you are building a solution based on a hypothetical. This fits the seventh premise, “*Solutions can often be constructed from hypothetical mapping.*”

You already use hypothetical explorations and constructions when you use “The Miracle Question” of Steve de Shazar. It is incorporated in *the Meta-Stating Possibility* pattern that you learned in APG. Here the hypothetical set up of a miracle—in the middle-of-the-night— invites you to start constructing a new possible world and what that would lead to. And, as you do that, you do so *apart from* and *outside of* the old frames. When you accept the hypothetical set-up of a miracle, you set aside the old constraints and frames that held you inside the problem. That allows you to escape from *the kind of thinking that created the problem*. It enables you to step out of that box of thinking and take on a new way of thinking.

In the APG pattern, we made it a little bit more elegant by also anchoring the two spaces— the space where you are engaged in the old thinking, and the space where you are free from it and can use your imagine to construct in your mind *life the day after the miracle*. And you get to throw in a bit of trance so that it taps into and allows unconscious resources to be accessed.

This was developed in the field of *Brief Psychotherapy* which grew out of Ericksonian hypnosis just as NLP grew out of it. There Steve de Shazar and others used various versions of the miracle question to facilitate constructing solutions using hypothetical thinking and imagining. Here are some additional versions, the first one uses the miracle metaphor, the others do not.

If a miracle happened tonight and you woke up tomorrow and found that the problem was solved, or at least that you were reasonable confident you were on a track to solving it, what would you be *doing* differently?

Let us say tomorrow you wake up and you have not decided yet about your job, but you are thinking you are *on track* to making an eventual decision, what are you *doing* differently?

If I were a fly on the wall and watching you, what would I see you *doing* differently? What would I see that would tell me that you are feeling differently? How would someone else know?

Lets pretend the problem is solved and you are having better luck with x-problem, what are you *doing* differently?

If this were our last session and you were walking out of here with the problem solved, or you were on track to solving it, what would you be *doing* differently?

Notice that with each of these, the essential question is about *what would you be doing*. The word *doing* focuses the solution on the *actions* that your client is, or will be, doing. This makes the solution process oriented and something that your client *does*. It is what they can do in the here-and-now. As these solution building questions focus on the *here-and-now*, the focus goes to getting *on track* to the solution.

If you utilize the worldview of your clients as you ask hypothetical questions, you can make it easier for your client to enter *the hypothetical solution frame*. One danger in using hypothetical and imaginative constructions, some people build utopian solutions of perfectionism. And as such, they are just too big, too unbelievable, too far in the future, and so on. At this point, think in terms of *scaling down the hypothetical*. Ask them how may they be doing the solution “a little bit” right now? As you together search and find times when the solution is happening *a little bit* even now, you prevent them from overwhelming themselves with too big of an imagined solution. What you are doing is locating bits of the hypothetical solution in the present. And with that you can invite your client to step into the movie.

If this is even a little bit of the way you want to be and what you will be doing, how much does that put you *on track* to your goal?

Many solutions are created and developed hypothetically. They are imagined into being. This is how new things can come into the world that did not exist before. You imagine, with your client, things that can be, then you work to make it actual. This is possibility thinking at its best— here being used to develop solutions. To your solution-focused coaching!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #22
May 20, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#7)

LOOK INSIDE THE PROBLEM AND BEHOLD — THE SOLUTION

As you engage in the search for solutions with your clients, there's one great place to explore that—on first thought— will seem contradictory, even paradoxical. It is stated in Solution premise #8, *Solutions are often implied in the "problem."*

Now I put the word *problem* in quotes because often the real problem hides within and behind "the attempted solution." What the person has been doing to fix the problem *is* so often actually the real problem. Of course, it almost never seems that way to your client and, in such cases, the client will actually mis-diagnose both *the problem* and *the solution*. Because of this, your ability to detect a mis-diagnosis by your client reveals a higher level listening skill (a 3.5 level skill). The reason an advanced listening skill is because it's subtle how an attempted solution actually operates as the real problem.

Probably the most common form of the attempted solution being the actual problem is that of seeking to avoid, resist, fight, or ignore the first-level difficulty. Here, taking my cue from the field of Brief Therapy, let us first distinguish between a *difficulty* and a *problem*. At the primary level of experience— there are numerous *difficulties*. These are things that you have to deal with and they are often difficult— requiring effort, energy, understanding, patience, etc. Then, when a person *mis-handles* the difficult, he creates a *problem*.

Not being able to get to sleep is a difficulty. Numerous variables can play into that— too many things on one's mind, not letting things go, activities prior to going to bed that keep one revved up or agitated (reading, talking, watching TV, playing games, scanning the internet), lack of exercise, eating snacks thereby activating the digestive system, etc. Without addressing any of these, the person's *attempted solution* is to "try really hard to go to sleep." Now we have a *problem*. This mis-handling of the difficulty makes it not only more difficult (which it does), but also creates a second-level (meta-level) problem. Now it becomes *the real problem*.

Realizing this gives you the clue as to the solution— we have to correct and change the attempted solution. *Stop trying to go to sleep— try to stay up all night*. Paradoxically, once a person gives up "trying" to sleep, he will more likely fall asleep. The problem here is also the mis-use of intentionality. The *trying to sleep* messes up a natural, organic process. The counter intention, *trying to stay up*, readjusts things so the natural processes can operate.

Here the Meta-States Model also provides you lots of critical insights. Primary state fear is not a problem and never is. If there is danger or threat, *fear* informs and energizes you to handle that

danger. You have a difficulty perhaps— handling a height, a snake, a tight place, etc. But if you mis-handle your fear, and you start *fearing* your fear— you have created a meta-level problem. When you bring *fear* to your state of fear— you are fearing your state, yourself, your experience but your state, your self, your experience is not dangerous. Again, your attempted solution is the problem. And again, paradoxically, *accepting and embracing the fear reduces the first level fear*.

For this second-level problem, meta-questions will flush out the hidden structure. “What do you think or feel about X?” (about the state of fear, the experience of sleeping, making a mistake, being embarrassed, etc.). It is your client’s second-level response to his first-level response or experience that *is* the problem. Whatever they have done in that second-response— *that is* the problem. If they have accessed a negative state, created a limiting belief, made a constraining decision, etc.— *that is the problem*.

What then is the solution? *The solution is to reverse the attempted solution*. Accept the fear, the non-sleeping, the embarrassment, the mistake, etc. “Embrace what you have identified as a difficulty.” Disliking, hating, fearing, angering, guilt, insulting self, and so on *is the problematic attempted solution* and not only makes the first level difficulty more difficult, structurally it sets up an unsolvable game.

As a solution focused Meta-Coach, welcome the person’s difficulty, explore it, accept it, express great curiosity and interest in it. Once you have the complaint fully described— see what happens *when you flit it around*. That will usually get you close to a true and lasting solution.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #23
May 27, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#8)

SOLUTION BUILDING VIA FRAMING CHANGE

An interesting frame that locks many clients into seemingly unsolvable problems is the assumption of stability. This is the primitive idea that the world is solid, stable, unchanging and fixed. While it is primitive, there's numerous factors that seduce a person to *think that way*. Language is probably the biggest culprit. It is the nature of words and language itself that when you name something— *that's what it is to you*. Afterwards it is hard to see or think about it in any other way. The fact of languaging an experience gives us a pseudo-sense of control over it.

This is especially the problem with *labels*. Once you label a person in a particular way— he is an alcoholic, she is a bitch, he is schizophrenic, she is a ruthless business leader, and so on. The label blinds us from being able to see the person in any other way. And with repetition, it creates a severe limitation. This is where diagnostic labels can become not only dehumanizing, but also put the person in a frame of unchangeability. Now the person is really stuck!

Consider the language of false nouns— nominalizations. These verbs turned into nouns deceive us precisely because they *hide the action and the processes* and *freeze them* so that they seem stable and unchanging. When you hear about a “relationship,” it sounds solid. Yet hidden away is that someone is *relating* to someone else in a particular way, at a particular time. It extremely over-generalizes and creates an immense distortion.

Yet we all talk in nominalizations and, oftentimes, the very process of clients talking in nominalizations *is the problem*. “With my relationship on the line, my self-esteem has suffered a lot.” Such overly abstract statements prevent us from actually knowing what's going on, but even worse, we infer an unchanging world. “The *realization* that my *career* has reached a *stalemate* makes my *depression* worse.”

Implied is the idea that some things are unchangeable. Yet actually, *change is an ongoing process*. Change is inevitable. Stability is the illusion. Everything is constantly changing because we live in a process universe where at the sub-atomic level, everything is energy. This underscores solution premise #9, *Solutions can be built by framing change as an ongoing, inevitable process*.

Therefore, to be a solution focused Meta-Coach, ask about change, expect change, look for change, and highlight changes. While this can be challenging with some clients, patience and persistence along with change expectation questions will eventually help clients discover that change is the only option. “I've always been this way; I'm just sensitive to criticism.” You were

that way as a child? You were sensitive to criticism when you first learned to walk? How sensitive to criticism would you be if you walked into a mental ward and one of the patients started criticizing you?

The nice thing about change is that you don't have to start with large transformational change, you can build a change solution from small changes. In fact, small changes can snowball into larger and larger changes. So value minimal changes and invite your client to see that bits of change has begun. "What has changed since the last session?" If the client can't find any, ask for specifics and tune your ears for discounting. "So things are about the same. Okay, and where there times when you could have expected that things would have gotten worse, but they did not?"

If the change seems too big and overwhelming, scale it down. Use a small, even a minor, change to develop a larger solution change. Inviting a small change, one that may even seem irrelevant, can often facilitate an entire system to shift and change. This often happens when you ask the clarity check question. You ask your client how she is using the word depression and in the process you discover it means being unhappy and when you find out that there are small little happiness's present, the overall gestalt of depression changes.

When you do this as a Meta-Coach, you are also using systems thinking. You are essentially stepping back and gaining a larger level perspective which enables you to see change. It gives you perspective. It's like returning to a home or town after being away for ten years— you can see lots of changes whereas someone who has been there all the time hardly notices them.

When you know that change is continuous and stability is the illusion, ask questions that assume change, expect change in your client, highlight instances of change. Then, out of change co-create solutions that will direct the change so it becomes truly *a good change solution*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #24
June 3, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#9)

SOLUTION BUILDING VIA DIFFERENCES

You can count on one thing— if you have tried and tried one thing to create a solution and, after you have quality controlled it so that you know it is good for you and persisted sufficient— doing more of the same will in all likelihood not work. You will simply get more of the same. Or worse — it could make things even more problematic. Of course, you will want to make sure about the ecology and persistence. After you have asked all of the crucial specifics that you can think of, “What was the quality of what you did?” “How long did you persist?” “What as your attitude as you acted?,” only then *do something different*.

When you have done all of that, you are now ready to set *the difference frame* with your client. “We now know what does *not* work. “Is there anything in the attempt you have used to solve things that we could change in some way that would make it work?” “If not, are you willing to do something different? “Are you willing to do something different even though it may strike you as strange, weird, silly, embarrassing, etc.?”

Now if some of what your client is doing is working even to a small degree— then do more of the same. If it does, ask, “Does this put you on track? Are you at least going in the right direction?” If yes, then that would indicated to do more of the same and/or to upgrade what the person is doing. If not, then confirm and get a decision, “Enough is enough; no more of that.” Now you are at the place of doing something different— anything. At this point, *anything different offers a potential solution*.

Bateson argued that what we map onto our mental models of the world is difference and that what stands out in terms of solutions is *the difference that makes a difference*. So use that idea to co-create with your client, a significance difference. That will then be the solution that brings about the needed changes. The good news is that there are lots of ways of developing *difference*.

- What could you do that would be different? How would that be different?
- What different time, different place, with a different person, etc. could you do?
- What difference could you bring to your representations, frames, beliefs, decisions, etc.?

Consider the search, that you do with your client, for differences as an experiment. Now your tasks and explorations are an experiment to find out how to adjust, shift, and alter the current actions. You can explore if the person knows someone who can get that outcome and what is that person *doing differently*? You could explore those unique moments when your client is able to achieve their goal, what’s different about those times? You can ask about the wildest and craziest ideas and how those differences could make the difference.

If nothing is the same, if change is the only constant (last week's article), learning to think and value difference becomes a critical piece in your facilitation. This will be especially powerful for a matcher or someone who deeply believes in a particular practice. For that person, the difference questions will help to expand the person's meta-program of sameness/ difference. To your best solutions!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #25
June 10, 2020
Solution Focus Meta-Coaching (#10)

SOLUTION BUILDING VIA SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Sometimes in the process of co-creating a solution with your client— sometimes things seem to go round and round in a circle. Your client describes what he wants to do to achieve an outcome, perhaps step up to a challenge. Yet in describing it and trying to do that, he then interprets it as making his sense of anxiety and fear worse. But he “knows” better, and so he tries harder, yet every time he acts in that state, he triggers even more his fearful and anxiety-increasing interpretations thereby making the problem worse. He is going in circles. His acting and interpreting is feeding off of each other sending him more and more into a downward spiral.

We humans often do this. The way we interpret something that we are doing (or avoiding) leads to “more of the same” so that we recursively go round and round. Stimulus leads to a response which leads back to the stimulus which leads to the response, etc. We dislike something, then we dislike our experience of disliking, that causes us to dislike the disliking-of-our-dislike even more. We get upset and angry at our angry outbursts which leads us to then get even more angry at our anger-of-our-anger.

If this describes the problem of a spinning out of control system, then the solution will be to stop feeding the system back onto itself. Sounds easy! But, of course, it is not. To the person *inside a negative self-reflexive system*, it can even be difficult to see the structure of the problem. They are inside the frame and *the frame has them*. That’s why when you tell them to stop doing what they are doing as part of their attempted solution— it sounds crazy to them. That’s their solution! “Why would I stop doing that?”

Here the problem is one of *more of the same* makes things worse. Then there is the additional problem of being so caught up inside the frame that the person cannot see the actual problem. This blind spot makes things worse as the person thinks you are robbing him of the solution. So what do you do as a Meta-Coach?

To co-create a solution in a situation like this, first you will want to facilitate your client to *step out of the system* so that he can see it. When she can do that, she can then perceive what’s actually going on, and then it will make perfect senses. Yet in doing this, that is, getting the person out of the vortex of a spinning out-of-control system can be challenging.

The problem structure here is one common for most people who are *addicted* to something. There are unspoken, even unconscious, values that can occur that keeps the system spinning. It fits the structure of, “I want to... but I can’t.”

“I want to quit smoking, but I can’t.”

“I want to stop eating sweets or junk food, but I can’t.”

“I want to stop procrastinating, but I can’t.”

It could also fit the structure of, “I want to start doing X, but I can’t get myself to do that.”

“I want to start exercising regularly, but I can’t get myself to start.”

“I want to read regularly every day, but I can’t ... too many distractions.”

Begin the solution process by inviting the person to step out of the system by observing their pattern over time. Do that with ***exploration questions***:

How long have you been in this state of *not* doing what you want to do? When did it start? How long have you been trying? Has anything worked to enable you to do what you want to do and sustain it? Have you had enough of doing more of the same of what has not been working? Do you need to keep trying even though he has not worked?

