

My name is Sandra Vesterstein. Thank you for downloading our eBook, *A Guide to Making High-Quality Decisions in a Time of Uncertainty*. I have been working in the personal and professional development field for the past 30 years. Every day, I am reminded of how incredibly fortunate I am to have been introduced to NLP – Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

Since 2009, I have been a Master Trainer of NLP, and am honored and privileged to have introduced the power of NLP to both students and clients. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to guide people to develop a mindset of purpose-driven thinking. When someone adopts this mindset, it allows flexibility in thinking, feeling, behaving, and believing. As a result, a person can gain the ability to change and evolve how they perceive themselves and the world.

Before we focus on the strategy of making high-quality decisions in a time of uncertainty, I believe it is essential to understand the foundation of this decision-making strategy, which has its basis in NLP.

WHAT IS NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMING?

NLP Overview

- It is the study of our subjective experience.
- A system for understanding how our subjective reality is processed both consciously and unconsciously.
- A set of techniques that expand our perceptions and beliefs, which leads to an awareness of personal coherence and identity.
- The art of modeling actions and behaviors so that any known ability may be reproduced and taught.
- An attitude of curiosity and respect for each other, ourselves, and for what we have yet to become.



NLP is a model of excellence and communication that was co-developed by Dr. Richard Bandler and John Grinder in the early 1970s. It is a model that helps us understand how we communicate with ourselves and others through our neurology, language, and physiology. Bandler and Grinder

Initially studied three therapists, Dr. Fritz Pearls, Virginia Satir, and Dr. Milton Erickson, to determine the strategies they used to achieve incredible results with their clients. To do this, it required that they model these therapists. Modeling is the ability to master the therapist, or the person achieving desired results, by adopting the belief systems, physiology, thought processes, and strategies that underlie their particular skill or behavior. Through the process of modeling, Bandler and Grinder were able to deconstruct these individuals' therapeutic strategies. After this, they reconstructed the processes and techniques so that they could be taught to others. The goal of this process was to achieve similar results.

NLP acknowledges the unique subjective realities of every individual, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This approach is not only the most useful and accurate, it is also the most respectful way we have of addressing the true human potential of every individual.

While some approaches have provided interesting and meaningful ideas for a broader population than others, few have demonstrated effective, reliable techniques for achieving their models. They can tell us what to be, but not how to attain that goal. Since it has been proven to bring significant results, NLP is unique.

NLP is a technology that acknowledges and values the incredible variety and differences that make up human experience and expression. It provides a way to simply and efficiently understand, organize, and utilize that variety to help us tap into our true potential.

Incorporating NLP in your life will help you to:

Manage your emotions	Be resourceful under stressful times
Have more behavioral flexibility	Engage in skillful communication
Increase your speed of learning	Become a more influential leader

MAKING QUALITY DECISIONS IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY



The quality of our life is a reflection of the quality of the decisions that have been made by or for us. Whether the decisions are large or small, it is the collective effect of these decisions that ultimately shape our experience and determines our overall satisfaction in life. The quality of our decisions is based on our perception of the world,

which is governed by the thoughts and feelings we are running at the time we make them.

Feelings are not right or wrong. They are either useful or un-useful, depending on the situation. While we can be in the emotional state of love or fear, we cannot be in these two opposing emotional states at the same time. Love wears many different masks of feelings, such as honor, respect, connection and acceptance. Fear also wears many different masks, such as anger, sadness, regret, and judgment. Our emotional state will determine if we are making fear or loved-based decisions. To embrace the importance of our emotional state and decision-making process, we must first understand what makes up our experience.

WHAT MAKES UP OUR EXPERIENCE?

The illustration to the right is a basic representational model of what makes up the structure of experience. When we understand the structure of experience, it helps us to gain insight into why we behave or respond to our environment in the way that we do.



An experience's meaning is determined by the thoughts we have about it. When we assign this meaning, it triggers emotions or feelings. These thoughts and feelings then trigger behaviors, which are all governed by the values and beliefs we have about ourselves and the world. Keep in mind that at any time, we can tweak or adjust any one of these elements (i.e., thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and beliefs), and the relationship between these elements changes and thus changes our experience.

WHAT DETERMINES HOW WE PERCEIVE THE WORLD?



Now that we understand the basic structure of experience, it would be helpful to know what triggers our response to a situation and how we then process and perceive the world around us. To process the world, we take in information consciously and unconsciously through our senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, and intuition.

Our conscious mind can only keep track of seven, plus-or-minus-two, chunks of information at a time. It can process 40 bits of information per second and is responsible for

about five percent of what we do. Since we can only consciously keep track of a certain amount of information, our mind has to delete, distort, and generalize much of the information coming in through our senses. We will discuss what determines how this occurs later.

Our unconscious mind can process up to 20,000 bits of information per second and is responsible for about 95% of how we respond and interact in the world. It governs our automatic responses. All of our beliefs, emotions, and behavioral patterns exist in the unconscious mind.

