

**NEURONS**

**VOLUME X**

**2019**

# NEURONS — 2019

## **Alfred Korzybski Series**

- 1) Alfred Korzybski and the Media
- 2) Alfred Korzybski on Unleashing Potentials
- 3) You— An Effective Public Speaker?

## **Critical Thinking**

- 4) Thinking Human Beings
- 5) A Cognitive Make-Over
- 6) Biases Alive! Media's need for a Cognitive Make-Over
- 7) Thinking for a Change
- 8) Thinking — The Ultimate Leverage Point
- 9) When Thinking Gets Out of Control
- 10) Thinking: Fixed and Growth
- 11) Fast and Slow Thinking
- 12) Think Slow to Think Fast
- 13) Are your Meta-Cognitive Powers Wimpy?
- 14) Things are not as Bad as you Think
  
- 15) Capitalism: What Are We Talking about?
- 16) Hate Will Find a Way
- 17) Authentic Capitalism
- 18) Who Wants to be a Capitalist?
- 19) Cognitive Make-Over in Brazil
- 20) Suppose Children Ran the Government
- 21) When Neuro-Semanticists Get Together
- 22) I Now Know Where they Got It— Neuro-Linguistic Programming
- 23) Designer States — I
- 24) Designer States — II
- 25) Designer States — III
- 26) What Kind of a Cognitive Make-Over Do You Want?
- 27) To Truly “Think” – To Accelerate Your Learning
- 28) Using History to Establish Credibility
- 29) Danger: It's Designed so You Don't Think!
- 30) When Thinking is Seriously Contaminated
- 31) Forgetting to Give Credit
- 32) Welcome to Brain Camp
- 33) A Brilliant Author Gets It Wrong
- 34) When You Can't Think
- 35) *Announcement*: A Great NSTT in Brazil
- 36) Responding to Information
- 37) When Thinking is Cloudy

- 38) At the Heart of [Gun] Violence
- 39) Curing the Heart of Violence
- 40) Cognitive Fallacies in Everyday Language
- 41) Second Stage Victimization
- 42) PRESENT-ISM: The Difficulty of Thinking about the Past
- 43) The Obvious Elusive: What is NLP?
- 44) Communication Myths
- 45) Mind-Reading at its Worst
- 46) Calm and Cool Thinking: Thinking Under Stress

**Professional Communicator**

- 47) Seven Distinctions of a Professional Communicator: Map Vs. Territory
- 48) Person & Behavior
- 49) Meaning & Response
- 50) Sensory & Evaluative
- 51) Frame & Feeling
- 52) Advocacy & Inquiry
- 53) Current & Desired State
- 54) Training Professional Communicators
- 55) Communicating Professionally
- 56) The Richness in Communicating
- 57) The Hidden Dimensions of Communication
- 58) Critical Thinking or its Lack When Communicating

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #1**  
**January 7, 2019**  
*Executive Thinking and Korzybski (#6)*

## **ALFRED KORZYBSKI AND THE MEDIA**

Picking up the idea in the last Neurons about Korzybski and Commercialism—the problem that made the commercialism *morbid* and therefore unhealthy is that it promotes shallow values. Korzybski also described commercialism as primarily *infantile*—suitable for children, but not for adults. This would also apply generally to *the media*. Mostly the media has a morbid influence on our lives and does so because it is addressed to that which is most childish and infantile in us.

1) *Bad News*. We all know it, “Bad news sells.” Yet we all also can hardly resist it. The complaint is pretty universal, “Why can’t they show some good news?” But good news isn’t *news*. What happens everyday, especially what we can pretty much count on and depend on—is not *news* and doesn’t interest us that much. “Flight #302 landed safely at the airport.” “Schools across the state opened their doors at 7 am and teachers taught their classes.” But let there be bad news — train wreck, shooting at a school, storms, etc. and that’s *news*. It grabs our attention and concern. Yet a daily diet of one catastrophe after another, one scandal after another, one conflict, war, shooting, etc. after another — and we end up with a false and highly distorted picture of the world.

2) *The Fearful*. Like bad news, what is fearful and frightening, what triggers anxiety and distress, what scares and upsets, and what is dangerous or threatening—that’s *news*. This in fact, is what most of the bad news focuses on. The problem is that 90 percent of the things we worry and fret about never happen. Yet we can spend an outrageous amount of time focusing on what might be or could be. Actually, a great deal of the *news* today is not about bad news, it is about *potential* bad news. So-called new reports focus on “trends” about what could or might be *if*... And so they play out all sorts of *what if* scenarios that raises anxiety, fearfulness, and distress.

3) *The Sensational*. If that holds true for good news, it also holds for *the normal*. What’s normal is much less interesting, engaging, and newsworthy from what is abnormal, out of the ordinary, and sensational. Yet once again, a steady diet of the sensational creates a false-to-fact portrait of the world.

4) *Linear and Binary*. The most typical kind of thinking that drives the bad news, the fearful, and the sensational—is linear thinking and binary or dichotomous thinking. This is the thinking that posits the options as either X or Y; one or the other. This eliminates every alternative in-between the two as well as any other alternative. It over-simplifies things and attempts to create a black-or-white world. The truth is that we live in a systemic world—a world that is organized and structured within systems. The truth is that within almost every issue there are multiple

variables that play a role.

5) *The Over-Simplified.* We have a bias for simple answers. “Could you repeat that in a more simple way?” Yet because a system is a set of inter-related variables as well as contributing factors, restraining factors, supporting factors, amplifying factors, etc., we inevitably have to take all of these into consideration if we’re to understand the system. We also have to think long-term rather than short-term. How will various consequences will complicate things over time?

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #2**  
**January 7, 2019**  
*Executive Thinking and Korzybski (#7)*

## **ALFRED KORZYBSKI ON UNLEASHING HUMAN POTENTIALS**

Korzybski created General Semantics because he had *a vision* for mankind—a vision of human beings growing up out of the “childhood” of humanity. His vision was also beyond the power of any single individual—a vision that required the collaboration of many, many people (*Science and Sanity*, pp. 560-561).

That vision grew from a question. As an engineer, he readily recognized that year after year, decade after decade, century after century—our ability to engineer better buildings and bridges kept improving. It gets better because we build on the previous discoveries and understandings of those who went before us.

“So why are we not getting better and better in the ‘soft’ sciences? How is it that we keep improving in science, mathematics, chemistry, physics, etc. but not in psychology, sociology, politics, anthropology, etc.? What is the difference?”

Korzybski’s answer, in part, was that in the sciences that are progressing, we have developed specialized language that is precise. But we have not done that in the others. A science that develops precision language and that can be productively critical of itself (receiving feedback from experiments that show what doesn’t work) keeps developing. Where we have learned *how to be specific*, we are able to build on previous knowledge. Understanding, knowledge, skills, etc. can grow and develop *when we have a way to be precise and self-critical*. That allows us to tap into human potentials in a new way.

“The origin of this work was a new functional definition of ‘man’ ... based on an analysis of uniquely human potentialities; namely, that each generation may begin where the former left off. The characteristic I call the ‘time-binding’ capacity.” (Korzybski, *Science and Sanity*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. 1993, p. xxxxii)

Starting where the former generation left off—that was the idea. Yet for that to happen, we have to be able to both effectively communicate the information that’s developed and test that information. If we can’t put it to the test, we can’t find out if it is just fluff and imaginary. We can’t develop robust information that can serve as foundational. We also have to be able to reflect on what we already know, have learned, and think to keep improving it. For this, Korzybski offered a Theory of Multi-Ordinality which he contended was the basis of sanity.

All of this explains the importance of critical thinking. It is not enough to just think—we have to examine and re-examine our thinking. We have to test our thinking and question it against the

facts and the criteria of credibility. And that's what the executive functions in your brain were designed to do. But you also have to learn *how to use the higher executive functions* in order to do that. And that's where we typically need a cognitive make-over.

I like what Joseph Yeager wrote about thinking: "There are always options if we know how to think of them." (*Thinking about Thinking with NLP*, 1985, p. 25). Yet that's the crucial factor—knowing *how to think of something*. So what stops you?

Surprising one big thing that stops us is—previous thoughts. It works this way. Once you think about something—your thinking itself becomes a *way of thinking*. And then, as a way of thinking (a thinking style or pattern) it gives you a format, a template, and/or a frame for future thinking. That's good. It is also bad if you get locked into that *way of thinking*. When that happens, you become stuck. You become stuck in your thinking, boxed-in to that way of thinking. That's why you need to get out of that box. And there are ways to do that.

Here's another factor that can stop you. What can stop you is that you are *not* even aware that your thinking is the problem. You are thinking, but not thinking about your thinking— and without doing that, you can't manage your thinking. And that means you can't tap your thinking potentials of creativity, innovation, wise decision-making, etc. This is why meta-thinking (meta-cognitive) skills are so important. So while unleashing potentials requires numerous things— I mentioned some 25 factors in the book *Unleashed* (2007). Yet at the heart of unleashing, it involves a cognitive make-over.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #3**  
**January 11, 2019**

## **YOU — AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKER?**

Would you like to become a person who can stand up before a group, whether 10 people, a 100, or a thousand and effectively communicate a message? That's the core competence that we teach and train at Trainers' Training. Yes, we also focus on *how to train* people in particular skills and especially in NLP communication skills, but more foundationally— we facilitate the development simply standing up and speaking with clarity, credibility, and confidence. Interested?

Well, it only makes sense. In Neuro-Semantics, as a professional and ethical association of NLP, we have been studying and modeling *effective public speakers* for twenty-some years. With each year, we then conduct one intensive training for trainers, speakers, and presenters somewhere in the world. The training is highly experiential so that day by day you are given opportunities to get up on your feet and learn the art of communicating. You also get to see those who are Master Trainers present as well as those in that track present and receive feedback for their next steps of development.

The feedback at NSTT is *deliberate practice feedback*. This means both during and after a short presentation, you are given some immediate feedback so that you can flexibly adjust things *in the moment*. And afterwards you receive some more “next step” suggestions and then you do it again. “Take Two...” And to promote accelerated adult learning— we bathe all of these in a lot of fun and playfulness. Why? Because people learn best when they are having fun. Now are you interested?

This year— 2019— we take NSTT for the very first time to Indonesia and to a very special place in Indonesia— to Bali. There will be people there from a dozen or more countries— which will make the experience international.

Now there are requirements for attending— since the training enables a person to teach and train the basic NLP Communication Models, then NLP Prac. and Master Prac. are required. However we do have another pathway— those who have become Licensed Meta-Coach have been through the three modules of Meta-Coaching. They have had a basic introduction to NLP (Module I) to Meta-States (Module II) and then to the coaching bootcamp (Module III).

Interested? For more information about NSTT Bali 2019— go to [www.meta-mind.com/nstt2019](http://www.meta-mind.com/nstt2019) And/or write to Mariani Ng at [info@meta-mind.com](mailto:info@meta-mind.com). Also you can find lots of information at [www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com) Click on Trainers / Become a Neuro-Semantic Trainer.



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #4**  
**January 21, 2019**

## THINKING HUMAN BEINGS

*Most people do not “think.” Most of the time **you** are not thinking!* Does that strike you as shocking? Or does it not shock you because you simply do not believe them? Of course, it all depends on what I mean by the word “think,” doesn’t it? So, here we go.

Question: If you are entertaining thoughts in your mind that you have thought of before, is that “thinking?” Or is that just rehearsing what you already know? If you think something for the tenth time or the hundredth, are you thinking or just recalling? If *thinking* is the mental effort involved in coming to understand and know something, then regurgitating former thoughts would not actually be *thinking*. So merely have a thought in your mind does not necessarily mean that you are thinking. Thinking involves more and different.

If we start with this definition of thinking, then *thinking is not what you think it is*. It is not merely having a “thought” in your head. Consider the experience of reading. Typically when I read, most of the “thoughts” that I entertain in my mind are not my thoughts, but someone else’s. In fact, that’s generally why I’m reading, I’m wanting to know or understand what someone else has thought and written about something. So I’m not actually *thinking*, I am receiving. I am typically in a passive state of mind, one of receiving thoughts and letting ideas run through my brain. There’s very little mental effort.

Now true enough, from time to time the words that I’m reading stimulate me to actually think—that is, *to think of things I had never thought of before*. In that moment I am thinking—I’m entertaining new ideas, ideas I have not thought of before. Now my brain is working as it is representing, comprehending, organizing, considering, and “working over” those ideas. In the end, I may or may not accept and agree with the ideas—yet regardless of that I have engaged in mental effort. I have thought.

Using this definition to define *real* thinking—then the mental effort of thinking is *considering, understanding, presenting and working on something that I don’t know*. If I already know something, then I’m just barely “thinking.” I’m remembering, recalling, going over something already known. This means that *real thinking begins at the border of what you don’t know*. Ah, so “thinking” starts when you do *not* know something. Now you have to think.

This actually identifies seven categories of using your mind or brain that are aspects of *mindlessness*—of unthinking. While the following are all forms of “thinking” in the most general terms, they are also forms of pseudo-thinking. A “thought” is being processed, but the person is not using his or her full potential of *thinking*.

## Reactionary — Toxic— Automatic – Aristotelian – Superficial – Agenda — Certainty

Several of these forms of thinking operate unconsciously— in (1) *reactionary thinking*, you usually react without your mind being in gear! So also in many forms of (2) *toxic thinking* (limited beliefs, superstitions, childish thinking patterns, cognitive distortions). And obviously with (3) *automatic thinking*, whatever you previously thought and learned has dropped out of conscious awareness and is now operating outside-of-awareness. (4) *Aristotelian thinking* speaks to how we polarize things, create false dichotomizes and then live in an either-or world. (5) *Superficial thinking* is lazy thinking that is shallow, naive, and escapist. It is usually borrowed thinking in that the actual ideas that you are thinking come from other people— they are the political or religious bullet points that you’ve heard and that you now repeat in pretty much a mindless way.

(6) *Agenda thinking* seems like real thinking, but it is not. Instead of entertaining an idea you might disagree with, you filter it out due to your ego-investment in a particular ideology, belief, understanding, political party, etc. Your thinking is highly motivated to see things in a certain way and confirmation bias enables you to keep supporting it. (7) *Categorical thinking* shows up as certainty wherein you “know” something “for sure.” And that’s the way it is. Period. No question. Case closed. This seems like thinking, yet it is really the opposite of thinking— in the state of certainty the mind is closed. The defenses are up.

*Real thinking* begin when you start considering something that is *new* to you, *unknown* to you, something that you are *confused* about, or what you do *not know*. Now isn’t that interesting? Thinking begins when you work an idea over in your mind— and this usually means an idea that you have not thought of before. Thinking begins when you do *not* understand something. Once you understand— you stop thinking. (Well, most pepole do, I hope you are an exception to this generalization.) And what are you experiencing when you do *not* understand something? You are confused, perplexed, doubting, questioning, etc.

Now you know why I wrote, *thinking is not what you think it is*. And why most of us do not do a lot of actual *thinking*. And that brings up another fascinating factor about human beings— most people are highly motivated to bring an end of thinking as soon as possible. Why? We do not like feeling confused, perplexed, in doubt, struggling with questions in our minds!

Who does? The answer is *thinkers*. Scientists, explorers, researchers, and children. Ah children! Is that why they are also such passionate learners? Is that why they never seem to be an end to their questions? That is until we send them to school and the school knocks it out of them as they learn to “shut up, be still, don’t move, and don’t ask so many questions!”

Then they grow up un-curious, bored and depressed, unable to ask probing questions, poor learners, turned off to reading, un-creative, stuck, fearful of making mistakes, hate being confused, run away from perplexity and complexity, etc. No wonder they need a **Neuro-Semantic cognitive make-over**.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #5**  
**January 21, 2019**

## **A COGNITIVE MAKE-OVER**

Now *make-overs* are common these days. There are home make-overs—a re-modeling of a home to give it a whole new look and function. There is the personal make-over— an updating of one’s wardrobe— hair, dress, and public presentation. A *make-over* cleans things up, updates what is out of date, eliminates what is non-functional, introduces more effective and efficient techniques, and establishes what will be more solid and robust. Sound good, right? Well, what if we did that for your mind— for your thinking capacities?

Cognitively we all need regular *make-overs* in order to keep our minds highly efficient for processing information, solving problems, creating highly desired innovations, connecting effectively with people, negotiating conflicts smoothly, and much, much more. With a *Cognitive Make-Over* you will be able to avoid being deceived by a cognitive bias and/or experiencing the misery of the cognitive distortions. Is that enough reasons for getting a cognitive make-over? If not, then consider the biggest reason of all.

*The quality of your thinking determines the quality of your life.* There’s a reason for this. It is because thinking— both *what* and *how* you think— governs everything. It governs your communications to others as it governs your communications to yourself. It governs your emotional states which, in turn, govern your skills and performances. It governs your ability to solve the problems that life throws at you and your flexibility in adjusting. Now that’s a thought about thinking!

When it comes to thinking, that’s something you already do. You have been doing it from your beginning. And that’s also why you now have *thinking habits*— and some of them are undoubtedly poor thinking habits, and amazingly, you are also probably not be aware of them. These habits can lead to sub-optimal beliefs and actions thereby making life unnecessarily stressful and miserable. And all along, you may not even be aware of your thinking or your thinking habits because they are usually not conscious. Given that you may also be unaware and lacking the most important cognitive skill— meta-thinking.

*Meta-thinking*, the ability to *think* about your *thinking*, gives you the capacity to quality control your thinking, to update it, and to make sure it serves you well. Without that ability you can be easily influenced and duped by those who know how to play to the basic human cognitive biases. And that can be a formula for personal catastrophes, failures, and disappointments. Without that ability, you cannot “run your own brain.”

So, do you need a cognitive make-over as you start this new year? Do you ever—

- Assume that you know what others are thinking or intending?

- Over-react to a trigger (when someone pushes your buttons)?
- Assess probabilities incorrectly so you think your chances are higher than they actually were?
- Test hypotheses inefficiently?
- Violate your own values and premises?
- Let irrelevant contexts affect your choices?
- Ignore alternative hypothesis when evaluating data?
- Display information-processing biases that blind you to a situation?
- Are absolutely sure about something and then get surprised?
- Find it difficult to solve the problems of everyday life?
- Struggle in figuring out how connect with someone or influence someone?

Where there are poor thinking habits, there are all sorts of other things that happen that make life miserable— broken marriages, ruined friendships, tricked by a mortgage lending scandal, caught off-guard by an economic bust, surprised by a technological accident, deceived by a pyramid sales scheme or a telemarketing fraud, fall for religious fanaticism, psychic scams, etc. All sorts of unpleasant, and even disastrous, things happen when we fail to effectively think through things or do effective information processing.

Now the good news is that *the way you've been thinking up until now* does not have to continue to govern the way you think. You can change your mind, you can renew your mind, you can get a cognitive make-over and get upgrades on all of your current thinking styles and patterns. And it is not as difficult as it might seem at first glance. It is what we do in NLP. It is what we do in Neuro-Semantics and especially in Meta-States. It is our speciality.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #6**  
**January 24, 2019**

## **BIASES ALIVE!**

### **The Media's Need for a Cognitive Make-Over**

Two new reports this past week — each one provide a vivid demonstration that News Media *bias is full alive and thriving*. Both are examples of news reports which, in the end, turned out to be fake news. In each case, information was taken *out of context* and whenever that happens— information taken out of context is *pretext*.

The first was the BuzzFeed report announcing that the President directed his lawyer Michael Cohen to lie. When some unnamed person leaked that, the new media went crazy presenting it over and over using it to call for impeachment (that seemed to be their desired agenda). Of course, no information was given as to when or where or any detail about such. Then in a very rare move, Mueller's Special Counsel (from whom the alleged allegations were leaked) immediately sent out a special message saying that that report was not accurate.

“BuzzFeed's description of specific statements to the Special Counsel's Office, and characterization of documents and testimony obtained by this office, regarding Michael Cohen's Congressional testimony are not accurate.”

The news was fake. While almost every news organization ran with it and treated it as real, none could corroborate it. So when there was no corroborating evidence, most news outlets dropped the story. I don't recall that anyone apologized for jumping the gun or presenting false information. It was as if they got a tidbit that they thought they could blow up into a devastating story against the President only to later find out it that they did not. Just today I heard National Public Radio report about it again. They said that Mueller's office of the special counsel said that “disagreed with some elements of the article.” Yet that's pretty sloppy reporting given that's not what Mueller said. He said the testimony *was not accurate*.

The second report was about the video that went viral over the weekend at the Lincoln Monument. Some young teenagers were in Washington DC for the March for Life and were encountered by some other groups. When someone from the news media got a picture of one young man (Nick Sandmann) face to face with an American Indian (Nathan Phillips) who was beating a drum— his conclusion was “This is disrespect.” And it went viral. Then it became a case of racism!

But yet again, the news media jumped the gun. Fortunately there were videos of the entire incident and it so happened that the young man did not confront, intimidate, or even approach the native American. It was the other way around. The man beating the drum was the person who walked toward the young men. And instead of the teenagers from the Covington Catholic High School calling names and insulting, it was the other groups, the Black Hebrew Israelites group

who were cussing and yelling. All the young man Nick Sandman did was stand still and smile. He said in an interview that he figured if he was calm, smiling and not reacting at all, it would calm things. The initial story was unquestionably debunked by the evidence of the full video. There you can see the native American approaching the group of boys.

*Biases prevent thinking.* When you have pre-judged a person or situation— you jump the gun and react. You don't patiently gather facts first and face them whether you like them or not. In biases people adjust facts to fit their biases. News people should think— facts first, evidence first, then conclusions. But all too often they put their opinions first and then doctor the facts to make it look like the case.

Second, after the evidence of the facts came in— the Media people for the most part have refused to apologize for their initial attacks. They not only did not apologize, but they refuse to. Apparently they have an agenda, and their agenda thinking (to wit, prejudice) trumps the facts. So they are not *thinking*— they are propagandizing with their broadcasts and newspaper reports.

Now at least one CNN report kind of apologized. CNN's S.E. Cupp wrote that she wished she had the fuller picture before weighing in. Yes, really! That would be nice to slow down the reactionary response and *think first*. Apparently, some critics have quietly deleted their criticism from social media without offering an explanation or apology. Others instead of thinking, have kept on trying to defend their rush to judgment instead of simply admitting they over-reached and over-reacted.

**I think it's time that the News Media outlets get a *Cognitive Make-Over***— the way they are currently so quick to jump to conclusions, over-exaggerate anything that they can frame as dramatic, presently highly biased reports, and not accept responsibility is a big source of cultural semantic pathology.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #7**  
**January 24, 2019**

## THINKING FOR A CHANGE

I didn't know it until I began studying *thinking* in earnest. I began that study after completing the book on creativity (*Creative Solutions*, 2017). For years, I had been presenting the workshop on *Creativity & Innovation*—the third module in the Self-Actualization Diploma series. Since 2007 that has been one of my favorite trainings because of its focus on problem-solving. I especially liked it because of the way the four critical factors of problem-solving came together to form a united structure. Namely, outcome, problem, solution, innovation.

Prior to that I had never seen the relationship between these four phenomenon. I always thought of them as distinct and separate. Then I realized that you can't have a "problem" without an outcome. If you don't have an outcome—something you want that you do not currently have, then you do not have a problem. Problems arise when you select a goal as a desired outcome. A problem is the distance from *now* to *then* (present state to desired state). So a solution solves that gap, that difference. It solves the block, obstacle, or lack of resource. But then, just because you have a solution does not necessarily mean that you should innovate it. It may involve too much time and too much money. It may be unecological for your health, relationships, etc.

All of that was actually a study of *thinking*—how we *think* (or don't think) about facing some aspect of reality to get what we want and to deal with the constraints, restraints, and challenges involved in making it happen. What I also found in presenting the *Creativity and Innovation workshop* dozens of times, mostly to specific divisions within organizations, is that most people do not think very clearly when it comes to problem-solving. Even people in R&D departments had significant problems to clearly sort out the real problem from the many forms of pseudo-problems (symptoms, consequences, contributing factors, riddles, etc.). And that's why I decided to look further and deeper into critical thinking.

Many, many years previously, for a short period of time, I studied critical thinking. A local college asked me to design a short course on critical thinking (which I did). As soon as I completed that, I moved on. More recently, in revisiting the field of Critical Thinking I discovered that there had been a lot of new developments and new models, I also discovered something that surprised me—namely, *no one had ever in the past 40 years applied NLP to Critical Thinking*. I read dozens upon dozens of books and looked into multiple programs and *not a single person* so much as quoted the Meta-Model as a critical thinking tool.

So that's what I did in *Executive Thinking* (2018). It was (and is) the first and only NLP book that specifically addresses the subject of critical thinking—that is, cognitive biases, fallacies, and distortions. And while in many fields people use NLP without giving it credit or quoting sources, even this has not happened in the field of Critical Thinking. Why no one else ever

thought of applying the Meta-Model to Critical Thinking or why not a single theorist or writer in Critical Thinking ever knew about or used the Meta-Model, I don't know. All I knew was that it was time!

What the Meta-Model does *in terms of critical thinking* is that it provides a very practical and effective way to handle the vagueness and ambiguity of language. And given that we mostly *think* in language and words—the critical thinking skill of understanding how language works and how to use it with precision is a most foundational skill. That's what the Meta-Model offers. In several ways it offers you a way to distinguish your words as your mental maps *about* things from the external reality (territory) that you want to navigate.

Using the Meta-Model, you learn to *representationally track words to your internal mental movie* (see *Communication Magic*, 2001). That skill depends on you distinguishing empirical (sensory-based) words from evaluative language. If you can't make a picture in your mind of what a word *refers to* then you ask more questions. You ask, "Specifically where, when, what, who, which, etc.?" You index specifics that allows you to extensionalize your meanings (Korzybski). Important? Here's what the developers said about it originally:

"The Meta-Model is ... the foundation of everything we do. Without it, and without systematic control over it, you will do everything we teach you sloppily. The difference between the people who do the things that we teach *well* and those who don't, are people have control over the Meta-Model. It is *literally* the foundation of everything we do. You can be b right and witty and sharp and make the most complex metaphor in the world, but if you can't gather information well, both internally and externally, you won't know what to do. The Meta-Model questions are the ones that really give you the appropriate information immediately. It's a great tool for that. ... It's really important to understand that most people are very chaotically organized on the inside."  
"By not having the Meta-Model responses systematically wired in, people get stuck. One of the things we noticed about Sal Minuchin, Virginia Satir, Milton Erickson, and Fritz Perls is that they intuitively had many of those twelve questions in the Meta-Model wired in." (*Frogs into Princes*, 1979, pp. 71, 77)

If you think sloppily, you talk in sloppy and vague ways. The cure? Take a 30-minute dose of the Meta-Model daily for 90 days. I will do a mind good.



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #8**  
**February 4, 2019**

## **THINKING**

### **THE ULTIMATE LEVERAGE POINT**

A long time ago (or so it seems) I entered into the field of psychotherapy. In the 1970s I began a search to understand human nature—my own and others. Not knowing any better I began with Sigmund Freud and read everything he wrote. That led me to Alfred Adler and all of his writings and from there I began dipping into Jung and many, many others. I liked Adlerian psychology best. That was the 1970s and Transactional Analysis was the new big thing— so I read extensively in TA as well as attended various TA conferences and trainings. The leverage point of change and the possibility of renewal in psychoanalysis and its many divergent forms was “Where Id is, let ego be.” To achieve that there was dream analysis, uncensored thought expression, exploration into unconscious connections, etc. A basic idea was that by *understanding* what happened and why, one could be cured. And that was valid— to a limited degree.

In the early 1980s as I was working on my first book on emotions, I came across RET and Cognitive Psychology. That opened up a new leverage point for change— to *what* people were thinking. That shifted the problem to beliefs— limiting beliefs, toxic beliefs, misunderstandings, cognitive distortions. And the primary means for dealing with this was *arguing* against the belief and/or challenging the cognitive distortions. That was a significant step forward. The leverage point changed. It was no longer *understanding the past*, it was *what* you are thinking today. The *content* of your thinking— that’s the problem. And that also was valid— but again, only to a limited degree. It is true that sometimes getting better information and more updated information is the answer.

When I discovered NLP in 1986, NLP filled in the details of the Cognitive Psychology model as it gave the details of thoughts— the representational systems (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.) and the meta-representation system (language). Now I had more precision in getting to the leverage points for change. It is not only *what* a person thinks, but also *how* a person thinks. The problem may be *how* you are representing something. Change that, and everything changes. And this is also valid— to a much greater degree.

But there was also a problem in that—it does not address everything that needs addressing. By highlighting the importance of *structure*, NLP (in the hands of many people) dropped the importance of *content* altogether. They wanted no content at all. A big mistake. Sometimes ... the problem is content, and not structure. If you believe a false and erroneous idea— a cognitive fallacy— you have a problem and merely changing its form (structure) will not fix that.

NLP began fixing this with the discovery of Meta-Programs— *thinking patterns*. Sometimes a human problem arises from the *content filter* that a person is using. I then contributed to the NLP model when I modeled the structure of self-reflexive consciousness because this highlighted the structural role of the relationship of thought-upon-thought which creates higher level frames of mind (like meta-programs). And with this the leverage point for transformational change became more balanced—the combination of *what* and *how* a person thinks.

All of this highlights the ultimate leverage point for transformative change— *thinking*. Thinking itself is the ultimate human phenomenon that creates our experiences, our emotions, our mental models of the world, our communications, our beliefs, understandings, decisions, memories, expectations, future anticipations, etc. This goes back to the most ancient of wisdom:

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” Proverbs 23:7.

