

# WHAT IS NLP?

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## *A MODEL OF COMMUNICATION AND PERSONALITY*

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) began as a model of how we communicate to ourselves and others. It was originally developed by Richard Bandler, John Grinder and others. This model explains how we process the information that comes into us from the outside. The belief is that “The map is not the territory.” And so the internal representations that we make about an outside event are not necessarily the event itself.

Typically, what happens is that there is an external event and we run that event through our internal processing. We make an Internal Representation (I/R) of that event. That I/R of the event combines with a physiology and creates a state. “State” refers to the internal emotional state of the individual – a happy state, a sad state, a motivated state, and so on. Our I/R includes our internal pictures, sounds and dialogue, and our feelings (for example, whether we feel motivated, challenged, pleased, excited, and so on). A given state is the result of the combination of an internal representation and a physiology. So what happens is that an event comes in through our sensory input channels which are:

- **Visual**  
Including the sights we see or the way someone looks at us;
- **Auditory**  
Including sounds, the words we hear and the way that people say those words to us (unless you specifically want variety in form);
- **Kinesthetic**  
Or external feelings which include the touch of someone or something, the pressure, and texture;
- **Olfactory**  
Which is smell; and
- **Gustatory**  
Which is taste.

The external event comes in through out sensory input channels and it is filtered and we process the event. As we process the event, we delete, distort, and generalize the information that comes in, according to any number of several elements that filter our perception.

### **DELETION:**

Deletion occurs when we selectively pay attention to certain aspects of our experience and not others. We then overlook or omit others. Without deletion, we would be faced with much too much information to handle with our conscious mind.

**DISTORTION:**

Distortion occurs when we make shifts in our experience of sensory data by making misrepresentations of reality. In Eastern philosophy there is a well-known story of distortion in the rope versus snake analogy. A man walking along the road sees what he believes to be a snake and yells “SNAKE.” However, upon arriving at that place he is relieved as he discovers that what he sees is really only a piece of rope. Distortion also helps us in the process of motivating ourselves. The process of motivation occurs when we actually distort the material that has come into us that has been changed by one of our filtering systems.

**GENERALIZATION:**

The third process is generalization, where we draw global conclusions based on one or two experiences. At its best, generalization is one of the ways that we learn, by taking the information we have and drawing broad conclusions about the meaning of the effect of those conclusions.

Normally, the conscious mind can only handle 7 (plus or minus 2) items of information at any given time. Of course, many people can't even handle this number, and I know people who are a “1 (Plus or minus 2).” How about you? Try this: Can you name more than 7 products in a given product category, say cigarettes? Most people will be able to name 2, maybe 3 products in a category of low interest and usually no more than 9 in a category of high interest. There is a reason for this. If we didn't actively delete information all the time, we'd end up with much too much information coming in. In fact, you may have even heard that psychologists say that if we were simultaneously aware of all of the sensory information that was coming in, we'd go crazy. That's why we filter the information.

So, the question is, when two people have the same stimulus, why don't they have the same response? The answer is, because we delete, distort, and generalize the information from the outside.

We delete, distort and generalize the information that comes in from our senses based on one of five filters. The filters are, Meta Programs, belief systems, values, decisions, and memories.

**META-PROGRAMS:**

The first of these filters is Meta Programs. Knowing someone's Meta Programs can actually help you clearly and closely predict people's states, and therefore predict their actions. One important point about Meta Programs: they are not good or bad, they are just the way someone handles information.

**VALUES:**

The next filter is values. They are essentially an evaluation filter. They are how we decide whether our actions are good or bad, or right or wrong. And they are how we decide about how we feel about our actions. Values are arranged in a hierarchy with the most important one typically being at the top and lesser ones below that. We all have different models of world (an internal model about the world), and our values are the result of our model of the world. When we communicate with ourselves or someone else, if our model of the world conflicts with our values or their values, then

there's going to be a conflict. Richard Bandler says, "Values are those things we don't live up to."

Values are what people typically move toward or away from (see Meta Programs). They are our attractions or repulsion's in life. They are essentially a deep, unconscious belief system about what's important and what's good or bad to us. Values change with context too. That is, you probably have certain values about what you want in a relationship and what you want in business. Your values about what you want in one and in the other may be quite different. And actually, if they're not, it's possible that you may have trouble with both. Since values are context related, they may also be state related, although values are definitely less related to state than are beliefs.

### **BELIEFS:**

The next filter is beliefs. Beliefs are generalizations about how the world is. One of the important elements in modeling is to find a person's beliefs about the particular behavior we are trying to model. Richard Bandler says "Beliefs are those things we can't get around." Beliefs are the presuppositions that we have about the way the world is that either create or deny personal power to us. So, beliefs are essentially our on/off switch for our ability to do anything in the world. In the process of working with someone's beliefs, it's important to elicit or find out what beliefs they have that cause them to do what they do. We also want to find out the disabling beliefs, the ones that do not allow them to do what they want to do.

### **MEMORIES:**

The fourth element is our memories. In fact, some psychologists believe that as we get older, our reactions in the present are reactions to gestalts (collections of memories which are organized in a certain way) of past memories, and that the present plays a very small part in our behavior.

### **DECISIONS:**

The fifth element, and related to memories, is decisions that we've made in the past. Decisions may create beliefs, or may just affect our perceptions through time. The problem with many decisions is that they were made either unconsciously or at a very early age, and are forgotten.

These filters will determine our internal representation of an event that is occurring right now. It is our internal representation that puts us in a certain state, and creates a certain physiology. The state in which we find ourselves, will determine our behavior.

Remember that in this model the map, the I/R, is not the territory. Our every experience is something that we literally make up inside our heads. We do not experience reality directly, since we are always deleting, distorting, and generalizing. Essentially, what we do experience is our experience of the territory and not the territory itself.

In a study of communication at the University of Pennsylvania in 1970, the researchers determined that in communication, 7% of what we communicate is the

result of the words that we say, or the content of our communication. 38% of our communication to others is a result of our verbal behavior, which includes tone of voice, timbre, tempo, and volume. 55% of our communication to others is a result of our nonverbal communication, our body posture, breathing, skin color and our movement. The match between our verbal and non-verbal communication indicates the level of congruency. (See *Structure of Magic II*).