



Anchoring: Stimulus-Response Conditioning as Transformational Healing Tool

By

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[Based on Chapter 6 in *Healing with Language: Your Key to Mind-Body Communication*,
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Anchoring is a form of stimulus-response conditioning. The brain learns by making associations. Specific associations are often called **anchors** or **triggers**. An **anchor** is a stimulus that produces a specific and predictable response. Whenever two or more stimuli are presented at approximately the same time, they become associated at a neurological level. Presenting either of the stimuli will reactivate the established neural pathways.

Anchoring is one of the three principal ways of influencing behavior (The other two are **changing submodalities** and **using hypnotic language patterns**.) Anchoring is so effective that an entire branch of psychology, **Behaviorism**, is dedicated to studying its influence and application.

In a classic experiment with stimulus-response conditioning, Pavlov used a tuning fork (often referred to incorrectly as a *bell*) as the stimulus he wanted to pair with the presentation of food to dogs. To establish the tuning fork as a stimulus or **anchor**, he originally presented food (an *unconditioned stimulus*), which produced the natural response of salivation, and rang the tuning fork (the *conditioned stimulus*) at the same time. The dogs **learned** to associate the tuning fork with the presentation of food. Pavlov was then able to use the tuning fork alone to induce salivation in the dogs. The sound of the tuning fork had become an anchor for a conditioned response. All learning works basically in this way.

Anchoring works the same way with humans. Much of what we learn, for example, we learn by establishing anchors. Words are anchors for specific sets of associations. Depending on the context, if you hear the word *bridge*, for example, you may think of a structure for crossing a body of water, a card game, a connecting passage in a piece of music, part of a person's nose, a connection between individuals or cultures, dental work, or any number of other things.

Anchors are usually set and **fired** or **triggered** below our level of conscious awareness, so they are—or can be—a powerful tool for persuasion and motivation. Emotional states are typically induced by internal or external visual or auditory anchors. We create a mental image, see something, say something to ourselves, or hear something, and we have an emotional response. Anchors may also be used to recapture a particular mood or psychological state. You may have a particular song, for example, that triggers pleasant or unpleasant memories and their associated feelings. Or perhaps the smell of a particular perfume or cologne brings a certain individual to mind.

In general, pleasant emotional states allow more access to resources for effective behavior than the emotional states we typically call unpleasant or negative. Once identified, unpleasant states and those that limit the availability of resources can be changed by adding new anchors that lead to more resourceful states. If you begin to panic at the sight of an elevator, for example, elevators have become an anchor for a particularly unpleasant state. Because the unwanted response to elevators was established through anchoring, that response can usually

be changed quickly and easily by the same process.

Most programs for stress reduction and relaxation training set up a series of anchors to trigger the physiological and psychological changes known as *the relaxation response*, a state known to enhance health. Common examples of anchors often used to trigger specific behaviors include the following:

- Using a specific piece of music when you want to sleep, meditating or exercising at a specific time every day, or taking a nap after lunch.
- Placing photographs of your family on your desk to remind yourself why you are working.
- Using bath salts, scented soaps, or essential oils to promote a sense of well being.
- Wearing “lucky socks” or some other special item to enhance sports performance.

Anchors are frequently established by accidental circumstances. If you are feeling especially good (or bad) when you hear a particular song, for, example, that song will tend to trigger those same feelings the next time you hear it.

When we communicate with others, we are constantly setting anchors (and having them set on us) regardless of whether we are doing it deliberately. It is not a matter of *whether* we are setting and using anchors but rather of *how well* we are doing it and to what effect.

Anchors can be set and triggered in any of the sensory modalities: **visual** (a gesture, an expression, a shape, a color, etc.), **auditory** (a word or phrase, a tone of voice, a melody, etc.), **kinesthetic** (a touch, a posture, or a specific feeling), **olfactory** (the smell of something, such as a particular soap, perfume, or something cooking), and **gustatory** (a taste, such as of something sweet). Or, with the appropriate *conscious intent*, an anchor may be set in a person’s *energy field*.