"If you are pained by an external thing, it is not this thing that disturbs you—but your judgment about it." (Marcus Aurelius, *The Meditations*, 121-180 A.D.).

“Man is not disturbed by things, but by his interpretation of things.” (Marcus Aurelius)

“The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing their inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.” (William James)

Yet *thinking* is much more than just representation. That is but one form of *thinking*. There is also considering, questioning, doubting, choosing, selecting, foregrounding, believing, understanding, concluding, framing, meaning-making, discerning, imagining, etc. Why is this? *Because thinking is stratified — thinking comes in layers*. That’s why all thinking is not the same. What we call “thinking” takes many different forms as it occurs at different logical levels.

As *the* leverage point for change, *thinking* includes both what you are thinking and how you are thinking. This now provides a much fuller description of the leverage point for renewing your mind. It begins with *awareness* (“Where Id is, let ego be.”) so that you develop sufficient *mindfulness* to take charge of your life. Next you become mindful of *the content* of your consciousness— what you are thinking. And as you do, becoming aware of *the structure* of your consciousness— how you are thinking.

For further reading:

*Executive Thinking* (2018)

*Winning the Inner Game* (2007)

*Neuro-Semantics* (2012)

From: L. Michael Hall  
2019 Neurons #9  
Feb. 11, 2019

## WHEN THINKING GETS OUT OF CONTROL

Just as a person can get out of control, so can thinking. *Thinking can get out of control.* Nor is that all that uncommon. It may happen to you, or someone you love, at almost any time. What triggers it? All that's needed is a state of fear. Get into a state of panic and your thinking will get out of control. So also with any intense experience of fear, anger, excitement, lust, etc. Almost any *very strong and intense emotional state* will do it. Then, instead of calmly and rationally thinking something through— we jump to conclusions, over-generalize, awfulize, catastrophize, personalize, etc. Suddenly our thinking regresses to the cognitive distortions.

When we are threatened, or in a state of fear, we commonly fall back to the thinking patterns of childhood (the cognitive distortions). That's because the emotional side of our thinking is prevailing rather than the rational side of our thinking. Threat, danger, overload — these are the things that trigger the lower functions of our brain to be activated. That's when we go into the flight—flight—freeze response of the “general arousal syndrome.” Then blood is withdrawn from brain and stomach and sent to the larger muscle groups preparing us for a more fundamental survival response.

No wonder we can't effectively *think* and especially *calmly think through* an issue. We're definitely in the wrong state for doing that. If you want to do your best thinking— you'll need to reduce the sense of threat and/or danger. You have got to step out of reacting so that you can consciously respond.

Now when it comes to *your thinking getting out of control*, you can easily recognize that state or experience. You or another person becomes defensive and argumentative. You begin speaking in over-generalized ways saying that things *always* happen, *no one* cares, *everybody* is against you, etc. When thinking gets out of control, people stop being reasonable. They are not only emotional, they are *overly* emotional. If they were merely emotional, that would be fine and it would be healthy. It is when we get *overly emotional* that we then have a problem doing our best thinking.

At that point you cannot reason with them. They are too agitated, upset, and irritable to think anything through. Accordingly, you cannot have a healthy disagreement. They are quick to demonize and moralize. The other side is not just wrong, they are bad. Evil. The issue is not just a different point of view, it is immoral. Now they are thinking and talking in stereotypical ways so that they no longer treat people as individuals, but as categories. That allows them to more easily dismiss what they say because “those people” would say that!

Now does any of this sounds like the way politicians, news commentators, and others on television and radio commonly talk? Dahhh! It is the way that most of them constantly talk! So, yes, of course. Now while I suppose it keeps the audience engaged in a similar way to how a sporting event keeps people engaged, it sets up things as a battle. “Who’s ahead? Who’s going to win?” It doesn’t really help people to think better, understand a problem, or solve an actual problem.

The good news is that you can also tell when thinking is under control. Then, when someone makes a good point, the opposing side will acknowledge it and say, “That’s a good point.” “Fair enough, I’ll give you that. That makes sense.” But when was the last time you heard that from a politician? It certainly doesn’t seem to happen very often by my count.

Anyone whose thinking gets out-of-control from time to time probably needs a cognitive make-over. The issue is not only a matter of defusing yourself or someone else, the problem is deeper. It goes to the meta-cognitive capacity to recognize, monitor, and regulate one’s thinking itself. How about yourself? Would you like a cognitive make-over?

For further reading:

*Executive Thinking* (2018)

*Winning the Inner Game* (2007)

*Neuro-Semantics* (2012)

*Defusing Hotheads*, a training manual, and a small booklet.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #10**  
**February 18, 2019**

## **THINKING: FIXED AND GROWTH**

There are many, many ways to think about *thinking*. Some years ago Carol Dweck introduced the growth—fixed mindset distinctions. These “mindsets,” as she called them, were two different styles or patterns of *thinking*. While her area of application was, to a great extent, education and how students think about some of the components of learning, she described her research of some three decades as a systematic approach to answering the question:

“Why do some people achieve their potentials while other equally talented people do not?”

Her final conclusion was that the answer did *not* lie in ability, but in the mindset that people operated from. One mindset or thinking style looked at personal ability as something inherent (a given) and needs to be demonstrated. The other thinking style viewed personal ability as something that could be developed. It was not a given, it was a potential.

### **Contrasting the Fixed and Growth Thinking Patterns**

In the NLP meta-programs this is the Aristotelian (static) thinking pattern and the Systemic thinking pattern (Meta-Program #8). Do you see the world as static— permanent, solid, fixed, or do you see it as dynamic, fluid, changing. Do you think in terms of Either/Or or Both/And?

If you have the fixed thinking or mindset, your way of thinking about intelligence, challenges, obstacles, criticism, and the success of others seriously interferes with your ability to handle the everyday challenges of life—both at home and at work.

*You view intelligence as static.* This leads to a desire to look smart and to avoid challenges because a challenge might question or undermine your intelligence. You believe “This is the way I am.” Because a challenge could be difficult and because success is not assured, rather than risk failing, a fixed thinker avoids challenges. You stick to what you know you can do well.

*You view obstacles as things to avoid.* If a challenge is something that you can decide to do, then an obstacle would be *an external force* that gets in your way. And if things are fixed, then your effort will not really make a difference. It is useless or worse. Your attitude becomes, “What’s the point of working hard and exerting effort if it doesn’t make a difference?” With this thinking pattern you see effort as an unpleasant experience that doesn’t pay any real dividends. You then think that the best thing to do is to avoid it!

*You see criticism as negative and hurtful.* With the fixed thinking pattern you hear criticism of behavior or skills as criticism of *you* as a person. This personalizing then

discourages you so that you do not even want to hear it. After all, things are fixed and they are the way they are.

*You see the success of others as threatening.* You believe that, “The success of others makes me look bad.” To defend against this, as the fixed thinker you try to convince yourself that the other’s success was by luck, who they knew, etc. You do your best to explain it away. That’s because you interpret the success of others as diminishing you. Therefore you easily fall victim to jealous and envy.

Those with the growth mindset or thinking pattern sees their own skills and abilities as open to change and development. Neither their intelligence, competencies, nor future is fixed. This way of thinking enables you to see things in an entirely different way.

*You see intelligence as something that can be improved and developed.* This leads you to want to learn and to embrace challenges. You think, “The brain is like a muscle that can be trained.”

*You see challenge as a means for improvement.* Therefore you embrace challenges as that which moves you out of your comfort zone as you step up to the next level of development.

*You see a set-back or obstacle as a challenge.* An external obstacle is just something to deal with and conquer, not something to give in to. You distinguish between yourself as a person and what you do. Person and behavior are two very different phenomena.

*You see effort as the means to success.* For you, effort is the key for growing and developing. You think that it is the quality of effort that makes the difference and so you fully embrace effort.

*You hear criticism as a source of useful information.* Because criticism is not about you as a person, but what you do or the expression of a skill — you treat it as holding valuable information which you can use to get better. You know that others can often see and recognize what you may be blind to.

*You celebrate the success of others as a source of inspiration and information.* As others succeed, as a growth thinker, you use that to motivate yourself to go for it as well. It provides information about how to do it and inspiration that it can be done.

Because how you think makes a big difference in your life, *fixed thinkers need a cognitive make-over.* That’s because, with a static cognitive map— change becomes a threat and to be corrected becomes an existential threat to your very being.

For further reading:

*Executive Thinking* (2018)

*Winning the Inner Game* (2007)

*Neuro-Semantics* (2012)

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #11**  
**February 25, 2019**

## **FAST AND SLOW THINKING**

An excellent book on cognitive illusions and biases is Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). On the surface the book is about economics and the economic theory that Kahneman, along with Amos Tversky, created—Prospect Theory. Yet there is much more in the book than that— primarily the application of *a particular psychology of thinking*. And this particular psychology of thinking explains why we humans find it difficult to think statistically and why we over-rely on our associative meanings, intuitions, and are so susceptible to numerous cognitive illusions and biases.

Kahneman begins the book by distinguishing *two modes of thinking* which he designates as *system 1* and *system 2*.

*System 1*—thinking automatically and quickly with little effort. It is not under voluntary control. It's your first thoughts. It's you at your primary level of experience.

*System 2*—thinking requires conscious attention, is effortful, and is associated with focus, concentration, choice, agency (responsibility). It is your second thoughts. It's you at your meta level of experience.

In terms of *Executive Thinking* and getting your own *Cognitive Make-Over*, in *system-1* you are not actually “thinking,” you are *reacting* according to your programs. You are on automatic. It is only when you engage system-2 that you are *thinking*. I have diagramed this in the training manual as a “thinking” continuum which separates these two dimensions— distinguishing when you are *not* thinking and when you truly are *thinking*.

Now *fast thinking* is your glory and your agony. It offers so much— a way to simplify the world, create coherent stories that raise confidence, detect patterns (even when there is none, p. 115) and get you to naively trust your intuitions. It's easy, it's comfortable, it feels good. No wonder fast thinking is very seductive and is also the source of flawed understandings, inadequate decisions, and misunderstandings. Here is a warning—with its biases, it is filled with systemic errors. So beware of your first thoughts! Those *fast* thoughts coming into your mind does not indicate that you are actually thinking— you are mainly reacting from whatever belief programs, understanding programs, etc. that you have received.

It's seductive. You, like me, are easily seduced by the fast thinking of system-1. After all, with it you experience a world that is more tidy, simple, predictable, and coherent than it really is. This leads you to feeling over-confident regarding whatever you are *used to thinking* (what we call your comfort zone). This explains why some people are so resistant to change— they want to live in a tidy little world that demands little mental effort. “System-1 understands sentences by trying to make them true...” (122). Beware! What you *have thought* are products of a younger

self with less experience than you have now and may be thoughts that have outlived their usefulness.

*The slow thinking of system-2 is very different.* In this kind of thinking you proceed through a sequence of steps very deliberately and that requires the effort of attention. However, as Kahneman constantly warns, we have a limited budget of attention so expending mental effort in *thinking* is costly. That's why it is easier to not-think. He notes that "a coherent train of thinking requires discipline" (p. 40). Yet system-2 is capable of a more systematic and careful approach and is the basis of science, intelligence, discovery, mindfulness, and wisdom. System-2 can manage the systemic errors of system-1 so that you do not fall victim to the built-in biases. Or, as we say in Neuro-Semantics, you can best manage and govern your primary levels via your meta-levels. That's where you set your understanding and belief frames.

Your system-1 fast thinking sets you up to be gullible and biased to believe (p. 81) as you are naturally prone to construct the best story possible about what happens to you (p. 85). This is the basis of the narrative bias that we all suffer from— if you can create a coherent story about something, that will suffice to convince you. It is not truth or accuracy that convinces us— it is coherence and a good story. That should give us all pause—given *the stories* that the media are constantly creating for us, often as with the Chicago story the last two weeks, jumping to conclusions before the facts were in.

For this reason *system-1* tends to just ignore or eliminate random events which do not lend themselves to explanation. They do not fit a tidy predictable world. That's why the presence of luck and probability are difficult concepts for us to fully understand and incorporate into our thinking and reasoning about things. It makes statistical thinking difficult.

In terms of doubting, that's *system-2's* priority. "System-1 is not prone to doubt. It suppresses ambiguity and spontaneously constructs stories that are as coherent as possible." (114). It is system-2 that's in charge of doubting and un-believing (81). And "sustaining doubt is harder work than sliding into certainty." (114). Yet *doubting* and *questioning* lies at the essence of *thinking*. It is the doubting questions of the Meta-Model that enables you to be more precise in your communications. It is the doubting-questions that gives you a chance to have *a second thought* before you jump into things, merely reacting. It is the ability to doubtfully-question that makes you a great critical thinker so that you can activate the executive functions in your brain.

Fast or slow thinking— we need them both. We need them for different reasons and purposes. Yet without *awareness* of this distinction— without a meta-awareness (a meta-state) about this, you don't even have a choice. And choice is one of your highest executive functions.

For more on this from Neuro-Semantics:

*Executive Thinking* (2018)

*Meta-States* (2012)

*Cognitive Make-Over Training*



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #12**  
**March 4, 2019**

## **THINK SLOW TO THINK FAST**

I wrote about Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011) in the last Neurons as an excellent source for understanding the basic cognitive biases. Kahneman in that book also introduces the idea of *two modes of thinking*. Both of them are necessary, yet each one has its own specialities.

In *System-1 fast thinking* you operate automatically and quickly, with little effort. Your thinking is highly sensitive to impressions, feelings, and inclinations (intuitions). You create coherent patterns of ideas from associative memory, quickly infer causes and intentions, neglect ambiguity, suppress doubt, and you are biased to believe, exaggerate emotional consistency, deal only with what easily comes to mind, substitute easier questions for difficult ones, etc. (p. 105).

As such, while *System-1* is easy and effortless, it sets you up for mind-reading and cause-effect mistakes, over-reacting, cognitive biases and cognitive distortions. Yet once you have expended effort and something thought-through and come to some conclusions (beliefs, decisions, identity, permissions, etc.), system-1 carries out those programs quickly and automatically. It is run by the lower levels of the brain.

In *System-2 slow thinking* you operate consciously and slowly and to do so requires effort. That's why to be thoughtful induces a cognitive strain on your mental system requiring attention, focus, concentration, choosing, etc. You establish beliefs and understandings, make choices, take over when things get difficult, with it you can monitor system-1, doubt, un-believe, can reset expectations of system-1, and surge with conscious attention to deal with surprises.

As the executive functions of the brain, *System-2* gives you the ability to do *executive thinking*. It is here that you attend, monitor, notice, choose, decide, etc. You become your own personal executive, making the executive decisions about what you believe, who you are, where you're going, the values you live, etc. This is effortful. It requires discipline and via cognitive strain and effort, you build up programs that best suit you—which are most ecological for you.

Now because your brain has both lower and higher functions, and because you need to keep translating between the dynamic, fluid representations of the lower brain functions and the more static, permanent higher brain functions (Korzybski, 1933)— *you need both systems*. You need both systems in good communication with each other. In fact, the meta-capacity of translating up and down is precisely what enables you to keep learning and updating your programs thereby making your responses most appropriate and effective.

Now to do that, you also need to *go slow*— do your mental work of thinking things through, thinking about your thinking (meta-cognition)— so that you can *go fast*. Going fast at the primary level in an effective and accurate way is what the experts do and what we want to model. They have programmed themselves slowly over the years in a given domain (chess masters, musicians, physicists, mathematicians, athletes, etc.)— the ten-year rule of Anders Ericksson— so that now they can very quickly (intuitively) function in their domain with ease, comfort, and precision.

Today the experts go fast because they have gone slow. This is also true for you! Think about something that today you can do very rapidly with accuracy and precision. Think learning to type on a keyboard, riding a bike, playing tennis or chess, etc. Whatever that is, you did not begin that way. Nor did it develop quickly. You engaged in thoroughly studying, practicing, and adjusting with feedback until today you can *go fast*.

How does human expertise in any area develop? First comes the slow deliberate thinking by which you come to understand something. You read slowly and extensively, forget speed reading. Get James W. Sire's book, *How to Read Slowly* (1978). Talk out what you learn with friends. Try to teach it to someone. Do something about what you have read. Practice. Get feedback. Then if you keep it up for ten years, you can reach a level of quick response in a complex context. How is your integration of both fast and slow thinking? For many, this is one area wherein people need a cognitive make-over.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #13**  
**March 11, 2019**

## **ARE YOUR META-COGNITIVE POWERS WIMPY?**

There is “thinking,” and then there is *real* thinking. Most thinking is System-1 thinking— *the fast thinking* of Kahneman which is automatic, easy, inevitable, and without effort. You do this kind of “thinking” whether you want to or not. It operates from the lower levels and functions of your brain. Here you are on automatic. Kahneman says that *real thinking involves cognitive effort*, even strain. It is the kind of thinking that requires choice and intention. So Daniel Kahneman also notes that when you opt for the path of least resistance, you are actually let your meta-cognitive powers go wimp. When I read that— I got several ideas about wimpy meta-cognitive powers.

Now your *meta-cognitive powers* are your higher executive thinking powers— considering, questioning, exploring, doubting, explaining, reasoning, creating, inventing, synthesizing, systematizing, etc. These are your powers or functions above and about other cognitive powers.

1) *Wimpy meta-cognitive powers means you are highly limited in “running your own brain.”* To “run your own brain” you have to “go meta” to your thinking and to your emoting. You have to transcend the primary state so that you can observe your thinking, monitor your thinking, learn about the way you think, the ecology of your thoughts, meta-model your linguistic expressions, etc. When you can do all of that, then you can choose the best thoughts and beliefs.

2) *Wimpy meta-cognitive powers means you struggle to govern your attentions with your intentions.* At the primary state these are your attentions— what you pay attention to and unless you *set* higher intentions, you will live attentionally. Then you will be a pawn of social media, of advertisements, of TV, of political correctness, etc.

3) *Wimpy meta-cognitive powers means you will struggle in making high quality decisions.* The only “decisions” at the primary state of *fast thinking* is your automatic programs— pleasure, short-term values, what looks good, etc. To truly *decide* and to be an informed and skilled decision maker, you have to access your conative powers— which are part of meta-cognition.

4) *Wimpy meta-cognitive powers means you probably struggle with your sense of self, personhood, and “being.”* A rich, robust, and strong sense of self arises as a concept that you build with your best thinking. What’s automatic are the programs you experienced from your parents and peer groups. And that probably means that you have constructed a *conditional self-value*, one dependent on various things.

5) *Wimpy meta-cognitive powers means you avoid real thinking, and default to what others have thought, and to being politically correct.* This describes the life of a slave, not a free person. You are defaulting to the easy and fast thinking. To get approval.

6) *Wimpy meta-cognitive powers may mean you fear real thinking.* And why would you fear thinking? Because you don't know what it will bring up, where it will take you. So you opt for that status quo and to keep confirming your present biases. Without developing your meta-cognitive powers, you may even fear thinking. "You better be careful, you think too much!"

Your executive thinking (which you can develop as skills) are those that arise in your neo-cortex and in your pre-frontal lobes. These are the powers that enable you to be executive of your own life. Without developing these, you are a pawn, a worker in your own factory, a non-voting member of your union, a slave on your own plantation, a citizen of a country without a government, a choir member without a conductor. Now let's say that you discover that your meta-cognitive powers are wimpy, under-developed, now what? Get a cognitive make-over. Discover your executive thinking patterns and develop them.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #14**  
**March 18, 2019**

## **THINGS ARE NOT AS BAD AS YOU THINK**

After several people recommended that I read a fairly new book on cognitive biases, I read *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World— and Why Things are Better Than You Think* (2018) by Hans Rosling. It is a good read. It is about how thinking goes wrong and specifically how so much of our thinking *about the world* is wrong. That's because of the availability bias. We know *what* we know due to what the media offers us via the news, journals, TV shows, movies, etc.

It's also because of several biases that drive the media generally— our bias for the negative, the fearful, the bad, the dramatic, the sensational, etc. and given the media, most people think that the world is in really bad shape. Yet it is not.

“Step-by-step, year-by-year, the world is improving. Not on every single measure every single year, but as a rule. Though the world faces huge challenges, we have made tremendous progress. This is the fact-based worldview.” (p. 13)

Now to demonstrate that Rosling quotes the numbers— the numbers that originate by the United Nations and other international organizations. The problem Rosling says is that “our brains often jump to swift conclusions without much thinking.” He says that we have “dramatic instincts” by which we give meaning to things and which accounts for our attraction to *dramatic stories*. From there he identifies various mechanisms (he calls them “instincts”) that trick our brains to draw false conclusions. I have here labeled them as biases (to not confuse how the word instinct is typically used).

“But we need to control our *drama* intake. Uncontrolled, our appetite for the dramatic goes too far, prevents us from seeing the world as it is...” (p. 15)

The first one that he addresses is the “gap instinct” which is driven by *binary thinking* which you probably know as either-or thinking, black-or-white thinking. It seems that we humans love to dichotomize: good versus bad; heroes versus villains, rich versus poor. That's why we tend to divide the world in two on a great many issues. And whereas—

“... the world used to be divided into two but isn't any longer. Today, most people are in the middle. There's *no gap* between the West and the rest, between developed and developing, between rich and poor.” (p. 27)

He asks, “of the world population, what percentage lives in low-income countries?” The majority suggests the answer was 50 center or more, the average guess was 59%. The real figure is 9 percent (p. 30). That led him to divide the world population of 2017 into four levels.

“Today the vast majority of people are spread out in the middle across levels 2 and 3, with the same range of standards of living as people had in Western Europe and North America in the 1950s.”

He next identifies *the “negativity” bias*— our tendency to notice *the bad* more than the good. Extreme poverty rate (defined as living on Level I, on less than \$2 a day) has moved from 85% (most of humanity) in 1800 to 9% in 2017 (page. 52). And in the “last 20 years extreme poverty dropped faster than ever in world history.” This negativity bias feeds the media. Media needs the drama that negative stories create to sell newspapers and news broadcasts.

Next is *the fear bias*. “When we are afraid, we do not see clearly. ... Critical thinking is always difficult, but it’s almost impossible when we are scared. There’s no room for facts when our minds are occupied by fear.” (p. 103). The image of a dangerous world has never been broadcasted more effectively than it is now. Journalists have done an incredible job in reporting every disaster as if it were the worst ever. As a result, the world seems terribly dangerous and getting worse! Yet paradoxically, “the world has never been less violent and more safe.” (p. 107). Today there are far, far less annual deaths from disasters than ever before. It was 453 per million in 1920, today it is 10 (p. 110).

“In 2016 a total of 40 million commercial passenger flights landed safely ... Only ten ended in fatal accidents.” (112)

“Today, conflicts and fatalities from conflicts are at a record low. I have lived through the most peaceful decades in human history. Watching the news, with its never-ending flow of horrifying images, it is almost impossible to believe that.” (113).

*The size bias* refers to the “instinctive urge to look at a lonely number and misjudge its importance.” Rosling illustrates this with the number 4.2 million— the number of babies who died last year. Alone that is terrible. But if you compare the number with itself at different times, it looks very different. In 2015 it was 4.4 and in 1950 it was 14.4 million (131).

*The generalization bias*. “Everyone automatically categorizes and generalizes all the time. Unconsciously.” (146). While it is necessary and useful to generalize, it can also be very distortive of one’s perspective. “Wrong generalizations are mind-blockers for all kinds of understanding.” The challenge is to be aware when you are generalizing, and to be conscious of the categories that you create and use. Then as a critical thinker, to question the categories.

*The destiny bias*. This is “the idea that innate characteristics determine the destinies of people, countries, religions, or cultures. ... things are the way they are ... and will never change.” (p. 167). It may have once made sense when people lived in circumstances that didn’t change much. But not today. Seeing things as *not* changing operates today as a blinder that prevents seeing the need to update our knowledge. Yet how often we say things like: “He won’t change.” “The politics of Africa won’t change.” “That organization won’t change.”

*The single perspective bias*. Simple ideas are attractive and we all love the moment that a single idea seems “the key” to everything. It leads to wanting problems to have a single cause which then blind us to multiple causation and systemic causation.

*The blame bias* — the urge to “find a clear, simple reason for why something bad happened.” (206). Find the guilty party! The problem with finding “the bad guy,” is that when you do, you usually *stop thinking*. You assume that you are done with *thinking*, and you can move on. Yet almost everything is more complicated than that! Stop looking for villains and keep looking for causes and contributing factors.

“If you really want to change the world, you have to understand how it actually works and forget about punching anyone in the face.” (p. 221)

“Reflecting reality is not something the media can be expected to do. You should not expect the media to provide you with a fact-based worldview ...” (212).

Systemic factors encourage them to produce skewed and over-dramatic news.

*The urgency bias* is the urge to do something *now, today*, or it will be too late. “This moment will never come back. Act now.” Yet when you feel the urgency to act now, *you will think less critically*, if at all. If you feel that you have to learn something *now*, slow down. Stop cramming. That’s not the best way to learn something. Urgency creates stress and stress amplifies our biases which then blocks us from critical thinking. Stress leads to poorer decisions and can numb you to a real emergency.

Reading *Factfulness* would be a good antidote for all of those cognitive biases which those in media and in politics seem so susceptible to and which they perpetuate upon us. For the most part, news and politics are two areas that play upon our natural biases the most. As such, they create more unsanity and distorted thinking, not less. And that makes them dangerous to our mental and emotional health.

The next news report that you hear— take a moment to consciously listen for drama, sensationalism, vividness, blame, personalizing, urgency, fear, etc. then believe about 10 percent of what you hear. It will do your brain good.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #15**  
**March 25, 2019**  
*Thinking Clearly About*  
*Our Economics & Politics #1*

## **CAPITALISM**

### **WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?**

Because the subject of capitalism versus socialism as both political and economic systems have been in the news a lot recently, I thought I'd address this subject. Some on the extreme of the Democratic party have been promoting Socialism thinking it offers a better way to go. I don't think it is and here's my thinking about why that is.

First of all, *what is it?* What are we talking about? The idea of capital is that people can earn and save their money and then use it to create new products or services that can expand their income. The dictionary defines it as an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than the government's.

The term itself comes from the Latin root of the word "capital" is *capitalis*, and from the proto-Indo-European word *kaput* referring to "head." Once upon a time wealth was measured by the number of head of cattle that a person had. Capital today refers to money, hence financial capital, capital which serves as a resource for investing in businesses by which you can increase your wealth.

Yet there are many versions of "capitalism," so it is not just one thing. If we put it on a continuum, we can distinguish degrees of capitalism. To the far left there is predatory capitalism and/or crony capitalism—a kind that developed back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Without any controls, it degenerated into monopolies. Those in charge seemed to have no appreciation at all of human capital and so a ruthless form of capitalism emerged which unfairly took advantage of people.

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**Predatory**

**Market-based — Conscious**

**Socialistic**

Capitalism generally refers to an economic and political system which allows the market of goods (supply) and a market of need and want (demand) to determine what an item should cost and what would be a fair price. Without too much intrusion by government and with an informed public, supply and demand has created a booming economy and the development of a very broad middle class in the US. When the government takes increasing control via regulation of the market, it becomes socialistic capitalism. The idea here is that the government knows best.



I also put Conscious capitalism in the middle — as a much more balanced and humane approach. Two books which address this subject have made the same argument that Abraham Maslow made back in the 1950s— which were made explicit in the 1960 book, *The Human Side of Enterprise* by Douglas McGregor. John Mackey and Raj Sisodia wrote *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business* (2014) and Fred Kofman wrote *Conscious Business: How to build value through Values* (2006). In addition, Maslow himself wrote a book on this subject, one with an unpronounceable title, *Eupsychian Management*. It is now available with a new title, *Maslow on management* (1998).

The point with *conscious* capitalism is that we conduct our economic and political affairs— mindfully and consciously, that is, *that we think through* what we are doing and why. In this kind of capitalism we take into consideration not only the money part of business, but also the *human* part. We consider what makes for healthy, ecological, and respectful economic relationships. Doing that calls for responsibility, awareness, feedback, ongoing adjustments, etc.

Now Socialism is also a political and economic theory of social organization. It is one which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the government. What's behind that? The assumption is that government can do a better job at deciding prices, industries, who should win, who should not, etc.

Among the problems I have with that is that it *presupposes* that we humans are a selfish race of bastards ready to take advantage of each other whenever we get the chance. That may be true of life in the jungle. But we have needs and drives *beyond* the basic needs. It *assumes* that humans are not responsible, do not want to be and, in fact, cannot be and that we still need a father or mother to tell us what to do so we don't fight over the goods.

### **Capitalism and the Modern World**

Before capitalism, the human race lived in a world of depots, dictators, strong men, kingdoms (royal families), tyrants, etc. Then no one owned anything except those at the top. Then the king or dictator or whoever was in charge decided on the economics and was the political power. Then over the years (the centuries), with the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment, the introduction of science— people overthrew the Kingdoms (or turned them into mere ceremonial entities) and became self-governing.

That, in fact, became the great American experience at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Could a people govern themselves? Seventy-years later, Abraham Lincoln framed that as the central issue in the American Civil War— could this nation govern itself, determine its own future, change the old status quo, and launch into a new era? As that was being established, so also was the idea of a free market. Men and women could freely choose what to create and could forge relationships to do that business. This was the birth of capitalism.

