

NEURONS

VOLUME X

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NEURONS — 2018

- 1) Taking NLP to a Brighter Future
- 2) Searching for the Optimal State
- 3) What You Won't Find in the *Structure of Magic*
- 4) *Report*: The NLP Leadership Summit
- 5) What You Don't Accept, You Can't Understand
- 6) *Thinking* is in Short Supply
- 7) The Problem with Answers
- 8) Name-Calling: Primitive Thinking that Shuts Thinking Down
- 9) Short-Term Thinking: Another Thinking Disability
- 10) Critical Thinking and School Shootings
- 11) The Problem with Success
- 12) Arguments that Shut-Down Thinking
- 13) Indoctrination or Education
- 14) Intellectually Lazy People
- 15) Meta-Detailing: Zooming In and Out, Up and Down
- 16) "April Fools!" I was Just Faking
- 17) Critical Thinking as the Competitive Advantage

Great Decisions Series

- 18) Great Decisions do not Just Happen
- 19) *Thinking* for Great Decisions
- 20) Pausing to Decide
- 21) Discerning and Deciding
- 22) Unbiased Decision Making
- 23) Pseudo-Decision Making
- 24) Lucky Decisions
- 25) Beyond Pro/Con Decision Making
- 26) The Multiple Meanings of the Word "Meta"
- 27) Deliberate Practice Feedback
- 28) The Last Master Practitioner Training
- 29) Thinking as Questioning
- 30) Critical Thinking in the Military — Red Teaming
- 31) Non-Threatening Collaboration
- 32) How to Detect Fake News
- 33) Exposing a NLP Myth
- 34) Collective Learning
- 35) Why we do not ask Why

Getting Over the Past Series

- 36) Getting over the Past
- 37) How the Past lives Today– and What You Can Do About it
- 38) Getting Over Your Past Codes
- 39) The Art of Rewinding Old Terrifying Movies
- 40) From the Past into the Present
- 41) Facing Personal Tragedy
- 42) Accusations and Critical Thinking
- 43) Did She or Did She *NOT* get Over the Past?

Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges

- 44) Facing Uncertainty
- 45) Emotional Credibility
- 46) Learning From Experience
- 47) Critical Thinking 100 Years Ago
- 48) Equality and Collaboration
- 49) Learning Problems

- 50) Say “Hello” to Your Frontal Lobes
- 51) Say “Hello” One More Time
- 52) Alfred Korzybski and Critical Thinking
- 53) Alfred Korzybski and Thinking
- 54) Alfred Korzybski and Thinking
- 55) Alfred Korzybski and Mindfulness
- 56) Alfred Korzybski and Semantic Reactions
- 57) Alfred Korzybski and Commercialism

NLP Articles

- Searching for the Optimal State (2)
- What You Won’t Find in the *Structure of Magic*. (3)
- What You Don’t Accept, You Can’t Understand (5)
- The Multiple Meanings of the Word “Meta” (26)
- Deliberate Practice Feedback (27)
- Non-Threatening Collaboration (31)
- Exposing a NLP Myth (33)
- Collective Learning (34)
- Why we do not ask Why (35)

Critical Thinking

- Thinking* is in Short Supply (6)
- The Problem with Answers (7)
- Name-Calling: Primitive Thinking that Shuts Thinking Down (8)
- Short-Term Thinking: Another Thinking Disability (9)

Critical Thinking and School Shootings (10)
The Problem with Success (11)
Arguments that Shut-Down Thinking (12)
Indoctrination or Education (13)
Intellectually Lazy People (14)
Meta-Detailing: Zooming In and Out, Up and Down (15)
“April Fools!” I was Just Faking (16)
Critical Thinking as the Competitive Advantage (17)
Thinking as Questioning (29)
Critical Thinking in the Military — Red Teaming (30)
How to Detect Fake News (32)
Accusations and Critical Thinking (42)
Critical Thinking 100 Years Ago (47)
Say “Hello” to Your Frontal Lobes (50)
Say “Hello” One More Time (51)
Alfred Korzybski and Critical Thinking (53)
Alfred Korzybski and Thinking (54)

Events

Taking NLP to a Brighter Future (1)
Report on the NLP Leadership Summit (4)
Critical Thinking and School Shootings (10)
The Last Master Practitioner Training (28)
How to Detect Fake News (32)

Politics

Accusations and Critical Thinking (42)
Did She or Did She *NOT* get Over the Past? (43)
Emotional Credibility (45)
Meaning Deficiency and Distortions (52)

Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges

Facing Uncertainty (44)
Emotional Credibility (45)
Learning From Experience (46)
Equality and Collaboration (48)
Learning Problems (49)

Alfred Korzybski Series

Critical Thinking 100 Years Ago (47)
Alfred Korzybski and Critical Thinking (53)
Alfred Korzybski and Thinking (54)
Alfred Korzybski and Mindfulness (55)
Alfred Korzybski and Semantic Reactions (56)

Alfred Korzybski and Commercialism (57)

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #1
January 1, 2018

TAKING NLP TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

What is the future of NLP? Will NLP become more well known and accepted? Will NLP be able to establish more credibility in academic communities? Will the field of NLP eventually weed out those who are misusing the models and who have been giving it a lot of bad press?

These are but a few of the questions that many of us often wonder about and ask each other about for years. And what is the answer? For years, most of the answers that I heard in discussions were on the dark side. The problems seemed too big and pervasive to be able to address. In Conferences all around the world, I would hear about lots of really good things happening in the field, but then there would be a few instances of people mis-using it, manipulating with it, and so there seemed to be a strong sense of helplessness about effecting real change.

In fact, this actually describes the primary reason that we started Neuro-Semantics. We set our Vision Statement back in 1996 “to take NLP to a higher level ethically and professionally.” We knew some of the things that would have to happen to achieve that and we put them into the Vision Statement. Our vision then and now is to create a world-wide community of men and women who collaborate, give credit to sources, apply NLP to ourselves.

More recently, 2012, another factor arose and is now becoming a force for good in the field of NLP. It is the *NLP Leadership Summit*. We began very small—inviting the “elders in the tribe” of NLP, those with 20 years or more experience as recognized “leaders” in the field to come together at the NLP Conference in London and just talk. “Let’s talk about our leadership and where we are going.” And so we did. 30 to 40 of us meet each year, year after year, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015...

The power of “conversation” with those leaders initiated a self-organizing force, something I had hoped for, but really didn’t expect. At least not so quickly. Given that those who came were indeed leaders, and truly cared about the future we were creating and wanting to do better, after we began to get used to each other and as we began practicing listening, seeking to understand, we also began wanting to do something about our dreams. That led to the website, www.nlpleadersummit.org.

By talking about our values and visions and our understandings of what NLP is, we began



documenting our conversations and that ended up as *the content* of the website. The content is what we have co-created as our understanding of NLP and what is required to be a member of the Summit. And with each meeting at the NLP Conference, we began to think that we could do more ... and so we began planning for our first three-day summit. That occurred in January 2016 in Alicante Spain. Again an event that occurred in a self-organizing way as 38 of us meet for an extended three days conversation, a colloquium wherein we discovered we could talk extensively and deeply and not split apart. Out of that came the book that Joe Cheal edited, *Powered by NLP*.

Afterwards, we continued meeting at the NLP Conference in 2016, 2017, and so now we are ready for our second three-day Summit. So very soon, January 12-14, 2018 we will again meet in Alicante Spain for a three day colloquium for an extended conversation.

Now the NLP Leadership Summit is not a Conference—there are no speakers. It is not an Association—there are no officers or constitution. It is a summit of leaders. Just as world leaders gather from time to time to talk about a common problem— that’s what we’re doing. We have within our membership fifteen (15) Associations of NLP represented. But rather than try to create another organization, we are just simply *associating*. That is, meeting, talking, seeking to understand, and letting discoveries emerge.

A strange thing about the NLP Leadership Summit is that while we are all leaders in our own right, in our own communities and areas, we have no leaders in the Summit. Instead what we have done from the beginning is co-lead — we have made it possible for everyone to have a voice and to speak and we have done so with respect for each other and our differences. By taking away the restraints that come with a formal organization— we have reduced politics to a bare minimum.

Now there are a few of us who exercise some of the roles, like organizing the place, the venue, the dates, etc. and who facilitate the discussions. Yet we are all colleagues. So while I didn’t know it at the time that Ian and I were writing the book— it is an extended experience in *Collaborative Leadership*.

Invitation: If you or someone you know has been a recognized leader in NLP for 15 years or more— you can go to the website and apply as a member. If you want a physical copy of the book, *Powered by NLP*, it is available at cost, for only \$5.

**POWERED
BY NLP!**



*Reflections and Future
Developments of NLP*

*From The NLP Leadership Summit
January 2016*

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #2
January 8, 2018

SEARCHING FOR THE OPTIMAL STATE

From the beginning, NLP called *the optimal state*—the “genius” state. I don’t know who started that. Judith DeLozier and John Grinder popularized it in *Turtles All the Way Down* (1985) from their 1983 workshop. Robert Dilts did a modeling project on actual geniuses and wrote his series of books, *Strategies of Genius*. Anyway “genius” became the NLP word for the optimal flow state.

In 1990 Csikszentmihalyi’s studies on “happiness” led to his naming the state *flow* and he then followed that up with many studies as well as books on flow. That was his popularization term for what Abraham Maslow had termed “peak experience” some 40 years prior. And in the domain of sports, the most popular term has been, and continues to be, “in the zone.” All of these terms and phrases are different ways of talking about *the one’s very state for a given activity*.

More recently Steven Kotler has explored the state of flow in his book, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance* (2014) which he repeated with co-author, Peter Diamondis in *Bold: How to Go Big, Achieve Success, and Impact the World* (2015). In these books they have some valuable things to say about flow.

“Csikszentmihalyi ... is a more pedestrian version of Maslow’s inquiry. The ones who felt their lives had the most meaning were those who had the most peak experiences. It often involved an element of novelty and discovery. ... Csikszentmihalyi renamed peak experiences— flow.” (2014, p. 20)

“McKensy found top executives reported being up to five times more productive when in flow. Creativity and cooperation are also amplified.” (Ibid. p. 21)

Kotler even gives a lot of attention to the neurochemistry and the brain autonomy involved in flow. Here is a sample:

In flow, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is also deactivated, an area of self-monitoring and impulse control. Flow also activates the medial prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain that governs self-expression. The brain release a number of powerful painkillers that deaden us to the damage being done and allows us to push our maximal strength closer to its boundary. In the hypofrontality, the same events that create our sense of self also distort our sense of time; temporal awareness is calculated by multiple areas of the brain working together.

But there is a problem. In *The Rise of Superman* he focused almost entirely on those athletes who are engaged in extreme sports. And while the reading of the young men who push the limits of the human body in rock climbing, jumping off cliffs, running, skiing, etc. is exciting, even mesmerizing— it leaves several false impressions. The first is that to get into flow, to access this

wonderful optimal state, you have to engage in doing something extreme and dangerous. In this, the book is not balanced and over-stresses the importance of danger, high consequence environment, and risk as key flow triggers.

That's just not so. Csikszentmihalyi's studies provide a far more balanced approach. While he included some examples of extreme sports, he also wrote about playing chess, reading, writing, etc. The optimal state is *not* only, or even mainly, a function of getting your nervous systems into a revved up state. Flow is actually more about one's state of mind— attention, intention, purpose, etc.— than about a physiological state of intense arousal.

Another false impression is that it takes both the intense physiological state and a period of time, like twenty minutes, to get into the flow state. The idea is that you have to work up to it. You have to rev up the body in preparation. This is what many of the extreme athletes described and talked about.

Our experience in Neuro-Semantics is the very opposite. Like any state, the optimal state of flow is a function of preparing your mind and body to be in your best state and once there, then that state of mind, body, and emotion is *a state that can be anchored*. And if it can be anchored, then it can be called forth very quickly. That's what we refer to when we say it allows you to have the flow state at your command. For most things (reading, writing, speech, etc.), I can turn it on within seconds.

This is what we do in the “accessing personal genius” state that we train in the APG training. We prepare a person with the *prerequisites of genius*— those foundational requirements so that you can put it together and then turn it on and off at your command. The NLP premise behind this is that if you know *how* you create a mental-emotional state, and you set up the required frames and triggers, then you can have it whenever you choose in a moment. You do not have to sit around waiting for it and you do not have to get your body into a revved up state.

Csikszentmihalyi enabled us to recognize the flow zone as that sweet spot between challenge and skill. Take what you understand about some activity and act on it, developing your skill at the challenge-appropriate level. Do that repeatedly, and you will find yourself in the flow zone—lost in that valued engagement and getting better at it. Here meaning and performance comes together into a synergy. Here your intention and your attention synergy to close the knowing—doing gap. Here your attention comes to the here-and-now fully and you become of *one-mind* about what you are doing. Now you are in the flow or genius state of full engagement.

Books related to this:

In the Zone by Tim Goodenough and Mike Cooper

Secrets of Personal Mastery.

See www.neurosemantics.com / Products / Neuro-Semantic Books

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #3
January 15, 2018

WHAT YOU WON'T FIND IN *THE STRUCTURE OF MAGIC*

Here's something amazing. When you read *The Structure of Magic, Volume I & II* (1975, 1976) there are several things that you will not find. You will think that they are there. You will assume that they were there. But they are not. At least that's what happened to me. Now looking for, and identifying, what *is there* is really easy compared to looking for what is *not there*. That is a very different thinking process. When I first read *The Structure of Magic* books of NLP, I read to understand what was there. More recently working on a book on critical thinking, it suddenly dawned on me that there are some important things that are not there. And it is surprising.

To set this up, first I'll identify what most of us thought would be there, expected to be there, and actually walked away from thinking was there. It is actually quite subtle because the books do cue us as to what to expect but then, disappointedly, let us down. But you have to notice because if you don't, you won't.

What *The Structure of Magic* cues you to look for is how Richard Bandler and John Grinder modeled three amazing "wizards" of therapeutic communication.

"... so amazing to watch that it moves us with powerful emotions, disbelief, and utter confusion. Just as with all wizards of the ages of the earth whose knowledge was treasured and passed down from sage to sage—losing and adding pieces but retaining a basic structure—so, too, does the magic of these therapeutic wizards also have structure." (1975, p. xiii)

Regarding what they said were "the magical quality" of Virginia Satir and Fritz Perls, they focused on the structure behind the supposed "genius." And by focusing on structure, they said that the therapeutic wizards had within their minds some meta-models:

"To deny this capacity or to simply label it *talent, intuition, or genius* is to limit one's own potential as a people-helper." (p. 6)

"They introduce changes in their clients' models which allow their clients more options in their behavior. What we see is that each of these wizards has a map or model for changing their clients' models of the world—i.e., a Meta-model—which allows them to effectively expand and enrich their clients' models in some way that makes the clients' lives richer and more worth living." (p. 18)

Well, when you read these first books on NLP, in spite of the mythology about modeling Virginia and Fritz, there is nothing—*absolutely nothing*—in the books about the thinking, believing, states, experiences, etc. of these two persons. In other words, they did *not* model Perls and Satir. What they "modeled" were their techniques— not all of them, but some of their

techniques.

The shock in this—get ready for a shock—you will *not* find anything about modeling the two persons that they called “therapeutic wizards” who performed “therapeutic magic,” namely, Fritz Perls or Virginia Satir. There is no record of what or how they modeled either person. Nothing! In fact, both of them are only briefly mentioned in the books.¹

Further, regarding that these “therapeutic wizards” each had a model in their heads which allowed them ... to induce change into their client’s model of the world, again, there’s nothing. Nothing else is ever said about that unless the authors meant that Perls used Gestalt Therapy and Satir used her version of Family System Counseling. Yet whatever “model” they had in their heads that enabled them to know what to do, when to do it, how to do it, with whom to do it, etc., none of that is ever mentioned, let alone made explicit.²

Here’s a second surprise. In spite of NLP claiming *not to be a theory*, or to operate from a theory, these original books are based on a theory—namely, *the linguistic theory of Transformational Grammar*. In fact, all of Chapter 2 in the first volume is about that theory. The chapter, “The Structure of Language” is all about Transformational Grammar, what it is, its structure, the theory, etc. And so is all of Appendix A. That’s a lot of theory when arguing for a no theory approach.

Now I’m not saying that they did not “model,” they did. Well, kind of. They took a theory of linguistics and how language works and imposed it upon what Fritz and Virginia were doing. Yet nowhere in *The Structure of Magic* did they identify which Meta-Model questions they got from each of them. What they modeled was Fritz’s patterns that had been developed in Gestalt Therapy. That was what actually began the whole adventure—running a Gestalt Class at Kresge College and discovering that using the Gestalt techniques (e.g., the empty chair, dream externalization, etc.) as well as Bandler mimicking Perl’s language patterns and tonality. It was from these techniques that the NLP patterns arose. For example, from the Gestalt double chair technique arose the NLP Visual Squash technique which at first they called *meta-tactics* (Vol. II: 89-95).

What they modeled from Virginia were *the techniques* which she had discovered and created which comprised her Family Systems (Vol. II: p. 132). So they ran her “parts parties,” as well as played polarities (Vol. II, p. 133, system polarities). And they also called these *meta-tactics* long before they became NLP patterns (Vol. II: 156-158ff). Also in the book *Changing with Families* (1976) that they co-wrote with Virginia.

The mythology of NLP beginning by modeling Perls and Satir is exposed if we simply ask—What did they discover about Perls and Satir in terms of their thinking? What was their strategy for deciding how to work with someone? What was their strategy for using this or that technique? What were their best states? Their most empowering beliefs? The silence to these questions is deafening.

Studying and exploring Gestalt Therapy and Family Systems Therapy can partially give us some answers these questions. That's what I did after I learned NLP. I went back to the works of Fritz and Virginia and read everything that they wrote to detect the meta-model linguistic distinctions in their work. Yet that's different from modeling these experts. Further, Perls had been dead for two years when they began to model him which, of course, means that they modeled a dead man!

Another thing that you will not find in *The Structure of Magic*— you will not find a single mention of a single person among the 20 or 30 who helped co-create the Meta-Model. You will not even find “the third man” who originally co-developed NLP, Frank Pucelik. Nor will you read about Robert Dilts, Judith DeLozier, Leslie Cameron-Bandler or any of the other two dozen key players in the origins of NLP. They didn't give credit to anyone who enabled them to create the foundations of NLP.

References:

1. *Perls* is only mentioned on pages 5 and 6 in Volume I. In Volume II, on p. 66 and 94, and in a footnote on page 96. *Satir* is mentioned on pages 6, her communication categories are mentioned on pp. 160-1, 163. In Volume II: she is mentioned in terms of the Satir categories and how to use them in conjunction with the Meta-Model to diagnose members in family counseling. (p. 46, 47-53, 55, 57, 119, 123, 136, 155).
2. I think that they never did actually “model” them. Yes, for fun Richard mimicked Perls' tone of voice and way of talking. What they did was simply Gestalt Therapy patterns that they learned, that's what they did in the Gestalt class that they conducted and out of that they noticed a few of Perls' characteristic ways of questioning.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #4
January 15, 2018
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REPORT ON THE 2018 NLP LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

The Summit began in 2012 as an experiment to answer the question: Can those of us who have been in the field for 15 or more years as trainers or leaders get together and explore the future that we want to create? We began in London during the NLP Conference because many of us had met there for many years. What we discovered was that we all shared a common vision about quality, credibility, standards, etc.

Two years later we took a bold step and agreed to meeting for 3 full days in a Summit to address the common problems we all face. We planned it in 2014 and then we made it happen in 2016 in Alicante Spain. Those of us there found it a highly enriching experience and so we planned another 3-day Summit. This time we doubled our numbers and expanded into many more countries — 23 in all.

We have now completed the 2018 Summit with 75 to 80 leaders, 15 were “sponsored” by a member. Those 15 were “young NLP Leaders” who we sponsored as a way to mentor those with less than 15 years as a “leader” in preparing them as the next generation leaders. With the Summit members we have 14 NLP National Associations represented. At the 2018 Summit, we had one of the original three founders, Frank Pucelik, two from the very beginning— Robert Dilts and Terrace McClendon and several others who have been in NLP from the late 1970s and 1980s.

What really stood out I think to everyone was quality of the people present as well as the shared vision and values among us. We held what is called a *colloquium*— a guided information conversation designed to enable us to understand and appreciate each other more. Our aim was and is simple — to associate with one another. And yet we all have a vision of one day having a unified international body, an umbrella organization that can coordinate our efforts, enable us to do so much more together than alone or apart, and to have a way of encouraging compliance to the ethical and training standards.

What came out of the Summit this time? Similar to the previous Summit, various work groups have been organized to work on a variety of issues— standards, ethics, media response, technology, fourth-generation NLP (we are now in the fourth generation), membership, designing ideas for an international body, etc. What we would eventually like to do is to create an international umbrella body that would be able to embrace all of the Associations. This should have been done 40 years ago, but it wasn't. And we all sense that the time has come to remedy

that.

Unlike so many meetings that we all attend, one thing about a group of action-oriented leaders, is we tend to get things done. After the second Summit, we created a website, www.nlpleadershipsommit.org. We set up a process for those recognized as “leaders” in the field who can sign-off on the NLP description and values and who has 15 years of being recognized as a “leader” to be welcomed into the Summit.

The next Summit will be 3 or 4 days, January 9-12 and unless we find another place, we will return to Alicante, Spain. And eventually I’m sure that we will host the Summit in various places all around the planet.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #5
January 22, 2018

YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU DON'T ACCEPT

I wrote an entire chapter in the book, *The Crucible and the Fires of Change* (2012*). Do you know why? Because as a book on change, it wanted to fully describe a basic change principle. Namely, *You can't change what you don't accept*. A strong irony? Accept in order to change. For most people, it seems completely paradoxical in the sense that it seems contradictory.

“I want to change this experience of being poor, this limiting belief, this self-sabotaging identity, I don't want to accept it! That's the last thing in the world I want to do!”

In the years during which I had a psychotherapeutic practice, this was a constant phenomenon that I encountered in the counseling sessions. It was common with most of the clients I saw. They were often crystal clear about the change they wanted to make—their desired outcome. Yet as they discovered what the therapeutic process for getting there required, namely, embracing the problem, entering into it to understand it on its own terms. That is, accepting the problem as a problem and a problem that they are responsible for (or at least responsible to)—that was not easily accepted. They fought against that. They resisted that.

Ah, *resistance*—the big bugaboo of therapy. Typically, those who need therapy (healing from traumas of the past), who come for therapy, who need to change, are also those who fight the most against the change. Every therapist worth her salt therefore has to learn how to avoid resistance or to get around it. As a therapist I learned from NLP how to do that. I learned that by matching (pacing) a client, I could thereby give him a sense of connection, rapport, safety, and understanding. Matching the person physically, verbally, emotionally, and semantically would prevent the person from feeling assaulted or forced to make a change. This created a personal relationship that reduced or even completely eliminated resistance to you as a person.

The only resistance that would then be outstanding to deal with would be resistance to accepting one's current state and/or the problem. Another paradox occurs here: to get over, overcome, deal with, solve, etc. a problem—one has to *embrace* it. That's what is meant by the line—you can't change what you don't accept.

Consider something that you don't understand—not something that requires years of disciplined study such as you would undertake at a University. Think of something that others understand and believe and act on that you don't. Think of a political position that you just don't understand. Think of a religious position, an economic position, etc. something like that. Others understand it, but you don't. You not only do not agree with it, you also do not *understand* it.

“I just don’t get it! How could anyone in their right mind think that! How could anyone believe that non-sense and still be sane?!”

The disagreement in these cases is not due to a lack of intelligence, nor even study. It is due to a lack of acceptance. Behind the disagreement and the disbelief is a non-acceptance, a rejection. And that’s what prevents even an intellectual understanding.

I can best illustrate that (and this is offered just as an illustration) using the political situation in the US by those “on the left” who do not understand President Trump. Now it is not news to say that they do not understand him. Duh! Nor is it news that they fully and completely disagree with him, dislike him, and reject him. No wonder then that they don’t understand him! As long as they don’t accept that he is the President, that he won the Electoral College with 314 (needing only 270), and accept that he is ‘their President,’ — they will continue to not understand him.

And by not understanding him, then they will suffer from the onslaught of the cognitive distortions, cognitive biases, and cognitive fallacies that plague the human race. They will use these, knowingly or not, to “explain” to themselves (and others) what it all means. They will explain that he didn’t rally win, the Russians colluded and gave him the election (*denial*). They will explain that he will cause everything to go to hell— the stock market will crash, unemployment will soar, Gestapo police will round up twelve million illegals and put them into concentration camps, etc. (*awfulizing, catastrophizing*). They will “explain” that he is mentally deranged, an idiot, a fool, in over his head, doesn’t know what he’s doing, etc. (*name calling, ad hominem*). And so it will go. What is the source or cause of their lack of understanding? They do not accept that he is President. You can’t understand what you don’t accept.

NLP began with the idea of meeting a person at his model of the world. Instead of expecting others to come to your model of the world, enter into and match theirs. Seek first to understand and then to be understood. If you don’t do that, it will be next to impossible to truly understand or influence them. Your misunderstanding of them will continue and will grow and, given human nature, your reasoning will become *rationalization* as you will be influence to your own detriment by the cognitive biases and fallacies that distort your thinking.

Accepting Donald Trump, in this case, would entail reading about how he built a billion dollar real-estate company. Begin with *The Art of the Deal*, he not only told his story but revealed his values, his strategic thinking, his ways of thinking and handling business and economic challenges, etc. In his book, *The Art of the Comeback* he described the economic crises of the 1990s in Manhattan and how he handled his own financial crises and didn’t let the problems that he faced defeat him.

Having followed him since 1989 when I started my own wealth creation, what he set forth in those books fully explains his actions today. The one I really disagree with is his policy of hitting back twice as hard anyone who criticizes him. Today he is doing that with the tweets. Crazy? Mentally deranged? Not exactly. For him it is policy. and while I don’t like it, I do understand it. For business and even for being a television celebrity, it worked for him. Whether it will work in the domain of politics where being “politically correct” tends to be the standard, that’s another question.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #6
January 29, 2018

THINKING **IS IN SHORT SUPPLY**

I've been thinking about thinking, again. Well, actually I've been thinking about thinking for decades. After all, that's what NLP is all about and what the Meta-States Model is about—stepping back to look at the kind and quality of thinking that we are doing to see if the mental models that we create in our heads are actually effective. Picking up from Korzybski's original thinking in *Science and Sanity*, NLP began by asking about the mental maps we create because we do not deal directly with reality. We deal with reality as filtered through our mental models. Knowing that initiated the whole exploration into the structure of experience which means exploring how we are thinking and coding things.

Why focus on *thinking-about-thinking*? Because of the fact that your experience can be no better than the thinking you put into it. It is the *quality* of your thinking determines the quality of your experiences.

