

Time To Think – NLP in action?

In this series of articles we wanted to explore how Time to Think (TTT) works so effectively by examining the links with Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) coaching. How can NLP help us appreciate how TTT achieves its results and how we can model TTT using NLP methods?

One of the common presuppositions of both NLP and TTT is that people have all the resources they need to achieve the results they want. What they may not have is access to those resources at that precise moment.

My contention is that both NLP and TTT achieve results by enabling people to access the resources of their unconscious minds (or right brain) to facilitate change. The resources are located at an “other than conscious” level - if the person could change “consciously” they would have already done so (and not needed coaching.)

Much of NLP addresses the unconscious mind - it is itself modeled on the work of the therapist Milton Erickson. Erickson achieved extraordinary results with trance and using language in specific ways that bypass the resistance of the conscious mind. These language patterns (the Milton Model) are also used in the questions in TTT (especially the Incisive Question.)

The expansive nature of the unconscious mind is more “solutions oriented” and “generative” than the more logical left brain activity. In terms of other coaching models it is worth pointing out that Brief Solutions Therapy and Solution Focused work is very much modeled on Milton Erickson. His approach is also very consistent with the essence of Appreciative Inquiry.

We will look at five elements of the relationship between TTT and NLP

1 Engaging Our Senses – Modeling how TTT listens, engages and creates space

2 Belief Change—assuming we can –How TTT realises potential

3 Towards an Abundant Frame of Mind – generating more choice and possibilities with TTT

4 Questions, Questions – The space between, comma, and the role of repetition – How TTT Changes our Mind

5 Being Present to New Futures - The Time element of TTT and the present to future orientation of coaching.

Part 1

Engaging our Senses - Modeling how TTT Listen, Engages..... and creates space

The evidence suggests that whatever coaching model is being used, it is the quality of the relationship that is the single most important determinant of success. With the pressures on people's time and very demanding schedules, the coaching relationship provides a space for slowing down and being present with each other. The quality of connection will then shape the creativity of the session and the breakthroughs achieved.

Indeed many of the issues that show up in coaching (and thinking sessions) result from not being fully present – or certainly the capacity to be fully present would help considerably in dealing with the situation. The senses only know **now**, the current moment and movement. So engaging our senses and being present when coaching is a key skill. With TTT our eyes being focused on the other person's eyes while keeping our eyes "soft" and in peripheral vision, is a key way of maintaining our presence and our connection with the Thinker. Our "focus" is on them as they are what matters and we want to see and sponsor their thinking.

This state of "relaxed alertness" and being in peripheral vision is key to being present (and helps reduce the amount of internal dialogue.) In an NLP context it also allows us to be aware of the client's movements - even the smallest of facial twitches – as we "calibrate" what is happening for them. This is of course a crucial skill in all coaching and in TTT is especially important because it means that our "soft eyes" can observe all those tell tale signs that "thinking" is still taking place.

In NLP a lot of work is done on exploring people's preferred "Representational Style" – that is do we have a preference for Visual, Auditory or Kinesthetic information channels for interpreting the world.

Critically in NLP terms listening - the auditory "rep" system – is vital as it humanises people. The visual rep system – how we see things – automatically "objectifies" things rather than humanise them. (We "see" objects out there) To get to someone's heart we have to go through the auditory channel.

NLP is all about making distinctions, so it is useful to make some distinctions about how we listen in a TTT way. The more capable we are the richer distinctions we create richer experiences and a richer "map" of the world. Therefore it is useful to think about the distinctions we make when listening in TTT.

The first key distinction is between listening and hearing and what truly listening means. When we are listening in this context it is an experience using all of our senses and being

fully present. Being centered in this way we are listening from a place where we are connected both with our self and with the other person. In effect being grounded, centered and connected we may call it “core listening”. All of our channels are open to the thinker and with high levels of active curiosity and receptivity, the better our listening. In effect it is listening with all of our resources and both sides of our brain as we pick up all that is being communicated as well as what is being “said”. (So much communication is non-verbal and therefore we need to “listen” for this!) This is a critically different activity to simply hearing – using our ears to recognise sound and decode it.

Stephen Gilligan refers to this type of “core listening” as “Sponsorship” – the coach “sees” the essence of the client and all of who they can become. This being present at a core level allows for this potential to be realised. The outcome of positive sponsorship in this sense is to “awaken awareness of self and the world” for the client.

There are various ways in which we might be listening. The following was a very useful set of distinctions made by the coach Michael Neill. We often listen while rehearsing what we are going to say next - people are schooled to “**listen to argue.**” If you like we are taught an “advocacy” approach rather than an “inquiry” approach and this has a strong impact on our ability to listen.

In effect, with advocacy we are thinking up our next point or line of argument and not listening – we are waiting to speak, not listening. One might blame this on the tendency towards promoting Hegelian dialectic as a way of learning – where we resolve things through logical discussion with a pro (evidence for) and anti (evidence against) stance to the issue. The danger is we merely confirm what we already think or we learn more about what we already know. This in many ways is a far more comfortable place to be. It may also be that we do this because it proves “I am right and you are wrong” - what we think (or believe) gets attributed to our identity (see Logical Levels below). Again listening to be proved right is operating from the left brain as it supports our ego.

What this distinction also reveals is that the logical “listen to argue” approach is based on a “cause and effect” left-brain approach. Here the left brain tendency to sequential thinking means that we see things as leading on inevitably and that the first event “caused” the second event (and so on.) In reality this is often a rationalization after the event. Conversely the potential and possibility associated with Inquiry is very much a right brain function (see table in section 3)

Listening to argue will also lead to us to listen to our own internal dialogue as we rehearse our next clever point or question. From a coaching perspective reducing our own internal dialogue (or “Auditory digital” in the NLP notation) –that is what we are producing internally - gives us more opportunity to hear what the client is saying

(externally). This allows us be more present, there is more space and we have a much better quality of connection.

