

# Creating Behavioral Shifts Using NLP

by [Stuart Tan](#)

Has there ever been a time where a friend made a complaint to you about something, and the most striking thing about that complaint was that your friend could have been one of the people contributing to the problem? Well I have, and what never ceases to amaze me is how people expect others to change, but cannot see that they themselves need to change.

Consider this example. A managing director is facing difficulties in a corporate environment. His assistant director is very vocal and speaks his mind, even if it means contradicting the MD publicly in a board meeting. You can imagine how badly the MD's ego was hurt by these incidents! Now, the MD considers him a threat, and starts to label his assistant a "maverick" and a wet blanket. He speaks to his board and argues that they should give this assistant director the boot. In the meeting, however, the MD tries so hard to fire the assistant director that he shoots down any of the board members' suggestions to try to accommodate, to try to be flexible, to try to talk to his assistant, to give him credit for his hard work, etc.

Now guess who is deemed the "maverick" and the wet blanket!

If you want change to happen, it needs to begin from the inside. I've noticed that the more you want to make things outside of you change, the less effective it becomes to make that change happen!

Jeremy was a person who always blamed others. I've known him since I was in school. He was constantly blaming his teachers for being bad and that they were boring. He later on even blamed his school for being the reason why he failed his examinations. Once he was given the boot from school, I never saw Jeremy again. But about three years ago, I met Jeremy, driving a flashy Porsche, and obviously very successful. I sat him down and asked him what change he made.

When he started speaking to me, I was shocked because it felt like a completely different Jeremy speaking to me. He said he had learnt how to stop being so arrogant and difficult because it was bothering a lot of people around him. He ultimately crawled his way out of the hovel and into a decent job in sales where he worked so hard, he turned out to be one of the most successful in his company.

Most people, however, are too proud to accept the responsibility for their own problems. In fact, it is always easier to believe that the responsibility was not theirs. What's worse is that if the problem was even more remote, they might say "but that's not my problem, why should I bother at all with it?"

The fact of the matter is we should bother about it if we want to sow the seeds of change. No matter how small our influence within that environment, it can be leveraged and create a very powerful effect, if only we tried!

A general trait of humans is that they look outside of themselves to find answers, when the answers lie within themselves. This calls for a change in perception. What people see inside their heads is filled with beliefs, attitudes and values. In order for things to change, these must somehow change first.

The first thing we need to establish is that our interpretations of behaviors will activate our beliefs about that behavior. A student may be interpreted as being "disruptive" in class, but all he was doing was "talking to his friends". The difference between the two descriptions is important because the latter is non-judgmental, while the former is value-laden. This kind of description is more precise and can enable you to make a change to the behavior. After all, it is easier to recognize how to help someone to stop "talking to his friends" than to stop some one being "disruptive", isn't it!

Such value-laden judgments are just as harmful if they are positive. Telling someone that he or she has "high performance" doesn't help to give them the feedback they need to sustain such "high performance". Imagine an employee or

a student who has just stumbled upon a method for dealing with their work effectively, when they never were able to do so in the past. Simply 'praising' them will not get anywhere! You'll need to be able to praise them while telling them what they did as a process. That way, you have the precise behavior reinforced.

This is what we mean, therefore, by the difference between "content based" and "process based". The focus of NLP is very much process based. The question that is used most of all is "how". For NLP practitioners, the "how" question is easily answered because they have been empowered by a set of models that emulate processes that lead to excellence. However, for those who are not NLP practitioners, the "how" thinking is always a stumbling block.

Here are three general principles for creating behavioral shifts.

#### 1. Awareness.

Awareness is a highly underrated skill. In NLP, we use a more precise definition called "calibration", which refers to your ability to tune into and "measure" human experience. Many people are aware of faults and they are consistently finding faults. They probably are good intentioned people who want to get something done, but somehow approach the situation inappropriately.

The first step, as I mentioned earlier, is to recognize that while it is true that other people contribute to the problems we face, we cannot ignore the fact that we too are contributing to the problem. We need only change our ability to recognize this, and then take charge of what we can change first.