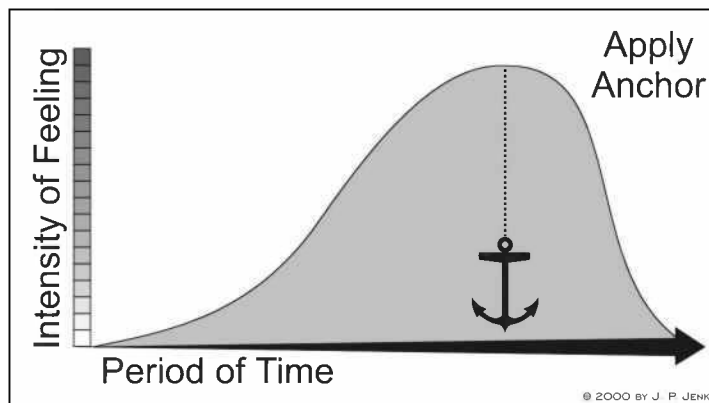
The strongest, longest-lasting anchors are set with conscious intent in two or more sensory modalities simultaneously.

To be effective, an anchor needs to be set at the *right time* and with the *right intent*. Set the anchor when the person is experiencing (or re-experiencing) the emotional state that you want to be able to trigger with the anchor in the future. If the emotional state you are after is *happiness*, for example, have the person remember a time he or she was extremely happy and have him or her fully associate into that feeling. Set the anchor—and do so *deliberately*—when the person is fully associated into the feeling.

Set the anchor just *before* the individual is fully associated into the state and then hold the anchor as the state peaks. Release the anchor as the person begins to return to his or her normal state of consciousness.

The following figure illustrates the timing for setting an effective anchor:

Setting an Anchor



Anchors for extremely powerful states will generalize and be triggered by approximations. If you are walking along lost in thought, for example, and suddenly hear the screech of tires and a horn honk and look up to see a truck skidding to a stop just inches from you, you will probably have a fairly strong response that most people would call *fear*. The horn honk and sound of tires screeching would probably become anchors for that feeling. Because of the strength of the emotional state, at least for the short term, *any* horn honking or the sound of tires screeching might trigger that same feeling.

To trigger most anchors, however, you will usually need to duplicate the original anchor exactly—the same touch (same place and the same intensity); the same gesture; or the same word delivered with the same tone, pitch, and volume. The effectiveness of the anchor will be determined by the intensity of the state the individual is in and the precision with which the anchor is set. The test for effectiveness is the degree to which triggering the anchor causes the individual to associate back into the desired state.

The other critical factor is the **conscious intent** of the individual setting the anchor. In most cases, when an anchor doesn't work, it is because the person setting it did so too soon or too late and missed the peak point of association into the state (bad timing) or because he or she lacked the appropriate conscious intent.

Because communication is redundant, the other person will be aware at the unconscious level whether you **really intend** to set an anchor or whether you are simply going through the motions.

Having the right intent may require the same kind of practice as developing a sense of the correct timing. In setting a kinesthetic anchor, for example, if you touch too often or touch at the wrong time, or if you are hesitant to touch, your uncertainty—your lack of conscious intent—will be what you communicate to the other person.

According to Virginia Satir,

Now, for me, my touch is not going to send much to you unless I am integrated myself, unless I really feel whole myself: then energy moves out. If I feel I *have* to touch, or have to be careful about touching . . . that won't work. Because it's not a gimmick, and it's not a strategy. It's a living kind of passing back and forth—a real feeling of one human being really touching another in a literal sense—it's probably worth hours and hours of something that doesn't contain that.
[Quoted in Andreas, *Virginia Satir: The Pattern of Her Magic*, p. 83]

Kinesthetic Anchors

As you begin working with anchors, it is usually best to start with kinesthetic anchors because they are the easiest to set and trigger with consistency. Visual anchors must be seen to be effective, and auditory anchors depend on your being able to repeat a word or phrase using the same tone of voice that you used when setting the anchor.

Some people are uncomfortable about touching another person to set an anchor. Although a few people are touch averse, in most cases fears about touching are unfounded. Not long ago, we were teaching a group of nurses how to set anchors, and a couple of them said that they could *never* touch a patient for fear of being sued. When we asked them whether they ever took someone's blood pressure, gave them an injection, or inserted an IV tube, they admitted they did and that they did indeed touch people at such times.

The fact is that we touch other people with great regularity, but because most of us have been brought up with at least some degree of apprehension about our physical bodies and especially the pleasures that may be associated with touch, we often ignore—*delete* from conscious awareness—the times we touch or are touched during the course of a normal day, from shaking hands to hugging, to helping someone with his or her coat. In each of these exchanges, we are setting kinesthetic anchors, even when we are not aware that we are doing so. Almost always, the question isn't *whether* to touch but *how* and *for what purpose*.

