

Neuro-Linguistic Programming Applied to a Touch for Health Balance

By Brian Esty

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) is a collection of therapeutic tools found to be very effective at changing patterns of behavior. These tools are based primarily in verbal communication and are directed at resolving conflicts between the conscious and non-conscious aspects of awareness. This is accomplished by observing cues that identify non-conscious thought processes, and communicating using these cues to create solutions that are more congruent with our conscious intent.

This is very close to what we do in a Touch for Health (TFH) balance. We communicate with the non-conscious, energetic aspects of self using muscle testing, and identify solutions which enable energy to move more congruently with our goals. NLP offers us as TFH practitioners additional tools we can utilize to achieve these ends, enhancing the power of our balances to facilitate change in our lives.

Over the years NLP has acquired some ethical issues as the techniques have been applied to manipulate people into choices they may not have otherwise made. Unfortunately, muscle testing also suffers some of the same problems. The distinction, as we well know, is to always work from permission, with respect and in the context of conscious choice for a specific outcome.

BACKGROUND ON NLP

NLP originated from research done by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, studying three very effective psychotherapists in the 1970's: Fritz Perls, Milton Erickson and Virginia Satir. Fritz Perls is recognized with his wife as the innovators of "Gestalt Therapy". The core of the Gestalt Therapy process is enhanced awareness of non-conscious aspects of sensation, perception, bodily feelings, emotion and behavior - in the present moment. His work opened possibilities for using physical responses for emotional and cognitive issues.

Virginia Satir is the innovator of Family Therapy. She began treating families in 1951. She believed that a healthy family life involved an open and reciprocal sharing of affection, feelings, and love.

This translates to the idea that we are not either well nor clinically diagnosable; rather we constantly move back and forth on the spectrum between wellbeing and dysfunction and that we could all feel / function better. These were considered radical ideas at the time, outside the mainstream of scientific consensus. John and Carrie Thie, as well as Joseph Heller (Hellerwork) and the innovators of NLP - Richard Bandler and John Grinder and many of the "fathers of the human potential movement" studied with Satir.

Milton Erickson is generally regarded as the father of Therapeutic Metaphor. This is metaphor which intentionally engages the non-conscious mind. Erickson is widely recognized for his approach to the non-conscious mind as creative and solution generating. His work with metaphor opened the way for story telling to be used both in trance induction and conscious therapy. The use of metaphor is a powerful component of Touch for Health and studying Erickson and his students is a great way to gain proficiency with this rich therapeutic modality.

Matthew and Carrie Thie both have said that one of the core differences between TFH and the wellspring for most of its techniques - Applied Kinesiology (AK), is the influence of Satir on John and Carrie Thie. Applied Kinesiology is essentially a model for diagnosing and treating dysfunction or disease, IE: for fixing problems. TFH originates from a frame where diagnosis is a hindrance, that healing is a consequence of positive intent, that we are on a journey to realizing our full potential and that miracles can happen.

The NLP tools I would like to discuss are:

- Using Eye Movements to assess thought patterns.
- Anchoring a balance.
- Re-Framing during a balance as a way to shift energy
- Future Pacing to strengthen a balance

You may have run across some or all of these tools in other trainings. Here I intend to present them specifically for the TFH model.

EYE MOVEMENTS:

Before getting into the specifics of eye movements it is worth taking a moment to go over left / right brain dynamics. Our brains are divided into left and right hemispheres. Our left brain runs the right side of our bodies and right brain runs the left side of our bodies. Over time the two brain halves have taken on specific functions. Normally the left brain controls more linear functions and the right global. Occasionally someone will have the functions reversed, but at least 90% of the time this is the case. The linear functions are more logical, thoughtful, reasoned out, and the global are more emotional, feeling, relational.

