

Essential NLP - Practical Tools for a Great Life

Podcast 3 – States and the Importance of Language

Hi and welcome, this is the essential NLP skills podcast 3. For those that have been following me so far you'll know we began with an introduction to NLP and what we'll be covering, and we started to look at some very specific techniques and approaches within NLP because this amazing field has got so much to offer you.

And the two things we looked at to start off with in the last podcast (that's number two, if you've not listened to it already) were, firstly, rapport - how to have rapport and to make sure you make it work without creeping people out - because that's essential if you're going to do NLP, as we want to use these tools effectively, ethically, professionally and comfortably.

And secondly the concept of state.

So just a brief reminder: rapport is about how do you increase your chances of having a decent relationship with pretty much everybody you meet; how can you communicate effectively and make them feel like you're somebody who actually has something to contribute, is somebody valuable, and worthwhile.

The states concept says 'we are always in a state' – we are always in one state of mind or another. The question we start to become much more aware of is, 'Is the state of mind we are in right now, the best possible state we could be in for the job that we are currently doing?'

The answer is very often, 'No it's not', and then the problem becomes how we change it.

Well we are going to look at some approaches for changing that today. The first step in making these changes is to understand a little bit about how the brain works. And to do this I need to introduce the idea of neuroplasticity which is a really exciting idea in neuroscience. It says that what we find is the more you use your brain in a particular way - much like training a muscle - the stronger and better developed it becomes. So the more we run a particular pathway, the stronger, quicker and more influential that becomes on all brain function.

Neuroplasticity opens up a whole doorway for change. In the old days they used to think the brain was like an electrical circuit board; when you used it you set down pathways those pathways were burnt into the brain forever.

Now they've discover that's just not the case at all. The brain has this incredible ability to change and learn and to grow in response to how it is used. So if we imagine a synapse, which is a little gap between two nerve cells. The signal comes along it reaches this gap and it has to jump across the gap. As it jumps across the gap it can go to one of a number of different nerve cells that will carry it onto a different destination. So one destination may be pain, another may be pleasure, another area may be happiness, another may be hunger. And the brain decides which one it funnels this signal into.

If you find that you constantly jump that gap, that synapse, and end up at the same

nerve cell each time then the brain goes 'hold on a minute, we keep on using this particular pathway, out of all the variations we could use, this is the one we seem to be favouring and as a result it says 'I can make his job easier by moving these nerve cells together so that gap they have to jump is tinier' and at the same time all the other nerve cells that are not being triggered start to move away. This produces a physical change in the structure and architecture of the brain. This means that the next time the signal comes along it's obvious where it is going to go. It's going to go along that favoured pathway. This favoured pathway then becomes very fast and becomes very influential and it starts to connect with all sorts of other parts of the brain.

What's also fascinating is if you start to change that response. So let's say the pathway is - you see chocolate and you want to eat it - the brain processes this as - you see the chocolate - it jumps across the synapse - to a desire to eat it. If you start to change that - so you add a new potential pathway, where you see the chocolate and you decide not to eat it and go exercising instead. If you run that pathway a number of times then the brain goes 'well if you are going to use this a lot I will make that easier' and if the old pathway that moved towards eating and desiring chocolate isn't going to be used any more, then we will just let that fade away.

And you see a physical shift in that the gap that has to be jumped by the signal gets smaller for the nerve cells that you're now favouring. So the chocolate desiring nerve cells move further away and the ones that say 'no I don't want chocolate - I'm going to exercise' move closer to that signal of seeing chocolate. As result the brain is constantly changing and remodelling itself, as a result of how we use it.

The problem is, of course, we are creatures of habit and get very used to doing things in one way and our brain helps that, as a shortcut to make this easy for us.

I'd like you to do an experiment. If you have a cup of tea or coffee nearby pick it up and if you have a spoon nearby pick that up too - if you don't just imagine it but physically grab them as if they were there - and start staring your tea or coffee.

As you do that just notice did you start clockwise and anticlockwise? Then did you carry on or did you shift direction?

Every time you stir cups of tea or coffee you'll do it exactly the same way.

Now imagine you're brushing your teeth in the morning. Imagine you're holding the toothbrush. The chances are you always hold it in your dominant hand and then you put the toothpaste on and you'll always squeeze the toothpaste in one particular part of the tube and you always start from one end of the brush head - you'll squeeze away from you, or squeeze it towards you. And then as you put the toothbrush in - actually physically now just lift your imaginary toothbrush and put it into your mouth - you notice you always start in a particular part of your mouth. Some teeth get the first brushing, before you move somewhere else. We are creatures of amazing habit. And this is good because it makes things very rapid but it also is problematic if the habits we have are not very good.

So going back to the topics we talked about on the last podcast if you're very familiar at getting into certain states then you'll find it easier and easier to trip and trigger those states. And sometimes it will not be very good or appropriate to do that, but as a result of neuroplasticity you will have trained yourself into doing that. I am sure

some of you listening can recognise that. Times when 10, 20, 30 minutes later you say 'I wish I hadn't done that - why did I say, why did I do that?' well the reason is, unfortunately you trained your brain to do this.

