

Essential NLP - Practical Tools for a Great Life

Podcast 2 – Rapport and States

Hi and welcome to podcast number two in the series Essential NLP skills, I'm Phil Parker and if you tuned into podcast number one you'd have heard me giving a general overview of what we are covering in this podcast series of the fascinating world of NLP - looking particularly at how can you use that in your life, making it real and also looking from time to time at the mind-body connection which is a special area of excellence I work in.

Today we are going to be starting our journey on some specific techniques that you can start to apply in your life and just to generally make your life better and improve the lives of others around you.

There are two major features we are going to be looking at today, one is 'rapport' and the second is 'states'.

So let's begin with rapport, which is the ability that we have as humans to feel comfortable with each other. Yet of course there are times when that's not the case - those times when we are with people and we just don't have a good feeling about it - we don't trust them, we don't respect them, we're not sure about them, it doesn't feel comfortable. This is when we are 'out of rapport'.

So we can notice that rapport is a really essential thing that underpins all successful relationships and all great communication and in fact, if you don't have rapport that sense of connectedness or trust, that sense of 'ok I get this person, they seem like my kind of person' - if you really don't have that, then you don't have very much at all.

If you look at times when you have been talking to somebody and you just haven't had rapport with them - either they didn't 'get you' or like you, or you felt that way about them - you'll notice these things didn't turn out brilliantly.

So rapport has to be built to make relationships work - but unfortunately rapport can be broken very easily. As a result we need to be brilliant at recognising when we have rapport and what we need to do when we're losing it so that we can get it back.

There were some researchers who did an interesting experiment. They were looking at people in a dating bar - a place designed for people specifically to meet members of the opposite sex to see if they like each other enough to go on a date; and maybe they get to hang out and possibly start a relationship. Whilst watching them they observed an interesting phenomenon.

They noticed a couple who had just met - who were maybe having a drink - that they start to notice that if they were 'in sync' with each other - so for instance one would lift their glass and the other would lift their glass too. Or if one would cross their legs, the other would cross theirs too. If they saw this sense of people matching each other in this way it was very predictive that these people would hang around for a while and probably leave the bar together to do whatever they wanted to do for the rest of the evening.

Equally they noticed people who were 'out of sync', so if one lifted their glass and the other put it down, or one crossed their legs and the other uncrossed their legs, and if they were out of sync they were very unlikely to stay together for the evening.

So what can we learn from this? Well the first thing is the idea of 'matching'. When people match each other it seems this encourages rapport.

It's a natural phenomenon that goes along with rapport, so equally if you begin to 'match' people's movements and gestures you can encourage an increase in rapport.

So how do we 'match'? Well there are lots of ways to do this.

The first obvious one is using language. When people use certain words, then using those specific words back in a conversation will make them feel like you are both talking about the same thing, you're both on the same page.

So for instance if someone says "let's go to the shops" then when you talk about the process of going to the shops you want to use the word 'shops', not 'store', 'supermarket' or 'Mall', because they've use the word shops very specifically.

Many people don't see this subtlety and instead put their own version of the word 'shops' into the conversation and people think 'actually you're not quite getting me', 'you're not seeing where I'm coming from on this'.

And there are lots of other ways we can match apart from using language. We can notice their gestures, notice the speed or voice tone that they use. We can match posture, in fact we can match almost anything.

There is a caveat that's coming up later on, which is doing too much of this starts to become unpleasant. It starts to become an invasion their personal space, but we will come back to this matter, when we talk about 'polluting' in a little bit.

The benefit of matching is it means that you can encourage a sense of 'Hey you know what, we are quite similar' and this is useful, of course, because you know there are some people you need to work with or talk to who normally wouldn't be your best friend but in a context where they are maybe a consumer, customer or a boss, it can be very useful to encourage a better relationship with them.

Next we have 'leading'.

The idea of leading is once you are matching people, and to some degree in sync with them, you can help them to move to a different state of mind and activate different neurological processes for them.