Given that, how's your thinking? How is the quality of your thinking? Obviously, poor quality thinking is, and always has been, a problem for us humans. In fact, it is humanity's biggest problem. If you think superstitiously, or use a child's wishful and magical thinking as your style—you will be in deep ... nonsense. That kind of inadequate, sloppy, and imprecise thinking will undermine nearly everything you attempt to do.

Ah, *thinking*. That is what education should be focused on— thinking clearly, precisely, and intelligently. But here's the problem. Schools are mainly focused on the content of thinking, not the process of thinking. Test it for yourself. How many classes did you have in school on *the process of thinking*? Did you have any? I did not.

Now you might be thinking, “Thinking is not in short supply, I think every day. I am thinking right now. How can thinking be in short supply?” If so, then let me make sure we are on the same page about “thinking.” That's because not everything that is called “thinking” is thinking. Many mental activities are falsely called thinking.

Thinking means taking facts and information and working them over in your mind so that you can grasp and then understand what that data means. To truly think is to take an idea inside your mind, turn it over to look at it from various positions, situate it in a context so that you understand what it means or could mean. A parrot can hear words and repeat those words, but who would say that the parrot is “thinking” as we humans *think*? It is parroting. It is saying words without those words really making sense or meaning within in its mind — as far as we can

tell.

So merely talking and saying words and repeating things that you have heard is actually not “thinking.” And isn’t this the mental state of lots of people? They are really not thinking— they are just repeating political or religious or business bullet points. They are just repeating what they heard parents, teachers, preachers, news commentators, and others say. *Thinking*, real thinking, involves wrestling with ideas and concepts. Mere agreement, mere rehearsing the party line on something, can occur without *thinking* being involved. *Real thinking* actually involves a lot of mental effort— work— to grasp, comprehend, and understand.

In this, real thinking involves questioning, exploring, wondering, and intense curiosity. You can tell that your thinking is becoming *real* when you discover that you are expending a lot of mental effort. Thinking is actually hard work— which is why people generally avoid it. Most people seem satisfied with answers and so quit questioning.

This is one reason why I put scores and scores of funneling questions in my most recent book, *Creative Solutions*. In that book I used the Neuro-Semantic Precision Funnel to create quality questions that facilitate the creativity process. Creativity starts with a desired outcome. When you create a well-formed goal, you actually thereby create a context for problems. That’s because a problem is anything that gets in the way and blocks your outcome. Without an outcome, you can’t even have a problem. So the great thing about a problem is that it says you have an outcome you want that you don’t presently have.

Then, in that situation, you need a solution. This is where creativity comes in— solving a problem so you can move to your outcome. But before you jump in there, there’s another set of questions. These are designed to help you figure out the innovation process. Should you innovate the solution?

Ah, the whole *outcome— problem— creative solutions — innovation* process actually requires a lot of thinking! It requires an active mind. It asks that you engage in the effort of really thinking through something to well design it. In the process, the *real thinking* that is required is simultaneously both critical and creative. It involves the critical thinking skills of asking challenging questions and the creative thinking skills of inventing solutions.

That’s one example of real thinking. To be authentically productive in setting goals and making them happen requires high *quality thinking*. It requires the ability to be precise and accurate, to be critical and creative. How’s your thinking? Get a thinking quality injection— discover the Meta-Model and the Meta-States Model!

Check out — *Creative Solutions* (2017)
Meta-States (2012)
Communication Magic (2001)

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #7
February 5, 2018
Thinking is in Short Supply #2

THE PROBLEM WITH ANSWERS

We all want answers. I think I can comfortably say that without contradiction, namely, *we all want answers*. Don't you? I think this is a pretty basic human drive—to wonder about things, to be curious, and to want answers to the problems and challenges that we face in life. And given that, I think we could also say that we all like *answers*. Scanning the displays and the books at any bookstore, it seems that *answers* also is a big selling point.

But there's a danger in answers. That's why we need to be aware and to **beware**. Why? Because answers, especially pre-mature answers, are dangerous to your thinking capacity. Now if you have never before considered that *answers* could be dangerous, this may be a new perspective for you. What is the actual *danger* when you find an answer to something or when you draw a conclusion, and have an answer to a question or problem? To understand this danger, I'll first frame the role of questions and answers, that is, problems and solutions.

Here's the frame: we *think* to mentally work over an *idea* about something. That's why *real* thinking primarily involves questioning, exploring, wondering, and intense curiosity. It involves positing one idea, then another, then turning them upside-down, and looking at them from various points of view. *Thinking* is work. It is not just parroting what we've heard. It involves working first to understand the idea, playing around with it, then testing it, checking its source, thinking it through to what it leads to, consequences, repercussions, and much more. Real thinking refers to an active mind alive with ideas.

It is *thinking* that truly distinguishes us from other species. A parrot can say words. It can hear and repeat words, but it does not *think*. It does not really understand what the words mean or what it is saying. It is parroting. And that's what a lot of people do and call it "thinking." But they are mistaken. They are not truly thinking, they are repeating talking points and ideological creeds that they learned by rote, etc.

If *real thinking is the mental effort of working over ideas for understanding and discovery*, then the end result of thinking is to reach conclusions, create solutions, and get answers. Yet here is a strange and ironical fact about answers. The irony actually makes *answers* dangerous. Namely, when most of us get an "answer," we stop thinking.

That's an amazing thing, don't you think? *Answers bring an end to thinking and your mind stops working*. There are several explanations for this. One is that we mostly think in order to solve problems and get answers. So when we reach that goal and get some answer, our purpose has

come to an end. So we stop our exploration. We stop thinking. And if you especially feel satisfied with the answer, the search stops, there's no more inquiry, and so you close the file that you opened in your mind. You have no need to keep thinking.

What other danger is here? Not only do we stop thinking, we tend to grab ahold of the first solution and go no further. So the possibility of finding an even better solution goes away. The possibility of continuing the search and finding the next-level solution, and the one after that, the next-level solution to that solution, and so on — all of that is lost! After all, how many times have you arrived at an “answer” — a solution or some workable idea and then later, someone showed you something ten times better? Or you stumble upon an idea that went far, far beyond your first solution?

Answers stop the creative problem-solving process. Talk about danger! What could be an incredibly important creative solution is stopped mid-stream as you eliminate even that possibility. Answers can deceive you into thinking that you're done, that there's no more surprise or mystery.

For others, having an answer satisfies their need for closure. This refers to the meta-program of closure/ non-closure, this perceptual filter relates to how comfortable you are when information is presented, like a story, but the story is not finished. Those with a filter for “closure” feel anxious until it is closed. Once closed, however, they can now feel okay or satisfied. For others, an answer enables them to feel smug, even superior. They use it as a psychological defense for a faltering sense of self value. They really misuses an answer.

This also answers why, as noted in the previous post, *thinking is currently in short supply*. People keep cutting off *thinking*. They end their mental exploration of a question or problem for too soon. Wanting mental ease and comfort, they grab an answer (no matter how inadequate). For good healthy and vigorous thinking, this is a problem.

Solution? Learn to think with clarity and precision. Start with *Winning the Inner Game*, *Movie Mind*, and then go to *Creative Solutions*. Those books will give you the foundation then for NLP and Neuro-Semantics. To your thinking excellence.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #8
February 12, 2018
Thinking is in Short Supply #3

NAME-CALLING

Primitive Thinking that Shuts Thinking Down

All politicians all do it. At least, I can't think of a single politician who doesn't do it. Yet in name-calling, they are actually practicing *a very primitive form of thinking*. It is one that is appropriate for a seven-year old or maybe a 13-year old, but not for an adult. Actually, it is a form of pseudo-thinking that shuts down healthy thinking.

Now there's a particular kind of name-calling that Donald Trump does. I never liked it, yet it was often funny, and sometimes incredibly entertaining. And what would you expect from a successful TV entertainer and producer (The Apprentice) or from a successful business man who knows how to establish a brand (the Trump Brand)? During the campaign, he gave names to his opponents, names that typically stuck: lying Ted, crooked Hiliary, Pocahontas, etc. This simple kind of name-calling strikes me as what young children do, sometimes for play, sometimes to torment other children. It also stops thinking. Once you label someone in that way, the conversation is over.

A more insidious form of name-calling is making a judgment about someone and then presenting that judgment as if it was a fact. This is what many of the Democrats do in response to Trump. They make a judgment that he is unfit to be president or is mentally deranged or something else and then they use those terms to describe him. While it is also name-calling, it is more hidden. Once they describe him with their judgment terms they do not own that it is their judgment. They try to sneak it in as a fact.

This form of name-calling confuses two levels of information— descriptive and evaluative. Yet when a person cannot make this distinction, that person can never be a professional communicator. You can find that statement over and over in the early NLP literature and it was made to introduce the importance of sorting out what is sensory-based (see, hear, feel, etc.) as a description. A description that is empirical versus those that are evaluative based. The first set of descriptions use the sensory predicates. The second set use the Meta-Model distinctions that are ill-formed— unspecified nouns and verbs, nominalizations, lost performatives, universal quantifiers, etc.

Descriptive language can be immediately tested because it is empirical and available to your eyes and ears. Evaluative language cannot be seen or heard. It is an evaluation by someone using some values, criteria, and standards. So when you use evaluative language, you are engaged in a high-level and subtle form of name-calling. “You are rude.” “She is very gracious.” “He is

hateful.” “She is a racist.” “They are blind to their prejudices.”

All of that is just name-calling. It is using and imposing evaluative judgments on someone. All that it accomplishes is to prejudice people against someone that the person doesn't like. To the question as to why someone thinks, say, or does what they do, this is the answer. It gives people an answer and thereby enables them to stop thinking. It fallaciously “explains” the person's actions that they dislike. This kind of name-calling offers a false answer that shuts down further inquiry.

Name-calling confuses map with territory. The word (as a map) is then assumed to be the real thing (the territory). It is as if the word *is* the reality. The strange thing about this is that if the person reacts to this name-calling by vehemently reacting— that very reaction then encourages more name-calling. The reactivity fuels the person doing the name-calling because it works in that if it galls the person, upsets him, and “gets” him.

It is stereotypical thinking that feeds name-calling. We make a judgment about someone based on a stereotype about some classification assuming that “everybody in the class is essentially the same.” That stops any fresh thinking that considers the person based on his or her uniqueness. Malcolm Gladwell spoke of this in his book, *Blink* (2005) by quoting psychologist Keith Payne: “When we make a split-second decision, we are really vulnerable to being guided by our stereotypes and prejudices, even ones we may not necessarily endorse or believe. (P. 223)

This map—territory confusion can seem “magical.” Because we don't question the name calling, we take it as real. It is a negative form of reframing. So where reframing puts a positive spin and meaning on what we would normally find challenging, name-calling puts a negative spin and meaning on what we might otherwise value. In this way, name-calling creates disvalue as it attempts to set a negative anchor.

The next time you hear name-calling, whether it is overtly in the way Trump does it or more covertly as others do it— remember it is designed to stop thinking and to make robust inquisitive thinking in short supply.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #9
February 19, 2018
Thinking is in Short Supply #4

SHORT-TERM THINKING

Another Thinking Disability

I've been writing about why *real* thinking is in short supply and the various factors that actually *stop* thinking. Here's another. Regarding a central time factor that's involved in thinking, there are two forms of thinking. There is short-term thinking and there is long-term thinking. The first comes easy and quickly for us. In that sense it is much more "natural" to think short-term, yet it is also frequently a disastrous form of thinking, one that can get us into lots of trouble. Children think that way, and a good bit of parenting and teaching involves helping a child or young person to lift up his thinking horizon to look out further into the future and consider consequences of today's thinking.

In his classic work *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) Peter Senge focused primarily on systemic thinking. In that work, he described six "learning disabilities" which we can also view as *thinking disabilities*. Here are the six learning or thinking disabilities, one of which is short-term thinking.

- 1) Identification: "I am my position."
- 2) Blaming: "The enemy is out there."
- 3) Reactivity: Automatic reacting to words and first impressions without stopping to think.
- 4) Single Cause-Effect: Seeing things as static snapshots rather than a series of events.
- 5) Short-term thinking: Focused on the immediately and not able to see consequences or cycles.
- 6) Pretending: Believing what you *want* to see, therefore optimistically saying, "All is well!" Focus on image and appearance rather than substance.

In short-term thinking you focus on what's immediately in your awareness without extending your perception or vision into future time and/or space. This makes the breadth of your vision limited so that you do not think in terms of consequences, symptoms, repercussions, etc. Today, this also happens to be the way most managers and executives operate. They focus on the short-term profits, opportunities, changes, etc. They measure things by what's happening in *this quarter*. It is short-sighted and it does not really give a new process a chance to take root and grow.

One problem with short-term thinking is that it privileges tactical thinking over strategic thinking. Do that and while you may win a battle you may also do so at the expense of losing the war. Short-term thinking feeds impatience, low frustration tolerance, and a sense of demandingness ("I want what I want now!"). Short-term thinking disregards that things take time as they go through stages of development. It assumes that you can make informed decisions about processes without waiting for the process.

Organizations often declare that a program or an approach doesn't work after one quarter, hardly giving it time to get started. Consequently, business has been plagued by "flavor of the month" programs for years, going from one fad to the next "big thing" under the illusion that the solution will be a quick fix and doesn't have to deal with systemic factors.

By contrast, long-term thinking requires patience, asking about what an action will lead to and what will result from that result, and so on. Long-term thinking requires much more mental effort in seeking to understand things that are hidden from view. Some of this is *consequential thinking*, another higher level executive function, and one that typically doesn't even emerge until late adolescence. Yet many adults do not use this as part of their thinking capacities. Some of this is about maturity, the willingness and the ability to wait as you take development into account.

If you have ever said, or heard someone say, "I just didn't think that X would happen!" you have witnessed one of the consequences of short-term thinking and how it stopped you or someone else from thinking, from really thinking something through. No wonder Senge described it as a thinking and a learning disability.

Long-term thinking looks for the system within which an event, experience, behavior, or program is within. "What are the systemic factors that play a role here?" With a long-term perceived, you begin to consider the language system, the cultural system, the economic system, the political system, the religious system, the family systems, and on and on. You look for the communication loops— the feedback and feed-forward loops so that you can consider how long it takes for information and activity to get around the system loops.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #10
February 26, 2018
Thinking is in Short Supply #5
How Over-Simplified “Answers”
Shut Down Thinking

CRITICAL THINKING AND SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

With the tragic shooting at the school in Florida last week, the focus in the USA has arisen again about *how do we stop this kind of senseless murdering*. This happens after every such event. Why? Probably because the usual superficial non-systemic thinking focuses on one variable, the guns. Those who so focus think that because the bullets come out of the gun, the gun is the culprit. Therefore all we need to do to stop violence of this sort, mass murders, domestic terrorism, etc. is to stop gun sales. Simple as that. Stop anyone and everyone from having guns and the problem is solved. If only the world was that simplistic! But alas, it is not.

Actually this thinking extremely limited thinking stops us from engaging in *real thinking* about the subject. As a form of fallacious thinking it operates from the limited view that events are caused by a singular cause. That kind of thinking is not only narrow-minded, it is childish, a form of simplistic linear-thinking, and therefore ineffective.

For more adult way of thinking we have to think systemically. What is the system within which the shooting occurred? What other variables are involved in what happened? Once people are able to think systemically, we can then begin to think in terms of the leverage points in the system, that is, where even a small change can have transformative influence. We can also begin developing an integrated multi-dimensional approach.

Guns, of course, are often the instrumental means whereby someone wounds and kills. Yet sometimes the instrument is a car, a bomb, a knife, a machete, etc. If the solution is to eliminate the instrument used, we would have to stop selling cars, trucks, knives, chemicals, electronics, etc. Yet are the guns the critical causation factor here?

The instrument of destruction whether a gun, bomb, or car is in the hands of some human. So let's back up to *the person* who does the harm. Who are these people? Motivationally what's driving them? What are the social influences that affect them? Now we have many, many more variables to that play a role:

- Personal psychology: the mental health of the person.
- Social context: the health and well-being of that community: social media, movies, drug culture, gang culture, etc. Creating more of a sense fo connectedness, social responsibility to and for each other.
- Social responsibilities: those around the person who know him or her best. Are they

- speaking up?
- Radical ideology: is the person influenced by terrorist philosophy or groups, extreme groups promoting hate (Neo-Nazis, etc.).
 - Enforcement community: police, FBI, other authorities: integration of information, thoroughness in checking up on leads.
 - Legal requirements: regarding background checks, laws. Are they enforced?
 - Security for public events: schools, parades, airports, malls, etc.

Over-simplistic thinking focuses on *one aspect of a problem*, assumes that is the sole or primary factor and then over-generalizes it, formats it as “it is this or terrorism.” The argument shuts down real thinking because people take sides and argue for a position without giving thoughtful consideration to all of the other factors.

Fact: *Complex problems are never solved by simple solutions*. I wish they were. But wishing does not, and will not, make it so. We have to expand our thinking, our considerations, and operate from a more holistic view. We also have to learn to listen to all of the views in order to put together an integrated systemic approach as the solution. That means that “solving it once and for all,” which is the cry that is now being heard on all of the news networks, has to involve a multi-dimensional approach. Police cannot do it alone, nor teachers, not law-makers, no parents, etc. People from many different areas have to come together to work *collaboratively together*. In fact, the lack of collaboration is a major culprit.

Single causal thinking looks for the “golden bullet,” “the magical formula,” “the one thing that will solve the problem.” All of that is over-simplistic and actually makes solving the problem more difficult. We have to work together. And that means listening and seeking first to understand each other. And far too many who are supposedly trying to solve the problem are not doing that. Listen to the cable news programs and hear them arguing, condemning, judging, name-calling, etc. and *not listening, not collaborating*. Instead, they are polarizing and politicizing. One of the real questions in this debate is — When we will learn that solving complex problems is all about collaborating.

Want more? See the book I wrote with Ian McDermott, *Collaborative Leadership* (2016)

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #11
February 26, 2018
Thinking is in Short Supply #6

THE PROBLEM WITH SUCCESS

The problem with success is that when you succeed, when you develop a track record of success and you develop a reputation— people will begin to *assume* that you know what you're talking about and have insightful things to say about *everything*. But it is not true. You do not know and can't say insightful things about everything. And worse still, as people assume that your track record of success gives you particular advantage of understanding, knowledge, and intelligence—they will stop questioning you and stop challenging you.

This is a problem? you ask. Well, obviously some people (maybe most people) don't like being questioned and challenged— but the brightest and best do! In fact, being challenged is what makes them the brightest and the best. They get feedback, they get to wrestle with their ideas in the public marketplace and out of that they come out more insightful, more robust, able to make more refined distinctions, and more able to clearly communicate their ideas. They not only like feedback, they not only thrive on it, they demand it.

Alfred Sloan, CEO of General Motors, is an excellent example of this. When he was running GM, whenever there was no one to disagree or oppose him on a decision in the board room, he would postpone the decision altogether. Why? He thought that if there is a lack of dissent, it meant that the decision had not been carefully considered and there may be too much groupthink. He knew that he needed someone who pushed back on an idea and challenge it.

What happens with success is that we and the people around us *stop thinking*. Assuming that we now know, assuming that we now have the answers, assuming that our guesses are top-notch, those around us start deferring. They become "Yes men." They default on thinking assuming that the person in charge will do the thinking. And in groups, organizations, and corporations, this leads to *group-think*. And all of this is disastrous to staying on the cutting-edge of creativity and innovation.

Success, like answers, actually cut off thinking. Now true enough, we want both. We want answers and we want success, but there's a problem with each. *Both ends the search*. Both brings a halt to the inquiry and both closes the ongoing development so that instead of developing a great answer or creating a great success— we settle for mediocre answers and successes.

What's needed is *real* thinking. And that means a healthy skepticism for whatever answers we have so far and whatever successes we have achieved to-date. Just because we have an answer or

or some success is not enough. Test it. To quote an old Bible verse: “Test all things and hold fast to that which is true.” (I Thessalonians 5:23). So ask questions:

What is the level of accuracy in this information? Is it valid? How valid?

What is the level of relevance? How pertinent is this information for our question?

What is the level of sufficiency for this answer? Is it thorough enough? Could it be more?

Actually, success is not enough. What if the success happened by accident? By coincidence? What if it happened by factors that you’re not aware of? In that case, you have no way of perpetuating the success or replicating it. In that case, you really don’t know the factors that played a key role in the success and so there’s no way that you can make it will last. And anyone who is impressed with the success and who asks you about it will be getting pseudo-information.

Sometimes a person or a corporation succeeded because it of the zeitgeist (the spirit of the times). It was the right moment. Anyone with almost any offering would have been an instant success given where the markets were and what you were offering. So if you are not engaged in *real* thinking and understanding and intelligence— not only will you be deceived about the reasons for your success, you will have a false confidence for continuing it or reproducing it. Not good.

Because success tempts people to stop thinking, they focus on *the end-results* rather than *the process* that created the end-results. This reveals yet another problem and danger in thinking—results thinking. Now certainly we all want results, but if your thinking is about the end-values and not the means-values, we can very easily set ourselves up for unethical practices by over-caring too much on the end results.

Succeeding to reach a goal, in and of itself, is not enough. Don’t be satisfied just because you got the results that you set out to achieve. *Engage in some deeper and more profound thinking.* Consider the process and the “critical success factors.” Can you specify the actual *processes* that you engaged in that made the difference? Aim for a deep *mindfulness*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #12
March 5, 2018
Thinking is in Short Supply #7

ARGUMENTS THAT SHUT-DOWN THINKING

When we want to make a point with someone, we arrange certain facts together in order to make “an argument,” that is, to “argue” for our point. This use of the word “argue” or “make an argument” refers not to “arguing” in the normal emotional sense of the word. It refers rather to *a reasoned way of thinking* that is designed to bring another person to see and understand your positions as well as to persuade the other person to agree with your argument or your point. This use of the term “argument” does not referring to bickering, accusing, or disputing at all. It is *reasoning*, giving reasons, giving evidence, and making an appeal for a perspective. And when you do that, you make your way of thinking clear which goes back to the Latin word, *arguere* “to make clear” from which “argue” and “argument” come.

Yet the two meanings of argue and argument are connected. Typically, you present your evidence for your point, but then the more you contend for it, the more you debate, and then lecture, and then disagree, and then eventually both parties in up making accusations and personal attacks. We all know that far too well! In the end you are in a shouting match about who’s right and who’s wrong and so you are now arguing in the most obnoxious and aversive form of that term.

Now *a good argument* depends on several things. First good evidence and then the ability to clearly communicate your line of thinking that led you to your conclusions. It depends on an open mind that you could be wrong, that you could not have the most relevant facts, and that your reasoning may not be correct. It depends on robust dialogue that listens, reflects, gives sensory-based feedback, and adjusts as issues become clearer.

One of the ways that arguments go wrong and shut down thinking is when they are based on fallacious reasoning and this is what you can see on any evening on television or cable. In fact, to me it is a wonder of the world that such *low level arguments* continue night after night. Anyone who actually *thinks* about it for just a few moments can see that it is false reasoning and that it is primarily propaganda and childish argumentation and it’s not going to lead anyone to a thoughtful consideration or change of mind. So why does it continue? Probably for the entertainment value (!) and because it delights the “true believers.” That’s my guess.

Some people base their arguments by appealing to one or more cognitive biases. “As everyone knows how X is a racist.... you can expect ...” this social appeal or bandwagon bias comes with

an assumptive bias. By labeling, the person taps into the labeling bias (that words are the reality), and therefore unquestioned. We all tend to easily confuse words and labels with the reality they refer to and often never even question the labels. Intellectually we *know* that words are just words and labels are just labels, but in the heat of an argument, we forget and respond to the labels emotionally. Call someone a name (and it does not have to be derogatory) and all sorts of associations and assumptions come along with it. Now *thinking* stops and *defensiveness* begins!

Then there is the causation bias which is so easy to trigger. Mention a name or term and we stereotypically link all sorts of things with it and also assume all sorts of very questionable causations. Thus, we think that anyone advocating for gun rights must want or at least approve mass shootings. We think that anyone advocating for gun control must want or at least approve of only criminals having guns. We are assuming causation in both cases, “If you do X, then that must of necessity mean that you want Y.” Of course, such arguments are fallacious and their appeal is wrong-headed. We are assuming too much.

A bias that drives the majority of people is that of simplicity and over-simplifying and so if you can tell a cohesive story, you can appeal to how simple it sounds to them. This is the narrative bias at its best and it works best when there is less information because in that way you can make an appeal based on simple causation and not have to answer questions that arise due to other facts that do not so easily fit into the narrative.

Beyond the cognitive biases are the cognitive fallacies— the appeals based entirely on fallacious (erroneous thinking). Here a person makes an appeal based, not on the reasoning, but on character (the person), or emotions, or correlation, etc. People appeal to an over-simplification of the other’s argument by creating a strawman argument which they then proceed to tear apart which they easily do because it was a weak strawman argument.

We all make arguments for our ideas and beliefs. It is how we attempt to influence and persuade each other. Yet we do not all make high quality arguments. Often our arguments are of poor or low quality. And often we learn to do that as we see and hear such low quality “arguments” in the media. A big problem is when our arguments utilize cognitive biases and fallacies— that’s because those arguments actually shut down thinking rather than encourage it.

The next time you make an argument or hear one— consider, “Does this argument encourage open exploration, dialogue, and respectful exchanges, or does it seem to be shutting the down on conversation?”

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #13
March 12, 2018
Thinking is in Short Supply #8

INDOCTORATION OR EDUCATION

There's lots of things that *stop thinking*, that is, things which prevent people from *thinking* in the sense of learning and discovering. I've mentioned a number of these ways in this series on how thinking, *real thinking*, is in short supply. One of the primary ways that we humans stop thinking is by indoctrination which is a substitute of real education.

To indoctrinate is to take some idea (doctrine) whether a belief, a rule of conduct, a policy, a framework of understanding, an assumption, etc. and get someone to believe it and accept it so that they do not question it. In the dictionary it is also described as "to often repeat an idea or belief to someone in order to persuade them to accept it." "The act of indoctrinating, or teaching or inculcating a doctrine, principle, or ideology, especially one with a specific point of view."

When we indoctrinate someone we seek to get them to unthinkingly and even blindly accept an idea so that it is treated as an unquestioned given. This tends to be one of the functions of every "culture," whether it is the family culture, business culture, or religious, ethnic, national, etc. culture. When everybody around us assumes and acts in a similar way, then it is difficult to even think an opposite thought or to question it. As a cultural given, it is then easily accepted as "the way it is."

Education, however, is (or should be) completely different from this. Education is defined as "the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life."

