Chapter 1

NLP Explained

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In This Chapter

▶ Setting out on a journey together

▶ Exploring the key themes of NLP

▶ Getting the most out of NLP

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*H*ere's a little Sufi tale about a man and a tiger:

A man being followed by a hungry tiger, turned in desperation to face it, and cried: 'Why don't you leave me alone?' The tiger answered: 'Why don't you stop being so appetising?'

In any communication between two people, or in this case, between man and beast, there's always more than one perspective. Sometimes we just can't grasp that because we can't see the way forward.

NLP is one of the most sophisticated and effective methodologies currently available to help you do just that. It centres on communication and change. These days we all need the skills to develop personal flexibility to the extreme. Tricks and gimmicks are not enough: we need to get real.

So welcome to the start of the journey and in this chapter you'll get a quick taster of the key themes of NLP.

What Is NLP?

We're all born with the same basic neurology. Our ability to do anything in life, whether it's swimming the length of a pool, cooking a meal, or reading this book, depends on how we control our nervous system. So, much of NLP is devoted to learning how to think more effectively and communicate more effectively with yourself and others.

✔ **Neuro** is about your neurological system. NLP is based on the idea that we experience the world through our senses and translate sensory information into thought processes, both conscious and unconscious. Thought processes activate the neurological system, which affects physiology, emotions, and behaviour.

✔ **Linguistic** refers to the way human beings use language to make sense of the world, capture and conceptualise experience, and communicate that experience to others. In NLP, linguistics is the study of how the words you speak influence your experience.

✔ **Programming** draws heavily from learning theory and addresses how we code or mentally represent experience. Your personal programming consists of your internal processes and strategies (thinking patterns) that you use to make decisions, solve problems, learn, evaluate, and get results. NLP shows people how to recode their experiences and organise their internal programming so they can get the outcomes they want.

To see this process in action, begin to notice how you think. Just imagine that it's a hot summer's day. You go home at the end of the day and stand in your kitchen holding a lemon you have taken from the fridge. Look at the outside of it, its yellow waxy skin with green marks at the ends. Feel how cold it is in your hand. Raise it to your nose and smell it. Mmmm. Press it gently and notice the weight of the lemon in the palm of your hand. Now take a knife and cut it in half. Hear the juices start to run and notice the smell is stronger now. Bite deeply into the lemon and allow the juice to swirl around in your mouth.

Words. Simple words have the power to trigger your saliva glands. Hear one word 'lemon' and your brain kicks into action. The words you read told your brain that you had a lemon in your hand. We may think that words only describe meanings: they actually create your reality. You'll learn much more about this as we travel together.

A few quick definitions

NLP can be described in various ways. The formal definition is that it is 'the study of the structure of our subjective experience.' Here are a few more ways of answering the $64,000 question: 'What is NLP?'

✔ The art and science of communication

✔ The key to learning

✔ It's about what makes you and other people tick

✔ It's the route to get the results you want in all areas of your life

✔ Influencing others with integrity

> ✔ A manual for your brain
>
> ✔ The secret of successful people
>
> ✔ The way to creating your own future
>
> ✔ NLP helps people make sense of their reality
>
> ✔ The toolkit for personal and organisational change

Where it all started and where it's going

NLP began in California in the early 1970s at the University of Santa Cruz. There, Richard Bandler, a master's level student of information sciences and mathematics, enlisted the help of Dr John Grinder, a professor of linguistics, to study people they considered to be excellent communicators and agents of change. They were fascinated by how some people defied the odds to get through to 'difficult' or very ill people where others failed miserably to connect.

So NLP has its roots in a therapeutic setting thanks to three world-renowned psychotherapists that Bandler and Grinder studied: Virginia Satir (developer of Conjoint Family Therapy), Fritz Perls (the founder of Gestalt Psychology), and Milton H Erickson (largely responsible for the advancement of Clinical Hypnotherapy).

In their work, Bandler and Grinder also drew upon the skills of linguists Alfred Korzybski and Noam Chomsky, social anthropologist Gregory Bateson, and psychoanalyst Paul Watzlawick.

From those days, the field of NLP has exploded to encompass many disciplines in many countries around the world. It would be impossible for us to name all the great teachers and practitioners in NLP today, but in Appendix A, you will find more guidance on extending your knowledge.

So what's next for NLP? It's certainly travelled a long way from Santa Cruz in the 1970s. So many more pioneers have picked up the story and taken it forward – made it practical and helped transform the lives of real people like you and me. The literature on NLP is prolific. Today you'll find NLP applications amongst doctors and nurses, taxi drivers, sales people, coaches and accountants, teachers and animal trainers, parents, workers, retired people, and teenagers alike. In 'The Part of Tens' we list just a few.

