

Using NLP to Improve Your Management Skills

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Have you ever wondered why you don't get along with particular employees, why some members of your team don't follow to your instructions, or why, when you think you're approaching something correctly, it just doesn't have the desired effect? NLP, Neuro Linguistic Programming, is fundamentally about making sense of how we do things and how we can affect change to make things better. NLP involves reprogramming our internal processes and our behavior to achieve better results.

Oftentimes when things go badly, we believe something is wrong with the people we're dealing with; it doesn't occur to us to change our own attitudes and behavior. Even if we realize we could handle a situation better, it can be difficult to know how to make effective changes—changes that can endure. NLP can provide a framework for making the desired changes. By following its techniques, you have an excellent chance of fundamentally changing the way you think and behave, and therefore how you interact with others.

NLP is not about what to do; it's about how to do it. It can help you improve how you manage people, how you communicate with others, and how you lead your team.

What You Need to Know

What is NLP?

The acronym NLP stands for Neuro Linguistic Programming. The "Neuro" relates to our thought processes, which activate the neurological system. The "Linguistic" refers to how we communicate with others, especially through language and how it can influence our experiences. And finally, "Programming" relates to our patterns of behavior and our emotions, which we use to learn, evaluate information, deal with problems, make decisions, and ultimately achieve results.

NLP is essentially about learning how to think and communicate more effectively with others.

Does learning NLP require a lot of study?

Understanding the theory of NLP can take some time, and you will need to read and interpret it. However, learning NLP is predominantly accomplished through practical application, which means that you can learn the theory while you put it into practice.

What to Do

Understand the Behavior of Others

NLP stresses that people's interpretation of the world and their view of behavior, values, and norms are shaped by socialization, upbringing, education, and the culture in which we live. Having an understanding and awareness of this can enable you to deal with behavior in others that may seem inconsistent with your ideals.

Taking time to think over a person's behavior and the motives behind it can be a very effective way of dealing with someone you find "difficult." Disagreeable behavior may be the result of a desire for something entirely unrelated to the present situation or may have underlying causes that are not immediately apparent. Understanding this and addressing situations with this in mind will allow you to step back and view the situation objectively, without an emotional and instinctive reaction and can often allow you to resolve situations much more easily and with greater effect.

NLP also teaches us to remember that behavior does not make the person. When dealing with "bad" behavior among your employees, be conscious of the language you use and try not to criticize the person, but rather the behavior that he or she has demonstrated. Bear in mind that each of us is capable of behaving in certain ways in certain circumstances when affected by our external environment and our internal emotions, but that behavior does not define who we are.

Find a Role Model

We all take inspiration from others, and it is very easy to spot the people who do their jobs very well. One NLP technique is to use your observation of such a person to your advantage. Rather than feeling jealousy or resentment toward someone who is more successful, NLP teaches you to "model" that individual in order to realize success yourself. Modeling involves studying and observing an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behavior and then replicating the approach by "acting out" those attitudes and behavior.

A "model" can be anyone you admire and who achieves the kinds of results that you feel could be useful in your role. Observe your model's behavior. How does that individual relate to people? What body language does your model use? What words and tone of voice does he or she use? What attitude does he or she have? Begin to adopt that behavior and work it into your own approach to others.

Modeling can also be used to "clone" the best performing members of your staff. You can use this technique to identify the ways in which your best staff members work and then encourage and train the rest of the team to behave in a similar way.

Build Rapport

Though you may find that you develop a natural rapport with some people and not others, that does not mean you cannot build rapport with everyone you meet or work with. It is easy to feel that those people you do not have a rapport with are simply “difficult,” but avoiding that kind of assumption allows you to develop rapport with anyone by using simple NLP methods:

- **Mirror the other person.** Two people experiencing natural rapport tend to mirror each other’s body language and use of words or tone of voice. It is possible to artificially simulate rapport by consciously mirroring the other person. By observing his or her body language, choice of words, subjects of interest, as well as values and ideals, you can adapt the way in which you communicate to suit the individual you are dealing with. Mirroring should be subtle since exaggerated mimicking can actually break rapport!
- **Identify what the other person’s values are** in order to approach leadership in alignment with those values. Inspire people by recognizing what inspires them.
- **Listen to the language that people use** and identify whether it describes what they see, what they hear, or what they feel and adapt your language and method of communication to match their preference. (See “Communicate Using Representational Systems” below.)
- **Disregard any assumptions** that you might have about the other person and make a conscious effort to listen and appreciate that individual’s point of view without being judgmental. Avoiding making judgments or having preconceived notions of someone’s motives will allow you to remain focused on what the person is actually saying, rather than making inferences and focusing on those things that reaffirm your negative viewpoint.
- **Appreciate the pace at which people like to communicate** and the volume of information that they can process at any one time. Try to communicate at their speed and level of detail.

Communicate Using “Representational Systems”

When describing the way in which people experience the world, NLP focuses upon the five senses of touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell. In addition, NLP identifies three broad ways in which people make sense of experiences and filter information from their environment. They are known as:

- Visual—you focus specifically on what you see;
- Auditory—you notice the sounds around you;
- Kinaesthetic—you are particularly aware of how things feel both physically and emotionally.

These three ways of dealing with the external world are described as “representational systems” in NLP terminology. NLP identifies the link between language and the way in which we use our senses to respond to our environment and how language can reflect a preferred representational system. Observing the language that people use and identifying whether they are using visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic senses can provide you with an insight into the way that they are responding

to information and to their environment. Identifying which representational system an individual is following at any one time will allow you to determine what form of communication he or she will be most responsive to, for example, visual demonstrations, conversations, or written documents. In addition, NLP teaches that by adopting the language of the representational system of someone you are interacting with, you will be able to communicate your message with much greater effect.

Take 100% Responsibility for Communication with Others

NLP teaches the importance of taking 100% responsibility for your communication with others. Whether you are attempting to communicate something or you are listening to something being communicated to you, it is entirely your responsibility to ensure that your message is understood or that you understand the message that you are being given. A few specific examples of how to take responsibility for communication are:

- avoid making assumptions of any kind;
- ask the other person to repeat what they think you have asked of them;
- be absolutely clear about requirements and expectations and specifically vocalize anticipated deadlines;
- repeat to the other person your interpretation of what they have said;
- ask for clarification and perhaps examples of what is required.

What to Avoid

You Fail to Employ “Outcome Thinking”

A key component of NLP is “outcome thinking,” which refers to maintaining a focus on your objective. This can apply equally to practicing NLP, since it is easy to become so focused upon mastering the techniques that you continue to use techniques that may be inappropriate for your workplace, employees, or specific situations. You should be careful not to pursue a specific technique if it is not working for you. Remember that your objective is to make changes and to see results. If it is not having the desired effect then try something else. It is important that you be aware of the effect that the NLP techniques are having, rather than simply attempting to illicit the change in yourself.

You Allow Your Focus on Perfecting the Techniques to Impair Your Communication Skills

There is a danger that you may focus so intently on mastering NLP techniques that you pay more attention to the techniques than you do to listening to what is being communicated to you. Listening to others and developing excellent communication skills is central to the NLP approach and should not be neglected when practicing NLP techniques. Practice the techniques at home, with your friends or partner, or in situations where it will have no impact on your work in order to be able to use them effectively in the workplace.

Where to Learn More

Book:

Ready, Romilla, and Kate Burton, Neuro-linguistic Programming for Dummies For Dummies, 2004.

Web Sites:

NLPWorld: www.nlp-world.com

NLPInfo.com: www.nlpinfo.com