

Improving Your Communication with NLP

One of the major contributions NLP has made to personal development and life enhancement is its [applications](#) to communication both internal and external. NLP offers many practical techniques to allow us to engage in more meaningful interactions with those around us by limiting many of the barriers to effective communication. This article will look at some of the ways NLP can enhance our communication skills specifically with others, and in doing so enhance the quality of our lives. Called Neuro LINGUISTIC programming for a reason, NLP is focused on the language patterns involved in the way we communicate with ourselves and others. Language patterns, specifically the words we use and how we use them have a profound effect on our experience of every day life. When we have an experience of any kind, then we give a label to that experience, the label, or the words we use BECOME the experience. For example, you return from a day at Disneyland and someone asks you how it was. You might answer it was awesome, fantastic, thrilling, scary, exciting, fun, heart pumping or crazy... whichever word you choose to describe the experience, IS the experience. Say you chose 'scary'. Really the word 'scary' isn't anything, it's just a combination of letters. But at the same time scary is a feeling, a set of thoughts and mental imagery that is associated to that combination of letters. Think of this: Imagine if you didn't know the word scary? For some reason it had been omitted from your vocabulary, or you'd never heard it said as a child. Would you know how to be 'scared'? It's reported that some small island nations don't have a word for 'war'... Imagine how that affects their way of life! ...the words we use and how we use them have a profound effect on our experience of every day life. Words cause chemical reactions in our minds. The things we say or hear said to us, particularly the words that they are said in, cause us to feel certain ways about things and react in certain ways to certain circumstances. How do you answer when someone asks "How are you?" Do you mindlessly reply "Fine" or "Ok"? How do you feel when you say that? How do you feel after you have said it? What if you replied "Phenomenal!", "Really superb", or "Fantastic"? Do you think you would feel differently? Two people can have the same experiences day to day, but one can label them "ok" and one can call them "Awesome" and as a consequence one person will FEEL awesome and one will physically feel OK. Do you see the power of words yet? If not, think about it in a more external communication type context. Say someone has just given you their opinion on something and you reply "I'm not sure I agree"... Do you think this would make the person feel differently to if you said "You're WRONG". Both replies have indicated the same meaning... you don't agree with them, but the words used create dramatically different reactions and so greatly influence the interaction between the two people. Ok, ok you get it, words influence how we feel. So how can this knowledge help us in our communication with others? Another significant aspect of NLP in relation to communication with others is the use of what are called Meta Models. There are certain patterns of speech that limit the way a message is communicated to a listener. If we are aware of these patterns we can, as a listener, use our communication to clarify someone's true meaning and more effectively understand their perspectives. Some examples of these communication patterns are: Universal Quantifiers Are words like "always" and "never". When someone says always or never they almost never (see how common these are) mean them literally, but when they say them they create the chemical reaction in their brains that would occur as if it really were ALWAYS or NEVER. For example I'm talking to Susie about her husband Jim and she says "Jim never does anything romantic with me". While it very likely isn't the case that he NEVER does, by using that language pattern she physically FEELS like she would feel if he NEVER did. I can better understand Susie's feelings better here by questioning "Always?" To which she will usually reply, "well not ALWAYS but I can't remember the last time he did!" Already I have a better understanding of the situation and at the same time, Susie now feels less emotionally intense about the situation because she has described it differently and so she is in a state that is more conducive to effective communication. Comparisons Are words like "better", 'worse', "best", "badly". The problem with these words is when they are used we invariably miss out the part of the sentence that puts the comparison in context. For example "I could have done so much better", raises the question "Better than what?" Whose standard are you using for comparison? Is it yours or someone else's? How reasonable really is the statement that includes the comparison? And yet when it is used it creates an emotional intensity that prevents the speaker from thinking clearly about the situation. When you hear someone using a comparison like this it is best to establish the context for the comparison by asking "Better than what?" and "Worse than who?" to gain greater understanding of the message being communicated. Making Judgments Judgments are statements that indicate an opinion or fact. Things like "John isn't very sociable" are considered judgments. These statements are usually taken as fact by most listeners when in fact they can be rather misleading. Whose opinion is it that John isn't sociable? And on what criteria is this based? Unless these factors are established, the statement "John isn't very sociable" doesn't really hold any weight. Again by establishing whose opinion the judgments are and the reason it has been established, a better ground for effective communication is established. Complex Equivalence This is a statement that assumes a relationship between two events that might not (and very likely doesn't) exist. Here's an example: "John doesn't like me", "How do you know that John doesn't like you?" "He always says hello to everyone else in the room before me." This statement assumes a complex equivalence that John saying hello to you last is equivalent to him not liking you. Of course you have never asked him if that is the case so this might well be an incorrect assumption. The way to clarify these is by asking "How does this mean that?" and "How does John not saying hello to you first mean that he doesn't like you?" These are just a few of the subtle factors that can influence the effectiveness of communication between people. You probably notice that they apply equally as much in internal communication. You might diffuse some emotional intensity within yourself by realizing that the reason you are angry with that person is because you think he NEVER does what he is supposed to. Upon asking yourself "Never?" you will see the situation differently, lessen the intensity of your emotional state and be better able to come up with a positive solution.

About the Author

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