Education, from the Latin word *educare* and from *ducere* "to lead," literally refers to the act of leading out. That is, you *lead out* of the person the discovery which then enables it to be that persons. It refers to enabling a person to bring out or train out one's thinking, questioning, discovering, etc. in the process of learning. Going back to Socrates and Plato, the idea in education is that there is within us the knowledge or at least *the capacity* to know and to understand. Education draws out this capacity thereby enabling our ability for learning. More important than the specific content of what we learn is our increased ability to learn—to think, to understand, to question, to explore, etc.

Given this, the least effective way to education is to *lecture*. To tell someone what to think shortcuts the learning, the thinking, and the discovery process. To lecture, tell, instruct, preach, etc. is spoon-feeding people with the answers. And as noted in Neurons #7, when we get

answers, we generally stop thinking. Giving people answers will make you feel good, even powerful, knowledgeable, and in-the-know, and the answer will give people a short-term pleasure. Yet in the long run it cheats them. That's because it undermines their learning to use their mind and discover for themselves.

This robs them from having to exercise their minds— they do not exert their brains, they do not struggle to gain clarity or to focus. Answers are to the brain what junk-food is to the body. It is sweet and delicious. Like jello, it is easy to swallow. You don't have to chew. But without the need to chew, to tear apart, and to digest, you can't make it your own. You can't incorporate it into the very fabric of you.

Many people who think they are educated are actually only indoctrinated. Content information has been pumped into them which they have learned and over-learned so that they can recall it, quote it, and filter things through it. But they are not actually educated. They can present and defend a dogma, an ideology, but they cannot criticize it. They cannot think about it reflectively and they cannot bring critical thinking to it. They are "true believers" in that they are dogmatically inflexible and they cannot look at their beliefs with humor. Humor for them is sacrilegious.

Recently when I presented some questions about what we were doing in Group and Team Coaching, several begged for the answers. I refused. "Figure it out," I said. "What do you think? How will you find the answer?" Later when I was asked about it privately, I said was on strike against spoon-feeding the answers. I don't know if that led the person to doing some personal reflecting, but at least that stopped the petitioning.

Even if you've been indoctrinated, even by good stuff, nothing stop you from getting an education. Engage in some critical thinking— use the Meta-Model to question the assumptions you've been operating from, check the language your ideas are coded in, and examine the facts that you've been using as evidence. Step back and look at the kind and quality of thinking that you've been doing. It's never too late to begin getting a true education. Adopt the attitude that Mark Twain took; he said that he "never let his schooling get in the way of his education."

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #14
March 19, 2018
Thinking is in Short Supply #9

INTELLECTUALLY LAZY PEOPLE

Recently in a discussion on the NLP Leadership Summit group, Lucas Derks spoke about a subject and in his comments, he wrote the following. Because Lucas is a clear thinker and excellent researcher, I always pay special attention to what he writes.

“[This term] obscures what is really going on there ... it satisfies intellectually lazy people; now they believe they know something, but what they believe is only a substitute for real understanding. ... Using this term in this manner discriminates nothing from everything.”

I have separated this statement from the specific discussion in which it occurred (e.g., which was on “energy” psychologies) because it strikes me that this description can be applied to a great many things. Given the nature of language, and the way most people use language, the terms, phrases, and descriptions that we use all too often does not promote clarity or understanding. Instead it “obscures what is really going on.” We all know that this occurs a lot among politicians— they have the ability to seemingly say something meaningful, but which can be interpreted by people on all sides of an issue as supporting what they think. It also tends to be the language of news commentators— especially those involved in “fake news,” the end result of their reporting is that they have obscured what’s really going on.

Even more dangerous, however, is that such languaging “satisfies intellectually lazy people” yet all the while it deceives them. The deception? Now they think they “know” something when, in fact, they don’t. To know the subject under discussion would require the effort of seeking to understand, of critically thinking by examining the hidden assumptions, to examining the language being used, and asking hard questions. But they do none of this. They are content to embrace a term or phrase that sounds intelligible, but which actually communicates nothing.

This fits the most common bias in human nature, the bias that affects us all. This is the bias that “we think we understand.” In my newest book on critical thinking, I put this as the first cognitive bias. As many of the thinkers and researchers in *Critical Thinking* have noted, this is actually an amazing bias. That’s because, given that the more research and science opens up so many new areas of exploration and informs us of how little we do know— you would think that there would be a hunger in most people’s minds for learning more, understanding more. But no. Most people are pretty satisfied and feel that they basically “understand” things. As a result, they are not intensely curious. They do not constantly check books out of the library or buy books to discover what they don’t know. They are content. They feel comfortable.

What explains this? *They think they understand things!* Now this bias is particularly dangerous because it invites all of us to either stop thinking or at least to avoid thinking. “Oh I know about that!” We dismiss even the possibility of learning something new. Thinking we know, it is a small step to thinking we know “all about it.” For anyone intellectually lazy, this feels intuitively right—it feels comfortable. And it makes a person *feel* self-confident. It closes the “search” program in the person’s mind so one can sleep more soundly. It is the structure of being a human zombie!

To do otherwise requires effort— maybe even struggle— and for many that isn’t fun, it’s uncomfortable. It creates stress, and not the stress of excitement (eustress). It is also—for some— threatening. It threatens their sense of identity— who am I if I don’t know? Am I stupid? Unintelligent?

Again, that’s another indication of the lack of *real understanding*. Here people confuse their “self” with their thoughts and make their personal value based on knowing or in being right. Yet when they do that, they completely mis-use their intellectual powers and think that “knowing” makes you a somebody. The truth is that you were born a somebody, because you are a somebody, you can now use your intellectual powers for the exciting adventure of discovering. Now you can boldly declare that you don’t know and begin the human journey of finding out.

The very presence of intellectual laziness amazes me. I don’t understand it at all! There is so much that we do not know. Everyday I keep discovering more things that I do not know, that I’m fascinated about and that I want to explore. I hope you do too.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #15
March 26, 2018

META-DETAILING

Zooming In and Out, Up and Down

I first introduced the term *meta-detailing* in 1997 in the book, *The Structure of Excellence*, which is now titled, *Sub-Modalities Going Meta* (2004). It was in 1996 that, along with Bob Bodenhamer, I worked out the fact that sub-modalities are not “sub” that is, they are not smaller details of the sensory representational modalities. The *so-called* sub- modalities are themselves actually categories and if you look closely, you’ll notice that most are nominalizations— distance (close or far), brightness (high or low), dimensions (two-dimensional flat pictures or three-dimensional pictures, etc.). So nominalizations like these cannot be smaller pieces of representational systems.

The big *secret* that we discovered back in 1997 was that these features of representational systems actually worked *symbolically and semantically*. That is, if a person used “distance” for a *code* that would *mean* “real” or “not so real,” then the closer an object, the more real and the greater the distance, the less real the object would seem.

Consider the nominalization “brightness.” Originally, NLP taught that if an object was “bright,” it inevitably was more compelling and emotional. Yes, that makes sense. But if we’re talking about a romantic evening at a nice restaurant (a particular context), then making that picture “brighter” might actually reduce the sense of romance. And strange enough, making it “dimmer” might make it seem more romantic. What gives?

The fact is that the cinematic features of our representations do not contain meaning in and of themselves. They work symbolically. They stand for some meaning (semantics) that we attribute to them. The so-called “sub-modality” is actually just a symbol. Originally before they were called “sub-modalities” Todd Epstein named them *psycho-graphics*. As graphics or pictures (cinematic features) that made a distinction in the modality (visual, auditory, etc.), they had a psychological effect, hence psycho-graphics.



All of this is the background for meta-detailing. A detail like a cinematic feature (a sub-modality) operates within a larger framework— something *meta* to it. I originally got the idea of *meta-detailing* from several sources—the key one being Robert Dilts’ work in modeling and his three books on *The Strategies of Genius*. In modeling Walt Disney, Robert noted that Disney had the ability to take a

large level idea (a meta-frame) like “charm” and detail it down into specifics like big eyes, rosy cheeks, human-like expressions, long eye-lashes, etc. and thereby make a mouse charming! The meta-frame of “charm” as a concept is made real by identify some cinematic features by which we semantically construct the idea of “charming.”

What is meta-detailing? Meta-detailing means accessing and holding a meta-level idea (a belief, decision, identity, understanding, permission, etc.) *and simultaneously* being able to identify the specific sensory-based details that actualize the meta-level idea. The term *meta-detailing* is at the same time a holistic systems word that unites general and specific (global and details). It ends the polarization of thinking in either-or terms and creates a synergy of the two. In the book *Inside-Out Wealth*, this holistic skill is one of the most important skills for succeeding at wealth creation. In my new book which is due in June (2018), *Executive Thinking*, I have put meta-detailing as one of the critical thinking skills.

When you learn to meta-detail, you *hold* in mind a relevant meta-frame which you thereby commission to operate as your relevancy frame and over-arching frame-of-reference. Then, as you do that, you dive down into the details of that frame. This enables you to energize the critical success factors of that frame and it simultaneously prevents you from getting lost in irrelevant details.

A nice example of a cosmic zooming in and out can be seen on youtube. While it is not the same thing as meta-detailing, it does provide a memorable way to think about zooming in and out:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfSNxVqprvM>

May you meta-detail to bring richness and fullness to whatever you do!

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #16
April 2, 2018

“APRIL FOOLS!” I WAS JUST FAKING

In many parts of the world April 1 is “April Fools” day. It’s a day to play practical jokes— to present something that’s not real, to fake someone out, and then to declare, “*April’s fools!*” Shouting that then exposes the hoax and, ideally, then everyone gets a good laugh. There aren’t many times or places where fooling someone, faking something that isn’t real, is funny, fun or playful, but this is one. Most of the time it misleads, deceives, and creates significant problems.

This is especially true when it comes to fake news or false information. And while there has always been fake news, we seem to be in an age of exaggerated fake news. In fact, some news companies blantly and intentionally set out to manipulate the news for various political agendas. Long time before President Trump identified CNN as “fake news station,” we talked about the subject of dis-information and mis-information. It’s been around for a long, long time.

An innocent form that generates fake news is when people simply make mistakes about information or when people make assumptions and write them as if they were facts. That happened to me when I was twenty-one. While driving I bumped my car into another car. We exchanged insurance forms and went our way. The next day in the local news paper, it was reported that I was injured and taken to the hospital. When some friends asked me about my injuries and told me of the report in the newspaper, I said, “That’s news to me.”

Why or how someone made that report I never found out. I’m assuming that someone may have seen the accident and reported that I drove away and when someone else heard that they may have said, “maybe he had to get to the hospital,” and then another dropped the “maybe.” And by the time the “information” pass through several people, someone told a report that the driver of one car was taken to the hospital for injuries and then, without checking, that’s what he wrote.

Mis-information frequently occurs like that. It is the old child’s game of “telephone” where 10 or 20 people pass on a story and the final story is usually significantly different from the first story. Sometimes it happens like that. We humans are generally not very skilled in accurate listening so we “hear” with half an ear, hear through our filters, and contaminate facts with our perceptions without even being conscious that we are doing so. This can become disastrous especially when we’re passing on “gossip” about someone and have reasons to speak ill of someone.

Yet that kind of “fake news” is innocent compared to intentionally generating and inventing “news” in order to sway opinions, beliefs, and understandings. Now that the dossier against President Trump has been exposed, we have a great example of people intentionally inventing so-called “news” in order to discredit someone and apparently from what we now know use it to

start a special counsel investigation. It's now known that it was paid for by the Clinton Campaign and the Democratic National Party. Yet since it is still in process, we won't know the full extent of it until the special counsel's work is done.

Now the very fact that people can, and do, invent "fake" news and information puts all of us at risk of operating—not only from inadequate information—but positively false information. And fake information occurs in every field, every discipline, and even in scientific areas.

Now there is one profession that fully capitalizes on this—that of stage magicians and illusionists. They mostly create visual illusions that trick our eyes and minds. Using the natural dispositions (biases) regarding sight and how the brain fills in information, they can trick us into thinking that something exists or operates in a way that it really does not. What we think we see or perceive is fake, and not real. You can find lots of these if you google "illusions," or "attention tests." Look for the invisible gorilla if you have not seen that illusion.

If we are all at risk from mis-information and fake news or information, *what can we do about it?* What can we do to protect ourselves as we seek to find the truth about something, the real facts?

The place to begin is with a healthy skepticism that does not naively or automatically believe whatever someone says or what you read or hear in the news. Then, with that healthy skepticism, learn to skillful ask questions, and for that, there's no better tool than the Meta-Model. This is a set of linguistic distinctions and questions. The linguistic distinction identifies a place where language is typically and generally weak—"ill-formed" was the word that Noam Chomsky used. To this weak spot in mapping things, the Meta-Model provides a set of exploratory questions. The design is that by asking the questions, it invites the speaker to provide a fuller description and so to provide a richer map.

When you use the Meta-Model distinctions and questions in this way, you learn *critical thinking skills*. Now you can think things through more effectively, gain greater clarity on what someone is attempting to communicate, and test the validity of words and phrases. After all, words are not reliable indicators of truth. People can and do lie using words. So we have to test the words to see if they are accurate symbols of the territory.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #17
April 9, 2018

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE VIA CRITICAL THINKING

When was the last time you heard that one of the best ways to get *a competitive advantage in business was through critical thinking*? Like “never.” And yet when this idea is presented, it is seems so obvious that it seems almost redundant to mention it. That was not the case in 1997 when Quinn Spitzer and Ron Evans wrote *Heads, You Win! How the best companies think—and how you can use their examples to develop critical thinking within your own organization*. Whew! What a long sub-title! Here’s some things they wrote in that book:

“Organizations seeking to move from the competence gained from a flexible and well-supported skill-development program to a proficiency that can make critical thinking a source of competitive advantage will find the task nearly impossible without a forceful, committed, and ‘up-front’ leadership such as that demonstrated at Chrysler, Seagate, and Corning.” (p. 221-222)

Now the mention of those three companies were just the tip of the iceberg to all of the companies that they quoted who introduced some form of critical thinking into their training programs. And why? Why would an organization invite training in critical thinking? Again, the answer is so simple and obvious that it almost seems unnecessary to articulate. And yet the answer is also most often overlooked:

Critical thinking skills are needed in order to gather high quality information, to cut through all of the data and information and get to the needed critical knowledge. It is needed for high quality problem defining and solving, it is needed for intelligent decision making. It is needed for planning, executing plans, and for innovation.

Introducing these core *thinking skills* into a company wholesale in a revolutionary way means getting the training to lots of people.

“The revolutionary road to critical thinking skills has been taken recently by Chrysler, Corning, British Airways, Seagate Technology, and others with great success.” (p. 229)

The evolutionary approach is a slower approach and more covert as it introduces the training only to those whose jobs require critical thinking skills. This was the approach of Hewlett-Packard, Sony, Reuters, Honda and others which was more suitable for their needs (p. 230).

One of the fascinating facts that started Spitzer and Evans experimenting with critical thinking was the fact that Sam Walton build WalMart without an MBA, that David Packard made HP an industry leader without “business process re-engineering,” and that many other top leaders in the 1990 did not have business background. How could that be? How could they succeed so spectacularly without business education? The answer?

“These executives were not just people of action, but people of thought— critical thought. And

with the precision of hindsight, we can conclude that the critical thinking they brought to their businesses was fundamentally more effective than that of their colleagues and competitors at the time.” (p. 17)

Specifically, they were especially proficient at four core processes—

- 1) Effectively assessing complex economic environment— *situation appraisal*.
- 2) Accurately identified the cause and implemented corrective action— *problem analysis*.
- 3) Assessed benefits and risks of the choices for great decisions—*decision analysis*.
- 4) Implemented actions effectively as they seized opportunity—*implementation analysis*.

Then, with these core critical thinking processes they were able to do the following which is exactly what we aim to achieve in the Meta-Coach trainings. In fact, the language itself is strangely similar and could just as well describe Meta-Coaching.

“... effective managers excel in the art of questioning: they cut through the clutter to bring clarity and order to confusion. They go straight to the heart of the problem and uncover its underlying cause. When they take action, they have an uncanny ability to home in on the relevant data and choose the best alternative. And they reach beyond the fixed boundaries of the present to identify the threats and opportunities that lie ahead.” (p. 241)

The key to success in business, as it is in every other dimension, is *the thinking behind the understanding and the actions*. It is *the quality and kind of thinking* that governs how people respond. The thinking is what gives us the leverage point for change and transformation and the map that guides how we interact with the territory.

The book, *Creative Solutions* (2017) focuses on this and sorts out the core competencies in terms of the four areas that determine any goal and the translation of that goal into action and reality. When I wrote *Creative Solutions* I did not realize that it is actually a book on applied critical thinking and that it offers a disciplined, data-driven critical thinking process around those four competencies. I discovered that after as I was writing the next book which is on critical thinking. That surprised me.

- 1) *Outcome* — What do you want? What are your dreams and visions?
- 2) *Problems* — What’s in the way? What’s stopping you from achieving your goal?
- 3) *Solutions* — What will solve the problem and get you to your goal?
- 4) *Innovation* — What will you implement to execute your vision to make it real?

The next book (which will be available in May or June), *Executive Thinking*, focuses on the special of thinking that is most frequently referred to as critical thinking.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #18
April 16, 2018
Great Decisions Series #1

GREAT DECISIONS DON'T JUST HAPPEN

Every day you make dozens and dozens of decisions. Most are *routine* decisions—when to get up, what to wear, whether to shower, what to eat, etc. You make many or most of these decisions without much conscious awarenesses, you make them by habit, sometimes by the circumstances around you (e.g., you eat what's available in your refrigerator or pantry). Other decisions, while still pretty much routine, you make more consciously—what to do first, what to prioritize, what to skip or put off, etc.

Then there are the decisions that determine your future and life—what job to take, where to live, who to marry, what to invest money into, whether you should join a project, etc. These are the big ones, but they are not always the most influential ones. That's because sometimes it is the simplest and smallest decision that opens the door to other even more determining decisions. You go to a training, you meet someone and that someone may become a business partner, introduce you to your future boss, or lover, or company, etc.

Decisions— we all make them, but we do not all make them equally well. Sometimes, in fact, we make really poor decisions and suffer the consequences for years, even decades. Sometimes upon discovering a really stupid decision that has created lots of pain and misery, we slap our forehead, “What was I thinking?” Of course, the answer is usually, “You weren't!”

Instead of thinking, you were reacting, or blindly following habit and convention, or letting circumstances dictate your choices. Sometimes instead of engaging in *real thinking*, you engaged in hasty and superficial thinking. Sometimes instead of *thinking things through* you jumped to conclusions, operated from a cognitive bias, and made unwarranted assumptions precisely because you did not do *real thinking*. Sometimes you relied on low quality information, “fake news” and didn't question the information before you made your choices.

The point? *High quality decisions require high quality thinking*. It requires the kind of quality thinking called critical thinking that gathers, processes, and tests information before jumping to conclusions. The reason you make poor decisions and poor judgments is due to your impatience, reactivity, jumping to conclusions, etc. Conversely, effective decisions making means reversing these states and attitudes. It means recognizing and catching your cognitive biases (confirmation, availability, etc.) so that you can test things with a healthy skepticism.

Imagine how your life would be different and better *if only you could consistently make great decisions*. Now wouldn't that be wonderful? The problem for almost everyone is that we humans do not consistently make great decisions. Actually some people are quite skilled at

consistently making horrible decisions that create havoc in their lives. In fact, all of us at times make a lot of poor decisions. It seems to come with being human. Sometimes, we make absolutely disastrous decisions that create tremendous misery for ourselves and others and put our lives and fortunes at risk.

The good news is that we are not alone in this, if we can call this *good* news. Many of those who we look up to as leaders and as great decision-makers also do not consistently make great decisions. Observing examples of poor judgments as the following, you might wonder, “What were they thinking?” “What went wrong in their thinking and deciding?”

- The executives in the many Swiss watch companies in the early 1970s *decided* to ignore Japanese quartz watches. That caused them to miss the revolution in their industry!
- The executives at IBM *choose* to focus on typewriters and giant mainframe computers and *thought* there was no market for a personal computer. And similarly they missed that revolution.
- The executives at Coca-Cola *decided* that they would launch a New Coke, only to have to re-decide that decision.
- Quaker Oats executives acquired Snapple as an acquisition and then found that the deal soured its earning. Poor decisions by intelligent men and women!
- Steve Jobs made a disastrous decision when he choose John Scully to be the CEO at Apple. That didn’t turn out good for him at all.

By way of contrast, Bill Gates reconsidered his first decision about the internet and made one that turned out to be brilliant. William Hewlett and David Packard made a bold decision to move HP niche in test equipment and into the computer industry which turned out to be a great success story. What’s the difference? What determines the quality of decisions— the poor ones from the brilliant ones? How can we learn to become a more intelligent decision-makers?

This dilemma about the quality of decision making is universal. Ever since the first decision makers choose “the knowledge of good and evil,” we the daughters of Eve and sons of Adam have lived outside the Garden and have been prone to making many poor decisions. I suppose it is one consequence of free will. We’re *free* to make really stupid decisions.

We are also free to make really great decisions, but that requires mindfulness, intelligent information gathering and processing, patience, and the skill to *think things through* in order to “make up our minds” in a way that will serve us long-term. In other words, to make a stupid decision all you have to do is react emotionally and mindlessly failed to think things through and that takes no preparation.

Conversely, to make *great decisions consistently* takes preparation— lots of it. It demands a rigor and thoroughness. It requires developing intelligent strategies that will allow you to make the most of information, turn that information into knowledge, and then apply your criteria (values) as you consider trends and probabilities about future events. It requires asking appropriate and incisive questions that get to the heart of things. That’s where the Meta-Model and *Executive Thinking* (2018) comes in.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #19
April 23, 2018
Great Decisions Series #2

THINKING

FOR GREAT DECISIONS

If great decisions do not just happen (Neurons #17), then to make a *truly great* decision, you have to engage in *real thinking*. What enables you to make a great decision is the quality of thinking that you bring to the decision. This involves being able to think things through, gather required information, weigh the decision against high quality criteria, and then make a committed decision.

The word itself, *decision* literally refers to a cutting (“cision”) that divides things (“de”). When you make a decision you simultaneously say *yes* to one thing and *no* to other things. In deciding, you choose between options, you select what you want to do, and then you consider, evaluate, deliberate, and determine your direction. Robbins (1991) says that a decision is “the giant power that shapes destiny.” That’s because when you make a decision, consequences follow. In that way deciding shapes your future—your destiny.

This reveals that the act of *deciding or choosing* is one of the highest executive powers of your mind. When you decide or choose you set a direction for your consciousness, you establish a focus and perceiving, you distinguish your values and disvalues, you experience the power to cause things to happen in your world, etc. And that’s just the beginning.

Deciding is not only a function of thinking, it is one kind of thinking. Because of that, you can’t make quality decisions any better than you can think. Low quality thinking means low quality decisions. And because deciding depends on thinking, this explains why we often make poor decisions. Why?

- First, because we are not thinking —instead we are reacting or we following tradition and habit or we are letting external circumstances decide for us. So we default on deciding.
- Second, we think poorly —we act with haste, think shallowly, superficial understanding. We make unwarranted assumptions. We are blind to our premises and biases.
- Third, we use low quality data for our thinking —we quote questionable sources like “fake news,” we don’t ask about sources or question the source’s credibility.
- Fourth, when it comes to major life decisions, most people do not have a well-thought out strategy for making a decision.

Because of all this, the phenomenon of *deciding or decision-making* is not well understood. Most people actually need to develop a disciplined, systematic approach to decision-making. Deciding is about the future— anticipating, forecasting, and appraising what *will* happen or *likely* to happen. It is about understanding trends (past and present) and their direction. Deciding is

also about dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty— it is about not “knowing,” but the probability of X or Y happening and being prepared. Deciding is up against our myopia about the future. And all the while we are striving to make decisions in order to make things happen.

One of the first strategies that most people learn in NLP training is the *decision strategy*. The process involves thinking about a decision that you made that worked out very well and then identifying *how* you made that decision. What were your concerns? How did you compare it against your values and standards? What processes of evaluation did you go through? How did you weigh the advantage or dis-advantage of the alternatives? Etc.

Additionally, another aspects of the thinking that we engage in when we make a decision concerns the meta-program filters that influence what and how we sort out information. This leads to your unique decision-making style. To the end, there are numerous styles of decision-making, styles that are governed by the particular meta-programs that you use in deciding.

- *Speed*: How quickly or slowly do you make decisions? Do you immediately act or do you reflect? Or do you delay?
- *Definitive*: How decisive or indecisive are you? How often do you change your mind?
- *Convincer*: What convinces you to make a decision or that you’ve made a good decision? What representation system? How many times do you need to experience a convincer?
- *Authority source*: Do you feel the right to decide in yourself or do you need the advice and counsel of others?
- *Direction*: Do you make decisions about what *not* to do or experience or what you *want* to experience?
- *Alternatives*: Do you need lots of options or do you focus on procedure? How many options?
- *Substance*: Do you make decisions based on facts, emotions, circumstances?
- *Striving*: How do you strive to make things happen? Facts first (investigate and clarify), design plan (schedule, format, prepare, coordinate), jump into action (active, proactive, risk-taking, experimenting), implement solution (action oriented).
- *Self-Other*: Cooperatively, collaboratively, independently, rebelliously (mismatch).
- *Responsibility*: Are you under-, over-, or in the middle in terms of response-able?
- *Goal Striving*: How do you go after a goal? Cynic perfectionism or Optimizing.

If deciding is such a powerful experience, then to make great decisions, as an individual or as part of a group, requires that we upgrade our thinking and develop a high quality decision-making strategy. This is one thing that regularly happens in Meta-Coaching as clients get to talk through a decision and received insightful questions. This is one of the things you learn in the trainings. Here’s to making great decisions for your future!

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #20
April 30, 2018
Great Decisions Series #3

PAUSING TO DECIDE

I started out the day intent on counting the total number of decisions that I typically make within the time frame of one day. My first *decision* occurred when I sensed morning light coming into the bedroom, that's when I *decided* to look at the clock, it was 6:15 a.m. I then *decided* to push the button that turned on the radio. I *decided* to listen to the news. Soon I *decided* to get up, then more *decisions* in the bathroom, and even more *decisions* about getting dressed, which sock to put on first, etc. I *decided* to do my morning exercises (crunches and pushups), I *decided* to go downstairs, I *decided* to eat breakfast which included multiple *decisions* about what to eat, what to prepare, how to prepare, etc. Later I *decided* to go to Starbucks which entailed dozens more of *decisions*, to turn this corner, to wait for that truck, to ... It soon became overwhelming. I hit more than 200 *decisions* in the first hour.

Decisions govern our lives. Most are ordinary and either are barely conscious or so completely automatic that they are totally unconscious. Previous thinking and deciding about various things have now become automatic *decisions* that operate as my “way of being in the world.” Previous learnings created *decisions* that now comprise my lifestyle. Decisions mold and form and engineer our lives.