So if, for instance, you meet someone and something bad has happened and they are in shock, stunned or stressed, they're likely to be talking fast and breathing fast.

You can help them by 'matching' and then 'leading' them by just slowing your voice down and slowing your breathing down. This allows them to follow you and to calm down.

This leads us to next thing, which is called 'cross matching'.

Now obviously if someone is hyperventilating (breathing very fast) and you start to match them by breathing very fast too, then you're going to get stressed too, as breathing fast changes your body physiology - but not in a good way. This is where cross matching comes in. This is used when you notice somebody is displaying a certain set of behaviours, maybe repetitive movements, posture, breathing and you know that matching them directly would not be very good for you; so instead you can actually match in another 'system'; so every time they breath in very fast you could just tap maybe subtly on your thigh every time you hear their breath going in and out.

Experience shows that they would notice that unconsciously and they would also notice that syncing that was going on; they would be aware that was going on, for they have somehow, unconsciously noticed what you've been doing and how it's in sync with them, and then if you start to slow your tapping down, then you will find their breathing will follow. This is because when you are in sync with someone it becomes an engagement, so whatever you do starts to affect them.

This then leads us onto the interesting phenomenon of polluting and mismatching.

Mismatching is when you say the wrong thing. For example someone says 'I really want to go to the shops' and you say 'Yes let's go to the store' but they say 'No I don't want to go to the store, I want to go to the shops' and now unintentionally you have suddenly raised this issue of 'do you really know who I am or what I am talking about?'. This is mismatching. So be aware of making sure that you use language that makes sense to them rather than what 'our version' of what they said was.

The second thing is that this is a skill that you need to use quite carefully. You don't want to launch into copying everything that people do. If you do this it will just feel uncomfortable.

I talked to an NLP practitioner some years ago, that I wanted to send a client to. This was before I had trained, about 30 years ago. And I said to them, 'I've got this client that I'd like to refer to you for NLP' and they said 'oh, you have a client you like to refer to me for NLP'.

And I said 'yeah, I think this client could really benefit from having some NLP' and they said 'so you think this client could really benefit from some NLP'.

And I said 'you know what, I've actually read quite a lot about NLP and I noticed that you are matching me and my language a little bit too precisely and it's a bit uncomfortable for me'.

And amazingly he said 'so you've read quite a lot of books about NLP and you think I'm matching you a little bit too precisely...'

At that point I just hung up the phone because I thought if somebody is using the skills in such an unskilful way then I will not be referring clients to them. Because matching is a great thing, but if you over-match it comes a bit spooky and a bit sinister. So use it sparingly and use it in a genuine and authentic way with your intention being 'how can I encourage a good relationship with this person?'.

So that's a brief overview of rapport. What I would recommend you do spend a bit of time looking at who is in rapport and who is not. What's going on when they are not and when they are? When somebody rubbed you up the wrong way what happened? When you unintentionally upset someone or switched someone off by what you said, what happened?

Just start to explore this whole idea and what you'll find is when you're in rapport with somebody you naturally start to use language and behaviours that are similar to them and your rhythm matches theirs. You can see this with kids if you listen to kids who hang around with each other in a 'gang' then their language patterns, idioms and behaviours start to become very similar. And sometimes when you hear them in another room you are not sure which one of the kids it is because they all now sound very similar to each other.

And now we can move onto the idea of states.

States is such an important concept within NLP, and my work as a whole, that we are going to start today to explore it - in the next podcast we'll take this even further.

The first question obviously is: 'What is a state?'

A state is any state of mind we get ourselves into, and we are always in one state of mind or another. And this is the real key to understanding the human condition, as one of the problems we have is that very often we are in the wrong state of mind to do the job at hand. Understanding this makes success and change much easier.

Let me give you an example: imagine you are in a car driving to the airport; you have a plane to catch; it's an important journey. You've left yourself enough time, but suddenly there's a traffic jam and it's a dreadful traffic jam - it's absolutely blocked, lorries overturned and on fire and you are sitting there and you are getting later and later and very soon it's going to get to the point where you will miss your flight.

