
Kluwer Mediation Blog

A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Self-Care and Improvement: Working with State (Part 2)

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For readers who are new, the “Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox” series is an ongoing series focused on using Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in our practice of amicable dispute resolution. The first section (with 6 entries) focused on rapport (the first of which can be found [here](#)).

This second section focuses on matters of self-care and personal improvement for mediators. For ease of reference and the convenience of readers, I will list in this and subsequent entries the series the entries in this section.

1. A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Self Care and Improvement: Preliminary Thoughts
2. A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Self Care and Improvement: Working with Physiology
3. A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Self-Care and Improvement: Working with State (Part 1)

The last entry, Part 1, basically introduced readers to what anchoring is, and how to create an anchor for yourself. Anchoring is simply stimulus response conditioning and the purpose of anchoring is to be able to access a resourceful state whenever we choose to and to be able to transfer it to desired contexts.

This entry builds on Part 1 to provide nuance and variation on anchoring. As such, I recommend reading that before this entry. In this entry, I want to discuss:

- Stacking Anchors
- Establishing Anchors with others
- Future Pacing

Stacking Anchors

So far, we've established a single anchor i.e. a particular state has been associated with a specific stimulus. Taking an example from the last entry, in my personal anchor, I associated the state of “unshakeable confidence” with the kinesthetic stimulus of touching my left little finger to my left thumb.

Stacking anchors essentially involves associating more states with the same anchor. Done well, one will essentially have created a “Super-Anchor”, the activation of which will lead to a powerful collage of states.

The steps to stack an anchor are:

1. Identify the desired states
2. Access the states (one at a time)
3. Link the anchor
4. Repeat steps 2-3 with each desired state
5. Break the State then Test the anchor

You will see that the process for stacking an anchor is essentially the same as that for establishing an anchor. The key points for establishing an anchor were covered in the last entry and I won't be repeating them here.

For the purposes of stacking anchors, it is important that the desired states to be stacked are complementary. For example, consider the following list of states:

- Confidence
- Humour
- Anxiousness
- Peace
- Alertness

From this list, it should be evident that confidence and humour are similar states and can complement one another. Similarly, alertness and peace can also be considered complementary. And even though confidence and humour on the one hand, and alertness and peace on the other, are not exactly the same, they are arguably similar enough such that they could probably be stacked on one another.

Anxiousness however, should stick out like a sore thumb in the company of the other four. It is in a different class of states such that stacking it with any of the other four will cause a clash and possibly lead them to cancel one another out.

Some of the more astute readers may be asking “Why would one want to anchor anxiousness?” There are reasons why we might wish to anchor a non-resourceful state but that will be answered in the next entry when we consider how to collapse anchors.

For the moment, the point is simple. Ensure that the states to be stacked are similar enough to be complementary.

Establishing Anchors with Others

So far, we've only explored setting a self anchor, and specifically a kinesthetic one. Self anchors do not have to be kinesthetic. They can be an external visual item (e.g. a picture or symbol or colour) or an external auditory item (e.g. a piece of music or a tone of voice). Self Anchors can also be internal visual items (remembered images) or internal auditory items (remembered voices or sounds).

This explains why we feel bad when we see someone we don't like or hear their voice. And it works the same way when we think of them. Test this for yourself. Think of someone you don't like. See their image and hear their voice and notice how you feel. By simply thinking of their image or their voice, we respond the same way as if they were present. This is why anchors can be

so powerful. It can disable us but we can also use them to our advantage.

We can also establish an anchor on behalf of your friend. In other words, you can anchor your friend's state to an external visual or auditory anchor such that when you activate that anchor, s/he re-accesses that state. It is sometimes desirable to do this because some people find it more effective to have someone else take them through the steps in the process.