We can also **“listen for”** – things that support our world view. We hear what we want to hear. The NLP communication model suggests that we all have filters and preferences that shape what we take in from the outside world. We generalise, distort and delete information as well as having the filters of our emotions, our values and beliefs and our metaprograms that means we “hear” what we want to hear.

We can learn to listen for certain things – things that may improve the quality of our coaching. For example when does the client “light-up”? What “modal operators” (the *musts*, *have tos* rather than *mays* or *wants* as well as a language of *possibility*) are working? Conversely we can listen for things that may not benefit our coaching. It may be we interpret things in a way that support our view of the world and confirms our filters and biases.

Then of course we can just **“listen to”** in a TTT sense where it is all about core listening skills and a spirit of “inquiry. The dictionary definition of **Inquiry** highlights the link between presence, listening and exploration

Inquiry

1. The act of exploration and discovery.
2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.

•Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC exploration, Study

Thus when we are truly listening and not waiting our turn to speak we are in a state of “relaxed alertness” as we listen with “soft ears” as well as “soft eyes and this opens a pathway to discovery.

When we are truly **listened to** “we speak things into creation” –the unconscious (or right brain) can come out to play and has the space to connect with our inner experiences and inner wisdom. By speaking it out loud the energy of our words combined with the power of true and liberating assumptions, will then bring it into “being”.

Being present is crucial in all coaching models, though TTT takes it further. By being present we suppress all the inner dialogue and as we are not thinking of the next great question (advocacy) or technique we stay in an **“inquiry”** space. Through our core listening skills we are truly connected to the Thinker and present to sponsor them as they breakthrough into new possibilities and potential.

PART 2

Belief Change – assuming we can - How TTT realises potential

Beliefs -Working with what we are assuming is far easier and more effective than dealing with beliefs

One of the keys to the effectiveness of TTT is the way that dealing with assumptions can achieve much quicker breakthroughs than the “changing of beliefs” in NLP.

A belief is something we accept as true. The question then is whether the belief serves us or limits us. As Henry Ford said “whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right.” This encapsulates the fact that often beliefs are about what we believe to be possible and whether we have the resources and capabilities to achieve something. When we talk about not being able to do something it maybe because we do not have the capability or it may be we do not have permission - that is we believe we are not allowed to do it. Thus what we *believe* can truly limit our potential.

Whether we think “we can” or think “we can't” may well have been installed or “imprinted” from early family experiences. As a result, these (limiting) beliefs may be long forgotten and residing in our unconscious. The way we see and experience the world is fashioned by those beliefs and we “see” things that confirm those beliefs. In an NLP Coaching context, the unconscious elements of beliefs that cause the client to be “stuck” are grouped into three headings:

Hopeless – there is no expectation of the outcome happening and therefore the client is very unlikely to take action.

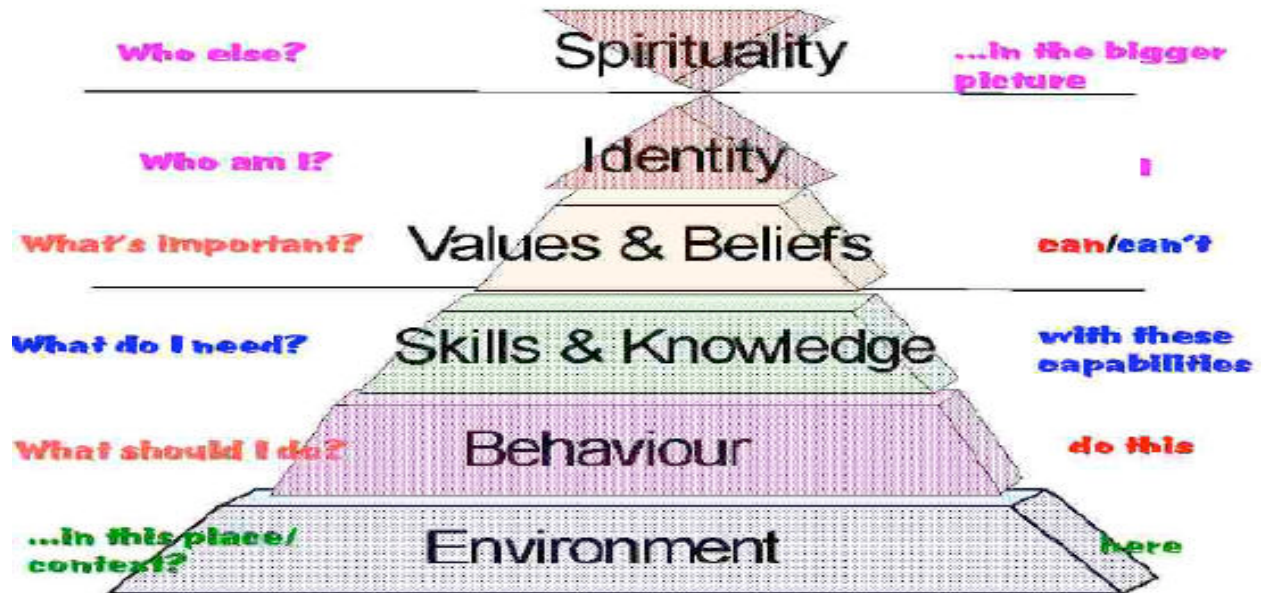
Helpless – the goal is achievable for others but they do not have the resources to achieve it. Therefore they are unlikely to act.

Worthless - the goal is achievable but they are not convinced they deserve it because of who they are (identity), where they are from or what they may have done or not done. Again the client is unlikely to take steps forward.