What resulted from that? Capitalism became the world's greatest source of wealth creation which it had ever known or experienced. The middle class was born, production expanded, entrepreneurs arose, and a century of prosperity began unlike anything previously experienced.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #16**  
**April 30, 2019**

## **HATE WILL FIND A WAY**

After two years, thirty-million dollars, CNN and other media outlets raging against the President by giving him negative reports 92 percent of the time, the Mueller Report has concluded that there was *no collusion* between the Trump Campaign and the Russian Government. That was the big news this week in the US. As a result, the report sent shock and surprise through the country. If it had been a committee of all Republicans, the report would have been highly questionable. But Mueller chose 16 Democrats instead of Republicans for the committee. Many of those Democrats were (and are) strongly pro-Hillary and anti-Trump. In fact, some on the committee deeply hate Trump.

Now writing as a psychologist, rather than as a political commentator, what interests me is *the psychology of hate* so prevalent on the left, a hatred that was not seen during Obama's presidency. Because I've spent the last two years on critical thinking, I'm particularly interested in how this epidemic of hate distorts clear thinking, how it evokes and amplifies cognitive biases, how it prevents rational thinking, and how it stops one from adjusting one's mental maps.

In studying high quality thinking— executive thinking. and presenting the Cognitive Make-Over training, I have focused primarily on how *fear* is the big block to clear thinking. You can't think clearly when you feel threatened or in danger. Obviously this is also true for any strong emotion, especially negative emotions (anger, sadness, stress, etc.). Only more recently I have begun considering how unmitigating, hate which the left has for President Trump, is distorting their thinking and their ability to think.

*Hatred*— it starts with dislike and it is stroked by anything and everything that can increase animosity. This leads a person to *look for* things to dislike and as *the need* to dislike increases, so does the *belief* that there's hidden things— secret things. This activates a self-fulfilling prophecy which is supported by the Confirmation bias. When you believe someone is bad and corrupt, you then look for indicators to prove your belief. Eventually a person caught up in hate may even develop a meta-belief — now believing in the importance of hating — hating as a value, hating as justified in a conflict, etc.

Hate as a self-organizing attractor enables people to mobilize their energies— keep them motivated. Hitler used hatred and anger to arouse support for his cause. Read *Mein Kampf* and notice how it sounds like an angry sermon of a morally outraged person. That was his persuasion strategy which he used politically to deceive the German people.

Before the delivery of the Mueller Report, I had a conversation with someone who was strongly against President Trump. I knew his politics having talked about that subject before. So I asked, “Do you *hate* President Trump?”

The person began nodding ‘yes’ while still hesitating verbally, but then said yes.

“Good. Let me ask you, if all the evidence shows that there was no collusion, will you believe it?”

“Well, there may be other evidence...”

I interrupted and reposed my question. “The supposition was that *if all evidence shows* no collusion ... what then?”

That actually shut him down. He just would not answer.

After a long pause, I said. “Well, how about this. Could you look upon him as having been falsely accused for the past two years.”

He could not.

“What would have to take place inside you so that you could give him the benefit of the doubt?”

He couldn’t think of anything.

“Wow!” I commented. “Your hate is that strong!”

“What do you mean?” he quickly asked.

“Well it seems that your hatred is so strong, it takes away your ability to be fair-minded and rational. It has somehow set an intention in you and a bias that you are not even willing to question your belief or your thinking.”

He said it was an unfair question.

I tried one more time. I presented the situation as if it were reversed so that it happened to someone on the left. But I guess he got the point because he got up and politely said goodbye. I’m sure we will talk another day.

When you have *hate as a belief, as a self-organizing attractor* in a person’s mind— it will find a way to justify itself and to filter out any information that would counter it. Hate will find a way to keep hating. The solution? Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote this:

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

“We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.”

And Will Smith added this:

“Throughout life people will make you mad, disrespect you and treat you bad. Let God deal with the things they do, cause hate in your heart will consume you too.”

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #17**  
**April 2, 2019**  
***Thinking Clearly About***  
***Our Economics & Politics #2***

## **AUTHENTIC CAPITALISM**

*"The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent vice of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries." - Winston Churchill*

“Authentic capitalism is the *only* way you can build an organization that benefits its customers, employees, investors, communities, suppliers, and the environment. .... Just as people cannot live without eating, so a business cannot live without profits, but most people don’t live to eat, and neither must businesses live just to make profits.” (p. xii)

John Mackey, Raj Sisodia *Conscious Capitalism*

What makes capitalism balanced, conscious, and authentic is that we base business not on exploitation or coercion, but on cooperation. People then exchange goods, services, and information on a voluntary basis. They exchange and engage in trade voluntarily for mutual gain which is founded on the principle of win/win. What is presupposed in this that some “leftists” seem to oppose is personal responsibility, the lack of entitlement, the need of all to contribute, etc. Again Mackey and Sisodia describe the benefits of this socially:

“Free enterprise, when combined with property rights, innovation, the rule of law, and constitutionally limited democratic government, results in societies that maximize societal prosperity and establish conditions that promote human happiness and well-being— not just for the rich but for the larger society.” (p. 4)

“Business leaders can liberate the extraordinary power of business and capitalism to create a world in which all people live lives of purpose, love, and creativity—a world of compassion, freedom, and prosperity. This is our vision of Conscious Capitalism. (8-9).

When we think through what we are doing and when we make capitalism *conscious* and *authentic*, we can create a world of compassion, freedom, and prosperity. This is noble to the extent that it elevates our lives as human being and it is heroic to the extent this system is what has and continues to lift people out of poverty.

What of the assumptions behind Socialism is that all resources should be shared fairly and equitably and we need an agency powerful enough for force this fairness. “Much of today’s animosity stems from a misconception that we need to share all resources fairly and equitably.” (Mackey, p. 17)

Business can be ethical. When it is based on voluntary exchange, then our truthfulness, honesty, and character play a role so that we can be in the market for the longer term. When a market is open to everyone who wants to participate—it provides opportunities for all. Ed Freeman wrote:

“Business is not about making as much money as possible. It is about creating value for stakeholders.”

### **Creating an Authentic Conscious Business**

How does this come about? Mackey and Sisodia argue that “You cannot have a conscious business without conscious leadership.” (p. 34). Ah, now there’s the rub for many companies! They do not have conscious leaders. Their leaders may hardly be conscious at all. If they only have one bottom-line (money) then they will be operating to the far left on the continuum and closer to predatory and crony capitalism.

Self-Actualizing leaders who are conscious and authentic have at least two and usually three bottom-lines: profit, people and purpose. That’s what I wrote about in *Unleashing Self-Actualizing Leaders and Companies*.

*Profit:* The business has to be profitable, making money, financially viable.

*People:* The business has to first and foremost take care of their people. All of the business occurs by and through people. Do they feel valued, respected, cared for.? Is the business a good place to work?

*Purpose:* Does the business have a purpose that people can take pride in and feel inspired by?

A self-actualizing company does not only work for the *stockholders*, it works for all *stakeholders*. That’s because it meets human needs from the bottom of hierarchy of needs to the top; from survival to the social to the level of values and higher purpose. And to do that it has to create a coaching culture— one of trust, accountability, transparency, integrity, locality, egalitarianism, fairness, personal growth, compassion, meaningfulness, etc.

This brings into the enterprise the *human* aspect. That’s because people need more than survival; they need to be recognized, to grow, to learn, to make a difference, to contribute, and to do what’s meaningful. The problem is profit-only capitalism by leaders who make money the primary purpose of business. Now given that every business revolves around customers— someone buys what is offered, then one immediate higher need is creating value for customers. And in capitalism this is where competition helps. With competition we focus on getting better, improving our products and services, innovating new things. In this way we create a demand for what a market of customers will buy. Ludwig von Mises said:

“The market system brings prosperity to those who satisfy the desires of others in the best and least expense way. Wealth can only be attained by serving the consumer.”

The point? Fred Kofman says, “Service drives the market economy, not greed.” That’s why when business is conducted with a high level of consciousness, everyone involved no longer finds a false dichotomy between ethics and business. Business must be inherently ethical if it is to succeed in the light.

Conversely, if a business produces shoddy products, or worse, harmful products, if it exploits employees, cheats suppliers— in a free enterprise that business will not succeed in the long run.

Because the business is not a responsible one and not responsible to its customers, demand for what it offers will eventually dry up either because the products are of low quality or the enterprise itself is viewed with contempt.

Business is also fundamentally about people working together. We bring people together into a business so that cooperatively they can create value together. How they work together then is a critical factor. How they experience each other and especially how they experience the management and leadership relationships. Ignore any of this (which so many leaders do) and things can get into a mess pretty quickly: conflicts, dis-engagement, thief, secrets, silo mentality, etc.

Mackey and Sisodia say that “Conscious businesses seek to eliminate fear” and that’s because fear prevents people from fully developing which, in turn, prevents organizations from realizing their potential. Fear is also deadly for creativity and innovation.

To move to mindful, conscious and authentic capitalism— *self-actualizing capitalism*, we need great purposes, inspirational meanings, honorable service to all, truth that eliminates secrets and lies, the beauty of striving for excellence, the heroic courage to step forward to be a contributing influence in the world.

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- Kofman, Fred. (2006/ 2013). *Conscious Business: How to build value through Values*. Boulder CO: Sounds True.

#### Neuro-Semantic books

- Unleashing Leaders* (2009)
- The Collaborative Leader* (2016)
- Games Business Experts Play* (2001)
- Inside-Out Persuasion* (2012)
- Political Coaching* (2015)

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #18**  
**April 8, 2019**  
*Thinking Clearly About*  
*Our Economics & Politics #3*

## **“WHO WANTS TO BE A CAPITALIST?”**

That’s what I asked when I began the Wealth Creation training in Moscow many years ago. I had been there the previous year (1998) presenting APG which was recorded and promoted. Now it was application time. What could you do with the Meta-States Model? Announcing that the training would be using NLP and Meta-States for learning how to create wealth, over 300 crowded into an auditorium. Decades of Communism meant that everybody there grew up in an economic and political system in which they learned nothing about how a free market works and how to think like a capitalist. It was a great opportunity, one that we repeated two more times.

“Here you are in this NLP Center and you have come to study and learn how to create wealth in your lives. Who here wants to be a capitalist?”

Every hand shot up. For me it was an eery transcendent moment; this American in the former Soviet Union training people in capitalism! But the moment soon passed because the strategy to create wealth starts with the process to create *internal wealth*— to be wealthy in your thoughts, emotions, understandings, ideas, creativity, relationships, etc. It is from one’s *human capital* that financial capital as well as all other capitals flow. Ultimately because wealth is inside-out, it begins with the wealth of an idea— a way to create value for others. If you have an idea for a product or service, if you would like to do something that you’re good at and love to do, then you have a beginning.

Then to make it real, start saving capital so that when you have some money saved up and when you have opportunity, you can invest it — maybe in a home, maybe in a business. If you succeed in the business, you can hire others – and then you become a job creator. You enable them to do what they do best and love.

Now the process of creating wealth requires lots of effort, thought, vision, learning, relating, getting along, structuring. It is not for the lazy or the irresponsible. It would be easier if you didn’t have to think, learn, and do. It would be easier if only someone would just give you money without any conditions. Of course, other than well-fare, that’s pretty unrealistic.

Now to survive a capitalistic system—if you don’t want to think, work, learn, etc.—you can get a job and work for someone. Then you can avoid thinking, learning, and maybe even working. You could aim to do as little as possible to keep your job(!). Or better, you could find a bureaucracy and work there until you get tenure. Then you could glide along, barely working, and never ever even considering whether you are contributing value to the organization or to anyone.

I'm a small-time capitalist. After I began saving up some extra funds so I could pay a very small down payment on a house. That's how I entered the real estate market and got into purchasing homes which I could rent. Having rented all of my adult life, I knew what that was like and felt like when it wasn't good. I knew what unthoughtful and inconsiderate landlords were like. I swore I would do it differently. So I set my goal to first of all provide the best home I could by keeping things in repair. I knew that if I provided good value for money, it would be a good win/win relationship for all. So I always kept rent below market value. I also wanted every family to feel at home, to make the house their home and so added things they wanted if that was possible. Consequently a great many ended up buying the house.

As a conscious capitalist, I always aimed for a win/win arrangement. I took the legal papers for contracting and re-wrote them in everyday language. By keeping the rent low for value, those who rented were not constantly looking for another less expensive place— their rent was a good 10% below market value. That was a win for them. What was a win for me was to have responsible persons who were taking care of things.

I also became a small-time capitalist with regard to trainings. From research and presentations, I created training programs and as others experienced the trainings, many began asking if they could train. So over the years, I worked to make it possible for others to train the material. That was, in part, how Neuro-Semantics came about. Instead of creating a franchise, “owning” the trainings, charging franchise fees, etc., I decided to create a collaborative association that would, in part, be an open source community. This enabled those who wanted to — to become trainers and make a living doing what they loved. As a conscious capitalist, wanting to become a self-actualizing capitalist, I set up a system that would serve “the larger good” rather than as a self-promotion. Their fees would not go to me, but to the community of trainers in the local institutes to help promote the trainings in that country. And the cost for using the manuals, a \$5 royalty for each manual produced.

Capitalism, as noted in the first article, is not just one thing. There are many versions and kinds, some self-promoting and cruel, some humanistic and self-actualizing.

“Patriotism is when love of your own people comes first; nationalism, when hate for people other than your own comes first.”

Charles de Gaulle



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #19**  
**April 15, 2019**

## **COGNITIVE MAKE-OVER IN BRAZIL**

I had the privilege to conduct the new Neuro-Semantic program, *Cognitive Make-over for Executive Thinking* this past week in Rio de Janeiro. As this was only my third presentation of this training, a training based on the book, *Executive Thinking*, yet different from it, I am still in the process of working out the training structure and processes. And I'm learning from those in the trainings what works, what does not, and how to make it a life-transforming experience.

One way I usually set out to discover this kind of information is simply to ask, from time to time, after we cover a process or at the end of the day: "So what will you take away from this?" "What insights have you gained?" "What difference will this make in your life back home, at the office, with your colleagues?" A common theme this time was about the very nature of thought.

"I thought I did a lot of thinking, I have discovered that I hardly actually *think* at all."

"People have often said to me that 'You think too much.' What I'm taking away is that I'm actually not *thinking* that much, and that talk is not necessarily thinking." Another, "Thinking is a lot of hard work. I've had more 'brain strain' in these three days that I had all year last year."

Along a continuum of "*thinking*" ... starting from not-thinking (being mindless) and not truly "working over an idea in your mind" and the six stages of not-thinking to the ten-stages of actually *thinking* (mindfulness), most people began realizing how little we actually think in a day's time. When I have done an assessment of myself, I estimate that I only think about 5 percent of the time. Most of the time I'm either on automatic (thinking and acting from previous learnings) or maybe in the state of "knowing" (feeling sure of what I know and not questioning it). I'm on automatic thinking when driving and in "knowing" when ordering at Starbucks(!).

For most everybody, discovering this was a new insight. So also discovering that real *thinking* means considering, questioning, and doubting. Thinking starts with what you do *not* know or understand. If you know, if you understand— then you are not thinking. You are running a previous learning or program.

I promised everyone at the beginning that they would have *brain strain* by the end of each day. The basis of my promise was contingent upon the exercises that participants would experience. And when I checked, "Did anyone experience brain strain today?" most said "yes, of course!" While there are no pain receptors in the brain itself, the brain is an organ that requires lots of blood and oxygen and because of that, when you are mentally working to get your head around

an idea, considering it this way and then that way— the effort of thinking consumes a lot of nutrients, oxygen, and blood. That's why you can feel it.

Would you like to know how I packaged or framed the cognitive make-over in Brazil? I framed it around several items.

- *First, unlearning.* What have you learned that just does not seem to *go in*? If you learn something, but then it doesn't seem to be available to you out there in the real world, could there be something in the way? Could there be an old learning blocking the new learning from going in so that it is available to you when you need it? What do you know intellectually, but do not do practically? Cognitive make-overs usually begin here— learning to *unlearn*, to release what is old and no longer relevant.
- *Second, getting out of the knowing stage.* Another big cognitive make-over for lots of people is giving up being “sure,” and “understanding,” and “certain.” These are actually *dangerous* states. They operate as part of the most essential human bias— We think we understand. The truth is that we hardly understand anything! The illusion of understanding, the delusion of certainty— this is the problem of those who are “Know-it-alls” who cannot be told anything. As a cognitive make-over, access a beginner's state of mind, a know-nothing state, an openness to new learning and re-learning is what makes a person a great learner.
- *Third, reducing reactionary states.* Lots of people, maybe even most or people, have areas wherein they are reactive. Push a button and **Pow!**, they react. There's a trigger which gets them, that rattles their cage, and that deeply disturbs them. It could be a word, a look, a tone, a gesture, etc. What is needed is a way to break these patterns so that the person can *respond* (rather than react) as the person wants and chooses. For this we had some patterns for unplugging buttons and cleaning out the system errors.
- *Fourth, the next cognitive make-over is the first step of thinking— considering.* This refers to trying on a new thought. Taking it on to see what it would be like, giving it a chance within one's mind. This is also the foundation of all listening and supporting — which, in turn, is the foundation of all healthy relationships — leading, managing, coaching, etc. The person who cannot *consider* another person's ideas has severely limited himself.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #20**  
**April 22 , 2019**  
***Thinking Clearly About***  
***Our Economics & Politics #4***

## **SUPPOSE CHILDREN RAN THE GOVERNMENT!**

While every country has a “government,” not all governments are equally effective or desirable. Historically, kingdoms and dictators have been the norm. Less than 300 years ago, *the idea of government by the governed*—the people governing themselves—arose. And that began the first modern Democracy, the United States. From there it spread all around the world.

Now the framers of the US Constitution knew one thing that seems to be missing today. Namely, to have an effective democracy *you have to have an educated populace*. You have to have people who understand democracy, how it works, a literate population which reads, studies, thinks, and who keep up with issues. You need people who can actually *think* and reason! Without a *thinking population*, you can’t have a healthy democracy.

Democracy is endangered when there are too many people who are ignorant of these things. Then they become like a mob— *wanting* whatever they want, wanting it *now*, thinking *short-term*, and not thinking in terms of the well-being of the whole population. This, however, describes the way *children think*, not adults. And when the thinking of citizens is reduced to that of *childish thinking*— you have a problem. We have a problem. That’s because childish thinking is preeminently characterized by what we call the Cognitive Distortions.

When you have non-thinking and childish thinking citizens, then not-so-ethical politicians arise who seek to get them on their side and get their votes. How? *By promising to give them more and more stuff*. They think the secret to success in getting votes is to promise to give more stuff away. It’s the Big Give-Away Strategy! This kind of thinking goes back to the days of the Romans— where the Senate satisfied the population by giving them bread and circuses. Today, many politicians seem to be operating from the assumption that “the more I can promise to give away, the more votes I’ll get.”

Now to put this childish mentality on steroids, all someone has to do is add the idea, “You *deserve* it.” In fact, to amplify that, “You are *entitled* to it and if anyone says otherwise, they are depriving you of your inheritance.” What does this do to people? If you are not a critical thinker, it puts you into a state of desire and hope. It then becomes an expectation and after that, a demand.

This is one of the aspects of socialism that some on the extreme left are opting for here in the United States. The focus is on what people *deserve* and are *entitled to*. You *deserve* a job, an

interesting job, a job that pays you very well. You *deserve* free college and university entrance. You *deserve and are entitled* to a social environment where you do not see or hear anything that conflicts with what you believe in.

This as patronizing— if you are a thinker. You recognize that it is speaking to you as if you were a needy child. Government is your fondling parent—here to protect you from adult responsibilities. Ah, yes, *responsibilities*. That seems to be the word missing today in the mouth of politicians. J.F. Kennedy’s call, “Ask *not* what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” is now really out-of-date. Who talks that way today? Yet healthy democracy needs men and women who can *think* for themselves and take responsibility for themselves.

*Now if children ran the government*, what would society be like? What would you hear in the news and from press releases?

- People deserve and are entitled to what they want, cost is not a consideration.
- The government should control what can and cannot be said, they should legislate what you can say. There should be no “freedom of speech.”
- The government should control the economy so that everyone is getting a fair share even if that means taking from the rich and giving to the poor. We should not have inequalities. And it’s the government’s job to make all things fair.

Of course, now we would have Orwell’s *1984* and *Animal Farm*.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #21**  
**April 24, 2019**  
*Home-Coming Announcement*

## **WHEN NEURO-SEMANTICISTS GET TOGETHER**

The most regular time and place that we get together every year is at Trainers' Training. Yes we also do so at the Neuro-Semantic Conferences, but that is not a regular event as is NSTT. For years, NSTT has often been like a reunion for the Neuro-Semantic community. It is when we ask everyone on the Leadership Team to do their best to come together for a leadership summit just prior to the training.

Well, this year, we are not only going to be doing it as we have always done it — but we are going to have a special day of Reunion. Why we haven't thought about doing *that* before, I don't know. But now that we have thought about it— that's what we are doing to do!

**Mariani Ng and Basian Tjong**, who are sponsoring NSTT this year have announced that **the Evening of July 18 — we are having a party.**

“It is a welcome party free for all participants, master trainers, and team leaders — and also all other Neuro-Semantic Trainers.” All are invited to come for that evening and to even stay and join us for Day 1 of *Psychology of APG*. Your only cost would be your meals. And oh yes, Meta-Coaches are also warmly welcomed to come.

This year leading out with me will be two Co-Trainers who have co-trained NSTT with me many, many times— Mandy Chai of Hong Kong/ China and David Murphy of Mexico. And along with them will be at least 9 of those well-experienced Trainers who are in the Master Trainer Track — who will be delivering the Evening Presentations.

As an international NLP community, Neuro-Semantics has been lifting up the professional and ethical standards of NLP since 1995. Since then our focus has been on collaborating, on creating collaborative partnerships, on giving credit to sources, and on applying what we present to ourselves (self-leadership).

This year's NSTT is scheduled to begin at 9 am on **July 19** and continue through the evening Graduation on **August 2**. Actually, Graduation night is another time when we often have visitors join us for the celebration and party.

- **July 19, 20 and 21 — Three days of the Psychology of APG.** Perfect for coaches and trainers to understand the psychology within the NLP and Meta-State models.
- **July 19– August 2 — 15 days for intensive training in how to be an effective Trainer.** How to get up on your feet and speak with confidence, ease, and grace. How to speak to touch the minds and hearts of your listeners. Great not only for trainers, but for anyone in a leadership or management role.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #21**  
**April 29, 2019**  
*Thinking Clearly About*  
*Economics & Politics #5*

## **HOW A MASTER PERSUADER WON THE ELECTION**

If you ever read the Dilbert Cartoons in the newspaper or seen them posted on the walls in cubicles and business offices, then you know of Scott Adams who created *Dilbert*. As a cartoonist he wrote dialogue in those cartoons exposing the non-sense and blindness of bureaucracies and organizations. Well, to my surprise, on August 13, 2015 he predicted that Donald Trump had a 98% chance of winning the election. And he is *not* a Trump supporter. Having voted Democrat for many years he even describes himself as ultraliberal (p. 4).

Now while I know of Scott Adams as a cartoonist, I did not know him as a persuader or a political pundit. Sometime during the decades of producing *Dilbert*, Scott Adams studied hypnosis, read extensively in the field of persuasion, including books on NLP. In his Appendix he refers to Anthony Robbins, *Awaken the Giant Within* and the Bandler/ Grinder book *Reframing*. And after reading the book, I would guess that he has read other NLP books. He could have even had some training in NLP for all I know. How I found out about this was from Brian van der Horst, Paris, when he mentioned Scott Adam's new book on the NLP Leadership Summit.

The book is *Win Bigly: Persuasion in a World Where Facts Don't Matter* (2017). Adams here tells the story of how he predicted that Donald Trump would win the election more than a year ahead of the election. As he documents the major events during the 2015—2016 of the two campaigns, he explains his framing of Trump as a Master Persuader and why Trump's persuasion skills convinced him that he would win (pp. 2, 6-7). Along the way he pointed out 31 sign-posts of "Persuasion Tips."

In my opinion, we can look upon *Winning Bigly* as an NLP Application book. Although he only documents NLP in the first appendix, he definitely uses NLP throughout the book. He especially notes many occasions where Trump engaged in "pacing and leading" (p. 28). He describes the individual maps that we operate from as "movies" that we invent in our minds and constantly emphasizes that they are not about facts and reality and the only value in them is as they are useful. That is, if they make us happy and better at helping us predict what will happen.

"The common worldview, shared by most humans, is that there is one objective reality, and we humans can understand that reality through a rigorous application of facts and reason. ... The only wrinkle with that worldview is that we all think we are the enlightened ones. And we assume the people who disagree with us just need better facts, and perhaps better brains..." (p. 2-3, 35, 37, 45)

“... the human mind is not equipped to understand reality in any deep way. Instead, we create little movies in our minds, and we live in those movies until events in the observable world make that impossible.” (p. 243)

“Humans only *imagine* that facts matter to our decisions. The reality is that we are inventing our own personal facts to fit the movies playing in our heads.” (247)

Adams presents himself as a persuader, a hypnotist, and political observer. He warns about the Confirmation Bias throughout the book and the power of cognitive dissonance which leads us humans to create movies and stories in our minds (p. 16). Confirmation bias is just a bug in the human operating system. “It *is* the operating system.” (p. 61). He writes about various filters that we use that cause us to mis-read things (mind-reading . p. 59). These are “not windows to reality.”

“All that matters is whether or not your filter keeps you happy and does a good job of predicting.” (p. 93).

Adams explains how the media and pollsters got it so wrong and how it set up so many people for cognitive dissonance on Election Day which then generated mass hallucinations (p. 50). He explains why Californians not only do not understand New York humor or style, but positively mis-understand it (pp. 171–172).

“Sure enough, Trump’s win set off a cluster bomb of cognitive dissonance the likes of which history rarely sees.” (p. 52)

“When ... New Yorkers laugh at ‘offensive’ jokes, we are usually reacting to the *awfulness* of it. ... It’s funny *because* the idea is so awful.” (p. 171)

He even explains something that I did not like in Donald Trump and which I misunderstood. What I considered just simple name-calling and negative framing, Adam saw as high level priming persuasion. Quoting Trump’s designations for his competitors, low-energy Jeb, lyin’ Ted, crooked Hillary, Pocahontas, Goofy Elizabeth Warren, cryin’ Chuck Schumer (p. 129-134), he analyzed why these terms were powerful persuasively and why those that Hillary’s campaigned used were not (135-136).

“Cialdini’s newer book, *Pre-Suasion*, focuses on how to prime a person to be persuaded. It teaches how to put a thought in a person’s mind that will influence the next thought in ways that would not be obvious to the untrained.” (p. 166)

Throughout the book Adams points out various *persuasion techniques* that Trump used (and continues to use) which many people take offense at as his New York humor. What they don’t realize, says Adams, is that it is a technique. “People who are not trained in persuasion would miss the technique.” (p. 137). And so they do and as a result, still do not understand him or his appeal or how he won.

Given that he has already written about NLP in his blog— written about Milton Erickson, John Grinder, and others, my suspicion is that he knows a *whole lot more about NLP than he’s putting on*. Even to write the following statement suggests that: “Much of the NLP field has exaggerated claims, but there is some strong reality at the base of it.” (p. 263).

<https://blog.12min.com/win-bigly-pdf/>

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #22**  
**May 6, 2019**  
*Another NLP Secret*

## **I NOW KNOW WHERE THEY GOT “Neuro-Linguistic Programming!”**

When I first learned NLP I made a decision to read all of the foundational books that were quoted by the founders, and so I did. Korzybski, Bateson, Satir, Perls, Erickson, Chomsky, and so it went. Also George Miller, Eugene Galanter, and Karl Pribram. For that I went to the library, and checked out their book, *Plans and the Structure of Behavior*. I wanted to read the source of the TOTE model. But to tell the truth, I didn't get much out of it. Problem: I read too quickly. I was also too focused on understanding TOTE and modeling, and overall—I wasn't ready for it.

Then last week I reread the book. Or more literally, I spent time actually *read* it for the first time—slowly, deliberately, and now with 30+ years of NLP experience behind me. And in that book I found a lot!

### **What I did Not Know**

I did not know that what Miller, Galanter, and Pribram did in that book was challenge the “reflex arc” of behaviorism as the “unit” of study that makes up “behavior” and replaced it with the feedback loop of the TOTE structure. I did not know that they opted for a “neuron theory” about the nervous system and the processes by which the old stimulus and response model was then re-conceived to occur within human neurology. I did not know that they relied *heavily* on the computer revolution that had been going on and constantly compared the “programs” within a computer to the instructional and operational Plans that go on in a human being. I did not know that they used the best of neuro-science at that time and kept making guesses about brain anatomy and where and how in neurology, the “map control room” of working memory might occur. I didn't know that they wrote a whole chapter on linguistics and relied exclusively on Noam Chomsky's work. That's a lot of things I didn't know about their work or that book.

What is that book about? In a word, the whole book is about *the plans* (which they also call *programs, programming*) within the nervous system (*neurology*) and how it is coded primarily in language (linguistics). And there you have it— *neuro-linguistic programming*.