One of the foundational principles of NLP is the concept: “The Map is Not the Territory.” This concept speaks to how we receive, process, and translate information from our outer world (i.e., The Territory) through our nervous system. We assign meaning to our thoughts and memories based on this internal map. Metaphorically speaking, we process information from the outside world through our Map of Reality, which is a representation of the outer world based on our filters. These filters are made up of our beliefs, values, attitudes, memories, language, time and space, matter and energy, and Meta-programs. It's important to note that Meta-programs are processes that determine what we are paying attention to on an unconscious level. They are the mental shortcuts that direct our decisions, behaviors, and actions. All of these filters govern how we interact in the world with our self and others.

We create our internal map from past experiences. This map is personal and unique to us, and it is subjective. To respond to a situation, we go within and access the archives of our memories in our

unconscious mind (i.e., our internal map) to find a similar situation to compare with our current experience. We do this to find a way to respond. To accomplish this, however, information must pass through our filters, and we only accept information that matches our internal map.

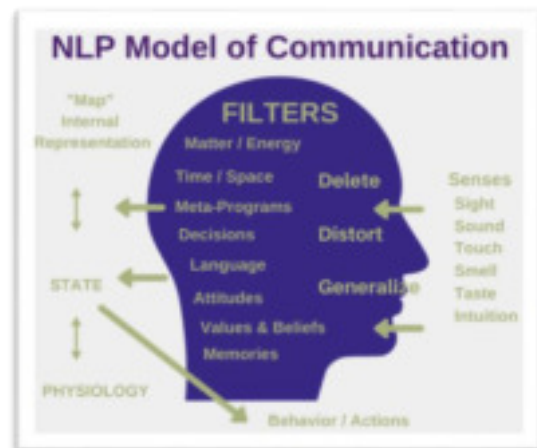
What we think is going on in the world is not actually happening. It is merely our interpretation of events and experiences. We interpret the world by processing information through our senses. As this information appears, we then filter it by deleting, distorting, and generalizing. Let's explore how this works in more detail.

HOW WE DELETE, DISTORT, AND GENERALIZE

DELETION

Deletion is the process by which we selectively pay attention to certain aspects of our experience and exclude others. Deletion allows us to focus our awareness and attend to one portion of our experience rather than another.

This process makes coping possible and allows us not to be overwhelmed by certain external stimuli. It's important to remember that this same process can be limiting if we delete portions of our experience that are necessary for a full and rich model of the world. One example of this would be a person who believes they are being unjustly treated and picked on without perceiving their participation, or role, in bringing this situation into existence. In this case, they have not developed a useful model of the world.



DISTORTION

Distortion allows us to make shifts in how we experience sensory data. Without this process, we could not plan for the future or bring goals and dreams into reality. We misrepresent reality in fiction, art, and even science. A microscope, a novel, and a painting are all examples of our ability to distort and create misrepresentations of reality. All inventions take place because of our ability to distort and imagine what could be rather than what is.

We can limit ourselves with distortion in many ways. Think, for example, of the person who distorts all criticism with the interpretation, “I’m bad.” As a result of this type of distortion, any value to be had by the criticism is lost; so, too, are opportunities for change and growth.

Consider the frequent distortion of turning a process into a thing. When a “relationship” is disassociated from the process of relating, those involved suffer a loss. It becomes a thing "out there" to be talked about, out of our control, and no longer dynamic.

GENERALIZATION

Generalization is excellent for learning. It is the process by which components, or pieces of a person’s model of the world, become detached from their original experience. These components then come to represent the entire category of which the experience is just an example.

Generalization can be useful or not, and depends on the context.

For example, a woman enters a dark room and reaches for the light switch. She does not have to learn a new strategy for acquiring light every time she enters the room. Because she has generalized the knowledge that switches on walls typically turn on lights.

Each of us makes many generalizations that are useful and appropriate in some situations and not in others. For example, if a young man behaves in a way that wins the respect of his fellow males and engages in this same behavior by generalizing it in all contexts, he may experience great difficulty in obtaining respect and interest from women.

Keep in mind that all of this is happening on an unconscious level.

WHAT DOES THE UNCONSCIOUS / CONSCIOUS MIND HAVE TO DO WITH DECISIONS?



The unconscious mind is part of the autonomic nervous system. This system controls our vital bodily functions such as heart rate, swallowing, breathing, digestion, and arousal. Even though the

autonomic nervous system is mostly unconscious, our conscious mind can control it as well. Our response to what is happening in our world is based on what we have deleted, distorted, and generalized. Our response arises from the meaning we have assigned to our experience through our filters and map of the world. Given the meaning we assign to this experience, we will either trigger our sympathetic or parasympathetic nervous systems.

Our mental, emotional, and physiological state is influenced by our perceptions. When we perceive real or imagined danger, our sympathetic nervous system is turned on and becomes the platform from which we make our decisions. This is the stress response, and it calls us to act quickly. In this state, we do not contemplate the long-term ramifications of our decisions and behaviors because our nervous system is more concerned with survival. Our choices are limited in this emotional state, and we are often unable to entertain other options or formulate more useful or resourceful ways of responding. In this state, we are actually making a fear-based decision, which is needed when there is actual danger. However, when we perceive danger when no danger really exists, this type of response limits us and usually leads to a poor-quality decision.