(See Robert Dilts “Beliefs Pathways to Health and Well-Being”)

A useful framework to understand how beliefs operate is to consider the “logical levels” developed by Robert Dilts. As we go up the “logical levels” things have more leverage (that is drive the levels below to produce great learning and change) but can also be more challenging to change.

Chart of Logical levels



(This version of the levels is courtesy of Charles Faulkner.)

Identity refers to our sense of who we are and is distinct from the other levels – it is the entity experiencing the levels below. Having greater clarity around our sense of identity helps us i) clarify our life's purpose ii) have clear boundaries between self and others and iii) be clear what values and beliefs support our best sense of self and those which restrict us from realising our true sense of who we can be (our "idealised self".)

Beliefs are often linked to what we value – as the chart of the logical levels shows they are at the same level of learning and change. In effect they address the "Why?" question. What motivates us to do what we do? And as that wording makes clear values drive behavior - we "do" it. Values offer us "up front motivation and after the event evaluation" – they are the criteria against which we "judge" the event. As values are abstract nouns they find their way into our behaviour through the connecting beliefs – our values become manifest through our beliefs and our behaviour.

This is why as we go higher up the logical levels there is a direct relationship with the lower levels – so values drive behaviour for example and our values and beliefs help "support" our identity. So if we have a value around respect how we behave towards others will be very evident (and clearly we can infer from people's behaviour what their values are)

A useful way of thinking about this (and indeed using it) is that we can face with a challenging situation we can choose to regard the behaviour as problematic not the person (identity). Keeping the person's identity separate means we can honour that individual while working with the behaviours. This can be even stronger if we consider the "positive intent" of the behaviour – what are they trying to achieve that is positive and important to them.

A "belief" being an abstract noun (ie a nominalization) means it can become ossified. The belief may also be out of our conscious awareness and something that is tied to our identity ("we strongly believe") or an important part of the culture. Therefore working with the belief may require a fair amount of work to uncover the key belief and change it to a more empowering one.

In contrast "what are you assuming" uses the *verb* which makes the situation much easier to work with. An assumption is just something that we are holding as a possibility – and other assumptions are equally if not more valid. Shining the light on to the assumption that underpins the belief (or whatever is limiting us in this context) and the use of the verb to facilitate action makes the situation far more fluid and easy to resolve. We are not tied to assumptions and rarely hold them at an identity level and therefore they can be changed far more easily compared to grappling with a highly abstract notion that is deeply embedded.

Using the linguistic model of NLP demonstrates why the "what are you assuming" question works so well. It is because it "de-nominalizes" the belief by turning it into the verb of what we are actively assuming (which underpins the belief). This gives us clarity on what we need to work with – we bring our assumptions into conscious awareness. Assumptions are much easier to deal with – they are easy to identify and easy to shake off. Conversely, beliefs are likely to operate at an identity level and there may be a much stronger attachment to them. For example "I am not worthy of success" is a belief literally embedded at an identity level. *Example of assumptions that can be changed easily here to create effective change?*

From the TTT philosophy of independent thinking, working with assumptions is also important in an NLP context. A key issue with Beliefs is, as we have suggested, they are often not the client's beliefs in the first place – they may have been "installed" by parents, schools, society at large. Therefore background, especially our formative years and culture play a large part and this is why they often lie out-of-conscious awareness. And because they have been i) such an integral part of a client's upbringing ii) incorporated at an identity level and iii) out of conscious awareness, changing them can be challenging.

While NLP has many useful approaches to eliminating limiting beliefs, they are less effective and elegant than working with assumptions. We have far less attachment to an assumption and it is easier to dissolve. If you like it is a perfect example of Occam's razor – cutting through the complexity with the simplest question that gets results – what are you assuming and what is the bedrock assumption?

Working with assumptions also gives the client independence putting them back “at cause” – they (not parents, school or society) are responsible for what they are assuming about a given situation. This fosters a more independent approach as they can take responsibility for their own assumptions – and change them easily. This then leads to effective change.

And it is not just about getting rid of assumptions (or beliefs). The substitution of a true and liberating assumption provides forward momentum not just the elimination of a block. That the substitution is easy to achieve it convinces people on how quickly change can occur. EXAMPLE

This creates a positive belief – something the unconscious mind really wants to work with and is intrinsically “generative” – we can “generalize” a true and liberating assumption across all of our thoughts and way of being. This connects us with our resources and can then guide us on our path. ”.) Replacing limiting assumptions with “true and liberating assumptions” allows us to expand into who we truly are and can be. This means we can then “do” (we have the skills and capabilities and behaviours) whatever is required to achieve our further goals, become more of who we are and be more fully aligned with our sense of purpose. This represents true sponsorship of people at an identify level.

Part 3

Towards an Abundant Frame of Mind – generating more choice and possibilities with TTT

*Modeling effective change.....Positive framing and creating well formed outcomes....
Meta- programs and TTT – turning “away froms” into towards....*

One of the key issues in NLP coaching – and most models of coaching – is creating “goals” that are clear and stated in the positive. This is referred to as a “well-formed outcome”. For a “well formed outcome” what we want must be stated in the positive (towards) as well as initiated and maintained by self (we can achieve this outcome through our own actions and resources, we are “at cause”).

In terms of how the conscious and unconscious minds can be made to work together more creatively and effectively (the art of coaching and Time to Think) appreciating how they work is of paramount importance (and something we will explore in more detail in section 4.) In terms of setting outcomes and achieving results it is important to be aware that the unconscious does not recognise a negative and we cannot action a “not”. (The unconscious mind is developed through experience and “not” is a linguistic construction)

A good example from sport is when a former England football manager (Steve McLaren) was motivating his players by insisting “We must not lose this game”. If we take the fact that the unconscious does not recognise the negative the embedded command is lose this game! (Also note the modal operator, “must” also introduces pressure – this is discussed further below).

