

NLP and Levels of Motivation. *Suppose, the Official CANLP/ACPNL Bilingual Newsletter*. Fall 2008, pp. 20-24.

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Motivation lies at the heart of much of what we do. Making an outcome particularly compelling or ending a powerful compulsion are some of the things that we do best. Our interventions often work because they are rooted in the neurological matrix of perception that is manifested most basically as submodalities.

Research from standard psychological and neurophysiological sources has validated many of the visual submodalities. Fearful stimuli evoke different responses depending upon their distance or perceived distance. When the feared stimulus is far off, it evokes freezing responses that may allow us to avoid detection or assess the next action. Closer to the feared object, we run away and still closer we fight. Stimuli that seem to be moving toward us evoke more powerful responses, while those that are receding evoke lessened responses (Blanchard, Blanchard, Takahashi & Kelly, 1977; Muhlberger, Neumann, Wieser, & Pauli, 2008). Moving stimuli, whether the movement is congruent with the expected movement of the object or not, the simple fact of movement awakens stronger emotions than do static stimuli (Simons, Detenber, Reiss, & Shults, 2000; Simons, Detenber, Roedema, & Reiss, 1999).

De Cesarei and Codispoti (De Cesarei & Codispoti, 2006; Codispoti & De Cesarei, 2007), showed that larger emotional stimuli evoked stronger responses than did smaller, independent of their valence. The same authors (De Cesarei and Codispoti, 2008) have also shown that focus, or the availability of fine-grained detail, affects emotional impact in the visual system. Pictures lacking fine-grained detail were perceived as less impactful than those containing high levels of

detail. They also found that attention was based less on fine-grained detail than by whether there was enough detail to recognize the object.

Research into the functions of the orbito-frontal cortex, where the brain creates hierarchies of value, indicates that motivations reflected there are ordered preferentially in terms of the amount of detail that they provide and the richness of their representation across multiple sensory systems. Objects that are more fully represented across multiple sensory systems are perceived as more valuable or more threatening (Kringelbach, 2005). Further data emerging from studies of the superior colliculus--where spontaneous eye and head movements are controlled and where visual, somatosensory and auditory information is integrated--indicate that when auditory and visual impressions move together across the perceptual field, the neurons in that area fire more intensely. This has the effect of increasing the amount of attention paid to the object in question (Sparks, 1999).

Submodality distinctions work because they reflect these hard-wired dimensions of perception. The fate of those manipulations, however, is determined by the ecology of the intervention. If they are applied for a momentary rush, to close a sale or other short term manipulations, without regard to the real needs of the subject, they inevitably fail. Grinder and Delozier, in *Turtles all the Way Down*, warned that our interventions are only as good as the contexts into which we place them. Ecology, they warned, was an essential part of the ethical and effective use of NLP (Grinder & Delozier, 1987).

On the next level of motivational tools we have the well formedness conditions for outcomes. At their most basic level, the NLP well formedness conditions for any given outcome specify that:

1. The outcome must be stated as a positive thing or experience; something wanted, not something unwanted or ended.
2. The outcome must be something that is under the goal seeker's personal control which also implies that the task should not be stated too broadly.
3. The outcome must be specified in terms of multiple levels of sensory experience; it must be described in terms of what can be seen, heard, felt, tasted or smelled.
4. The outcome should be evaluated for ecology; what it will change in the person's life and the lives around them?
5. The outcome should be imagined and experienced in fantasy as fully as possible (Andreas and Andreas, 1989; Bodenhamer and Hall, 1988; Cade and O'Hanlon, 1993; Dilts, Delozier & Delozier, 2000; Linden & Perutz, 1998).

For the most part, these characteristics are typical of deep, intrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivations are desired for their own sake. They are meaningful to the individual independent of external pressures or rewards. They are contrasted with extrinsic motivators which include things like money, sex, power, fame and popularity: stuff. Extrinsic motivators are well known for their capacity to sometimes weaken intrinsic motivations. When, however, they are simply the fruit of a deeply held personal direction or outcome, they present no such problem (Deci and Ryan, 2008; Hullerman et al., 2008).

Intrinsic motivators are desired positively (Deci and Ryan, 2008; Gray, 2005, 2008). They are characterized by choice and personal autonomy; they often include strong self efficacy beliefs (Baumeister and Heatherton, 1996; Deci & Ryan 2008; Hullerman et al., 2008; Koestner, 2008; Nootz, 1975). Because they are often rooted in previous or vicarious experiences, they can

be specified in sensory terms (often with special emphasis on kinesthetic elements—this is how I will feel) (Baumeister and Heatherton, 1996).

Well-formed outcomes can be powerfully motivating and have the benefit that they are often self-correcting.

During 1992, the author was teaching psychology at a local Community College. As part of a lesson on motivation, he asked students to apply NLP well-formedness criteria to outcomes that they had already set for themselves. An important facet of the exercise was the imaginal experience of the anticipated outcome. That is, after specifying a positive outcome, after determining that the outcome was under their personal control and specifying several means by which the student would know that they had attained the desired state or position, they were asked to imagine stepping into the end state and trying it on.

On this occasion there was a young woman in the class who had been working towards a degree in nursing. She had just begun the program and had no idea of what it was that a nurse actually did. When she tried on the imagined experience of the day-to-day realities of nursing, she came rather quickly to the realization that it was not something that she wanted to do. She changed her major soon thereafter (Gray, 2008).

The imposition of well formedness conditions can often be used to differentiate between extrinsic outcomes with relatively superficial motivations and intrinsic motivations which provide stronger sensory and motivational cues. Conversely, well-formedness conditions can also be used to provide long term motivations for outcomes that, though necessary to the individual in their immediate social context, may be relatively meaningless in terms of personal development. When an outcome is coded as important or valuable using the well-formedness conditions, it is treated as an intrinsic motivator and may sustain behaviors over years or decades

even if they are relatively superficial. As a result we have the condition where a person completes a productive career, raises a family and at the end of it awakens to discover that their life has been relatively meaningless. Mid-life crises may be understood as the result of awakening from a life motivated by social obligations that were not part of the individual's core identity or life calling. They were, however, coded as intrinsically meaningful as long as the appropriate context held.

The most powerful motivators may be those related to an individual's calling or life purpose. The idea is explained in Jungian terms by James Hillman in *The Soul's Code* (Hillman, 1996). There, he points to the Jungian concept of individuation or growth into conscious development of one's full genetic potential. In NLP terms it might be understood as learning how to cooperate fully with the deep positive intentions of the unconscious and the path that opens up to us when we do. A near identical idea is Maslow's idea of self-actualization. Here the motivational path is described in the familiar phrase, 'What a man can be, he must be' (Maslow, 1943, p. 382).

Maslow indicated that when every deficiency need is met there remains a positive need for growth into something more. This describes a path which, if not immediately compelling, is at least persistent and draws the individual to reach out beyond their current circumstances and capacities to find deeper meaning and fulfillment. He says:

It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming (Maslow, 1943, p. 382).

Motivations at this level are often characterized by their natural capacity to reflect the submodality characteristics of high levels of value and are typically well-formed. It is precisely because of this identity with deep intrinsic motivation that when we apply the well-formedness conditions to lesser outcomes, they powerfully impact our perceptions of the target object or activity.

As practitioners who often deal in personal motivation, we would do well to consider whether the motivations we supply are ephemeral, long-lasting but nevertheless passing, or rooted in the deepest levels of our clients' lives. Even when they only seek a kick start for an ephemeral outcome, we would do well to help them to reach for more.

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