In their own words they began by comparing brains and minds to computers and programs:

“The notion of a Plan that guides behavior is, again not entirely accidentally, quite similar to the notion of a program that guides an electronic computer. ... we reviewed the cybernetic literature on the analogies between brains and computers, between minds and programs.” (p. 2)

From there they based their work on cybernetic ideas (p. 3) and on the metaphor that minds



create and operate from internal maps. As they use the terms Image and Plans throughout the book, they mean internal representations. The Image is all the accumulated, organized knowledge one has (p. 17).

“A human being ... builds up an internal representation, a model of the universe, a schema, a cognitive map, an Image.” (p. 7)

“[The brain] is far more like a map control room than it is like an old-fashioned telephone exchange.” (p. 8 quoting Edward Tolman)

“The problem is to describe how actions are controlled by an organism’s internal representation of the universe. ... What we must provide, therefore, is some way to map the cognitive representation into other appropriate *pattern* of activity.” (p. 12, 13)

“Without a program nothing can happen. A computer must have a program. As soon as someone suggests that people are like computing machines ... people must have programs. If a man is like a computer, then the man must have somewhere available an organized set of instructions that he attempts to execute.” (p. 197)

Does this sound like an NLP book? Yes! Yet it is not. And yet, in one way it is since it is one of the foundational books that NLP drew heavily upon, but quoted very little. Now the solution they came upon for describing how actions are controlled by internal representations is a hierarchical organization of behavior (p. 15).

“When we speak of a Plan... the term will refer to a *hierarchy* of instructions. ... *A plan is any hierarchical process in the organism that can control the order in which a sequence of operations is to be performed.* A Plan is essentially the same as a program for a computer.” (p. 16)

Then declaring this to be the basic form of organization in problem-solving, they define *strategy*, *tactics*, and the *execution* of the plan. “The central problem of this book is *to explore the relation between the Image and the Plan.*” That is, between one’s Map and the Program for action.

### **The Big Exchange**

In challenging Behaviorism and the *reflex arc*, the three authors argued that the basic elementary unit of behavior is not the reflex (which is a myth, over-rated, and merely a useful fiction, p. 22, 23) and can be replaced by “the neuron doctrine” of neural and receptor tissues responding by testing-and-operating via feedback messages (p. 25-26), hence the Test-Operate-Test-Exit “we shall call a TOTE unit.” (p. 27). The feedback loop itself now replaces the reflex arc. And for the arrows in the diagram— “What could flow along them?” Energy, information, and control. *Energy* as in the neurons and *control* as in instructions (p. 28). The stimulus processes now focus on the incongruity between Image (map, a desired outcome) and the Test (p. 30).

That is all in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 focuses on computers and programs. Chapter 4 on one’s Map in terms of intentions, values, knowledge, evaluations, memory, etc. and all of that “knowing is for the sake of doing.” (p. 71). Chapter 5 is titled “Instincts” talks about imprinting programs in animals. Chapter 6 describes how we turn skills into habits, “the plan is turned over to the muscles.”

“Man is assumed to be capable of building up his own ‘instincts.’” (p. 89).

“The cerebellum is a machine to provide analogue Plans for regulating and integrating muscular coordinations...” (p. 92)

Chapter 7 introduces the idea of Meta-Plans (p. 98). Chapter 8 on hypnosis, “one of the seven wonders of psychology” and is used to highlight how we can relinquish a Plan, letting someone else install a Plan (program). Chapter 9 introduces what we call Meta-Programs (aspects of personality), 10 on memory, and 11 on Linguistics and specifically on Noam Chomsky (p. 144)! The book then returns to using the Plan to solve problems (chapters 12-13) and concludes with a chapter on neurology— Some Negro-Psychological Speculations).

How about that? What is *Plans and the Structure of Behavior* (1960) about?

It is about *structure*— the units of analysis so we can understand behavior.

It is about *plans or programs* — operational instructions for how to do things.

It is about *images or maps* — background knowledge that enables us to cope.

It is about *human neurology* — how our nervous systems and brain functions to create our experience.

It is about the *feedback loop structure of test-operate-test-exit* (TOTE) that enables us to look into the black box of consciousness.

I don't know if this is where the term “Negro-Linguistic Programming” originated, but it would make perfect sense that it was derived from here. And especially given that John Grinder worked one year in George Miller's lab. It's something to think about.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #23**  
**May 13, 2019**

## **DESIGNER STATES — I**

**Suppose** you could *texture* your mental and emotional states... **Suppose** you could add various *tastes, feels, qualities* to your current frame of mind... **Suppose** you could make the way you move through the world *richer and fuller* so you beam with delight... **Suppose** that you were no longer stuck or limited in a bland or boring state...

These *questions* focus attention on the quality of your everyday states. They suggest that you could *design* the very quality of your life. How about that! This is one of the most exciting feature of the *Meta-States Model*. As you consider the quality of the following states, take a moment to explore their *quality*. You can do so regarding their—

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intensity and strength | <input type="checkbox"/> Accessibility and development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Features and feel      | <input type="checkbox"/> Ecology and balance           |

When you think about your basic states— confidence, anger, joy, fear, playful, anxiety, respect, courage, sadness, excitement, curiosity, relaxed, etc.—how are they currently *textured*? What are their qualities? Here are some possibilities:

Hesitating confidence, courageous confidence, foolish confidence, playful confidence, bold confidence. Slow awareness, dull awareness, bright awareness, brilliant awareness, curious awareness. Fear of commitment, stressful commitment, playful commitment, miserable commitment. Aggressive curiosity, rigid curiosity, humorous and silly curiosity, serious curiosity. Hostile anger, dreadful fear of anger, shame about feeling guilty for being angry. Shameful fear, bold fear, curious fear, playful fear.

### **Meta-Stating to Texture a State**

When you *apply* one state to another (meta-state), the second state qualifies the first state. As you transcend the first state and apply a second state to it, the first becomes a member of the class of the second. Now the higher level state coalesces into the first state and textures it. In this way your meta-states get “into your eyes” and coalesce into your muscles. They become the governing frame-of-reference which is usually hidden from your view. To find them, you have to tease out the higher levels. To *flush out the hidden meta-states* ask about the quality of a state.

What’s the quality of your anger? Would I like you angry?  
Are you respectful and thoughtful when you’re angry?  
Or, do you lose your head and go ballistic when you get mad?  
Do you maintain civility and patience when you’re feeling upset and angry?  
Or do you become impatient and insulting?

The answers about the *quality* reveals the higher frames.

What do you believe about anger?  
What memories in your personal history informs you about this?  
What values or dis-values do you have about experiencing anger?  
How does this affect who you are?

How does anger play into or fail to play into your destiny, mission, and vision?  
What do you expect about anger? About people when they get angry?

### **“Seeing” Meta-Levels in Your States**

These questions reveal the meta-levels of your states. As *textured* states, they have properties, features, and characteristics. Over the years, you have *qualified* your states. You have set your states inside of various frames. Using “anger” as a prototype, you experience your *thinking-and-feeling and neurological somatic sensations* **about** the state of anger. You like it or dislike it. You fear it or love it. You dread it or long for it. You believe it can serve you; you believe it turns things ugly.

Structurally, a meta-state relates to a primary state as *a higher state about it*. The lower state is a member of that class. The higher meta-state is a category for understanding the lower.

That’s why “fear of our anger” (fearful anger) differs in texture so much from “respect of our anger” (respectful anger).

That’s why “shame about getting angry because it only turns things nasty” differs so much in texture to “appreciation of my powers to get angry because it informs me that some perceived value feels violated and allows me to respectfully explore the situation *anger*.”

As a higher logical level, the mental and emotional *frames* that you bring to your primary experiences represent *a governing influence* in your life. The higher frame is a message about the lower experiences and so modulates, organizes, and governs it. No wonder your meta-states are so important! In your meta-states, you have values, beliefs, expectations, understandings, identifications, etc.

Knowing all of this gives you *choice* about your states, your emotions, your attitudes, etc. You can *choose* the *quality* of your experiences and thereby create richer, fuller, happier, more fulfilling, and more robust states. Interested? That’s what the Meta-States Model offers as it takes the basics of NLP to a higher level.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #24**  
**May 20, 2019**

## **DESIGNER STATES — II**

When you *meta-state* one state to another— you put the second state at a higher (meta) position to the first and doing that positions it to become *the frame* of the first, *the category*, *the classification*, and *the governing belief* of the first. Amazing, right? It’s amazing because now the second-state textures or qualifies the first. Now you can create all sorts of designer states— customized just for the attitude and orientation that you want.

<i>Joyful</i> learning.	<i>Playful</i> seriousness.	<i>Curious</i> confusion.
<i>Respectful</i> anger.	<i>Mindful</i> fear.	<i>Compassionate</i> sadness.
<i>Calm</i> frustration.	<i>Awe inspiring</i> self-value.	<i>Humble</i> confidence.

And when you do this, *you* take charge of your states of mind-and-emotion so that you can operate from the optimal state in whatever you are doing. Sound interesting? This is what you get when you learn the Meta-States Model. Here you build in the kind and quality of ecology so that your states and attitudes truly serve you well, bring out your best, improve your productivity, relationships, health, etc. And yet when you do this— more is happening.

### **Transcending and Including**

What more is happening? You are *transcending* your state, your primary level which is comprised of all of your thoughts and feelings *about* something in your world. It is your first response (or reaction) to some trigger in your environment. We call that your primary state. Here you are aware and focused on some external trigger. You fear driving fast, being closed in a small place, a harsh tone of voice and so on. You get angry at violence, insults, and threats to your way of life. You delight in and enjoy the beauty of a scene or a piece of music.

Next, you *transcend* that experience while at the same time *including it* as you move up to your next thought—a higher level of thought *about* the first. This creates a new level of organization—something *higher* that contains the lower *plus something else*.

In respect, considerate, and patient anger—you still have anger. You still feel the sense of threat or danger to your person or your way of life, yet you have now textured the anger with another state so that something new has emerged in you. You have the anger state *plus* something a transcending state (like respect, calmness, curiosity, etc.) so that you have a higher quality of anger. Perhaps you have a designer state of respectful anger.

It was Aristotle who long, long ago wrote: “All of the lower is in the higher, but not all of the higher is in the lower.” So, while molecules contain atoms, but atoms do not contain molecules. When you move up the levels of your mind, your higher level *includes* the lower *and transcends* it. As you transcend the lower, you *add* new features, qualities, properties, and characteristics to it. You create customized designer states.

When you use the Meta-States Model, you have the ability to engineer new emergent properties into your states. Talk about using the executive functions of your brain and engage in a higher level of self-management! Doing this can give you the key to “the structure of your subjective experiences” as you make your experiences richer and more robust, as you make them serve your highest goals, meanings, and values.

When your learning is *taken up into* playfulness and appreciation, when you *engulf* it with passion and the intention to improve the quality of your life—something new emerges. You have a passionate learning state that’s accelerated and exciting. We call that a “genius” learning state.

### **The Systemic Nature of Meta-States**

You have now been introduced to the systemic nature of your meta-states. Because you can take your *thinking-feeling* response and iterate it over and over recursively, you can create not only beliefs, but *belief systems*. And when you do so, you establish higher level frames of mind that are so stable that they can stay with you for a lifetime. Further, given the nature of beliefs as “self-fulfilling prophecies,” you set up the higher beliefs as self-organizing attractors in your mind-body system. Thereafter, they seem to have a life of their own— creating and recreating *you* in their image. Since this systemic nature of your meta-states is so powerful, be very careful about the belief systems that you construct.

Of course, that’s the problem, isn’t it? You constructed many if not most of your belief systems during your childhood when you were growing up. And unless you engage in specific cognitive make-overs —those childhood belief systems are still running your programs. They *are* your programs for how you function.

Ready for a cognitive make-over? One aspect of it is to create some customized designer states for yourself so that you can operate from the most optimal states in whatever you do. Now that’s a thought!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #25**  
**May 27, 2019**

## DESIGNER STATES — III

Given the last two posts on *Designer States*, when you meta-state yourself and one of your states, you not only are able to give it *the texture and qualify* that you want, but you simultaneously do a lot of other things. You set a meaning frame, you classify it, you transcend it and include it in a higher experience, and you establish a self-organizing attractor. That's a lot for a single action — applying one state to another state. Yet there is more.

Here's another thing. Your states are *holons*. That is, you experience your states *as a whole within itself and* simultaneously *as a part of another whole*. Research scientist Arthur Koestler introduced the term “holons” many years ago to describe reality as composed of “*whole/parts*.” This concept rescues us from unhelpful dichotomizing and enables us to understand something in a more holistic way. And *whole/parts* is the way it is with every meta-state.

These whole/parts *holons* refer to any “entity” that is itself *a whole* and yet simultaneously *a part* of some other whole. When it comes to states such as confidence, courage, commitment, playfulness, joy, flow, etc., they are also a part of a larger whole. While you experience them as a whole and can deal with them as a whole unit or experience, they are also *inside of* higher level wholes— meta-levels of beliefs, decisions, permissions, memories, anticipations, etc.

If a mind-body state operates as a holon in that it is *within* many higher mental-emotional frames (beliefs, values, expectations, etc.) which support it, then when you detect a meta-state, you have a part of a greater whole. Like a hologram—if you know how to read it, you have a lot more than what is immediately obvious. And that can give you a heads up on the structure of the experience.

Ken Wilber also speaks about holons. He uses such terms as *agency and communion* and then *transcendence and dissolution*. He says that a holon has identity and autonomy—it has its own agency (activity, energy) and identity as a whole. Yet as a *holon* within a larger whole, it also communicates and has communion with other wholes.

In *joyful learning*, learning has *transcended* itself and gone beyond to become more than mere learning—to become joyful. The transcending-and-including process adds novel components to the original state. Or, on the other hand, it can dissolve qualities and change the nature of the state. That happens in *calm anger* and in *respectful anger*.

When a state, as a holon, moves up to transcend itself, *something new emerges*.

This happens when you are in a state of fear— facing something potentially dangerous — and you transcend your fear as you go into commitment and responsibility so that *courage* emerges. Now the person goes into the burning building to rescue a child. Courage—the ability to face a fear in spite of the danger. Here the lower is transcended and included in

the higher to produce something new.

In systems, a *gestalt* is “more than and different from the sum of the parts.” So a gestalt state is more than just a meta-state, it is a meta-state that has transcended its components and formed a new configuration. Merely *adding* the parts together (the primary states) does not, and cannot, explain the new *emergent state*. The leap upward invites a higher structure of an experience.

Wilber offers another description: “holons emerge holarchically” (p. 27). Originally Koestler also created the term holoarchy to replace “hierarchy.” This means that the meta-levels (logical levels) that you and I experience do not comprise a hierarchy. They are **not** hierarchal. They are holarchical. That’s why we cannot say that one logical level is higher than another. Values are not higher than beliefs. You can believe in a value. You can believe in an identity or a vision.

Holarchies describe an order of increasing wholeness. Particles to atoms to cells to organisms. Or letters to words to sentences to paragraphs. *The whole* of one level becomes *a part* of the whole of the next. Each higher level *embraces* and *engulfs* the lower. That’s why when we take a primary state like anger and set frames about it (respect, calmness) to create new emergent properties as a larger holon.

Imagine embracing your anger with acceptance, appreciation, and then wonder. Imagine engulfing it in love, respect, and honor. Imagine applying mindfulness, values, and patience to it. Imagine bringing ecology concerns, moral uprightness, and honor to it. Mix well. Put into the oven of your mind, let it bake for awhile...

Imagine embracing your power to take action in the world with acceptance and appreciation. Imagine engulfing it with ownership, excitement, and joy. Imagine applying hope, desired outcomes, willingness to take intelligent risks, love, and concern for others, to it. Mix all of these well in a state of contemplative relaxation. Let it bake as you learn and explore and develop...

How’s your holographical set of states? Are they structured so that you have the most optimal qualities to your states?

**For more reading:**

Hall, L. Michael (1995/ 2012). *Meta-States: Reflexivity in Human States of Consciousness*. Clifton, CO: Neuro-Semantic Publications.

Wilber, Ken. (1996). *A Brief History of Everything*. Boston MA: Shambhal.



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #26**  
**June 3, 2019**

## **WHAT KIND OF COGNITIVE MAKE-OVER WOULD YOU LIKE?**

Make-Over programs on television refer to improving, refreshing, rejuvenating, or completely redoing something—a house, a restaurant, one’s visual appearance (hair, makeup, clothes), etc. Similarly a *cognitive* make-over refers to either improving your thinking/ learning skills, refreshing competencies that you have, rejuvenating those cognitive capacities that have become stale, and/or completely re-doing your thinking, perceiving, and learning patterns. In this, there are many kinds of cognitive make-overs.

- What kind would you like?
- What kind of make-over of your cognitive capacities would enhance your life and raise your self-efficacy to cope with the world that you face everyday?

If there are many kinds of cognitive make-overs, you may wonder, “What are my choices? And what do each of these choices mean?” You could opt for any one or combination of the following:

- \_\_\_ A Learning Enrichment Cognitive Make-Over
- \_\_\_ An Enhanced Memory Cognitive Make-Over
- \_\_\_ A Smart Decision-Making Cognitive Make-Over
- \_\_\_ An Enriched Strategy Cognitive Make-Over
- \_\_\_ A Thoughtful Foresight Cognitive Make-Over
- \_\_\_ A Risk-Management of Future Consequences Cognitive Make-Over
- \_\_\_ A Critical Thinking Skills Cognitive Make-Over
- \_\_\_ A Creative / Innovative Cognitive Make-Over
- \_\_\_ An Emotional Enrichment (E.Q.) Cognitive Make-Over

*Cognitive Make-Overs* begin with your basic cognitive (thinking) skills— how you represent information (representation systems), how you encode it (sub-modality or cinematic features), how you retrieve your ideas (memory access), the questions you ask about the variables of an experience, how you create your emotions from your thinking, etc.

Now while *cognitive* refers to “thinking,” in the human mind-body-emotion system, *thinking* includes much more than what we have traditionally thought of as “thinking.” It has been the dualistic thinking that dichotomizes thinking and feeling that has been the culprit for creating that pseudo-problem. Kinesthetic feeling is one of the basic forms of thinking along with visual and auditory thinking. And an emotion itself is a composite of meaning-making thinking plus a kinesthetic. That’s why *as you think, so you feel*. And also, *your feelings inevitably influence your thinking*. Thinking–emoting is a holistic package and cannot be strictly dichotomized.

That's why a *Cognitive Make-Over* inherently entails what's called "emotional intelligence"—awareness, monitoring, regulating, and relating. And why every *Cognitive Make-Over* provides a richer and more robust emotional state whether it is confidence, resilience, compassion, efficacy, etc.

*Cognitive Make-Overs* then move to a meta-level where you think–about–your–thinking begin with monitoring and regulating your emotions, managing your memory strategies, develop your capacities for critical thinking, creative thinking, risk-management thinking, manage your decision-making skills, planning (anticipating, setting expectations, entertaining scenarios, etc.) and much more.

Further, to expose another dichotomized myth, *to think is to learn and when you learn you are thinking in new and different ways*. As a result, this means that every cognitive make-over entails a higher level of learning— learning more effectively, accelerating your learning, overcoming learning disabilities, enriching your learning capacities, etc.

This is critical individually and for organizations since accelerating learning and improving the quality of learning is a key competitive advantage in today's world. No longer is it sufficient to have learned. You have to keep learning and what's more—you have to be continually learning about learning. You not only need to be a sharp, skillful, and competent thinker, you have to be able to think-about-thinking— meta-thinking. You not only have to learn, you have to unlearn. So, what kind of cognitive make-over would you like?

***To Learn More:***

*See Executive Thinking* (2018)

*Creative Solutions* (2017)

*Communication Magic* (2001)

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #27**  
**June 10, 2019**

## **TO TRULY “THINK” — TO ACCELERATE YOUR LEARNING**

On the surface it seems so simple, yet when you explore within it—it is profound. What? That “to think is to learn.” Obviously, to learn anything, you have to *think*. And that *thinking* involves lots of things. Namely, you have to use your mind to entertain ideas about something so that you can understand that something, comprehend how it works, consider its consequences, calculate its costs and benefits, transform the idea into practical actions that you can learn as skills, apply to self, and then practice with feedback until it comes under your control.

All of this says that *thinking* is far more than just one thing— there are actually dozens and dozens of aspects and forms of thinking and that means there are multiple dozens of *thinking skills*. Before I did the research into this, and the training, I never even thought in terms of thinking skills or enumerated the many different kinds of thinking skills. (You need *skills* to think?) But now I have. And as with any and all skills, there are beginning skills, fundamental skills, core skills, more demanding skills, and skills at the expert level— advanced skills. So it is with thinking skills.

To *think* about *thinking skills*, in the training *Cognitive Make-Over*, I constructed a continuum and then stretched out the cognitive skills from simple to complex along that continuum. I also distinguished the various stages of non-thinking (reacting, being on automatic, passive thinking, borrowed thinking, agenda thinking, and “knowing” or closed-minded non-thinking).

The point? *All thinking is not the same*. How about that? *Thinking* comes in many forms and expressions. And that leads to many, many *thinking styles* or patterns. Now in NLP we have a model, the Meta-Programs Model (see *Figuring Out People* and *Words that Change Minds* by Charvet) that describe the basic 20 along with another 40 for unique contexts. With meta-programs we distinguish *how* as person is thinking— optimistically or pessimistically, globally or specifically, by matching or mismatching, for options or procedures, etc.

Now, to get back to learning. If in *learning* we *think*, then all of these thinking skills, styles, and patterns give us multiple aspects of learning. And for every one of them that you are missing or under-developed in, you essentially have a learning disability. That is, your capacity to learn using any given *thinking style, skill, or pattern* is undeveloped or weak in its development. Now imagine that!

But the good news is that every one of these *thinking skills, styles, and patterns* gives you what you want to expand your learning, enrich it, make it more robust, and accelerate your learning. Imagine that!

Consequently, one of the things that many are getting from **Cognitive Make-Over** is an expanded boost to their learning capacities. Without focusing on “learning” per se, they are becoming more competent in their learning abilities due to their expanded *thinking competencies*.

Implicitly, rather than explicitly, they are *meta-learning*. They are learning about their learning which is one of the key aspects of meta-cognition and the executive functions of the pre-frontal cortex. And when you expand your thinking abilities to be able to learn about your learning, you are in a position to choose new and better learning strategies for yourself, eliminate factors that undermine effective learning, and improve your entire learning system. And all of this is a very generative way to enhance yourself as a person.

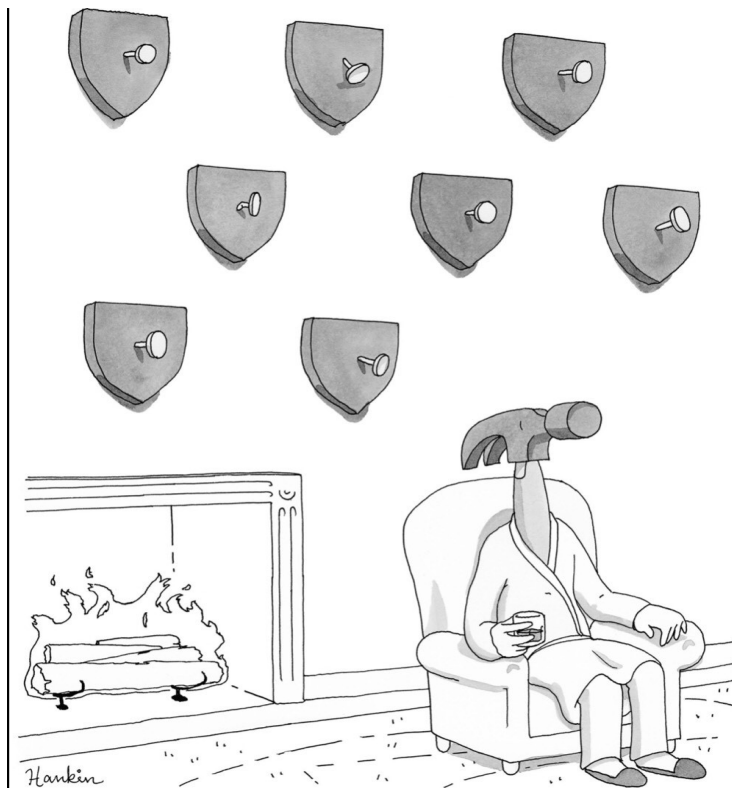
Now I say that this is implicit in the training, yet you could make it explicit if that is one of your goals. And if you do that, you would be engaged in a *Learning Cognitive Make-Over*. Or, as noted in the previous Neurons’ post— you could focus on several other kinds of cognitive make-overs.

Here’s the thing, just as *enriched learning* is not automatic and just as you can accidentally learn some really wrong things, stupid things, and even dysfunctional things— so also is *thinking*. Good healthy informed clear thinking is also not automatic. You have to learn how to *think* clearly and precisely so that our thinking is of high quality and truly enhances your life. None of us were taught this in school. They did not tell us that *thinking has to be learned and practiced to be of high quality*. Yet it does. And given that, that’s why in Negro-Semantics we are not only focusing on the *content* that you need for “running your own brain,” but also the very activity of *thinking*.

## On being a Hammer-Head

*If all you have is a hammer— everything that you see (and want to fix) looks like a nail.* That's what Abraham Maslow said in his book on the Psychology of Research. This leads to the insight that *what you are* to a great degree determines what you can perceive. *What you have experienced* (and therefore received) highly predicts what you can discern as you move through life.

In terms of your thinking patterns and skills— what you have been trained to discern, distinguish, and perceive— determines what you can detect. No wonder your meta-programs play a highly significant role in your intellectual development (learning) and in your skill development (competencies). Each meta-program, as a *perceptual filter* (or lens) determines what you can see and given that, what you can do in response.



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #28**  
**June 17, 2019**  
*The History of NLP*

## USING HISTORY TO ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY

Recently in a public forum when I presented a bit of the history of NLP, a young man asked, “So, why did you write the book *NLP Secrets: Untold Stories*? Was it just as a historical record?” Now before he could finish his question, I was already shaking my head back and forth to signal “no,” that’s not the reason. And so before I said a word, he continued. “No? So why? What did you hope to accomplish?”

“Credibility,” was my one word answer. I wanted to establish *credibility for NLP — for the NLP Communication model* and for the development of NLP over the decades. As a child of the Human Potential Movement and as a child of the Cognitive Psychology Movement, NLP appeared at a time when moving beyond psychology’s focus on pathology to generative development. Arising at a time when computers were beginning to model “intelligence,” information processing, and computing capacities and when a strength-based or resource-based approach was part of the spirit of the times— it arose as a significantly new approach. I wanted to demonstrate how it was (and is) a valid approach.

Sure, some of the characters involved in the history of that development were not paragons of virtue— by any stretch of the imagination. But NLP did not grow up as about anyone— not the founders nor even the first exemplars (Perls, Satir, and Erickson). It grew up as about an *idea*. The idea was that *there is structure to experience* and when you discover it, the structure gives you access to the power and magic of that experience.

That’s why I wrote the book— in part to set the history straight, to address many of the myths that have grown up around NLP, and to position the role of those who mis-use the model.

That people can and do *mis-use* a model, or a technology, an idea is part of the history of any and every movement. So it has been with NLP. There have been people who took the powerful communication tools and used them manipulatively. There were others who solely focused on how to use it to make money. Yet *mis-use* itself is not an argument against something. *Mis-use* simply warns us that there is a proper and ethical use of that thing.

The credibility of NLP goes back to the scholars that were quoted and relied upon to build the foundations of Neuro-Linguistic Programming. I’m talking about scholars like Gregory Bateson, Alfred Korzybski, Abraham Maslow along with Carl Rogers, George Miller with his associates Karl Pribram and Eugene Gallanter, and Noam Chomsky. The credibility goes to these

individuals and to the disciplines that they represent— General Semantics, Cognitive Psychology, Transformational Grammar. And there’s more— Gestalt Psychology and Gestalt Therapy, Family Systems, and Ericksonian Medical Hypnosis.

Now true enough, credibility lagged for awhile after the beginning. In those “*Wild Days of NLP*” (as Terry McClendon titled his book), the focus was entirely on a discovery stage and then a practical “what can we do with this stuff?” stage. Further, given some of the iconoclastic individuals who were involved at the beginning— they downplayed (and even argued against) traditional quantitative and statistical research methodology. That created a vacuum of research at the beginning. And it would be a few years before new qualitative research methodologies would become available for researchers.

It wasn’t until mid-1990s that a new generation of NLP trainers, thinkers, researchers arose. That led to many people finally conducting research on various aspects of the NLP model, as well as a NLP Research Conference, a Research Journal, and many chapters and books looking at NLP in terms of evidence-based methodologies. Yet many people in NLP are not aware of this and most people outside of the various NLP communities do not know this.

I wrote about the wild and wonderful and strange people in the history of NLP to tell the story about how it all came about and who was involved. By expressing the myths and telling the untold stories, it not only reveals “family secrets,” it lifts NLP up above the fallible human beings who were involved. It moves things up to the model and the processes by which we can make our individual and collective lives much, much better. And when that happens, the world can change for the better. Ah yes, that’s why I wrote it— because NLP has the power to change the world, one person and one group at a time — I wrote to enable NLP to change the world.