When nurses take someone's blood pressure or give an injection, they will touch the person. In touching, they have the opportunity to set an anchor that will help the person feel better about the procedure rather than worse. One kind of touch will cause the person's blood pressure to elevate, while another will result in a lower reading. One anchor will exacerbate the fear called "white coat syndrome," while another will reduce it. To set an anchor that helps, you need to be consciously aware of touching and of what the touch communicates.

Touching someone to console, for example, may actually anchor in the feeling of grief, so that the next time the person is touched in a similar way, the feeling of grief will return. If a person is experiencing grief, sadness, fear, or anger, encourage him or her to breathe through the emotion. Before setting the anchor, allow the person to access a sense of calmness or other resource state, and then set the anchor while demonstrating care or sense of nurturing.

Exercise: Setting Kinesthetic Anchors

Use the following steps to set and trigger an anchor:

1. Find a partner who doesn't mind if you touch him or her on the back of the hand. Have your partner think about—and associate into the feelings of—a time he or she was especially excited or amused about something, and have him or her *reassociate* into that experience as fully as possible.

Begin by asking, "Can you remember a time you were *really* excited about something, perhaps a special birthday present or trip you were planning?" Or, "Can you remember a time you found something *really* amusing, so funny that you laughed out loud and couldn't stop laughing until you were exhausted?"

Use both your words and tone of voice to help the person recapture the feelings of that moment. If your tone of voice is flat and dull, the other person will respond to that more than to your request for him or her to recall something exciting or amusing.

If you want the person to associate back into feelings of excitement, **sound** excited. If he or she is associating back into feeling amused, sound amused. Let your body, voice, and energy field communicate excitement or amusement. Facilitate the other person's experience by **going first**.

Remember the exercise on calibration, and **use your sensory acuity** to assess your partner's degree of association into the earlier experience.

2. When your partner's physiology and energy field indicate that he or she is re-experiencing the event, set an anchor by touching **a specific place** on the back of one of his or her hands. Press firmly and in a way you are certain you can duplicate later. Change the subject, and talk about something else for a moment.

When your partner is not especially expecting it, trigger the anchor by pressing his or her hand again in the same way and same place you did previously.

Note: A kinesthetic anchor can actually be set anywhere on a person's body, but anchors should be set where the other person is comfortable being touched and where you will be able to duplicate the anchor later when you wish to use it for a specific purpose.

3. Watch his or her face and note any shift in expression, physiology, or energy field. If you set and triggered the anchor successfully, you will see him or her access the feelings you anchored previously.

You may also use anchors to influence your own responses to various stimuli and to change negative associations that you had established previously to more positive, more useful associations. If you feel undue anxiety before speaking in public, for example, you can set an anchor on your knee for the feeling of relaxed confidence, and then trigger that anchor whenever you are required to speak.

Exercise: Setting and Collapsing (Integrating) Kinesthetic Anchors

One of the interesting things about the human brain is that when it has a choice between what is usually called a *negative* response and a *positive* one of equal or greater strength, it will choose the positive response. You can demonstrate this by first setting an anchor that corresponds with the unpleasant feelings that you associate with a past experience.

Second, after you have set the first anchor, set another anchor that corresponds with the feelings you associate with one or more positive experiences. Finally, after both the negative and positive anchors have been set, **integrate** (or **collapse**) them by triggering both at the same time.

When the anchors are fired simultaneously, the neurological patterns associated with both anchors are activated, giving the brain the opportunity to choose between the two. When they outweigh the negative feelings,

the brain automatically chooses the positive. As it does so, a new neurological pattern will be established, and it will produce the new response to the old, negative stimulus.

To set and collapse anchors, do the following:

1. Find a partner. You and your partner should both think of something that has happened in your lives about which you still have bad feelings. Start with something relatively small. The purpose of your initial exercise with anchoring is to demonstrate that anchors can be set, triggered, and collapsed deliberately. You can work on more serious problems and limitations as you practice and gain confidence.
2. You and your partner should sit facing each other. The person who goes first associates into the memory of the thing that happened in her or his life about which she or he still has bad feelings. When that person is **fully associated** into the experience, the other person sets an anchor for that feeling by pressing the back of the first person's *left* hand (or *left* knee, depending on how you are seated).