When you drive this home and the person is ready to give up the old attempted solution, then ask ***the commitment question***, “Are you willing to try something different?” You will probably get a *yes*, but that’s not sufficient. Ask, “Are you willing to try something new and different *even if* it doesn’t make sense, and you don’t believe in it?”

Take the fear-oriented person who can scare himself out of his wits about something. He wants to start a business, but is scared of failing, scare of taking a risk, fear of looking foolish, etc. He thinks about it, makes plans, but doesn’t take action. Take him through the *exploration questions* and then through the *commitment questions*. Now you are ready for the *self-reflexivity questions*.

When you bring fear to the idea of starting a business, what does that do to you?

Applying fear to the idea puts you in what state of mind? What emotional state?

If you were to reverse this, what emotion would you want to or need to bring to this?

The answers will be things like courage, passion, responsibility, love, commitment, “do it anyway,” etc. Now you have the solution. So meta-state that solution as the person’s answer.

“As you bring courage to starting a business, what will you be able to do that you haven’t been able to do before? What else? ...”

What you are doing is changing the self-reflexivity pattern. Fear to fear only increases the fear and makes the fear become paranoia and negativity. Courage to fear changes the quality of the fear, now the person can face the fear and take smart calculated risks so that he can get started on the project.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #26
June 17, 2020

ADHD / ADD — CURSE OR BLESSING?

Coaching and training often brings us in close contact with people who have (or think they have) Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). For nearly 25 years, our analysis in Neuro-Semantics is this— People are more likely to have *intention deficit* rather than attention deficit. True ADD is based on a brain deficiency and that is actually rare.

What we usually call ADD is simply the *lack of wanting to do whatever one has attention deficient about*. The child does not want to study grammar or math. The adult does not want to read up on self-help or pay attention to a conversation that seems irrelevant. So test it. Ask about what the child or the adult can pay attention to, focus on, and get completely absorbed in. “What do you love?” “What do you find most engaging? Video-games, baseball, sports cars, etc.?” If there is even one place in life where a person can stay focused— then that person does not have attention deficient disorder. Instead that person suffers from a lack of interest.

Recently, in the March/April 2020 edition of *Psychotherapy Networker*, Edward Hallowell, a Harvard Medical School faculty member for 21 years was interviewed in an article titled, “A Vast Difference: Depathologizing ADHD.” He has written the book, *Driven to Distraction* and he believes that ADHD is “a blessing rather than a curse.” He also does not think that the problem is attention deficit.

“... the deficit disorder model is simply inaccurate. This is not a deficit of attention at all. It’s an abundance of attention. The problem is controlling it.”

He described the brain of high energy people as “having a Ferrari engine for a brain with bicycle brakes.” ADHD is a combination of distractibility, impulsivity, and restlessness. It is power without control. Talk about a reframe! *Power without control*. And if that’s what it is, the solution is to “add control” so that the power can be directed and focused.

“The flip side of distractibility is curiosity, which is a tremendously powerful force. The flip side of impulsivity is creativity. What is creativity but impulsivity gone right? You don’t plan for creative ideas; they just pop. They come with disinhibition. So they depend on having brakes that aren’t too strong.” (p. 60)

Here are some more reframes. ADD is impulsivity which is the basis of creativity, “creativity is impulsivity gone right.” This provides a positive spin on what is commonly labeled a problem and something bad. But that does not help. Labeling is often just a more sophisticated form of name-calling which is a cognitive distortion. And this is probably the case with most cases of ADHD. Labeling invites a person to adopt a negative self-identity which only complicates the problem as it layers another level of negative framing over the experience.

“What kid wants to be told he has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder? ... It’s

pathologizing, stigmatizing...”

So how can you handle ADHD? The article by Dr Edward Hallowell focuses on education, on helping people understand the actual structure of what we call attention deficient.

“It begins with education, with reframing. It also begins with wanting to understand it. ... It’s about finding the right places for people to thrive, which involves trial and error. ... Physical exercise helps a lot, as do sleep, nutrition, coaching, and understanding the components of executive functioning.”

It is very, very rare for a person to actually have a brain disorder that involves attention deficient. Ninety-five percent of the time the problem is a lack of intention— the person has not set his or her *intentions on the values of a given experience*. And as a Meta-Coach you can resolve this by repeatedly running the Intentionality Pattern with a person. Run it repeatedly until the person builds up a set of energized intentions and aligns his attentions so that they serve his intentions. You can also run the Empowerment Pattern so that the person takes ownership of her mental and emotional powers and her verbal and behavioral powers.

ADD and/or ADHD does not have to be a curse. It can be transformed into a blessing —power under control, attention driven by intention and when you have that, you can then direct the person to put it into use and develop one or more “genius” states wherein that person has all of his or her resources available for living life at its fullest. Do that as a Meta-Coach and you are on your way to change the world one conversation at a time.

About learning, he says that

“... getting a taste of success along the way is critical to staying on your learning edge. That’s the fuel that keeps you hungering for more, building tolerance for failures which are an inherent part of deliberate practice. Paradox in deliberate practice— at first your own confidence declines while your actual, measured ability in whatever skill you’re working on improves.”

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #27
June 24, 2020
Making Your Conversations Hypnotic #1

COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Can They be Hypnotic?

As a Meta-Coach, you know all about the basic *conversations* that are inherent in coaching. You have been trained to discern the first five: Is this a clarity conversation? Is this a decision conversation? Is this a planning conversation? Is this a resourcing or experiencing conversation? Is this a change conversation? The great majority of coaching conversations will fall into those five basic categories.

In PCMC training and in the manual, there are pages about the distinctions within those conversations. And the importance of that lies in being able to *think strategically* with your clients. That is, to think in terms of *where* are you in relationship to what your client wants? Further each conversation entails a different state and a different strategy. Almost every conversation begins with a *clarity conversation* because it takes the communication dialogue of going back and forth in an effort to understand your client— on your client’s terms— and to begin to recognize the meaning-making patterns which your client uses.

There are, of course, many more coaching conversations. You will find some in the book, *Coaching Conversations*, you will find specific ones in *Systemic Coaching*, as well as in *Executive Coaching*. And when it comes to coaching groups of people, there are yet even more coaching conversations (*Group and Team Coaching*).

Now for another question, and one that may seem strange upon first glance. *Can a coaching conversation be hypnotic?* Actually that’s an easy question to answer. The answer is yes, of course. Anytime you take a client *inside* so that he focuses narrowly on some concern— a memory, an imagination, a concept— you have just *induced a hypnotic state*. This state differs from an uptime state of being in external sensory awareness. It is a downtime state (to use NLP language). The person has gone *down* inside herself.

I said, “yes, of course,” because to exchange words, to dialogue about meanings, to “communicate” is to invite your listener and responder to go inside. It is inevitable. That’s how *words* work. To make sense of any word, phrase, sentence, or story, you have to go inside yourself to access the linguistic code that you have learned. If you didn’t learn the linguistic code, then all of the words are gibberish to you. You do not know what they are saying or talking about. It is in this sense that *language itself is hypnotic*. That’s why in NLP we say that all communication is hypnotic.

So whenever you and your client are engaged in an intensely focused conversation about things not present — the person’s job, spouse, children, boss, financial dealings, exercise, etc.— you and your client are, at least partially, in a hypnotic state. That’s what you learned when you learned the Milton Model in your NLP trainings. And if you took Master Practitioner training, you learned the basics about how to recognize hypnotic language patterns and how to use them.

This is important as a Meta-Coach. Why? For many reasons. Here’s one. Because a basic core coaching competency is *state induction* (skill #7), your ability to elicit, induce, invite, deepen, and use your client’s *state* is essential to being an effective coach. That’s what makes coaching experiential. If you cannot do this — and most coaches cannot! — you cannot truly “coach.” You only have a chat. You are merely intellectualizing about coaching and not coaching. Coaching, as an intimate, intense, deep, personal conversation *absolutely requires the induction of state so that the client feels and experiences the meanings of the conversation.*

Is that a strong enough reason why? Watch most coaching conversations, especially by people who have not been trained in NLP, and you will be watching boring, blah, bland, and non-transformational talks. Anyone could carry on those talks! What distinguishes a true coach — and hopefully every Meta-Coach, is that you know how to get a person to *experience and emotionally feel* things. That’s what state induction is all about. If your client’s are not getting significant transformational changes — review and practice the *state induction skills* in your ACMC manual. Then practice daily until you can look like and sound like what you’re talking about.

While coaching is *not* hypnosis, to the extent it is a *deeply felt conversation* that gets to the heart of things and brings about transformation — coaching is hypnotic in nature. That’s what the new book, *Thinking Hypnotically* (2020) is all about and more specifically what the PDF file book, *Hypnotic Conversations* is all about.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #28
July 1, 2020
Making Your Conversations Hypnotic #2

DETECTING THE HYPNOTIC IN COACHING CONVERSATIONS

If indeed all communication inherently involves aspects of the hypnotic and if an intense and personal coaching conversation takes a person inside in a hypnotic way— how can you tell? How can you recognize when a client is in a trance state? How can you use hypnotic language patterns in an effective way in your coaching?

\

In answer, *calibrate to your client*. Learn to tell when a client is speaking from what's on the edge of his tongue versus when he goes inside and enters into a “downtime” state. Can you tell? What are the signs of a trance? It's obvious when a person goes into a *deep* trance— eyes glaze over or close, facial muscles smooth out, breathing becomes slower and muscle tension relaxes, etc. Similarly, these same signs will be there when your client is turning inward— except they will be more minimal and less obvious, hence he need to calibrate.

Perhaps the biggest difference will be the time element. In a coaching conversation, your client will be going in and coming out ... sometimes moment by moment. The time spent in trance will be short, sometimes momentarily ... and there will usually *not* be any awareness of this in your client. From her perspective, she is just talking and she thinks she is present to you. In terms of calibration— you will have to refine your skills to tell when your client is inside and when outside.

Here's a clue. Whenever you ask questions that cannot be immediately answered, but the person has to *think about something*, the person will be going inside to access that information. This is where detailed questions— questions about what something looked like, sounded like, felt like, etc. are often questions that cannot be immediately answered. This is where asking Meta-Model questions often elicits what we call a *transderivational search to the person's reference index*. In everyday language — he has gone inside to get his reference (what he's thinking about), when, where, how, etc. He is in a trance. At that point, the question for you is —what trance states are you inviting?

Now because the coaching conversation is designed to be a dialogue— an exchange of meaning as you ask about the person's meanings, the trance states are often just a second or two long. The person goes there and comes back out with the required information. Sometimes in your conversations, you have probably noted that a person is taking a long time. Depending on the context and the conversation— you might “hold that space” so the person can gather her thoughts while inside. And to help her, you might want to quietly utter the key words that will help her stay focused there.

At other times, the person is inside *and up against an internal barrier*. It may be a taboo, a repression, a blank, etc. Now you not only “hold the space” but validate that moment and that experience giving the person permission to be there, to “not know,” to just stay there, and that it’s okay. At other times, the person may be inside getting stuck in a negative loop. Since that is never useful, you will want to detect that and then *interrupt that old dysfunctional trance and bring the person out*. That’s when you need to have several ways to do a state interrupt.

As a Meta-Coach I suggest that you start with this recognition — *the hypnotic is present when you are coaching*. Why is that? Simply because the person’s larger unconscious or out-of-conscious mind is present. The person sitting there has lots of history (past) that’s held in memory. The person sitting there has lots of future that’s held in her imagination. Many of the person’s knowledge is now in the body, in muscle memory, it also is there. By recognizing the presence of the hypnotic— you can also begin to listen for and distinguish old trances that the person is living. Often these are the very trances the person has come to have you help them de-hypnotize so that they can stop their past from being so determinative in today’s living.

In *Executive Thinking* (2018) and *Brain Camp* we focus on aspects of the unconscious (the not-thinking) and how you can detect these aspects of the person’s experience. When you know how the old learnings, the limiting ideas, beliefs, and decisions manifest themselves— you can begin to calibrate for them and catch them in real time. And as you become increasingly skilled in recognizing the hypnotic moments, you’ll be developing your skills for leading *Hypnotic Conversations* (2020).

For more information — see *Trance-Formations* (1979)
Thinking Hypnotically (2020)
Master Prac. Module on Trance

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #29
July 8, 2020
Making Your Conversations Hypnotic #3

HYPNOTIC TALKING

Do you know how to detect the *source* of your client's talking— where they are getting that information? Is the information that your client is providing coming from what's on the tip of his consciousness? Or is she going *inside* and gathering deep internal information and getting to “the heart of things?”

NLP 101 gives you the first clues about this. Think eye-accessing cues. As you ask questions and as your client provides answers—notice and calibrate how your client moves her eyes. Calibrate the difference for each individual client in terms of where that person gathers *past* information and *future* (or imagined) information. Typically the person will move eyes to his left for the past and right for imagined. What is seen is usually up, what is spoken is horizontal back and forth. What is emotional (kinesthetically) will be down and right and what is valued will be down and left. All that is statistically “typical,” *and* there will be idiosyncratic differences between individuals.

Once you calibrate to a particular client, you will essentially be creating a map of how that person internally organizes information. Now when she answers quickly— that presupposes that the information is on the tip of the mind and in conscious awareness. She does not have to search for it. However, if he looks away (or defocuses) and seems to be *searching* for information— then you have a pretty strong clue that the person has entered into a hypnotic state. The person is in “downtime” (to use NLP talk). The person is either recalling or constructing information.

And amazingly, you can talk with the person while he or she is in that hypnotic state. Ask for detailed questions that require deep internal processing. “Is that picture in color?” “Where do you hear that voice, to your right, or left, or behind you, or somewhere else?” To ask about how the person has coded the information in sensory terms generally requires the person to go deeper into that state and bring that information back out.

“Are you inside that movie— you are there again, seeing and hearing and feeling what you felt then? Or perhaps it is like you are watching it and you are seeing *you* experiencing that?” This question is not only asking about a particular cinematic code (a sub-modality) it is also asking about a meta-program distinction. “Are you *experiencing* it from the inside-out or from the outside-in?” A great many problems that people have is that they use a present-code for a past reference. The result? No wonder they are still feeling bad! In their mind (mind-body system) *they are in the past.*

Your job at that point? Invite them to come into the present. Ask the person, “Was it cloudy or was the sun shining on that day?” To answer that the person has to step out of the *present* code

and look back on it. Frame by implication—you are asking them to leave that old trance. You are inviting them into an experience of de-hypnosis. And you are doing that by asking a simple information gathering question. Isn't that amazing!? And even if they say, "I don't know" they are still stepping out of the *code for the present*.

Now *talking with your client while he is in and out of trance* describes what's going on— whether you know it or not. To facilitate this, ask clarification questions about any of the reference your client speaks about that does not immediately trigger a sensory-based image. To do that, use the *Representational Tracking* tool that you learned in *Coaching Essentials* or in *NLP Practitioner* (see *Communication Magic*, 2001). That will train your intuitions about what to ask and when. Here the "clarity check" serves several purposes. It not only does intelligent information gathering, it also enables you to encourage your client to take the time *to go deep inside*.