But the good news is the brain doesn't really care which pathways are being activated. It just wants to activate the ones that are most commonly activated - it's just trying to help you out. So therefore we need to start activating the positive paths - the ones that take us into where we want to be, more and more and more and more and more.

How do we do that?

Well one of the simplest ways to do this is to realise that words and states and neurology are all intimately connected. We talked about this a little bit in the last podcast where I said that if someone is in love with a guy called John, then everytime they hear John's name it makes them think happy thoughts. Then when something very unpleasant happens when they see John with somebody else, then their relationship to the sound of John's name completely changes.

What I'd like you to think about, just for a moment, is a classic NLP question: 'What happens when I ask you to not think about Elvis Presley juggling 12 purple monkeys?'

As soon as I mention Elvis Presley juggling 12 monkeys - even though I've asked you to not think about it - guess what you think about?

Yep, there he is, the king of rock 'n' roll, juggling his monkeys and you may immediately squash that image and think of something else - but to understand the question we have to capture that image.

We need to get smart about this, because classically what people do, is use the wrong kind words that generate the wrong kind of states.

They even do it when they tried to work out what they want.

This is called negative wants. So if you say 'What do I want?' and you answer 'I want to not be angry'. Then what you actually do with the word 'angry' is you trigger the neurology of anger which, of course, makes it easier to feel anger. Yet people do this all the time. It is one of the most common things that I have to work with people on as they so consistently answer the 'What do I want?' with a negative - saying 'I don't want this'.

Now we know that this neurologically propels them towards getting the thing they don't want.

I can't count the number times when I ask people 'What do you want?' and they say, 'I don't want to be stressed' - 'I don't want to be anxious' - 'I don't want to be ill' - 'I don't want to be guilty' - 'I don't want to be jealous'. Each time they say it they're just taking themselves to their mental gym and exercising, once again, exactly the pathways they don't want to be exercising.

You see this a lot in healthcare. I was asked to work with some brilliant consultants

who'd found that they had got some clients who had reached the end of the road with medical pain care. They are on strong opiates and were still in pain. They came to see me and I helped them using NLP and the Lightning Process to get them off these drugs and to get them pain-free. So they were very intrigued as to how I had done that and asked me to do some training with them. And the first thing I looked at was their language.

When people came to see the pain consultant and they have a lot of pain it wasn't surprising that they spend a lot of time thinking about pain. Which unfortunately activates all the wrong neurology. Then they get a letter, and the letter says 'Please come to our PAIN clinic'. So they turn up and park in the PAIN clinic car park - this is the second time it has been mentioned now - they go to the PAIN reception room (number three) and the PAIN receptionist (number four) says, 'Please take a seat in our PAIN waiting room' (number five) and fill in this form about your PAIN (six) then they walk down the corridor to door that says PAIN consultant (seven) who says 'Hi I'm your PAIN consultant' (eight) 'How are you feeling?' and, of course, the reply is now 'In a lot of pain'.

Research by Dr Weiss in Germany about this showed that if you say the word pain, or words related to pain, it increases the activity of the pain processing centres of the brain - which means you're more likely to experience pain.

So if you are listening to this podcast and have pain, I apologise as I mentioned it so many times. Instead think about other words.

Now what's interesting is if you talk to people who have that particular symptom they find it very difficult to work out what they want without referring to pain.

What was even more fascinating was when I asked the pain consultants to come up with what they wanted for their patients - but without using the word pain - it took them 15 minutes and they came up with this: 'What they want for their clients is PAIN relief'. Clearly that contains the word pain and so once again re-triggers the experience, neurologically and physically of pain.

I'd like you to spend a few minutes and think about what is the opposite pain? How can we express what we want without using the 'P' word?

If you have stuff going on in your life, and most of us do, think about what you want. The first step is make sure it is something that is expressed in positives, in what you want neurologically, this is absolutely the most significant thing you can do because your words are linked to your states and your neurology.

So today we have looked at neuroplasticity, we've looked at the idea that the brain is like a muscle, the more you use it the stronger and more effective it becomes, and that words and states are intimately linked with neurology, and we can change our words but first of all we will have to notice the words we use, because mostly we don't. We will have to think about what we say - so my challenge to you is to engage in the adventure of noticing your language - find out what you're saying - you'll probably find you're saying a lot of stuff that is not getting what you want neurologically or getting what you want with other people. If you say to people 'I hope you're not going to get upset when I talk about this', then you've already told them to 'get upset', you're working against yourself.

So I'd like you to really recognise what language are using and start to think about, 'How can I say this in a positive way?' rather the negative one.

Again if you want the transcript of this, it's free send us an email phil@philparker.org
- looking forward to connecting with you again and have a great day!

Phil



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