The steps to establish an anchor for your friend is the same as that for establishing a self anchor. For ease of reference, the steps are:

1. Identify the desired state*
2. Identify a suitable anchor*
3. Access the state*
4. Link the anchor*
5. Break the State then Test the anchor
6. Repeat steps 3-5 until a strong anchor is established

The "*" next to steps 1 to 4 indicate some minor modification as this now relates to establishing an anchor with someone else. We will go through these briefly in turn.

1. Identify the desired state

This should be your friend's desired state for which you wish to establish an anchor. This state should be identified by your friend and should not be something imposed upon externally.

2. Identify a suitable anchor

This refers to the visual or auditory anchor or kinesthetic anchor that you will use to link to the desired state selected by your friend. Remember to make it unusual enough and replicable by you. For example, you could raise both your eyebrows or hold your fingers in a particular way to use as an external visual anchor. Humming a tune or adopting a particular tone of voice are examples of external auditory anchors. Examples of external kinesthetic anchors would be a touch on the shoulder or the middle knuckle of your friend's left hand.

3. Access the state

Your friend will need to access the state identified in Step 1. For illustration's sake, let's say this state is unshakeable confidence. Remember this needs to be fully experienced, vivid and associated. Sometimes, you may have to help them access that state by saying, for example:

"Can you remember a specific time when you felt unshakeable confidence? As you remember that time, I'd like you experience it as if you were there, see what you saw, hear what you heard, and feel the feelings of total unshakeable confidence."

4. Link the anchor

Have your friend give you a signal when they have fully associated into that state so that you can activate the anchor to link to this state. Your friend should also let you know when the state peaks so that you will know when to release the anchor.

If desired, your friend may also wish to activate his/her own self anchor at the same time. In fact,

this can then be the signal for you to activate your external anchor.

By way of completion, two final points to be made here.

First, when you start anchoring someone else, you will generally need them to provide you that signal to indicate that they have accessed the desire state. However, as you get more experience, you will find that there are observable physiological manifestations of the person accessing the state. For example, there might be a difference in their posture or skin colour or even facial tension. An NLP Practitioner is trained to develop the sensory acuity needed observe these physiological manifestations.

Second, it seems obvious but may need saying. If you are going to anchor your friend with an external visual anchor, then your friend needs to be able to see you. Their eyes need to be open and you need to be positioned such that you are in their field of vision.

Steps 5 and 6 remain the same and as with self anchoring, you may need to repeat the process a number of times to strengthen the anchor. Further, you can also stack anchors using this method. Simply make the appropriate changes to the process for stacking anchors.

Future Pacing

In the last entry, I recounted my experience of establishing my personal anchor for public speaking and activating it whenever I needed it. At some point, the context of public speaking became the anchor itself so that I did not need to activate the self anchor anymore. However, this presupposes that one remembers to, or has the presence of mind to activate the anchor in the appropriate context. Sometimes, one may be so caught up in the moment that one forgets to activate the anchor or that even an anchor exists.

One way around this is the process of future pacing. Future pacing essentially works in two ways. First, it is a form of mental rehearsal. Sports psychologists have known for the longest time that mentally rehearsing one's sport can be as effective actual practice. Hence "visualize the perfect swing" is common advice for tennis and golf players. Second, it connects the anchor to identified moments, events or context in which we need the anchored resource/desired state.

The process for Future Pacing are:

1. Identify a time in the future when the resource/desired state is needed
2. Imagine that time (vivid and associated)
3. Activate the anchor
4. Imagine completing that time successfully with the assistance of your resource/desired state
5. Repeat steps 1 to 4 with 3-4 more similar future times
6. Test

Testing involves thinking of similar future times without activating the anchor and noticing how the resource/desired state automatically presents itself. If it does not, or does not present strongly, then either the desired state was not a sufficiently strong resource, or the anchor was not properly set, or the future pacing was not properly carried out.

Needless to say, future pacing can be done by oneself or for another person.

That bring us to the end of this entry. As mentioned, the nuances and variations in this entry build on the last so it is important to have read that one first. I hope this has been helpful and that you will have fun practicing! Thanks for reading!


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