This is also a point in coaching where most coaches go too fast. The conversation goes back and forth at 100 miles an hour (160 kilometers an hour) with your client giving you information and never stopping, slowing down and going inside. All of the information is from his conscious mind and nothing is from *a search inside*. That's why the information is fairly superficial and not all that meaningful. And that's because you are not asking clarity check questions. You are assuming that you understand—and that will be *a fatal flaw* for your coaching.

Slow it down so that you can enable and facilitate your client to go inside to places where she may not have been in years—in decades. Slow down so he can access old meaning structures (programs) which are now causing problems. If you do this, you will be able to facilitate greater transformation in your clients— and transformations that will last. (More next time)

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #30
July 15, 2020
Making Your Conversations Hypnotic #4

THE HYPNOTIC INWARD JOURNEY

In the previous article, I suggested that by using clarity checks and slowing the conversation down (#3), you can empower and facilitate your clients. You empower them to *go inside* and access the very frames which are either causing the trouble or the frames that will set the person free. And when they *go inside*, because that is the “downtime” state of trance, it stands in contrast with the “uptime” state of being in sensory-awareness. As a Meta-Coach you need the ability to take a person into both states and to constantly monitor where your client is. Your use of the *uptime* state grounds your client in reality, in today’s see-hear-feel world. Your use of the *downtime* state invites your client into his or her internal world of meaning— and it is to that world you coach.

You coach *the inner game* of your client’s meanings— beliefs, values, decisions, identities, permissions, taboos, memories, imaginations, understandings, knowledge, etc. All of these aspects of *meaning* comprise your client’s semantics and it is those semantics which inform the person’s neurology, out of which then comes the person’s performance of the outer game.

One way that NLP talked about these ideas was by introducing the idea of *a transderivational search to a referential index* or TDS. This arose when NLP built its communication model on Norm Chomsky’s Transformational Grammar. And the TDS refers to how words work to the extent that they *refer* to an experience in the person’s memory.

Yet because information habituates and becomes unconscious, 99% of what we “know,” we do not remember when we learned it or even know that we know. As we live today, we simply assume it. Yet while forgotten, it is not gone. We continue to use it as our reference point and automatically respond to it in a non-thinking way (See *Executive Thinking*, 2018). Therefore as a Meta-Coach your job is to help your client get to “the heart of things” —his or her references of meaning which are mostly outside of conscious awareness.

All of that explains why *taking your client inside to the inner game* is essential for effective coaching. This explains why any true coaching is *meta-coaching* in that it is going after the frames that structure the person’s “model of the world.” It is in this sense that all effective communication and effective coaching is hypnotic in nature. This also explains why all of the patterns you learned in *Coaching Genius* as meta-state patterns were simultaneously hypnotic patterns. If you want to fully understand that, I put the “genius” pattern in *Thinking Hypnotically* and then all of the rest of those patterns in *Hypnotic Conversations*.

In addition to the two processes mentioned in the last article (#3) and even more powerful are the meta-questions. That’s because a meta-question, by its very nature, does not ask about something in the external world. It asks about a person’s inner world of thinking-and-feeling. And it is so

simple. So easy. In fact, its ease is what blinds most people to it.

“You say you’re tired of the emotional ups-and-downs that come with the fear of failure? So would you say that you are also *tired* of being *afraid* of failing at something?”

What’s implied and built into this meta-question is the unspoken premise that the person can *step back* and look at his *fear* of failing and *feel tired* of the effects of that fear. Now you can build on it and invite the person to go in even further.

“Are you *tired enough* of the *fear* to access the resources you need so that you can face that fear with courage and determination and not let the fear put you off from taking effective action?”

Notice the pathway for taking the person inside— you are pacing his present state (fear of failure) and *tired* of that fear and then you build on it. At a higher meta-level is “resources,” specifically “courage” and “determination” which once applied (“face the fear”) will lead the person to take effective action. Did you notice the hypnotic nature of that question? Here are trance words — nominalizations (resources, courage, determination) which, because they are unspecified, the person has to fill in the meanings.

Now suppose the person is also in a state of doubt and hesitation ... perhaps this is too big of a jump for him and he mumbles, “I don’t know if that’s possible ... I’ve tried before.” When I hear that, I know something about the person’s current *skeptical trance state* which he is in.

“Yes, that may be so ... yet what I’m wondering is if you would *like to believe* that it is possible? ... [pause] ... imagine what that would be like if somehow you could access a bold courage to face that unrealistic fear and not take counsel of that fear, if only for a moment, if you stepped into that level of courage ... how would that be for you?”

Again, pace, pace, lead. Pace, pace, lead is the meta-level hypnotic pattern that our founders discovered in Milton Erickson. And you lead as in that paragraph with meta-questions. You hold the space and the meaning construct (courage to face fear) as you invite your client to enter into a space that may be new and foreign.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #31
July 22, 2020
Making Your Conversations Hypnotic #5

META-STATING IS A HYPNOTIC INDUCTION

When you bring one state to another (meta-state), you invite a person to move up (transcend) the first state and enter into a higher state. And that higher state is typically outside of consciousness — it is what is in the back of the mind. And when you do this, you engage in a hypnotic process as you take your client *inside* (a downtime state) an experience. Now while the term “hypnosis” poorly describes this (because of all of the mythology around hypnosis), it is hypnotic in nature.

What this means is that whenever you coach your client’s states and meta-states, you are inevitably doing something hypnotic. That’s why learning and over-learning the Meta-States Model is so essential to your effectiveness as a Meta-Coach. Yes you experienced the APG program, yet that is just the introduction to Meta-States. I generally recommend that you take APG at least five times and from different trainers to truly “get” it. Why? Because no one gets it the first time or the second time. And there’s a reason for that. What you get in APG is a very tightly condensed training that will take you many months to unpack. I spent years constructing it and years refining it in trainings.

Nor does it end there. And after APG, you can take the four days of LPG (Living Personal Genius) and/or many of the Meta-States Application trainings. One of the unplanned for things that arose with the Meta-States Model are the many, many application trainings. And why? Because most of the highly desired “states” that we humans long for are not simple primary states. Most are meta-states. And because they are meta-states, they are composed of layers of states. They are composed of specific meta-level strategies that bring various resources together to create such states as resilience, forgiveness, determination, seeing opportunities, seizing opportunities, etc.

And many of these complex layered meta-states also require the synergy process. That is, not only do you bring one state to another, you do so in such a way that in the interaction something emerges that is “more than and different from the sum of the parts.” The states gestalt or synergize to create a synthesis that you can not plan. Ideally, the person who trained you in Meta-States quickly took you through the 16 interfaces of state-upon-state (at the back of the APG manual) to at least introduce you to the incredible range of possibilities.

Then there are the numerous books on the Meta-State Model. *Meta-States: Mastering the Higher Levels of Mind* gives you the theoretical background and applies it to resilience. *Dragon Slaying: Dragons to Princes* applies meta-states to those highly unresourceful states that we call “dragon” states and how to build up resourceful complex meta-states. *Meta-States Magic* is a collection

book that combines the three years of the Meta-States Journal and gives you lots of background information to the basic APG patterns.

When we applied the Meta-States model to NLP time-lines, that generated *Adventures in Time*. When we applied it to Meta-Programs that led to the book *Figuring Out People*. When we applied it to the reframing patterns, *Mind-Lines*. Applied to model led to *NLP Going Meta*. Applied to sub-modalities led to *Sub-Modalities Going Meta*. And so it continues.

Because when we embrace a state or experience and then transcend that state to a higher state—you not only have a meta-state, you have just set a frame of meaning about that first state. You have classified that first state putting it into a conceptual category. You have either constructed a new matrix of meaning for your client or entered into your client's matrix to discover how he or she has constructed their inner world of meaning.

No wonder than that the whole process of meta-stating is hypnotic and what you are doing is not changing the outside world, but the inside world. We call it the *Inner Game* because that sells much better than “hypnosis.” Yet when you know that *taking a person inside one's inner world of meaning* is either hypnotizing or de-hypnotizing, then you are able to appreciate the impact that you are having (or can have) in that person's constructs of reality ... and the difference that will make in his or her life.

When you embrace a state and then access another state to apply to it, you are engaged in a hypnotic conversation with your client. To the extent you really don't know that or realize that, you really don't know what you're doing. And that can be frustrating... a frustration that vanishes away when you understand and begin to do *hypnotic thinking* yourself as a coach.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #32
July 29, 2020
A Funny Thing Happened
in the Coaching Room #1

COACHING WITH HUMOR

When you think and talk about the field of coaching, more than likely you are in a business state, a matter-of-fact state, and a serious state. After all, your clients bring to you the things in their life which are serious— job and career, what to do for a living, family, how to raise healthy kids, how to solve conflicts, stress management, negative emotions, ill-health, the purpose of life, and on and on. Add to that, when many clients arrive in your coaching room, they are not in positive states— they may be desperate, they may feel helpless, even hopeless, often they are uncertain and insecure.

Yet if you get as serious as your clients, you definitely will be less effective than you could be. If you get serious, you will not have available one of the most powerful interventions— humor. Does that strike you as incredulous? That’s not surprising. In most cultures around the world, humor, playfulness, fun, laughter, etc. are framed as the polar opposite to being professional and effective. Yet that’s a myth and a significant misunderstanding.

As a coach, and especially as a Meta-Coach, *you need humor and you need to use humor in your coaching sessions.* Humor as an attitude, a resource, and an intervention is one of the most powerful states that you need as a coach. That’s why I have demonstrated repeatedly for nearly 20 years that one of the opening frames I typically use is one that positively frames humor.

“I may smile or even laugh during the intensity of the conversation that we’re going to have, that’s because humor enables us to lighten up, gain a broader perspective, and find creative solutions. I will never laugh at you, but only at us silly humans who can get over-serious to our own detriment.”

In a book about change, Steven Friedman recommended humor and enumerated several of the benefits of a humorous coaching approach.

“The more serious you are about getting results, the more humor and laughter you need to use. Humor and laughter both promote hope and are a direct antidote for anxiety, fear, rage, and sadness.” (*The New Language of Change*, 1993, p. 105)

Friedman’s comment about the seriousness of “getting results” highlights the place where you will be able to find *funny things* in the lives of your clients. We all tend to naturally get serious when we get focused on a goal. It comes with the territory.

Michael Apter, a theorist in the field of humor (*Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach*, 1993), explains that when we go into a *telic state* we naturally become serious and with seriousness, we are highly liable to do all kinds of things, silly things, stupid things, to reach our

goal. *Telic* from *telos* (goal) refers to a focused, goal-oriented state. By contrast, Apter says that the *paratelic state* is a state wherein our focus is not on some external objective, but on what we are doing— on the process in the here-and-now. It is also the “play” state where— whatever we’re doing— we are fully present and enjoying it. Maslow called this the *being*-realm (B-realm) and contrasted it with the *deficiency*-realm (D-realm).

What is potentially funny or humorous in your clients? Often it is *the goals* they set, the *ridiculous* things they do to achieve their goals, the *crazy* ideas in the back of their mind by which they explain their actions, the *excuses* that they come up with to explain irresponsibility, etc.

- *Goals:* They want to *not* feel something, fear, anger, sadness, pain, etc. If you step back from this and think about it, this is really humorous. Now you have an intervention. “You really do not want to feel fear? ... Really?” Then draw a picture for your client about how ridiculous that would be.
- *Trying to win:* Another tremendous source of humor is *what* people actually do or think about doing to achieve their goals. He wants less conflict at home and more peace, so he yells at his wife and teenage boy. Think about that one! Do an acknowledgment, “So I hear that in service of less conflict and more peace, *you yell at the people in your house*. [pause] ... Am I getting that right?” Here, by helping the person actually *hear* what he is saying, the incongruity may break through in a smile. Suddenly he sees how silly that is.
- *Crazy ideas:* Whatever your client thinks and feels comes from her frames. Her mental frames set up the beliefs, decisions, understandings, taboos, etc. and governs her experiences. By hearing them, you will hear Cognitive Distortions and because they are out-dated childish thinking patterns, they contain lots of humor. Perhaps your client is “should-ing” on himself — that’s funny inasmuch as in English it sounds like “shitting” on oneself.
- *Excuses:* Here’s another place loaded for humor. But not if you get caught up in the content— you have to be able to maintain perspective. When your client complains about not having enough time, enough energy, enough sleep, and so on —you can reply with a humor exploration. Of course, make sure you are in rapport, and smile so the person knows you’re being playful. “Oh, I didn’t realize that you don’t get 24 hours like the rest of us. How many hours do you get for a day?”

Now to coach with humor, while it sounds easy and fun, is actually much more complex than it sounds. And it will require a lot from you.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #33
August 5, 2020
A Funny Thing Happened
in the Coaching Room #2

ARE YOU A HUMOROUS COACH?

How humorous are you as a coach? If I were sitting outside of your coaching room, would I hear much laughing going on in your sessions? What does it actually mean to be a humorous coach? Does it mean telling jokes? For that matter, what is the interface between humor and coaching?

All of these questions, and many more, highlight one of the most *missing ingredients in most coaching—humor*. As a human resource, it is precisely what many clients need. It is definitely what every perfectionist needs! And given that most people who seek out a coach is a top performer or wants to be, a person who wants to achieve more, do more, think more, create more, etc., they are prime candidates to be victims of the occupational hazard of high achievers—getting too serious.

Recently I have shifted my focus on *thinking* to a new dimension — *humorous thinking*. I began with *Executive Thinking* (2018) for activating your highest executive thinking potentials. That led to the training, *Brain Camp*. From there I began focusing on the specific thinking that's involved in modeling. That led to *Thinking as a Modeler* (2019) for an inside look at modeling expertise. After that came *Hypnotic Thinking* (2020) for unleashing unconscious potentials. That has led to a new training which I will do for the first time early next year. Then, still on the subject of the most unique thing for humans—*thinking*, I shifted to studying humor. That has led to the next book, *Humorous Thinking*—the essence of creativity, reframing, innovations and well-being.

And what is this subjective experience that we call *humor*? At first glance, you would think that would be an easy question to answer. I discovered that it is not so easy. In fact, in the very process of *defining* what it is, I discovered numerous things about humor that has deepened my appreciation for this experience and its role in our consciousness.

Many of the things about humor are paradoxical. For example, humor is not the opposite of being serious, it is the antidote to seriousness. Humor is not about fun and lightness, it is actually about what is wrong, unsettling, and disturbing. Humor is not an immediate or primary emotion, it may include one of several primary emotions, but mostly, it is a meta-emotion involving numerous hidden frames. Humor seems to be about play and playing, which it is for children, but for adults it is semantic play and lies at the heart of what makes humans distinct—creativity, innovation, mental flexibility, and reframing.

What is humor? Humor is a benign recognition of incongruence, it is the ability to maintain perspective in the midst of imperfect human life. It is the ability to mentally play around with

perspectives and solutions to problems. It is the ability to enjoy yourself in a world that is inherently unfair, unjust, imperfect, and full of stupidity.