How do you feel in that traffic jam? Well for most people they feel frustrated, annoyed, angry, etc. The question is, though, 'does that help in anyway?'

Does that make the lorry that's on fire suddenly extinguish itself or turn it back on its wheels and drive off?

No, of course it doesn't. All it does is make you more in danger of having a heart attack, punching someone, driving erratically, making bad choices, so this is a classic example of us being in the wrong state.

Another great example is when people go to interviews. What state are they in? Well, most people are in a state of nervousness, when in fact they need to be in a confident state.

So 'state' means getting ourselves into a particular state of mind (technically activating a particular set of neurology) that produces feelings and ways of thinking.

And the problem is that we are so often in the wrong state.

The next problem is that often we don't even realise that we are in a state, we think this is just how it is and we don't have any tools to know that it is possible to change state, or how to do that.

When you think about the schooling we had; we learnt a lot about Maths, English, History and Geography but we never learned about how to change our state. Yet actually these are some the most important things we could ever do.

So how do you change state? Well that's for a later podcast but first thing I'd like you to do is just notice how much of the time you're in the right state and how much of the time you, or others, are in the wrong state. What would it be like to be able to shift from one state to another?

And very briefly I am going to introduce another interesting concept which is NLP and hypnosis/hypnotherapy which are very closely linked but most people don't realise that, and the reason for this is most people think that hypnosis and hypnotherapy is like stage hypnosis - where you go into a deep sleep and think you're Elvis or a chicken!

Hypnosis isn't about that at all - hypnosis is all about helping people to learn how to shift from one state to another - and that's exactly what NLP is as well. And when we think about states, and how they are present all the time, the question is not 'are you in a state?' - the question is 'what state you are you in and is that useful for you?', then we can start to see the whole idea of hypnosis is almost irrelevant. As in fact people are always in one state or another, sometimes it's a great state and sometimes it's not.

Also we find that certain people can encourage us into the wrong states. So for instance when we go to a doctor and quite often they'll say something which may or may not be accurate, may be true and may be helpful or not, and we will completely buy into it.

So imagine the doctor says 'it's going to take you this long to get well', whether they are right or wrong, that will have a massive influence on how long it does take you to recover.

And you could argue this is a hypnotic state, a state where such suggestions are made that you've taken. I would argue instead it's just that in that moment we are in a state where we are ready to believe what they say. How often have you had the experience of coming out of a doctors appointment as your friend says 'what did they say' and you say 'you know I can't remember' and that's because you go away into some state where you just listened but you didn't really take it in.

Certainly I found that in lots of my classes at my school I would come out with not much of an idea of what going on, apart from how beautiful the trees were outside the window.

Again when we are studying we are very often in the wrong state. What state do we need to be in to study? We need to be focused and sharp and we need to be taking all in. However it's often not the state we are in.

So start to look at the idea of 'states' where they occur in our lives, where they are useful and where they are not useful. And particularly notice it in other people - it is very easy to see it in other people but it's even wiser to see it in ourselves!

And the last point I'm going to talk about is the 'serenity prayer'. This is something I have written about a fair bit.

The serenity prayer says:

'God grant me the courage to change the things I can change.

The serenity to accept the things I can't.

And the wisdom to know the difference between these two things.'

This is very much what we are talking about with states. Often we put ourselves in the wrong state - we get frustrated with the way things are even when we know we can't change them - such as the traffic - but we don't put our energy into doing the things we can do, which is changing how we deal with things. Changing our state and responding in a different way - that's where real wisdom lies.

And we are going to be exploring this on the podcasts of the future. How you can change of state? How you can start to deal with the things you need to deal with? How to find a way to be ok and accept the things you can't change. And then you can start to notice the results of being more present to what's going on that is powerful and positive, and enjoy your life and making it the absolute best you possibly can.

So until next time please get in touch with me if you'd like any topics covered, just email me at phil@philparker.org. I hope you enjoyed it, if you did please share it and review it on iTunes – and I look forward to connecting with you again - have a great week!

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