Make sure that the anchor set is definite and specific so that it can be duplicated exactly later. Remember that the anchor needs to be set when the person is fully associated into the feeling or **psychological state**. A quick, dissociated memory of the situation is not enough for an anchor to be effective.

3. After the anchor is set, you and your partner should think about something else, a neutral subject, for a minute. This is usually called **breaking state** or **going to a neutral zone**.
4. The person going first should then think about something that happened in his or her life that produced positive feelings, and the stronger the feelings and the more completely the person associates in, the better.

Have the person find feelings of success, competence, joy, and accomplishment. Also, be sure to add a sense of humor based on a previous experience of finding something funny enough to have caused him or her to laugh out loud. The person should associate into each of the positive feelings, either from one especially significant accomplishment, or from a number of different positive situations.

For each of the positive feelings, set a definite and specific anchor on the back of the person's *right* hand (or knee). Setting more than one anchor in the same location is known as **stacking anchors**. When the negative feeling is strong, stacking a number of positive anchors will produce better, more reliable, results and may be necessary to overcome the unpleasant feelings.

5. Spend a minute discussing a neutral subject, and then test the anchors one at a time, pausing between each test. If the anchors were set correctly, touching the anchor on the back of the person's *left* hand should automatically trigger the memory of the negative experience and its associated negative feelings.

Touching the anchor on the back of the person's *right* hand should automatically trigger the memories of the positive experiences and their associated feelings. If the anchors do *not* produce the appropriate feelings and an observable shift in physiology, repeat Steps 2 through 5.

6. When both anchors have been set and produce the appropriate response, **integrate** (or collapse) the anchors by simultaneously pressing the backs of both hands in exactly the same way the anchors were set. The person collapsing the anchors may facilitate the process by triggering the “positive” anchor first and asking the person to **transfer the resources** from those experiences to the situation that **used to** bother him or her while firing the “negative” anchor.

While triggering both anchors, ask how having those resources available would have changed things. Release the anchor for the unwanted feelings while continuing to hold the positive anchor, and then ask how having those resources at that time would have helped.

The person on whom this is being done may experience a moment of confusion before the brain establishes a new neural pathway for the new response. The person collapsing the anchors should be able to notice a more positive response to the situation that used to produce negative feelings.

7. Change roles, and repeat the process.

Anchoring During Bodywork

When you are working with someone on a massage table or otherwise working with someone you know well, take advantage of the fact that the place on the body most sensitive to anchoring is on the breastbone at the location of the heart chakra. Use that location for setting the positive anchors, and use the left wrist, elbow, or shoulder for setting negative anchors you wish to collapse.

If you are a body worker, remember that the entire process of bodywork is a form of kinesthetic anchoring. When you touch a client (or whoever is on your table), do so with the conscious intent of anchoring in the feelings that will best serve the client’s purpose.

Be attentive to where and how you are touching the client when he or she has a significant emotional or physical reaction, and either set a specific anchor to reinforce and perhaps amplify that state, or work to collapse that anchor with one or more resource states.

Once you have demonstrated to yourself that kinesthetic anchors do indeed “work,” you can begin employing visual and auditory anchors to achieve similar results.

Visual and Auditory Anchors

Although kinesthetic anchors are the easiest to use, you may not always be able to set and trigger them, especially in business situations. For this reason, you should practice setting and triggering anchors in all three major sensory modalities and in the energy field. Facial expressions, gestures, space (where you stand or sit), tone of voice, specific words, and even throat clearing can be used to set an anchor for specific psychological states.

Kinesthetic anchors are usually hard to ignore. Visual anchors, however, require that the person be able to see what you are doing, and auditory anchors require that the person be able to hear you sufficiently well to pick up the anchor on at least a subconscious level.

As you practice with visual and auditory anchors, remember that once you have set an anchor, it will usually need to be duplicated almost exactly to produce the desired response. Your *conscious intent* in anchoring is especially important when you are setting visual and auditory anchors.

When you set a visual anchor, for example, it helps to visualize the energy of your intent moving from your anchor to your audience. When you set auditory anchors, others will hear the degree of intent in your tone of voice, so make sure that your voice communicates it.

Also, remember to repeat the anchor—the word, gesture, tone of voice, use of space, etc.—**only** when you wish to generate the anchored response. If you trigger it at inappropriate times, it will quickly become contaminated and lose its effectiveness. For example, if you are using physical space to anchor a particular feeling by standing or sitting in a particular place, stand or sit in that place **only** when you want your audience to have the anchored response. If you stand or sit in that place at other times or for other purposes, the space will lose its ability to produce the desired response.