Humor is one of our best ways to be authentic with our own imperfections and the imperfections of others. Humor is a resource— of mind and emotion— by which you can connect with others, create long term bonds, reduce stress, manage the negative emotions of fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety, and stay inspired regardless of what the world throws at you.

Humor is also fun. It is a delight to smile, to chuckle, and to laugh aloud. Humor puts you in a good mood, makes you easier to live with, and endows your “personality” with an attractiveness that we call “a sense of humor.” Humor can turn away an angry response, soften a criticism, enable people to stay friends, and release pleasure neuro-chemistry in your body. And humor is a hypnotic trance, the world’s fastest hypnotic trance as you are induced into the joke world and then momentarily you are back.

What’s amazing about humor is that while it involves the most difficult puzzles about human beings, human consciousness, the unconscious, the meta-levels of the brain —it is available to everyone and seems the simplest thing in the world. So what can humor do for you as a Meta-Coach and your clients? In addition to all of the things mentioned above, humor can lighten up the intensity and seriousness of the coaching conversation. It can give you and your client that larger perspective so that it doesn’t get caught up and defeated by the content of a struggle.

Given all of this, let me re-phrase my opening question. Would you like to become a humorous coach? Would you like to use more humor with your clients so that they will find more joy and fun in their coaching conversations with you? That will be our focus next time.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #34
August 12, 2020
*A Funny Thing Happened
in the Coaching Room #3*

SPONTANEOUS HUMOR IN COACHING

You don't need to make things up, the truth is entertaining enough.

To be a humorous coach does *not* mean telling jokes. Don't even think about going there! Telling jokes in a coaching context will seem corny and ridiculous. The comedy that you want to access and share in coaching is not Stand-Up comedy where you present one gag after another. That obviously is artificial and would seem like something external and irrelevant jerry-rigged onto coaching.

If that's not what I mean by a "humorous coach," or using humor in coaching, then what do I mean? I am referring to the spontaneous humor that arises socially everyday from the funny things that happen to us. The great majority of humor, of laughs, of smiles does not occur via the telling of jokes. We mostly smile and laugh at the small surprises, incongruencies, and playfulness that springs up unintentionally and accidentally. Most humor occurs from the way we mis-speak, get things wrong, act in clumsy ways, bungle something, make funny faces, etc.

And you can count on all of that happening regularly in coaching sessions. If you have eyes and ears for it— *it is there*. All you need to do is to recognize it and then to learn how to use it effectively in service of your client. Some humor that you will hear are Freudian slips— people accidentally say something which they didn't mean to say yet which actually reveals a hidden truth.

Mostly, however, the humorous will be about things in your client's life that are incongruent, exaggerated, non-sensical, ridiculous or ludicrous, a misunderstanding, a silliness, etc. So look for these things. Actually you are in a position to see and hear humorous things much better than your clients. You have the perspective of an outsider and can hold this larger picture in mind. And, unlike your client, you are not caught up inside the frame or blinded by it.

Further, your client is highly likely to be not only serious, but over-serious and therefore not in any mood to be humorous. Precisely because of that, they all the more need a humor perspective. Of course, for you to be humorous and use more humor, you have to maintain a particular perspective and state about coaching, and about your clients. First and foremost, you have to remember that as a Meta-Coach, you are there to facilitate, not to fix. Your clients are not broken, they don't need therapy, and they have sufficient potential to become their best selves. What they may need is your support and challenge so that they will take courageous action.

The perspective of an effective coach is that life is much larger than whatever challenges a client is up against. As a Meta-Coach your task is to stay out of context (except to ground the conversation). It's your job also to be able to invite your client to step back from his life, his immediate experiences, his beliefs, values, decisions, understandings, etc. so that he can gain perspective about the choices (conscious or unconscious) that he has been making and is making. And precisely because your client is in a *telic* goal-oriented state and has immediate practical needs, it will be very, very easy for her to get serious and therefore ridiculous.

That's what you should look for. Look for it and then grab it so that you can play with it and invite your client to play with you. How you will do that will depend on your style as a coach and your own comfort with humor and with challenging. Will you gently play with it? Will you use surprise to create a shock effect? Will you tease and rib her? Will you exaggerate and make it ridiculous?

Once when I heard a client talk about his internal critic as a voice in his head that would not leave him alone, I gasped as in terror, as if watching a horror movie of aliens popping out of a person's chest:

“Oh my God! The voice won't leave you alone! It's like the voice is a ghost who's spooking your mind and haunting your emotions! Oh my God!”

He knew I was teasing and playing and so he said in a more light-hearted way. “Well, it's not like that, it's not *that* bad.”

“Oh, so it's like a tenant who took up residency but won't pay rent, you have asked him to leave and have even issued a legal edict to leave the property, but he won't go. The voice has moved in and refuses to be evacuated.”

Now he was laughing. “No, no ... it's not like that.”

“So it's like a psychic has hacked your brain, stuck in a voice, a voice that rags on you and makes you feel like shit and you have to listen to it over and over and over and over and...”

With more laughter he interrupted me, “No, nothing like that. *I'm doing it*. I'm criticizing myself for not being perfect...” Now it was my turn to interrupt which I did with a disappointed tone:

“Oh, is that all? Shucks, I thought we might have a case of real pathology here, a case needing exorcism. Shucks... And I guess you know that *you can just stop doing that ... and problem solved!?*”

Humor— a way to indirectly communicate sensitive things in a way that can get through defenses and let the person gain an internal sense of distance. Try it!

Coming soon: The newest book, *Humorous Thinking: The Essence of Creativity, Reframing, Innovation, Well-Being, etc.* (2020)

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #35
August 19, 2020
A Funny Thing Happened
in the Coaching Room #4

HUMOR— A PATHWAY TO META

If you are like most people (and as a Meta-Coach, I hope you are not!), you wouldn't have even a clue that humor requires multiple meta-levels. You would not be any the wiser to how humor offers a doorway into "the back of the mind." Nor would you immediately guess that humor can help you diagnose a client's personality or be a signal for limiting beliefs. Yet humor can do all of that and more.

Philosophically and psychologically humor actually exists as a significant conceptual problem. That's because when you start to "explain" it, it is not easily explained. When you start to explain it, you then have to define it and that introduces even more problems. That's because there are many different kinds of humor— some healthy and some quite toxic. That was the problem I quickly encountered when I began to model the structure of humor. There are different structures for different kinds of humor.

If we begin, as humor itself begins, we start with the physical humor of children. What do they find that's funny? What's fun! Running, jumping, chasing, playing hide and seek, swinging around, etc. By the age of six something new emerges. Because the child can now hold two meanings in mind about the same idea, they can now play some simple word games, most notably "Knock, Knock" jokes. Later, after adolescence and into the adult years, humor requires the meta-level of background understanding of context. That's why young children typically do not *get* the joke or humor of adults. They don't have enough conceptual knowledge and cultural scripts to understand what's missing, what's incongruent, what's messed up, etc. to find it funny.

How about that? *Humor requires a meta-level of background knowledge— much of which is unconscious— against which the "joke" plays against.* Here is a joke from Lenny Bruce:

I won't say that ours was a tough school, but we had our own coroner. We used to write essays, 'What I'm going to be if I grow up.'

For a child to *get* that joke, he has to have a good bit of background knowledge. He has to understand what a coroner is, what a coroner does, why a school would have a coroner, and how that relates to the word "tough." That's a lot. Such jokes do not work with anyone who does not have sufficient background knowledge or cultural life scripts.

For something to be funny, it also has to perform two seemingly contradictory functions: it has to be within a context of safety so that it is benign and not dangerous or threatening *and* it has to violate expectations, understandings, mental frames, etc. When you think about it, that's a lot. Aristotle said humor is "that which is out of place in time and space without danger." So just as

we define an “emotion” in Neuro-Semantics as “the *difference* between expectation and experience,” so also humor. On one side of the scale there is a person’s expectations (the map of one’s beliefs, values, understandings, frames, etc.) and on the other side of the scale is experience (the territory of what happens, what exists, what was said or done). If expectation and experience are the same — nothing. But if there is a gap and expectation is violated, then there is emotion — in this case, humor.

Humor arises in the gap between expectation and experience. That’s why we laugh if that gap surprises us. “Ah, I didn’t expect *that!*” But it has to be a benign, non-dangerous surprise. If it is dangerous, we don’t laugh, we experience other emotions – fear, anger, stress, sadness, etc.

How does this fit into coaching? Ah, yes, at the juncture of your client’s *expectations* and *experiences*. And, every client you have has expectations. Do you know what your client is or was expecting? Have you tested the expectations to see if they are realistic, ecological, and reasonable? And every client you have has experiences. What has your client been experiencing and what is your client experience right now?

If you don’t know— ask. Ask and then get ready to hear some humor. Although more typical than not, your client is in a *serious* state about things, and will not see the humor. But you do, which enables you to help your client become aware of the incongruency. Then, with a bit of humor, perhaps a laugh, your client will gain enough distance to rethink things. And with that the Meta-Coaching can begin.

Coming soon: The newest book, *Humorous Thinking: The Essence of Creativity, Reframing, Innovation, Well-Being, etc.* (2020)

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #36
August 26, 2020
A Funny Thing Happened
in the Coaching Room #5

HUMOR— THE ABILITY TO TRANSCEND

The only way that you can laugh at something unpleasant, incongruent, or even distressful is to *step back from it*. When you are *in* something, it is next to impossible to see what could be funny. That's why the things you laugh at with friends when you reminisce about old times are the very things that *when you were there*, you could not laugh about. It is only with the distance of time, space, or psychological growth that you are able now to look back and laugh. And don't you say this? Haven't you said, at one time or another, "Well, one day I'll look back on this and laugh"?

So, why not now? Why not laugh sooner rather than later? And if this is good for you and me, it is also good for our coaching clients. In fact, because our clients are usually high performers and people who are more likely than not to take risks, stretch out of their comfort zone, and make really good mistakes (and not little measly mistakes)— they will all the more need *humor as a saving grace*.

Laughter is the vestibule of reframing. When you can smile, chuckle, or laugh at a mistake, a time when you got overly serious you treated something as an issue of life or death— then you can lighten up, gain some perspective, put things into a larger framework, and see it through new eyes. Often, before you can reframe, you have to laugh. Often, the "Aha!" of insight follows the ha, ha of humor. "Ah, now I get it!" So also with your clients.

The overly focused, over-serious, narrow band of focus that people get into when they get serious precludes them becoming argumentative, oppositional, resistant, and aggressive. Then, not being able to see the forest because of all the damn trees in the way— they tend to over-react, and make big deals out of minor things. Now, how many clients get into that kind of state?

What's needed at this point is the ability to transcend the immediate and gain a larger perspective. And that's precisely what humor enables. As a perspective, humor makes it possible for a person to step back and gain a broader point of view. It especially enables us to see our humanity— our fallibility, our silliness, the ridiculous things we say and do. When you suddenly gain a humorous perspective about something, you are liberated from it. It can no longer dominate and control you. You are free to be creative in figuring out what else you can do about it.

But here's the thing— when you or your client is in an angry non-humorous, serious state, the last thing anyone even *wants* to think or feel is humor. That's why it usually takes some *actual* time and space to get enough *distance* so as to be able to see it humorously. Now you know why, as a Meta-Coach, you need to have state induction skills and skills to interrupt a state or pattern. A humor interruption can jar your client so that she is shaken out of one state and enabled to see

things from a very different point of view. What is a *humor interruption* sound like or look like in a coaching conversation?

- *It could be a play on words.* This most naturally can be used when your client mis-speaks. “I just want to eliminate fear from my life.” “Eliminate, like when you go to the toilet, that kind of elimination?” This humorous rejoinder illustrates one of the key functions of humor— it gets people to stop and *think*.
- *It could be a purposeful mis-understanding.* “Did you just say that there’s no real leadership in your organization? Did I hear that right?” Again, it gives pause for thought.
- *It could be a surprise.* You could introduce a surprising idea into the conversation, an idea that jars and shocks. I do this whenever I hear someone talk about low or high self-esteem. “How low are we talking? Is your self-esteem down to your knee? If it is down to your ankles, then you really have a problem, but let’s hope to God that it is not down to your toes...” I introduce this silliness to make a point— another function of humor— to say that self-esteem is not an emotion.
- *It could be pointing out an incongruency.* “I am finding it hard to believe you ... because while you say you have the resources, your voice sounds *unsure and doubting* (spoken with a little child’s voice for emphasis).”
- *It could be playing with ideas.* We do that in NLP whenever we announce that an experience is a skill. “Wow! From what you’ve just said you must be a master hypnotist giving yourself those post-hypnotic suggestions of being a complete idiot who can’t do anything right.”

There are scores and scores of ways that you can introduce little moments of humor into a coaching conversation. As a skill, your ability to *add humor* or *to humorize* will develop with focused practice. For humor to be a saving grace it will need to be done from a state of respect and compassion and for the purpose of getting your client to laugh at the human dilemma. It must never be the case of laughing *at* your client, always *with* them.

Coming soon: The newest book, *Humorous Thinking: The Essence of Creativity, Reframing, Innovation, Well-Being, etc.* (2020)

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #37
September 2, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #1

HOW COULD YOUR GREAT COACHING GO WRONG?

Your client walks in, plops down in your coaching chair, you ask *the* question, “What do you want?” and off you go on the coaching adventure. Simple. Obvious. Your client, who does not need therapy, is there to make his or her life better. And you are there as a “making life better” facilitator. It’s a happy marriage. Right? What could go wrong? Well, actually lots of things. Here’s a list of some of the things that could go wrong:

- One of you is in a bad mood.
- Mis-diagnoses go unchallenged.
- Goals don’t develop.
- You never get specific; you stay in lala land.
- You induce the wrong kind of states.
- You reinforce limiting beliefs.
- You immunize a person against change.
- You fail to inspire.
- You fail to challenge.
- You get caught up in the details.

Things can and do go wrong. Coaching as a discipline is not a fail-safe experience and because it is not, this explains why effective coaching requires significant training and supervision. It requires expert skills and a meta-perspective. After all, human lives are at stake! If coaching is about change, the change could be for the worst rather than the better if you don’t know what you’re doing and are not aware of the pitfalls. That’s why it is so critical to distinguish the field of coaching from therapy and other professions, receive integrated experiential training in the required skills, and work within a professional community for accountability and support.

Recognizing things that could go wrong gives us a heads-up about potential problems. It enables us to prepare ourselves so that we are not taken back one of by the problems. At times, it enables us to preframe things therefore preventing certain problems from arising.

The Problem of being in the Wrong Mood

Imagine trying to coach when you are in the wrong mood— perhaps upset, perhaps angry, perhaps fearful about various things, etc. Imagine that! Or, imagine trying to coach a client who shows up in a state that is simply the wrong state for coaching. Now that’s going to be challenging!

Of course, the worst thing is when *you as the coach* are in the wrong mood. Now, even before you can begin coaching, you’ve got to coach yourself so you can manage your state. You’ve got

to shift your thinking, feeling, and physiology so that you can get into a coaching state— a state of quiet listening, patient acceptance, curious interest in your client, caring attitude about wanting the very best for this client, etc. What does this mean for you as a Meta-Coach? It means you need to be ready with some self state interrupt patterns and interrupt patterns robust enough to thoroughly jar you from the state you're in and jet propel you into your *genius coaching state*.