This was a vital qualifying match and needless to say they did lose it. What was also interesting was that during the match his body language as he stood on the sidelines was so negative as he was focused on not losing. This is hardly encouraging to the players. Had he said “you have lots of talent and are great footballers, so go out there enjoy yourselves and win this game” the outcome may have been different. It would certainly have been more motivating and the impact on their energy and physiology (and his!) would have been quite different.

This also highlights that we get what we focus on – so if we focus on negative things (like not losing) then lo and behold that is what will manifest itself. Therefore the more positive language and “framing” we can use the better. By framing we mean the focus we have in a specific context – the “lens” we look through will determine what we see. Therefore we can focus on a “problem frame” where we spend our energy really getting to understand the problem and its root causes and then that may turn into apportioning blame. However, if we focus on negatives we will attract further negatives as we have set ourselves up to look for problems – our frame or “lens” is pre-set.

However, a “solution frame” would be looking for how we can get the outcome and results we want and the resources we need to achieve them. In effect the “problem frame” is a scarcity model of the world while the “solution frame” is an abundant frame that generates possibility and potential.

That the objective is stated in the positive is therefore extremely important to its achievement. This school of thought argues for example that why diets do not work is that they are set up to fail as the target is “losing” weight (an “away from”). If the objective was to be a happy, healthy and fit then this can be visualized more effectively and the goal is more compelling - it is “towards” these qualities.

Modeling people who successfully achieve change reveals that initially they may have an “away from” running, that creates initial momentum. However, for the goal to be sustainable a “towards” is needed. Therefore removing a negative (a limiting assumption) is not in itself going to create sustainable momentum – we need to replace the negative with a positive – a true and liberating assumption. Doing both together – eliminating a negative and replacing it with a positive - is therefore both powerful and empowering.

The “Away from” a negative or “towards” a positive pattern is something that we have been “programmed” with – they are programs that guide and direct our thought processes. They are referred to in NLP as Meta Programs and are very similar to the elements that make up Myers-Briggs.

“Away froms” are far less helpful than “towards” as they are driven by not wanting something (or feeling I “should” do it or that I am doing it for the benefit of others). This can lead to going from one difficult situation to another - “out of the frying pan into the fire” – as we are focused on what we do not want that is what we attract.

With “away from” (knowing what we don’t want or what we want to avoid) – the energy (or state) that produces decisions is often the issue. If we are acting or thinking from this place if it is out of fear/concern then the conscious mind will have closed down - the quality and insight will be reduced. Of course by focusing on what we don’t want means of course that is precisely what we do get!

“Away from” motivations may have “fight or flight” energies associated with it. In Bruce Lipton’s *Biology of Belief* he talks about the role of protection and growth. The protection and growth mode (towards) is much healthier for the cells/body than “fight or flight” as it is far less stressful. The other key aspect of “away froms” is that they can have lots of energy associated with them. However, once that energy is used getting away from the situation, what next? It maybe that the client is then exhausted and has nowhere to go and the motivation dries up.

An example provided by NLP Trainer and Coach, John Overdurf, is if we consider an entrepreneur who has been a millionaire three times over (and by implication losing it all) what does this tell us? It tells us that he needs the “away from” motivation of poverty to kick in to get him focused on the business and making money. Once successful that motivation evaporates and the business starts to deteriorate.

The “towards” motivation creates a state of “energy” that is more appropriate to effective decision-making – we focus on what we do want to create. This is more generative and more aligned with an abundant frame of what is possible.

In effect we imagine the outcome and how will that affect us and bring that energy back to the present moment. This is referred to by John Overdurf as the “end state energy” and having that energy now to inform our next step is an extremely effective NLP tool. As we shall see the incisive question very much models this approach as it creates the conditions of achieving the goal courtesy of the true and liberating assumption.

Focusing on Choice - The “Modal Operators” of possibility v necessity

Coaching is about enabling clients to be independent (or “at cause” in NLP language) and responding from a position of choice. Language is crucially important here as it both reflects and creates the client's experience.

The Meta Model of NLP deals with the patterns of speech in people's language that was observed in a therapeutic environment. Modeled on the work of Virginia Satir, it helped identify ambiguity and limiting thoughts and a way of generating more precision about what was being said and ways to overcome limiting thoughts/beliefs. In effect it was challenging the client's view of the world and ensuring that they appreciated that the “map is not the territory” – what we think/believe is a representation of the world not how the world is. There are other ways of seeing the world if we move to being “at cause” and appreciating we have choice.

The “modal operators” of necessity are the have tos, musts, need to, shoulds, ought tos while possibility and choice is represented by will, can, want to, could, would or may.

By using “must” or “should” the implication is that there is a lack of choice and they are often referred to as “pressure words” and reflect a “frame of necessity” or obligation. It may be we are doing things because they are expected of us. Clearly this will determine how we experience the world and how we do things – if we “have to” do something it will be a very different experience than if we “choose to” or if we “want to”. As well as affecting our experience of it, the modal operators will determine the energy we bring to the task.

By using words like “I can’t” or “It’s impossible” the client is expressing a limiting belief that change cannot be achieved. It may also be reflecting resistance to change. Therefore the underlying assumptions need to be addressed.

If we use words like “can” or “may” or “want to” it implies we have choice – and therefore our experience and energy we bring to the goal is very different. To appreciate the wisdom of “what more do you want to achieve”, Michael Neill in Super Coach has put these modal operators into a very effective frame:-

| Should | Have to | Want to |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Self Image | Means to an end | Inner Guidance |
| The right thing | Prerequisite | Choice |
| Rationalisation | Desperation | Inspiration |

To the extent that the “should” reflects rationalisation and “Have to” represents a cause and effect (I have to do this, in order to do that) this suggests left brain activity (see table in section 4.)

