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Retrain your brain to achieve a healthier self-image

The National staff

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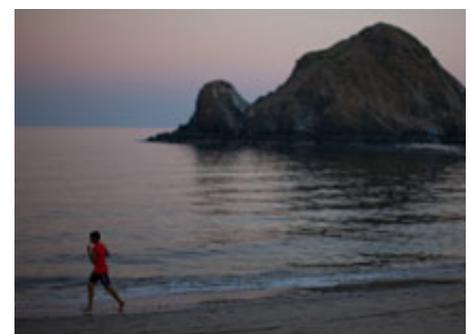
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Learning neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), its adherents say, is like discovering the user manual to your mind. It is meant to show you how what you think (neuro), say (linguistic) and do (behavioural patterns; ie, programming) directly impact the results you get in life, both the good and the bad. And when you understand how you're creating your life - at work, at home and socially - the reasoning goes, you're then in the best possible position to make a few changes so that you can consistently create more and more of what you want. Devotees says NLP puts you back in the driver's seat, offers you clarity of vision to pursue your goals and gives you the fuel to head in whatever direction is right for you.

"The images, beliefs and values you hold deep in your unconscious mind control your thoughts, actions and body," says Carol Talbot, an "empowerment" expert, founder of Matrix Training and the region's most internationally experienced and qualified NLP trainer. "Of all the options for personal development, what gives NLP such strong positioning is the way it offers you a tried and tested way to understand your own mind better and to direct your thoughts in far more productive ways. It's a systematic road map to break out of any mental and spiritual ruts to kick-start a lifetime of happiness and contentment."

NLP, of course, is one of a raft of techniques that work to address thought processes as a way of healing or self-improvement. Other well-known practices include timeline therapy, hypnotherapy and mind coaching;



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plus, one could always choose to be one's own life coach with the multitude of self-help books available on the market.

Shivani Adalja is a New Age well-being consultant and founder of the Alignment Institute in Abu Dhabi. She believes that converts to practices such as NLP are on the rise.

"The awareness about these techniques has spread in the last few years," Adalja says. "People are looking for more holistic solutions rather than quick fixes. The connection between mind and body has become even more evident and people are keen to try different types of therapies."

Adalja believes the results of such programmes speak for themselves and that these mind therapies can be a quick healing process.

"Depending on how deep-rooted a problem is, the client can feel different immediately after the first session," she says. "If the client is having issues with weight, self-confidence or has been through extended emotional trauma, then it might take six to 10 sessions to see results."

Though a devotee of this type of therapy, Adalja also notes that mainstream medicine and practices have their place.

"When I sit with a client in the first preliminary sessions," she says, "I am normally able to tell if the problem is physical or psychosomatic. I have diverted many clients to go visit their doctor or another medical practitioner before they start sessions with me if I feel they need another type of 'help'."

So can these mind techniques actually help everyone or assist in changing people's lives or the way they think? Enthusiasts of NLP say the programme's sheer scope makes it relevant to pretty much anyone, from housewives to entrepreneurs, students to CEOs and everyone in between. The only conditions, goes the warning, are a willingness to address the issues holding one back, a determination to take one's life to the next level and an acceptance that responsibility for success ultimately lies with the individual and the amount of effort he or she is prepared to plough into getting results.

Furthermore, according to Adalja, finding a good practitioner is key.

"People need to do their research to find a good practitioner," she says. "That's half the battle won. Always ask around and gather some information before making an appointment."

Nida Humayun, bank manager

Quite simply, I needed a new me, both personally and professionally. And that's exactly what NLP gave me. We all got different things out of the course, but the biggest change for me personally has been my whole belief in myself. It was lacking before. I'd always been told there was a lot more I could achieve, but also that I was the one who was sabotaging my own success. So I always felt I had potential, but I just didn't know how to unlock it.

NLP made me a lot more conscious of the words I was using when I spoke to myself, when I thought about things, and when I communicated with other people. It sounds so simple, but it really was just becoming aware of my thoughts, words and actions that has made all the difference. Because using different words can actually make a huge difference to the impact they create. And once I was aware of that, I could stop, step back and think about whether my words were helping me or stopping me from getting what I wanted.