What that further means is that you need to identify and practice that genius coaching state often enough so that it is at *ready access*. Do that repeatedly and set an anchor for it and then when you need it, all you need to do is fire that anchor. As this is one of the great offerings that you have for your clients— it is essential that you do this for yourself and that you get really good at this.

Question: Why would you get into the wrong mood? Well, *life happens*. Things happen that are unexpected and undesired. From traffic, noise, sickness, children, money problems, conflict with colleagues, taxes, and so on. All sorts of things can come up that can disturb your inner peace. Further, you are running a business and all sorts of business things can come up just prior to the beginning of a session.

The real issue is not *what comes up*, but your resources for handling problems. First is your attitude resource. Do you have, and can you maintain, a robust attitude toward the existence of problems? Have you reframed problems — blocks to your objectives— as a *given* in life? As an *opportunity* for solving problems? As a potential for generating more value for yourself and others?

Are you crystal clear that you as a person are not the problem, that the problem isn't everywhere, and that it will not last forever? Once you have that clarity, you not only will be resilient within yourself, you will also be a good model for your client — an example of how to face and address the problems that life throws at us.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #38
September 9, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #2

MIS-DIAGNOSES GO UNCHALLENGED

Your client walks in, plops down in your coaching chair, you ask *the* question, “What do you want?” and off you go on the coaching adventure. Simple. Obvious. Your client, who does not need therapy, is there to make his or her life better. And you are there as a “making life better” facilitator. It’s a happy marriage. Right? What could go wrong? Well, actually lots of things.

The most obvious thing that could go wrong — right from the start— is that your client begins with a mis-diagnosis of what is needed in his life to make it better. To then complicate that, he mis-diagnoses what he thinks will make his life better. And then to triple the complication, you accept those mis-diagnoses at face value(!). You just run with it. You don’t question them, reality test them, or clarify them. Now we have three mistakes back-to-back.

Coaching involves diagnosis? Yes, of course! But don’t let the term “diagnosis” or “mis-diagnosis” misled you. What are we really talking about? We’re talking about something that everybody does. Whenever something goes wrong or something seems amiss or something is missing— as we think about it, *we come up with ideas about it— its source, its solution*. We are diagnosing. We are figuring out what it is, what causes it, how it works, its significance, and what we should do about it. [Ah, yes, the core 4 meaning construction questions again.]

As people *think about these things*, the more cognitive distortions, biases, and fallacies they employ in their thinking, the worse the diagnosis becomes. Woe! That should cause you to pause! The more off-target they get and the more erroneous the whole conceptual concept. The problem is *the kind of inadequate thinking* which they are employing as they think about the problem and about possible solutions. Here’s a big reason for you to be aware of the ways that thinking itself goes wrong.

Obviously, you want to know what your client thinks— how he is reasoning. And as you ask and listen— run the diagnosis through the checklists (of the cognitive distortions, cognitive biases, cognitive fallacies). Check the reasoning to catch any of these distortions, biases, or fallacies. Again, this is where your practical ability to *use* the Meta-Model comes in. This is where your ability to ask clarification questions multiple times as you track down how your client is using a term comes in.

As I wrote in the series on Solutions, frequently the attempted solution which your client has attempted is the problem. What she did to solve one problem has created more of the same or additional problems. That speaks about the life history of a misdiagnosis.

As a Meta-Coach, set in the back of your mind that what your client thinks will help may be a mis-diagnosis. Here you will need some healthy skepticism. Ask:

“And how did you come to that conclusion that X may be the problem? Are there any counter-facts to that conclusion? What other conclusions have you draw? If that isn’t the actual cause— what would you guess could be some other possibility?”

Put something else in the back of your mind as a warning light – *Solving the wrong problems solves nothing!* If you solve the wrong problem— the actual problem is still there and both you and your client will have a pseudo-enjoyment and confidence. So, slow down and spend time chasing down the real problem, get it clearly defined, then you and your client will be ready for problem-solving.

Whenever you diagnose, you are assuming things about “the problem” and “the solution.” Do you know the *assumptions* that you tend to use and operate from? If not, that would be a good coaching subject to be coached on. To your highest and best!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #39
September 16, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #3

GOALS DON'T DEVELOP

Here's something else that could go wrong in coaching and this happens to be a subtle one— your client's goals don't develop. Obvious you begin with *the* question, "What do you want?" and you supplement that question with the intentionality question, "Why is that important to you?" In fact, you repeat that question five times or more to make sure that the goal presented is indeed a real goal, an important goal, a goal that is relevant to the person's life, and a goal that's connected to her values.

And yet ... as you well know, often the goals are small selfish goals that won't really make that much of a difference in the person's life. At that point you, as the coach, are at a choice point. "Should I go with this goal that my client has presented or should I challenge him to get something really significant?" There is no one "right" answer to that. For some clients who are not very trusting, they may need you to first accept what they offer without much questioning so that they learn to trust you and enter into the experience of coaching.

Yet for other clients, to go with the goals they first present, could very well be a sign that you don't believe in them very much, that you are okay with them thinking small, and that you don't care enough to challenge them. That's the condition I have set for ACMC training— for training Meta-Coaches. We expect that you use the practice sessions to present your goals and to make them big enough and significant enough to give the coach something real to work with. If you don't, and a really important question arises again, "Are you, as a coach, coachable?" If a coach-to-be only gives minor little goals, we cannot tell if that person is actually a self-actualizing person willing to stretch out of his comfort zone or not.

That's one point and yet this is another one. *Healthy goals develop.* As you are reaching forward to a significant goal, it will expand, evolve, develop, and become a much more significant goal. Clients normally start with an outer goal— lose weight, begin exercising, learn a new skill, etc. Then, within the coaching process itself, the person begins to grow and change and as they change, *so do their goals.* What started off as a shortsighted little selfish goal develops into a goal for achieving something much more noble.

- Making more money becomes creating a business that will enrich the lives of many others.
- Losing weight becomes wanting to become a more beautiful person on the inside.
- Getting rid of the smoking habit becomes wanting to be energetic as a model for one's children.

How often it is that a client enters coaching and has no intention of achieving some noble purpose, but in the process they catch a vision. They begin to think of higher and more noble reasons for living. Their goals change from outer goals to inner goals— goals of *being and becoming*, goals

for how they live their lives from the inside-out. Now they want to be more resilient, more loving, more contributing, more patient, etc.

That's what happened to me when I first set a financial goal. At first it was just about money. It was just about increasing income. Later, my financial goals expanded to include budgeting, saving, investing, and later passive income, etc. Later the goals evolved from money to creating value, to seeing opportunities, to seizing opportunities, to becoming a wealthy person within myself— wealthy in ideas, time, relationships, health, joy, etc. What started out as an external goal evolved into some self-actualization goals, goals about *being and becoming*.

So again, I ask: Are your client's goals developing? Are they becoming self-actualization goals? Are they moving your client to living more of a self-actualizing life? When your client's goals develop, the person moves more and more into generative goals. Instead of focusing on fixing problems and finding remedies for various hassles of life— the goals become about *becoming*. They become about becoming the very best version of the person. Now they have goals like:

- highly resilient
- a great learner
- more charming when frustrated
- more forgiving when mis-represented
- more contributing

If that is yet another thing that could go wrong, now you have a heads-up and an idea of what you can do as a Meta-Coach.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #40
September 23, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #4

YOU STAY IN LA-LA LAND

The next item on the list of *things that could go wrong* is “You don’t get specific, you stay in la-la land.” Here’s a mistake that many, many coaches make— their coaching is far, far too general. Actually, in terms of thinking and communicating effectively— this is the case with most people. And that’s why the NLP Communication Model is so effective and necessary if a person wants to be a professional communicator.

Recently when someone asked me why I wrote the book on *Hypnotic Thinking*, I said “because that is how we all think and how we get in trouble with our thinking.” We think hypnotically as we use trance-like words, unspecified nouns and verbs, nominalizations, and language patterns that typically assume ideas that actually create our confusions and misunderstandings. And you can expect clients to think and talk in these ways. That’s why they are sitting in your coaching chair and need your help to get specific.

But, of course, if you can’t get specific— you won’t be able to help them get specific. And why get specific? *That’s how you ground things in reality.* And without things grounded in reality— the likelihood for a person to get confused and disoriented is high. And for you to help a coaching client person move forward in life, that person needs *a grounded hope*, a hope based on facts and what’s realistic for that person.

As a Meta-Coach this explains why we begin with the NLP communication model and especially the language model. When you learn it, you learn how to effectively ask the clarification question. This refers to asking how a person is using a word or phrase and chasing that referent until you get a sensory-based description. Typically that means you have to repeat the clarity question three, four, or five times. And with really global processors, sometimes you may have to keep chasing down that referent with ten or twenty questions.

A very seductive thing happens when you and your client are talking “global” talk— *it seems meaningful to both of you.* And because it seems to make sense to you, you do not detail the specifics. You think you understand. Actually, that is the first and most common cognitive bias that we humans suffer from— we think we understand. Talk about seductive. It seduces you to not ask, not explore, not question. Talk about a blind-spot— you are blind to the very thing you need to do and because you are blind, you have no inner urges or cues or intuitions that you are missing something. Yet you are missing things— lots of things!

Because of all of these things, you stay in la-la land. It seems meaningful and you think you are understanding your client and your client thinks she is understanding you and getting a lot of value from the coaching. It *seems* that way, but it is not that way. If this describes you, then

here's what I recommend for you to come down from la-la land and work on planet earth.

1) *Anticipate (expect) that you are missing a lot.* If you set this as your frame of mind, you will be more alert to things and more ready to explore your client's mental maps. This will help to break that assumptive state that you know. Question your knowing.

2) *Learn and practice clarity questions.* Whenever you hear any key word— set your aim to explore it with at least 3 to 5 clarity questions. Experiment with this with your buddy Meta-Coach. Take a key word, delegation, leadership, stress, etc. and ask about it until you are able to begin to see and hear the sensory referent in the theater of your mind.

3) *Learn to target nominalizations and inquire about them.* If vagueness has a champion, it is nominalizations. And in language, they are everywhere. First, you will need to be able to identify them. To practice, take a newspaper and read with a red pen— underlining every nominalization. Do that until the nominalizations, as it were, start jumping off the page and flagging your attention. Once you have turned on your mind and eyes to nominalizations, begin to denominalize them. What is the verb (action) that's hidden inside of the nominalization? In relationship there is relating. In motivation, there is moving. In self-esteem, there is esteeming.

4) *Flush out unspecified verbs and nouns.* Here's another place for you, as a Meta-Coach, to get really skilled. When you hear a verb— make a picture in your mind of the verb. If you hear "relating" to make a picture of that you need a who. Who is relating to who? How are they relating to each other? When, where? When you hear a noun— make a picture in your mind of that "object, person, or place." If you can't decide on it, detail it more. "Parents should relate to children with compassion." What parents? What children?

Here's to you plopping your feet down on planet earth and grounding yourself and your client so that when they go meta to la-la land, it is tied to reality!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #41
September 30, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #5

YOU INDUCE THE WRONG STATES

The next item on the list of *things that could go wrong* is: “You induce the wrong states.” This can occur by what you specifically do or by what you fail to do. As you know, one of the essential skills of a Meta-Coach is state induction. And what states? The feedback form offers some of the most basic states that you want as a coach to induce— rapport, compassion, trust, curiosity, openness, and learning.

What are some of the common states that are often induced which are counter-productive for coaching? The answer is frustration, irritation, pressure, controlled. And what triggers the frustration or irritation? Clients complain that the coach seems disconnected, not paying attention, or not really listening. For feeling pressured or controlled, clients say that the coach may be pushing too hard, confronting in a way that feels aggressive, or asking for responses that seem disconnected to their goals. Sometimes the wrong state in the client is the state wherein a client feels that the coaching isn’t working, isn’t going anywhere, and the client doesn’t see any evidence of change— discouraged, skeptical.

Because coaching is a *relationship* and because coaching requires trust— the coach has to be inducing an intimate state of care and compassion. It is rare that a client will open up and gain much from coaching if the client doesn’t *feel the connection*. So whenever a coach does something that breaks rapport, that seems uncaring or seems to be lacking compassion— that can induce the wrong state.

Solution? As a Meta-Coach, express your care and compassion. This is where using acknowledgments enable a client to *feel heard*. And using empathy statements along with validations builds up the relationship between you and your client. But don’t do it as “a technique.” Do it as a caring person. This is one reason to have some time between sessions so that you can get yourself into the right state.

If you are wanting to challenge your client and you do so without sufficient rapport— the challenge is likely to come across as being pushy, demanding, pressuring, or even manipulative. If you are thinking about improving your challenging skills and you jump in and confront something sensitive in your client— you could induce a state of offense or insult. Or if you move from one subject to another too quickly, that jarring transition may come across to your client as a disconnect or even as the lack of consideration.

Solution? Take your time with your client making sure that you have rapport. Do it physically and even more important, do it with their values, beliefs, and meta-programs. As you match and

pace their values, and they get the sense that you are in service of them being the best version of themselves—you earn the right to challenge and confront. As you do, include a bit of humor to create a light touch, so that your challenge is felt as playful and respectful.

To earn even more trust, ask your client how he feels about you and the relationship. “Am I doing anything that creates doubts or distrust in you?” “Do you feel that I’m caring and compassionate enough?” Here asking for feedback and receiving it well deepens the trust.

In terms of inducing the wrong state be very, very careful with “the feeling question.” “And how do you feel about that?” Asking this question when your client is talking about a problem, a defeat, a failure, a traumatic experience— *and you will probably deepen their pain*. You invite them to go more into it emotionally. And most of the time that will be not only unuseful, but counter-productive. Instead, ask the meaning question. “Given that you feel X, what are *the meanings* that you are giving to that situation?”

Unless a person is disconnected to his feelings and you are working on re-connecting them, you will *not* need the feeling question. For most people, emotions will come when you get a description and when you ask about the meanings, values, intentions, and other meta-levels. They will go into state and experience their emotions and you can amplify them by acknowledgments.

Here’s to things going right more and more in your Meta-Coaching!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #42
September 23, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #6

YOU REINFORCE LIMITING BELIEFS

The next item on the list of *things that could go wrong* is: “You reinforce limiting beliefs.” How do you do that? Your client states a limiting belief and you un-intentionally and well-meaning say things that actually invites the person to confirm the limiting belief. Your client says, “I’ve never been very good with reading, I’m a pretty slow reader.” You nod knowingly and utter something like, “And how do you feel about that?” Or “So you’ve always been that way?” Or, “What is your IQ level?” “Well, it’s okay, everybody can’t be a speed reader.”

Clients naturally bring up limitations and often when they do, they operate from a perspective that “that’s the way it is.” The worst thing you can do at that point is to confirm it. Confirming anything strengthens it and locks it in. That’s the structure of a belief— a confirmation about a thought. So be careful when you hear a limitation ... whether a limiting belief, decision, understanding, memory, imagination, etc.