From: L. Michael Hall  
2019 Neurons #29  
June 24, 2019

## DANGER: IT'S DESIGNED SO YOU DON'T THINK

When Joshua Epstein of the Brookings Institution wrote about making decisions. Yet he also noted that “society is formed largely to the end of removing that need” (namely, to make decisions) and if that’s the case, then removing the need to *think*). To explain he then wrote this:

“Many social norms exist simply *so that we no longer have to think* about other options. We structure society so as to *keep the need for thought to a minimum*. We are compelled to make a decision only when no social convention prescribes it. The stronger the norm, the less we as individuals need to think about it. ... As people familiarize themselves with the rules, they also learn how much [they need] to think about how to behave.” (pp. 306-7, italics added)

Now isn’t that amazing? Here Epstein offers yet another perspective on the role and function of society and culture— by establishing the “rules” for *how we do things around here*, the rules become hidden frames which determine *what* to think. So we defer to others and to the rules that they have created. We look around to see what they are doing, how they are doing things, then instead of *thinking*, we conform. We conform to the norms set by the “rules” that were created in former times by someone who thought that would be a good thing to do. This saves us from the effort of thinking today. It makes things easier. And that’s right, isn’t it?

Yes but it comes with a price. Here’s what I’ve learned from that. Whatever induces us to conform, or to be compliant, simultaneously induces us to stop thinking individually and to use (and default to) the thinking of the group.

Then as members of a community, we learn to operate on the principle of doing as little thinking as possible. Conversely, if we started to *think*, then we would start asking questions:

“Why do we do things this way?” “What if we did it in another way?” “Do we *have to* do it this way? Could we change this?”

And, of course, to ask such questions is to be a heretic to the old ways, a disturber of the peace, and an activist who seems to be looking for trouble.

Now our brains, are by their very nature, social in nature. We learn from each other, our mirror neurons (10% of brain cells) are always looking to what others are doing and we all have a strong urge inside to get along, to conform, to be accepted, to belong, etc. Our brains are also *thinking machines*— designed to question things, explore possibilities, solve problems, anticipate what will happen, create new ways of doing things, innovate, etc.

With these conflicting drives—no wonder that we can get into conflict with ourselves and with



others! It's inevitable. On the one hand, we want to think—imagine, reason, draw our own conclusions, figure things out, discover, etc. and on the other hand, we want to rest our brains, come to a conclusion, find closure, belong, be loved and accepted, fit in, etc. Being both mindless and mindful lures us into each day.

In the training on *Cognitive Make-Over*, I put “norm thinking” in the category of “Borrowed Thinking” which was one of the six stages of *Not-Thinking or Mindlessness*. This means that instead of engaging in the authentic activity of thinking, we defer to “think the thoughts of others who came before us.” They did the work. They expended the energy and we are living off of their endeavors as we think their thoughts. It saves us from the effort of thinking— of questioning, exploring, checking, etc. Now we can live from the norms, that is, from the rules.

In language “rules” shows up in the Meta-Model distinction in several ways. There are the *modal operators of necessity* that indicate personal or family or social rules as indicated by *need, should, must, have to*, etc. These words code a demand or a rule and with that, thinking ends.

“I need to finish my plate.” “You should say ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’” “They must learn how to drive more carefully.” “You have to eat more.”

With such statements, one doesn't have to think. Thinking is ended and a “mode of operating” is induced as a rule is stated as an absolute statement. Then there are *Lost Performatives*— a statement is made without any connection to whoever said it. It's a lost map: “Boys shouldn't cry.” “Have a stiff upper lip.” So ask, “Who invented that rule? When and for who? Is it still applicable today? Under what conditions?”

It is far too easy to stop thinking. And there are many other linguistic distinctions that can stop thinking. An over-generalization can (“You know how men are!”), labeling, either/or descriptions, etc. So if you think you think— *think again*. Maybe you aren't. Maybe you are conforming to thinking that was done by others centuries ago. Maybe it is time for some fresh thinking. If you discover that, in fact, most of the time you are not *thinking*, that discovery itself enables you to begin *thinking afresh*.

From: L. Michael Hall  
2019 Neurons #30  
July 1, 2019

## WHEN THINKING BECOMES SERIOUSLY CONTAMINATED

When it comes to *thinking*, real thinking, thinking through a problem to a solution, thinking up new creative ideas, thinking about a loved one and how to connect or communicate— *the problem with thinking is that all thinking is contaminated*. And this is one, if not *the*, biggest problems with clear thinking. Our thinking is not clean. It is muddled, convoluted, biased, and flawed.

Yet for most people, most of the time, it does not seem this way. I suppose it is like a pair of glasses that very, very slowly gets some dust, then becomes a tiny bit cloudy, and does so for days on end and the person wearing the glasses does not look *at* the glasses, but only *through* them. Eventually vision becomes a bit dull and foggy, but the person adjusts to the film that collects on the glasses. Their seeing is contaminated but they don't notice.

So with *thinking*. You think *about* what you have to do, the people you encounter, driving, traveling, chores, etc. All the while you seldom *think about your thinking*. Yet if you did step back and engaged your meta-cognition powers, you could then become aware of your cognitive distortions, biases, and fallacies. You could then be in a position to actually work on and update your very capacity to think with more clarity, accuracy, precision, creativity, etc.

Picking up on Alfred Korzybski's famous quote that "the map is not the territory," NLP framed *thinking* as the process by which you and I construct mental maps or models in our heads about the world. What we do when we *think* is map out what something is, how it works, its value or significance, its consequences, rules, etc. in this way we *make meaning* of things. Now isn't that an awesome insight? By your *thinking* you construct the "meanings" of anything and everything in your life. That means that the *quality* of anything and everything in your life— and how you experience it— is ultimately a function of the quality of your thinking.

Wow! Now that should give you pause. It does me. It is *not* the things out there in the world, the people I engage with, the work I do, the traffic, the noise, or whatever that determines my experience or the quality of my life. *It's my thinking!* Thinking is *that* consequential.

And yes, all of your thinking (and all of my thinking) is contaminated to some degree. The way you have been thinking has set up thinking-filters— perceptual patterns, meta-programs, cognitive distortions, and so on. You have constructed "beliefs" and "understandings" and these now contaminate your thinking. It's circular. As a child when you first start to "think," you created ideas and beliefs and understandings which today cloud and filter your thinking. Your

first thinking influences your second thinking. The capacity to think, which is your *medium* through which you construct mental maps about things, then becomes *the filters* through which you now experience the world.

We sometimes say that this is “the Catch-22 of consciousness.” You have to use your current mind (thinking capacities) to change your mind. And this is where your blind-spots can defeat you because it is hard to see the frames governing your thinking when you are inside those frames. The question is, How can we get outside of the frames (outside of the box) to see afresh? How can we unlearn what we learned when we are inside of that learning and it seems normal or natural?

This is not just a problem for those people who have a bad relationship with reality (the territory) and need therapy to readjust their maps so that they can better navigate life. It is a problem for all of us. For all of us our thinking is serious contaminated by cognitive distortions, cognitive biases, and cognitive fallacies.

NLP accidentally came up with a great cure for this serious contamination when the Meta-Model of Language was invented. Given how much we *think in language* and how much language itself distorts, generalizes, and deletes vital pieces of information —the Meta-Model gives you critical *questions* so that you are not so easily deceived and bamboozled by words. Those questions also activate your ability to *think again* in a fresh and out-of-the-box way. And when you do, you are mostly able to update your thinking, clean out the fog, and over-ride the old thinking programs.

Now if that interests you, then grab a good NLP book on the Meta-Model. Learning the Meta-Model is a great way to begin to clean up your languaging and mental mapping— to wit, your thinking. Recommendations:

My book is *Communication Magic* (2001) from Crown House Pub. An update on the Meta-Model commissioned originally with Bandler.

*Magic De-Mystified* by Bryon Lewis and Frank Pucelik, also by Crown House Pub. Is another excellent book on the Meta-Model.

*Introducing NLP* by John Seymour and Joseph O’Connor is a basic NLP book, like many others, that has a chapter on the Meta-Model that gives you a quick introduction.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #31**  
**July 8 , 2019**

## **FORGETTING TO GIVE CREDIT**

I read two excellent books this past week by the same author. The first book by Marilee Goldberg is titled, *The Art of the Question: A Guide to short-term Question-Centered Therapy* (1998) and the second book by Marilee Adams (she got married!) is *Change Your Questions—Change Your Life*. My interest in both books was the author's focus on questioning which is the heart of thinking. Having seen these books recommended in other works, I wanted to discover if there was anything new about questioning that might add to my own understanding.

*Then I was surprised.* In reading the first book I found out that she was trained in NLP as a Master Practitioner and had studied with Leslie Cameron-Bandler, had corresponded with David Gordon, and had read some of Robert Dilts' books. I was also delightfully surprised to find that *she boldly presented NLP in the book* as a rich source for learning how to ask questions. Here's what I found in the book:

“Information-Gathering Questions and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)” is a section that begins on page 37, giving some background on NLP  
She then listed a great many of the questions which she learned from NLP including “the Outcome frame,” the Virtual Question from Leslie and M. Singleton (pp. 41-42), and even included “the Miracle Question” of Steve de Shazer.  
Insightfully she presented “questions as interventions” (p. 43).  
She explored Questions and Presuppositions (pp. 44-46).  
She wrote a series of Neuro Logical Level Questions (pp. 52-53).  
Then from all of that she developed her own version of “Question-Centered Therapy” and spent the rest of the book illustrating how she used question-centered therapy in therapeutic contexts and even in couple therapy.

All good stuff! Now while the first book is long and redundant (345 pages), the second book is much shorter and much more to the point. She wrote it as a story of a man who was “The Answer Man” but struggling in being a leader because he *told* and *lectured* and *did not listen very well*. When he could not lead his team because of that, he was ready to resign, he was sent to an *inquiring coach* where he learned the power of questioning. *Change your Questions—Change Your Life* (2015) presents a story that is easy to read, compelling, and that presents a question-centered approach to living and leading.

*But ...* the second book, in contrast to the first book, offers *not the slightest hint of NLP* or its influence. And whereas Marilee Goldberg gave plenty of credit and recognition to her sources in 1998, as Marilee Adams, the implication in 2015 is that she invented the entire question-centered approach entirely on her own with no ideas from Cameron-Bandler, Dilts, or Gordon or the rest of the NLP tradition.

After I read the second book and searched through the back pages and appendices for any reference to her sources—I came up empty. There were none. It is *as if* the whole idea of questioning and the power of questioning was given birth in her mind and her mind only. She stands on the shoulders of no giants who went before her. She gives credit to no one. At least that is the impression that's given.

Similarly, Marshall Goldsmith who wrote the Foreword gives no indication of the actual sources for the book. She puts quotes at the top of chapter headings from several people—famous people (David Rock, Linda Page, Daniel Goleman, Joseph Campbell, Viktor Frankl, Margaret J. Wheatley, Carol S. Dweck, Peter Senge, Rumi, Martin Seligman), but not a single NLP person. And in her “End Notes and References” (p. 225) not a single NLP reference, so unlike the first book.

### **Reflections**

This is one of the ways that NLP keeps getting “lost” in various fields— whether psychotherapy (her first book) or business (the second book). NLP is there, but un-accredited. Neuro-Linguistic Programming serves as a significant part of the scientific foundation, but the typical reader would never know it. The author could not have consciously hid it better.

Why do people do this kind of thing? Now I have to just guess— maybe they want to take all the credit. Maybe they are fearful of criticism if they acknowledge their sources. Maybe they are just forgetful. Maybe they are insecure and want to have others think that they have invented it all by themselves. Maybe the publishing company told them to get rid of all references to NLP. I don't know why any single person leaves out their sources. Anyone who has written University Papers or papers for a Graduate Degree know that it is part and parcel of scholarship to quote sources.

Maybe it is due to the scarcity frame of mind. Of course, by *not* quoting NLP, tens of thousands of NLP trainers, coaches, consultants, therapists, etc. will *not* quote the book and reference it. And by *not* quoting sources, Marilee does *not* help to promote NLP as a legitimate field and model. So in this, all lose out— which is the legacy of scarcity. Herein lies a lesson for all, does it not?

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #32**  
**July 15, 2019**

## **WELCOME TO BRAIN CAMP!**

I've got a new name for our training on *how to think*, how to become a critical and a creative thinker, how to generate great ideas, how to achieve a cognitive make-over for remembering, learning, deciding, planning, *being*, etc. *Brain Camp*.

Because *thinking* is the most fundamental thing that you do— more fundamental than communicating, more fundamental than learning, the foundation for influencing, persuading, leading, coaching, relating, inventing, selling, etc.— if you don't know the basics about *thinking* and how to be a *clear and concise thinker*, then everything else is in jeopardy. In fact, you are jeopardizing the very quality of your life. Yet here is the problem—who every studies *thinking*? Who trains or coaches or provides development in *thinking skills*? There's hardly anyone. Until now.

Test yourself. Here's a short and simple way to test your own understanding and experience of this most core competency:

- What is “thinking?”
- What are the composite elements that make up thinking?
- How much training have you had in each of those components?
- Name three or four of the key kinds of pseudo-thinking expressions.
- Describe how wanting to be sure, certain, and confident actually undermines thinking?
- What are some of the key factors that prevents new learnings from “going in?”
- When new thoughts do not “go in” and “take,” what is the solution?
- How many thinking skills can you list?
- What is the core thinking skill— the absence of which indicates you are not thinking?

For thousands of years, as we have created schools and sent our children there, they have learned *what to think*. Almost never are they taught *how to think*. Yet the time has come to change that. *What to think* was highly valuable when significant change took decades if not centuries. The *what* would last. But no longer. It's estimated that some 40 to 60 percent of all jobs that will be available in 20 years *do not exist today*. That's why we need to be teaching children *how to think* in addition to what to think.

And with the acceleration of change, the same applies to us— *you and I also need to develop the ability to think— to refresh our thinking, to unlearn what we once learned that's now in the way, to break the old semantic reactions and the automatic thinking that keeps us blind and deaf to the ever-changing emerging world.*

Hence, *Brain Camp!* Like any intense training that occurs in an intense training context, at *Brain Camp* you will first of all discover what *real thinking* is and to distinguish it from the many forms of pseudo-thinking. At *Brain Camp* you will learn the foundations for how to “run your own brain” and how to re-wire your brain so that your thinking fits for today’s world. You will learn the basics of the unlearning skills, how to set up new neural connections for new learnings and to accelerate your learnings. You will learn how to *think about your thinking* so that with the development of meta-cognitive skills and strategies, you will be able to take control and not be the victim of cognitive biases, distortions, and fallacies.

At *Brain Camp*, you will discover how to take good care of your brain. Like the ancient Greeks, our aim is: “A healthy mind in a healthy body.” Then, as you learn about the levels of brain functioning, you can use your *whole brain* and translate from the lower to the higher and the higher back to the lower. This will enable you to be much more *mindful* and, in fact, live more *mindfully* as you tap into the higher executive functions of your brain. That will enhance your executive thinking skills—

- Planning— intentionally forecasting to design a compelling future.
- Deciding — make executive decisions that are smart and discerning.
- Assimilating information for creativity and innovation.
- Remembering— keeping track of things and having memory resources more accessible.
- Consciously choosing— living from choice rather than reactivity.
- Learning — accelerating your learning through higher quality learning strategies.
- Integration— self-regulation, monitoring, emotional intelligence.
- Problem-Solving — defining, reframing, and resolving “problems” as puzzles for the brain.

And yes, there are obstacle courses at *Brain Camp*, obstacles in the form of exercises and drills that will enable you to think forward, think backward, think downward, think upward, think reflexively, think analogously, and more.

While *Brain Camp* is only three days long, you will be abundantly challenged so that your brain will get a good workout. One man in Mauritius said it was like a “mental earthquake—lots of old formulations were shaken down.” Many others said, “Before this training I thought I was thinking, but now I realize that I was not.” One lady said, “Thank you! Now the real adventure begins.”

Finally, a warning: *Brain Camp isn’t for everyone*. You have to be courageous to handle it. You have to be willing to get out of your comfort zone. If comfort is one of your highest values— then this is not for you. If you have to be right and perfect— *Brain Camp* would blow you away and you would find it destructive to the need to be right. *Brain Camp* is for those ready to venture out to the growing edge personally and vocationally— who want to use their whole brain as they navigate life.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #33**  
**July 22, 2019**

## **A BRILLIANT AUTHOR GETS IT WRONG**

I recently read an NLP Book which was recently updated (2018) in which the author simply got many aspects of NLP wrong. And it was written not only by an NLP trainer, but someone who *somehow* got somebody to designate him a master trainer. And yet he does not seem to know, or maybe he does not value, knowing the field of NLP— at least staying up with the field. So how could anyone be considered a “master” of anything if that person isn’t even aware of current developments in the field? I ask that rhetorically.

Now the book is a book about using NLP in business, and the author simply and constantly gets things wrong, in fact, lots of things wrong. What strikes me in reading this book, and others that the author has written about NLP, is that after he took his basic training, he stopped learning. Perhaps he caught the toxic thought-virus known as “Everything I ever needed to know I learned at X course; now I know it all.”

And yet ... it is not all bad. Not at all. On the one hand, there are moments of brilliance in this author’s writings—excellent insights. I have gotten many wonderful ideas from him. But then, on the other hand, there are statements which show what I can only describe as an incomprehensible ignorance. For me, they bring into question his willingness to read what others are writing or whether he has taken a simple moment to re-read and think about what he has written.

For example, while he repeatedly asserts that the Meta-Model is important and puts it up as an incredibly powerful communication tool, then he prodigiously uses *Universal Quantifiers* (always, never, everyone), *Either-Or Statements*, *Comparative Deletions*, etc. in his own writings. Here are some examples of *Universal Quantifiers*:

“The unconscious mind —both your client’s and your own—*always* knows what it wants, and *always* knows what to do...” (280)

“When the client first tells you what they want, or what the problem is, they will tell you *everything* you need to know... *All* you have to do is pay attention.” (281)

Now **if** I give him credit that he knows what he’s doing, then I would be implying that he very manipulative. Conversely, **if** I assume that he is just making a point and using “regular” language to do so, then I would be implying that he does not pay attention to his own writings in terms of applying the Meta-Model to himself. He also doesn’t know that the old “7- 38-55 percent” myth about communication has been invalidated (see the Neuro-Semantic Website <http://www.neurosemantics.com/the-7-38-55-myth/>).

Now some 25 years ago, I introduced into the field of NLP Alfred Korzybski’s linguistic



distinction of *Multi-Ordinality*. This means that the same word, when used reflexively on itself, thereafter operates at various meta-levels and will mean something different at each level. For example:

- You can *fear* a bear, and you can *fear* your fear (become paranoid). You can *fear* your paranoia (experience acrophobia).
- You can *love* a new boyfriend, and you can *love* the *love* that you feel (infatuation). You can then *love* your infatuation (romanticism).

Language has this wonderful and wild and weird quality of being reflexive or recursive. Some words (mostly nominalizations) can be used on themselves. But not true nouns. They do not work this way. You can not have a *chair* of a chair, a *house* of a house. True nouns are not reflexive. Nor do verbs work reflexively. So we do not *sit* on sitting, *run* on running, etc.

*But* as Korzybski pointed out some words, like *nominalizations* are reflexive. I noted this in 1991 as I wrote about seven linguistic distinctions that Korzybski identified in *Science and Sanity*. Later, in 1997, I added them to create the *Extended Meta-Model* which is today in the book, *Communication Magic* (2001, Crown House Publications). Then Byron Lewis included it in his 2012 edition of *The Magic of NLP DeMystified*. Yet this NLP author does not seem to know anything about any of this development of the Meta-Model. It's as if he has not kept up with the field or read from others in the field.

“The Subject-Verb-Object language structure reflects our observation of life; someone or something does something to someone or something. Note that the subject and the object are different, they cannot be the same. A chair cannot sit on itself. A person cannot carry themselves. ... The action cannot be recursive, it cannot apply to itself. I can love you, and you can love me. ... You cannot love yourself, and you cannot value yourself, so here is the central paradox.” (276)

“You cannot love yourself!” That is the point that he writes about and seeks to prove. Amazing! And note the definitive, absolutist, over-generalized statements. “The action cannot be recursive, it cannot apply to itself.” Yet it is by over-stating things in an over-simplistic way that he paints himself into a corner— declaring at the end that it is a paradox.

Well, yes, if you do not know that *the human mind is reflexive* and that we can linguistically map things in a reflexive, recursive way. That's what multi-ordinality is linguistically— some words do indeed operate recursively, they apply to themselves. Linguists have known and written about this for more than a century. This is not a new discovery. It is what I wrote about in great detail in *Meta-States* in 1995. Now because this trainer / author does not know about reflexivity, he argues, “You cannot coach yourself. It is not possible. You can't see yourself, you see, so you can't give yourself feedback.” (319). From this misunderstanding he then asserts that “it's not possible to love yourself.” (275).

What a tragedy! Here is a NLP Trainer who potentially has all of the resources of the field of NLP at his disposal (if only he will stay in touch with the field) to correct these misunderstandings. Yet he doesn't seem to know how to look beyond his own thinking and that, in turn, obviously limits his understandings.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #34**  
**July 29, 2019**

## **WHEN YOU CAN'T THINK**

In writing about *Executive Thinking* and the cognitive make-over that we work on in the *Brain Camp*, my focus has been exclusively on those states of non-thinking— when you *do not* think. I have focused on the mindlessness of reactive thinking, automatic thinking, passive thinking, borrowed thinking, etc. Then someone asked me what about the people who *can't* think. My first thought was that they are just *not* thinking, choosing not to engage in the effort of thinking. But the person then talked about Daniel Goleman's "amygdala hijacking" and states wherein one's emotions get so overwhelming that one cannot think.

True enough, there are states wherein we experience emotional flooding which, when they occur, a person literally and physically *cannot* think. When emotions get strong enough and intense enough, they can flood conscious awareness to such an extent that, at those times, a person "loses control." Then typically that person may say things which he will later regret or do things that she may later find extremely embarrassing. Some people talk about "seeing red" when they get so angry that they "cannot see straight." Others have had the experience of actually losing consciousness and fainting.

In such stressful moments, people literally cannot think. I've seen it here this week at NSTT as we challenge people as they engage in one of the most stressful activities for we humans— standing up and speaking in public. There have been moments when a person, wanting so much to do well and to be seen as highly competent, gets interrupted by the person giving feedback and for that moment of surprise or shock goes into a state of blanking out ... unable to gather one's thoughts or words.

Now while thinking and emoting are not dichotomous functions and they do operate systemically so that as thinking influences emotions so emotions also influence thinking. Given this, the intensity of one's emotions can be amplified in such a way that they can become overwhelming. In NLP language, when this occurs then we say that the person begins to experience *state-dependent thinking, perceiving, remembering, speaking, behaving, etc.*

With the intensity of emotions, especially the negative emotions, our brain-body system is activated to respond. And depending on a person's level of development, the responses that occur often regress to much more primitive responses. As the sympathetic nervous system becomes increasingly activated, a flood of energy may bombard the mind and take over a number of processes including rational thinking, social consciousness, the more highly developed coping skills, etc.

In *The Developing Brain* (2012), Daniel Siegel writes,

“One’s thinking or behavior can become disrupted if arousal moves beyond the boundaries of the window of tolerance. ... Outside the window of tolerance, excessive sympathetic branch activity can lead to increased energy-consuming processes, manifested by increases in heart rate and respiration and as a ‘pounding’ sensation in the head.” (281-3)

Depending on a person’s “window of tolerance” and emotional development, the person may become highly irritable, given to emotional outbursts, find himself unable to gather his thoughts and talk very coherently, etc. All of this can be amplified by being physically exhausted, suffering from sleep deficiency, emotionally worn-out, etc. Enough about the problem. We all know about moments where it seems that we cannot think. So what can we do about such moments?

Here your meta-cognitive cortical capacities can come to the rescue. After all, you cannot control what you’re not aware of. So the simple step of *stepping back and identifying the moment* starts activating the parasympathetic nervous system. It enables you to have a moment of mindfulness. “Oh that’s what’s happening!” This is the “if you can name it, you can tame it” idea.

For flexibility in responding, great self-regulation, embracing an experience with acceptance initiates a subtle change. That’s because you can then *change what you’re telling yourself about your experience*. And that changes the meanings that you then apply to it. You are meta-stating yourself with some of the most profound states of all —awareness, acceptance, seeking-to-understand, patience, etc. and that sets the state for critical thinking, mindfulness, resilience, and much more.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #35**  
**August 4, 2019**

## **A GREAT NSTT IN BRAZIL**

A couple days ago we completed **NSTT—2019 Bali**. It was an exceptional training with an exceptional team and exceptional people who came to become Licensed NLP and Neuro-Semantic Trainers. Coming from 15 different countries, we have 54 for Psychology of APG and NLP and we had 45 for the full Trainers' Training.

The scene and venue was also really fantastic, right on the ocean beach where we had our Opening and our Closing. We were in a beautiful ballroom as you can see in the following pictures.

Our focus for the 15 days was on *the quality of the skills* which are required to be truly effective in training and presenting. Within that context we used *deliberate practice* so that the presenters would repeat a particular aspect of presenting over and over until they began to get it. Consequently it was great to see every single person eventually reach the competency benchmarks and by hard work earn their certificate.

While everything we do is grounded in NLP and the basic information within the Practitioner and Master Practitioner courses--- we have also been re-working that material to fit into various Professional Tracks: Coaching, Leadership, Business, Health, Self-Actualization, etc. We continue to work on and develop the NLP Track but simultaneously recognizing that because it does not immediately lead to a profession, it has and will continue to be difficult to “sell.”

With *the Meta-States Model* as the flagship of Neuro-Semantics, the creativity of models and patterns in Neuro-Semantics has been taking NLP to many new places. This not only explains the abundant creativity in Neuro-Semantics, but also how for 25 years Meta-States has been re-modeling NLP and explaining the hidden structure behind the effectiveness of NLP.

The torch of NSTT was passed by Mariani Ng (Indonesia) to Mohamed Tarek (Egypt) so that NSTT will be in Egypt in Oct. 2020, from which it will move to Mexico (2021), and then to Malaysia (2022) and then to Hong Kong (2023).

From the Back of the Room:”



<="">

From one side:



<="">

From the other side:



Group Work --- we had 9 teams.



Giving Feedback to a Presenter (in this picture, Mohamed Tarek)



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The inevitable and never-ending “self-ies”



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David Murphy getting Passionate in his Presentation



Co-Training with Mandy Chai and David Murphy





**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #36**  
**August 5, 2019**

## **RESPONDING TO INFORMATION**

When “information” comes to you, how do you respond? What we see constantly in the news is *reactivity*. People reacting before they even know all of the relevant information. Yet when people do this, they are doing several unthinking and mindless things. Here are some of them.

First, they are immediately and quickly *assuming that the information* is true and unquestionable. Big mistake! How many times in recent years has the “information” which was originally put out turned out to be wrong and erroneous? Dozens and dozens and dozens of times! That’s because *there is a time-lag* between the first reports about some event or some statement and the fuller story when all sides are examined. Yet because some people are so quick to emotionally and semantically react—that then becomes a secondary problem. Something that makes it harder for them to eventually adjust and change their first reaction so that they can later embrace the truth. The problem? Mindlessly reacting rather than mindfully responding. They commit themselves to a false version and get stuck, fearful of changing their minds.

Second, they *assume that the information is clean and undistorted*. Another big mistake! In fact, we can expect that most “information” is distorted, biased, and therefore not clean. After all, “information” that is spread quickly and immediately by people usually is spread by those who have some agenda in spreading it. The problem here? Biased spreading. People spreading it because they see that they can manipulate it and use it to make a point. The solution?

- Question the source: Who is spreading this?
- Question the agenda: For what purpose is someone spreading this?
- Question the context: When, where, with whom did this take place?

Information is distorted and not clean is either mis-information created by people who only know part of the facts and do not have the whole story or it is dys-information spread by people who are more concerned about making their point, pushing their agenda, winning a point than the actual facts and truth.

- Could this information contain mis-information and not all of the facts?
- What facts or contexts are not being stated? What is missing from this information?
- Could this be dys-information pushed by someone who has a hidden agenda?

Reacting to information with these assumptions then sets a person up to “jump to conclusions” and over-generalize things. These cognitive distortions then creates more distortions and confusions as they amplify negative emotional states. And because *the kind of thinking* within the cognitive distortions are “childish,” it increases the sense of being victimized.

None of this should actually be a problem at all for the NLP and Neuro-Semantic trained person. Why not? Because the Meta-Model of language gives the trained person the foundational skills for critical thinking. After all the Meta-Model provides the distinctions and the questions by which you can stay *mindful* while questioning the data that first comes to you.

- Who specifically is providing this information?
- How did they specifically know what they are writing or saying?
- What are they not saying? (Deletions)
- When, where, and with whom does this information arise? (Context facts)
- How specifically does X *cause or make* Y? (Causation statements)
- How do you know that X thinks, feels, or intends Y? (Mind-reading statements)
- When you use this vague generalization (a nominalization) what actions are you referring to? (Nominalization words and phrases)
- What are you assuming when you frame things in that way? (Presuppositions)

In all of this, NLP's Meta-Model provides you a set of questions which, if you use them, enables you to *think critically, precisely, and accurately* so that you are not triggered to *react*. Now you can *think things through more rationally and clearly*, you can stay mindful and conscious and not get your buttons pushed by overly emotional language.