Then there are the circumstances that I default to (an implicit *decision*) that actually replaces or substitute for a conscious *decision*. I *decide* to take Elm Street because I can see construction up ahead on 7th Street. I didn't really want to go down Elm Street, but I also didn't want to get stuck in the traffic. The *decision* didn't seem like a *decision*, that choice seemed determined by that circumstance.

Then there are *the conscious decisions* that determine and govern life today and life into the future. “Should I say yes to this project or not?” “How can I say no to this request without hurting her feelings?” These are the *decisions* that we struggle with— we consider the pros and cons on each side of the decision. And if there are several choices, then we have multiple sets of pros-and-cons. And so we go back and forth between saying *yes* to the choice or *no*. All of this also influences my identity: Am I a decisive person or not? Am I indecisive?

Pausing to Think

Now to create high-quality decisions in all of these cases, you have to pause in order to think. Otherwise you will be merely *reacting* to events and circumstances and defaulting to old programs that actualize previous thinking. And that may not be good for you. To switch off the autopilot — you now have to step back (go meta) to gain perspective—to see the larger picture and to consider what is really important to you. This means becoming mindful of your values

and the criteria that you set for what is truly important.

To *decide*—you first have to define what’s meaningful to you, what you consider significant to your overall well-being, and set your highest intentions. Otherwise you will just be engaged in wishful thinking.

This process shows up in Meta-Coaching in several ways. We begin every coaching session by inviting the prelude of a decision by asking for the person’s agenda, wants, dreams, hopes as we ask, “What do you want from this coaching conversation that will make the most transformative difference in your life?” This starts the deciding as it invites the client to make a choice— “What should I bring up?” In making this decision, the person will either talk about what he positively wants (a toward-value) or what he does *not* want (an away-from value or dis-value). More decisions then arise as we ask a series of well-formed outcome questions—

“What will that look like or sound like when you get it?” “Why is that important to you?” “When do you want that?” “What do you have to do to get what you want?”

Through the process of leading and facilitating the well-formed *outcome conversation*, the client evidentially sets the agenda and creates (or co-creates with the coach) a desired outcome for the coaching and for her life. This is the first *pause*, the second one comes next as we inquire about the values and dis-values of taking actions to make the decision real. This involves identifying all of the values and benefits of the objective as well as the dis-values and costs. Both sides are critical for truly being mindful of what a person will gain and the price one will pay for that gain.

At an even higher level, we often step back for yet another *pause*. This is the pause of considering the standards or criteria that a person is using— against which the decisions are made. *To make a decision, you make it against some criteria.*

What are you treating as most important? Is it time, money, health, energy, joy, accomplishment, achievement, efficiency, recognition, respect, etc.?

Pausing here to look at your criteria and the prioritization of your criteria enables you (and your clients) to be much more thoughtful, mindful, and reflective in decision-making. Doing this enables you to become truly *discerning* in the decision-making process. Yes, you can make many decisions quickly and within a split second and for the everyday kind of decisions that we make minute by minute, that’s usually fine. Yet for *truly high-quality decisions*, you’ll want to pause— step back— get mindful —elicit your highest values in order to make great decisions that you’ll be proud of. Pausing and thinking enables you to access some of your highest executive thinking powers.

[The new book, *Executive Thinking* (2018) will be available in middle to late May. Look for an announcement about order it soon.]

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #21
May 7, 2018
Great Decisions Series #4

DISCERNING AND DECIDING

Deciding is one thing, *discerning* is another. While they are not the same, they are closely connected and intimately related. But how? Which one comes first? Which one drives the other?

The answer is that *discernment comes first*. First, you need to think— to *really think*. Then as you thorough and authentically *think*, you are enabled to consider things with a more indepth perspective and also from multiple perspectives. This, in turn, enables you to make many refined distinctions about differences that make a difference. That’s what discernment is and what it focuses on— making refined distinctions that enable you to be *wise* in your decisions.

How much would you like to be able to make *wise decisions*? How much would that create a richer and fuller and more satisfying life? This highlights the problem with poor, hasty, and/or unthinking decisions —such decisions usually set us on the wrong pathway, a pathway that we will come to regret. And this seems to be rampant among humans as indicated by statistics:

- 40% of senior level hires fail or quit within 18 months.
- 50%-plus of teachers quit their jobs within four years.
- 83% of mergers and acquisitions fail to create value for shareholders.
- 50% of marriages end in divorce.

I can’t imagine that anyone would argue against the need for *wisdom* when it comes to making decisions. Yet how many of us have made wisdom an essential step in our decision strategies? For most of my life, I thought that wisdom was a great idea. No problem there. But incorporate it into my everyday decision-making processes? How do I do that?

For that matter, what does it mean to have *a step for wisdom* in our decision-making process? To *discern* is to separate or distinguish between things that are different (*dis-* “apart,” *cernere* “to sift”). This ability refers to discriminating between things that are often confused in order to attain to perception, insight, and mental acumen. In discernment, you use a searching mind to mentally penetrate a subject to more fully and thoroughly understand it. For myself I have only recently realized the importance and value of such *distinctions*. And that’s why I have put them as one of the advanced skills in Meta-Coaching and one of the crucial factors in critical thinking. So in the new book, *Executive Thinking* they play a significant role (ch. 24 *Thinking Strategies*).

Something else about wisdom. Typically when we think about wisdom, we usually think about the process of *learning from experience* and that suggests why wisdom is more the gift of age rather than youth. It’s the mistakes and errors and wrong roads taken over time that gives us the

data-base of sufficient experiences to have made the learnings that make us “wise.” This is what now enables us (hopefully) to think through something rather than react.

Gregory Bateson said that wisdom consists of being able to take multiple perspectives on a single subject. It was this idea that led some of the first trainers in NLP to create the pattern for multiple perspectives.

- *First personal perspective* is what you see from your own eyes, ears, and body.
- *Second personal perspective* is from the other person’s point of view— what I look and sound like in his eyes.
- *Third personal perspective* is the view from outside of both — from a third person.
- And *fourth personal perspective* is from the viewpoint of the system— seeing the fuller system of influences that are present and active.

Involved in discernment also is a thorough and pervasive questioning—a questioning that exercises a healthy skepticism as it looks for valid evidence and is not satisfied with superficial answers. I think it is in this sense that Pierre Abelard described wisdom as an aspect of doubting:

“The beginning of wisdom is found in doubting; by doubting we come to the question, and by seeking we may come upon the truth.”

Involved also in the wisdom of discernment is the full acceptance of human fallibility. The contrast can be seen in the foolishness of the know-it-all youth who doesn’t even entertain the possibility of being wrong. Dietrich Dorner (1996) describes this in *The Logic of Failure* in these words:

“The ability to admit ignorance or mistake assumptions is needed a sign of wisdom. People however tend to desire security over wisdom. The ability to make allowance for incomplete and incorrect information and hypotheses is an important requirement for dealing with complex situations.”

Oh for the wise discernment that can enable us to make informed decisions that serve us well.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #22
May 14, 2018
Great Decisions Series #5

UNBIASED DECISION-MAKING

If you and I are going to make *great* decisions, there's another requirement. Namely, making decisions that are unbiased. Yet in saying that we now have a problem. The problem is that we all are so primed and skilled in making decisions that are highly biased in our favor. We are biased to think and decide for what we want, even if it is not reasonable, rational, or ecological. In fact, this is the problem with most decisions. Whether you are trying to decide something about yourself or for yourself, or you're part of making decisions as a family, or a business division is trying to make a decision — *most decisions are highly biased*. And worse than that, most of the time we're not even aware of it.

What makes our decisions so biased? There are many factors—

- We solely use information that is *available* to us, that we easily remember or have access to (availability bias).
- The ideas, understandings, and beliefs that already structure our lives— we are biased to *confirm* what we already know (the confirmation bias).
- The narrative or story of your life or group (the narrative bias).
- The need to justify what you've already said or committed to (self-justification bias).
- The desire to make things as simple and easy as possible (ease bias; over-simplification bias).
- The desire to want to get the results that you want (the results bias)

And on and on it goes. There are a great many (scores and scores) of biases that can intervene in your decision-making— biases that you may be completely unaware of and yet biases actually controlling our choices and preventing you from discerning differences that may be critical. Given all of these cognitive biases, how is it possible for you and me to make *unbiased decisions*?

The How To —

The first answer is to be sure to take the time to pause, step back, reflect, and consider before deciding. Taking a meta-moment to step back gives you the ability to slow down the compulsion to make a decision simply because you are caught up in an emotional state favoring a particular decision. While emotion does and should play a key role in making solid decisions, you and I also need to avoid being railroaded into a decision solely because of intense driving emotions. Sure you *want* it—and that's a good sign. But upon reflection—is it really good for you? What consequences may result from it which you have not thought about? Can you really afford it? How holistic is it when you consider family, relationships, health, etc.?

For big decisions that mean major shifts or reorganizations in our lives— we need a bigger meta-moment for reflection. For this longer-term pause, you may want to put the decision on hold for several days, a week, or even more in order to more thoroughly think through the ins-and-outs of the decision.

A second answer is to be sure to gather high quality information as you are getting ready to make a decision. What information do you need? What information is available? Do you know how to get it? Who to ask? How to collect and arrange it so that you can use it in a highly resourceful way? The problem here is the *confirmation bias*, again— you will be tempted to gather information that is supportive of the decision you want to make. We all do this. To resist that temptation, intentionally create a set of questions such as the following:

- What information goes against my preference? How thoroughly have I welcomed, entertained, and considered that information?
- What information have I not considered?
- What do I not know? What do I not know that I don't know? What potential blind spots may I be operating from?
- What am I assuming to be true or obvious?

This now brings up a third option in answering how to deal with your own natural biases as you make decisions. Get with someone who will play devil's advocate with you— someone who will bring a strong healthy skepticism to your decision-making process. Find someone to talk it out with and who will ask “hard” questions to test what you are saying and/or who will help you sort out the pros and cons as well as identify the criteria you're using as you are thinking about a decision.

Unbiased decision-making is rare and it will never be completely clean of biases, but there are ways that you can work toward reducing your bias so that you can more likely make a great decision. To your highest valued decisions and your best performance in decision-making!

Want more? Check out the new book — *Executive Thinking* (2018).

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #23
May 21, 2018
Great Decisions Series #6

PSEUDO-DECISIONS

There are decisions and then there are things which pass for “decisions” yet which are not real decisions. They are pseudo-decisions. They often and usually seem like a decision in some respects, but actually they are not. These include wishes, false impositions of choices, non-choices, intuitive decisions, habits, etc.

Wishing

When you make a real decision you *cut off* alternatives (*de-cision*) as you say *no* to some things and as you make a commitment to a goal, an understanding, a direction, a way of life, etc. That is, as you say *yes* to what you are deciding for. Wishes are different. When you make a wish, you long for something, so you are operating from a state of desire ... and yet the wish is a weak little emotion. It lacks the energy and passion of a real decisions which makes things happen.

In wishing, you say you want something, you are wishing for it. There is an inner urge. Yet what you do not have is the conviction to stand up and be counted for that thing or the plan of what you are definitely going to do. And with a longing rather than a conviction, there is not the moral courage to act on it to make it happen. You are just wishing ... expressing a desire, sighing about a possibility, but not cutting one thing off in order to say yes to another thing. In wishful thinking there is an inner urge, but it is too fragile to make anything happen.

False impositions of Choice

Sometimes a decision is coded as *an either-or choice*. Decide now: Do you want X or Y? Are you doing anything fun this weekend or are you just catching up on some work? Decisions of this sort are most often polarized choices wherein you have dichotomized some set of choices. As a result, it seems as if you can only have one choice or the other.

“Either you succeed or you are a failure.” “Which are you, strong or weak?” “Are you smart or stupid?”

Yet these are actually false choices. They are treating a range of possible choices as an either/or choice having polarized the extreme polar ends of a continuum. The same is true for “whether or not” choices.

“I need to decide whether or not I will marry him.” “The only choice before me is whether or not I will invest in that course.”

To answer these kinds of questions is to recognize that what has been put before you (or what you created) is actually a bi-polar choice. Then, when you recognize that, it enables you to widen your choices. You can ask, “Why not view myself as strong in some qualities and weak in

others? “Yes, I engage in activities that sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. *I am* neither, they are just descriptions or categories of behaviors.” By recognizing the kind of choice, you can then frame it as “both–and” instead of “either–or.”

Non-Choice Decision

Sometimes when we are attempting to make a decision, the way we frame actually positions things so that we have no real choice. A common way we do this is to tell ourselves that we have no choice! Another way to set this up is to use various manipulative questions.

“I suppose I’ll sign up for X, there’s really no other choice.” “Don’t you want to have a reputation as a strong, decisive person? That’s why this is just right for you.” “Great. Then which would you prefer, that I deliver this on Wednesday or Thursday?”

Intuitive Decisions

Then there are all of the choices that you actually experience outside-of-your conscious awareness. These unconscious decisions, based on old programs that you created long ago, are still operational because you have not updated them. Once upon a time you made a choice, then you repeated it over and over. Then, over time, you became so regular and consistent with acting on that decision, that the sense of choice dropped out of your conscious awareness. Now it is your “program” for operating. Perhaps you once “choose” to do things in a certain way, or drive to a certain destination, or respond in a particular way ... yet today that choice is not current and fresh. It is an old decision that has put you on automatic.

Perhaps this is how you get up in the morning, or brush your teeth, or eat, or watch TV, or a thousand other things you do. Today you do it by habit and the habit now operates within you in what we call an “intuitive” way. Consequently, many of your everyday decisions which you make today are no longer based on mindful awareness of today’s context, environment, or possibilities. Because you are on automatic, you are not actually “thinking.” Yes, you are making decisions but not consciously. An old program is now your default mode and today you may not even be aware of the choices you are making. When and if you are asked, you say, “It’s my intuition.”

Mindfulness in Deciding

To make great decisions today, *aim to do so mindfully*. Instead of relying on old decisions and living in the comfort of being mindless, get off of automatic pilot, and come into the moment. Yes, it will probably be less comfortable than operating from an old decision that’s now habitual. When you do that, then you can use your best executive thinking to make decisions that will serve you for the long-term.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #24
May 28, 2018
Great Decisions Series #7

LUCKY DECISIONS

In some decisions you are lucky— very lucky. To discover this think about a decision that you made which turned out really great. In fact, repeat this several times reflecting on different decisions that you made that as you look back on that decision today, you consider that it was a really great decision. Perhaps you made a decision about a stock or some investment, and it just so turned out to be a winning one. Perhaps you chose a certain College and it was there that you became friends with a certain person who has become your best friend and that friendship has lasted decades. Perhaps the house you bought happened to be in an area that has been booming economically and it has increased in value 20 to 40 percent a year.

If you did that exercise, you undoubtedly feel good. And that's good. It did turn out very well. Yet just because it turned out well does not mean that it was a great decision. So here's the bad news—from that one or more experience of great results, you still do not know how to make a great decision. Results alone do not define a “great decision.”

What you do know is that on those occasions, things turned out great. It means that the decision you made just so happened to result in wonderful things for you. You got *great results*, but that is not the same as *a great decision*. Decisions that result in great results could have been flukes, accidents, luck. There's no way to replicate the decision, because the key was not *the decision itself*. An old verse in the book of Ecclesiastes speaks to this:

“I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all.” (Ecclesiastes 9:11)

Here's what it takes for a great decision. *A truly great decision* is one that is based on clear thinking, thorough examination of facts, good information gathering, high quality of reflection, perhaps consulting with others to avoid delusion, etc. Given this, great decisions typically, usually lead to great results. But even then, not always. You could make a great decision on your part and then something beyond your control could mess it up.

Ah, *decisions!* Have you ever said about a decision, “If I had thought about it, really thought about it, I would not have done that!” This speaks about a decision gone wrong. It did not get great results, it produced poor results. Conversely, if you ever said, “I can't believe the way things turned out! I was really lucky.” Well, that's a decision gone right— in spite of you! When a decision *just so happens* to have turned out great— that's luck. That's happen-chance. That's the luck of the draw. It just happened to turn out that way, it could have turned out for the worse. That's a *lucky decision*. Be glad, but don't depend on it.

The problem even with lucky decisions is that sometimes they have sad endings. This often happens to those who win the lottery. The decision to buy the lottery ticket at a given time and the decision to use certain numbers— all of that is just luck. That's why your strategy (i.e., the way you did that) can't be replicated so as to reproduce those results over and over. It is why the decision that led to that great result is not followed up with a series of great decisions and why most lottery winners— five years later look up the win as one of the worst things that happen to them. They were not ready. They did not know how to handle the money and all of the problems it brought. They were lucky in winning the money, they were not lucky in all of the decisions that they have to make in handling the money effectively.

The danger with a lucky decision is trusting it or trusting yourself to have more lucky decisions. That idea is not a good one. What is a good idea is learning how to gather high quality information, setting conscious criteria for your decisions, and checking with others for potential blind spots. While you cannot count on luck, you can count on creating and working an intelligent decision-making strategy.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #25
June 4, 2018
Great Decisions Series #8

BEYOND PRO/CON DECISION-MAKING

In Meta-Coaching we use the *Axes of Change* as our first and primary model for enabling people to make intelligent, robust, and ecological decisions. Specifically, we use the second axis, The Decision Axis which is based on the meta-program of *reflective—active*. To that end, we invite a client to *reflect* on the pros and cons of a choice. What are the advantages if you make that choice? What are the disadvantages? Typically this leads to a whole list of *reasons why* a choice would be beneficial and *reasons why* a person has to be cautious because it will have another set of things that will cost the person.

This pro-and-con orientation in decision-making is what we all use. To a great extent it is how we naturally and inevitably think. That is, we default to thinking in terms of choices and contrasts, values and dis-values, this or that. Simultaneously, we also think in terms of the *reasons why* I am for or against something. For this reason, it make perfect sense to start by asking for the advantages and disadvantages. But the Pro/Con list is just the beginning. There's much more to do if you are to generate *great* decisions and especially if you want to create *highly intelligent or smart* decisions.

What potential problems could there be here? Ah, yes, human reasoning! And why? Because when we reason— even if you have been highly trained in effective, clear, rational, systemic reasoning—you still are liable to the cognitive biases and also to the cognitive distortions and fallacies. If you are not aware of that, check out the newest book from Neuro-Semantics, *Executive Thinking: Activating Your Highest Executive Thinking Potentials* (2018).

A Well-Formed Decision

NLP introduced the idea of a *well-formed* outcome some 40 years ago, and from that I developed a Neuro-Semantic Precision Template and from that created a well-formed problem, a well-formed solution, a well-formed innovation (all are now in the book, *Creative Solutions*, 2017) as well as other well-formed patterns. So how about a **Well-Formed Decision**? Doesn't that make sense if we want to make great and intelligent decisions? Given that, here is a list of questions— questions within certain categories — that enable a person to construct a well-formed decision.

The Well-Formed Decision Questions

The Subject of the Decision: First identify 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: Decisions, like every other experience occurs in some context. Identify the specific context for the decision under consideration.

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) How does it (or could it) influence other areas of your life?

6) Is anyone else involved in making the decision? Are you the sole decider? (Who)

The Required Actions of the Decision: As an experience, you have to *do* something to *make* a decision, identify these actions even if they are the micro-actions of thinking and feeling.

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? What else do you need to *do* to make or take the decision?

The Inner Power (Capacity) for Making the Decision: Given that *action* is required for a decision, then inner ability is also required.

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? To process it?

10) Have you ever made a similar decision in the past? What did you do that enabled your decision-making?

The Planning Process of Decision-Making: With big decisions and decisions that will forge a new or long-term direction for life, you will probably want to plan it in order to manage it over time. Identify how you will do this.

11) How do you plan to gather the information and order it so you can make a decision? If others are involved in the planning, information-gathering, or deciding, what is your plan for integrating them into the process?

12) 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? Do you have someone on the team who can do that?

13) How will you monitor a long-term decision that requires ongoing observation and action? What feedback will you want and/or need to stay on plan?

The Supportive Resources for Deciding: As an experience, it can be supplied with sufficient resources or it can lack them. Identify the resources that you want to round-out your deciding.

14) Is there anything that can or will stop or interfere with you getting the information, formulating it, and making a decision from it? What potential risks are there? What risk management skills do you need? How much risk is there involved? What contingency plans have you set up?

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

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: How will you bring closure to the process of decision?

17) How will you know when you are ready to make a decision? When you make the decision, what will be the convincer for you? 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 else, or what?

Want more? Check out the books—

Coaching Change: The Axes of Change (2004/ 2015)

Creative Solutions: Creativity and Innovation (2017)

Executive Thinking: Activating Your Highest Executive Thinking Potentials (2018).

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #26
June 11, 2018

I originally wrote this in April, but have held it because I wanted to finish the series on Decision making.

THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF THE WORD “META”

During the past year I engaged in an extended discussion with Steve Andreas about the term *meta*. You can read that discussion on either the Neuro-Semantic website or Andreas’ website. It’s all there for your pursual. You will probably noticed that in the discussion, we both seemed to talk past each other and as a result we did not come to a meeting of minds. And while I pretty much anticipated that, I really do not understand why we could not get on the same page. Steve claims that I did not answer his questions. In my view, I fully answered his questions. I feel that he did not really seek to understand the multiple meanings that are entailed in the term *meta*.

In reflecting on this, I suspect that a possible reason is that some people simply do not see the wonder and the “magic” of *meta* is that *they do not recognize that the term meta is both a multi-ordinal term and a systems term that requires the acceptance of numerous system principles*.

To explain this, I will first describe multi-ordinality and then the “magic” of *meta* within a system and as a systems dynamic. That will then allow me to specify how linearly thinking is the problem in preventing a person from seeing the richness of the term *meta*.

Multi-Ordinality

Alfred Korzybski describe terms that have an overgeneralized meaning and whose meaning changes according to its level. He termed these infinite-valued terms *multi-ordinal*. This means that at all of its levels (“multi-”) the term is reflexive—it can be used on itself. You can *fear* fear. You can *love* love. Linguists say that such terms are polysemous, that is, “marked by multiplicity of meanings.” Korzybski writes (*Science and Sanity*, 1933/ 1994):

“‘Mankind, science, mathematics, man, education, ethics, politics, religion, sanity, insanity, iron, wood, apple, object, etc.’ We use them not as one-valued terms for constants of some sort, but as terms with inherently infinite-valued or variable referents.” (pp. 138–9, 433)

Korzybski argued that his Theory of Multi-Ordinality and Reflexivity solved the problems created when we confuse map and territory. They fail to distinguish the levels of abstraction (logical levels). For this reason I added *multi-ordinality* to the extended Meta- Model (*Communication Magic*, 2001).

“A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a *similar structure* to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness. ... If we reflect upon our languages, we find that at best they must be considered *only as maps*. A word *is not* the object it represents; and languages exhibit also this peculiar self-reflexiveness, that we can analyse languages by linguistic means. *This*

self-reflexiveness of languages introduces serious complexities, which can only be solved by the theory of multi-ordinality. The disregard of these complexities is tragically disastrous in daily life and science.” (p. 58, italics added)

The term *meta* has multiple meanings precisely because *it is a multi-ordinal term*. Can you go *meta* (step back to a higher perspective) to the process of *meta* (stepping back)? Yes, of course and you can do that level upon level. Yet if you are using linear thinking to understand this, you will not and cannot understand this. Korzybski stated that the “Theory of Multi-Ordinality” (i.e., General Semantics) addresses map/territory confusion. The linguistic distinction of multi-ordinality explains why any word used multi-ordinally *means something different at every level*. And that’s why we have to ask, “At what level are you using that term?”

Multi-ordinality means that *the term takes on a different meaning at each ordinal level* (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). That’s why we have to ask, “At what level are you using the term?” So *fear* at the first level refers to something “out there” in the territory that is dangerous. But can you *fear* your state of fear? What is fear² of fear¹? We could say that the second-level of fear (fear²) is paranoia. Could you fear³ your fear-of-fear?¹

The term *meta* at the first level simply means “above, beyond, or about.” Context then determines what is put at a higher level to the first level. You can have an emotion *about* an emotion; a thought *about* a thought. When you talk *about* the way you talk, your language is meta-language. When you use a metaphor to make a comparison, you are meta-stating with that metaphor. A metaphor is literally *meta* and *phorein* (to bring, to carry over). As you create a metaphor, you bring one image, thought, idea, reference, etc. to another so that it becomes the frame which formats a structure for the first. When you do this, you *think about one thing in terms of another*. Andreas uses the word “scope” for the primary level and “category” for the meta-level (*Six Blind Elephants*, I, p. 26)

The Strangeness of Systems “Magic”

When you put one state in a *meta-relationship* to another, you are likely to create which seems like *magic*. This “magic” is *not* literal, it rather describes an effect— how *meta-relationship* can strike us as magical because the result is often surprising, unexpected, and amazing. Here is the meta-stating process whereby one element interacts with another element and out of the mixture, something new and different and unexpected arises. Since a gestalt refers to something that is *more than* and *different from* the sum of the parts, multiple meta-stating gives rise to *gestalt* states.

What this means is that if you *add* up all of the parts, elements, or components together, you cannot explain the resulting experience. What we call “learning” becomes a very different experience when you bring *joy* to *learning*. “Joyful learning”— here the quality of the learning changed, but the experience itself hardly seems like learning at all. It seems like fun. People in the meta-state of joyful learning seem to be very happy and passionate. Looking at them and evaluating what they are experiencing, you could say all sorts of things such as—they are “in the zone,” they are in a state of pleasure, they are just enjoying themselves, etc. Yes, you could also

put “joyful learning” as one member of the class of “learning” as Steve does. Yet that does *not* deny or prevent “learning” within the category of “joy.”

This is the way it is with *systems*. In systems, when various components interact with other components, *new emergent properties* arise that cannot be explained by adding the elements together. A new quality arises. Bring respect, calmness, and kindness to your primary state of anger— “I’m angry because you snub me and didn’t give me a referral” and you have a very different experience. *Calm respectfully kind* anger is hardly felt or experienced as “anger” at all by the one receiving it. The person giving it is firm but the calmness and kindness gives it an unique quality as the respect tempers the person’s words and confrontation so that it is quite acceptable. It doesn’t seem like anger, it seems that the person is simply being direct and open. Andreas’ mindset seems to make the “anger” category his primary referent than “going meta” to that category.

Consider the person who has *forbidden* himself from feeling anger because he considers that it means being “out-of-control.” Here we have multiple levels. (Believing anger means out-of-control) (I forbid myself) from (experiencing anger). So when anger is experienced, because it is forbidden, that taboo could create one of several different gestalts— inability to recognize anger, blindness to one’s anger, anger transmuting into stress (or frustration or fear or some other emotion). If you calibrate to that person’s state, would you even recognize that he is angry? Maybe not.