A limitation limits and it may be a constraint that one has to learn to live with, challenge, change, or transcend. Or it may be a self-imposed limit that should be rejected and overcome. The first thing to do is to find out more about the *limitation* — clarify that nominalization. Limited in what way, how, at what times, with whom, etc.? Find out what resources are needed to deal with the limitation— to ameliorate the limitation, eliminate it, manage it, etc.

How else could you reinforce a limiting belief? Your client says, “I want to exercise (or anything else, budget, etc.) but I have never been able to follow a procedure, I’m just not a disciplined person.” And you say, “I know what you mean. I can’t discipline myself either!” Or you say, “Well, all of us can’t be a Rocky and go through the pain and suffering of getting in shape.” Or if you feel unsure of where to go, you say in a wimpy say, “So you don’t think you would want to do that” as you shake your head side-to-side.

I can’t tell you how many times I have interrupted a coach-in-training during ACMC when a client states a limitation and the coach says something like that, or just ignores it and tries to move on. “Are you going to let your client get by with that?” If the coach just didn’t know what to do, I’d comment, “Your client has just uttered a limitation —has just highlighted the very subject that needs to be dealt with— do you know how to respond to that? Do you know how to address it?”

Moments like these are often *coachable moments*— the very moment when something deep and profound has been brought to the surface, a moment of openness from the client. Such moments need to be treated as a precious gift. For most clients, it is a moment of vulnerability, maybe one that accidentally arose and so if you don’t catch the moment and handle it with respectful compassion, it

could very well be gone. An opportunity missed or worse, a limitation reinforced.

When there's a limiting belief, you are dealing with a meta-level frame of reference— and often *that is the problem*. And if you recognize it as a higher frame, don't assume your client is also recognizing it. In fact, your client often will not see anything wrong with it. "That's the way it is." It doesn't seem like a *limiting* belief, but a fact of reality.

Doubling is a great coaching skill for a limiting belief, decision, or understanding. Question it skeptically so as to plant doubt about it. "You really believe that?" "Absolutely?" "Do you like believing it?" "Were you born believing that?" "When did you come to think in that most limiting way?"

When your client suffers from frames that limit her, it is no time to be nice. At that very moment, your client actually needs your strength and firmness to counter the limitation. Then as you counter it, you offer a model for how your client can continue that process when back at home. Where do you learn that? You can learn countering skills in the counter-framing that is in *Mind-Lines*. You can learn it in *Brain Camp* or with the book *Executive Thinking*.

Here's to your coaching going right more and more of the time!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #43
October 14, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #7

YOU IMMUNIZE A PERSON AGAINST CHANGE

The next item on the list of *things that could go wrong* is “You immunize a person against change.” At first glance this one seems completely insane! As a coach you are a change agent and people come to you to make a change, so how in the world could you mess that up? How could you *immunize* someone against change?

To answer, let’s review what we mean by *change* in coaching. The essential idea is that of *making a difference* in one of the ways that a person is functioning— mentally, emotionally, verbally, behaviorally, or relationally. Given that, What change does your client want to make? I hope you ask that question, and ask it that directly. It will help. To make that difference, as a coach, you will want to know what your client wants to *exchange*.

“You want to change X from what to what?”

Asking this will enable you to hear your client’s preferred filter. Is it an *away from* filter or a *toward* filter. Which ever your client chooses, both are operational simultaneously. If your client is moving away from stress, what does he want to move toward? If she is moving toward more discipline in exercise, what is she moving away from?

Change also speaks about learning. That’s because *to learn is to change*. And when you change, you have learned something. Learning and change are two sides of the same thing. Both involving altering something, making it different, and improving the quality of life. But all change is not the same— there are many *kinds* of change which occurs at various levels (behavioral or performance, developmental, and transformational).

Reviewing the Axes of Change, you can explore with your client the motivational energy of the change, the criteria and decision aspect of a change (to make sure it is ecological), the creative solution building aspect of change (how the change will occur), and then the most scary part of all, the innovative aspect of change as the person makes the change real in his life and integrates it into his person.

Given all that, how could things go wrong? How could you immunize your client to change? Given that many people, including coaching clients, do not have a positive attitude about change — if you activate some of their negative beliefs about change— it could immunize them against change. Negative beliefs about change:

“It’s hard to change.” “Change is painful.” “I don’t change easily.” “You never know the consequences of change.” “Change doesn’t last, things will go back to the way they

were.”

One aspect of change is *making* the activity that no longer serves you well *conscious*. This can mean a lot of mental work— bringing into consciousness what you are doing automatically and unconsciously. Once you do that, then there is the new procedures that you want to practice and repeat until they become automatic. That can feel like a lot of work. So before jumping in on all of that with your client— check out what your client thinks and feels about those things. If you don’t, you may immunize your client ... by getting her to do a little bit of change, then feeling frustrated, quitting and reinforcing that one is not good at change work.

Then there are the mis-matchers and strong-will resisters. They want to change— at least that’s what they say, but they suffer from the ability to *get themselves to do what they choose*. So they end up procrastinating, changing the subject, giving up, strive against themselves and end up with some self-contempt. Given this, as a Meta-Coach you will not want to be too direct with these clients. That would probably make things worse. With them, you will want to use indirection communications.

There is also your own attitude toward change. Do you get excited about making changes in your own life? Do you have a coach and are regularly working on making a change?

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #44
October 14, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #8

YOU FAIL TO INSPIRE

The next item on the list of *things that could go wrong* in coaching is “You fail to inspire.” Now that make seem strange on first glance. You would think that every coaching client would show up in your office inspired about his or her possibilities for unleashing potentials. But the sad truth of the matter is that they do not. In fact, it is not all that uncommon that your coaching client, in spite of wanting more out of life, and believing that he has more potential to unleash, may show up discouraged and down in the dumps.

Now *inspiration* is a strange thing— we all want it, do we not? And it is available to us all, is it not? And when a person is inspired, she will achieve so much more than when she is not. Yet many people will go their whole lives without understanding what it is or how to inspire themselves.

To understand what it is, contrast the idea of *inspiration* with that of being *dis-spirited*. In one there is *spirit* thriving, in the other there is the lack of spirit. And what do we mean by *spirit*? Mostly we are talking about an attitude — determination, courage, energy, vitality, direction, purpose, etc. What inspires you as a coach? What inspires you in your work? In your hobbies? In your spiritual life? When it comes to inspiration— *at the heart of inspiration are values*. Values are what matters to you— what you care about, what you believe in, what you treat as important. So ask your client: “What do you really, really care about? What is ultimately important?”

Then, with a set of values, prioritize them so that you have *a value hierarchy*. Now you can build up a sense of vision. You can build up with your client a sense of vision about the future, about his purpose, and about her direction in life. Obviously, given the well-formed outcome, this is where you start as a coach. Yet when you do, remember that there are levels of information within all of us. So when you first ask your client “What do you want?” you are going to get surface answers. That’s why you have to dig deeper. What’s behind wanting that? And what’s behind wanting the next level? Going meta to the levels of values and wants will get you to the person’s meta-values.

We humans tend to experience *inspiration* as we get more and more in touch with our real selves, our authentic talents and possibilities, and then develop a way to translate that into life-style. Maslow helped out in this by identifying this realm as the *being-realm* and he identified two dozen *being-values*. That’s, at least, a place to begin with your client. What are the *being-values* that most excite the imagination of your client? Set up experiments in the daily lives of your clients which set her on a pathway to discover her *being-values*.

Now to coach your clients for inspiration, not only do you have to talk about values, visions, directions, hopes, dreams, etc., once you discover what it is that most inspires a particular client, you will want to keep that inspiration before him. That means speaking to him about it and using it as his highest frame-of-reference. Now you can begin to challenge him:

“What have you done’ this week in service of your vision, your inspiration?”

“How have you kept your vision alive and fresh this week?”

“Are there any challenges that have arise that’s dulling your vision or dampening the inspiration?”

Inspiration has to be kept alive and fresh. Otherwise, it can go stale. You can’t develop it with your client just once, it has to be an ongoing experience and one that you help your client to *refresh* on a regular basis. Why? Because of the habituation process. Everything habituates and unless we fight against it and work to maintain *mindfulness*, everything tends to become dull as we become unconscious.

For that reason, Maslow argued that “getting used to blessings” was one of mankind’s non-evil force for evil. Think about that! We all get use to blessings. Experience a blessing day after day after day and eventually, it will not seem like blessing, but as “what should be,” what’s normal, what’s expected. Eventually, you come to expect it and when it happens, it doesn’t surprise or delight you any longer. You expected it. The step after that is to demand it. You begin to talk that you “deserve” it. Entitlement! Talk about a way to mess up something really special and precious! And to lose your inspiration. What once was inspirational now becomes ordinary or worse ... dull.

That’s why you have to keep refreshing perspective, thinking, and emoting in order to keep an inspiration *alive and vital* in your mind and emotions. How do I do it? I have it written down. Long ago I wrote down my values ... vision ... inspiration and I keep it fresh by regularly recalling it as a privilege and honor. I refuse to take it for granted. I refuse to frame it as something I deserve. I do not. It’s a gift ... a gift that I have the privilege of holding as a stewardship.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #45
October 29, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #9

YOU FAIL TO CHALLENGE

The next item on the list of *things that could go wrong* in coaching is “You fail to challenge.” Sadly, this is an all too common failure—Coaches fail to adequately challenge their clients. Now if you ask them, nearly all of them will say that they do. “Yes, I challenge my clients.” If you ask the clients, “Do you feel that your coach challenges you?” most will say no. Or they will say, “Not enough. I wish my coach would challenge me more.”

What’s going on here? The problem is that most coaches are *people* people, they love people, they want to see people grow, they do not want to offend, they do not want to hurt anyone’s feelings, and so they hold back when it comes to the very idea of *challenging* a client. They are too compassionate, too nice, too soft, too gentle. And if there are any cultural frames about pushing people, provoking people, teasing, etc., then they may be incapable of actually challenging a client because “it would not be respectful.”

Let’s back up. What do we mean by *challenge* anyway? And why does a coach need to challenge his or her clients? What’s the purpose? In coaching, which is a form of self-actualization psychology, a coach challenges a client in order get the client out of his comfort zone so that he will stretch forward to unleash potentials that the client may not even be aware of. If the client stays in her comfort zone with everything comfortable and familiar, there will be no change, no growth, no development. *People grow when they are challenged to move out of what’s comfortable and to take on something bigger or more challenging.*

As a coach, *you challenge in order that your clients grow and unleash their potentials.* If you do not challenge, your client will probably not grow. Will he feel comfortable? Yes. Will she like you? Yes. Will he keep doing what he has always done? Yes. Will she keep getting the same results that she has always gotten? Yes. But grow, develop, or unleash? No. That’s why you need to challenge—why you *owe* it to your client to challenge, why if you *respect* your client, you will honor her by challenging her.

Okay, so now the how. *How* do you challenge? The biggest misunderstanding is that to challenge is to be aggressive, nasty, or mean. *Challenge does not mean any of that!* To challenge is to first *test* your client. For that, use testing questions. It forces a person to make small clear commitments. “So you want to get healthy and fit?” “That’s what you want?” These are yes—no questions. Keep asking them to drive home the point and to get a commitment. Ask clarification questions. “How are you using the word ‘fit?’” Then pursue the definition 4 to 7 times until you get a see-hear-feel answer. On your part, this can feel pushy, even aggressive.

With testing and clarifying questions, you are *challenging your client’s over-generalized model of*

the world. Most clients operate for too globally. Your job is to ground their feet back on mother earth. That will take some challenging. Next use the value-questions, “Why is that important?” repeatedly until you move up the value hierarchy and get the person into the *being-realm*. This will take some doing. It is both a science and an art. Here you are challenging the superficial level of responses and pushing into the realm of your client’s deep authenticity. Now the coaching conversation is getting real. And uncomfortable! Your client is now probably beginning to feel open and vulnerable.

When the conversation gets real, your client is beginning to speak his truth in a way that he may have never spoken truth before. This isn’t abstract Truth (with a capital T), this is your client’s personal truth. This is the heart of challenging—enabling and empowering your client to get real. And this also is where *unleashing* really begins. This is what the books — *Get Real* (2016) and *The Crucible and the Fires of Change* (2010) address. [If you don’t have those, I’d recommend you get them.]

When you challenge, you are asking your client to *come out from behind himself*—his personas, masks, cover-ups, roles, and all of the ways that we humans hide from ourselves. When you challenge, you are asking your client to make the conversation real. And you do that by moving up and beyond the immediate thoughts and emotions, beyond the actions and behaviors of everyday life, up to the governing frames, up the levels of beliefs, all the way up to presuppositions and assumptions. That’s why we call it Meta-Coaching. You are coaching to the person’s inner matrix world of frames.

So the ultimate challenge is a challenge to your client’s frames. So Preframe things, “If we find a problem or something that you think is ‘the dark side,’ I want you to know that *you are not the problem*. If there is a problem, *the frame is the problem*.” Flushing out the frames that’s holding a person back, leashing them to an old referent event or to a toxic belief— and then challenging that frame— when you can do that, you are really getting to the heart of coaching. Don’t fail in this. Challenge!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #46
November 4, 2020
What Could Possibly Go Wrong series #10

YOU GET CAUGHT UP IN DETAILS

The next item on the list of *things that could go wrong* in coaching is “You get caught up in the details.” This is a very common problem for new coaches. And it is very easy and seductive to get caught up in the details. After all, here is a person sitting in your coaching chair opening up and talking about intimate details of his life for the purpose of gaining insight, developing new skills, and making changes. Within the seductive nature of these details is the idea that your client needs your advice. Yet in reality, he does not!

The sooner you can dissuade yourself of that non-sense, the quicker you will master the art of coaching. *Your client does **not** need your advice!* Put that as a sign in your coaching room so that you can constantly see it— so that it stares at you. Now, I didn’t say your client may not *want* your advice. For many clients do. Some will tempt you with directly asking for it. “So what do you think?” “What should I do?” But don’t get seduced into that game, it is destructive to the coaching process.

Coaching is not about advice-giving, it is about *facilitating your client’s learning and discovery*. Instead of giving advice, you ask questions— questions that force your client to think, to wonder, to search, and to discover the truths for oneself. You aren’t there to give them the fish they want, you are there to help them learn how to fish for themselves.

Content is seductive because that is how we normally talk. It’s how you talk with your family and friends. It’s what you talk about around the dining table, at the pub, in the bleachers watching a ball game. And that’s why some people who are “great talkers” think they would be good coaches. Wrong! First they have to learn to stop the “normal” talking, shut up, listen, and learn to think about the hidden levels in the back of the person’s mind.

Content should make up about 20 percent of the things you talk about, the information you need. That leaves 80 percent of the things you talk about and the information you work with to be *process or structure*. How well do you know this distinction? The 20% content is what you need to *ground* the conversation in reality and it needs to be sensory-based and empirical— that is, see— hear— feel referents. Most people do not talk that way, so you have work to meta-model that level of specificity. If you cannot make *a movie in your mind* from their words (and their words only), then you do not yet have the 20% content that you need.