Responding to “information” sounds simple and inevitable on the surface. Yet when we think about it, to do so sanely and mindfully requires slowing down reactivity and first getting all of the facts. Getting all of the facts also means asking lots of questions—challenging questions that seeks to get behind and around and above the statements so you can understand them in context. Here then is a simple formula that will solve the problem of mindless reactivity:

- Take a breath and slow down any *automatic reactivity*. Remind yourself that “information” can be mis-information and/or dys-information. First appearances can be deceiving. Everything is not as it appears. Appearance and reality are not necessarily the same.
- Question things. Ask detail questions that explore the context and the context-of-the-context of the information. Question what is *not* being presented. “What are you not saying?” Be a detective for flushing out the fuller story.
- Chase out cognitive distortions and biases. Use the NLP Meta-Model to get more precision and accuracy. Identify the linguistic structures of vagueness, assumptions, etc. so that you can flush out when hidden agendas may be driving the “information.”
- Check with others and other sources of information. See if there is a political agenda behind the data, and who is lining up on each side of an issue. Be suspicious if it is one-side.
- Apply the golden rule. Would you want “information” about you to be communicated in this way? If not, then challenge the person or persons or organizations that are pushing a certain agenda.

Here's to your best information processing!

[For more, see *Communication Magic* and look for a training in the NLP Meta-Model.]

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #37**  
**August 12, 2019**

## **WHEN THINKING IS CLOUDY**

Dominating the news last week and this week has been the distressing events involving two mass shootings, one in El Paso, Texas and the other in Dayton, Ohio killing some 31 people and wounding dozens of others. Interesting enough, one shooter wrote a manifesto aligning mostly with the right and the other aligning with one of the democratic candidates (Elizabeth Warren). In spite of that, the “media” generally engaged in “the blame game” illogically blaming President Donald Trump for the shootings— something the media did not do when there were mass shootings under Obama.

In the meantime, President Trump called the mass shooting Saturday in El Paso, Texas, an "act of cowardice," and said there "are no reasons or excuses that will ever justify killing people." Then he said in the strongest words possible that we have to be *against* all racist ideologies and white supremacist ideology.

"Today's shooting in El Paso, Texas, was not only tragic, it was an act of cowardice. I know that I stand with everyone in this Country *to condemn today's hateful act*. There are no reasons or excuses that will ever justify killing innocent people."

How much clearer could he be? And while you might think that would end the blame game, it did not. The fallacious argument being used is that Trump’s “rhetoric is racist” because it “creates an atmosphere” of hostility. [Apparently they do not consider their own rhetoric of name-calling, insults, and threats as racist or creating an atmosphere of hostility!] As evidence they quote various statements from Trump, yet not a single quote actually says what they say it says. They quote statements and they seem to believe it proves their point. Yet even others on the same side admit they are over-reaching. So what’s going on here?

The answer is *filtering*. People *filter* their thinking, reasoning, and arguing *through certain biased filters* (cognitive biases) and *do not realize that they are doing so*. They actually think that they are seeing and hearing evidence for their conclusions. This is the nature of cognitive filters— something that we all do and a challenge to clear thinking that we all have to deal with. It is the confirmation bias. It is the very reason we need to do critical thinking and why critical thinking one of the most needed cognitive make-overs we all need. It seems to me to especially apply those in politics and in the media.

Now the most extensive list of filters in NLP is the Meta-Program filters. These *perceptual lens* color the way we think, reason, and argue. And they are inevitable. Yet they don’t have to blind us. It is only when a person doesn’t realize the filtering effect of their meta-programs that the filter operates as *blind-spots*.

Here then is an explanation for the cloudy thinking which is so regularly demonstrated by the media. There's no need to demonize those who do so— they are caught up in a dilemma that is altogether human and inevitable. Yet that doesn't excuse it. It is still false, inaccurate, and muddled (as Bateson would say). It still needs to be challenged and corrected.

Yet there is now an even bigger problem, namely, *many do not seem to want to correct their cloudy, muddled thinking*. I get it, or at least kind-of-understand it, with political candidates— after all, they have an agenda. And as with nearly all politicians, they seem willing to use any and every cognitive fallacy to make a point. Wouldn't it be great if they were required to study critical thinking? It seems to be in the nature of politics to exaggerate, take things out of context, engage in name calling, insulting, etc. All parties do this. Apparently, the candidates seem to think this will get them votes. If that's the case, we can undercut a lot of that by teaching more and more people critical thinking [which is one thing we are doing in *Negro-Semantics*].

But then there is the mainstream media. If they were real journalists, they would know better than to present such a one-sided view. Yet many of them seem to be as greedy and unethical as aggrandizing politicians. They grab onto any statement, or mis-statement, take it out of context, exaggerate it, use it to blame and accuse— all to get a story or a headline.

Another set of filters are the *cognitive biases*. These also are quite human and inevitable until a person understands them and develops skill in catching them in the moment. Of course, doing that requires meta-cognitive development— something built into the Meta-States Model. I put these biases into seven categories in *Executive Thinking* to make them easier to remember.

- The Understanding Bias — assuming you understand.
- The Availability Bias — assuming that the information that's available is sufficient.
- The Confirmation Bias — assuming that what you believe is being confirmed.
- The Consistency Bias — assuming that consistency proves credibility.
- The Experiential Bias — assuming that if you experience it, it is true.
- The Social Bias — assuming those around you are pointing you in the right direction.
- The Context Bias — assuming that context is irrelevant and doesn't really matter.

The cure for clearing up cloudy thinking is the executive thinking that your higher brain functions are designed for. But they are not automatic. For them to be operational, you have to develop them. And that comes through learning and practice until you train the skill so it becomes automatic. And that's why we now have *Brain Camp for Cognitive Make-Overs*.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #38**  
**August 19, 2019**

## **AT THE HEART OF [GUN] VIOLENCE**

When there are mass shootings and multiple deaths as recently happened in El Paso Texas and Dayton Ohio, the question arises about *what causes it and what can be done to stop it*. It's a common conversation which is repeated it every time another mass shooting occurs. It is also a conversation that hardly ever seems to make a difference. Whether the shooting is in the US, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Africa, or wherever in the world, the same arguments and the same "solutions" are appealed to again and again. Yet the tragedies continue.

If the issue was only about *the means* used to kill, wound, and create terror, we would also have to band cars, trucks, knives, machettes, etc. Also it does makes perfect sense to have stricter and more meaningful background checks and Red Flag laws so the wrong people don't get guns. I'm all for that. Yet as is often noted, such laws alone will not stop most of the mass shootings. People determined to kill will find a way, especially criminals. Beyond the external constraints we can construct, the laws we can pass, and the other external solutions— for the real solution we have to get to *the heart of violence*. So what is that?

In answering that, the temptation will be to think superficially. It is to think that watching violent movies and/or video-games "causes" violence. It is believing that extreme ideology is the cause, or that valuing gun ownership causes it. But such are not "causes." How do I know that? Because the great majority of people who do such watching, believing, and valuing *do not engage in any kind of violence*. These are not the causes. They also probably have very little correlation to the problem.

For real answers we have to go deeper. Are you ready to go there? You may not like where I'm about to take you, but truth isn't dependent upon liking the answer. To get to the answer of the causes and then of the solutions, *consider the profile of the typical mass killer*. It is usually a guy (males dominate this field). It is usually a loner and someone frustrated with his life situation (job, lover, money, etc.). It is also someone (obviously) with very little empathy or compassion for people. In a socially empty context, the loner gets little to no feedback from others— so no corrections to an attitude of dislike, hate, prejudice of who he blames for his problems. Oh yes, it is always a blamer. In that stark and empty social world "crazy" ideas grow and thrive and become putrid. But he doesn't notice. As he gets used to those sick ideas, they seem familiar and even "normal." Without the sunlight of reason there is no updating or correcting his attitude.

Then to this dangerous seething pot of anger, hate, and blame add a heavy dose of 24-hour news cycle which highlights every shooting, bombing, car crashing, disaster — and the miserable loner can easily get an idea in his head of glory, recognition, and self-validation so he writes a manifesto of the world's evils, and goes off to be a martyr.

Now where would all of that pathology begin? Ah, in the home. In the person's original upbringing or if not there, then in school and/or at work. Almost any unresolved trauma could set this off. Yet here's where research in Developmental Psychology, and especially in Attachment Theory takes us. Attachment theory has identified the four basic patterns that develop between care-givers (parents) and children. One is healthy. Three are not. None of this is about blaming parents, in fact, when you read about the attachment patterns (below), you will notice that all of these are pretty "normal." They are "normal" given the stresses and strains of everyday life in today's world. And given that very few people take *parenting* serious enough to take a class or read a book, it is all the more "normal." People generally assume that we will know what to do when they become parents. Then life hits.

Attachment patterns govern how well a parent bonds to a child so that the child attains a "secure sense of attachment to the caring parent." Children need that in order to feel safe in the world, loved, cared for, soothed, and know how to regulate one's own emotions. Without a secure sense of attachment to someone who cares, the child will do his best to try to adapt— which is what leads to the dysfunctional patterns. These categories come from Daniel Siegel's work, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are* (1999/ 2008) which he took from the original work of John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst and psychiatrist.

- *Secure attachment.* A bonding pattern of love and support, parents giving compassion, patience, time, and most of all—personal presence. Parents able to "read" the infant's signals, or respond empathetically.
- *Avoidant attachment.* A non-bonding pattern. Parents essentially not available emotionally or mentally. They are preoccupied, busy, stressed-out, dealing with their own issues, etc.
- *Ambivalent attachment.* An on-and-off bonding pattern. Parents sometimes available, sometimes not. They aim to be present, then something comes up, then they feel bad and become intrusive. The pattern repeats later and they again become dis-connected.
- *Disorganized attachment.* A dis-orienting non-bonding pattern. Parents themselves unstable and therefore frightening to the child. Children become afraid, even terrified of the parent's drinking, abrupt mood changes, yelling, etc.

In the avoidant attachment pattern, the child avoids people. He (or she) becomes a loner. Latest statistics among Millennials is that a full 22% say that they have no friends, and 30% are not dating at all. In the ambivalent pattern, the child is full of anxiety and insecurity. And for the disorganized pattern, the child lacks a coherent mind that can make sense of things and adapt to it effectively.

When a person enters the world and he is not safe, does not have a secure sense of being and cannot make sense of things—that person is a dangerous person. We are made for unconditional love, care, compassion, empathy, meaning, play, significance, etc. and without it the world becomes dangerous, threatening, and anxiety producing. Yet we look for meaning ... even if it is in a riot of violence and pain— even if it means going out in a flurry of anger and revenge.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #39**  
**August 26, 2019**

## **CURING THE HEART OF VIOLENCE**

If those who end up engaged in mass shootings and killings are *loners* who are generally disconnected from people, if they are *blamers*, thinking that it is this person or that group which makes them angry, frustrated, outraged, etc., and *non-compassion*—lacking basic empathy for other human beings— *what can we do about that?*

If this is the basic profile of those who seek glory or martyrdom by going on a shooting spree (or driving a car into a crowd of people, or planting a bomb), what can be done to stop them? Obviously, we can look for signs of trouble—emotional outbursts, racist talk, extreme comments on social media, threats against people, etc. We can pass meaningful Red Flag laws which maintain due process so such laws are not misused. We can have stricter background checks to eliminate any loopholes in them. Yet all of that is trying to stop something that’s already fuming and seething and ready to explode.

Let’s start a lot earlier. Let’s look at the ways we (as a society) nurture infants, raise children, and educate young adults. Failure in these areas is what creates insecure, angry, disconnected extremists who could then be capable of mass murder in the first place. Somehow a darkside potential is activated within them. Certainly we are all exposed to a lot more violence than ever before— on TV, in the movies, on video-games. And that can’t help but to stimulate violence and make violence a possibility in the minds of many people.

Yet instead of asking “What’s causing this?” there’s another question we can ask. Namely, *“What’s missing in that person’s life?”*

- What’s missing in that person that he has little to no empathy, compassion or love?
- What’s missing in that person that he is so disconnected and living as a loner?
- What’s missing so the person lacks an internal sense of power (locus of control) and so blames external targets for his misery and does not accept personal responsibility?
- What’s missing in the person that causes him to embrace extreme ideology from either the right or left to justify his “crazy” plans to kill as many people as he can?

*Something is certainly missing.* To grab a gun, bomb, machete, car, etc. and head out to kill as many people as one can is not normal. Even if Hollywood has “normalized” murder and violence in movies, it is not normal to actually murder someone. Something has gone wrong. There’s a dark black hole deep in that person’s mind, emotions, and social relationships.

My thought is that what’s missing is similar to what is missing in a feral child. A child lost in the wilds and raised by animals (dogs, wolves, monkeys) may survive— as many did up until the

19<sup>th</sup> century, never became *human*. Missing the imprint period of language, their brains did not get the required experiences to activate the needed neural circuits of the higher brain (neocortex) functions and so did not enter into the symbolic meaning system of humans.

The mass murderer who shoots down innocent people is similar. Somehow they have missed the critical *attachment patterns to others* that occurs normally with empathetic, responsive, and caring parents. Attachment Theory (as mentioned in the last post) suggests three insecure attachment patterns that can mess a person up. The avoidant pattern is especially problematic in that it leaves a person empty of connection and so they dismiss compassionate connections with others. Failing to receive love, empathy, compassion, and firm boundaries, the person consequently misses out on how to regulate his own emotions and drives properly. Lacking basic self-regulation of emotions and drives the person adopts various defenses for self-protection.

Others may have received some nurturing and empathy, but perhaps too little. Or they may have suffered some traumatic threat or loss of a loved one— and that unresolved trauma or loss may be the seething center. It may be a consuming fire within that undermines any sense of meaningfulness in life, any hope for love, and so the person turns to destructiveness (hate, angry, outrage) as the darkside of “meaning.”

In these ways that the real issue is a mental health issue. Yet not all issues of mental health, but those that involve avoidance of intimate connections, lacking empathy, developing hatreds and resentments, and lacking meaningfulness. That kind of mental illness seems to be the culprit. No wonder they are out-of-control and the basic human feeling of compassion for others does not stop them.

A person who has made-meaning in his life so that it is meaningfulness does not engage in mass killings. Why would he? A person who knows love, empathy, care, meaning, significance, connection, and attachment does not become a mass murderer. What can we do? We can —

- *Promote high quality parenting*— effective parenting that nurtures, cares, connects, creates a secure attachment, boundaries, etc.
- *Enable healthy secure bonding strategies*. It’s never too late to experience an empathetic relationship with a caring person. And every such person is an agent for well-being in the world.
- *Enable healthy individual empowerment* so that every child, teenager, and adult will claim his and hers *innate powers of response*. Then they can become the architects of their own lives, responsible, and cut out blaming.
- *Enable one’s meaning-making powers* to unleash their highest values and best performances, to construct a meaningful life.

Want more? See the books— *Games Great Lovers Play*; *Secrets of Personal Mastery* — on the website [www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com). Or get to one of the Parenting #101 workshops.



From: L. Michael Hall  
2019 Neurons #40  
September 2, 2019  
*Cognitive Fallacies Continued*

## COGNITIVE FALLACIES IN EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

In ancient times, tribunals accused certain persons (usually women) of being “witches.” If a woman denied that she was a witch, the denial was used as proof that she was a witch. The reasoning was this, “Witches always deny that they are witches.” Conversely, if she said that she is a witch, she was burned at the stake. If she denies it, she was burned at the stake. It was a double-bind cognitive fallacy—damned if she confesses; damned if she denies! There was no way for her to prove that she was not a witch. The accusation implied the proof.

Talk about craziness and irrational thinking—that kind of double-bind reasoning condemns a person by the very act of making an accusation. A very similar thing happens today with name-calling. You use a derogatory label to refer to someone, and the label itself presupposes the very thing that it asserts. The fascinating thing about that is that when a person argues against the label, that person subtly assumes the validity of the label. “No I’m *not* stupid.” This tends to reinforce the label inasmuch as it has the structure of a *command negation*. “Don’t think of blue.” “Don’t question my sincerity.” “I’m not dishonest.” “I’m *not* a crook.” (Nixon).

In these double-binds, name-calling, criticisms, etc. there is a cognitive fallacy. What is the fallacy? It lies in the fact that the person on the receiving end is being called upon to *prove a negative*. This kind of thing happens a lot in language. Here is another cognitive fallacy that’s incorporated into language and that is difficult to flush out because it requires some *thinking things through* and some *critical thinking skills*. I bring it up now because calling someone a racist is today American Media’s Accusation Flavor of the Month.

I’m speaking about the cognitive fallacy within the phrase “unconscious bias,” “unconscious racism,” or any other “unconscious X.” Let’s begin by considering the two words “unconscious bias.” If we use the NLP Meta-Model, you will notice that what we have here first are **two nominalizations** which have been tied together. And when they are used together in this way, the result sounds meaningful while it actually is not and does not point to anything empirical. You can tell that it is not meaningful when you start questioning it.

- What do you mean by unconscious bias (unconscious racism)?
- Who is not aware of his bias? When is he not aware of it? In what way is he not aware?
- What does he need to do to be conscious of his bias?

Often, the person using this terminology will say, “It is just there and you can’t know that it is there, if you don’t, that’s evidence that you are unconsciously biased.” Ah, the double-bind assumption of the very thing which is being proposed!

To open up our understanding of this let’s begin by de-nominalizing the words. Underneath the false nouns (nominalizations) are verbs indicating actions or behaviors.

*Bias*: an orientation, tendency, attitude, a thinking pattern.

*Unconscious*: not-conscious, unaware, not aware.

By turning the false-nouns back into verbs (and actions) here’s what we have: *becoming aware of what we were not aware of, namely, our orientation, attitude, and thinking patterns*. With this we can now ask questions that will provide more clarity of thought:

- What actions are you seeing or hearing that indicate a bias against certain persons, women, racial heritage, ethnic background, sexual preference, etc.?

Now often those who use such language do so to promote a certain agenda. It is manipulative language and they are using it to get an unfair advantage in their propaganda. So they say things like the following to prevent the phrase from being clearly understood, , “But unconscious bias is very subtle, it is hidden in social and cultural structures,” it is institutionalized bias. Yet if the person shifts from an individual to talking about a group (e.g., organization, society, country), then again, we ask the Meta-Model questions to derive some clarity of meaning:

- What are the practices, policies, rituals, rules, ways of operating (group behaviors) which we need to be aware of that disadvantages some people, those of one race or another, females, etc.?

The point in using the Meta-Model is this: If you can’t identify the behavior of some concept and put it in terms of external actions and words, or internal behavior such as thinking patterns, *then you are dealing with an unsubstantiated vague concept that only exists in a person’s mind*, and not in reality. It’s an ungrounded assumption. Without identifying a specific behavior, it is a muddled double-bind cognitive fallacy, in other words, craziness and irrationality. No wonder the person cannot clarify.

To further push for clarity, ask, “How can I demonstrate that I don’t have an unconscious bias?” If the answer is, “You can’t” then that reveals you are facing someone with a belief-system which cannot be falsified. And that, of course, makes it not only unreasonable and unscientific, but a form of manipulation. The structure of the person’s argument is unanswerable which is probably what the person wants. Now he can rest confident (and arrogant) in his belief.

Actually, there is no such thing as “unconscious bias” or “unconscious racism” apart from behaviors, words, utterances, etc. that a person—at some point in time—is unaware of. Once we make it conscious, we can fix that bias by adopting a more sane and appropriate way of thinking. That’s what we do when we reframe a limiting understanding or belief.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #41**  
**August 26, 2019**  
*Thinking Style and Experience*

## SECOND STAGE VICTIMIZATION

Three weeks ago Jeffrey Epstein committed suicide in prison. He was there as a convicted sex predator who apparently trafficked in sex with scores, if not hundreds, of women. But then he died. And while the report said it was suicide, many question that. Anyway, more recently (August 28) a dozen or more women went to court and testified about their experience were then interviewed.

“He took away my innocence” one said. “He cheated me out of my childhood,” another asserted. “He has now taken away my day in court to tell my story.” “I wanted to see justice done, but now that he’s gone, that will never happen.”

Now what strikes me is not the pain and distress of the women suffered due to the criminal behavior of Epstein, but how they are perpetuating their own misery *by the way they are thinking about it*. It’s one thing to be mistreated, abused, deceived, etc. It is another thing to take a bad experience and unnecessarily perpetuate it. The first is an example of interpersonal violation and abuse, of “man’s inhumanity to man,” the second is an example of self-abuse.

A basic principle in most psychology and especially in NLP is that *how you frame something determines how you experience that thing*. So if you frame things so that you are the recipient of another person’s actions— you have thereby victimized yourself. The amazing thing in this is how you can do it so quickly and so easily with language. The above examples demonstrate this. Here they have taken a nominalization (“innocence,” “childhood,” “justice”) and posited that a person has *taken that away*. That frames them as a victim of a theft, a theft of something that is *lost forever*. After all, how do you get one of those things back? Language is not innocent. What you *say*, and what is *implied* in what you say, can be as devastating as an actual assault.

It began with being a victim of another person’s lust, anger, violence, stupidity, unethical behavior, craziness, etc. That describes the brute facts of what happened in a given case. The victimization could have stopped there. But for some, that’s just the beginning. To make matters worse, *they then victimize themselves by the way that frame things*. They jump-to-conclusions which are unfounded, they over-generalize, they personalize, they awfulize, etc. and in the end they so interpret things so that they are in a stuck state of loss, injustice, disempowerment forever. They frame things so that there’s only one solution and it *depends on something or someone external* to them. And if *external*, then they can do nothing about it.

The disempowerment then worsens with the actions that the “victims” take, namely, complaining, whinning, and narrating a self-identity as a victim. As a way of thinking, all of this

makes things worse, puts one into a prison of one's own making and throws away the key. And as if that's not bad enough, all of this creates a particular mental blindness—they can't see what they are doing and what they could be doing.

All of this describes *second stage victimization*. And while we cannot always control the first stage of victimization— when we are the object of someone's rage or cruelty or stupidity, we can always control *how we respond to that first stage*. Doing so, in fact, is the place where true human *empowerment* occurs.

This was the place of empowerment that Viktor Frankl accessed when he wrote in *Man's Search for Meaning* that his captors and tormentors in the Nazi Concentration Camp could not make him hate them. They could do all kinds of cruel things to him— imprison him, take away everything precious to him, reduce his food intake to eight ounces of soup a day, etc. But “they can not make me hate them.” My choice of how I will respond to them is *my choice* and that is the ultimate human freedom.

“No one can make me hate them.  
They cannot take away the ultimate  
human freedom to choose one's  
response.

*Viktor Frankl*

He was a victim once, but not twice. He received treatment regarding which he was powerless to do anything, but he did not continue the victimization treatment to himself. He asserted his unconditional value as a human being. He claimed his ultimate powers of response. And in doing that he did not become traumatized by what otherwise traumatized millions and could have traumatized him. He took it and experienced it on the primary level, but never on the meta-level. That is, he did not give it a negative meaning that would imprison him in a mental prison.

President Reagan did something similar. After he was shot by John Hickley and nearly died, he forgave him. His son, however, did not and refused to. Thirty years later his son said that he was still angry at Hickley and unwilling to forgive him. At the same time he noted that his dad, the President, forgave him two days after the shooting. Two ways of thinking about an experience— two ways of experiencing an experience.

From: L. Michael Hall  
2019 Neurons #42  
September 2, 2019  
*Cognitive Fallacies Continued*

## PRESENT-ISM

### The Difficulty of Thinking about the Past

When it comes to the past, whether it's your own personal history, some other person's history, or the history of an age— *it is very, very difficult to think clearly and intelligently*. There are several reasons for this. Let's start with your own history and your cognitive awareness of that history, what we call *memory*.

When it comes to *memory*, there are so many different kinds of memory; there are also many different brain areas and functions responsible for the different kinds. There is short-term working memory and long-term memory. There is autobiographical or narrative memory which is how we sustain a stable sense of self across time. There is semantic memory, procedural memory, flashbulb memory, etc. There is implicit and explicit memory. Lots of kinds of memory!

How does memory work? Well, we know that it certainly does *not* work like the memory of a computer. Push "save" and the computer's memory encodes and stores the code and when you retrieve it later by "opening" the file, what you stored is what you get— high fidelity. Not so with human memory! First, what and how you remember depends on the code and the coding you use— it is a construct of your perceptions, understandings, sensory-awareness, beliefs, etc. And then every time you retrieve the memory and refresh it, *you reconstruct it* so that it is changed ever-so-subtly and unconsciously by your current state of mind. How about that! What you are currently thinking changes what you previously thought.

Precisely because remembering is re-constructing, there is no "pure" or pristine memory. We do not remember things so much as they were, but *as we are*. This also explains how memories can be changed and always is being changed. It explains how you construct false memories and how false facts can fairly easily be imprinted into your memories.

Daniel Gilbert in *Stumbling on Happiness* (2005) described the power of experience on memory. "There isn't a view from nowhere. Once we have an experience, we are thereafter unable to see the world as we did before. Our innocence is lost and we cannot go home again." (p. 57)

The same dynamics occur when we try to "remember" (understand, comprehend) the past of individuals from previous ages or even an age. Gilbert's book focuses on one thing— why we are so bad at predicting our personal and emotional futures. He notes that it is a cognitive fallacy to view the past via presentism.

“Historians use the word *presentism* to describe the tendency to judge historical figures by contemporary standards. As much as we all despise racism and sexism, these isms have only recently been considered moral turpitudes, and thus condemning Thomas Jefferson for keeping slaves or Sigmund Freud for patronizing women is a bit like arresting someone today for having driven without a seat belt in 1923. And yet, the temptation to view the past through the lens of the present is nothing short of overwhelming.” (2005, pp. 161-2)

It is very, very difficult to take second perceptual position with another person as you try to empathize and understand what the other is experiencing *on their terms and from their perspective*. It is even more difficult to put ourselves into the historical cultural frames of mind of a previous age and seek to truly understand how people thought, reasoned, felt, perceived, etc. The easiest thing, and the most fallacious thing, is to evaluate (judge) them *from our perspective*— our values, our understandings, our frames-of-mind, our frames of reference, etc.

Yet when innocence has been lost, you cannot go home. You can't even do that with your own past (history). Try to *remember* what and how you thought and felt when you were five. Or when you were twelve. You can't! And worse, notice how easy it is to judge *your past self* for something stupid that you said or did. Yet how unfair to that past self to judge through today's lens. Since then you have learned a lot, experienced a lot, matured, grown up, left home. The innocence of that previous stage of life is gone. And you can't go back.

Where you are today—how you are thinking, feeling, perceiving, valuing, evaluating, etc.—determines and governs how you re-construct past memories. It contaminates what you remember. It affects your memory of your own life and of all those who came before you.

Regarding Thomas Jefferson in the reference above, today it is impossible for us to put ourselves back into the cultural and social context of the late 1700s. Slavery had been going on for hundreds of years. The slave industry was running strong and only in the 1700s did the more enlightened come to the conclusion that it was wrong and dehumanizing. It took longer for those in the industry to see it. Both the ship-owners who transported the slaves and the tribal chiefs who gathered their own people, jailed them, and sold them had vested financial interests in that industry. So it took them much longer to accept that their industry would end.

We didn't live in that world— in that cultural milieu. And because we didn't grow up in a culture in which that was accepted as normal, it is nearly impossible today to even imagine that. When asked why Truman didn't try to escape his constructed world in the movie *Truman*, the director (played by Ed Harris) said, “*We all accept the world as it is given to us.*” You and I do the same. Living in culture is living within a mental/emotional environment of which we are mostly unconscious. I wonder what are some of the cultural things which we accept today that might be consider shocking and abhorrent in the future? Presentism— the cognitive fallacy that contaminates looking at the past because we use the lens of today. It prevents us from truly going back.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #43**  
**September 16, 2019**

## **THE ELUSIVE OBVIOUS— WHAT IS NLP?**

For me, it is a simple thing to define is NLP. Yes, I know that the question, “What is NLP?” induces many NLP Trainers and practitioners into a state of uncontrollable stuttering. Yet the truth is that the answer is obvious and right before your eyes—if you only have eyes to see it. I bring this up again because last week I read chapter 6 of Bruce Grimley’s book on NLP and Coaching, fantastically titled, “A New Theory of NLP.” After collecting 14 definitions of NLP from “15 NLP experts from around the world,” and then writing a whole chapter on what NLP is, I was stunned that not one time did Bruce or any of these “experts” say the elusive obvious—*NLP is a communication model*. Amazing!

One expert said that it “defies easy description.” Others quoted the subtitle of *NLP Volume I*, “the study of the structure of subjective experience” which is valid. Steve Andreas came very close “An explicit and powerful model of human experience and communication.”

It’s amazing that we have so complicated this question, “What is NLP?” and turned it into an area of complexity. Here’s what I wrote two years ago as a post here on Neurons as I argued that it is simply and essentially *a communication model* (#30, July 10, 2017).

### **NLP: WHAT IS IT— REALLY?**

Morpheus asked Neo when they first met, “Do you want to know what *it is*?” Neo answered with a question, “What is the Matrix?” The question here is, “What is NLP?” Now some NLP people seem to have a challenge about defining and describing what it is. I suppose that’s because as a meta-discipline, it can be applied to so many things. And yet, what it can be applied to is *not* the same thing as what it *is*. *Identity* is not the same thing as *application*.

In terms of defining NLP, it is *a communication model*. How do I know that? Well, look at the title of the original books. The two volumes of *The Structure of Magic* is titled, *A Book about Communication and Change*. And in those two volumes, the authors present “A Meta-Model of Language in Therapy.” Next, look at all of the communication models of NLP—

- The list of 12 linguistic distinctions (from Transformational Grammar) and questions to enable a person get a fuller and deeper representation of the person’s experience is the Meta-Model.
- The list of the sensory representation systems and their distinctions that comprise the language of the mind.
- The list of non-linguistic processes (calibrating, pacing, etc.) for communicating.