NLP also gave me the tools to direct my thoughts in much more resourceful ways, and now I have greater control of my mind.

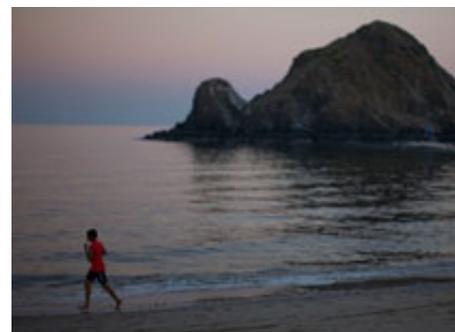
So if ever I find myself telling myself I can't do something, I now immediately correct myself and know what to focus on instead that will get me properly motivated.

Personally, I feel I'm able to say the right things at the right time and in the right way now. It makes me feel really good about being myself. If I had a problem with something, I used to talk about everything else that was not the problem, but now I address the problem as it is - see it for what it is and deal with it in a constructive manner.

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Of course, this has also impacted my professional life and boosted my confidence in the way I do things. I seize more opportunities now, and I know how to get rid of any lingering doubts stopping me achieving my goals.

When I look in the mirror, I feel like a different person and it's all to do with the way I now view and communicate with myself.

Lily Akpuaka, hotel training manager

I'd been smoking for nearly 20 years, having started when I was 13. And like most smokers, I'd tried to give up before, but nothing was working for me. It was only when I was introduced to NLP in early 2010 that things began to change and I finally put things together and understood what would make me, personally, give up.

The first step was looking at the values that made me smoke. At 13, it was all about being cool, and belonging, wanting to be grown up. After that, it became more like a habit, but even recently I was influenced by how cool somebody looked the way he smoked.

So I decided to associate smoking to something visual that I didn't like, and, although that had a strong impact, it was only when I also associated smoking to a feeling that I didn't like that it worked.

So for the visual, I turned that initial image of "smoking being cool" on its head and started really looking at the features of people who were addicted to smoking. You can really spot a smoker. Some of the indicators can include chapped lips, prominent noses, dark circles under the eyes, dry skin, stringy hair, and if they're fairer skinned you can often even see the nicotine under their skin.

I didn't want to be like that. So every time I lit a cigarette, I'd picture what I didn't want. I also associated it with being weak. I value the way I look and I wanted to preserve my health both internally and aesthetically.

The kinesthetic feeling I chose was to associate smoking with something genuinely disgusting in my hand; to handling (sorry, because this is a bit gross) a bag full of vomit. And every time I picked up a cigarette, that's what I focused on.

I chose things I knew would work for me. I got the visuals, and feeling so strong in my head that to take a drag was really nasty. And I've not looked back since then. I actually enjoyed the withdrawals of it, because I knew what I was getting rid of.

People get the belief that it's impossible, and psych themselves into believing that. Then along comes NLP and it's really like being set free. I'm home and dry now, feeling healthier, energised and super solid.

Angelica Horvatic, personal trainer

Everything was different after NLP, but most importantly, it gave me direction, and I'm now more strategic in the way I move towards my goals. Even things that just used to be dreams - they've now become more like achievable goals.

I'm a personal trainer and it had a big impact at work because it helps me succeed with all different types of people. Before NLP, I was putting people in boxes more, whereas now it's a more individual approach to clients. My consultation sessions are therefore longer because I understand the importance of helping clients discover their health and fitness values - what's driving their determination to get fit. Are they doing it for themselves or for someone else? What's their real motivation?

This gives them more direction because they now know what they want and for what reason, instead of just having vague goals like many people when it comes to exercise. I take them through the NLP questions that really clarify their goals - questions which will help them achieve anything in any area of their lives - to make sure we're setting goals that make sense to them.

I get lots of clients saying: "Wow - this is a good question!" It really makes people think. It opens their minds so they're more accepting of other ways of thinking and doing things. It's opening the gate for the new habits to pop in and be installed. Understanding and clarity are definitely important parts of their success because it guarantees them taking action.