However, if we are following our inner guidance and wisdom and coming from a place of inspiration this is much more likely to be right brain. This will create much greater well being and connection with our true purpose.

How does this connect with TTT?

TTT produces effective outcomes and breakthroughs as the structure of a session moves the client from an “away from” space to a “towards” space. The “true and liberating assumption” combined with a further session goal produces a “towards” motivation and offers the client lots of possibility and choice. (“How else would you.....”)

There is also evidence to suggest that sustainable unconscious change occurs in this way. This also results in a big shift in the energy of the client and the resources they are now connected to as a result.

The thinking session (Stage 1) may see a lot of “away from” and have an energy that is important (though may be not as healthy and as generative as one might ideally want.) This will inevitably reflect perhaps some of the “stuckness” of the situation. However, as the underlying assumptions get dissolved and replaced by a true and liberating assumption then the energy associated with this is far more “towards” and

generative. Being associated with the inspiration of “what more do you want to achieve” is vital.

The Incisive question then has the goal of the session combined with the true and liberating assumption. This creates all the positive energy of a “towards”. It also presumes that the client both has the resources to do it and can access those resources to achieve the goal – “how would you....”

Answering the question also provides lots of positive energy from having achieved it – the “as if” frame as discussed in Section 5. This then allows us to take that energy of success to dealing with the situation. In NLP terms we take the next “smallest step” from the energy field of the solution and with the associated resources and learning of having (already) been successful in doing it. The appreciation then reinforces the positive resources the thinker has.

Writing this down then anchors those resources and the process of writing them down captures the thoughts and energy of the breakthrough (As well as being a form of manifestation – by writing it down it is more likely to come into being) This gets it in the muscle as we kinesthetically do something that we can also refer to subsequently.

Part 4

Questions, Questions – The space between, comma and the role of repetition

Coaching and Questions

It is often said that the art of great coaching is asking great questions. What constitutes a great question is of course subjective and depends on i) the quality of rapport established ii) the clarity and cleanness of the question iii) the “state” of the person when the question is asked and iv) how the question is “heard” or received. So for example if the client is in a confused and less than resourceful place then they may not “hear” or “get” or “see” the “great” question. So, presence, precision, timing and state are vital.

The art of questions/coaching is to create the conditions to think differently and creatively. This allows for “fresh” thinking to achieve breakthroughs rather than the hypnotic impasse of telling the old story with the type of thinking that produced the problem in the first place. Einstein said “None of my great discoveries ever came through the process of rational thinking.” He was also known for “staring into space” which given his subject matter makes sense and may have also led to his conclusion that “imagination is more important than knowledge”.

The TTT process unlocks “creative” not “rational” thinking. One of the interesting aspects of TTT is that it allows the client to find a place (or state) where they are connected to their resources so that the quality of response is considerably magnified. In effect the thinker can draw on all their resources but crucially their right brain intuition (see below). In many coaching approaches the coach’s intuition is encouraged and celebrated – but surely it is all about bringing out the intuition of the thinker?

Asking questions conventionally as a coach often means we use our left brain to ask questions – this then directly appeals to the client’s (cognitive) left brain. This may (inadvertently) leave the client going on a further cognitive quest and staying in the problem frame. The success of TTT is that it avoids this trap of left-brain to left brain communication and allows the space for more creative thinking to emerge.

A good example is that many (NLP) coaches use the **“What do you want?”** question. I have never particularly liked this question and often found the results it generates in my work of limited value. People often have no idea (why should they?) Crucially the linguistic presupposition is that there is a “lack” – there is something they do not have and just as importantly it may be that it is something “outside” of them not “within” them. It therefore does not honour the presupposition that clients already possess all the resources they need.

They may well answer from their “left brain” – and quite possibly feel distressed because they don’t know but feel that they “should”. Alternatively they may say they “want” what they think you (or society) want to hear - what they “should” want. How many people “want” things that they think are important because parents/peers/society tells them they should want it? And they will be “successful” when they have them? So “wanting” can lead to being “acquisitive”. Of course, often when we get what “we” want we are left feeling empty and dissatisfied. The advertising industry works on this principle brilliantly. Being influenced by the “outside” like this is being a victim.

A more useful frame is to assume that they already have everything they need (a core presupposition of NLP and Time to Think) though may need the time and thinking space to “access” it (ie they have what they want “within” themselves.)

So what if we were to ask (as suggested by Michael Neill) “**what do you want to create?**” or “**what would you love to create?**”

The question now assumes the client has all the resources they need “inside” - it is then a matter of how they can be applied to get to their outcome. This opens up a blank piece of paper and accesses the creativity of the right brain. Coming back “inside” in a thinking session allows us to reconnect with what matters to us and be “**generative and creative**” by uniting left and right brain resources. That leads to us being more internal and focus on the well-being we generate “inside” by drawing on our inner wisdom and resources.

An overview of left and right brain functions

Work by the psychologist Miller has suggested that the cognitive mind is capable of dealing with 7+/- 2 bits of information. Beyond this the conscious mind gets overloaded. (This is why telephone numbers used to be seven digits.)

The left brain has a problem orientation, cause and effect approach. It also tends to have an either/or structure. The cognitive bias can also be bound up with a greater sense of ego and the focus on problems invariably corresponds to an earlier stage of development - the problem state will often be a manifestation of themes or issues of an earlier age when we had fewer resources. Our goals and desires on the otherhand are more of the now. If we stay thinking in this left-brain mode then the likelihood of breakthrough is limited. (The Archimedes principle tells us that a breakthrough is more likely in the bath or shower.)