Consider the person who *hates* selling because to him it means “taking advantage of people for monetary gain.” What is the primary state? Presenting a product. Suppose it is the state of wanting to present or offer a product, a product he believes “is good value for money,” and “useful.” But the belief frame “selling takes advantage of people,” which the person hates, now holds him back. What is the feeling? The person feels stuck. The person feels conflicted inside. “I know it is a good product, but I don’t want to be aggressive or controlling.” The gestalt state here is *being stuck*. This emerges from the inter-relationship between the thinking-feeling components in the person’s mind. Yes, “hating selling” can be treated as a member of the class of anger (Andreas’ position). We can also see “selling” in the higher category of “hate” (my position). It is not an either/or choice. Both are legitimate.

In Neuro-Semantics, we talk about this layering of multiple elements (the meta-stating process) as *texturing the state’s quality*. How do you want your learning state textured? How do you want your loving state textured? If the quality of your life depends on the quality of your state, then the quality of your state depends on the quality of your meta-state. The state that you put at a *meta level* to your first state — qualifies it, textures it, and sets up the “magic” of the emergence of new properties. This is the point that Andreas has not (or will not) concede.

Consider the primary state of acting sequentially in a step-by-step way (the procedure meta-program). Let’s call that—being “disciplined” because the person is following a procedure. Now ask, “What do you think and/or feel *about* being disciplined?” (i.e., acting sequentially). Imagine that a person says, “I think that I’m losing my spontaneity and that I have no freedom.”

That now becomes the higher category. What will be the effect of that belief (a category and meta level state) about the primary state? Probably stuck and unable to act. “I can’t do that.” If we again ask for an explanation, she might say, “without freedom I have less opportunities and won’t grow, I’ll be dying inside.”

This is another example of tabooing a primary state. The person stops herself from “acting sequentially, one step after another” because at the meta level category she attributes the meaning of having no spontaneity, choice, freedom, growth, etc. The meaning at these meta-levels overloads the primary state (the scope) and shuts the person down.

“Magic,” in the sense of something being surprising, unexpected, and amazing, arises from the emergent properties (qualities) when we bring one or more thoughts or feelings to another. It is the interplay of these elements that systemically give rise to experiences that can’t be explain by mere addition.

When a *gestalt* occurs from combining multiple elements what happens is that we cannot anticipate the results. Add commitment to a goal, responsibility and passion to the primary state of fear and out of the mixture will sometimes come “courage.” *Courage*, as the gestalt of those components, is something “more than” and “different from” adding those elements together. A reductionistic analysis of “courage” will not find those pieces or how they intermingle. This is the “magic” (the wonder and surprise) of creating a gestalt of multiple meta-level components.

Consider making a mistake. At the primary level, this is something we all do on a daily basis. But “making a mistake” does not stand alone. You think and feel something about it. But what? What category do you put it in? Do you (fear) (making a mistake)? Do you (judge yourself as a person) for (making a mistake)? Those are different states/ categories. And they are radically from (learning) from (making a mistake). What if you bring (appreciation) (learning) (wondrous curiosity) and (playfulness) to (making a mistake)? What gestalt experience would that generate?

Part of the “magic” of meta-stating various resourceful elements to a primary state consists of the surprise and wonder of the emergent properties and their qualities. What if you were (fascinated) and (joyful) about (embarrassment)? You might experience something like the outrageous physical humor that Jim Carey is known for. What if you had (gracious) and (playful) (persistence)?

All of this suggests a process that we use with the Meta-States Model. We write various “states” on pieces of paper and then pick up 4 or 5 of them and try them on in our imagination. What would (outrageous) (optimism) and (passion) along with (joyful exaggeration) do for a trainer? Could that turn out a Anthony Robbins?

Take any primary state experience — whether you focus on behavior, emotion, or thought— and then playfully layer on top of it various resourceful states and consider what could arise as an emergent property.

(Accepting) (loving) (gentle) compassion.
(Relaxed) (dedicated) (persistent) engagement.
(Thoughtful) (calmness) (proactive) decision-making.

When you “go meta” to the next higher level and layer on yet another state of thinking-feeling, you then put a twist on the primary experience because you are putting it into a higher category. It textures that experience. It adds another quality to it. The mixture of multiple resources sets up a systemic complexity that operates as a catalyst for a new and unpredictable emergent property.

When you “go meta” you are doing what Ken Wilbur described as “transcending and including.” It is not *either* you are transcending *or* you are including, you are doing both simultaneously. Yes you transcend from the primary level to a meta-level *and* you are including that primary experience *inside of* a new meta-level that becomes its frame. This generates all sorts of new possibilities.

The Problem is Linear Thinking

If *meta* is a multi-ordinal and systems term, then *what stops full appreciation of it is linear thinking*. And surprisingly this is a very common problem for many in the field of NLP. This, in spite of the fact that there were many *system influences* in the founding of NLP (Satir Family Systems, Perls *Gestalt*, Korzybski’s *General Semantics* as a non-Aristotelian *system*, Bateson’s *cybernetic systems*, etc.).

When you have a complex adaptive system that involves large number of parts (elements, components) and which interact with each other, then you have a kaleidoscopic array of simultaneous non-linear interactions. Given this, the sum is *not* a simple sum of the behavior of the parts. And why? Because as the elements interact and as the aggregate behavior of the whole occurs, all of these are fed back to the individual components. What in linear thinking is viewed as the *effect* then becomes the next level *cause*. And around and around it goes.

The key then lies in *the interfaces* that occur when one meta-level or phenomenon interacts with another. The following comes from *Meta-States* (2012) and is included in the training manual.

- 1) **Reduce painful primary states:** Calm about anger.
- 2) **Intensify or magnify primary states:** Worry about worry, anxious about anxiety.
- 3) **Exaggerate and distort states:** turn psychological energies against oneself: fear of anger: anger at one’s fear.
- 4) **Negate or neutralize a state:** In doubt about doubt, I feel more sure.
- 5) **Interrupt states:** Humorous about serious, intentionally panicking.
- 6) **Confuse States:** Ridiculous about serious.
- 7) **Contradict levels to create paradox:** hence "paradoxical intention," the "be spontaneous now" paradox. Try really hard to relax, "never say never"
- 8) **Dissociate from strong feelings:** observing a remembered trauma.
- 9) **Seed a new process to create response potential:** courage to have courage, playful uncertainty.
- 10) **Grab Attention:** appreciative about anger, lovingly gentle about anger.
- 11) **Entrance or hypnotize:** Rebel against thinking about just how comfortable you can feel if you don't close your eyes before you're ready to relax deeper than you ever have before, now. I wonder if you're going to fail to succeed at not going into trance at exactly your own speed or whether you won't.
- 12) **Generate gestalt states:** Suppress excitement—>anxiety.

- 13) **Jar consciousness for humor:** An accomplished liar, flexible compulsiveness.
- 14) **Qualify, temper, texture an experiences:** Joyful learning, ruthless compassion.
- 15) **Solidify a state:** Believe or value in X, take pride in X.
- 16) **Loosen states:** Doubt X, question X, be playful about X.

Summary

The *meta* process is a very dynamic one. Further, if used in an open system, then it never reaches an end-point, it never achieves its goals and “arrives,” it keep evolving, growing, and developing— becomes increasingly complex. This is why many do not see the dynamic nature of *meta* and why it takes on new properties and meanings at different levels.

- At the primary level, *meta* just means “above, beyond, or about.”
- *Meta* then establishes a relationships that is hierarchical as it establishes levels.
- As *meta* is used *in relationship* to something else, it takes on the meaning of “including and transcending” which speaks of a system of inter-related components.
- As a system and systemic in nature, *meta* enables various emergent properties to emerge that cannot be explained by adding them together. It is non-linear, non-additive.

Do I use the term *meta* in several different ways as Steve Andreas suggests? *Yes I do!* That’s because the term is multi-ordinal and systemic. That’s also why and how the Meta-States Model can help us model complex, long-term system experiences.

Post Script

Interesting enough, Steve Andreas, quoting his wife Connirae’s work in *Core Transformation*, actually describes how the meta-stating process works. He uses the word “category” where I use “meta-state.” After starting with a primary level limitation, you ask—

“*Having* this outcome (X), what do you want, through *having* X, that’s even more important?”

This question is asked repeatedly, each time substituting the previous outcome, creating a series of outcomes in a hierarchy of importance. Each successive outcome is a more general category of experience, with increasingly larger scope and importance.” (2006, Vol. I, p. 89)

Then he says, “the description usually falls into one of several categories: ‘being,’ ‘inner peace,’ ‘love,’ ‘Okness,’ or ‘oneness.’” These vague terms are meta-states and/or meta-level understandings or beliefs.

References:

1. Polysemy describes a word that has many different meanings. Mentioned in *Six Blind Elephants*, I, p. 59.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #27
June 18, 2018

DELIBERATE PRACTICE FEEDBACK

If you have not seek this kind of feedback, it is absolutely a *feedback like none other*. And more than that— it is the kind of feedback that according to Eric Anders makes for true expertise. This is what he wrote about in his classic work, *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance* (2006) and it was there that he identified the 10-year rule (the 10,000 hours of deliberate practice) that enables one to reach expertise.

“The core assumption of deliberate practice is that expert performance is acquired gradually and that effective improvement of performance requires the opportunity to find suitable training tasks that the performer can master sequentially—typically the design of training tasks and monitoring of the attained performance is done by a teacher or a coach. Deliberate practice presents performers with tasks that are initially outside their current realm of reliable performance, yet can be mastered within hours of practice by concentrating on critical aspects and gradually refining performance through repetition after feedback. Hence the requirement for *concentration* sets deliberate practice apart from both mindless, routine performance and playful engagement, as the latter two types of activities would, if anything, merely strengthen the current mediating cognitive mechanisms, rather than modify them to allow increases in the level of performance.” (2006, p. 692)

Malcolm Gladwell popularized the idea of the 10-year rule in *Outliers* as did others. The idea is that mere practice is *not* sufficient, it rather takes a very special kind of practice. Anders call it *deliberate* practice and set forth the criteria for that very special kind of practice in the above paragraph.

- 1) Designed to improve performance.
- 2) The action is repeatable.
- 3) The action is sharply defined.
- 4) Feedback to it is continuous.
- 5) The action is a stretch: beyond current
- 6) Action requires focused concentration.
- 7) Action is not easy, not inherently fun.

I bring this up because over the years we have developed a very unique kind of feedback, *Deliberate Practice Feedback*. For years we have used this in Trainers’ Training as we have identified the required skills for being an effective presenter as well as a whole set of sub-skills. It is the sub-skills that enable a person to practice over and over under supervision that allows one to stretch beyond current skill level to the next level, progressively moving toward expertise.

As recently as last week we discovered how we could to do this kind of feedback in learning the coaching skills. Because we have more than a dozen sub-skills for each coaching skill, we are now able to provide deliberate feedback for them. What’s unique about the feedback is that it is

given in *real time* and the person is given *in that very moment*, a chance to do it again. We think of it in the same way that a movie director wants to get the scene right and so does a “Take 2” or “Take 3” etc. until the production reaches a required standard.

If you were to join us in NSTT or in ACMC, you will find that from time to time the trainer or benchmarker will make an interruption, ask if you got the response that you wanted. If not, you would then get some feedback to shape what you did and then ask you to do a “Take 2.” This would repeat 2 to 4 times. The design is to bring to conscious awareness what you are doing, how you are doing it, and the effect its having. Then with that, giving you a chance to do some deliberate practice around a sharply defined action that’s part of expertise.

I am writing about this also because in just two weeks from now we begin NSTT in Colorado for 2018. Nowhere is there a trainers’ training that has developed as extensive a list of sub-skills and offers continuous and in-the-moment feedback during the presentations. If that is of interest to you, I have attached an Application Form and a Brochure of NSTT.

Reference:

Ericsson, K. Anders; Charness, Neil; Feltovich, Paul; Hoffman, Robert. (2006 Ed.). *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #28
June 25, 2018

THE LAST MASTER PRACTITIONER COURSE

To know, understand, and practice NLP involves two parts—NLP Practitioner and NLP Master Practitioner. Now most people have the first impression that *master* practitioner inevitably is more advanced than practitioner. It is not. The content of the master prac. course is certainly *based on* the basic NLP Communication Model that you learn in Prac., but other than that, the content is no more complicated. What is in the *master* practitioner course is there solely because it was developed later.

If you want to become a *practitioner of the NLP meta-discipline*, you need all of the pieces that are represented in both the prac. and the master prac. Courses. They are all necessary for a full understanding of the NLP Communication Model and for understanding how to model experiences of expertise. Back in the late 1990s, Bob Bodenhamer and I spent a couple years putting all of that material together into two volumes. You can now find all of it in the two-volumes of *User's Manual of the Brain*. Volume I is the textbook for NLP Practitioner and Volume II is the textbook for NLP Master Practitioner training.

What will you find in those volumes that cover the Prac. and Master Prac. courses? You will find the five meta-domains of NLP. After all, that's what NLP is—a meta-discipline. As a discipline about the structure of human experience, with the NLP models, you can map out the way the variables (state, linguistics, beliefs, values, understandings, capabilities, etc.) come together to create an experience.

Practitioner course begins with *the Meta-Model of Language*. This model is about how language works and it enables you to become a good critical thinker. First you come to recognize key linguistic distinctions so that you can quickly identify key critical categories for how we use language to map things. Identifying these distinctions then gives you a set of powerful questions for recovering a fuller description. Now you can be more precise in communicating and mental mapping. Reversing this model is the Milton Model, a model about how hypnotic language works, that is, how it enables us to induce desired resourceful states.

Practitioner also introduces you to *the Representational Model* for how “thinking” and then experiencing occurs and is coded. Within this model is *the Strategy Model* by which we can identify the representational steps of any experience in order to model it and/or design a model for some experience of excellence. Within this model are also what has been called sub-modalities—which are actually the cinematic features of the representational systems, a *meta-domain* and a meta-model in itself.

Then in Master Practitioner we focus first on another meta-model, *the Meta-States Model*. This model addresses the special kind of consciousness of human beings—our self-reflexive consciousness. It is this meta-domain that explains “logical levels” and explore the area of beliefs and values. Robert Dilts examined this area early in NLP and began mapping it out which resulted in his Neuro-Logical Levels. John Grinder and Judith DeLozier also explored it and used “logical levels” to begin mapping out the details of the genius state (*Turtles All the Way Down*). From the Meta-States, *the Matrix Model* arose in 2002 as a systems model that enables one to think and work systemically with individuals or organizations.

The next meta-model of NLP is the domain of *the Meta-Programs Model*. This model is about human perceptual filters—the mental and perceptual filters that we use in processing information. It model arose originally when Leslie Cameron-Bandler was running “classic NLP patterns” and finding instances where they did not work. Something was interfering. What was interfering turned out to be various meta-programs. Very quickly a dozen were made explicit and then over time, another 4 dozen. Later, we discovered that most meta-programs are created by the meta-stating process.

The last time I trained the Master Practitioner course as such was 2004, that was in Australia. Since then, from time to time, I trained individual units of these or specific parts that we applied to leadership, coaching, productivity, self-actualization, etc. But I have now agreed to do it *one last time*. Why? Because I want to get it all video-taped and recorded. I want to do that mostly for the Neuro-Semantic Trainers who train Master Practitioner today and those who will be doing so in the future.

This last Master Practitioner course will be conducted in Manila Philippines in August 13– 25, 2018 and sponsored by Breakthrough Consulting. Aldem and Vanessa Salvana and other Trainers in the Philippines will be offering the first three days of the Master Prac., The Meta-States Model (APG). I will lead the other 12 days. For information about this, here is contact information:

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From: L. Michael Hall
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THINKING AS QUESTIONING

What is *thinking*? One answer is that it is representation. That's because you think by *representing* something in your mind by using the sensory-systems so that you see, hear, sense, smell, taste, or give words to your thoughts. The representational systems comprise the *human code of "thought."* Do you want to change a thought? Change how you represent things.

Another answer is that it is questioning. True enough, we mostly conceptualize thinking and thoughts in terms of answers and yet where there is an answer, there is a question. Now we know that ideas, concepts, beliefs, understanding, etc. that you come up with, and *think* in your mind, are representational statements. Yet what is a statement but an "answer" to a concern (a question) that you are thinking about? So regarding these propositional statements (ideas, beliefs, premises, etc.), how far fetched would it be to consider that they *imply answers*?

Test it. Take a definitive statement such as, "That's the way to the mall." Could that actually imply a question like, "What is the way to the mall?" Or consider this one, "Wow! He really slugged that ball when he hit it." Could that imply questions such as, "Did he hit the ball?" "How well did he hit it?"

Now while I don't know that we can say that all thinking involves questioning, it's obvious that *a lot of thinking is actually questioning*. Maybe even *most* thinking is actually an internal questioning that seeks answers. Given this, then to think is to question. What we call *thinking* inherently asking and answering questions. It's what we do in our minds. Yet this facet of thinking is mostly outside of conscious awareness. Focusing, as we do, on the answers— we hardly notice the questions that call forth the answers. Yet they are there and they are directing our focus, our perceiving, our understanding, and our answers.

Let's now get personal. What hidden questions are you asking-and-answering in your mind as you "think?" Do you know? Do you know how to know? Whatever it is— that meaning-making process is actually key to all of your experiences and the very quality of your life. In NLP we say that "questions directionalize the brain," that is, questions give your brain a direction in which to go. "What model of car is that?" "Are there more women than men in that room?" We also know that questions create your focus— what you pay attention to. They define the very meanings (understandings, beliefs, values, etc.) that you are creating.

But all questions are not created equal. Some questions are empowering and bring out your best and some questions are dis-empowering and undermine your effectiveness. Questions can be terrible and toxic and they also can be brilliant and enlightening. What are yours? Here are some examples of dis-empowering questions that if you give these to your brain— you'll create

lots of misery and pain:

It never works out for me, so what's the use of trying?
Why do these kinds of terrible things always happen to me?
How could he do that to me?
Why does life have to be so unfair and cruel?

Conversely, here are some examples of wonderful questions that your brain will love answering and in the process will mobilize your creativity:

What am I learning from this that will build up new resources?
What can I do today that will increase my effectiveness and productivity?
What can I enjoy today and use to be happy about?
How can I add more value to what I'm doing?
Who do I love and how can I be a better lover?
What changes would I like to make that will make me a more grateful person?

It is precisely because questions are so powerful in creating meaning, establishing a direction in life, accessing internal and external resources, etc. that we put a lot of emphasis on *the quality of questions* in NLP and Meta-Coaching trainings. After all, what is the Meta-Model but a set of questions? Questions that are designed to enable a person to think critically and creatively and thereby generate a mental model that is more accurate, precise, and effective.

In the movie, *The Matrix*, Trinity said to Neo, "It's the question that drives us." That's what questions do—they establish a drive within us. Because of that we use "the core question" (a NLP technique that arose in the 1980s) in our Trainers' Training to provide trainers a powerful personal direction when training Core Question. This is a process for flushing out the driving questions currently in the back of your mind. Then you can run a quality control on the question.

To elicit a core question, ask, "If your presentation was the answer to a question, what's the question?" Unuseful and even toxic questions are like these: "How can I impress my audience with my brilliance?" "How can I avoid making a mistake and looking like a fool?" More useful and empowering questions are like these: "How can I present this so everyone learns easily and has lots of fun?" "How much more value can I add to this presentation?"

The bottom line? *To change your life, change your question.* Take on new empowering questions that will establish a new orientation and give you more joy and peace and love in life. Questions are that powerful. Or maybe I should write, "Do you know how powerful questions can be? Are you ready to develop some truly brilliant questions that will orient you in new and exciting ways? What would be the most fascinating question that you could plant in your mind today that would unleash you to be more authentic, caring, and committed?"

For Meta-Model questions, get the book *Communication Magic* (2001) and for Critical thinking, get *Executive Thinking* (2018). See www.neurosemantics.com to order.

From: L. Michael Hall
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CRITICAL THINKING IN THE MILITARY — RED TEAMING

It took a lot, but it finally happened. It took the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City to be attacked by terrorists and to fall. Immediately those in the intelligence community identified a key problem—there was a breakdown in communications. The information about the attack was there, but the *critical thinking* about it was missing. People were not collaborating or communicating effectively. It also took a disappointing failure in Iraq after freeing Iraq from a dictatorship. In both cases (and many others), it was as if someone had not *thought things through* before engaging in a war.

With all of that the U.S. military finally decided to install *critical thinking* as an intricate part of its planning processes. To do that it set up what they called “red teams” who were commissioned with the task of playing devil’s advocate and looking for how the plan could go wrong or be defeated. They called the process *red teaming*. At least some in the government were beginning to intelligently use failure.

“Failure is only the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.” (Henry Ford)

I didn’t know about this until I read it in Bryce Hoffman’s book that he wrote last year— *Red Teaming: How Your Business Can Conquer the Competition by Challenging Everything*. Here is how he defined the process of “red teaming.”

Red teaming challenges your plans and the assumptions upon which they are based. Red teaming makes critical and contrarian thinking part of your company’s planning process. Red teams are established to challenge aspects of an enterprise’s plans, programs, and assumptions.

Red teaming is critical thinking. It is getting an organization, or even more challenging, a bureaucracy, to question itself— to question its plans, strategies, and processes. It is establishing within an organization the ability to honestly look at itself, encourage bad news, reward “speaking unpleasant truths to power,” etc. All this is especially hard given that any and every bureaucracy by its very nature encourages compliance, rewards conformity, punishes whistle blowers, keeps status levels separate, and suffers from several biases (e.g., not-invented-here bias, status quo bias, etc.).

As a form of critical thinking, that is the design of red teaming? *It is to overcome the limitations of human decision making.* And that’s because we are all “unduly influenced by a dizzying array of cognitive biases and logical fallacies that skew our decision making and lead us in unintended directions without us even being away of it.” (p. 51). Hoffman sorts it out and puts it in three

phrases:

- 1) Use analytical tools to question arguments and assumptions.
- 2) Use imaginative techniques to figure out what could go wrong or right.
- 3) Use contrarian thinking to challenge the plan and force considering other alternatives.

Now Hoffman was the first and only civilian to ever be allowed to attend the Red Teaming Training on the military grounds of Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He knew some people and got some strings pulled which enabled him to be invited to the training. This was in part due to his previous book, *American Icon: Alan Mulally and the Fight to Save Ford Motor Company*. He noted that many had adopted the book as a manual for a new model of leadership— “a forward-looking, data-drive approach to management that Mulally had used to save not only Ford but also Boeing.” (p. 4).

Critical thinking is tough enough for a single person. We have so many psychological mechanisms to protect us from it (e.g., rationalization, cognitive distortions, cognitive biases, etc.)! It is even more challenging when a group or team takes it on. But it is next to impossible for a large organization and especially a bureaucracy. There are so many group dynamics and political dynamics that go against questioning the organization and “speaking truth to power.” So to solve that problem, Hoffman says,

“Red teaming is most effective when the red team has permission to question the unquestionable, think the unthinkable, and challenge everything.”

That’s because you are bringing in critical thinking to challenge the status quo, to raise self-awareness of one’s own biases and limitations and to become intellectually honest (p. 107). You are also bringing in critical thinking to identify, flush-out, and challenge your assumptions. That’s sure to stir up controversy and induce people with vested interests into states of insecurity. Doing this further means looking at the way you state problems, solutions, resolutions, decisions, etc. Why? Because *how you frame* these things determines the alternatives you consider and the way you evaluation them (p. 125).

Critical thinking in this “red teaming” format means making sure that you frame problems and solutions correctly. The US Army teaches red teamers start by examining the issue under review from a variety of different angles. Turning a problem on its head can also yield valuable insights and new perspectives. This is what we do in NLP via using multiple perspectives and that’s due to the flexibility premise that we operate from— the person with the most flexibility in a system will have the most influence.

For more, order *Executive Thinking: Activating Your Highest Executive Thinking Potentials* (2018). <http://www.neurosemantics.com/products/executive-thinking/>

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #31
July 16, 2018

NON-THREATENING COLLABORATION

Here's a fact that I simply did not consider when I co-wrote the book, *Collaborative Leadership* with Ian McDermott. I did not even think that for most people, and especially most leaders, that *collaboration could be threatening*. That idea just never crossed my mind. Being focused on all of the positive benefits of collaboration and being the natural collaborator, the idea that collaboration could be threatening just did not come up. Nor did it come up in the literature or in our modeling.

It was only recently when I was talking with some leaders did I become aware of this. That's when it suddenly dawned on me, "They find collaboration threatening!" Afterwards I decided to test the hypothesis by asking various people: "What do you think. Do you find the idea of collaborating with others threatening?" The response was immediate, "Oh yes, of course." I think that what amazed me even more than their answer was that the two persons I was talking with said it so matter-of-factly. They said it with a tone of incredulity, "How could you even ask such a question, of course there are threats to collaborating!"

At that point I needed more information. So trying to show no shock or surprise, I calmly asked, "What would you say are the threatening elements to collaboration?" "Lots of things," one of them said. Then over the next twenty minutes, both of them detailed many of their fears:

Loss of status, loss of control, loss of reputation, loss my distinctiveness, the risk of taking a chance on the other person not coming through on his responsibilities, the risk of failure, the risk of being judged on the basis of the other's incompetence. The list went on and on from there.

Eventually I got it. That's when I also connected it to a point that we made in the book, namely, *To collaborate, you have to get your ego out of the way*. The "ego" in the sense of our pride in ourselves, wanting things our way, and even demanding that we maintain complete control of a project— *the ego in that sense* can and does absolutely prevent good healthy collaboration. That's why people who have not completed the human development tasks, and are still immature and still overly focused on themselves, are not truly able to enter into a collaborative partnership.

From the Neuro-Semantic perspective, this is the place where we distinguish self-esteem from self-confidence. Your confidence in what you *do* is about your actions, behaviors, and performance. It is not about your value as a *person*. It is not about you having worth. It is about skills and competence. It is the person who *confuses* his sense of value and worth with what he does who gets his "ego" in the way. It is that confusion that causes him to be afraid — afraid that he will lose his value, his position, his esteem, etc.

Significantly, when you separate who you are as a person, your *being* from your doing, *then there's no threat in collaborating with others*. You are not living in a zero-sum game world where the other's "value" takes anything away from you. In fact, healthy collaborating results in the very opposite. With your *person* and *being* a given and unconditional— you are free to collaborate and every success of your partners adds to you and enriches you.

Unlike competition, collaboration does not involve pitting one person against another. Instead in collaboration you add your uniqueness to the others. In doing so, everyone is enriched. Everyone wins. It is in this way that collaboration, as a win-win arrangement, supports everyone as a partner in the enterprise.