How this applies to TFH is that if you are doing emotional work with your client it is more effective to be to their left - if they are laying down to stand to their left side. When the eyes are focused in the left visual field, the right brain is dominant in processing what is happening. The client then has more immediate access to their emotional experience, and less tendency to filter their experience logically. Another, less savory example of this is when buying a car the salesperson will often seat clients with the male to their left so that the male client is less logical and can be more easily pulled emotionally into the purchase.

One of the most useful pieces of information to come to us through NLP is the awareness that our unconscious eye movements reveal how we format our thoughts. Our inner dialog has a preference for organizing how to understand its environment through either visual, kinesthetic or auditory (sometimes taste and smell) cues. Observing your clients eye movements will tell you a lot about how they are thinking. When you are helping a client frame a goal for a session, this can be very helpful. It allows the clients brain to skip a normal step in internally translating conversation into how it normally processes information. You can use this information to frame how you converse with them. By framing your words in your clients processing mode, you speak more directly to their inner thoughts. By doing this, you are intentionally speaking in the language of your client's brain.

These are the basic eye directions and processing modes:

Visual processing = eyes up

Auditory processing = eyes to the sides

Kinesthetic processing = eyes down

Examples:

If you notice that their eyes went up and that they are processing visually, you could use terms like focusing / seeing / visualize. Instead of saying "What do you think about that?", you could say "How do you see that?", "How do you visualize that?", "Do you have any insight into that?" or words like "view".

If you notice that their eyes went down and that they are processing kinesthetically, you could use terms like feeling / touched / connect / walked through. You would say: "How do you feel about that?", "How did that touch you?" or words like "understand" or "grounded", "having a grip on things,"

For Auditory processing, where the eyes move to the sides, you can use: "Tune into that", "harmonize with", "resonate with"

Taking the extra step of speaking in the language of your clients internal thought processes will go a long way towards establishing a strong rapport, feelings of safety and being understood that supports them in transformational change.

ANCHORING

In NLP, Anchoring is used to merge two or more distinct experiences. This is done to create new choices for old patterns. Anchoring can be thought of as hooking up new possibilities for choice - at a non-conscious level of experience. The basic technique involves using some stimulus, usually a touch, but a visual or auditory anchor also works very well. The stimulus is coordinated with a specific feeling or thought in a way that, if the stimulus is re-applied, the feeling or thought will re-trigger and be re-experienced. When used in a TFH balance, it can be considered as a powerful tool for fortifying the results of a balance.

A common example is a client who comes in for a Touch for Health balance is asked: "When you leave today what would you like to be different?" the client begins to discuss this in a negative, dark way. Trauma is a good example of something the client may be working on. Your job as a TFH practitioner is to frame their issue in a positive, present tense goal, but before you start this, you can gently touch the clients forearm or knee, perhaps multiple times as you see the feelings and thoughts cross their

minds. The touch should always be the same pressure, timing and location. This creates an anchor that you can access at any time that should retrigger the negative experience you wish to work with. Again, you need to get your pressure, timing and location as close as possible to the original stimulus. For example if you are balancing Heart Meridian, after it clears you can trigger the anchor and re-test SubScapularis to see if the balance holds. Usually you can get two or three, possibly four good tests out of an anchor. Indicator muscle testing the trigger as part of the post assessment creates assurance that the goal is strong in relation to the negative experience. Another aspect of this is that when we are muscle testing, we are generating Anchors on the limbs we are testing. For example, when we test Psoas and find it weak, we have an Anchor where we were touching on the leg associated to that weak muscle test. After we balance and go back to retest Psoas, if we test the leg in the same manner, we retrigger the Anchor. This gives us as practitioners information that we balanced all of the elements that generated the weak test. It is best on the second test to first hold the leg differently to see if the Psoas switched back on, then trigger the Anchor and re-test to see if triggering the Anchor switched the muscle back off. This tells you that your balance addressed the specific stress, and not a more global imbalance.

