
Kluwer Mediation Blog

A Neuro-Linguist's Toolbox – Self-Care and Improvement: Working with State (Part 3)

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

Working with State: 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.

The following entry, Part 2, built on Part 1 to provide nuance and variation on anchoring by way of:

- Stacking Anchors
- Establishing Anchors with others
- Future Pacing

This entry, which is the last on Working with State, will deal with the process referred to in NLP as Collapsing Anchors. Collapsing Anchors builds on the techniques covered in Parts 1 and 2. As such, I recommend reading those entries before attempting the Collapsing Anchors process described here.

From this point, I will assume that readers are familiar with establishing an anchor and stacking anchors (both for oneself and with someone else), and the process of future pacing.

What is Collapsing Anchors? The basic process of anchoring allows us to associate a positive resource anchor with specified contexts such that the resource is automatically available in that

context.

Sometimes however, this association does not succeed because there is a strong negative state associated with that specific context, or a number of similar contexts are connected by the same strong negative state.

For example, if a person associates anxiety with a particular situation, and that anxiety is not limited to a specific instance but has generalized to many other contexts, then a simple resource anchor may not be sufficient to deal with the unresourceful feelings.

Collapsing Anchors involves overwhelming this generalized unresourceful state with a powerful positive anchor, thereby clearing the metaphorical space for the person to have new choices.

The steps for collapsing anchors are:

1. Identify and Anchor the negative state
2. Identify and Anchor/Stack the positive/resource states
3. Collapse Anchors
4. Test
5. Future Pace

I will go through each step briefly and highlight certain aspects that need particular attention. You can conduct the process of Collapsing Anchors on yourself, or assist someone else through it. Either way, I recommend reading through the steps first and then going through them again, performing each step.

1. Identify and Anchor the negative state

What is the negative state that you wish to collapse? In the example above, anxiety was the negative state but it could be any state that prevents you from peak functioning.

Sometimes, it is not easy to identify the negative state. In which case, it may be easier for the person to identify the context in which s/he feels unresourceful. For example, "Every time I encounter [situation X], I feel [negative state Y]".

Once the negative state has been identified, see if the person can identify the very first time s/he felt that negative state in that particular context. If the first time can be identified, then use that context to elicit the negative state for the purposes of anchoring. If the first time cannot be identified, then simply use whichever context that is most vivid for him/her to elicit the negative state for the purposes of anchoring.

Elicit the negative state by having the person remember that specific context in which s/he felt the negative state, and to associate into that memory. As the state peaks, set the anchor for the negative state.

At this point, break state by having the person think of something else or by walking around. Then test the anchor for the negative state. When done correctly, the negative state will return.

Once successfully done, break state again.

2. Identify and Anchor/Stack the positive/resource states

For us to successfully collapse the negative anchor, it is imperative that the positive anchor state is overwhelmingly powerful. As such, it is important to identify a list of positive resource states to anchor. You can find out from the person what powerful resource states might be helpful to them. You can also use the following possibilities:

- Feeling Powerful
- Feeling Loved
- Feeling Full of Energy
- Feeling Totally Confident
- Feeling like you can achieve anything

Once the list of positive states is identified, proceed to elicit each state, making sure they are intense and associated, and anchor them with an anchor that is different than the one used for the negative state. In other words, you will be creating a stacked anchor consisting of all the positive resource states you have identified.

Once you have completed stacking the anchor, break state and test the stacked anchor. Again, when done correctly, the collection of positive states will re-manifest in a powerful way.

Once successfully done, break state again.

3. Collapse Anchors

Once the single negative anchor and the stacked positive anchors have been set, we are ready to collapse them. This involves firing or activating both anchors at the same time. Both anchors are to be held until integration is complete.

What does integration mean? In order for us to be in any particular state, our nervous system has to be in a specific configuration. Some configurations are compatible and others are not. This is why, when stacking anchors, we need to select states that are compatible and complementary.

By collapsing anchors, we are essentially causing two very different configurations to exist at the same time and the stronger one will prevail. This is also why it is important for the negative anchor to be a single one and the positive anchor to be powerfully stacked. It would not do to have the negative one prevail!

This clash of configurations will manifest in one's physiology. It can be as dramatic as a flush in the skin, asymmetrical body movements or even a change in physiology. Or it can be something subtle like taking a deep breath.

Once integration is complete, while still holding on to the positive anchor, release the negative anchor. Continue to hold on to the positive anchor for 5 more seconds before releasing it.

Then, break state.

4. Test

There are 2 ways to test the success of the collapse anchors process. The first is to activate the negative anchor that was set. Either nothing should happen (indicating that the anchor had been "disconnected") or the positive states in the stacked anchor should manifest.

The second way to test is for the person to think of the situation or context that used to trigger the negative state. Similarly, either that memory will feel neutral or will have the positive states associated with it.

5. Future Pace

Have the person think of an event in the future, an unspecified time, where s/he might have responded in former way, and to notice what is now different. When the collapse anchors process is done correctly, s/he will not only notice that they feel and respond differently to that future event, but that they will also have more flexibility and choice in those feelings and responses.

Repeat the future pace 3-4 more times, into the future. A handy guide would be 1 week, 1 month, 3 months, and 1 year into the future.

That brings us to the end of this entry. While the process in this and the last two entries can be a little technical, with a little practice and experimentation, it can pay great dividends! Have fun and thank you for reading!

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