- The list of meta-program distinctions of perceptual filters that influence communication.
- The list of state or trance inducing linguistic and non-linguistic forms, hence hypnotic communication.
- The list of communication *guidelines* such as “The meaning of your communication is the response you receive.”

*It's a Communication Model!* And the original design was to look at *how* the expert communicators in therapy (Perls, Satir, Erickson) communicated which resulted in effective therapeutic change. Later, others were modeled for communication expertise in business, medicine, leadership, etc. The originators also used and quoted the Satir Categories of Communication, they started with the linguistic formulations from Transformational Grammar and a little bit from General Semantics.

In April (2017) when I was in London for the NLP Conference, we conducted a short meeting for the NLP Leadership Summit and at the heart of the conversation this year was membership as well as what is accepted as “Neuro-Linguistic Programming.” One person suggested several new age techniques around “energy.” That’s when co-founder Frank Pucelik spoke up to correct that mis-understanding.

“I remember what we did at the beginning and a lot of it was surely *not* NLP. We studied these things (new age techniques and things from Esalen) to try to find interesting patterns, to increase our observation skills, or to find out if there was any truth claims in these strange systems, and sometimes just for fun to see if we could do them. We studied many things including but not limited to, Psychodrama, Re-evaluation Co-counseling, Art therapy, stage hypnosis, Castaneda (Don Juan, etc.), Bio Feedback, Sensory Deprivation (Isolation tanks), Massage Therapy, Reading Auras, Gestalt, TA (Transactional Analysis), Rogerian Therapy, Earth Coincidence Control Office (John Lilly), Dolphin Communication Patterns (Bateson) , Encounter Group Processes, Sensitivity T-Groups, Past Lives, Occult Belief Systems, Pavlov, and many more. But we never considered any of these systems to be NLP. We based NLP on all the processes that are known to be NLP/Meta today. The Meta-Model, Rep. Systems, Systematic Use of Negations, Calibrations, Major Beliefs, Anchoring, Pacing and Leading, The Milton Model, Satirs' Conjoint Family Systems, Brain Hemisphere Functions, and the rest.”

Those were “the wild days of NLP” and in those wild days, while the founders explored lots of things, that in itself did *not* turn those things into NLP. Later Robert Dilts along with the originators put together the first Volume of NLP and sub-titled the book, *The Study of the Structure of Subjective Experience* (1980). That’s because *the elements of communication* (linguistics, sensory systems, non-linguistic responses, etc.) are simultaneously the components of experience. And if they are the components of experience— then we can use the very tools of communication to *model the structure of any and every experience*. That’s why NLP, as a Communication Model, grew and expanded by the process of modeling.

Isn’t that fantastic!?! *The components of experience— then we can use the very tools of communication to model the structure of any and every experience*. Did you catch the connection? The variables by which communication works (an experience) are the very variables



(structure) of all experiences. That's why and how the NLP model gives us the tools for modeling the structure (form, patterning) of experiences.

I was not explicit aware of this when I first learned NLP. It wasn't until 1996 that I explicitly woke up to this connection between *communication and modeling* when Richard Bandler asked me to write a book on the 25-history of the Meta-Model. And I did. The book (first titled, *The Secret of Magic*, 1997, and later re-titled, *Communication Magic*, 2001) was published by Crown House Publications. Prior to that (1992) I had added nine additional distinctions to the Meta-Model from Korzybski's General Semantics. And that list was then published in NLP Journals around the world and was incorporated in the second edition of *Magic Demystified* written by Bryon Lewis (and Frank Pucelik).

What is it? *Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a Communication Model*. It describes how we are patterned (programmed) in and by the communication processes within neurology and linguistics. And yes, it can be *applied* to anything "human," especially any and every human experience. But it is *not* everything. It is *not* therapy, counseling, psychology, or hypnosis—even though it arose from those disciplines. It is *not* persuasion, sales, management, leadership, or even coaching. Although obviously as a communication model, it will have lots of practical usefulness in these fields. *Nor* is NLP any of the many kinds of sci-fi "energy" programs that are touted under the name of NLP.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #44**  
**September 23, 2019**

## COMMUNICATION MYTHS

Given that NLP is a Communication Model and Neuro-Semantics is an Integrated Communication Model— *communication is our business*. That is also why we often, instead of giving a “NLP Practitioner” certificate, we give a *Professional Communicator Certificate*. After all, that’s what neuro-linguistics and neuro-semantic is all about— how we communicate meanings and understandings to ourselves and to others. And in this, there are numerous communication myths that we have to expose as we train people in advanced communication competencies.

### **Myth #1: Communication is talking.**

People who are deceived by this myth falsely think that by doing more and more talking, they are communicating more. Others may think that effective communication is equal to the gift of gab. But it is not! Professional communicators know that communication involves listening as much as talking. Talking, in the sense of advocating what you think, feel, and want is only part of communication, and actually it is a minor part. The word *communication* itself speaks of a co-union and a communion of two or more persons who interchange ideas, listen to each other, and seek first to understand then to be understood. Real communication is a collaborative adventure of discovery and, at its best, is a dialogue.

### **Myth #2: Communication is a one-way process.**

Since real communication is *not* talking, to truly communicate, you have to engage in a two-way process that is more like a dance. It involves both sending and receiving messages, receiving feedback and reflecting and adjusting, and learning, and co-creating the experience. In communication, we compare message sent and received to see if they match. Then we seek to match the other person's model of the world in order to understand the other person *on his or her terms*. In the reflecting process, we check on our own messages to check if we are being congruent and accurate.

### **Myth #3: Communication is easy.**

The only person who could possibly think that this is easy is the person who has not tried it. When you engage in the process of listening, entertaining another’s ideas, questioning and exploring, re-presenting your own ideas— you will quickly find out that it is challenging and demands a lot of you. It demands attention, focus, being present, thinking, etc. The dialogue process is actually a much more difficult challenge than most people imagine. The challenge is due to the many variables involved, and the ability to truly listen, consider, ask good questions, get one’s ego-investments out of the way, to recognize one’s own thinking and emoting filters, and more. All of these skills require training and practice in order to become truly competent in communicating.

**Myth #4: Communicating is simple.**

Rather than being simple, real communication is complex because it is multi-layered. It is complex also due to the many, many variables involved. With the messages sent and received, there is also the creation of multiple contexts of those messages. Complicating things is the language used, the non-verbals, the history of a relationship, and the multiple levels of thinking and emoting. There are also the multiple frames which govern the meanings and for those you have to *go meta*. Then there are the 60 possible meta-programs which filter how each person thinks and perceives. So getting on to another person's channel is most challenging.

**Myth #5: Communication is saying what you mean and meaning what you say.**

If only it was that easy and simple! But alas, “meaning” itself is an internal constructing of understanding, of linking and associating things together, so that actually “words do not mean” anything. It is people who *use* words to convey meanings. We do the *meaning-making* and we use words (properly and improperly, appropriately and inappropriately) so that we often have to check with others about how they are using their words and share our own operational definitions.

The basic NLP communication guideline is, “The meaning of your communication is the response you get.” Given that, *you never know what you have communicated*. With a video-recording, you can know what you said, how you said it, the context, etc. But you never know for sure *what* the other person *heard*. Not until you get a response can you begin to guess the message that the other person constructed from what you said and how you said it. It's the co-creation of meaning that makes communication a shared construct.

There are other myths and many, many more *communication guidelines* in NLP and Neuro-Semantics— guidelines that can enrich leadership, management, parenting, love and much, much more. For more, contact your nearest Neuro-Semanticist.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #45**  
**September 30, 2019**

## **MIND-READING AT ITS WORST**

This week there was a big political hullabaloo about a phone call President Trump had with the President of the Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. Finally a transcript was released and then a so-called “whistleblower” report (so-called because he was not a direct witness, but got the information second-hand and even third-hand from “the media”) had been classified as *biased* against President Trump and for a rival. Also it was written in the form of a lawyer brief.

Regardless of that, the Congressional Hearing was televised publically. Normally, a chairman of such a committee would begin by quoting the facts of the case, establishing the context, and invite the witness to make an opening statement. But to my absolute amazement, Representative Adam Schiff, the chairman of the committee and a strong anti-Trump democrat began by reading *an account that he completely made-up*. Later he admitted that it was a “parody” (“a work of close imitation for comic effect or in ridicule; feeble or ridiculous imitation”). But he failed to note that in the hearing. He presented it in the context of a serious Congressional Hearing *as if* it was real. It wasn’t. He created a comic imitation of the President’s phone conversation. It was his projections. Yes, you read that right. He began with what he later said to Wolfe Blizer on CNN was mockery. “I was mocking the President’s behavior.”

Now this “parody” was full of statements that the President never said and never would say. Yet Schiff made up a skit that would have been more appropriate for *Saturday Night Live* than a Congressional Hearing. So the question I was immediately pondering as I listened to it was, “Why would anyone do that?”

Now what he presented, if the parody had been true, would have condemned the President. Could that have been the reason? Was he trying to manipulate those present in the hearing room and all of those watching by setting a frame that assumed his guilt? After all, even if you admit, “It’s a parody,” once the information is out—few people can simply dismiss it, set it aside, and not let it influence them. The NLP Communication Model views this communication ploy as manipulative and therefore unethical.

I’m writing about this because Schiff’s statements which *assume* he knows President Trump’s motives and intentions is the most overt example I’ve ever seen. In linguistics we call that *mind-reading*. In psychology we call that *projection*. And the problem with projection is that it always reveals much more about the speaker than the speaker’s object. As an unconscious defense mechanism, it reveals things about the speaker which are typically the speaker’s blind-spots. That’s why anyone familiar with this basic psychological fact is careful about attributing emotions, motives, and intentions to others.

Now as if that was bad enough, what I thought was worse was that no one called his hand on it. Later various political pundits on various news programs brought it up and addressed it a little bit. But for the most part, the most unworthy and unethical mind-reading and projection statements was made ... and no one called Representative Schiff on it. Not even the witness, Acting Director of National Intelligence Joseph Maguir, challenged it.

If I had been there, I would have confronted him about his mind-reading and projection and challenged him about that languaging being manipulative. Putting words, motives, emotions, and intentions into anyone's mouth— words that if they had been spoken would convict that person of wrong-doing turns the whole information-gathering process upside-down. Instead of asking open-ended questions searching for facts and truth, it starts from the assumption of wrong-doing, and asks leading, rhetorical, and assumptive questions which, if the person answers them, accepts all of the assumptive frames. This is always destructive to communication. It undermines critical thinking. It shuts down a search for facts. It forces people into a game of manipulation and one-upmanship that is more appropriate a seventh-grade boys locker room. It is shameful for grown-up men and women.

Here is the made-up parody from Adam Schiff:

“And what is the President’s response — well it reads like a classic organized crime shake down [Schiff’s judgment and frame about the President’s response]. In essence [well, in Schiff’s view], what the President Trump communicates is this [mind-reading]: We’ve been very good to your country. Very good. No other country has done as much as we have. But you know what, I don’t see much reciprocity here. [A frame so it sounds like a quid pro quo which is what the investigation is suppose to be investigating, not assuming.] You know what I mean? [Hypnotic invitation to set in and experience the assumptions.] I hear what you want. I have a favor I want from you though. And I’m going to say this only seven times, so you better listen good. [Seven times suggests the President is patronizing and treating the Ukraine President as a child, a silly and ridiculous mockery.] I want you to make up dirt on my political opponent, understand? [mind-reading, “dirt” is imposed and made-up by Schiff, rather than investigate the facts.] Lots of dirt, on this and on that. [Repetition for hypnotic effect.] I’m going to put you in touch with people, and not just any people. I’m going to put you in touch with the Attorney General of the United States — my Attorney General, Bill Barr — he’s got the whole weight of American law enforcement behind him [mind-reading and projecting intentions]. And I’m going to put you in touch with Rudy, you’re going to love him. Trust me. You know what I’m asking, so I’m only going to say this a few more times, in a few more ways. [mind-reading and mockery.] And don’t call me again. I’ll call you when you’ve done what I asked. [a presupposition by Schiff to conclude the parody.]

Of course, the actual transcript of the phone call says none of this, nor does it even suggest or imply any of this. In terms of undermining effective communication, there’s nothing better than *mind-reading and projecting one’s own assumptions*. For the actual transcript see: [//www.politico.com/story/2019/09/25/trump-ukraine-phone-call-transcript-text-pdf-1510770](https://www.politico.com/story/2019/09/25/trump-ukraine-phone-call-transcript-text-pdf-1510770)

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #46**  
**October 7, 2019**

## CALM AND COOL THINKING

Of all the things that can *stop thinking*, hardly anything is as effective as stress. As a psychological experience, *stress* has a disorganizing effect on thought. It effects our brain to almost exclusively focus on whatever is the object of the sense of threat, danger, or fear. How well do you think when you're stressed or under pressure?

Regarding stress, there are two major kinds—acute and chronic stress. Acute stress is the obvious one. It occurs whenever there is something that you define as dangerous or threatening. The “danger!” message is what then activates “the general arousal syndrome.” Most people know this as the “Fight/ Flight, Freeze” of the nervous system. And when that occurs, blood is literally withdrawn from the brain (no wonder we can't think as well!) and stomach (and feel queasy) and sent to the larger muscle groups to prepare for fighting or fleeing.

Yet while these facets of acute stress are obviously physical and dependent on the anatomy of the brain (and body), they are completely *relative* to your definition of what's dangerous. This explains why what is stressful to one person is not stressful to another. It also explains why there's differences in the stress intensity of an experience. The more a person knows how to think about the experience and has resourceful skills for dealing with it, the less she will find it stressful. For the person who doesn't know how to think about it or what to do, the same experience can be extremely stressful. Like beauty, stress is in the eye (and mind) of the beholder.

With this understanding, we can now recognize how it is that stress is psychological. A memory of a traumatic moment with an experience can make one especially sensitive to experiencing something as stressful. So also the more you think about it using the various cognitive distortions. Whether you over-generalize, awfulize, emotionalize, or use some other cognitive distortion, doing such amplifies stress so that the emotion triggered (fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, etc.) then undermines calm and cool thinking. You cannot think at your best when stressed. No one can.

The fear response that leads to stress physically and literally shuts off your higher executive functions in the prefrontal cortex so that you can *react* to an immediate danger that is threatening you. Flooded by the emotions, you have knee-jerk reactions that are hardly within your control. If you do not go into reacting, you might *freeze up* and become inflexibly rigid. Now you might be going blank, “can't think,” can't focus, and so feel that you are losing your mind. And if your mind doesn't freeze up, perhaps you are responding by *fleeing*— literally and emotionally

running away from the stress trigger. In every one of these ways, you become cut off from your best thoughtful, mindful, and rational thinking.

Chronic stress creates the same kind of responses except that because it is chronic, the stressful overload comes gradually and usually comes upon you at unawares. This means that you will not even aware when it is happening. If you do become aware, it is the “last straw phenomenon.” You now might think that the final trigger that set you over the edge was the cause. But it was not. It was simply “the last straw.” You hit a threshold point and couldn’t take any more. Physically your blood pressure may have been off the charts, but you didn’t notice. You couldn’t. Amazingly, high blood pressure is not something that you can feel.

Chronic stress is an overload. It comes from another message, “too much.” It arises from a sense of “enough, no more!” Its subtly arises because everything habituate. That means that you can get used to living in high levels of stress, taking on far too many things, never feeling like you get a break from things, and then one day, one thing pushes you over the top. Chronic stress is much more a killer than acute stress precisely because it is so subtle.

*If you want to be a great thinker*— clear, concise, thorough, accurate, wise, etc.— you will need to learn to be cool and calm under pressure. You will want to develop the emotional intelligence to monitor and regulate your emotions. You will want to cultivate your meta-cognitive powers for mindfulness. You may also want to get to Brain Camp when it comes to a city near you.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #47**  
**October 14, 2019**  
*How to be a Professional Communicator #1*

## **SEVEN DISTINCTIONS OF A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR**

While many people don't seem to know what NLP is, the answer actually is very simple. Most essentially *NLP is a Communication Model* and, Neuro-Semantics, as a development within NLP for higher quality and professionalism, is most essentially an *integrated and systemic* Communication Model. Now while just about everyone knows that "communication" is important, most are clueless about how important it is. So, how important is it?

*Communication is critically important because communication drives everything human*—relating, parenting, managing, leading, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, persuasion, wealth creation, expertise, etc. In each of these domains, *the quality* of your communication is the quality of your experience, your skill, and your expertise. Communication governs each of these areas and many more. Now you know why we so intensely focus on *high quality communication skills* in Neuro-Semantics.

Further, because "mastery is in the details" in every area, there are critical distinctions about communication for knowing how to unleash your highest quality communication skills. If you learn these, you will be able to become a professional communicator. If you don't, you will be unprofessional, and possibly a toxic communicator, and worse, not even know it. The following *seven critical distinctions* are based the extended Meta-Model of NLP and on the Meta-States Model (see *Communication Magic*, 2000, *Meta-States*, 2012). I wrote it in 2005 and have updated it here for this series.

Here are core distinctions of every professional communicator. Given that mastery involves making critical distinctions, how well do you make the following seven critical distinctions?

- 1) Map and Territory
- 2) Person and Behavior
- 3) Meaning and Response
- 4) Sensory and Evaluation information
- 5) Frame and Feeling
- 6) Advocacy and Inquiry
- 7) Current and Desired state

There's also an extra benefit in learning these. When you use these distinctions, you eliminate *major communication diseases*. What creates *dis-ease* in the process of understanding each other? Ellis and Beck in Cognitive-Behavioral psychology describes these as the ways to make yourself (and others) miserable.

- Confusion of words with reality
- Mind-reading and hallucinating
- Judging, being judgmental, exaggerating



- Emotionalizing: minimizing, maximizing
- Personalizing: over-identifying, defensiveness
- Blaming, accusations, insults.
- Distracting, changing the subject, refusing to focus.

Conversely, the seven distinctions create the foundation for those powerfully profound skills and states that facilitate excellence in communication.

- Sensory awareness, able to observe what is present.
- Present in the moment and focuses on the now.
- Stepping back into an observing state (to be as objective as possible).
- Getting the ego out of the way to be “clean” intentionally.
- Staying open and receptive to feedback.
- Flexibly adjusting to real-time feedback and making on-course corrections.
- Thinking systemically and recognizing leverage points.
- Exploring curiously to discover what *is*.
- Seeking clarity in problem-definition.
- Solution-focus thinking in creating forward movement.
- Suspending meaning and opening up dialogue.

No wonder these distinctions are the prerequisites of true mastery in persuasive communication. These distinctions, as high quality frames, facilitate mobilizing your best resources for dialogue, co-creating mutual understanding and unleashing new possibilities. As this fits for coaching, training, educating, therapy, parenting, managing, and leading—these distinctions are essential for any and every *Professional Communicator*.

### **Distinction #1: DISTINGUISHING MAP AND TERRITORY**

It is common-sense wisdom that “The map is not the territory.” A map is never the territory it represents just as a menu is not the meal; a sex manual is not love making; a photo is not the person. As different phenomena, map and territory operate in different dimensions and at different levels.

Simple, yet so profound. Simple enough to know also simple enough to forget. How and when do we forget it? When we think that our thoughts, beliefs, values, and identities *are* real. That’s the delusion. What you think as a mental map is not real and never can be. When you forget, you *identify* and create identification. You identify map *and* territory as one and the same. Further, when you think that X *is* real, you think it is absolute; you think it is beyond question (unquestionable). This describes the concrete thinker, the absolutist, the pulpit-pounding pundit who has “the answers,” the guru who demands blind and unquestioning obedience, the fundamentalist in any system (Christian, Moslem, Liberal, Conservative, Political, etc.).

*Map* is the stuff *inside* which is generated from the way you code and represent the outside world. *Map* is your ideas, beliefs, understandings, feelings, memories, etc. which you create *about* the outside world of experiences. You do not deal with the world directly, but indirectly (the basic epistemology of NLP). You interface with the electromagnetic spectrum as mediated through your sense receptors, neuro-pathways, brain cortices, beliefs, belief systems, etc.

*Territory* is the outside world, all of the experiences, words, events, and happenings “out there” which we can represent in only a very limited way.

“The word ‘pig’ is not a pig. It is a word.”

Neo: “You believe in ‘karma’ ... in ‘love?’” “These are just words.”

For someone mapping what’s “out there” in the world and seeking to create an internal map that’s useful, the direction of fit should be from world to mind. *A world-to-mind fit* means that you are letting the world determine what you think— facts first, then thought. The reverse mind-to-world fit first thinks and then imposes that thinking on the world. This is never the way to start. It works only after you have thoroughly studied and mapped the world. Here you push the envelop through your imagination to see what else is possible.

As a masterful communicator you also know that all of your mapping is fallible, and even at its best, is only a guess. You also knows that the value of a map lies in its usefulness, in it being able to provide navigational guidance for moving through the world of experiences. Does the map correspond well enough so that you can use it to direct your thoughts and actions? Does it facilitate you having the experiences you want to have and to achieve the things you want to accomplish?

- How well do you recognize that *all* of your mental mapping is just a map?
- How integrated is this as your frame of mind?
- How quick are you to ask questions rather than tell, demand, or give advice?
- How grounded is your recognition that your feelings come from of your maps?
- How intuitive is this distinction so that you recognize that every emotion is *the difference* between your map of the world and your experience in the world?

Distinguishing map and territory enables you to begin your journey to being a professional communicator. When you distinguish map and territory, you tend to be much more careful about your words and sentences. As maps you know they all suffer of the limitations involved in mapping— you know you have generalized things, deleted things, and distorted things. You know that your verbal map is partial, incomplete, and therefore inaccurate. And knowing that, you cannot be an absolutist about your map. It is just a map and always can be improved.

For more on this, see *The Structure of Magic, Communication Magic, Inside-Out Persuasion*.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #48**  
**October 21, 2019**  
*Professional Communicator #2*

## **DISTINGUISHING PERSON AND BEHAVIOR**

We began with distinguishing map and territory. That distinction enables us to differentiate what we do in our heads— *thinking*— from what we experience on the outside, from our actions, activities, responses, as well as the things and events that we encounter as we move through life. The next distinction helps us sort out ourselves —who we *are* and what we *do*. Without this one, you will not be fully *safe* to communicate. With this one, you are free to think and express yourself without taking yourself too seriously.

### **Distinction #2: DISTINGUISHING PERSON AND BEHAVIOR**

There's a fundamental distinction between person and behavior, between *being* and *doing*. To positively assert this, we say that a *person* is not his or her *behavior*. What you *do* differs from what you *are*. You are more than our behaviors. Therefore don't ever judge yourself by your behaviors. If you're going to judge— judge behavior according to understanding and skill. Your behaviors are *expressions* of your thinking and feeling, *expressions* of your states, understandings, skills, development, contexts, environment, and many other variables. Your behaviors develop over time from incompetence to various degrees of competence which is why your behaviors at any given age are just behaviors which reflect where you are in your learning, discipline, interests, etc. at that time.

The problem with behaviors is that they are always and inevitably fallible, that is, imperfect and flawed. Always. What you *do* is a function of how your talents, strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and learnings come together in a particular context. It leads to achievements or to the lack of achievement in that context. When you are fairly skilled in a behavior, we call that “self-confidence”— you can now be *confident* in what you can *do*.

Yet that is an entirely different story from what you *are*—as a human being. What you *are* is a very different phenomenon from what you can *do*. What *are* you? You are a precious human being. And as a human being, *you are a semantic class of life*. Without animal instincts, you can choose your thoughts and actions. As a semantic class of life you have the ability to step back from yourself and reflect on yourself. And because you inevitably go meta to yourself, you are a meta-being. As you reflect on your states, thoughts, feelings, experiences, history, future, origin, destiny, values, meanings, you construct many different semantic self-states. Reflexivity, which gives you the special power to *transcend* your state, releases you to construct frames of your own choosing.

Having a reflexive mind is a challenge. The challenge is to manage well *your transcendent self* as you are reflecting. If you reflect back on yourself with anger, fear, distress, worry, etc., you

put yourself at odds with you. If you bring your anger *against* yourself, you sabotage your best self. Do that when you are simply trying to gather information, you will self-reflexively meta-state others with suspicion, fear, anger, hate, judgment, etc. Do that and your communication will really become ugly.

No wonder the *person/behavior* distinction is critical for becoming a professional communicator. I am more than my behavior; you are more than your behavior. Behavior is behavior— always fallible and always liable to be corrected. So don't base your value as a person on your behavior or achievements. Behavior is not *who you ultimately are*. So do not define yourself by what you do.

Now if you don't distinguish person and behavior, a comment about your behavior can feel like an attack with the result that you will become defensive and counter-attack, judge, close your mind, or use some ego-defensive maneuver. Using the *person/behavior* distinction enables you to step into *un-insultability*. Now you can defuse someone who has "lost it" (become judgmental, blaming, accusing, etc.) because that person *as a person* is not the problem. Their behavior is the problem. Assume that the person is trying to do something important or valuable via that behavior and then explore to find out what. Doing these things, as a professional communicator, will enable you to manage your state and stay focused on the issue at hand. To your professionalism as a communicator!

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #49**  
**October 28, 2019**  
*Professional Communicator #3*

## **DISTINGUISHING MEANING & RESPONSE**

As a professional communicator seeking to communicate insightful meanings, strange as this may seem—you cannot directly communicate “meaning.” That’s because *meaning is a phenomenon which is co-created* between you and the person(s) with whom you communicate. It is not a singular thing under your complete control. An NLP premise presents this distinction: “The meaning of your communication is the response you get, regardless of your intention.”

Implied in this premise is this shocking realization: “You never know what you have *communicated!* That’s because you never know what the other person *heard.*” What did he hear? *Hearing* is what the other person does with your words as he filters it through his way of interpreting things. So how can you figure out what he heard? Without that person telling us what he heard, the way to begin to figure out the answer lies in this question: How did he respond? That is, by noticing his responses you can begin to discover what the other person heard—the meanings he generated. Meaning shared is a phenomena between those communicating.

Neuro-Semantics focuses on the meanings (semantics) that we communicate, the meanings we program into our body (neurology), which we then perform as actions. Yet *meaning*, as a phenomenon of the mind-body system, *does not exist in the outside world.* Meaning is not externally real. It does not exist “out there.” You have never walked down the street and tripped over some *meaning* that someone dropped on the sidewalk. It’s not that kind of thing.

*Meaning is mentally constructed as an understanding.* It arises from how a person links and associates ideas and references. It arises from how you reflexively apply an idea so it becomes your frame-of-reference.

*Meaning* is inside, *response* is outside. When a person responds to what you say, that response gives you some clue about the meanings she must have constructed from what you said. Now you can explore.

“What did you hear? What does that mean to you?” “What meaning did you give to X?”

If you discover that the other has constructed meanings which you does not fit with what you meant to transmit, then simply try again. “Sorry, that’s not what I was attempting to say. I’ll give it another try.” The ensuing dialogue continues the co-creation of shared meanings.

This *meaning/response* distinction highlights that different people give different meanings to what is said and how it is said. A stressed tone of voice is just a response, the meanings you give

to that voice tone are *your* meanings. It may correspond to the other's meanings, it may not. Therefore an incongruous response, one that doesn't seem to correspond to your meaning is feedback— "This other person is interpreting it differently." This is not a matter of right or wrong; it is a matter of co-constructing until a state of mutual understanding arises. To discover that difference, suspend your own meanings, and inquire again.

The danger is that you automatically attribute meaning to a response. Yet you, like all of us, are biased to do this. Yet you are *coming from your map of the world*. You are operating from what it means to you. Actual *communicating* has not yet begun. Instead of communicating, you have jumped-to-a-conclusion assuming that your meanings are the same as the other person's. This is a great formula for confusion, distortion, and ruined relationships.

To avoid that, use the *meaning/response* distinction to your advantage and do one of the most challenging things as a meaning-maker—*suspend your meanings and explore* the other person's meanings. Slow things down to check out what each person means by the words being bantered about. This is what masterful communicators do. They know that they don't know anyone else's inner system of meaning. They know that the greatest seduction is filtering information through their own meanings and assuming that is what the other person meant. They know that this is a formula for being blind and deaf to others. That's why just *witnessing* responses and distinguishing responses from meaning is so important for staying in the game.

In summary, responses don't mean. Responses are just a response. It comes from meaning— so it is an invitation for you to discover the meaning that it comes from. How do you do that? Simply ask the other person, "You just responded with Y, I'm wondering what that means to you?"

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #50**  
**November 4, 2019**  
*Professional Communicator #4*

## **THE FOURTH DISTINCTION**

### **SENSORY VS EVALUATIVE DATA**

Bateson (1972)

“... therapy is an attempt to change a patient’s meta-communicative habits. Before therapy, the patient *thinks* and operates in terms of a certain set of rules for the making and understanding of messages. After successful therapy, he operates in terms of a different set of such rules. ... In the process of therapy, there must have been communication at a level *meta* to these rules. There must have been communication about a *change* in rules.” (p. 191).

#### **Distinction #4: DISTINGUISHING SENSORY AND EVALUATIVE DATA**

When I took my first NLP training, the refrain which was repeated over and over urged us to go to sensory-awareness and distinguish it from information that is evaluative:

“If you’re going to be a professional communicator, you have to distinguish sensory based information and evaluative based information.”