Is collaboration threatening? Is it dangerous? Yes to the insecure, the distrusting, and to the overly-competitive. Can that threat be ameliorated? Yes. How? By becoming secure in yourself with unconditional self-esteem and by completing your developmental tasks. Do that and you will be increasingly able to collaborate in healthy and productive ways.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #32
July 23, 2018

HOW TO DETECT FAKE NEWS

Regarding *fake news*—it has been around since the beginning of time. Creating dis-information and distorting information is as old as the human race. But more recently, especially since Donald Trump enter into the political arena, it has become part of the everyday conversations. This is especially true since Trump regularly calls CNN and MSNBC and other new sources “fake news.” Now each time he does whether in rallies or in press conferences, it stirs up the crowds as he pokes fun at them for delivering fake news. But what is fake news and how can we accurately detect news that is truly fake? That is the question.

Fake news is news or information that is inadequately presented so that it leaves an impression that you would not get if you got the full story. Sometimes fake news is fake because the information is exaggerated so what is unreal is the over-statements. Sometimes it comes from untrustworthy sources which is repeated over and over by others, some who are trustworthy.

1) Fake News confuses descriptive from evaluative language.

Journalism schools used to teach the difference between language that is descriptive and that which is evaluative. In older books on journalism this was a fundamental distinction. But apparently no longer. Whether in print in the New York Times or on air, journalists often confuse the two and, of course, when they do (intentionally or unintentionally) they create fake news. Now what they seek to describe empirically in see-hear-feel terms (sensory-based) are described in language that requires evaluation. In this way they impose their opinions and judgments into what should be “the news.”

This often occurs when a reporter adds a few words to help “explain” something. “Mr. X , trying to recover from what he said yesterday, today said...” But that explanation is mind-reading. The best cure for this is the Meta-Model of Language that NLP introduced in 1975. You can find this in *The Structure of Magic, Volumes I and II, Magic DeMystified, and Communication Magic*.

2) Fake News imposes the speaker’s perspective in its reporting.

While descriptive language enables us to get to “the facts, and just the facts” of the case, even that is not perfect. There is always the problem of perspective. “From who’s point of view?” “From who’s perspective are the facts being reported?” It is in this way that all news involves spin. Technically there is no such thing as “a no spin zone” (with apologies to Bill O’Reilly).

Now true enough, there are Spin Doctors— people who intentionally and purposefully *spin* the reporting of events and comments so that it serves someone’s particular agenda. That’s what those who are “commentators” on the news do. If they acknowledge that they are commentators

and that their comments are *their perspective and opinion*, all is fine. But they often do not. In fact, they often present their comments *as if* they were the facts and that they are reporting the news. It is at that point that their words become fake news because it is not *news* that they are reporting, but their opinion and agenda of the news.

3) Fake News edits the news to fit an agenda.

The way I often detect and catch *fake news* is watching an actual speech or report and then listen to a summary of it in “the news” on some station. What I saw and heard in the actual press conference and what is later “reported” may not be “spin” proper, or even the confusion of descriptive facts with evaluative views, but an editing of the comments and/or pictures so that the edited version leaves an impression that one would not have gotten from watching the whole thing. Whoever edited the piece, and whoever asked for the editing in a cut-and-paste manner, did so to *slant the news* so that it conformed with their agenda and opinion. Recently I have seen that often with the way President Trump’s comments are edited. When I am out of the country and see the news and then go home and see the recorded presentation, it is like looking at two completely different news reports.

4. Fake News uses assumptive questions to direct perspective.

An even trickier and more subtle way to create fake news is to ask a question about an event or speech (the actual news), a question that presupposes a particular perspective and then use the event to answer that question. This happened most recently with the separation of families coming across the southern border. By inventing questions, and especially using rhetorical questions, then the so-called reporters can show pictures of the event and prejudice public opinion so that it is spined in their direction. One reporter asked, “Is it moral to separate mothers from small children and infants?” then showed pictures of the event. The answer to that particular question is obvious, its relationship to the legal question about the border, however, is never posed. The end result, a false impression.

5. Fake News tends to sensationalize and over-dramatize an event.

As we all already know, the “news” on radio and television tends to focus on the negative because “negative news sells papers.” Negative news gets our attention in a way that positive news can almost never get attention. So it is really no surprise that news becomes fake (unreal) due to this very factor as it is given far too much emphasis. Then, given how that news *stories* and *images on television* can be dramatized and supplemented by other pictures, the bad news is distorted so it seems as the norm.

All that is called news is not news. Some of it is propaganda, some is commentary, some mind-reading, and some personal judgments. Today it requires a discerning reader/listener to think critically and effectively about the news.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #33
July 30, 2018

EXPOSING AN NLP MYTH

I first read “Buzz” Johnson’s article in 1994 when it was published in *Anchor Point*. Having worked in communications as a trainer and therapist I knew that the idea that communication is 93% non-verbal is just wrong. I also knew that from having attempted to watch and understand airplane movies without headphones. Watching their faces wasn’t enough. Sights and sounds of a foreign language movie would give me a sense of the actors’ states (angry, upset, in love, etc.), but that was about it.

In this article you will discover that most *information* comes *not* from non-verbal channels—tones, facial expressions, or so-called “body language.” No. Most information comes from the meta-representational system of language. Try to communicate that “Supper will be ready at 5:45 p.m.” with just tones and facial expressions. This highlights the crucial role that the higher linguistic systems play in our lives. We need *words* to convey higher level as beliefs, concepts, understandings, ideas, plans, meanings, etc. So while primary states are valuable and important, meta-states are much more so. They truly govern our experiences inasmuch as they set the conceptual and semantic frames that we live in. Because the myth is everywhere, even among NLP trainers who should know better, we publish it again to sharpen your critical thinking skills.

THE 7%, 38%, 55% MYTH

Dr. C. E. “Buzz” Johnson

In the remote sense that anyone in the NLP field needs their memories refreshed concerning the numbers in the above title, let me briefly give my recollection from numerous sessions. The total message one receives in any face to face communication is divided into three components. The words themselves, the tonality used in delivering those words, and the body language accompanying the other two.

The numbers indicate the relative weight or importance assigned to each of these three areas with body language receiving the 55% figure, tonality the 38%, and the actual words themselves being tagged with a paltry 7%. This strangely skewed distribution has bothered me ever since my introduction into this marvelous arena called NLP.

Out of the Mist

The first reason for my puzzlement was that none of my NLP instructors could tell me where those figures came from. Please do not interpret this to mean that I had been cursed with unknown and unknowing fly-by-night mentors. They are all very well known and active in the NLP community.

They are also, in my opinion, excellent teachers. However, when asked where I might find further information about the research that produced those numbers, I was vaguely referred to a variety of well known universities. I later drew a blank at each of these institutions.

Secondly, if these percentages are really valid it would mean that the learning of foreign languages could be greatly abbreviated. After all, if the words only account for 7% of the meaning of communication, we should all be able to go to any country in the world, and simply by listening to the tone and carefully observing the body language, be able to accurately interpret 93% of their communications! And I'll bet you always thought that learning Chinese or Russian would be a real stretch. In fact, from these percentages, it appears that you needn't even bother. You may be better off without being encumbered by all the intricacies of any language. People like Leo Buscaglia are looking forward to the time when words will no longer be necessary as he states in his book *Living, Loving & Learning*. Since a word such as "love" has as many definitions as it has definers, he feels it will be a happy day when the world of word hang-ups is replaced by "vibrations."

Counting on What?

I wonder how many of you have a 93% rate of accuracy when it comes to interpreting and understanding even your most intimate friends and family members? And that's with people speaking the same official language with its 7% impact!

It is not only the NLP community that is espousing and apparently believing the 7-38-55 myth. I've heard therapists and counselors who were unfamiliar with NLP allude to those same numbers. There also seems to be a widespread believe among the general population that words are relatively unimportant. I'm sure most of us have heard people mis-read with statements such as, "She didn't really mean what she said, she probably meant XXX instead." Or, "He may have said that but he didn't really mean it." Or, "It's not what you say, but how you say it."

In NLP change work, note how carefully we re-word statements in order to reframe a client's personal perceptions. And by very skillfully using just the right hypnotic language patterns, we are able to rapidly enhance desired shifts in our clients' understandings and attitudes and beliefs. Would we need to be this meticulous and conscientious if we were really dealing with only 7% of a person's awareness and comprehension?

I was finally able to track down the source of this myth thanks to a professional speaker who makes his living giving sales seminars and workshops. And yes, the 7-38-55 was an important part of his presentations. He didn't know how to spell the name of the individual responsible for the research that originated those numbers or which university was involved, but he gave me a valuable starting point by offering me a couple of different possible pronunciations. I think you'll be interested in what I found.

The Study

Albert Mehrabrian, Ph.D. of UCLA was the originator of the 7-38-55 theory. He speaks of it in two books, *Silent Messages* published in 1971, and *Nonverbal Communications* published in 1972. In these two books, he refers to research projects which were published in various professional journals.

I will get to the journals in more detail later, but first let's look at some of his statements from one of the books.

From Chapter 3 of *Silent Messages* we find that the numbers 7-38-55 expressed as percentages have to do only with what he calls the resolution of inconsistent messages, or to put it in NLP terms, incongruencies. He also states that there are very few things that can be communicated non-verbally. He initially was investigating liking/ disliking which he later generalized into feelings. In speaking with him by phone in March, 1994, he stated that his findings and inferences were not meant to be applied to normal communications. They were of very limited application.

Let me paraphrase some of his thoughts from page 134 toward the end of that book. Clearly, it is not always possible to substitute actions for words and therefore, what are the limitations of actions as instruments of communication? If you've ever played charades, you know that words and language are by far the most effective way of expressing complex and abstract ideas. The ideas contained in *Silent Messages*, and most other books for that matter, couldn't be done with actions. A very important thing to remember about the differences between words and actions is that actions only permit the expression of a limited set of things; namely, primary feelings and attitudes.

The Details

Now let's examine in more detail the specifics of a couple of his experiments from which some people have made some rather sweeping and inaccurate generalizations. From the *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 1967, Vol. 31. No. 3, pg. 248-252 is a report entitled Inference Of Attitudes From Nonverbal Communication In Two Channels. This study was designed to investigate the decoding of inconsistent and consistent communications of attitude in facial and vocal channels. The experimental team found that the facial component received approximately 3/2 the weight received by the vocal component. You can readily see that this roughly corresponds to the 38% and 55% figures mentioned earlier.

You may be wondering how this study was conducted. There was only one word used. That word was "maybe," selected for its apparent neutrality. Three female speakers were tape recorded saying that word while varying their tone of voice so as to communicate three different attitudes (i.e., like, neutral, and dislike) towards an imagined addressee. Then the tapes were listened to by 17 female subjects with instructions to imagine that the speaker is saying this word to another person and judged by the tones what the speaker's attitude is towards that imaginary addressee. So there was no direct feedback by anyone who was being addressed. It was a number of third-party listeners who were asked to mind-read, guess, interpret, imagine, etc., how the speaker felt towards someone who wasn't even there and, in fact, didn't even exist. There was no way to see or hear the reactions of this phantom individual, about whom someone was going to make several long-lasting and powerful speculations.

Next, black and white photographs were taken of three female models as they attempted to use facial expressions to communicate like, neutrality, and dislike towards another person. Then photos were shown to the same 17 subjects with the instructions that they would be shown the pictures and at the same time hear a recording of the word "maybe" spoken in different tones of voice. "You are to

imagine that the person you see and hear (A) is looking at and talking to another person (B).” For each presentation they were to indicate on a rating scale what they thought A’s attitude was toward B. Again, third-party mind-reading with no direct contact with the person addressed, B, because that person was non-existent. The conclusions from this experiment were that the facial components were stronger than the vocal by the ratio of 3/2 as referred to earlier.

An interesting comment that came out of the discussion section indicated that the effect of redundancy (i.e., consistent attitude communication in two or more channels) is to intensify the attitude communicated in any one of the component channels. Perhaps this is something that could be more profitably pursued instead of the denigration of words. Or as you can see from this particular study, word, not words. And that word was “maybe.” It seems to play words under quite a handicap not much different from playing charades.

Two Studied Combined

They integrated this study with another one to come up with the .07, .38, and .55 coefficients. This second study was reported in the *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, 1967, Vol. 6, No. 1, pg. 109-114 entitled, *Decoding Of Inconsistent Communications*. Here they dealt with inconsistent communication of attitude in two components; tone of voice and nine different words. Three words were selected that seemed to indicate a positive attitude, “honey,” “thanks,” and “dear.” Three were neutral, “maybe,” “really,” and “oh,” and three were negative, “don’t,” “brute,” and “terrible.”

Two female speakers were employed to read each of the nine words with each of the three tones, positive, neutral, or disliking of an imaginary addressee. These were recorded on tape which was then listened to by 30 University of California undergraduates.

They were instructed to imagine that each word was being said by one person to another and to judge what the speaker’s attitude was towards the imaginary recipient. One-third were told to ignore the information conveyed by the meaning of the words and to pay attention only to the tone. Another third were told to ignore the tone and pay attitude only to the meaning of the words. The last third were told to utilize both the tone and the content.

The findings were that the independent effects of tone, overall, were stronger than the independent effects of content. I should think so! After all, the words allowed were very limited while the tones allowed were unlimited as long as certain feelings were being demonstrated. But, after all, Mehrabian’s main interest is in non-verbal types of communication. However, in fairness, it was mentioned in the discussion that the methodology used failed to solve the problem for which it was intended. An alternative methodology could have employed written communication for assessing the independent effects of content and electronically filtered speech (with the content rendered incomprehensible) for assessing the independent effects of tone. I don’t know if an alternative experiment like that was ever carried out.

After commenting on some of the methodological problems, they do go on to say that the results indicate that judgments of attitude from inconsistent messages involving single words spoken with

intonation are primarily based on the attitude carried in the tonal component. The use of single words is a long way away from normal communications, don't you think? In fact, they admit that their findings can only be safely extended to situations in which no additional information about the communicator-addressee relationship is available. This seems to relegate it to the realm of tightly controlled laboratory-pure experimentation only.

I would invite all of you readers to examine not only Mehrabian's books, but also his articles in the professional journals which go into more detail concerning his experiments. If enough of us carefully analyze the available data, perhaps we can reinterpret the results in a more useful, meaningful, and workable way than we have in the past.

Time For Accuracy

If we continue to disseminate erroneous information such as the 7-38-55 myth, I feel we are doing a grave disservice not only to the NLP community, but to the public in general. We could do a great service by helping the public realize that the words they use on themselves as well as on others are extremely important in determining the effectiveness and longevity of relationships, the strength of personal self-esteem, and a whole host of other psychological physiological phenomena.

Words and language are probably the primary motivation factors for human beings and they can be enhanced by proper congruent tonality and body language. They can also be somewhat diminished by incongruencies which then often show up as confusion and bewilderment in relationship situations. For example, think how often some battered women have desperately believed the words of their batterers despite overwhelming incongruent behavior. "He said he was really going to change this time."

Think of your own personal experiences in close relationships that have gone sour. Haven't you also hoped and waited for change that would transform incongruent communication signals into congruent ones? Especially before NLP training? Haven't most of us, at some time, hopelessly clung to our own inaccurate interpretation of another's actions hoping for a miracle that would once again make everything whole and comfortable just like we thought it used to be? And what was the total affect of the spoken word at those times? Did the words really have only a 7% influence on our hopes and desires? Not likely. Given the emotional impact of prior experience and beliefs, our memories are not about to logically reduce the words of a loved one, or former loved one, to such an insignificant role instantaneously.

Such impersonal and coldly analytical reactions are probably destined to remain in the safety aloof confines of the experimental laboratory with its pretend situations and imaginary interactions. Perhaps we could benefit from a re-assessment of old acquired beliefs in the glaring light of real life relationship reactions and perceptions.

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Author

Dr. C. E. "Buzz" Johnson, retired Optometrist, has been through Master Practitioner and Trainer's Training. He has been researching the power of words in a variety of different disciplines, medicine, education, addictions, relationships, psycho-neuro-immunology, hypnosis, psychotherapy, etc. Quoted by Permission from Dr. Johnson, Published originally in *Anchor Point*, July 1994.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #34
August 5, 2018

COLLECTIVE LEARNING

You can learn, but can you *learn with others*? If we are to develop effective groups, we need to be able to get people to first *think together* and then secondly, to *learn together*. In Neuro-Semantics we have focused on these skills in our Meta-Coach Training of *Group and Team Coach Training*. These are both group coaching skills and, simultaneously, leadership skills. To this point, Arie de Geus of Royal Dutch/Shell, tells this story in his book, *The Living Company*.

In the early 1900s, milkmen in England would deliver bottles of milk to the door of each country home. At the time the bottles had no cap, and two different species of British garden songbirds—the titmouse and the red robin—learned to siphon the sweet, rich cream from the top.

Then between the two world wars, dairy distributors began placing aluminum seals on the bottles. Cut off from the rich, abundant food source, the individual birds—both robins and titmice—occasionally figured out how to pierce the seals.

By the 1950s the entire titmouse population in the United Kingdom—almost a million birds—had learned how to pierce the seals. However, although individual robins had been as innovative in breaking the seals as individual titmice, the red robins as a group never regained access to the cream. The knowledge never passed from the individual innovators who had learned to pierce the milk bottle seals to the rest of the species.

Now that's interesting and scientists were curious about why. Here's what they found out:

This difference in learning behavior could not be attributed to the birds' ability to communicate. As songbirds, both the titmice and the red robins had the same range of communication. But what was different were their social organizations, in fact, they differed greatly. Red robins are territorial birds. A male robin will not allow another male to enter its territory. When threatened, the robins send a warning as if to say, "Keep the hell out of here." They communicate in an antagonistic manner, with fixed boundaries they do not cross.

Titmice, by contrast, are a social species. They live in couples in the spring, until they have reared their young. By early summer, when the young titmice are flying and feeding on their own, the birds move from garden to garden in flocks of eight to ten. These flocks seem to remain intact, moving together around the countryside. The conclusion of the scientists who studied this case: *Birds that flock seem to learn faster*. They increase their chances to survive and evolve more quickly.

"Flocking," as cooperating and collaborating, not only increases learning, it accelerates the speed of our learning and adapting. Arie de Geus, drew these conclusions:

"Any organization with several hundred people is bound to have at least a couple of innovators. There are always people curious enough to poke their way into new discoveries, like the titmice finding their cream. However, keeping a few innovators on hand is not

enough, in itself, for institutional learning Even if you develop a high-caliber system of innovation, you will still not have the institutional learning until you develop the ability to flock.” (Arie de Geus, *The Living Company*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press. 1997. Jeff S. Wyles, Joseph G. Kimbel, and Allan C. Wilson. Birds: Behavior and Anatomical Evolution, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (July, 1993).

Now while learning can be a solitary activity, when individuals engage in that kind of learning they can only go so far in terms of group learning. For real progress, we have to learn together—to learn the process and art of *collaborative learning*. That’s an entirely new phenomenon and it is an experience that requires collaborative leadership.

It requires collaborative leadership because in traditional organizations there are numerous barriers that block this kind of mutual and shared learning. For example, there is the myth that “information is power,” there is the rule about giving information only “as needed.” There is the lack of feedback about the actions that people take and there is the lack of information about “what might have happened from the result of actions *not* taken.” All of these things prevent collaborative learning.

Such collaborative learning will require establishing feedback loops. It also requires experimenting to discover what works and what doesn’t. We also need a learning culture within groups and organizations, one where people can challenge ideas and hidden assumptions.

Collaborative learning inherently involves sharing what we’re learning, and spreading our insights and discoveries. Yet how many are paranoid of this! They fear that someone will “steal” their ideas and not give them credit. And that does happen. That’s why we have to have a trusting community and collaborative leaders who, in turn, prevent such things from happening.

For more — see the books *The Collaborative Leader* and *Group and Team Coaching*.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #35
August 12, 2018

WHY WE DON'T ASK WHY

When it comes to the very idea of modeling, it did *not* begin with Bandler and Grinder. As I have noted in many other articles, books, and posts here on Neurons—*Abraham Maslow* began modeling self-actualizing people back in 1938. And there were others. For example, Fritz Perls thought about *modeling* as an intimate part of the work of therapy, specifically Gestalt Therapy. In his last book, a book that was finished two years after his death, the book that Richard Bandler transcribed from audio-tapes and films of Perls—*The Gestalt Approach and Eyewitness to Therapy* (1973)—Fritz Perls wrote about finding the *how*.

In speaking about a client who had a headache, Perls said that people often present a headache—
“... as one of their most annoying symptoms. They complain that their headaches bother them ...”

In response, Perls described his approach.

“... we ask them to take more responsibility and less aspirin. We do this by asking them to discover through experiencing how they produce their headaches...” (*The Gestalt Approach*, 1973, p. 68)

That’s the heart of modeling—discovering *how* a person produces an experience. In order to do that, he then described more fully *how to get into the experience* to fully experience it and understand it (p. 68-70). In explaining this, he passionately argued against asking *why* and as emphatically urged them to ask about the *how*.

“The ‘why’ questions produce only pat answers, defensiveness, rationalizations, excuses, and the delusion that an event can be explained by a single cause. The why does not discriminate purpose, origin, or background. Under the mask of inquiry it has contributed perhaps more to human confusion than any other single word. Not so with ‘how.’ *The how inquires into the structure of an event, and once the structure is clear all the whys are automatically answered.* Once we have clarified the structure of the headache we can answer all the questions of the whys-guys ad libitum. ...” (Italic added)

If there’s any paragraph that succinctly summarizes *why not to ask why* and why to ask how, that is the paragraph. Then in typical Fritz Perls style, he adds a bit of humor to this subject.

“... if we spend our time looking for causes instead of structure we may as well give up the idea of therapy and join the group of worrying grandmothers who attack their pray with such pointless questions as ‘Why did you catch that cold?’ ‘Why have you been so naughty!’” (1973, p. 77)

Then to add yet one more argument against asking why, he adds this:

“The majority of questions the patient asks are seductions of the intellect, related to the notion that verbal explanations are a substitute for understanding.” (1973, p. 78)

Modeling is about coming to understand *the structure of an experience* and that means figuring out *how* the person is performing the experience. What is the person doing internally in the mind and/or externally with the body that is generating the person's subjective experience? Modeling is the process of answering that question.

The idea of *not* asking why in NLP came from other sources than from the founders of NLP. It most directly came from Perls and from Satir; both emphasized the importance of *the processes* over history, source, and explanation. Knowing *how something works* informs us about what we can actually do to change things. That is something that the "why of explanation" or the "why of history" does not provide.

Now in contrast to those two *why questions*, there is another. And it is a very productive question. That is the "why of importance or value." When you ask, "Why is that important to you?" you are looking for and probing into a person's values and criteria. And that helps us to understand what the person is intending to achieve. So while this *why* helps us understand the person more fully, that is not the case with *the why of explanation or history*. Those why questions tend to evoke intellectualizing and archeological surveys.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #36
August 20 2018
Getting Over the Past Series (#1)

GETTING OVER THE PAST

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

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

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

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

Your Experience of Time and Living in the Past

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more information: *Time-Line Therapy* (1988) Woodsmall and James.
Adventures in Time (1997) Hall and Bodenhamer.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #37
August 27, 2018
Getting Over the Past Series (#2)

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

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

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

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

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

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

things out. Are they good for you? Do they bring out your best? Via these kinds of questions you can run a *quality control check on your life*, on the way you are living your life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #38
September 3, 2018
Getting Over the Past Series (#3)

GETTING OVER YOUR PAST CODES

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

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

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

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

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

Past references are good when you use them for resourceful learning, for finding resources for

current challenges, and for feeling good. They are not so good or valuable for feeling bad again, for re-traumatizing, for keeping resentments, for feeling bitter, etc. Now when it comes to getting over the past, it's essential that you make sure that you have *permission* to do that.

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

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

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

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

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #39
September 10, 2018
Getting Over the Past Series (#4)

THE ART OF REWINDING OLD TERRIFYING MOVIES

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

1) Identify a mental representation that bothers you.

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

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

2) Step back and observe the old movie.

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

3) Float back and up into the control booth.

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

4) Begin to edit your old moves.

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

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

5) Playing the old memory for the last time.

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

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

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

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

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

Ready? Step in ... how much do you feel the comfort? When it is at a level of 7 or more, push the rewind button . . . and experience it rewinding . . . zoooooomm. All the way back to the

beginning. It only takes a second or two to do that fast rewind . . .

7) Repeat this rewinding process five times.

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

8) Test the results.

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

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

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

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #40
September 17, 2018
Getting Over the Past Series (#5)

FROM THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The past determines the future.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #41
September 24, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#1)

FACING PERSONAL TRAGEDY

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

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

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

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

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

If the answer is 'no,' then there are these questions: How could you represent X in a way that will

enable you to think and feel more resourceful? What would be a better thing to represent? What else is there to represent that you have left out?

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

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

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

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

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #42
September 25, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges #2

ACCUSATIONS AND CRITICAL THINKING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #43
September 27, 2018
Critical Thinking about a Testimony

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another contradiction. She asked for confidentiality. She asked that her name never be used. Then someone mysteriously leaked the information about who it was(!) and suddenly the media was at her door. The committee offered that she could make her statement privately, but no. She did not choose that. She chose to make it publically before the whole nation. So why was that? Why would a highly private person want to do that?

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

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

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

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

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

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

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #44
October 1, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#2)

FACING UNCERTAINTY

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

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

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

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

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

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

will pan out. All of this raises certain questions:

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

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

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

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

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

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

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #45
October 8, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#3)

EMOTIONAL CREDIBILITY

An amazing thing happened this past week. An accuser made accusations against a man with a sterling record as a legal scholar and a judge for 12 years on the Washington DC Circuit. Yet in the end, the accusations themselves proved to be un-substantiated and un-corroborated by any evidence or any witness. What I then found quite amazing is that— when asked if she was believable— a great percentage of the American population said yes. Many Republicans also said yes and went further, they said that “her testimony was credible.”

Now assuming that they were not just “being nice,” and that they really meant that, *how* could testimony be “credible” when there’s no evidence and no witness would corroborate it? How could most people say that they believe a witness who accuses a person of a hideous crime when there’s no evidence in the slightest? How does that work? What do we or should we base *credibility* upon?

In the words of the scores of people who were interviewed by the media— “it was an emotional testimony.” And yes indeed it was. But— and here is the big but— is “an emotional testimony” the same thing as or equal to “credibility?” Is the degree of your child’s *emotional intensity* when wanting something or complaining about something equal to and the same thing as *the validity* of his cry? Is it true that *because* he is emotional and really, truly wants something?