Each generation will take the ideas that resonate in their field of interest, sift and refine them, chipping in their own experiences. If NLP encourages new thinking and new choices and acknowledges the positive intention underlying all action, all we can say is the future is bright with possibilities. The rest is up to you.

A note on integrity

You may hear the words integrity and manipulation associated with NLP, so we'd like to put the record straight now. You influence others all the time. When you do it consciously to get what you want, the question of integrity arises. Are you manipulating others to get what you want at their expense? The question that we, the authors, ask ourselves when we are in a selling situation is simple. What is our positive intention for the other person – be it an individual or a company? If it's good and our intention is to benefit the other side, then we have integrity – a *win/win*. And if not, it's manipulation. When you head for win/win, you're on track for success. And as you know, what goes around comes around.

The Pillars of NLP: Straight up and Straightforward

The first thing to understand is that NLP is about four things, known as the pillars of NLP (see Figure 1-1). These four chunks of the subject are explained in the following sections.

- **Rapport:** How you build a relationship with others and with yourself is probably the most important gift that NLP gives most readers. Given the pace at which most of us live and work, one big lesson in rapport is how you can say 'no' to all the requests for your time and still retain friendships or professional relationships. To find out more about rapport – how to build it and when to break it off – head to Chapter 7.

- **Sensory awareness:** Have you noticed how when you walk in someone else's home the colours, sounds, and smells are subtly different to yours? Or that colleague looks worried when they talk about their job. Maybe you notice the colour of a night sky or the fresh green leaves as spring unfolds. Like the famous detective Sherlock Holmes you will begin to notice how your world is so much richer when you pay attention with all the senses you have. Chapter 6 tells you all you need to know about how powerful your sensory perceptions are and how you can use your natural sight, sound, touch, feelings, taste, and smell capabilities to your benefit.

- **Outcome thinking:** You'll hear the word 'outcome' mentioned throughout this book. What this means is beginning to think about what it is you want rather than getting stuck in a negative problem mode. The principles of an outcome approach can help you make the best decisions and

choices – whether it's about what you're going to do at the weekend, running an important project, or finding out the true purpose of your life. Head to Chapter 3 to get the results you deserve.

✒ **Behavioural flexibility:** This means how to do something different when what you are currently doing is not working. Being flexible is key to practising NLP; you'll find tools and ideas for this in every chapter. We'll help you find fresh perspectives and build these into your repertoire. You might like to head to Chapter 5 for starters on how you can maximise your own flexibility.

Let's just give an example here of what this might mean every day. Suppose you have ordered some goods by mail. It could be a software package to store all your names, addresses, and phone number of friends or clients. You load it on your computer, use it a few times, and then mysteriously it stops working. There's a bug in the system, but you've already invested many hours in the installation and entering all your contacts. You phone up the supplier and the customer service people are unhelpful to the point of rudeness.
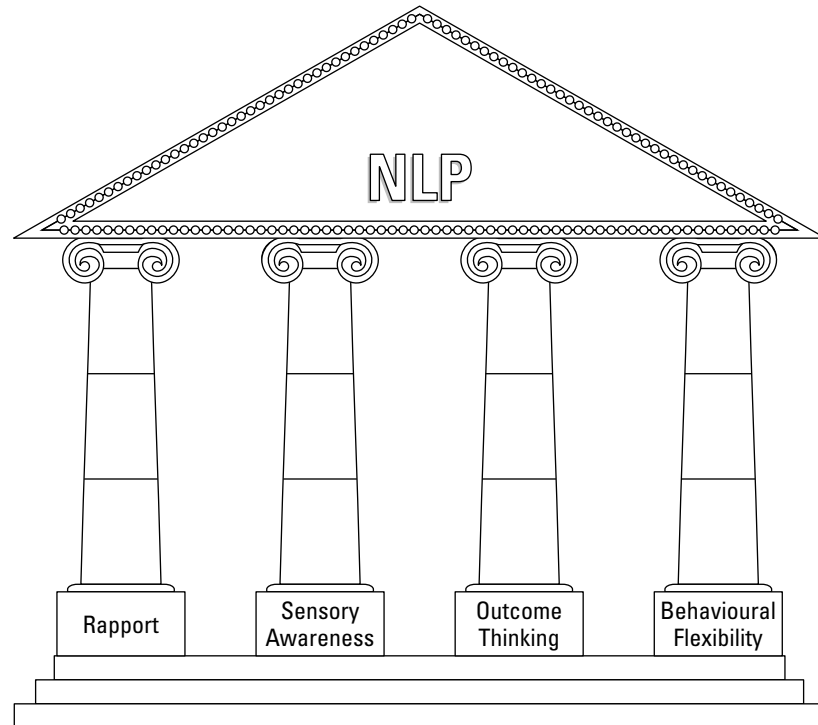
Figure 1-1:
The Pillars
of NLP.

