H I S T O R I C A L   T I M E S

Neuro-Linguistic Programming

By Robert Dilts
& Roxanna Erickson Klein

In the early 1970s, Richard Bandler and John Grinder united their creative energies and conceived of a project intended to "distill the skills of genius." Grinder, an Associate Professor of Linguistics, and Bandler, a student of psychology at the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) sought a better understanding of the work of therapists known for exceptional abilities and effectiveness. As part of this endeavor they studied Virginia Satir, Fritz Perls, Gregory Bateson and Milton Erickson. Through observation and analysis of recorded materials in addition to collaborative studies with the identified geniuses, they sought to develop insights that could potentially allow others to learn from and even replicate the talents they observed.

The visionary team was joined early on by Leslie Cameron-Bandler, Judith DeLozier, David Gordon, myself (Dilts) and others. The energetic and creative teamwork of the group brought forward the idea of neurological processing correlated with verbal patterns and behavioral actions. Eventually the group as a whole developed broad and sophisticated premises for the manners in which words and behaviors are connected with underlying mental processing.

The seminal studies produced several works including *The Structure of Magic Volumes I & II and Changing With Families* (co-authored by Virginia Satir). Though Erickson declined co-authorship, Bandler, Grinder and DeLozier went on to publish *Patterns of the Hypnotic Techniques of Milton H. Erickson, M.D., Volumes I & II* (1976–1977) Most of the NLP emphasis on observing subtle physical cues comes from their study of Erickson's interaction with his patients. Many fundamental NLP skills and techniques also have roots in the hypnotic skills and procedures practiced by Erickson. The Milton Model, for instance, is a set of verbal patterns associated with hypnotic language and suggestion that was named in honor of Erickson.

A number of other major NLP techniques were also inspired by Erickson's hypnotic work, including Visual-Kinesthetic Dissociation(a technique used by Erickson for both trance induction and pain control), Reframing(talking to unconscious parts of a person), Anchoring(establishing post-hypnotic cues), Change Personal History(from hypnotic regression techniques), and Futurepacing(derived from the hypnotic technique of pseudo-orientation in time). In fact, many of these procedures started as processes used in conjunction with a formally induced trance state. It was subsequently discovered that such processes worked effectively whether or not a person was officially "in trance."

During the early 80s Bandler and Grinder parted ways, but the NLP movement developed a sizable following and considerable momentum. The NLP movement offered training to a broad audience and promoted applications that could be used in a vast array of settings including coaching, sales and personal growth.

In the US, professionals in the field of psychology were reluctant to embrace methodology that did not require licensure and training within the accredited university system.

Formulating their own structure of training and certification, the NLP movement gathered sufficient interest and recognition to become accepted in the broader stream of methodologies.

Although NLP has evolved and changed over the last three decades, a number of fundamental elements from the seminal work have endured. They include: NLP's emphasis on observation and experience; the basic assumption of NLP that the map is not the territory and the notion that our maps of the world are constructed from the five senses; and the NLP notion that there is a positive intention behind symptomatic behaviors that must be addressed in order for the symptoms to be transformed.

NLP is a model of human behavior, communication and learning that has continued to evolve through the same process from which it originated—modeling the skills of exceptional individuals. As a third generation of NLP developers, trainers and practitioners move into the world, new distinctions and techniques continue to emerge. These new distinctions are leading to greater generativity and ecology within the practice of NLP and make it more possible to identify the "differences that make a difference" in the skills of exceptional people.

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