Conversely the right brain is more solutions oriented and with an expansive and generative and/or approach – it embraces opposites and paradoxes. The unconscious is a storehouse of all our experiences and emotions and can absorb 2

million bits of information per second. It is often said that the unconscious has decided half a second before our conscious mind what we think!

The Right brain is also very much driven by connection. The wonderful Jill Bolte Taylor video on TED (www.ted.com), "My stroke of insight", is a beautiful and very moving exploration of the functions of the two parts of the brain.

None of this is to say one is better than the other rather that creative breakthroughs require a conversation between the conscious and unconscious mind. The functions of the two minds are detailed below.

The functions of the two “minds”

| Left =academic, intellectual, business | Right = creative, intuitive, artistic |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 7+/- 2 bits of information | 2m bits of information (everything else!) |
| Logical | Round |
| Language (written and verbal) | Rhythm /Music |
| Linear | Random |
| Words | Imagination |
| Numbers | Spatial awareness |
| Sequential | Simultaneous |
| Routine | Pictures/ Dimensions |
| Local | Whole |
| Symbols | Global - Holistic awareness |
| Semantic relationship | Colour |
| Analysis (breakdown into (a)parts) | Synthesis (putting together) |
| Analytical | Metaphor |
| Cause and effect | Belief |
| Scientific | Storytelling |
| Objective | Image |
| Knowing | Concept |
| Parts | Insight |
| Reasoning | Intuition |
| Practical | Intonation/accentuation |
| Reality based | Senses/Empathy/Emotion |
| Through time/time lines | Now |

Thinking is often associated with being rational and left brain, cause and effect, sequential approaches. Rather than celebrating every one's inherent capacity to "draw" on their gifts and experiences, the creativity, connectivity and heart of the right brain is often undervalued or out-sourced to "creatives". ***It is rather like as human beings we have been given a V8 engine but think that is far better and safer to use just three of the cylinders.*** Therefore ***independent thinking*** - and I believe this is the wonderful gift of Time To Think - involves using both hemispheres in a creative flow of left and right brain synergy. We can use the V8 engine to its full effect and reap the benefits of its extraordinary design.

We might also distinguish left and right brain activities as a combination of head and heart –where there is a more imaginative and intuitive approach.

"Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become." **Steve Jobs**

"The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of." **Pascal**

Both these quotes acknowledge the wisdom and resources of the heart. And given that coaching is an "act of love" then we need to be operating from our heart – and (re) connecting the client with theirs.

More often than not in western business and finance we are operating from our heads, but even then only one part of it, the left brain (Einstein's "rational thinking"). Therein lies a big part of the problems we currently face. J.K Galbraith, the famous US economist, said adherence to the "conventional wisdom" was so widespread because it saves us from the "pain of having to think for ourselves". This slavish following of the "conventional wisdom" has left us in a far from comfortable position.

Steve Jobs' philosophy is fascinating as it is coming from a highly successful organisation. NLP is very much about modeling what works - it makes far more sense to listen to, and "model", successful players in any field. It is also an organisation that as the quote makes clear is "right brain" rather than "left" – whereas a lot of the "failed" companies have a left brain approach which is intrinsically "ego" driven.

Failed companies celebrated this left brain thinking – Enron management was self-styled as "the smartest guys in the room". This was only in a cognitive sense - they are using academic/mathematical intelligence as their criterion. As well as being ego driven there was also a complete absence of values – one of their key phrases was "earnings before scruples". (And think about the behaviours this drove given the logical levels outlined earlier)

The problem with a left brain approach and a related organizational pretence to “intelligence” is that a premium is placed on “**knowing**”. This is especially true for management and of course the “Leader” must know! The reality is of course more often than not we don’t know. However there is very little comfort, security or job prospects in “**not knowing**” especially when “expert” is the badge we wear. And I wonder whether an intrinsic part of being an expert is we are “set-up” to know - to analyse and focus on the problems, apply our insight and try to solve those problems within the context of the problem – all of which is left brain thinking! It is also important to point out here that Erickson was a big advocate of “disciplined not knowing”

Accessing the unconscious mind (or right brain) - the key to unlocking resources and a way of being. How does the TTT approach access right brain resources so effectively?

Accessing the resources of the unconscious mind is a key element in NLP both in terms of the approach and the results it produces. Indeed much of NLP is based on the modeling of Milton Erickson who achieved extraordinary results through hypnosis. While I have been using the concept of conscious and unconscious mind I should make it clear I am using very much an Ericksonian and not Freudian notion of the unconscious mind. This “model” of the unconscious is also very similar to the work done on left and right brain thinking. In this context therefore the terms are interchangeable with the right brain being in effect the unconscious mind.

One of the presuppositions of NLP – and very congruent with TTT - is that people have all the resources they need. Of course they may not have access to them on occasions and often this will be because they are trapped in their cognitive mind. Their unconscious mind does have all the resources and so we need to reconnect the left and right brains to move the client forward. Indeed Erickson argued that clients were clients because they were out of rapport with their unconscious mind (and it was their unconscious mind that got them to the appointment!)

The question then becomes – how do we reunite the person with all of their resources? The issue then becomes providing a framework for the client to get in touch with those resources. While Erickson did it through hypnosis I believe that TTT employs a similar approach and philosophy. The effectiveness of the questions is that, just as with Erickson, the questions employ techniques that either bypass the resistance of the conscious mind or alternatively open up space for imagination.

So how do the TTT questions access the unconscious/right brain.....their structure and repetition.....