Note, too, that some gestures, images, and words are well-established anchors already. Such visual anchors (in the United States, at least) would include thumbs up/down, an index finger pointed in someone's face, a raised hand with the palm out, raised eyebrows while looking at someone, patriotic images (the Flag, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln), and images of important cultural events and figures (Martin Luther King, Jr., The Empire State Building, New Year's Eve in Times Square).

Insofar as it has meaning, *every* word is actually an anchor. Some words, however, anchor fairly specific meanings for most of the speakers of a language. In English, common auditory anchors include such value words as *good*, *wonderful*, *fantastic*, *important*, *terrific*, *bad*, *rotten*, *incompetent*, *inferior*, and related words and expressions.

You can use well-established anchors to reinforce or encourage specific behaviors. Make sure, however, that the visual or auditory anchor actually produces the desired response in the individual or group *before* you begin using it. Most value words are **nominalizations**, which can mean different things to different people. In some groups, for example, referring to something as *bad* means that it is *good*.

In persuasive situations and negotiations, anchors may be used to establish an association between positive feelings a customer, client, or negotiator has about something (the U.S. flag, mom, apple pie, puppies, a sports hero, or anything else for which a known positive association exists) and something else (a product, service, or point of view).

Anchors for unpleasant feelings can also be used to help a client or customer accept or understand the limitations of a competitor's product or service or a particular approach to solving a problem. Anchoring has, in fact, become a staple of modern television advertising, not only for products and services, but also for politicians and political initiatives.

Exercise: Using Visual and Auditory Anchors

Work in groups of three. Person A will be the salesperson or persuader. Person B will be the customer or client. Person C will be an observer, who will be responsible for noting the specific anchors and their responses.

Select two competing products, services, or approaches to solving a problem with which everyone in the group is familiar, agrees can be sold or promoted ethically, and for which group members have no specific preferences.

Label one of these **Product** (or Service or Idea) **1** and the other **Product** (or Service or Idea) **2**. The “salesperson” and the observer then agree which of the two will be the product, service, or idea to be sold, and which will be the competitor’s product, service, or idea. Once you have the products, services, or ideas selected and defined, use the following procedure:

1. Have the “client” think of a product, service, or idea of which he or she **already** has a high opinion and describe the positive features and benefits of the product, service, or idea. The “salesperson” should use questions to help the person re-experience the positive feelings associated with the product, service, or idea: “How did you know that purchasing Product X was the right thing to do?” When did you discover that Idea Y would prove the ideal solution to the problem?”
2. The “salesperson” should use sensory acuity and calibration skills to note when the “client” is re-experiencing the positive feelings associated with the products, services, or ideas. When the “client” has associated into those feelings, the “salesperson” will set a specific and unique auditory or visual anchor. If the associations are strong, setting one positive anchor and one negative anchor may be sufficient. If the person has difficulty reassociating into the positive and negative feelings, use additional good and bad examples to **stack two or more anchors**.

Although it may be difficult to do in the context of the exercise, ideally the anchors will be sufficiently subtle that they remain below the “client’s” level of conscious awareness. If the “client” is consciously aware that an anchor is being set, he or she is likely to resist it.

3. Have the “client” do the same for a product, service, or idea of which he or she already has a poor opinion. When he or she is associated into the negative feelings for each of the poor products, services, or ideas, set a specific and unique auditory or visual anchor.
4. Briefly discuss something else.
5. The “salesperson” then discusses the selected product, service, or idea using the established auditory or visual anchors, connecting the product, service, or idea previously selected as positive with the positive anchor and the product, service, or idea previously selected as negative with the negative anchor.
6. Have the “client” choose between products, services, or ideas by stating which he or she likes better.
7. Discuss the results, including the “salesperson’s” use of anchoring. Were the anchors delivered at the right time and in a consistent way? Were the anchors effective in producing the desired responses?
8. Change roles, and repeat the exercise.

As an alternative to the preceding exercise, think about situations in which you need to be the most persuasive, and role-play setting and triggering visual or auditory anchors designed to increase your persuasiveness.

Creating a Circle of Excellence

Another procedure using a visual anchor is the *circle of excellence*. You can establish a circle of excellence for yourself by associating into times you felt exceptionally good about something you accomplished or the times you were feeling your best—healthy, happy, energetic, and as though everything you were doing was turning out exactly the way you wanted.