Once you do have it, now you’re ready for the 80% *structural process information*. This will include meta-programs, thinking patterns, beliefs and belief-systems, values and value-hierarchy, representational information, sub-modalities (the symbols as cinematic features the person uses

which stand for various concepts), their meta-state structures, their frame and framing styles, etc. When you gather this process information, you can then specify your client's *strategy* for precisely how she does what she does. Now you can clearly perceive his way of depressing himself, her way of procrastinating, etc. And with that information, you now can know and see leverage points of change in that person's system.

But if you are still back at content and gathering more than 20%, you will miss all of that hidden structure. You will be blind and deaf to the *dynamic structural processes* which are operational while you are coaching and you will keep missing the coachable moments.

How do you get out of content and learn to *think and perceive structure*? Plant the structure question in your mind and keep asking yourself about it. "What is the structure behind these words?" "What processes are enabling this person's story?" You can also take any of the meta-models of NLP and Neuro-Semantics and keep searching for answers to them.

What Meta-Model distinctions is this person using right now?

What Meta-Programs does this person keep using to filter his perceptions?

What representational systems and cinematic features is the person using?

What meta-states and meta-state structures are being presented to me?

What frames and framing structures?

Where is this person in the Axes of Change? In the Matrix?

Any of these questions will enable you to practice those meta-models which enables you to begin to live and breathe at the higher meta-levels instead of getting stuck in content. This is challenging as a coach? Yes, of course. That's why your training took you through modules for learning NLP, Meta-States, and five other Meta-Coaching Models.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #47
November 12, 2020

INSIDE & OUTSIDE THE BOX

If you have heard it once, I bet you have heard it dozens if not hundreds of times, “You’ve got to think outside of the box.” We say things like that to encourage creativity and to enable a client to not get stuck in an old way of thinking which cannot solve the problem. Question — *What is this box?* Where is it? How can you tell what’s inside it and how can you enable someone to think outside the box?

What is it? The box is your mental model of the world, your conceptual maps about yourself, others, work, home, life, etc. The box is made up of all of the multiple ways that you think, both consciously and unconsciously. It is made up of all of the images, sounds, and sensations (VAK) that you re-present to yourself in your mind from what you have seen, heard, and felt. It is made up of empirical facts and subjective observations. Here are a person’s experiences (states) and then, above and beyond all of that information, is the person’s conclusions by which he has invented the meanings of things (beliefs, values, decisions, permissions, understandings, assumptions, etc.).

How can you tell what’s in the box? Start with what is inside the box at the ground level. First, get the facts— the empirical facts. Those are the referent events that the person is using to draw her conclusions. Then get the person’s observations. “How do you see those facts?” This will give you insight into the person’s meta-programs as attention filters.

Here you have lots of tools from Neuro-Semantic NLP— meta-programs, Meta-Model distinctions, meta-states (the meta-level frames of beliefs, values, etc.), the cinematic features of the representations (sub-modalities). Use these to understand inside the box *from the person’s perspective*. What’s wonderful about this approach is that as the person makes you clear about himself, he gets more clear.

How do you enable one to think outside the box? Here’s something else wonderful: When you know what’s inside the box, you can often infer what is missing and needs to be there. As it is now outside the box, that’s where you will want to lead your client. Also what’s inside the box are mis-beliefs, false decisions, limiting understandings, unecological assumptions, etc. When you know that, you know what to specifically reverse or at least ameliorate.

To take your client outside the box, use the *as if* frame. *If you were resourceful, if you did believe X, if you were to make Y decision, how would that be for you?* You can also use the *what if* frame to imagine and suppose something that is possible or potential. You use these frames whenever you use “the miracle question” of Steve de Shazer that we have built into the Meta-Stating Possibilities pattern in APG.

Think of the coaching conversation as inviting your client to think both inside and outside of the box. A caution: Do not start *outside* the box. It is easy and tempting to do that, but until you know what's *inside* the box, there is just simply too much of the vast infinite possibilities outside of the box. If what you think is outside your client's box is actually inside, then you will be discrediting yourself by suggesting it. To target specifically and precisely what your client needs, you first need to have a clear understanding of what's *inside* the box.

Another caution: When you get a description of what's inside the box, be sure to ground it in some empirical facts. If you don't, then you stay in la-la land with your client and instead of coaching your client, your client will hypnotize you. When you are inside the box, triangulate between the grounding details, the meta-level meanings, and the person's objective (intention). These three dimensions of the client's processes (state, meaning, and intention) gives you the structure for the client's current experience.

What's outside your client's box will feel strange and unfamiliar to her. Expect that. While it may be familiar to you— it will in all likelihood be uncomfortable, even frightening to your client. After all, it is outside his model of the world— and yet, probably, exactly what the person needs.

Oh yes, remember you are inside your own box. That's all you can see! And that creates your blind spots and areas of limitations. So, always have a buddy coach coaching you and always be ready to pop out of your box into a new area that's uncomfortable.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #48
November 18, 2020

HUMOR COACHING

Do you ever do *humor coaching*? If a client needed humor as a resource, do you know what to do to coach that client for more humor? It could be just a single session, or if you have a perfectionist, or a client who is really serious, or one suffering from OCD, you could be looking at a number of sessions— 5 to 7 sessions.

Actually, some clients are in desperate need of humor. They desperately need a comic perspective, a playful attitude, so that they can play around with ideas, possibilities, and options and experience more creativity. Clients who are obsessive-compulsive and those who are overly serious, grimly earnest, and overly focused, who have no flexibility for adjusting as well as no joy or fun in life— they especially need the lightening up power of humor. Seriousness kills creativity and overly anxious clients are usually suffering from T.M.—terminal seriousness. They need to be able to think humorously. The less humor a person has, the less the person's capacity for learning, adjusting, flexibility, coping effectively in life, and more.

To initiate humor coaching with a client, ask your client some exploration questions around this subject of humor.

- How is your *sense* of humor? Do you consider it robust, health, and vigorous?
- How is the *quality* of your humor? Do you find it empowering and life-enhancing? Or do you find your humor on the dark side, aggressive, sarcastic, and insulting?
- How well do you use your humor to *gain perspective*— see the larger picture?
- How often do you use humor as *an anti-dote* to depression, fear, anxiety, anger, etc.? Do you know how to do that?
- How well does your humor support and enrich your *physical well-being* and your *psychological well-being*?
- Regarding the *skills* of humor, how would you rate yourself on each of the following: Your ability to perceive humor in things? Your comprehension of humor? Your appreciation of humor? And your creative ability to generate humor?

For humor coaching, once you have established the need and the desire for expanding one's capacity for humor, then set up a number of sessions. The design will be for your client to develop his or her capacity for healthy humor. Given that humor is *a perspective* and *an attitude*, start with the small delightful things in your clients life and invite him to generate five humorous perspectives about it.

As the capacity for humor develops, then select things that are irritating, annoying, and frustrating. Invite your client to generate five humorous perspectives for something that irritates him. Talk about a challenge! Your coaching goal will be to improve the quality and quantity of humor. You could have your client measure success by how many times she laughs out loud during the day, if only once or twice, you might set a goal for seven times a day. In this way you slowly move her

to developing a more cheerful attitude.

As humor is a perspective and involves the ability to shift perspectives, the greater your capacity for this, the greater your ability to frame and reframe, and to do so in real time. That's one reason that we often laugh at new reframes and why mind-lines generates a lot of fun and playfulness.

Humor coaching is not about joking with your client even though either you or your client may end up creating new jokes about the silly things that happen in life. Humor coaching is about delving into your client's meanings (matrix) to discover her current *style of interpreting* things. In human psychology, things hurt or heal depending on your interpretations. Interpretations of words, statements, situations, events, etc. load things up with meaning. Rigid interpretations load things up with rigid meanings. They lead a person to have no flexibility which is why they become unresourcefully stuck.

Flexible interpreters create meaning provisionally and then check them out. Do they work? Do they enhance life? If they do not, or if they do not enough, they shift the interpretations until they do. As they do this, they usually stumble upon numerous interpretations that create humor. Now your client gets to be playful in the way he or she interprets things. Of course, all of this presupposes that *you* have accessed your own capacities for humor and have unleashed a lot of your humor potentials.

**When you get serious, you get stupid.
When you get humor, you become human.**

The special deal on *Thinking Humorous* and *Resilience: Being the Phoenix* continues.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #49
November 25, 2020

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY

Two Sides of Humor Coaching

“Is *humor coaching* all lightheartedness and fun?” That’s what someone wrote and asked after last week’s Morpheus #48 on Humor Coaching. And, of course, the answer is no. Actually a surprising fact about humor is that it is not only a laughing matter, it is sometimes a crying matter. If that sounds a bit confusing, let me explain.

Essentially *humor is triggered by, and primarily about, incongruity*. Where there is something incongruent, something does not fit, something is odd, strange, out of place, inappropriate, inconsistent, unexpected, or surprising— you have the very foundation of humor. Humor starts with a violation of what’s normal and what we normally expect. Now concerning the psychology of incongruity— we humans are so built that we do not like it! It violates the very way our brains are set up to function. And so when we find it, there are some basic human ways of responding:

- 1) *We respond with stress*— which shows up as anger, fear, anxiety, etc. With incongruity, you feel upset with the world. You are negatively aroused. Now things are not funny, but serious.
- 2) *We respond with negativism*. We adopt a problem orientation and feel pessimistic and even cynical about things. Eventually we give up and live with the incongruity in a negative attitude of futility.
- 3) *We go into problem-solving*. Something is incongruent to the way it should be so you go into figuring out how to fix it. Now you get serious as you diagnose the problem, try to identify causes or contributing factors. Now you become solution focused.
- 4) *We see the humor in the incongruity*. You view what is out-of-place as silly, funny, humorous, playful, etc. and so you embrace the incongruity in a spirit of fun. After all, humor is “that which is out of place in time and space without danger” (Aristotle). Humor is a benign violation of your mental model of the world.

Herein lies the paradox, the wonder, and the mystery of humor. Humor is a mental frame-of-mind, an attitude, a perception that sees two things simultaneously— the wrong, the inappropriate, the violation, the incongruity *and* as it sees it from a position of safety, enjoys, embraces, and plays with it. Here then, at the heart of humor, are two diametrically opposite views of life— the tragic and the comic.

Here is something that is not the way you want it to go, as you hoped it would go, as you believe it should go, and yet you remain calm and cool, dispassionate, and strange enough, enjoy it. That’s because humor contains both the tragic and the comic which are two sides of the same coin.

The Tragic Perspective

Mentally rigid and intolerant
Serious – fed by fear, paranoia
External locus of control
Deterministic and fatalistic
Anxiety, fear, fatigue, hostility
Stuck – unable to cope well
Unhealthy: immuno-suppression

The Comic Perspective

Mentally flexible, tolerant, accepting
Playful and Creative fed by joy
Internal local of control
Freedom to choose — proactive
Elation, fun, surgency, delight
Able to effectively cope
Antidote : immune system enhancer

Comedian Steve Allen said that “Comedy equals tragedy plus time.” Author Tom Mullen said that “humor is tragedy standing on its head with its pants down.” So while humor thrives on *what is wrong*— it simultaneously enables us to laugh at it. Comedy helps us laugh at what would otherwise hurt or depress us.

Abraham Lincoln said to his cabinet during the great Civil War in America, “Gentlemen, why don’t you laugh? With the fearful strain that is upon me day and night, if I did not laugh I should die, and you need this medicine as much as I do.” (McGhee, p. 13). George Bernard Shaw noted that “Life does not cease to be funny when people die any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh.”

Comedy researcher, Steve Kaplan wrote, “Comedy is the art of telling the truth about what it is like to be human.” It tells the truth about our flaws, stupidity, weaknesses, lack of resources as we struggle to win with inadequate tools, resources, and imperfect knowledge. Horace Walpole distinguished two responses when he wrote, “The world is a comedy to those who think; a tragedy to those who feel.”

Now you have a hint at what is wondrously profound about humor. While it thrives on *what’s wrong*, it simultaneously empowers us to be able to laugh at, and play with it, as a way to cope and to maintain hope. Comedy enables you to laugh at what would otherwise hurt you so that, in the meantime, you develop the resources to figure things out and right the wrongs.

**When you get serious, you get stupid.
When you get humor, you become human.**

The special deal on *Thinking Humorous* and *Resilience: Being the Phoenix* continues.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #50
December 3, 2020

COACHING A CLIENT TO BECOME AN IDEAL CLIENT

It will not surprise most of you that *most coaching clients do not come to coaching knowing how to be an ideal or even a good client*. They don't. Even in Meta-Coach training at Module III, most people who are in-training-to-become-a-coach do not know how to be a good client. Isn't that amazing? Here are people, many of who are planning to become professional coaches, and they really do not know how to be a good client. I see it all the time at the ACMC level and that's why Meta-Coach Trainers constantly and consistently emphasize some of the basics about how to be a good client such as —“give your coach something significant to work with.”

If that occurs with people who understand a lot about personal development and about Self-Actualization Psychology, it's no wonder that some of coaching— especially at the beginning with a new client— needs to involve *coaching your client how to be a good client*. Now you have heard us jokingly talk about “the client from hell.” That usually is a way of describing a high mismatcher or strong-willed by temperament person who not only “cannot be told” anything, but who cannot even tell himself anything. But that's not what I'm talking about here. Obviously, the mis-matcher is a challenge, but it is a different kind of challenge.

Not knowing how to be a good client in coaching is pretty common. That is usually the situation of the person who has not been thoroughly introduced to Coaching and doesn't really understand what it is or how it is conducted. So no wonder they think it is just a conversation about goals! No wonder they might think of it as “therapy light.” Or a form of counseling or consulting. No wonder they might be looking to you for advise thinking your expertise is in the area of communication, relationships, and/or human problems. Of course, with these kinds of misunderstandings —they are *not* going to be good candidates for coaching.

So you have to coach your client right from the beginning how to step up to a whole new level of interaction and dialogue. *What is an ideal coaching client?* Glad you asked. The ideal client is someone who has a passion for life, for being his or her best self, for making real (actualizing) his potentials, for facing whatever challenges that she needs to face to break free of any and all leashes holding her back, and who is willing to be led and facilitated in the process.

Let's break that down into the pieces of an ideal client. An ideal client—

- 1) *Wants something*. It could be a *toward want*; it could be an *away-from want*. But the client wants something. There is energy and passion right from the beginning.
- 2) *Wants something significant and personal*. What the person wants is highly significant to him and, as such, is therefore highly personal.
- 3) *Wants something specific and challenging*. The person wants to remain calm under time

pressures at work, to do well in taking an examine, to write a white paper on a specific topic, to move into middle management, etc. What she wants is specific and a challenge to her current skills and resources.

4) *Is willing to step up and take on the challenge.* What he wants requires getting out of his comfort zone and facing a challenge to not sell himself short.

5) *Is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve the goal.* She wants to take on the new responsibilities and to be held accountable for them, to expend the energy and effort to do what needs to be done.

6) *Is willing to develop personally to be the person who he needs to be.* The person is open to change and to learning new ideas, experiencing new emotions, and shifting identity to become the person he can become.