The open-ended nature of the TTT questions immediately invites an expansive right brain answer. However, my sense is what can happen is that on the first iteration of the question it is as though all the pre-conceived thinking of the client about this topic gets

“downloaded”. It is then the repetition of the open ended question that yields more creative exploration – and doing this a number of times gets us into new rather than old (well-rehearsed) territory. This well rehearsed territory is, in effect, the trance of the “old story”. The repetition of the questions at the various stages breaks down the structure of the old story to invite in new thoughts and ideas. This yields fresher and deeper insights. The thinker is in a different place each time the question is asked making it a very different and powerful question. (Heraclitus quote – Nancy)

In addition the space is created by literally asking the question in a way that makes the comma crucially important. We leave space between the words to slow down the question and allow space for the thinking process to begin. The pace of delivery of the question influences the breathing of the recipient (as does the tone) and this will affect the quality of the thinking.

Clearly while the structure of the questions are very elegant and draw out the highest quality complete thinking of the thinker, this is all predicated on the presence of the Thinking partner and the connection and field created by the Thinking Environment. This is vital for the quality of the response and emergence of ideas and thoughts that create breakthrough.

One of the key elements of a creative question is starting with “If.....” The incisive question therefore addresses the right brain and is discussed in more detail below. It immediately suggests that the use of imagination is key....”what if.....” However, the “how would you element” brings in the left brain as it is a more procedural question. This then means we are bringing both hemispheres into play to yield fresh thinking that gets results as there is a procedure for putting it in place.

One of the ways that the right brain can be accessed is by immediately confusing the left brain! The rational element can be overloaded and so a stock response cannot be given. The “what are you assuming that is stopping you” question requires us to really think about our response and not give a stock response. If the question were “What is stopping you” that can directly fire off the left brain and lots of reasons for what is stopping the person will be presented – after all you have asked them to find them. (And this is not likely to leave the person in a resourceful state)

Milton Erickson was a master of using language that by-passed conscious resistance and a much of the L of NLP is modeled on his facility with language that appealed to the unconscious mind.

One of his key observations was that trance was a naturally occurring phenomenon and that we all had our own way with language (patterns) that took us into trance. If one believes this then a link with TTT is that when the thinking partner is talking at length they are engaged in a form of self-hypnosis which allows them to access the right brain.

(And interruptions disturb the trance.) While entirely subjective that is often my experience of TTT and it works wonderfully.

One of the key elements of Ericksonian Hypnosis is time distortion and his questions would often scramble the sense of time especially between now and the future. As we shall see the Incisive Question works so well because of the way it plays with time.

Having explored the Thinking element of TTT and how we can change our mind by using all of our left and right brain resources, we now turn our attention to the time component of TTT.

Part 5 - Being Present to New Futures

The Time element of TTT - the present to future orientation of great coaching.

But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

T.S Eliot Four Quartets

Being Present...new things happen in the moment – Be there.

One of the key distinctions of coaching compared to therapy is that the focus is on the here and now and the next steps to a compelling future rather than the exploration of the past.

In NLP one of the meta-program distinctions is between “through time” and “in-time”. Through time people see and experience time almost as though living in a wall-planner - time is seen as a “line” outside their body going from left to right. “In-time” people have time organized in front of and them (future) and behind them (past.) They are very much in the moment and are more in the experience of now. If they are in flow then they may be late for their next appointment and hence the saying “in-time” people are always late!

“Through-time” people can be “dissociated” from their experiences because time is “out-there”. It is often perceived to be an indicator of left brain thinking style.

Experiencing Time in a TTT Context- Creating time and presence? Productivity

Einstein time v Newtonian Time

How we experience time is vital and an important element of TTT is the way it seems to slow down time and make us more productive. Again this is because we create space and time through being present and being with the thinker. Again it allows the thinker to slow down and connect with the resources of the right brain, allowing for the time to be both more productive and considerably more effective.

A useful metaphor for exploring time in this context is provided by Gay Hendricks in the Big Leap. He splits our approach to time into Einstein and Newtonian time.

At the heart of Newtonian time is a dualistic split – we think or experience time as being “Out there” as a physical entity. It then can “come towards us” at startling speed when

we feel “overwhelmed” or deadlines “loom” and we “rush to catch up”. Notice how the language around this reflects this notion of time “out there” and a “thing” that comes at us or needs to be caught.

Interestingly work done by Meyer Friedman on “Type A” personalities suggests they are more prone to heart attacks because they have a marked sense of “time urgency” - their heart shows the wear of tear of racing and competing “against” time. One therefore wonders how working “with” time and being in charge of time – rather than the other way round - might make our lives and experience of time far more pleasurable.

Einstein Time is where we fully occupy our own space and gain the ability to generate more time through being fully “present”. Robert Dilts has commented that “when we are fully present we have all the time we need”. If we embrace the notion that we ourselves are the source of time it then exists “within” us - we have ownership and control over it. While time is “out there” rushing towards us we are victims of it.

The TTT coach being “present” is a crucial part of its success as it allows the connection for the thinker to do their best work. My sense and experience of TTT is that it promotes Einstein Time – by having Time to think we are no longer caught up in the rush of Newtonian Time. By slowing down and coming back to now and indeed coming back inside to think, we are now the source of our own time and in connection with our resources and back in control of time. And this may account for the productiveness of TTT session occurs because of what happens to the experience of time and the space it creates.

Again what is interesting in terms of right brain functioning is that the more we access the right brain the more in the “now” we are.

The Incisive Question – Future Pacing and the “As if” frame of NLP

The “As if” frame is where you act as if a desired outcome or state has already been achieved. It is sometimes simplified as “fake it until you make it”.

This enables us to use our imagination (right brain) to see ourselves in the future operating how we want to be, having overcome any constraints (left brain) in the way. Accordingly we enter into a world of possibility and imagination.