NLP

| Rapport | Sensory Awareness | Outcome Thinking | Behavioural Flexibility |

You need to bring out all your skills in building *rapport* with the customer ser-vice manager before anyone will listen to your complaint. You'll need to *engage your senses* – particularly your ears as you listen carefully to what the supplier is saying, and notice how to control your feelings and decide on your best response. You will need to be very clear about your *outcome* – what do you want to happen after you make your complaint? For example, do you want a full refund or replacement software? And finally you may need to be *flexible in your behaviour* and consider different options if you don't achieve what you want the first time.

Models and Modelling

Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) began as a model of how we communi-cate to ourselves and others and was developed by Bandler and Grinder based on their study of great communicators. So NLP says a lot about models and modelling.

NLP works by modelling excellence in every field. The premise begins like this: If you can find someone who's good at something, then you can model how they do that and learn from them. This means that you can learn to model who-ever you admire – top business leaders or sports personalities, the waiter at your favourite restaurant, or your hugely energetic aerobics teacher.

The NLP Communication Model

The NLP model explains how we process the information that comes into us from the outside. According to NLP, you move through life not by responding to the world around you, but by responding to your model or map of that world.

A fundamental assumption of NLP is that 'the map is not the territory'. What this means is that you and I may experience the same event but we do so differently. Let's imagine that you come to the next *Dummies*' party – we would both have a good time, meet lots of friendly people, enjoy good food and drinks, maybe watch some entertainment. Yet, if we were each asked the next day to recount what happened, we'd each have a different story to tell. And so the internal representations that we make about an outside event are different to the event itself.

REMEMBER

NLP does not change the world – it simply helps you change the way that you observe/perceive your world. NLP helps you build a different map that helps you to be more effective.

ANECDOTE

John is an architect who rents expensive office space in a central city location. He used to moan frequently that the offices were not cleaned to a high enough standard, the staff were lazy, and he never got any satisfaction from the office manager. On meeting John in his office we discovered that he worked in chaos, leaving the office with plans and design ideas on every available surface and not tidying anything away. He frequently worked late into the evening and was grumpy if interrupted, so the cleaners came and went without daring to disturb him. He'd clearly not considered anyone else's point of view and had not noticed what a difficult task it was to clean his office around him. His 'map' of reality was completely different to that of the office management team.

Modelling excellence

Modelling excellence is another theme you'll hear discussed. The NLP approach is that anything somebody else can do is learnable if you break the learning into small enough component parts. It's an empowering perspective and also an encouragement to convert large overwhelming projects into lots of small ones – like eating an elephant.

Tips for Using NLP to Greater Effect

As you'll discover, the practical application of NLP is about increasing choices when it's so easy to fall in the trap of being restricted by your experience and saying: 'This is the way we do things, and this is how it has to be.' In order to get the benefit of NLP, you need to be open and give yourself and others the benefit of questioning and challenging the norms in a supportive way. Here are a few tips to remind you how.

Attitude comes first

At its essence NLP is an attitude about life and a technology which empowers you with the tools and abilities to change anything about your life which does not reflect who you are today. Anything and everything is possible if you have the mind set and attitudes that support your success. If your attitudes don't support you in living a richly rewarding life then you may want to consider changing. Changing your mind and attitude *does* change your life.

Many people spend a lot of time looking at the negatives in their lives – how they hate their jobs, or don't want to smoke or be fat. By conditioning yourself to concentrate on what you *do* want, positive results can be achieved very quickly.

Curiosity and confusion are good for you

There are two helpful attributes to bring with you: *curiosity* – accepting that you don't know all the answers, and a *willingness to be confused* – because that precedes new understanding. As the great hypnotherapist, Milton H Erickson (more on him later too), said: 'Enlightenment is always preceded by confusion.'

If you find that ideas in this book make you feel confused, thank your unconscious mind as this is the first step to understanding. Take the confusion as a sign that you actually know more than you realised.

Change is up to you

Gone are the days when you need to stay stuck in a downward spiral of repetitive behaviours and responses that are tedious and ineffective. Today NLP is all about producing measurable results that enhance the quality of people's lives without a lengthy and painful journey into the past.

Once you move into the chapters ahead, you'll discover the experiential nature of NLP – that it's about trying things out, having a go. Test out the ideas for yourself – don't take our word for it.

The responsibility for change lies with *you*: this book is the facilitator. If you are not open to change, then you have thrown away your money. So we'd encourage you to do the exercises, note your new learning, then teach and share with others, because to teach is to learn twice.

Have fun on the way!

When Clint Eastwood was interviewed on TV by Michael Parkinson he offered sound advice: 'Let's take the work seriously, and not ourselves seriously.' NLP involves much fun and laughter. If you set yourself up to become perfect, you put enormous and unrealistic pressure on yourself too. So pack in a sense of your own playfulness as you travel and try to make sense of a changing world. Learning is serious work that is serious fun.