The client need have no conscious awareness that Anchors are being employed. Skilled therapists usually will Anchor in the clients dominant mode of cognitive processing, for example, if the client processes visually they will use a visual stimulus such as a specific hand movement that they are careful not to repeat unless they are ready to trigger the anchor. In Touch for Health it seems appropriate to stick with tactile stimulus.

RE-FRAMING

Re-framing involves the transformation of meaning. Perhaps the simplest example of this is shifting perception from the "Glass half empty to half full". During a touch for Health balance, as the energy moves more vigorously in association with the goal, perception should begin to shift to better alignment with the goal. It can be very helpful at this point to examine an aspect of the issue in a new light, from a different point of view. Doing so requires that the practitioner adopt a wider view of the landscape of the issue, to step back so to speak and adopt what is

known as a Meta viewpoint. This requires a certain amount of discipline and practice to pull yourself out of assumptions about what is being considered. However, it is essentially very simple and can easily be modeled on the "glass half empty to half full" idea. Keeping your mind open to the possibility of a re-frame creates the opportunity for it to emerge from your imagination. The fundamental practice in Touch for Health of framing goals positively and present tense is a form of basic re-framing.

Example (from Wikipedia)

A university or college student breaks his leg during summer vacation. He is crestfallen, because he can no longer play tennis and golf with his family and friends. A few days later, he realizes that he now has the quiet, alone time to learn how to play the guitar, something he had always wanted to do but had been too busy to attempt. He then discovers he has a great aptitude for music and becomes a decent guitar player by summer's end. One year later, he changes his major to music. After graduation he embarks on a successful music career. Years later, his friends recall how unfortunate his leg fracture was that summer, and he says, "Breaking my leg was the best thing that ever happened to me!" From then on, whenever he is disabled by injury or illness, he recalls the lesson and is far less despondent over his temporary disability than he otherwise would have been, as he takes the opportunity to do something novel.

FUTURE PACING

At the end of a balance, when you are doing the post assessment, you can help to "lock in" the results by adding in a technique known in NLP as Future Pacing. Touch for Health encompasses a version of this in the section on "Using Emotional Stress Release (ESR) for future performance". In that section a future event that has anticipated stress associated with it is "walked through" while holding ESR points. In Future Pacing you imagine your goal or desired change at various points on a future timeline - starting even a few hours, then days, then weeks months and years into the future. It is useful to guide your client through imagining these future events using generalized outline of the event. When doing so it is better to avoid specifics, and very helpful to phrase in the clients dominant mode of processing, IE: visual, auditory or kinesthetic.

You can employ an accurate indicator muscle while

doing this to discover stress on a future time that the client may not even consciously experience. This can then become the focus of another balance, revisiting the goal in the future context, or the stress can be cleared using ESR. Adding these steps to the post assessment strengthens the balance and makes it less likely that future stresses will initiate regression into an unwanted pattern.

Notes:

Much more information on these NLP techniques can be found online, in the books by Bandler and Grinder and books by practitioners like Anthony Robbins. It is common to run into layers of jargon and convoluted presentations in an attempt to synthesize these complex concepts. As Touch for Health practitioners a good understanding of basic concepts will provide plenty of resources to add to our balances. The book by Anne Linden Mindworks: an introduction to NLP is recommended as a good place to start.

BACKGROUND ON ME

Brian Esty has been in private practice in San Francisco since 1983 blending Hellerwork Structural Integration Bodywork, NLP, Craniosacral Therapy and Specialized Kinesiology. His grasp of sensory-motor dynamics is grounded in his Electrical Engineering education and approximately 2,500 hours training in Manual Therapy modalities. He has been a *Touch for Health* Instructor since 2006 offering classes in *Touch for Health* in San Francisco and other cities in the US. He is currently serving on the board of the *Touch for Health Kinesiology Association*. For the last 12 months he has been training as a Core Specialist in NeuroMotor Reflex Integration under Dr. Svetlana Masgutova, and is nearing clinical certification as a Core Specialist in the International and US *Masgutova NeuroMotor Reflex Integration* camps.