I've got a great structure going now. I follow up on my clients' progress more, by taking measurements and reassessing goals more frequently. There's more communication, because I fully appreciate now that ongoing communication about goals - and especially any obstacles - is essential. It's not about being hard on my clients; it's about pushing them through being realistic. NLP has made me more realistic.

NLP and exercise are a good fit. Most people who go for personal trainers actually need it for whatever reason in their lives. I get that and have a stronger sense of my life purpose.

I'm in the right business. I like people and helping them realise the amazing things they can achieve in their lives. I'm the right type of person for this job, and it's more rewarding now than ever. Personal trainers are paid to get results and NLP is all about results.

Paul Williams, company managing director

At the time I attended the NLP Practitioner Programme in 2009 with other senior managers at RMD Kwikform, Middle East Region we were coming out of several years of buoyant activity; business had been easy to get and staff were comfortable, but the dramatic change of the economic crisis had hit and we needed to adjust. Staff were insecure; their goals had shifted and they were drawing away from the business vision to focus on their own issues.

The NLP techniques we learnt helped staff overcome those issues, get back on track and reinstate both company and personal goals. Our personal development review (PDR) team linked the individual's goals to the company's vision and values. Our people were able to be more professional in the way they conducted the PDR approaches. And good people are subsequently still with us. Conversely, we also used our understanding of NLP to make tough decisions on the characters we didn't have the time or energy to pull through. Those tools and techniques proved very effective in terms of building up our staff, promoting both morale and company performance.

We also got Matrix on board to run a sales programme for our Middle East sales team. It went back to the sales basics, but with the added NLP aspect so the guys better understood what rapport was all about. It was exceptionally well-received, by the old-timers and sceptics as much as the new people.

Prior to all this, we were going through an Investors in People accreditation, which we've now received. Through that process we picked up some shortcomings in the management skills of the business.

While it's hard to say what change is directly attributable to NLP, the strategies and techniques with which we as a management group changed the culture of our business certainly came from NLP.

As a company, we need to embrace change. So in terms of who would benefit from NLP, it would be the type who we as a company would be happy to put our energies and efforts into in return. We've seen middle management come on extraordinarily.

I've been having coaching since this time, on and off. To me, NLP has just become a part of the way I work and communicate. I value things differently. The Practitioner programme alone gave me enough as a manager to use, although I do aspire to complete the Master Practitioner programme when I have the time.

Critics decry NLP as 'pseudoscience'

Neuro-Linguistic Programming was founded in the 1970s in California - when the human potential movement was becoming an industry - by Richard Bandler and John Grinder after they listened to taped therapy sessions of the late Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls. It has grown from addressing problems such as phobias, depression, habit disorder, psychosomatic illnesses and learning disorders to being applied within management training, life coaching, alternative medicine, large group awareness training and the self-help field.

Like many other similar techniques, NLP has its critics and detractors. Notably, some neuroscientists, psychologists and linguists maintain there is no scientific evidence that supports NLP, that it uses incorrect and misleading terms and concepts, and that it is in fact a pseudoscience.

The American researcher John C Norcross and his team in 2006 listed NLP as "possibly" or "probably" discredited, and in 2008 in papers reviewing discredited interventions for substance and alcohol abuse they put it in the Top 10.

In 2010, the US researchers S Glasner-Edwards and R Rawson listed NLP as "certainly discredited".

Harshest of all, the Polish researcher Tomasz Witkowski in 2010 wrote that "NLP represents pseudoscientific rubbish, which should be mothballed forever".

In response, NLP practitioners and academics have argued that the experimental method is not always appropriate for researching NLP, and proposed instead that it should be researched phenomenologically, or based on direct observation, "free from hypotheses, pre-conceptions and assumptions".

Further information

There are various ways in which you can choose to benefit from NLP - either by opting for NLP coaching, or for NLP therapy, or by

attending one of the NLP certification programs www.matrix-training.com For further information on The Alignment Institute or to make an appointment with Shivani Adalja, see website www.shivaniadalja.com. Sessions start from Dh900.

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