Be sure to include times you really were curious about something, times you were excited and enthusiastic, and times you felt patient and determined in pursuit of an important goal.

When you are *fully associated* into the feelings you had at the time of each accomplishment or the times of greatest wellness, set an anchor using the same specific kinesthetic anchor, *stacking* each new anchor in the same location on your arm or knee.

To ensure that you will be able to access the resource state when you desire, visualize a circle in your favorite color on the floor in front of you. When you can see the circle, step into it and trigger the anchor at the same time.

Repeat this process several times, perhaps adding a code word or phrase, such as *Excellence Now!* or *Health Now!* Then, any time you desire to have full access to those resources, you can simply visualize the circle, and then step into it.

Anchoring the Energy Field

When you set a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic anchor with conscious intent, you automatically set an anchor in the energy field of the other person or persons.

You can also set an anchor in someone's energy field without also using a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic anchor by visualizing touching his or her energy field with a projection of your own.

Use an *etheric hand*, a hand created from energy in your field, to touch the other person's field when the person is in the state you wish to anchor. You may also use visualization to *project a color* or *symbol* that represents the feeling or idea you wish to anchor into the person's field.

When you practice using an etheric hand (or projecting a color or symbol) every time you set an anchor in one of the sensory systems, you will find that your skill at anchoring energy fields will increase quickly.

Exercise: Setting and Triggering Anchors in the Energy Field

Experiment with setting and triggering anchors in the energy fields of others when you are in a position to do so without having them observe you. Be sure to set anchors when people are enjoying themselves—catch them at their best, and set your conscious intent to anchor that feeling for them.

Extend your own field, perhaps in the form of an etheric hand (if the other person can't see you, consider using a physical gesture to amplify your intent) to set an anchor in the other person's field. After setting the anchor, wait until the person's state has shifted and then trigger the anchor. Check to see how much of the previously anchored state returns.

If you are concerned about the intrusion, ask your Higher Self to ask the other person's Higher Self for

permission to set and trigger the energetic anchor.

Remember the presupposition about how there is no failure but only feedback. Consider your results feedback. The more you practice setting energetic anchors, the better your results will be.

Exercise: Using Anchors to Amplify States

Anchoring is typically thought of as a single stimulus producing a single response. If you catch someone feeling really good, for example, you can set an anchor for that state and then use the anchor in the future to enable the person to recapture those good feelings. Anchoring can also be used to amplify states or to chain states so that one leads automatically to the next.

Use a **sliding anchor** when you want more of a good thing—happiness, relaxation, amusement, excitement, pleasure, curiosity, or desire—or less of something unpleasant. Sliding anchors can be done visually, auditorily, or kinesthetically. Sliding anchors can lead a person from being mildly amused to rolling on the floor laughing, and they can do the same for other states as well.

Sliding anchors can also be used to diminish unpleasant feelings and restore equanimity.

In general, sliding the anchor **up** (higher visually and auditorily, toward the body on an arm or leg, or up the torso) amplifies, while sliding the anchor **down** will reduce the feeling state.

To amplify a state, do the following:

1. **Set an anchor for the state.** Whether you simply catch the person feeling good or have the person reassociate into a memory of the state you wish to amplify, when the person is associated, set the anchor.

If the principal anchor is kinesthetic, use a part of the body—such as the thigh (if you know the person sufficiently well) or the forearm—that will let you slide the anchor up as you amplify the state. Whether the anchor is visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, you are going to need to move the anchor **up**, so consider that before you set it.

2. **Slide the anchor “up.”** For most people, having the anchor slide in an upward direction is sufficient for their unconscious to amplify the state. Adding suggestions for *more* will help.

Use sound effects with rising intonation, and/or gesture with the and not doing the anchoring in an upward direction. Whenever possible, anchor in more than one sensory system.

3. **Repeat the process.** When you have moved your hand from 6 inches to about a foot or elevated your tone by about an octave, anchor the current state to the original location, and repeat the process. Each time you repeat the process, the state will be amplified.

Exercise: Using Anchors to Chain States

Use a sequence of anchors to **chain states**. When people experience a limiting state in a specific situation,

such as a sense of sorrow on entering a room where a loved one died, you can simply set an anchor for the sorrow or other limiting state, and then set and stack a series of positive anchors (such as several happy memories of times spent with the person who died). When both anchors are set, collapse or integrate them by triggering them at the same time.

