

# THE COURAGE TO CHANGE OURSELVES **RATHER THAN OTHERS**



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For more information, see:  
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Being a human being is hard. Life is full of challenges, apparent dead ends and unjust events. We live on a planet with war, chaos and pain. Never mind our own personal neurosis and fears, there is global uncertainty and more questions than answers about the future. The concerns that bring people into therapy are increasingly complex, as we face a time when our cultural, economic and social contexts have a major impact on our personal issues. Many people enter therapy feeling overwhelmed with a tidal wave of events. The world does not feel like a safe place, and all kinds of anxiety symptoms are mushrooming like an unwelcome garden of weeds.

It's often at this moment of despair that someone steps onto a path of self-discovery, and it can feel less like a heroic venture and closer to desperate survival. However, during the years that I have spent listening to clients' stories, I am always struck by the heroic nature that emerges once our front of house maître d' is taken hostage by difficult events. All therapeutic models have a name for the 'authentic self,' which is safe-guarded by a survival structure, built in our childhoods, when we discover what is acceptable or not to the world around us. Over time, we fortress and hide the parts of us that seem taboo to our families, friends, schools and communities. We learn who we have to be to get love, comfort and opportunities.

This is necessary in order to belong, but over time if the intensity of what we are hiding becomes too great, we begin to experience symptoms of distress, such as anxiety (of being found out), depression, obsessive compulsive symptoms, intrusive thoughts, melancholy, meaninglessness and loneliness. Whatever we bury eventually causes trouble in the psyche, like any marginalised group. Our psyches are very much like internal communities and if we rule our internal world as a dictator, we will find the uprisings and violent revolutions that are evident in the external world.

And so the challenge becomes the way in which we view ourselves and rule ourselves. Instead of being punitive, cruel and bullying with yourself, think about the qualities and behaviour of the people you most respect. If you admire strength of purpose and consistency, then develop the ability to be your own person regardless of what others think. If you admire kindness, generosity and transparency, develop your own openness and capacity to give, regardless of what you get back. If the ability to adventure and pioneer against the odds is something that inspires you, find projects that stretch you.

One of the most powerful things you can do is become the person you most admire. Through demonstrating qualities that inspire you, you will build self-respect, a sense of meaning in your life and, most importantly,

the security of liking the skin that you are in. We can't control the world around us, or other people, but we can begin to master our own internal worlds in a way that makes sense to our inherent, authentic values. For many, this means challenging the shame-making internal critic that seeks to maintain the status quo and avoid exposure. Often our attempts to change are met with an avalanche of interior stress and intimidation; thoughts that tell us we're inadequate, that we'll fail, and make a fool of ourselves. We hold a lot of prejudice against ourselves, so ask yourself: "Would I talk to a friend like this?"

Ironically, through convincing ourselves of our failures ahead of time, the internal critic is trying to protect our fortress by derailing risk-taking and reinforcing the belief that 'the known is the safest place to be'. It takes courage to move forward in spite of our internal misgivings and, often, we can feel that we are up against impossible odds, experiencing despair not just in ourselves and our circumstances, but in the larger economic, social and political world around us. These feelings are valid. But earning our own self-respect by facing our challenges in a way we can feel proud of despite the obstacles, and using our hard-earned wisdom to contribute to the world, is a far more fulfilling road than trying to change others. And certainly more in our hands than waiting for the world to become the kind of place we wish it would be.

## NEURO LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING



*Steven Payne is a Master Trainer (NLP University), ANLP Accredited NLP Trainer and International Executive Coach. Steven founded NLP Dynamics in 2011 ([www.nlpdynamics.com](http://www.nlpdynamics.com)), an organisation that helps individuals and companies communicate more effectively, create stronger impact and facilitate positive change.*

### What is NLP?

NLP is about choice; it looks at what is possible, and how we might reach our full potential. In essence, it works on the way we organise our thoughts and feelings (neuro), language (linguistic) and behaviour (programming) to get the results we do. It offers practical tools and techniques to help us better understand others and ourselves. Human beings are meaning-making machines. Being mindful of this can help us avoid slipping into the traps we set for ourselves. When we have an experience, we have to somehow make sense of that experience by assigning some form of meaning to it. The meaning we assign dictates how we respond. For example, you may be expecting a friend to call and when they don't, you could believe that they don't

care about you. Alternatively, you could believe that they must have been busy, or that their phone battery run flat.

How we think and what we believe affects how we feel and what we do. In our lives, it is not what has happened that has made us who we are; it is how we have responded to it. Challenging limiting beliefs you hold about yourself, others and the world around you, can be life changing.

Think about this. There is no inherent meaning in anything; we invent the meaning. Therefore, wouldn't it be powerful if we could genuinely alter our interpretations, so that we acted in ways that empowered us and moved us closer to what we wanted? NLP offers practical tools that help us do that.

NLP also helps us communicate better and build stronger relationships. When we speak, our language is littered with deletions, distortions and generalisations.

We will explore tools that help us truly understand what others are saying from their perspective, in order to avoid the type of misinterpretations that can have such negative consequences

in our personal and professional relationships.

### The Founding Principles of NLP

NLP was created from the process of recognising positive patterns of behaviour in others. In modelling successful people, the co-creators of NLP formed a set of founding principles, known as NLP Presuppositions. Some of these include:

#### The map is not the territory:

The meaning we assign to an experience is what we respond to. This, in essence, is our personal map of the reality around us, i.e. the territory. If we know that we can change the meaning of an experience, it also means that our map is not fixed. Someone else may have a different map of the same territory. Our map is, therefore, an opinion of the territory, not the territory itself.

#### Respect for other people's map of the world:

There is no one right map. If our map is just one version of events and we can change it, then it stands to reason that it is important for us to pay attention to other people's maps. Have

you ever listened to someone else's opinion and then changed your mind?

#### The mind and body is a linked system:

Your physiology affects the way you think, just as the way you think affects your physiology. If you are feeling low and lacking energy, notice what happens when you stand up straight, put your shoulders back, raise your chin and smile. What mental states do you associate with different physiologies?

#### The meaning of communication is the response it elicits:

If someone takes a different meaning from what you intended, then you have not communicated what you intended, regardless of the words you may have used.

#### There is no failure, only feedback:

Without feedback there can be no progress. If we take feedback as failure it can have a major impact on how quickly we get better at something.

**In my next article, I will show you how you can use NLP techniques to work with a specific limiting beliefs.**