What we have here is what NLP called a “complex equivalence.” One thing is *equated* to another thing. Here we have externally a strong *emotional statement, expression, state*, etc. Here also we have another thing, an internal concept— *credibility, validity, truthfulness*, etc. Then when we put these together into a sentence and equate them, we have a belief statement. The EB (external behavior) is now equal to (=) the IS (internal state) (see *Mind-Lines*, 2005).

- If something is expressed or stated *emotionally*, then it is true, valid, and credible.
- If an accuser is emotional (sincerely and intensely), then the accusation must be true.
- I have to believe someone (validity, credibility), if that person goes into an emotional state.

Of course, the linguistic framing here that creates this belief is pseudo-logical. It creates a false-to-fact belief, a limiting belief, and a statement of low-level primitive thinking pattern. The fact is that *the emotionality of a statement does not necessarily make it true or valid*. But of course, in an Age of Emotion (namely this age!), a non-critical thinking statement like that seems for most people easy to believe. Yet what are people saying, really saying, when they believe that? They are saying—

- If she’s emotional, her testimony is credible.
- If she’s just stating facts and not dramatically feeling it as she says it, her testimony is not credible.
- To be credible, a person must go into state, re-experience things and if it is a negative experience, the voice must crack, and the person must look like and sound like a victim.

Let's now step back for a moment and consider all of this. Upon what should we base "credibility" on?

- What *facts, evidence, information, etc.* justifies us to *believe* someone when they testify to some event?
- Is their emotions and emotional state a sufficient or even a necessary *fact* to the truthfulness of their statement?
- Is their emotion and emotional expression, in itself, *information or evidence* to the reality of the event?

If you think the answer to these questions is "yes," then go visit a mental ward. There you will find many highly emotional people with very intense emotional testimonies! Some will testify very emotionally about aliens taking them into spaceships and scanning their bodies or performing operations on them. Yet does that make them credible?

In medieval times, people testified very *emotionally* that some woman was a witch and that testimony was sufficient evidence for them to condemn her and burn her at the stake. For those a little bit more enlightened, they first interrogated her using painful devices to eek out a confession, and then they burned her.

The fact is *emotions, emotional states, and emotional testimonies* do **not**, in and of themselves provide credibility. Actors who have learned the acting method have learned how to turn on and turn off, at their command, all sorts of emotional states— states that are real to them and that can induce others into strong emotional states. To the extent that you might need a strong emotional state to be able to function or perform well in a given area, that's what NLP can teach you to do. Tony Robbins is highly skilled in this area as the thousands who attend his "Date with Destiny" program can testify to.

Credibility should go to facts. What is the evidence that such and such an event occurred? Who will testify under oath to corroborate the testimony? If nobody can say, "Yes I remember being there and seeing or hearing that," then is there any evidence, any facts that can establish the credibility of a report? For a modern, scientific attitude about things— we look for facts and assume that a person is innocent unless there are facts that indicate otherwise. This has been the basis of jurisprudence in modern societies for hundreds of years in spite of *emotional* testimonies.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #46
October 15, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#4)

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Learning, like thinking, is inevitable and at the essence of being human. If there is any mechanism or tendency or process that is a human “instinct,” it is learning. We see this in its most raw and primitive and essential form in small children—they are little ferocious learning machines! And yet ... what seems so instinctual, so intuitive, so basic to humanity is often, even frequently, lost. By the time many people get out of school, they are so turned-off about learning—they don’t want to read anything serious ever again. Many others have completely lost their curiosity and will only read or study whatever offers them some immediate short-term benefit.

Given all of that, there is a very strange myth about learning—it is that people learn best from experience. Now while it is true that the best learnings that we make seem to mostly arise from *experiential learning*, that is not the same thing as “learning from experience.” In fact, I think I can assert that if we’re talking about actual learning that makes a difference, then most people *do not* actually learn from experience.

To explain that assertion, I need to re-assert what real thinking and learning is. Merely repeating what you already know is neither actual *thinking* and it is definitely not *learning*. It is mere repetition of previous thoughts that were once heard and possibly learned. *Real* thinking means entertaining something that you did not know before, something new, something fresh. It is questioning what you know and delving into it—finding its premises and assumptions. *Real* thinking means embracing and entertaining what you do not know, what is unknown to you. Repeating what you already have thought and learned is, more often than not, an expression of the Confirmation Bias. You are using *thinking* to comfort yourself, reduce your anxiety, dampening your curiosity, and squashing your ability to learn.

When it therefore comes to *experiences*—most people do not *learn* from them. Instead, they use their experience to *confirm what they already know*. Or perhaps they use the experience to validate some stereotypical cultural perspective that they have grown up with. “See I told you, disasters happen in threes!” Actually, given all of the human biases, distortions, and fallacies—it is amazing that any of us learn from experience. We are so practiced in deleting information, distorting it, over-generalizing, and *thinking* through the filter of our biases.

To actually *learn from experience* requires a lot. The *openness* that it requires is an openness to being wrong, to mis-perceiving, to leaving out critical information. The *receiving of data* without automatically interpreting it through your meaning-making system means having a solid sense of self, sufficient ego-strength, to *not* need all of the ego-defenses that psychoanalysis and other therapies have identified.

To learn from experience requires also the ability to identify your current *frames* and try on some new and different frames for understanding the experience. And that means the ability to step back from yourself and *think about your thinking*. But that level of meta-cognition is severely underdeveloped in most people. In fact, while most people find that the Meta-State Model makes perfect sense and explains so much of their experience— that’s only after they come to understand it and that typically takes some time. At first, the meta-cognition in thinking-about-your-thinking seems weird and strange and takes some time to get use to.

Yet when you do come to the place that you can *learn from experience*— all of life takes on a very different feel. With the ability to truly *learn* from your experiences, every experience every day becomes a potential place of discovery. You begin to have insights about things not just once in a while, but regularly and eventually, every day. You have insights into yourself, into others, into how your career works, how your relationships work, and a thousand other insights. And with insights, you begin to have truly *Aha! moments* that often lead to all sorts of creative solutions to life’s problems.

This is an art. Let’s call it— *The Art of Learning from Experience*. And when you develop this capacity, then your relationship to the results of any action or communication becomes a cybernetic feedback system to you. That is, sudden what you have called “feedback” is not only no longer feared or dreaded, it becomes your way to sharpen and refine every skill that you have. And now you can experience the high quality kind of practice that distinguishes those who are experts in any and every field— “deliberate practice.”

The modern challenge today is learning, keeping up with all of the changes and updates in knowledge, and from using one’s experiences to learn from. If you don’t do that, you are sure to not keep pace with things and therefore fall back, even regress, from your current level of understanding and development. The modern solution is to *learn the art of learning* so that you can do something extraordinary, namely, learn from your experiences.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #47
October 22, 2018

CRITICAL THINKING A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

I've been reading Korzybski, again. Originally I read *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (1933/ 1995) to understand the background of NLP. Later I reread to find linguistic distinctions that were not included in the Meta-Model, and that reading led to identifying several new distinctions (1991-1992) which I wrote up as articles on that subject. Years later (1997) Richard Bandler himself urged me to put that into the book which we were going to title, *Magic Revisited*. In the end, however, it was titled *Communication Magic*. Another time I reread Korzybski to discover if there were any "patterns" in his original work. I discovered that there were. So I wrote about those patterns in various articles.

Today I'm at it again, rereading Korzybski and this time for yet another reason. I'm reading to identify more precisely what he wrote about the process of *thinking*, and especially *critical thinking*. And given what I've found already, some articles about that will be coming with regard to that. And that's because, to my surprise, he actually wrote about critical thinking (although he did not call it that)—many decades before critical thinking even became a subject.

Yet even before I began this particular re-reading of Korzybski, I looked for something about critical thinking by opening the 830-pages of *Science and Sanity*. And lo and behold—right in the beginning, I found a list of cognitive fallacies. In "Preliminaries" he has a list of fallacies in thinking (quoted from H.S. Jennings)—"the fallacies of non-experimental judgments ... the fallacy of attributing to one cause what is due to many causes..." etc. (1933, p. 5). In that list he focused primarily on *false attributions of cause*. So I noted that in *Executive Thinking* (2018) and at the same time realized that I need to read Korzybski again. So after publishing the book and finishing another project, I have now begun re-reading.

While the theme of General Semantics and *Science and Sanity* is not "thinking," at least not directly, and not as we typically think of it, yet it is about the process of bringing information or data into ourselves from the outside world to construct a map about it that we can use to navigate our way in the world. Yet given the structure of the human nervous system and the structure of the primitive Aristotelian language forms that we have inherited, the kind of "thinking" that we mostly do is primitive and Aristotelian. That's because our language and the way we use our nervous system does not fit with the structure of the world outside.

We "abstract" from the data outside with our nervous system, summarize that data, process it and then send it from the sense receptors to the lower parts of the brain, the thalamus, to the sub-cortical layers, to the higher level cortexes, then to the pre-frontal lobes and the neo-cortex, etc. In this

construct of information and the processing of data in the human system— our ‘thinking’ often goes wrong.

The critical thinking in *Science and Sanity* begins with recognizing that the information “out there” is abstracted again and again via our sense-receptors and our neurology before it ever reaches the levels of our neurology (in our brain anatomy) where we become conscious of it. Then, our conscious “map” of the “territory” out there is only a map and if our language does not have the same structure as what is “out there,” we have a problem. General Semantics arose as Korzybski worked to provide a way of languaging things so we can think and speak more accurate and precisely. Then, because he noted that we have inherited primitive forms of thinking and languaging — which he labeled as “Aristotelian,” he proposed a new Non-Aristotelian system—General Semantics.

Then, noticing that the extensional nature of mathematics has a structure that corresponds to the structure of the world “out there,” and how mathematizing enables science to be precise, he worked to develop an extensionalizing language. The opposite is intensional meanings (note the “s,” it is not “intention” as John Grinder misquoted Korzybski in *The Structure of Magic*). Intensional refers to using words according to their definitions without referent to the facts. To be intensional is to orient oneself by verbal concepts and abstractions rather than to external facts. This is essentially the structure of fantasy, imagination, and hypnosis.

Given that, the problem with thinking and languaging is that most words are over-intensional and simultaneously under-extensional. For an extensional orientation and language, we need a way to extensionalize “meanings” into specific referents. In NLP, we extensionalize by detailing specifics so that we describe things in sensory-based terms. This was and is the effect of the Meta-Model of Language of NLP— encoding our meaning in specific representational language. And that makes the Meta-Model a *great critical thinking tool*.

Now Korzybski invented several devices for extensionalizing— indexing co-ordinates, dating, using “etc.,” quotes, and hyphens. From that he then recommended several new linguistic distinctions— *Delusional Verbal Splits, Over/Under defined terms, Pseudo-Words, Multi-Ordinal terms, Identification*, etc. These were the distinctions that I found in his work and I wrote about as possible additions to the Meta-Model in 1992 and later became part of the Extended Meta-Model (1997). What he called for was more “critical verbal rigor” (p. 55) in the way we use language. So, in General Semantics, this was at the heart of the state of the art of *critical thinking — a hundred years ago*. And one of the key original sources of the NLP Meta-Model. And now you know.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #48
October 29, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#5)

EQUALITY & COLLABORATION

In one way, and one way only, can we all be considered *equal*— *we are equal in terms of human value*. Now that statement is an assertion of a belief or a premise. Legally in the United States we use that premise as an assertion for treating each other as *equals in the eyes of the law*. “All men (which includes women) are created equal...” Religiously or spiritually, this is a belief premise in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam given that the Bible says, “we are made in the image and likeness of God.” Therefore we can say that *in the eyes of the law* and *in the eyes of faith, we are all equal*.

Then equality ends. In every other way, we are not equal. Rather than being equal, we are all different in multiple ways. Biologically, we are different in our genetic wiring and capacities and that leads to being different in innate abilities and talents which then leads to differences in the skills and competencies we have developed. We are also different due to growing up in different homes, with different parents, different environments, etc. So while we are all the “same” in that we are human and share a very similar neurology, we all differ mentally, emotionally, verbally, and behaviorally. Thereafter, we are all equal and unequal; same and different.

Now while what I’ve written here about equality and differences is obvious, surprisingly it is an area of tremendous confusion. There are some who equate *equality* with being “equal in all aspects” and therefore find the above paragraph about differences offensive. They want to think that we are all equal in our understandings, competencies, abilities, etc. Yet even a superficial observation of the facts reveals that we are not and when we try to treat all children as equal, we only set them for tremendous disappointment later.

The fact of differences leads to another important sociological fact— *when people get together to cooperate in doing something*, in achieving something together, *hierarchies of competence emerge*. The reason for this is that not everyone is equally good at everything. Some are better at some things and worse at others. Consequently, when people collaborate on a project, as those best at any given task compete against each other they generate a hierarchy of competence. Those who thrive in math compete, those who thrive in language compete, those who thrive in athletics compete, and so on.

Trying to equalize everyone out *in any given area of competence* and pretend that all are equally informed, skilled, and/or competent denies the differences reality. In the political realm, Jordan Peterson has been speaking out about the critical role hierarchies of competence play in any society.

He says this term from biology is used by biologists to refer to any social animal group which competes. They inevitably create hierarchies of competence and not “dominance hierarchies.” He argues that human organizations are sufficiently complex so that dominance by itself is insufficient to create a sustainable hierarchy. Among chimps, for a hierarchy to last over time, the top chimp had

to be quite social so he can have companions who help maintain order. Stable chimp groups have friendships among the top ones. That's because pure or raw power is an unstable basis for a stable hierarchy. In using the idea of a hierarchy of competence, Peterson contrasts it with the idea of equality—ideas which show up as capitalism against socialism and Marxism.

Within any area of competence in society—it is smart to identify those who are competent and especially the most competent, and to reward them. After all, isn't that what you want when you are looking for someone to do something? If you need a plumber, you want someone who is competent in plumbing. If you need a mechanic for your car, you want someone who knows what they are doing and has the competence to do it.

An effective society (or community) encourages hierarchies of competence and reward them. This creates capitalism. If you're going to be a plumber, be a good one! Find a genuine hierarchy of competent and climb the ladder to its top. Learn everything you can, practice the required skills, and make something of yourself. If you want to be an architect, be the best architect you can be. If a coach, be the best coach. If a trainer, be the best you can be. To all of this Peterson adds two of the predictors of success in Western Societies—intelligence and conscientiousness. Study what you need to study and put in the hard work needed to become fully competent.

Now given all of this, *a community of people who collaborate together are both equal and unequal*. They are equal in having equal value as human beings. They should all be treated with honor and dignity as persons. They should also be treated as unequal in knowledge and skill. Some are more competent in managing the finances and others are terrible at that. Some are highly competent in running trainings, managing events, and others suck at that. Some are skilled in delivering a training or seminar and others are not sufficiently competent to do that. Therefore everyone's voice is not of equal value or weight in every decision that arises. Because I do not have knowledge, experience, or skill in architecture, medicine, IT, and thousands of other areas, my voice in those areas cannot and should not carry equal weight to those who do.

These facts naturally lead us to recognize and give more prestige to those who have developed expertise in a given skill. We recognize that they have developed superior understanding and skill so we defer to them when a debate arises. After all, shouldn't the most informed about a subject provide information as well as an example for us? It is precisely because we are not equal, not the same, that collaboration works as it does to enable all of us to win— to win more than if we worked by ourselves.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #49
November 5, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#6)

LEARNING PROBLEMS

Some people seem to have a really difficult time *learning*. In the field and literature of learning, there are a great many items that are described as *learning difficulties*. Now one of the strangest is that people can “know” things, and yet not “live,” practice, or use that knowledge. They know but do not and cannot implement. So what’s wrong? They *know* and *understand* certain concepts and principles. They may even *understand* how it works, what to do, the processes by which to actualize it. And yet they cannot *get themselves to experience that knowledge* in how they live their lives. The “knowledge” is academic, intellectual, verbal, and not practical.

This can especially be quite confusing when someone can spend plenty of time presenting and answering detailed questions about a domain of knowledge, and yet unable to make it part of his or her life. They *know*, but cannot *do*. Consequently, such persons are incongruent. They are not able to walk the talk. In this regard, the person has a knowing—doing gap. For years in Neuro-Semantics we have addressed this question in terms of *how* to close the knowing—doing gap and have come up with numerous processes for that, the one that is most well known is the Mind-to-Muscle pattern.

More recently I have discovered yet another reason for this gap. Here it is—sometimes a person is able to academically learn something and know something, but within the dimension of self there’s a problem. The person himself or herself is *unfinished*.

He is unfinished regarding *being okay enough* to focus on living the knowledge or truths. Instead the person is still trying to be okay—perhaps by competing with others, perhaps by putting others down in order to lift oneself up or in one of many other ways. When a person has hidden agendas like that— even what they learn is usually tilted so that the person is using it to “be a someone,” to “show someone else up,” to compete and win the recognition of a group, and so on. There are selves who are unfinished in the most basic of human drives—to be okay, to be a somebody, to be esteem as a person.

Obviously, this creates a strange learning problem. That’s because what is learned (the content information) is view by such persons as a means for self-promotion, self-validation, and self-protection. Personal hidden agendas like these can powerfully interfere with being able to *live* a truth or principle. The underlying problem goes back to one’s intention in learning. When it is not clean—when one is not learning for the sake of understanding, then one begins using the learning as a psychological tool for self-validation. Here we might describe the situation as one where “the ego is in the way.” That is, the person’s sense of self (ego) is misusing the information. He is using it to prop up his falling sense of self, “Now I’m a somebody because I know this.”

The solution to this is easy to say and difficult to apply. The person as a self needs to grow up,

complete the developmental stages and tasks (Piaget, Erickson) and esteem oneself as a valid human being in an unconditional way. Then he will be free of the need to misuse knowledge in that way. And then he will be free from that learning disability.

In Neuro-Semantics we offer several meta-stating self patterns to complete this unfinished development. In the book *Secrets of Personal Mastery* (1999, Crown House Publications) you will find the pattern for applying acceptance to self, appreciation, and unconditional esteem. In the book, *The Crucible and the Fires of Change* (2010) you will find chapters on these subjects as well as how to build a crucible for making this level of transformation.

The best learning is ego-free. That is, you are learning for the sake of learning and discovery. You do not have hidden agendas and motives in learning. We come up against this in the Meta-Coach Training a lot— which is why on the first day we run two patterns— *Releasing Judgment* and *Decontamination Chamber*. Both are designed to release the agenda-filters that cover the learning. Here then is a fundamental fact of learning that is so often over-look. It is a *self, a human being* who is learning. So, who is that person who is learning? How solid a sense of self does that person have? Why is the person learning? How clean or unclean are the motives of that person?

Here is the next amazing thing— when you get that issue resolved and you are fully free to learn for learning's sake— you will become an incredible learner! Your learning capacities will expand exponentially.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #50
November 12, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#7)

SAY “HELLO” TO YOUR PREFRONTAL LOBES

As a *neuro-linguistic* being, your neurology is designed to map the territory which is outside your skin. You do that by the neurological structures (nervous systems, lower nerve centers, higher nerve centers of the cortex, etc.) inside your skin. Korzybski, who invented the terminology of “neuro-linguistic,” expended great effort to describe the structure of the world beyond our nervous systems and how we experience them via our neurology and which we then “abstract” (summarize) to create some kind of internal code by which we can then adapt and adjust to that world. To do so enables you to live successfully, to fail to do so results in semantic shocks and reactions.

Now what is actually “out there” in the “territory” are energy manifestations—the electromagnetic spectrum of vibrations. And the great majority of this spectrum we cannot input and/or code. We have no sense receptors for receiving electromagnetic waves of ultra-violet rays, x-rays, gamma-rays, etc. For such we have to use extra-neural devices in order to pick up the vibrations.

What we do have sense receptors for are very slow vibrations that we record as sensation (touch), sound, heat, light, etc. Korzybski called this level that of the *Event* which is beyond us and we cannot access, then comes the level where we experience things as an *Object*. This is the un-speakable level; words cannot get to this level. After that comes the sense level (see, hear, feel, smell, taste, balance)—the sensory-based level; it is also un-speakable level. Next comes the level of *Labels* — where we use words to label the objects that we do detect. The levels of Labels then continues as we abstract more conceptual words for the simpler words. The last level is that of *Inference* where we draw conclusions, generalizations, create laws, premises, etc.

Given this, re-consider the old formulation of map and territory that Korzybski as a metaphor: “The map is not the territory.” The fact is—we are levels *away from* the territory when we are able to begin to detect it at the un-speakable level and especially when we start using words.

In your nervous system, your sense receptors trigger bio-electrical impulses as you receive “information” about the outside world. You then process that information as you “abstract”(summarize and transform) it from one order of abstraction to the next. In this way you create a map of the outside world. All the while, you are activating your lower nerve centers and so experiencing emotions and other affective states. From there your system is designed to send those impulses (that level of abstractions) upward to the next level.

Neurologically you have lower and then higher nerve regions. The lower nerve areas effect your

biological and emotional areas (breathing, digestion, etc.). This occurs in the lower sub-cortical levels (the thalamus region, hippocampus, etc.). The higher nerve areas, your cortex make up the executive functions of your mind-body system. These higher order structures within your frontal cortex and prefrontal lobes are the structures by which you exercise several executive functions. Among your higher executive functions are—

Consciousness of being conscious (self-awareness)

Consciousness of abstracting (mindfulness and/or meta-awareness)

Understanding, conceptualizing, language acquisition and use.

Insight, judgment, decision-making, sense of responsibility, beauty, ethics, etc.

Awareness is only the beginning of human consciousness. When you are aware of the world around you, we say that you are a sentient being. With *awareness* you “come to your senses” and input the sensory information all around here. This is the life of animals, infants, and small children. They live in the present moment, in the here-and-now world.

The next level is *knowing that you are aware*. This launches you into the unique *human* adventure of self-consciousness. When you learn to manage your awareness effectively (“run your own brain”) which includes managing your emotions (EQ, emotional intelligence), you become mindful. This awareness of your awareness is a *meta-awareness* enabling you to become your own CEO— the executive of your life— making informed, mindful, wise executive decisions.

This is the theme and focus of the new book, *Executive Thinking* (2018) as well as the training. It obviously includes how to think clearly and precisely which is the heart of “critical thinking.” It also includes creative and innovative thinking—the thinking that enables you to identify, define, and solve problems (*Creative Solutions*, 2017). In other words, it is an invitation to—

“Say hello to your pre-frontal lobes and to step up to more fully use your most powerful and essential human semantic mechanism— thinking and meaning-making.

You inevitably construct mental models as you seek to navigate the challenges of life. Yet in doing that, you need to be able to “abstract” through the orders, distinguishing the levels, thinking critically about the structure of your map-making, use your highest neurological levels. When you do, you can then be mindful, develop sound insights, make high quality decisions, learn, unlearn, eliminate cognitive distortions and fallacies, and so much more.

This thinking journey is a learning journey and a meaning-making journey. To do it well, you need to go for accuracy, precise, and specificity. You have to be skeptical about your own thinking processes (your brain is fallible and often wrong), and you have to keep testing the robustness of your mental map. Are you ready for that adventure?

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #51
November 19, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#8)

SAY ‘HELLO’ ONE MORE TIME

In the 1930s Korzybski noted that the brain is not fully developed until the late teens; now we know that the brain, and especially the frontal lobes “do not come fully alive until the third decade.” And there’s a reason— “the far-flung structures of the brain” have to be “fully myelinated.” And that occurs in the mid-30s. (Goldberg, 2009, p. 178). So prior to the mid-30s people still have a not-fully developed brain, they have a brain that’s continuing to develop. And after that, a brain that is actually *used* for thinking and mental effort and *challenged* will continue to learn and develop and even grow new neurons.

Neuro-scientist Elkhonon Goldberg in his book, *New Executive Brain: Frontal Lobes in a Complex World* (2009) says that the frontal lobes are more connected to all other parts of the brain than any other region (p. xiv). Further,

“The frontal lobes perform the most advanced and complex functions in all of the brain, the so-called executive functions. They are linked to intentionality, purposefulness, and complex decision making. The frontal lobes are to the brain what a conductor is to an orchestra, a general is to an army, the chief executive officer is to a corporation. The ability to lead to compel other human beings to rally behind a person or cause, is the most mysterious and the most profound.” (p. 5)

While we still have lots to learn about the prefrontal cortex, there are certain things that neuroscience now suspect. First, the prefrontal cortex seems to contain the map of the whole cortex (p. 34) and there it seems to be the instrument or agent of control within the central nervous system.

From his studies and experience Goldberg posits a distinction in the frontal cortexes in the right hemisphere and the left hemispheres.

“*Novelty* and *familiarity* are the defining characteristics in the mental life of any creature capable of learning. In simple instinctive behaviors the triggering stimulus is instantly ‘familiar’ and the degree of familiarity does not change with exposure. ... Unlike instinctive behavior, learning is change. At an early stage of every learning process the organism is faced with *novelty* and the end stage of the learning process can be thought of as *routinization* or familiarity.” (p. 66)

This transition from novelty to familiarity describes a fundamental cycle of human cognition. Of course, novelty and routinization are relative. What is novel today will become routine in a month or a year. This requires a dynamic relationship between the two hemispheres, a gradual shift in the locus of cognitive control over a task from the right hemisphere processing what is *novel* to the left hemisphere so it now seems *familiar* (p. 68). So in the course of learning a task there is a transition

from novelty to routinization which means from right hemisphere in the early learning stages when the task is novel to the left hemisphere once the task-appropriate cognitive strategies are firmly in place.

This learning begins in the right hemisphere as a bottom-up process. It is driven by ad-hoc computations aimed at establishing similarities or as we would say, formulating patterns. Once that is established, then the left hemisphere uses a top-down process from those representations encoding the class membership (p. 84).

Now inasmuch as some people are better at innovation and others at following routines, people sometimes conflict over these different abilities. Visionaries develop new trends in science, culture, or business yet often are not able to implement their ideas in a systematic and sustainable way. Others who are not so capable of developing new things are fully capable of taking something and making it work and/or sustaining it (p. 140). This describes other abilities—the ability to chart a plan, stay on course, “remember” the future, sustain attention, etc.

Goldberg asserts that the right hemisphere is “particularly adept at processing novel information to which none of the mental representations available in the subject’s cognitive repertoire immediately apply.” Amazingly, the brain is somehow able to acquire new information without the loss of previously acquired information. It can learn to deal with new challenges without “unlearning” how to deal with previous situations. Here the brain exhibits—simultaneously—the properties of plasticity and stability (p. 260).

Here also is a synergy of two propensities— facing novel situations and utilizing established knowledge. To wit, *learning*. This synthetic activity requires the coordination of multiple cognitive skills—something your prefrontal lobes do for you. The prefrontal lobes “enables you to fully collaborate with yourself”—with all of your cognitive skills and traits (p. 141). Talk about an ultimate *collaboration*. It is a collaborating occurring right there at top of your neck!