As my first introduction to the Meta-Model, this taught me to sort out the inner mapping of a meaning-maker and to ask precision questions. It taught me how to meet a person at his or her map of the world—at her bus stop (to use Shelle Rose Charvet’s metaphor). This is where all effective communication begins, that is, with sensory-based data. The first information comes from your “senses” (i.e., seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting). That is the information to *representationally track* to your mental movie screen. You can now track directly from the sensory level and make an inner movie which *re-presents* that information. This was the NLP stroke of genius—we *think* first of all in the sensory languages (images, sounds, sensations, etc.) over which we can become aware of and then manage. (Bateson noted this in his Preface in the first NLP book.)

All of this, however, is very different from *evaluative data* which comes after sensory representations. From the sensory, you next evaluate that information. You put it into categories, you compare it with other information, you estimate its value using various criteria. In evaluating, you infer (legitimately or illegitimately) as you draw various conclusions. You “abstract” from one level to another level as you draw conclusions, make generalizations, make decisions, invent beliefs, set intentions, etc. And you do all of this in lightning quick speed.

How can you tell when you, or someone else, has jumped from the sensory level to an evaluative level? Easy. *If the words you use do not refer to things you can put on a table* (e.g., chair, dog, green grass), *they are not sensory referents*. Because you cannot put the referents on the table (e.g., “good, bad, brilliant, disappointing, rude, nice, mean, beautiful”) these evaluations

(evaluative words) are entities of the mind. They exist solely in the inside-world of mind. Now you are literally thinking hypnotically.

You can reverse the process by creating evaluative language from sensory language. You can turn evaluative language back into sensory-based language. The NLP tool to do this is *the Meta-Model* by which you can regain specificity, precision, and empirical clarity. Use the linguistic distinctions to bring high level evaluations *down* so you can put them on your representational screen. Use the precision questions to make the conversation sensory specific.

This can be most challenging. In fact, most people are easily seduced by evaluative language so that they cannot make the *sensory/evaluative distinction*. Someone says, “He’s mean. He blasted that waiter.” And we’re off hallucinating as we invent meanings about what those non-specific words mean (to us). Actually, there is no “meanness,” no “rudeness,” no “kindness,” no “hurtful,” “healing,” in the sensory world. These words are from the evaluative world. You have to ask, “*What do you mean* when you use this word?” “How do you know that it is this X?” “If I could see or hear what you are referring to, what would I see and hear?”

The key to running your own brain is recognizing the distinction. “Am I speaking in sensory-based or evaluative language?” If you say that someone is defensive, hypocritical, incongruent, loving, sensitive, intuitive, etc., then be sure to recognize that you are not speaking with precision. You are not in the sensory-world. You are in an abstract evaluative world—your internal “hypnotic” world of your meanings. To return to earth, ask Meta-Model questions. If you don’t, the words will seduce you into *a narrative* of mis-understandings.

Without making this *sensory/evaluative* distinction you will never be a professional communicator. Unknowingly, you will be *imposing* your judgments on others. Even with the best of intentions of trying to understand others, you will not be seeing them at all, but a distortion of them. Your judgments and evaluations can come out in subtle ways making it nearly impossible for effective communications.

Turn this around. The kindest and most compassionate thing you can do with your loved ones is to thoroughly learn this *sensory/evaluative* distinction. Then you will know when you are evaluating, can take ownership of what you’re doing, and then create space for the other person. You are operating by a set of rules and the only way to discover that and/or change that, as Bateson noted in the opening quotation, is at the meta-level. To your excellence in effective communication!



From: L. Michael Hall  
2019 Neurons #51  
November 11, 2019  
*Professional Communicator #5*

## THE FIFTH DISTINCTION FRAME / FEELING

### **Distinction #5: DISTINGUISHING FRAME AND FEELING**

As the *sensory / evaluative* distinction occurs inside your mind and differs at different levels of experience, so does this next distinction—the *frame / feeling* distinction. And precisely because both of these distinctions are difficult to catch, almost everyone needs specific training and practice to become competent so that it eventually becomes intuitive. Further, because they occur within, and because you can jump the levels in a nana second, catching the *frame / feeling* distinction is a most challenging aspect of communication. Let's begin with some definitions.

**A *frame*** refers to your *internal context* of evaluative judgments, understandings, beliefs, decisions, history, values, criteria, and so on. As an inner filter, a frame governs how you interpret things. Your frames are your perceptual filters which you have learned over your lifetime. To understand anything requires a frame. Without a frame, you don't know how to interpret anything. When you set a frame, you set a classification or category and then you can use that category to understand what is before you.

**An *emotion*** (or feeling) refers to a response in your lower brain (amygdala, hippocampus) and higher levels (motor cortex) which activates your neurology. The *motion* generated by an emotion reflects the difference between your mapping of the world and your experience of the world. You *feel movement and motion in your body* given the ideas, beliefs, and understandings in your mind *in relation* to how well do the ideas work in the outside world and/or fit your values and criteria.

So what's the difference? A frame establishes a way to categorize things and as you categorize something, so you feel about it. Put a statement into the category of "insult," and lo and behold, you feel upset and insulted, maybe angry, maybe rejected. Put the same statement into the category of "words," and you may feel neutral, curious, and/or interested.

Frame and feelings also relate systemically. Primarily, *frames create emotions*. Where there is an emotion—there is a frame. It is being generated by some meaning. Yet the circular nature of a system with many interactive elements means that your emotions also influence your frames. While feelings are primarily *expressions* of your frames, feelings can also trigger frames. That's why just because you feel something that, in itself, is no reason to act on it. The frame may be toxic, distorted, or wrong—and that would make the emotion also toxic.

As mostly *symptoms* of your frames, emotions indicate that you may need to update the frame or enhance your skills in relating to the world. That gives you two ways to change what you feel. And while symptoms are important as information, they differ from the cause (i.e., the frame).

Here's something surprising. Because emotions reflect the difference between your mapping and experiencing of the territory, *all of them are right*. They rightly weigh the difference between the two. That makes them *relative*. They are relative to the mapping and the experiencing. Yet because your mapping may be off and your neurology (health, skills, competencies, environment, etc.) may be off, emotions invite you to discover the factors creating how things are off and what to do to set them right.

One danger is the belief frame that says you have to “be true to your emotions.” That was the big mistake of the emotive therapies during the 1960s. They made emotion primary rather than secondary. An even bigger mistake is to assume that “if you feel something, then it is real.” Believe that and you will become a slave to your emotions. You will then semantically load every emotional experience.

As a professional communicator, *suspend meaning* when you get responses that you don't want or understand. Doing that give you a chance to explore your feelings and their source. Sometimes this requires that you *suspend being emotionally reactive*. Recognize that while your emotions are always right, they are not always useful, accurate, or enhancing. Sometimes you have to acknowledge the feeling and act against it. Sometimes you have to rise up and operate from your highest intentions and understandings rather than your immediate reactive emotion. Sometimes you have to *refuse* to “take counsel” from your emotions.

Doing this enables you to become more professional as a communicator. If you don't, kiss it goodbye! You will personalize things, emotionalize, minimize, maximize, exaggerate, and tormented by other cognitive distortions. Conversely, recognizing the frame / feeling distinction empowers you to tell the difference between your framing and your consequential feelings. And that, in turn, allow you to manage your emotions intelligently. Now you can bring awareness, monitoring, and regulating to your emotions— the activities that define emotional intelligence.

[For more, see *Secrets of Personal Mastery* (1999) and the training program, APG. Also the training program, Emotional Mastery.]

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #52**  
**November 18, 2019**  
***Professional Communicator #6***

## **THE SIXTH DISTINCTION**

### **ADVOCATING / INQUIRING**

#### **Distinction #6: DISTINGUISHING ADVOCATING AND INQUIRY**

When it comes to communicating, there are dozens upon dozens of things you can do with words. Two major categories are advocating and inquiry. You *advocate* by asserting, saying your truth, making a proposal, giving advice, etc. You *inquire* by asking questions, curiously wonder about things, closely observe, seeking first to understand, etc.

In the *advocating / inquiry* differentiation, most people say that the first feels much more powerful. It feels powerful to take a stand and assert your ideas. It feels strong to tell, assert what you think, give advice, teach, preach, pontificate, consult, etc. When you operate from your model of the world, you advocate and urge others to do the same. And, true enough, there are times for this. There are situations in which you may even get paid for this.

Similarly, for most people the other side of this distinction feels less powerful. When you are inquiring, asking questions, exploring, seeking to gather information, and seeking to understand, you come from a place of openness. You give yourself a chance to understand a different point of view. Yet, *questioning* is actually a hundred times more powerful than asserting. This is due to the nature of the brain, as “the ultimate answering machine.” Put a question to a brain and it has a compulsive need to come up with an answer. Place a question in a brain, especially one that it cannot immediately answer, and the brain will go into overdrive seeking an answer. That’s how powerful posing a question can be.

How different with a statement. When you start from the premise that you know, that you have the answer, then instead of searching, you advocate what you already know. You default to what you have already mapped out. A common use of advocating is to use ideas as an initial offense against other ideas. You race onto the field of ideas and put yours out there first, forcing others to acquiesce or to be on defense. And while that sounds like a good strategic approach, it is not. That’s because there’s a problem with thinking that you *know*. When a mind knows, it develops a vested interest in that knowledge and automatically seeks to eliminate ideas that go against it. That’s why *telling* typically evokes the ego-defenses so others will not even consider an idea, no matter how brilliant.

Conversely, asking questions offers an approach which allows each person to think through an issue and come to one’s own conclusions. Master communicators *not only ask questions* right out of the gate, they ask questions about questions. With questions they curiously explore

meaning, significance, intention, possibilities, etc. in a search for truth. Socrates did that two thousand years ago operating from the premise that people know more than they know that they know. Today we ask Socratic questions to help people find their own answers. This is what any expert coach does.

Professional communicators ask questions— lots of questions. They gather information rather than jump in and speak with only partial knowledge. They know that the way to begin anything is with intelligence gathering. And they do that because they fully know that they do not know it all. Professional communicators also know how to advocate— to argue for a point of view, yet more important, they know *when* to do that and when not to. They also know how to do that with grace and charm.

The best communication with anyone comes through a balance of inquiry and advocacy. If only the politicians who debate would do that! They are so committed to talking and talking and talking, that they almost never ask questions. When they do, they ask rhetorical and manipulative questions. If only they would ask what the other person means by their words. If only they would ask to gather information before making professorial declarations. And this goes for all of them.

Inquiring and advocacy— what's a good proportional balance between them? How about 80/20? Inquire 80% of the time and advocate 20% of the time. Do that and you will be on your way to becoming a great leader— a leader who can win the minds and hearts of those you seek to influence.

[For more, see *Unleashing Leadership*.]

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #53**  
**November 25, 2019**  
*Professional Communicator #7*

## **THE SEVENTH DISTINCTION**

### **CURRENT VS DESIRED STATE**

#### **Distinction #7: DISTINGUISHING CURRENT AND DESIRED STATE**

The final distinction required for becoming more professional communicator is the *current / desired state* differentiation. This is the ability to look at yourself and others and to recognize the temporal dimensions of experience (i.e., *past – present – future*). Again, let's begin with some definitions for clarity.

For the *current state*, ask: Where are we now? Where are you now? What's currently going on? What are the challenges, problems, constraints, pros and cons, etc. of the current situation? To be able to do this as a communicator requires of you the ability to be present, to come into *the now*, to acknowledge and accept whatever *is* for whatever it *is* without needing to defend, argue, rationalize, or use any other ego-defense mechanism. Obviously, to do this takes a lot of ego-strength—the strength to accept what *is* without caving in or going into a fight/flight type of response.

Can you be present? That question sounds like an obvious, and even as a rhetorical, question. It is not. Coming into the here-and-now is one of the most difficult things for anyone of us to do. Why is that? We remember! We understand things today *through previous experiences*—experiences which we now use as references for interpreting things. In this way, the past is part of the present in our perceptual filters and why we need to distinguish the two.

Communicating about the present state includes two additional factors—symptoms and causes. Symptoms are the symptomatic problems that may arise—emotions, behaviors, consequences. Causes refer not to the past but to the meaning frames that hold the way to interpret something.

The past refers to what has been, where you have been, and the factors which have contributed to bring you to where you are today. The past is where you have learned what you know and which colors your perspectives today. There are several problems in thinking about the past. First, how we remember the past is highly vulnerable to what and how we think today. That is, your current understandings, beliefs, values, etc. color your memories so “the past” is not as it was. It keeps changing. It's the nature of human memory to change as we keep learning.

**The *desire state*** is another time dimension—it speaks of the future. This is the dimension of imagining and envisioning by which you create the future you want to move to. You elicit this when you ask:

Where do you want to go? Where will you go if you don't make a change? How will you get there? What's involved in the journey? What resources do you need? What are the steps and stages along the way? How will you know when you get there?

Whatever you have learned is time-dated. That's why whenever you learn something, it would be a great idea to stamp an expiration date on that learning. That's because what you have learned often becomes out-dated, redundant, and irrelevant. It does for all of us. While some learnings are forever, most are not. Things keep changing, new things come into play.

Further, thinking about the future is itself problematic. That's because it is highly unpredictable, much more so than most of us suspect. In fact, because our brains are designed as “anticipation machines” we suffer the cognitive fallacy of believing and trusting our predictions.

To move from your *current state*, to your desired state, you need problem solving skills. In NLP, we do this by beginning with a well-formed outcome and use the precision questions to clearly define what you want. Then in Neuro-Semantics we move to construct a well-formed problem statement. Doing that prevents us from attempting to solve pseudo-problems. Otherwise, you may be trying to work on a mere symptom, a paradox, or the wrong problem. Next comes creating a well-formed solution and innovation.

This distinction also keeps problems and solutions separate. You clearly define both to think and communicate strategically as you develop the plans, tactics, and resources for making a dream come true. This distinction enables you to synergize your away-from and toward motivational energies so that you build up a propulsion system and that integrates both aversions and attractions.

[For more, see *Creative Solutions*. You will find in that book the structure of a well-formed problem, well-formed outcome, well-formed solution, and a well-formed innovation.]

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #54**  
**December 2, 2019**  
***Professional Communicator #8***

## **TRAINING FOR BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATOR**

As you know, **NLP** is a communication model and **Neuro-Semantics** deepens communication making it all the more richer and more robust as it goes to the hidden frames. Therefore it's no surprise that we not only train the basic communication training in NLP Practitioner and Master Practitioner, but we also do that in the Meta-Coach trainings. In fact, the Meta-Coaching track includes both NLP and Meta-States in Modules I and II of Meta-Coaching. Then in Module III we add six more models—all for the purpose of being able to hold “a conversation like non-other.”

This explains why we give two different Certificates for Module III of Meta-Coaching, one a Coaching Certification (ACMC) and the other a Certificate for being a *Professional Communicator*. These trainings are our competency based trainings for learning all of the basics which are required for beginning to become truly professional as a communicator. This also explains why we have lots and lots of managers, leaders, CEOs, business owners, consultants, therapists, and others taking these trainings.

We began giving the Professional Communicator Certificate for ACMC training (Coaching Mastery) in 2005 when we had several C-level leaders and managers attend (CEO, CFO, COO, etc.). They didn't want a Coaching Certificate. Yet they found that the 7-core coaching skills were simultaneously 7-core *leadership skills*:

- Creating Relationships via listening and supporting.
- Exploring meanings and gathering information via questioning and meta-questioning.
- Establishing individual and team accountability via giving and receiving Feedback .
- Enabling implementation and innovation via state induction.

They also noted that the focus on framing, meaning-making, slowing conversations down, using the Communication Guidelines, and thinking systemically about communication, getting to the frames behind the communication greatly enhanced their leadership. Most were absolutely amazed—and surprised—not suspecting that there would be so much *leadership* in the coaching skills. When I was asked why that was, I noted that people engage a coach not to get advice, but to identify and mobilize their own hidden potentials and capacities. And that meant allowing the coach to *lead* them where they specify that they want to go. Coaching then is itself a leadership skill.

No wonder then over the past twenty years of this new century that Leaders and Managers all around the planet have been adding “coaching” to their leadership skills. Now they *lead* via coaching colleagues, and those down the reporting line, to find their own resources, capacities, and potentials. No wonder *entrepreneurs* also come to the Meta-Coaching trainings to develop their ability to work well with people in a business context. That’s usually their weakness. They are excellent at inventing something new, conceiving a new service or formatting of information. They are not so good at communicating their innovative ideas and/or sell them to investors.

So learning the models in the Meta-Coaching system is to learn how to be a much more professional communicator.

- The Facilitation Model explains the needs for balancing challenge and compassion—the meaning of the work and the care of the relationship.
- The Axes of Change provides a way to enable transformative change in people. It enables the ability to lead motivation, thoughtful and decisive decision-making, creative invention for doing things in new ways, and an never-ending process of continuous improvement to integrate the change into lifestyle.
- The Benchmarking Model offers a way to measure intangible things that have previously been near-impossible to measure.
- The Matrix Model for thinking and working systemically when there’s a wide-range of variables which are simultaneously in play and be able to following information into a human system and energy out.
- The Self-Actualization Matrix, Quadrants, and Assessment Scale for understanding the basic drives and needs of people and how to facilitate bringing out their best so that they unleash their potentials.
- The Meta-Programs Model for understanding the thinking, feeling, choosing, and semantic patterns of people and colleagues and how to adjust one’s communications so that it fits their ways of thinking and responding.

The secret for becoming a professional communicator lies in the NLP and Neuro-Semantics models and these are available in the basic trainings. They are also formatted specifically for communication excellence in the Meta-Coach trainings.

[For more, see *The Meta-Coaching System*]



**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #55**  
**December 10, 2019**  
*Professional Communicator #9*

## COMMUNICATING PROFESSIONALLY

Most people are not able to communicate professionally and do not communicate professionally. First of all they do not know *how* to do such, how to make the distinctions described in the first eight articles of this series. Knowing alone, however, is not sufficient, a person must be able to execute the qualities of high level professional communication. The most difficult part comes when you and I attempt to communicate and to use the distinctions that we know. Of course, that's where training comes in.

What does unprofessional communication look or sound like? It can take many different forms. Mostly it is communication that is sloppy, vague, and imprecise. Or it could be highly biased, prejudiced, and full of unsubstantiated assumptions. Another aspect of unprofessional communication involves the cognitive distortions that's characteristics of childish thinking—over-generalizing, all-or-nothing thinking, exaggerating, personalizing, awfulizing, etc.

What NLP did in creating its Communication Model was *integrate multiple sources of insights about communication* (Korzybski, Miller, Chomsky), skills demonstrated by expert communicators (Perls, Satir, and Erickson), structural formats from linguistics (Transformational Grammar) as well as from systems and anthropology (Bateson). The result was the NLP Communication Model which focuses on both verbal and non-verbal communication.

As a result, with the Meta-Model of Language, you have a set of distinctions and questions for flushing out communication that is sloppy, vague, and imprecise. With the Meta-Programs Model and the Meta-State Model, you can flush out communications which are highly biased, prejudiced, and full of unsubstantiated assumptions. These models also enable us to update the childish thinking (characterized by the Cognitive Distortions).

All of that is very useful in cleaning up language and communication making it more precise. And yet, even that is not enough. We have to do more to truly communicate professionally. What we need to be able to do is to communicate our truths from a place of authenticity. For that we have to move beyond the NLP Communication Model. We have to move beyond merely what we *say* to what we *are* as we communicate. We have to move to more than our state— we have to move to our *character*.

To achieve that, what we have done in Neuro-Semantics with the Meta-States Model is to access our highest value and *Being* states so that we operate from a commitment to truth and honesty. We source this from Maslow's work about *Being psychology* that involves moving into the *being values*. These are the values that make us authentically human and compassionate. Maslow

wrote about this in *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1965) and described it as “self-actualization.” In other words, to communicate at the highest and most professional level requires moving to the *Being* values and developing the kind of *character* who can and does communicate authentically.

For that we use many of the models which came out of modeling the self-actualization research of Abraham Maslow— the Unleashing Model, the Crucible Model, the Self-Actualization Quadrants Model, the Inside-Out Persuasion Model, and the “Getting Real” Model. Real communication is more, much more, than just words and non-verbal expressions— it is an expression of a person’s character, heart, and spirit. Now you know why we have developed the Self-Actualization Psychology Diploma and eight training workshops on self-actualization.

### **Post Script**

NLP Trainer Dianne Lowther has sent out the following notice about an article that presented the NLP Communication Model in a positive way. Check it out:

<https://www.finextra.com/blogposting/18203/nlp-and-sales--part-1--communication---an-interesting-paradox>

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #56**  
**December 17, 2019**  
***Professional Communicator #10***

## THE RICHNESS OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is about ideas, but not only about ideas. True enough, we primarily communicate in order to transmit our ideas. To do that we speak about information, data, and facts that back up our ideas, proposals, imaginations, and hopes. And yet in all of this we are also communicating other things beyond our ideas such as our state and our attitude. And because we do, people pick up on our attitude and sometimes... Sometimes that's the primary thing which our listeners pick up on.

In communicating, *attitude* is inevitably communicated. It is communicated by the *tone* that is set by the words, the word use, we use, by the language, the metaphors, the length of sentences, the colloquialisms, etc. In verbal communicate we communicate *attitude* by our tone of voice, tempo of speech, inflections, etc. All of this speaks about *state*— the state that we are in, the emotional state that we are operating from and even our physiological state.

There's a reason that we communicate our attitude and state. *We communicate from state to state*. That's one of the basic premises in Meta-Coaching. When you communicate, you are in a state and that state is going to be communicated along with your words. In fact, you cannot *not* communicate your state. When you communicate, you are also sending your words and ideas *to a person who is in a state*. But what state? It makes a difference. If the person you are communicating with is not in the right state for receiving your message— your message will not get through. Or it may be distorted and colored by the receiver's state and this can be so to such an extent that the person will pick up on, and conclude, a message the very opposite of what you are trying to communicate.

Say the words, "I love you" with a stressed voice and strained vocal chords so that it sounds angry and even aggressive and the *message* received will probably not be that of a loving one.

Say "I love you" with hesitation, halt and pause, and do so from a state of doubt and skepticism and again, the love message will probably not be communicated.

*From state to state* reveals that communication is truly co-created. It is a synthesis that arises from the speaker's message (words and non-verbals) *as it is processed and filtered* through the listener's mental frames. Hence, the NLP communication guideline: "The meaning of your communication is the response you get." Communication is not merely the exchange of information. It is *a communion* of minds and hearts— it is a co-union (comm-union).

"The meaning of your communication is the response you get" also reveals the somewhat

shocking conclusion— *You never know what you have communicated* until you notice the response and explore what is entailed in that response. The reason you never know *what* you communicated is because you do not know *what the person heard*. And people *hear* what they hear according to their interpretative filters (frames).

Here then is another thing professional communicators do — a professional communicator takes the *hearing filters* of one’s listener into account. Perceptually we do *not* all see and hear things neutrally. We hear according to who we are, what we value, the experiences that formulate our history, and the attitudes we have developed about things. We hear things through our meta-programs.

The Meta-Programs Model in NLP details 60 different thinking patterns which describe how we “think” (reason, perceive, see, hear, etc.). Each meta-program reveals yet another way that we can interpret the facts, data, and information that we’re exchanging. Each meta-program therefore offers yet another distinction in a person’s *hearing filters*. They reveal what the state we’re in, the attitude we are operating from, and how we are coloring what we hear.

In communication, more is transmitted than just words and ideas— emotions, states, attitudes, and meta-programs are also being communicating. And because of that communication can be sabotaged whenever a speaker is in the wrong state and attitude. As a professional communicator, it’s important to be on the alert to the many conditioning and contributing factors than ideas. It’s good to be suspicious about the richness of communication and what else if being transmitted other than ideas.

**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #57**  
**December 23, 2019**  
*Professional Communicator #11*

## **THE HIDDEN DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNICATION**

In the last post I noted that when it comes to communication, there are many more things which are communicated than ideas. Like what? In communicating, you are also transmitting your state, your attitude, your meta-programs, etc. These are present and are being communicated whether you know it or not, intend it or not. These are things that color your communications and are things which can contaminate your communications. That's why a professional communicator takes all of that into consideration when communicating.

The realization that there is a richness in communication which is not obvious, a richness that is hidden, and that you have to learn how to detect is another reason for learning to become a professional communicator and why it requires precise training and development. So, what are these hidden dimensions with the communication process?

*Meta-States.* When you communicate you are not only operating from a state, you also are operating from a state-about-that-state. And these will be communicated. One quick and non-obvious way this occurs is via your modifying terms. If in communicating, you mentioned that you found a particular learning boring, then you just communicated your state about your learning state. What a contrast to joyful learning. Aldous Huxley's favorite word which he used to modify his reflections was "extraordinary." That was his meta-state about learning.

In any conversation, you can always ask, "What is the quality of your X?" "What is the quality of your fear? Of your confidence? Of your playfulness?" The subsequent answer then tells you the person's meta-state. That's because the quality of your state is the quality of your meta-state and it is something you are inevitably communicating. As a professional communicator, when you sit up and take notice, you'll discover the meta-level frames of understanding that the person is operating from.

*Meta-Programs.* There are dozens and dozens of thinking patterns—60 key ones are located in the NLP Meta-Program Model. How is a person thinking? What kind of thinking patterns are influencing or driving a person's conclusions and beliefs? If you listen carefully, you will be able to detect. They are there—yes, hidden, but nevertheless there. To recognize them, the distinctions of the model provides a way to identify them and then use them. We use them first to create rapport with the speaker.

*Assumptions.* You can also always count on the hidden dimension of assumptions. Call them a person's premises, the implications that are required to make sense of what a person says, or the presuppositions behind and within the statements uttered— these are facets of what a person assumes in order to construct his or her meanings. One way to detect such assumptions is to look for presuppositional terms like when, where, how, etc.

“How would you like to find resources that will make you both more effective and efficient in reaching your goal?” To make sense of that sentence and to answer “how,” you have to accept the assumption which is built into it. Namely, there are resources that will make you more effective and efficient in reaching your goal.

*Self.* Hidden in all communications is another dimension, that of self. We are always and inevitably communicating our *self* when we communicate. After all, our communications come from us and they come through us. What are you communicating about yourself in your communications?

Using the Matrix Model, you can inquire about your *self* in the multiple dimensions of being a person, doing to achieve something, socially relating to other persons, being a temporal being, play various roles in different contexts of life, etc. If you say something like, “*I* can't do that. It's too hard.” The emphasis on *I* may indicate that you are questioning yourself as a person. If you say, “*I can't* do that.” You may be communicating your inability, the lack of skill.

There are more hidden dimensions. These are a few of the basic ones that you'll learn in NLP training. These are a few which will facilitate you becoming a Professional Communicator.

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**From: L. Michael Hall**  
**2019 Neurons #58**  
**December 30, 2019**  
*Professional Communicator #12*

## **CRITICAL THINKING OR ITS LACK WHEN COMMUNICATING**

I began this series of articles by identifying a set of *communication distinctions*. You can think of each of those distinctions as presenting one aspect of critical thinking—a distinction which if you ignore, or don't know how to make, would doom your communications to be vague, imprecise, and sloppy. Consequently, you would be more likely to create mis-understanding rather than deliver a clear message.

That's why critical thinking is important— it enables you to be more precise and with precision, therefore clear. It also enables your communications to be more mature rather than over-simplistic, naive, and childish. Given the cognitive development stages of childhood, children cannot engage in critical thinking. Only after puberty, with the development of formal logical thinking, can a person's thinking mature enough to begin to learn how to think critically. Yet even then it does not automatically happen and that's why many adults (perhaps most) do not know how to engage in the advanced thinking competencies called “critical thinking.”

One of the fascinating and disappointing things I learned when I researched the field of Critical Thinking was that not a single writer in that field knew or quoted the NLP Communication Model — the Meta-Model. And yet it is perhaps the very best critical thinking tool of all. Having read extensively in that field, I never came across a model that was half as good as the Meta-Model. That's why I put the Meta-Model in the book, *Executive Thinking* (2018).

It is the lack of critical thinking that makes most communication messy and lacking important distinctions. That lack also makes for a whole host of ways to mis-communicate and, of course, with mis-communication comes mis-understandings and conflicts. All unnecessary if a person knows how to think and communicate critically.

The original Meta-Model (1975) provided eleven (11) distinctions to make when using language to communicate. The extended Meta-Model (1997) expanded the list to twenty-one (21) distinctions— all of which enable critical thinking and precision in communicating. As a result, when you learn how to use the Meta-Model, you learn how to *think about your thinking while you are communicating*. Today we call that level of meta-cognition— mindfulness.

That quality of mindfulness is a function of your higher brain functions, your pre-frontal cortex. It is from there that you are able to think things through with a quality of precision and specificity

that comprises understanding and clarity. That quality of mindfulness enables you to know what you are doing with your words, your language, where you are sending the brains of those who are listening to you. When you don't know that— you are guessing. You are crossing your fingers and hoping and guessing that your words will make sense to others and will transmit whatever message or meaning you have in mind.

The critical thinking, or perhaps more accurate, the executive thinking of your pre-frontal cortex, enables you to be mindful about what you are doing when you speak. Now you can be more strategic. Now you can treat words and language as tools for achieving your ends. Now you can use the communication distinctions mentioned earlier to help you navigate the territory of communicating as a professional.