We then ask the explorer what they are thinking, doing or believing differently. In this context, they are acting “as if” they were successfully there. This is “future pacing” the client – taking them out into the future to experience it now. Running through the scenario actually creates an experience for the client of already having done it! Running the scenarios several times really gets the experience “in the muscle” as we

stack the success of the achievement. These “memories” then inform us as we undertake the path – and importantly we bring the energy of that success to it. This is used a lot in Solution Focus work and uses the notion of “proscopic” memory – we “remember” something that we have created in the future as the neural pathways have already experienced it (several times as we repeat the question.)

Interestingly the “As if” frame is one of the components that was identified by Grinder and Bandler (the founders of NLP) when modeling genius – the geniuses they studied had a number of things they did in common to achieve exceptional results. One of which was they operated “as if” they were doing something in a certain way and that brought about the results. This approach is intrinsically creative as we have to imagine the scenario - it turns a dream into a virtual reality, and acts as a bridge between dreamer and realist.

We can therefore see how the Incisive question “if you knew.....” is in effect the “as if” frame in action. Crucially it allows the imagination and right brain resources of the client to create a new blueprint for dealing with the issue and creating a compelling future– it is an act of “self-creation”. And it seems to me that TTT coaching brings a beautiful fusion of coaching as an act of love with the space and encouragement for “self-creation”. The “how would you” element is in essence a “future pacing” – inviting the client to explore doing the desired outcome and experiencing it accordingly. This really does create a strong sense of having the resources and capability to achieve the goal.

This creates powerful momentum and installs the belief that it can be done easily and the thinker has all the resources to “be” and “do” what is needed. The “how would you” element puts the Thinker strongly “at cause”. The unconscious mind has registered all the possibilities and change at this level is far more profound and long lasting. The unconscious mind will also apply the learning to other areas where relevant – hence the generativity of the process.

Another interesting element of the language of the Incisive Question is the way that it combines “options” and “procedures” metaprograms in one question. The Language and Behaviour Profile originally developed by Rodger Bailey and covered by Shelle Rose Charvet in “Words That Change Minds”, looks at the language associated with the metaprograms. Options people are always looking for new possibilities and ideas and will constantly want to improve on a system. Procedures people on the other hand believe there is a set way of doing things, want to do things properly and in the right sequence. They are interested in “how” we do things and not necessarily concerned with the “why”. Options people will often generate more and more ideas but never actually get things done. They are more interested in improving a system than following it.

The first half of the question “if you knew” combined with the true and liberating assumption in my view intrinsically creates options and possibilities. The “How would you....” then invites the client to create a “plan to follow”, a way of taking the next steps. This will ensure that the ideas can be put into action. Therefore combining a question that elicits “options” (generates ideas and possibilities) while having a question that will establish a “procedure” (“the how to”) for putting them into action, is an excellent way of appealing to both audiences and making sure things get done.

More specifically in the context of the way TTT engages the “whole brain”, the question appeals to both the left (procedures) and right (options) hemispheres which function differently. This is a key foundation of effective coaching – to get the client moving towards their desired outcome and knowing what to do next.

The other aspect of the Incisive Question is how it uses Ericksonian language. The combination of past and future tenses – which in effect scramble the time-line - was used a lot by Erickson. So he might ask “How surprised and delighted *will* you be when you are dealing with this easily and smoothly?” There is also a presupposition here that the change will take place successfully. Having “assumed” it will happen makes it far more likely that it will. It also fully sponsors the client and demonstrates how strongly we believe in them.

Therefore, the other element of the “as if” frame is the Thinking partner must be present with the client in their abundant future – so the partner is also acting “as if” they are there in the future with the thinker. This creates an important connection and synergy with the thinker and a powerful field of positive energetic change. The Incisive Question has all the synergy of a compelling future and a true and liberating assumption to help us achieve it – and the support and championing from someone who is with us and appreciates us as we celebrate it.

And the appreciation we express of the client is an important resource that reinforces our belief in them and celebrates the resources they have.

Conclusion

There are clearly many overlaps between NLP coaching (especially that which uses the techniques of Milton Erickson) and Time to Think. In particular the presupposition of the client having all the resources they need is common to both. The issue then becomes how to best access those resources. In Ericksonian Hypnosis those resources are located in the unconscious which is the storehouse of emotions and experiences and which has a wholly benign intent. The unconscious is solutions focused and focused on the positive.

Erickson argued the three keys for effective change work were the client must be i) “at cause” that is to say takes responsibility for what is happening and is not an “effect” of what is happening ii) is highly motivated with this being driven by their values and iii) future oriented. Erickson’s change work was then at an unconscious level through trance.

In TTT the structure of the session I believe closely follows this albeit in its own unique way. The emphasis on independent thinking is of course the same as being “at cause” – it is what we are responsible for and how “our” assumptions and thoughts are shaping us that matters. The true and liberating assumption and the incisive question are very much a forward looking mechanism. The questions then allow us to “draw” out solutions and ideas for the way ahead.

And I believe that common to both is the importance of creative right brain thinking that finds a path through to where and who we want to be in a generative act of self-creation. Time to Think ensures that the thinking is at a different level than the cognitive left brain approach that tends to loop and remain focused on the problem. By creating a dialogue between left and right brain the quality of thinking and the likelihood of effective action increases considerably.

The space and creativity allowed for by the process is generated through i) the nature and repetition of the question and ii) the presence of the thinking partner, listening from their core and sponsoring the thinker and iii) creating a field for exploration yielding fresh breakthroughs that can rarely be anticipated and continue to surprise and delight us.

TTT honours the individual and fully believes they are the expert. By creating space and time to be present and imagine a creative future, the experience is both powerful and empowering. In Erickson’s terms it puts the coachee “at cause” to ensure the first of Erickson’s three components is fulfilled. The emphasis on tools and techniques of other coaching methodologies can, if not sensitively handled, weigh the expertise in favour of the practitioner.