It is here in the prefrontal lobes that you and I develop “Executive Thinking.” Here you learn to become competent in developing insights that are clear and precise, in making smart decisions, in generating inspirational visions for the future, in transcending a present state and yet including it in a higher state of awareness, in stepping back to cultivate a higher level mindfulness, and so much more. Say “Hello” one more time to your prefrontal lobes!

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #52
November 26, 2018
Neuro-Semantics and Modern Challenges (#9)

MEANING DEFICIENCY & DISTORTION

Another mass murderer and another 11 people dead. It seems to be a weekly thing. Some grabs a gun, jumps into a car, wields a butcher knife, plants a bomb and boom! 10 to 100 or more people are murdered in one go. Then arises the cry that we have heard over and over, “Why?” “Why do these things happen?” “Why can’t we stop them?”

Then arises all of the band-aid cures: limit guns, put up concrete barriers, install metal detectors, march in protests, blame the other political party, and on and on it goes. Yet these are band-aid cures because regardless of how many gun laws we pass, the criminals still get them. No matter how many early warning signals we publish and no matter how many signs we print, “If you see something, say something,” the mass murders continue.

Then some conclude, “It’s the deranged persons themselves! They are the problem.” And yes, that’s true—the gun was shot by a *person*, the car that drove into a crowd was driven by a *person*, the radicalized fanatic swinging the knife was a *person*, so also a *person* put the bomb together and set it off. Yet while that’s a true answer, it still does not give us something actionable to do about it. Plus all “derangement” is not the same. The derangement of one individual is not the derangement of the next individual.

Further, what do we mean by “derangement?” One is a fanatic; one is mentally ill with a personality disorder or something, another suffers from a socio-pathology of some sort. One thinks God is speaking to him, another believes he can be the great Savior of his brand of society, another is pissed at getting fired, another takes the “News” literally and seriously and thinks such and such Senator or Representative is the mouthpiece of Satan. Derangement comes in so many different forms!

So, what gives? *Meaning*. The meanings that each of these persons has created about something is the problem. Each has constructed an understanding from their way of thinking and that *understanding*, as the meaning they made, *that frame is the problem*. And truth be told—they are as much a victim of that meaning as those who they inflict it upon. That is, they as human beings are not the problem, the meaning they construct—that’s the problem.

In Neuro-Semantics when we say that *the frame is the problem*—we are identifying that we humans live our lives by ideas and the quality of the ideas matter. You can think erroneously and create really stupid, dysfunctional, toxic, and pathological ideas. All ideas are not equal. Some are life enhancing and some are life destroying. Ideas matter. The mental map that you construct can either make your life a paradise of pleasure, growth, contribution, empowerment, etc. Or, your mental map can put you into an emotional hell that will destroy yourself and others.

On the *Meaning Scale or Axis*, there is the quality of the meanings that you are making. Are they accurate? Do they fit the structure of the territory beyond your skin so that you can use them to navigate the experiences that you want? Do they bring out your best? Do your meanings inspire you— put hope, determination, persistence, and resilience in you? Do your meanings excite you every day and get you out of bed and make you a better person for it?

If not, you probably have some *meaning deficiency*, and like vitamin deficiency, you need to up your dose of daily meanings. If your meanings leave you bored and depressed some of the time— wake up and refresh your meanings. Learn to be a high quality meaning-maker!

If your meanings are disorienting you so that you are becoming more and more disconnected to people, unable to hold a job, in conflict with others, etc.— you probably are suffering from some *meaning distortion*. And you probably think this is okay! Why? Because of the confirmation bias. You, like all of us, have a bias to look for and confirm what you already believe. So you will not even be aware of the danger you are in. You will justify, rationalize, and intellectualize your way from being able to see the frames which are creating your problems. It's a vicious catch-22.

Solution— begin with the realization that you are a map-maker and you are an especially fallible map-maker! It's not an easy thing to accept, but it is true. Your meaning-making skills are liable to make a thousand kinds of mistakes every day. A thousand! After all, your brain is a function of your eating, sleeping, drinking, exercising ... and it can be disastrously affected by lesions, viruses, accidents, and on and on. Stop implicitly trusting your thoughts. Set the frame: "I could be wrong and not know it." Ask yourself, "What am I missing?" Give up the adolescence need for "confidence," and be a scientist for a change.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #53
December 3, 2018
Executive Thinking and Korzybski (#1)

ALFRED KORZYBSKI AND CRITICAL THINKING

I learned something the other day. I learned that Alfred Korzybski wrote specifically and a lot about *critical thinking* in his classic work, *Science and Sanity* (1933). If you had asked me just a few weeks ago if that was the case, I would said, “My best guess is that he did not.” But that would have been wrong. Dead wrong.

“It is well known that higher intelligence is characterized by a critical attitude. By training with the Structural Differential until the memory of the characteristics left out and the non-identity becomes a permanent semantic acquisition with us, this critical attitude is also developed. No one who feels habitually these ‘characteristics left out’— ‘this is *not* this’— will ever *take a word or a statement for granted*. He will enquire, investigate; will always ask ‘what do you mean,’ a question which automatically leads to further investigation...” (Science and Sanity, p. 485)

The Structural Differential is the primary tool of General Semantics and constitutes the best pattern that they had for distinguishing the orders of abstraction, dis-identifying things that need to be distinguished, and getting “the feeling” of non-identity into one’s neurology. The practice of pointing to different orders of abstracting and saying, “This X is *not* this Y” embodies “the map is not the territory” principle so that one is left curiously wondering and exploring, “What do you mean when you say...?”

Now how about that for a wonderful `description of critical thinking? If *critical thinking* is the ability to think with clarity and precision, if it is the capacity to reflect on your thinking and to question it, then there are several blocks or interferences that we have to address. Namely, *identification, infantile thinking, cognitive fallacies, and confusing levels*.

In General Semantics, *Identification* is the big one. People “identify,” or equate their ideas with reality, words with territory, and one thing with another thing. In the world “identity” is invariable false-to-facts. That’s because in the actual world everything is different at every moment in time. So, “Whatever you say about it, it is not.” (p. 226). “If we identify, we do not differentiate.” Thinking one thing is the same as another thing creates a semantic disturbance in your neurology. To overcome this requires “training in consciousness of abstracting.” `

“By eliminating the semantic blocking, as in identification, we release the creative capacities of the individual.” (p. 485)

Infantile thinking in Korzybski’s writings is mostly what we today call *cognitive distortions*—

something he wrote extensively about. He described over-generalizations (“evaluations in extremes, either good, ‘wonderful,’ or bad, ‘terrible’”) either-or thinking (“no middle ground”), wishful thinking, etc. (pp. 518-519). The person who fails to grow up and grow out of the childish thinking patterns will find himself or herself blocked from adult thinking. He will find himself dominated by an infantile value system and unable to handle the reality of adult life.

Then there are the cognitive fallacies. Korzybski mentioned the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (after this, therefore, because of this) (p. 403), the vicious circle fallacy (p. 430), begging the question fallacy which assumes the very conclusion asserted (p. 446), etc.

For Korzybski critical thinking is “the critical semantic capacity for proper evaluation.” (p. 516). So the capacity to distinguish different orders or levels of abstracting lies at the heart of proper evaluation. This is based on the fact that the world is comprised of “a series of interrelated ordered events” (p. 57). Given that, a structurally appropriate map will record and code those series of order events.

The other big critical thinking skill that Korzybski highlighted was *the shift from intensional to extensional orientation and languaging*.

Intension: In an intensional orientation you start with words. You start with your dictionary definition of words and then you seek to relate, navigate, cope, and understand the world and others in terms of those words. It is a top down approach and one sure to mislead and even deceive.

Extension: In an extensional orientation, you start with the facts that you discover in the world. It is a bottom-up approach. You use a language that fits that structure. The extensional orientation, you stay grounded in reality and you build up your understanding from the territory to the map.

The problem with *intension* is that you start from your map and then try to get the world to fit into it. Actually, as Korzybski repeatedly noted, this describes a delusional way to operate. If you start from how the world is structured, you start with the elements, components, and details that you find there (the facts) and then you construct a map that fits the structure of reality.

Korzybski saw this as the way the human nervous system is designed, first the facts as processed by the lower brain regions (“lower nerve centres”), then moving up the levels in order to “the higher nerve centres.” The order or syntax is important, the structure of levels or layers is important, and the movement from lower to higher is important. It is important for both sanity and the development of sound knowledge (science), hence the title of his book, *Science and Sanity*. There’s more, a lot more — so until the next Neurons.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #54
December 10, 2018
Executive Thinking and Korzybski (#2)

ALFRED KORZYBSKI AND THINKING

In consideration of “critical thinking,” Korzybski began by writing about *thinking* itself. That sent him to neurology and how the nerves in our bodies work to bring data into itself and transform it so that it becomes “thought.” It also sent him to engineering and mathematics to find a language that would assist in modeling how the nerves, the nerve centers, the nerve sense receptors, the nervous systems, the lower and higher nerve centers of the brain, etc. does this incredibly complex activity that we call *thinking*.

A key discovery: The process of “thinking” is a part of the mechanism of “abstracting.” This term refers to taking some input (data) and summarizing it as you select certain parts and as you put into a form or code what you take from the input. At first this occurs far, far below what we call “thinking,” as your body, in the form of nerve endings and sensory receptors (eyes, ears, skin, etc.), abstracts from the energy manifestations of the electromagnetic spectrum “out there” which impacts you. The neurological form of your sense receptors have developed to be able to pick up certain vibrations and to then translate them into a form (a code of some sort) that you use physiologically. That first level is far, far below awareness, consciousness, and thinking.

Eventually the information constructed from the impulses become an activation in your nervous system and code by the lower levels of the brain as sensations and feelings. Later those abstractions are translated into what we call our “senses” —sight, sound, sensation, smell, taste, etc. Sometime after that, the nervous systems abstract again so that you become *aware of your senses*. And that begins consciousness—you become a sentient being with awareness and begin to “think.” From there the abstracting process gives us language so that we develop a meta-representation system for thinking, first sensory-based words, then more abstract words.

While it is all very complex and even today we do not know how all of it works, we have known a couple key facts for a long time.

One, thinking arises from the *abstracting process*, first in neurology, then in language.

Two, thinking follows the abstracting levels and so has an order or sequence, from lower to higher. That makes thinking multi-ordinal; we think at various levels and layer thoughts upon thoughts.

Three, our thinking is therefore self-reflexive; we can think about our thinking.

Four, the thinking process is similar to the mapping process—it works best when we start with the elements and events of the territory and map it so that the structure of our thinking corresponds as best as possible to the structure beyond our nervous system. “The map is not

the territory.”

Five, thinking can be *sane* so we make a good adjustment to the world, *unsane* in that we do not make a good adjustment, but suffer from dis-orientations and problems involving the nervous energy in our system, or completely *insane* so that we cannot adjust ourselves at all to the reality that we’re living in.

Now for Korzybski the basic problem that we all learn in childhood is to treat words as real and to identify them as the same as the referent that the word as a symbol stands for. He called this *identification* and it seems to be built into the way the lower nerve centers of the brain work. How does it show up in life? Associations. Our nervous system and brain *associates* one thing with another. For the infant, the cry magically produces the milk. Soon the word “hungry” brings about food. For small children, this introduces the stage of *magical thinking*, the word “is” the referent (the map is the territory). We equate. What I say something “is,” that is what it is.

With that, the unsanity begins. In this way we create *semantic disturbances* and *semantic reactions*. A semantic reaction, unlike a physiological reaction (blow air onto the eye, tap the knee), is a *reaction* based on a meaning— “His tone is insulting.” “Her huffing is disrespect.” “His strained and harsh voice is scary and makes me afraid.” By equating a stimulus with a response, we invent “complex equivalences” (NLP) so that “A = B” or cause-effect structures, “A causes or makes → B.” This disturbs us. We get upset, irritated, fearful, anxious, etc.— a *semantic disturbance*.

Now our *thinking* is not very clear or accurate. In fact, with semantic structures like that in one’s head, it is hard to think when a given stimulus occurs: sitting for a test, asking for a raise, thinking about the discipline in going to the gym, inviting someone out on a date, etc. Now a person can’t think, or thinks in such distorted and wrong-headed ways, the person cannot succeed in reaching goals or even understanding how the world works.

The solution? Stop identifying. Stop using a map (even a single-word map) to explain, understand, and interpret things, and open your eyes and ears to freshly experience the data. Then you can learn to build up more useful maps for navigating life. This means *delaying the semantic reaction*, taking a moment to *be silent*, and program into your neurology that whatever you say about anything, those are words and not the thing. “Whatever you say it is, it is *not*.”

In our newest Neuro-Semantic Training on Executive Thinking, *Cognitive Make-Over*, this is the process of *unlearning*. This refers to the fact that oftentimes in order to learn something new and more effective, you first have to unlearn an old habit of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting. You may have to unplug some of your semantic buttons. You may have to release old “learnings” that have become redundant and irrelevant.

From: L. Michael Hall
2018 Neurons #55
December 17, 2018
Executive Thinking and Korzybski (#3)

ALFRED KORZYBSKI AND MINDFULNESS

Korzybski wrote a lot about mindfulness except he did not call it *mindfulness*, he called it “consciousness of abstracting.” And this idea is perhaps the major theme in his magnum opus, *Science and Sanity*. Becoming conscious of abstracting means recognizing that you are “abstracting”—summarizing and drawing conclusions and that what you think and say are functions of your mental map-making, not reality. Then, being *conscious* of that, you do not identify your thoughts, ideas, conclusions, beliefs, etc. with reality. And that keeps you open, aware, and flexible.

Then, being *mindful* in this way, you are far, far less likely to suffer the jars, shocks, and surprises of reality. Such mindfulness will enable you to more easily and graciously adjust yourself to ever-occurring changes which, in turn, allows you to be more effective in adjusting (i.e., sane). Here Korzybski writes about many of the benefits of this level of awareness.

“There is no danger of taking ‘the joy out of life,’ the opposite is true. With the consciousness of abstracting, the joy of living is considerably increased. We have no more ‘frights,’ bewilderments, or similar semantic experiences. We grow up to full adulthood; and when the body is mature for the taking up of life and its responsibilities, we accomplish that, and find joy in it, as our ‘mind’ and ‘emotions’ have also matured. Such a consciousness of abstracting leads to an integrated, semantically balanced and adapted adult personality. Joys, pleasures, and ‘emotions’ are not abolished, as this cannot be done, given the nature of our nervous system and ‘mental’ healthy, but they are ‘sublimated’ to higher adult human semantic levels. Life becomes fuller, and the individual ceases to act as a nuisance and a danger to himself and others.” (S&S, p. 527)

Many discussions about consciousness fail to go anywhere because “consciousness” is always *about* something and never detached or about nothing. Whenever you are conscious, you are *conscious about something*. What is that something? So with *mindfulness*. You are *mindful about what?* The most curative mindfulness is *about* your thinking—“consciousness of abstracting.” That’s because knowledge is stratified and what you “know” comes in an order of levels. That is, you think, then you think about what you just thought. This reflexivity layers thoughts upon thoughts. It creates logical levels.

“I have found that one of the main difficulties of the learner, or in ‘thinking’ in general, consists in the fact that in any verbal discussion we must utilize different orders of abstractions and multi-ordinal terms. If we do not realize this, the problem often seems very involved; once we are conscious of it [mindful], however, the problem becomes simple. ... this special flexibility ... represents the working mechanism of ‘high intelligence’” (S&S, p. 487)

That *thinking* and *learning* occurs via different levels also follow the structure of the human nervous system and brain, there also we process information at different levels. Due to this different levels of abstractions, an inherent characteristic of human knowledge, “we cannot abolish it without abolishing multi-ordinal intelligence.” As we have lower brain functions and we have higher brain functions, we must make sure they operate in an open-loop way so they properly influence each other.

“Intelligence requires the passing from level to level in both directions.” (S&S, p. 482)

Given this, in order to use your full brain in a holistic way, you have to *think* (be mindful) at the primary level of facts, differences, immediacy *and* at the higher levels of conclusions, generalizations, similarity, etc.

“By training in this passing to higher and higher abstractions we train the ‘mind’ to be more efficient; this ‘mental’ expanding should be the structural and semantic aim of every education.” (S&S, p. 483)

By going forward and then back, and then going upward and back down we think in an integrative way and thereby close the knowing-doing gap. This then gives you *a felt sense* regarding what you know as well as *a conceptual sense*. You *feel* what you know and you *know* what you feel.

“Realizing that we abstract in different orders, we slowly acquire the most creative structural feeling that human knowledge is inexhaustible; we become more and more interested in knowledge; our curiosity becomes aroused; our sorting spirit stimulated and our level of multi-ordinal intelligence raised. It is well know that the higher intelligence is characterized by a critical attitude ... he will inquire, investigate, will always ask ‘What do you mean?’” (S&S, p. 485)

Key to this heightened curiosity and inspiration lies in removing the blocks such as semantic reactions and identifications.

“We should avoid the mistake of assuming that the average man ... does not ‘think.’ His nervous system works continually, as does that of a genius. The difference consists in that its working is not productive or efficient. ... By the elimination of semantic blockings, we release the creative capacities of any individual. ... Instead of being a semantic slave of the structure of language, he becomes its master.” (S&S, p. 485)

Then you can become mindful in a new and exciting way.

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Executive Thinking and Korzybski (#4)

ALFRED KORZYBSKI AND SEMANTIC REACTIONS

You know what a *reaction* is. But what is a *semantic reaction*? It is a reaction to something due to its *semantic* meanings. You are reacting not because something has impacted you, but because something *means something to you*. And, *you* were the one who created that semantic reaction within yourself! That's because you have attributed some *meaning* to some stimulus (a word, action, tone, experience, concept, etc.) and now you are unthinkingly reacting. Now instead of thinking, considering, and being mindful of the stimulus and even your thoughts about it and keeping your thinking current, you are reacting. And you are doing so unthinkingly.

Now in analyzing how this process works, Korzybski said that a person has *identified* two things which exist at different logical levels. That is, you have treated those two different things as if they were the same or equivalent. To you they are identical. There's no distinction between them. NLP later recognized as a "complex equivalent" and the NLP formula E.B. = I.S. (External Behavior equals Internal State) lies at the of reframing (which is fully developed in the book, *Mind-Lines: Lines for Changing Minds*).

Yet a *semantic reaction* of this sort is not innocent nor is it harmless. Actually it creates all sorts of emotional distresses—distresses that are self-made and unnecessary. Korzybski wrote:

"Through wrong evaluation we are using the lower centres [of our nervous processes] too much and cannot 'think' properly. We are 'over-emotional,' we get easily confused, worried, terrorized, or discouraged; or else we become absolutists, dogmatics, etc. ... Owing to wrong evaluation we add self-made semantic difficulties to the difficulties which we actually find in nature. When we live in a *delusional* world, we multiple our worries, fears, and discouragements, and our higher nerve centres, instead of protecting us from over-stimulation, actually multiply the semantic harmful stimuli indefinitely." (S&S, p. 481)

Here we "cannot think properly" because we are *only* using our lower nerve centers. Conversely, by "proper thinking," Korzybski means using your higher nerve centers—those that are associated with the executive functions of your cortex and prefrontal lobes. He means the advanced thinking of an adult who thinks things through, reasons well, checks contexts, chooses what is ecological, etc.

"Roughly the central part of the brain which we call the thalamus is directly connected with the dynamic world through our 'senses' and with those semantic manifestations which we usually call 'affective,' 'emotions,' all of which manifest themselves as dynamic." (Ibid)

The thalamus and other lower structures in the lower part of the brain create a very different picture of the world than the picture derived in the higher levels. That world is emotional—dynamic,

shifting, in flux, etc.

“The cortex which gives us the static verbal reactions and definitions, is not connected with the outside world directly but receives all impulses through the thalamus. On semantic levels the thalamus can only deal with dynamic material, the cortex with static. Obviously the optimum working of the human nervous system, which represents cyclic chain, where the lower centres supply the material for the higher centres and the higher centres should influence the lower, we must have means to translate the static into dynamic and the dynamic into static; a method supplied *exclusively* by mathematics.” (S&S, p. 758)

For an optimum functioning we need *both* the higher and the lower functioning of the brain. And for holistic thinking, we need them communicating back and forth between each other. This, in fact, is *the secret for a higher level of quality thinking— being able to translate up and down the levels of the brain*. Korzybski said that intelligence itself requires passing from level to level in both directions. That lies at the heart of “proper training in consciousness of abstracting.” (Ibid., p. 486).

What’s the reason for this? When you can distinguish the level of the “abstracting” (thinking, generalizing, etc.), then you will not be *identifying* and that eliminates the semantic reaction. That’s why the most basic semantic reactions are the Cognitive Distortions— awfulizing, personalizing, emotionalizing, etc. These are actually the characteristic ways that children think! Yet for them it is okay. Children have not yet developed the capacity or maturity to distinguish levels. And that’s also why Korzybski asked about your “semantic age” (Ibid., p. 149). “How old are you anyway, semantically?” Semantic reactions indicate childhood thinking, not adult thinking and responding.

If the lower nerve centers in the brain process data so that it registers as more fluid and dynamic and if the higher in a more static code, then translating dynamic information upward and stable generalizations downward gives you a fuller and richer understanding. It’s like a movie. When you watch it, you experience it as dynamic, moving, and fluid. Yet when you stop the movie, when you freeze-frame moments in the movie—you can detect the finite differences. At the lower levels, you have variance at every moment, conversely at the higher levels you have “invariance” (Ibid., p. 292, 230, 578).

Both levels are needed in your thinking and responding. The lower levels gives you a sense of continuity where you swim in an ever-shifting and non-permanence of details. The higher levels arrests the pictures to give you stable (or static) understandings— ideas and principles that are permanent at that level. We inevitably and naturally move upward to draw conclusions. Yet if you made those conclusions permanent and unchangeable and identify them with what is “outside and beyond the nervous system, then you create for yourself semantic reactions.

If, however, when you encounter the ever-moving, shifting, and dynamic world “out there” and then move that information upward as you draw conclusions and then be ready to extensionalize those static representations, you will keep yourself current to the ever-changing territory. Knowing this explains why we have several processes for dancing up and down the levels in the *Cognitive Make-Over* training for *Executive Thinking*,

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ALFRED KORZYBSKI AND COMMERCIALISM

“It is not fully realized that in a symbolic class of life, *symbolism* of any sort plays *an environmental role* and creates semantic reactions which may be distinctly morbid.” (S&S, p. 296, italics added)

In human experience, there is not only *internal contexts* that influence our thinking and responding, there are multiple *external contexts*. These contexts influence us inasmuch as they create not only the external and physical environment, they also create the external *semantic* environment. What is that? It is the result of how mental ideas within the minds of individuals (you and me) can be, and are, externalized and become a part of a larger and mostly invisible environment.

This means that what you conceptualize in the private reserves of your mind can be shared with others and when you and they then act on these ideas—you create *an external semantic environment*. You do that by *cultivating* your mind and emotion (and those of others) so that together we translate them into a *cultivated way of speaking and acting*. This is how we create an external “culture.” “Culture” here represents an external semantic environment.

Culture, like so many other nominalizations, sounds like a thing. It therefore sounds like a real external object. Yet it is not. Culture refers to the externalization of internal understandings and values regarding “how we do things around here.” That makes it a “logical level” of the mind. And that’s why you take it everywhere you go—it is how your mind and internal world of understandings has been cultivated are what it expects.

Because of this, culture is not an absolute thing—it is *a relative process*. It is a human process that is a highly fallible process. That’s why no culture is perfect or beyond criticism. In fact, all cultures are highly contaminated by low-level understandings, values, beliefs, precedents, etc. That’s why all cultures need to be challenged and upgraded. That explains why I do not limit these posts to only psychology and communication subjects, but also to politics, values, economics, etc.

Now one facet of culture is commercialism, which like any other aspect of culture can be healthy or unhealthy. Korzybski spoke to this in *Science and Sanity*:

“The morbid semantic influence of commercialism has not been investigated, but it does not take much imagination to see that commercial psycho-logics, as exemplified by the theories of commercial evaluation, ‘wisdom,’ appeal to selfishness, animal cunning, concealing of true facts, appeal to ‘sense’ gratification, etc. produce a *verbal and semantic environment* and slogans for the children which, if preserved in the grown-ups, must produce some pathological results.” (S&S, p. 295).

What are these *morbid semantic influences* that would make commercialism unhealthy? Korzybski began describing them in his section on infantilism. What he found was that unhealthy commercialism tends to be infantile in thinking and valuing.

- *Sameness*, conformity, dis-valuing being different. “Originality and individuality are tabooed among children. Because of semantic undevelopment, differences become a disturbing factor to them; they want everything standardized.” (p. 517)
- *Over-legislation*: “not wanting to ‘think,’ or bother about differences, they fancy they can regulate life by legislation.”
- *Impulsive*, given to impulses. “They cannot differentiate the essential from the unimportant. The immediate ‘sense’ perception or ‘emotion’ unduly influences their actions. Impulses to copy others dominate them. This results in weak judgment, over-suggestiveness...” They tend to focus on animal comforts which fail to lead to greater happiness or higher culture. (271).
- *Trickery*: putting something over on others via commercial tactics. Infantile characteristics of advertisements.
- *Lack moderation*: extremes things are ‘wonderful’ or ‘terrible.’ Chasing after national crazes. “The infantile semantic reaction to buy what they do not need.”
- *Marked credulity*: “They like fairy tales and fantastic stories.”
- *Acquisitiveness*: Need for collecting objects, “owning” conveys a sense of personal value.
- *Gregariousness*; “Afraid to be alone.” Appeal to popularity.
- *Easily distracted*: “Children seldom stick to anything for longer.” Constantly hunting for new excitements, impatient, restless.
- *Power maneuvers*: “Children like to domineer over younger brothers and sisters.” Infantile power is power *over* others, not power *with* others.
- *Symbolic evaluations*: “An adult evaluates a man by what he has in his head or character, but the infantile type largely judges him by the *symbols* (money) which he has, or the kind of hat or clothes he wears.” “Since commercialism cannot sell brains, but can sell trousers or a dress, it establishes semantic standards by which a man is evaluated by his clothes and hats.” (S&S, p. 519)
- *Infantile love*: “Such ‘love’ is often based on purely egoistic grounds. They ‘love’ what they represent to themselves, what they once represented, what they would like to represent.”
- *Un-responsible*: “Infantile adults have little regard for, or endurance of, life responsibilities. They tire quickly, are easily discouraged and frightened. They are irresponsible, unreliable...”
- *Exhibitionism*: An impulse for showing off. “Infantile men and women are primarily in love with *themselves* and care only how pretty they are. They spend large portions of their income on dresses and grooming ... they live in an infantile world and are socially useless...”

That was Korzybski’s take on morbid commercialism in his day—back in the 1930s. I wonder what he would say about commercialism today?