#### 2. Engaging in a self-change process.

If you want to help others to create the kinds of shifts that you want, you must yourself be able to take up the responsibility for changing yourself so that others might change. For things to change, you must first change yourself, your way of

thinking, the attitudes you have, and so on. It is a process of molding yourself to allow someone to engage with the way you are changing.

### 3. State control.

State control is probably one of the neatest skills I've learnt from NLP. It means that I have control over myself, and that whenever I feel bad about something, I am choosing to be that way, and can choose to be otherwise. Unfortunately, for many other people who have not learnt the art of state management, it is easy for one to believe that there is no choice about what we feel. Yet you cannot deny that believing that is, in and of itself, a choice.

You might wonder "how specifically would one gain awareness?" or "how does one engage in a process?" or "how does one control one's own states?"

The answers lie in the NLP trainings that are available worldwide. I cannot choose to change someone else's behavior, but I can certainly change myself to such an extent that the other person might be influenced by me to change his or her behavior. My definition of a behavioral shift is not of reducing an unwanted behavior, but of developing behaviors that are wanted in the first place, so that the need to get rid of unwanted behaviors is reduced, and the focus falling on creating more effective behaviors in the right context.

Corresponding with the three principles above are the following NLP processes and models.

**Calibration** is a process by which we tune into the surroundings and measure sensory stimuli. It requires us to open up our awareness to stimuli that we never were aware of in the first place. When a student or employee performs under your expectations, what kinds of behavior are you aware of that he was engaging in that led to such performance? Remember, I am talking about specific behaviors, not just imagined value-laden labels.

Engaging in a process is simple, once you are aware that everyone utilizes a set of **strategies**. Just as there are specific patterns of behaving that form a strategy for failure, so there are also patterns of behavior that lead to success and excellence. This is the heart of NLP. In this sense, I assume that all of the so-called talented people around me are merely users of a highly effective strategy. If I am to attain that level of excellence in myself, I can model myself after them in specific ways!

In order to engage in the hidden processes of excellence, we not only must be aware of and calibrate to people's experiences, we need to be able to ask the right questions, the 'how' questions, and allow that person's experience to speak for itself. The final stage of installation in NLP serves as a mechanism to build within the person a means of executing such 'talent' themselves.

The third element of state control is simple, once you understand the NLP models of **submodalities** and **anchoring**. It can be said that this is one of the pillars of NLP, and many techniques and applications have been created as a result of this.

**Submodalities** are what code your experience. While your experience might tell you that you are having a bad day, your mind codes it in sensory categories – the visual, auditory and kinesthetic. A bad day might appear to be bleaker, heavier and duller than normal. You might think "oh, this is common sense", but I'm not referring to such descriptions metaphorically. Your mind literally codes your real-life experience in a representational system that corresponds with what is going on in your mind.

While the distinction is not necessarily an objective fact, it is subjectively real to you, and that is what matters.

**Anchoring** on the other hand is a process of associating something with something else. By associating an emotion of enthusiasm with a stack of undone tax papers on the table, you can easily get yourself motivated to be compelled to

go for it and do your taxes each time you see them lying around on the table, for example. Imagine the possibilities for other instances.

If you were to become a practitioner of NLP, you get to do all this with people to help them extract their potential from themselves. There are a whole lot of other skills and models that can be learnt in a proper NLP training. As the years go by, more and more competent NLP practitioners are developing the attitude of generating their own models and frameworks to adapt to the individual whom they are helping. Thus, the final principle in creating behavioral change is an attitude: to be able to build in a sense of curiosity, possibility, experimentation and feedback, all rolled into one, for the purpose of making NLP a part and parcel of every day life.

So the next time someone comes to you complaining about something that went at home or at work, listen! You can curiously explore the problem and inform him or her about what you calibrated to and get them to change the focus, building in anchors that will direct them differently, so that they might realize their own patterns of behaviour so that they change first before anything else changes!

For more information about NLP, visit <http://AKLTG.com>. Free resources are available at <http://StuartTan.com> and <http://WorldofNLP.com>.