In truth, unless we are in real danger when we experience the fight-or-flight response, it is probably not the best time to make a high-quality or important decision that will have a long-term impact on our life. However, because of the stressors in modern-day society, this system seems to become activated more often than it should be. Many people are in a constant state of stress, which makes them perceive danger even though danger doesn't actually exist. A significant number of people who are in leadership positions have their fight-or-flight system stuck in overdrive. When the sympathetic system is constantly revving, people become hypersensitive, over-respond, take things personally

and perceive the world as a dangerous place. When someone is stuck in the stress response, there are fewer and fewer opportunities for him or her to feel safe and secure in the world.

Learning to use our conscious mind to switch from our sympathetic nervous system to our parasympathetic nervous system, which is our rest, digest, repair, and restore nervous system, is a skill that can be developed. Exercising this skill allows us to make decisions from a higher state of emotional being. When you learn to ask yourself what thoughts and emotions would be most useful while making a decision, it begins the process of choosing your thoughts and feelings rather than excusing your behaviors. Practicing this skill daily will significantly increase the quality of your decisions. To implement this skill, it is important to learn how to turn on your parasympathetic nervous system when making a decision that is not related to immediate danger.

Before we go into learning how to switch on the parasympathetic nervous system, it is important to know that in a perfect world, we want to be able to flow in-and-out of the sympathetic and parasympathetic system throughout the day. A problem occurs when we become stuck in one or the other system, instead of flowing in-and-out of these two systems. This stuckness is due to the recycling of un-useful thoughts and feelings, we don't handle things in a flexible and resilient way. When we learn to self-regulate our thoughts and emotions, this allows us to make higher-quality decisions. This is how we can experience more success, fulfillment, and enjoyment in life.

HONING YOUR SKILL IN CHOOSING YOUR FEELINGS & EMOTIONS RATHER THEN EXCUSING YOUR BEHAVIOR



We have all had times in our lives that we made decisions that we regretted later. Regret usually follows when our decisions have been made from what I call a low-quality feeling or emotional state. These emotions typically have the face of anger, shame, resentment, guilt or regret, etc. Do you get the picture?

Honing your skill—and it is a skill—to learn how to consciously choose your thoughts and emotional state rather than excuse your behavior, is definitely worth the investment. This skill requires you to set an intention to become consciously aware of your thinking and your emotions, which is also known as mindfulness.

In my practice as an NLP & Hypnotherapy Trainer and Practitioner, I call this purpose-driven thinking. When we practice purpose-driven thinking, we are truly engaged in choosing our thoughts and emotions rather than excusing our behavior. As a result, the life decisions that we make have a higher quality overall.

Now that you have an understanding of the autonomic nervous system and the sympathetic and parasympathetic response let's learn a simple technique to calm yourself and balance out your nervous system. A feeling of calmness and balance will allow you to come from a place of choice when you make decisions. This is because you're now "running" high-quality thoughts, emotions, and feelings.

First, let's learn how to calm down your nervous system so we can access the decision-making strategy.

Steps to dial down the sympathetic nervous system and balance out the nervous system:

- Think of a decision you need to make. Choose one that you've been procrastinating about or feel nervous making.
- Notice the un-useful emotion or feeling that comes up when you contemplate the decision.
- Take note of the options you are entertaining at this point.
- For this exercise, we are going to name the un-useful emotion you are currently feeling
 - Example: I am feeling nervous.
- Rate the feeling on a scale of 0-10, with 0 being the absence of feeling nervousness and 10 feeling extremely nervous.
- This next step requires your imagination:
 - Check-in with your body and ask yourself how you know you're experiencing this nervousness.
 - Is your chest tight?
 - Do you have pressure in your stomach?
 - What direction does this feeling move in your body?
 - Up and down, left to right, front to back?
- Imagine experiencing this nervousness in the exact opposite way. For example, if your nervousness is heavy, make it light. If it is moving from left to right, move it right to left.
- Take three deep breaths in for the count of 7 and out for the count of 11.
- Check back in with that feeling of nervousness and rate it.
- Let me guess; it is either gone or close to it.
- If the feeling is not totally gone, then repeat steps 3-5 until it is.

Steps to making decisions from a high-quality emotion or feeling:

- Remember a decision that you made in the past that you felt really good about.
 - See what you saw, hear what you heard, and feel what you felt.
- Feel the emotions you were experiencing during that time.
- For example, were you feeling confident or secure, etc.?

Now think about the decision you want to make and notice how differently you are thinking and feeling about it.

- Notice that you may see options or choices that you didn't see before or you feel and think differently than you did when you first started the exercise.
- Notice how making this decision seems so easier now.

Welcome to making decisions from high-quality emotions. As you practice making decisions this way, you will notice how the quality of your life improves exponentially!