7) *Is willing and able to carry on intense conversations to facilitate a new level of authenticity.* The person is willing to engage in a crucible conversation that challenges her to come out from behind her persona and become real— open and vulnerable.

Okay, that's ideal. And sometimes, just sometimes, a client will appear in your coaching room like that. Ahhhh! And considering that, *are you real enough, authentic enough, to coach a person like that?* Otherwise, consider it your job to coach your clients— all of them— to become an ideal client. When you do, that now makes clear why you begin with the Well-Formed Outcome questions and use them not only for information gathering, but also to facilitate the person becoming a better client.

That's why you ask question 3, "What do you want?" but you don't say it that blandly. Make it much richer and bolder than that. Ask, "What is the most important thing that you want to focus the coaching conversation on today?" "What would be the most transformative subject we need to delve into today?" When you ask that question, you are simultaneously *implying* several crucial things about coaching. Namely, this is not designed to be a 'normal' conversation. The conversation itself is designed to challenge you, make you uncomfortable, and get real.

Remember that as a coach, *you are a change agent!* So act like one; talk like one; have expectations of change about your client as if you truly are a change agent.

"What change would you like to make today that will free you up to become more real than you have ever been before with your loved ones, with your colleagues at work?"

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #51
December 9, 2020

RESILIENCE COACHING

Given that lots of people start things and do not finish them— there's lots of people who need resilience coaching. Given that many give up because they get discouraged, because they have a set-back, because they lack the needed resources, because they lose their inspiration and have not developed the ability for self-inspiration— there's lots of people who need resilience coaching. In fact, many of your coaching clients may need resilience coaching and not even know it.

So, what's a Meta-Coach to do? Enable your clients to recognize their own resilience quota. Do that by asking about resilience.

- How resilient are you? Where you would gauge yourself from 0 to 10?
- Are you highly resilient? Are you in the medium range? Do you lack in the vitality of resilience?
- How often do you get discouraged and feel like giving up? What skills do you have to bring you back from the edge of that disaster and stick with it?
- How resilient would you be if you lost all your money? If a close loved one got sick and died? If a child was abducted? If you have to declare bankruptcy on your business?
-

The time to build resilience is *before* you have a set back. After you have been knocked down and/or beat up by life— that is not the time to try to learn resilience, although that is typically when people suddenly realize that they need resilience. So as a *Resilience Coach*, begin by asking these kinds of questions to enable people to become aware and more conscious of the need and the power of resilience.

Once a client says yes to resilience, set a well-formed goal for resilience. Set a goal to bounce back from set-backs, to become a proactive agent in life and never a victim, to become untraumatized and untraumatizable, to develop coping intelligence for coming back from a set-back, to always landing on your feet with energy and vitality.

Resilience coaching will entail a crucible conversation — facing the knock down head on. The objective will be to have your client embrace and accept it in order to learn from it, to use it to spring back. That requires ego-strength— a significant part of the resilience coaching, building up one's ego-strength for facing life as it is.

At the heart of resilience coaching will be entering into the client's matrix of meaning and shift from the set of P's (personal, pervasive, permanent) to a set of T's (that, there, then). This radically alters the person's *interpretation of the bad things that happened* so that he is freed from that evil and does not take it inside. Here the resilience coaching will explore the frames that created the set-back— the beliefs, expectations, understandings, decisions, prohibitions, etc. Here you may facilitate a lot of reframing.

That is the heart or the core of resilience coaching, but not necessarily the end. Look for and provide additional resources that your client needs to have so much *bounce inside* that she always lands on her feet. What does she need? Courage, risk management skills, determination, emotional intelligence, etc.? Then, of course, measure it and monitor it. Figure out a way to measure the person's resilience and keep monitoring through the stages of the come-back. That enables the client to get a sense of success in the process.

Resilience fits perfectly with coaching, because we are dealing with clients who want to stretch out of their comfort zone, take risks to move to higher levels, and not sell themselves short. We constantly coach people for stepping up with their goals ... and with human beings who also often suffer set-backs and so who need to be more resilient.

Resilience is invisible wealth—it is not so much about money, as it is about the inner ability to make much of little, to transform scarcity into abundance, to develop a never-ending reservoir of resources for creativity from within. The resilient person is flexible and adaptable, a person who keeps thinking, learning, and adjusting and so is more alive and more present in the moment.

Resilience describe the person, who like a cat, knows how to *land on his feet*. And that implies something truly powerful, namely, that the resilient move to a place where they do not let traumas traumatize them. If that sounds super-human, that's only because we normally do not know that kind of neuro-semantic power that we have available within. When you discover that power, then you know how to let an event be just that and only that—*an event*.

Resilience coaching enables people to discover that it is what you *do* with an event that makes the difference. What do you think of the event? How do you interpret it? The resilient learn that they always have a choice and that they can tap into their executive *thinking and deciding*. They know that how they deal with adversity and challenges shapes their lives more than almost anything else. To your beset Resilience Coaching!

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #52
December 16, 2020

COACHING SMART DECISIONS

When it comes to *making smart decisions*— we all need help. If that sounds strange or strikes you as overly pessimistic, just look around at the decisions people are making. Millions are making decisions about things that will undermine their health and fitness. Millions more are making decisions that will lead to economic stresses, over-spending, under-budgeting, lack of saving, and even bankruptcy. Millions and millions more are making decisions that will lead to all sorts of addictions.

Actually, *the quality of decision making on Planet Earth is pretty poor*. And it affects all of us. I made some decisions when a young adult that led to a bad marriage, wrong career, financial ruin, living on the street for awhile, etc. “If only I had thought it through...” or if someone had taken the time and let me think things aloud I might have been able to hear the silly things I was thinking ... I would *not* have made many of the ridiculous decisions that I did. Yes, yes, I know. I would not be the person today that I am if I had not gone through some of the hell of experiences that I did. Yet that comes close to justifying my poor quality decisions. Personal growth isn’t dependent on stupid decisions. Some people never get over their stupid decisions.

How about you? A cognitive bias and fallacy that most of us fall into is re-writing the past so that we don’t learn that much from it. Some people validate their bad decisions without really considering how much better they could have decided. Just because you now have to live with the consequences of some previously poor decisions does not mean that there’s no value in re-doing the decision in your head and “changing personal history” encoding a high quality decision in your memory — as resources for the future.

Then there are organizations, businesses, corporations, and governments that make really poor decisions. It happens all the time! With only 25% of new businesses making it and surviving, someone’s making a lot of bad decisions, 75% fail. Even worse— 87% of all corporate mergers fail. Someone, or a lot of someones, at the executive levels are making some really stupid decisions. And what shall we say about governments and bad decisions— decisions that can negatively affect millions?

When it comes to *coaching smart decisions*, it begins when you ask your client what he wants. Those who “don’t know” obviously are not ready to make a decision. They are at the beginning stage of information gathering, of getting to know themselves, of examining their life context. Then there are those who *think* they know what they want, but who will very quickly discover, “No, that’s not it.” They try out one thing, then another, then jump into another. Their options meta-program is probably undermining their ability to make smart decisions.

There are plenty of clients who can’t make good decisions because they don’t know their values or their values are in disarray. They are the ones who go after pseudo-values only to eventually

discover that what they thought was important was not. Others over-optimistically assert that they know what they want, but eventually when they come up against *the cost of that decision*, they are not ready to pay the price. It is too much, the risk is too great, the dangers are too scary, and so they back off.

There are other clients who get clear about what they want, but are too active, even reactive, and so they jump into the decision without having done due diligence. They have not thought through what could go wrong. So they have no contingency plans for the unexpected and life is full of unpredicted events— 2020 certainly teaches us that!

When it comes to *coaching smart decisions*, as a Meta-Coach, begin by finding out the person's *way* of deciding. What is your client's strategy for making decisions, what are their values, what standards and measurements do they use, what meta-programs do they rely or over-rely on? How do they relate to deciding— are they decisive as a person or indecisive? Do they embrace risk or avoid anything risky? Are they optimistic or pessimistic about any given decision. I'd recommend you do some information gathering to model their current decision making strategy. What great decisions have they made? What really poor decisions have they made? How did they do each of these categories?

Because coaching is about challenging people to step up, actualize their highest dreams and meanings into their best performances— at the heart of coaching is enabling, empowering, and enhancing a person's *decision making competencies*. Do you know how to do that? Do you know how to coach a person through the well-formed decision questions?

Making a change is a decision and keeping the change so that it is sustained— that requires an ongoing set of decisions. So preparing your clients for high quality decision-making comes with the territory of being an effective Meta-Coach.

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #53
December 23, 2020

WELL-FORMED DECISIONS

As a Meta-Coach, you know all about a Well-Formed Outcome—it is your beginning place for needs analysis, your coaching contract, your strategic thinking format, and much more. And if you have taken the training in *Creativity and Innovation* (one of the Self-Actualization Trainings), then you learned about three additional ones—the Well-Formed Problem, the Well-Formed Solution, and the Well-Formed Innovation. Some really important patterns for coaching! Recently when I researched and wrote the new book on *Executive Decisions*, I put together *The Well-Formed Decision Pattern*.

It answers the question, “How can you tell if you have made a smart or intelligent decision?” And that question is often a critical question in life especially when it comes to the big decisions, the decisions that are determinative about so much of life. In the last post, *Coaching Smart Decisions* (#52) I mentioned the human tendency and weakness of making poor decisions. That is not something that just a few people do, *we all do!* We all have lived to regret decisions made in the heat of the moment, decisions made entirely out of an emotional state, and decisions made in unthinking reaction when we thought we didn’t have time to think things through.

Those who become aware of this are the very people who seek out coaches. They have probably already suffered from stupid decisions and they know the value of *thinking aloud with an intelligent questioner*. Then they can achieve at least one of the most important things about decisions—deciding after you have *thought things through*. So, next time your client begins talking about needing to make a decision—frame the importance of making *intelligent* decisions and that you have a tool just for that. Then whip out this set of questions to help him formulate a truly *well-formed decision*.

The Subject of the Decision:

- 1) What is the decision you want or need to make? What are your choices?
- 2) What will the decision look like or sound like? When you make it, you will say what?
- 3) Why is it important to make this decision? (Repeat several times with each answer.)

The Contextual Situation of the Decision:

- 4) When do you need to make the decision? What time factors are involved?
- 5) In what area of life is this decision relevant? (Where)
- 6) Is anyone else involved in making the decision? Are you the sole decider? (Who)

The Required Actions of the Decision:

- 7) What do you need to know to make the decision? What information do you need to gather and from who or where? How much information do you need?

The Inner Power (Capacity) for Making the Decision:

8) Is the information available now? How much information is currently available? If you don't know, what probably would you estimate? Is that information within your control to access? If not, then who has access to it?

9) Do you have the capacity to get the required information? Do you know how to process the information?

The Process of Making the Decision:

10) How do you plan to gather the information and order it so you can make a decision?

Do you know how to weigh and compare the options?

11) What cognitive biases, distortions, and fallacies may be in the information you gather?

Do you know how to question, check, and clean out the biases, distortions, and fallacies?

12) Is there anything that can or will stop or interfere with you getting the information, formulating it, and making a decision from it?

13) How will you monitor your plan and actions? What feedback will you want to get that lets you know what's working and what is not working?

The Supportive Resources for Deciding:

14) What could stop or interfere with this decision? What could undermine the effectiveness of the decision?

15) What resources do you need so that you can do this effectively and intelligently?

What risk management skills? How much risk is there involved? What contingency plans to set up?

16) How will you test the final decision to make sure it is ecological for you? How will you determine if it will create any long-term unintended consequences?

Concluding and Deciding:

3) Is the decision still compelling to you? Are you inspired by the decision?

17) How will you know when you are ready to make a decision? What will be the convincer for you to make the decision? In what representational system?

18) What will be the evidence that you have made a decision and ready to move forward? Will it be written, stated aloud, confirmed with someone, or what?

High quality executive decisions have a structure and these are these questions that can elicit that structure. And, deciding to decide *intelligently* — a great meta-decision, is an excellent place to start.

Neuro-Semantic News:

We have now put two more books on The Shop —
NLP Modeling Going Meta and *The Matrix Model*

From: L. Michael Hall
2020 Morpheus #54
December 30, 2020

LIVE-ABLE DECISIONS

If in the next few days, you decide to make some New Year Resolutions, *and* you want to ensure that the decision will be *sustainable*, that is, that you can make the change and keep the change, then not only do you need to use the Well-Formed Decision questions, you need to get yourself ready to *live* the decision. After all, that's the reason for a decision, isn't it? When you decide to do something, buy something, read something, go somewhere, etc., isn't the decision a decision to *experience*?

The purpose of a decision is so that the *decision becomes lifestyle*. When you decide to accept a job offer, the whole design is that for months, years, even decades later — *you go to work at that job*. Doing that job becomes something you live. When you decide to marry someone, the whole purpose is that you both *live together* as a married couple. So with exercising, you make the decision and then it is something you *live*.

The point is simple, obvious, and yet stark. *Decisions are to be lived!* If you tell me that you made a decision, then I could ask, “Are you *living* that decision?” “Has it become part and parcel of your lifestyle?” These questions would test the reality and authenticity of your decision. “Was it a real decision or some pseudo-decision?” If you tell me that you are thinking about a certain decision, then I would similarly ask, “Are you ready and willing to *live* that decision?” In asking that I'm underscoring the point: Decisions are to be lived.

Now with all of that in mind, we can next elicit a follow-up awareness. Is the decision live-able? Or would trying to live it lead to stress, unrealistic expectations, and ultimately disappointment. This is what happens at times for people who do not create a well-formed decision. They make decisions about things that they cannot actualize. Now we know why, sometimes, when you ask this question or when it is asked of you, this important insight arises. Suddenly you realize, “This decision is not even live-able.” Or, “There's no way to actually *live* this decision.”

Sometimes clients show up in a coaching session frustrated because they have been trying to force an unlive-able decision into their lives. They have set goals that are too high and too unrealistic. Or they have set goals that do not accord with their actual talents and skills. They would have to become a different person to reach their goals. That's why their decision is unlive-able. It does not fit for their context, lifestyle, relationships, energy-level, etc.

How then do we make the decisions about our goals live-able? First and foremost, spend time going through the Well-Formed Decision questions. Use those questions to shape your decision so that it truly fits for you or your client. Check the ecology of the decision up against the actual contexts and constraints of the person's life.

- Do you have the talent to develop this skill?

- Do you have the energy and willingness to put in the time for this skill development?
- Are you willing to shift and change your sense of self (personality) so that it fits?
- How will this fit or settle with your loved ones, friends, social context?
- What will be the effect of this decision on your health and well-being?
- How much stress and strain will this introduce into your life?

All of these questions are getting to the question of live-ability. Before I closed my practice and began traveling in 1996, I had invitations. But I turned most of them down. To have decided to have traveled at that time in my life was not live-able— I was a single parent to my daughter. It would have been untenable in terms of her well-being, disruptive about home, and unworkable. Later, when she became old enough to be on her own and/or to travel with me (which she did when she was a teenager), the decision to begin traveling some became live-able.