In some cases, an individual needs to go through a series of states to accomplish a particular objective or reach a certain goal. A person might, for example, be feeling that he or she *can't* do something that he or she would like to be able to do. How can you help the person get from *can't* to *will*?

You might lead him or her through the following progression: *can't, won't, might, can, will*. Or a person might be afraid to try something new, so the progression would be from *hesitation* to *frustration*, from *frustration* to *curiosity*, from *curiosity* to *desire*, and from *desire* to *acting with enthusiasm*.

To chain anchors, use the following procedure:

1. **Identify the elements of the chain.** Begin by identifying the *polarities*, the beginning and ending points of the chain, the person's current state and the desired state. Once you have the beginning and ending elements identified, identify the points in between.
2. **Elicit and anchor each state separately.** Have the person associate into the feelings of each of the states by remembering a time that he or she experienced it, and then set the anchor. The content associated with each state may be different as long as the person fully re-experiences the desired state.

Anchors may be visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, but the principal anchors should all be in the same system. Because kinesthetic anchors need to be both precise and convenient for rapid firing, use the ends of the fingers, knuckles on a hand, or other adjacent spots you can identify precisely and access quickly. If you set the anchors on a thigh or a forearm, you can use a sliding anchor to move through the states smoothly in rapid sequence.

3. **Test the anchors.** Check to make sure that each anchor elicits the designated state. If the response to an anchor seems weaker than it should be, set it again, and recheck.
4. **Fire the anchors in sequence.** Give each anchor just enough time to trigger its associated state, and then move to the next anchor in the chain. Repeat this process four or five times, increasing the speed each time.
5. **Test the sequence.** Have the person think of something to which his or her response has been the state used as the initial state in the chain, such as *I can't learn math* or *I hesitate to place important phone calls* and check to see if the chain fires automatically, taking the person from *can't* to *will* or from *hesitation* to *acting with enthusiasm*. If not, repeat Steps 2 through 5.

The Ethics of Anchoring

One of the most common complaints about anchoring is that it is “manipulative.” Because it takes place outside conscious awareness, some think that anchoring provides the individual who uses it with an unfair advantage in persuading others. All persuasion, however, is designed to influence others, and all persuasion includes elements outside conscious awareness. So the question is one of degree, rather than kind. The implication is that those who have learned to be effective at persuasion are less ethical than those who are ineffective, but that is not always the case.

Anchoring the wrong thing at the wrong time out of ignorance often proves less ethical than effective anchoring for the right reason. Many parents and teachers, for example, have anchored negative feelings about education, learning, and self-worth in children by telling them such things as “You *failed* the test. You’ll *never* amount to anything.”

We—and perhaps you—have witnessed physicians who anchored a patient’s sense of hopelessness when giving a prognosis and, in doing so, created a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Because everyone engaged in communication uses anchoring, regardless of whether he or she is aware of it, it is impossible to avoid whatever manipulation may be associated with it. When we talk about something we believe in or like, our nonverbal behavior is different from the nonverbal behavior we use to discuss something we distrust or dislike.

Such nonverbal behaviors, especially from parents, teachers, and other respected adults, are anchors to which children respond. If you light a cigarette every time you need to relax, for example, you are not only responding to something that’s an anchor for you, but also setting an anchor for children observing your behavior.

When you did the calibration exercise, you developed the sensory acuity to distinguish between *like* and *dislike* based on another person’s nonverbal behavior. Ideally, in any persuasive situation, you would now be able to recognize both deliberate and accidental nonverbal cues associated with a particular product, service, or idea so that you would be better able to decide for yourself. As you start learning more about using anchors effectively, you might begin by paying attention to nonverbal cues provided by others in persuasive situations. Do they associate specific words or gestures with particular ideas? Are they using words and gestures deliberately and consistently or accidentally and inconsistently?

Also, start noticing how television commercials are using anchoring, and whether they are doing so well or badly. Do they connect the advertised product or service to sports figures, well-known actors, or patriotic symbols? Do they use music to anchor specific feelings that they hope will become associated with their product, service, or politician?

How effective are the anchors? Do any anchors seem haphazard and anchor the wrong thing? As you begin noticing the way in which others are using anchoring, you’ll find that your ability to use anchoring effectively will improve automatically.