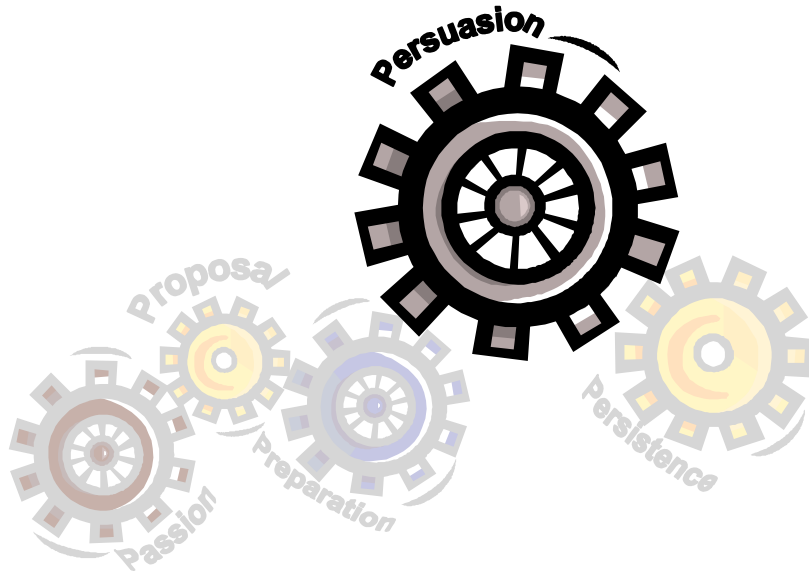


This chapter is taken from Bernard Ross's new book- written with Clare Segal on Influence to be published by Wiley in August 2008. It covers the material in the session. To find out more visit www.managementcentre.co.uk or

www.managementcenterusa.com.

Chapter 8: Speaking the language of influence



This chapter is designed to challenge your current perception about how donors and others use language. It is also designed to help you become a better fundraiser by developing greater flexibility in the way *you* use language – paying attention to your own and other's preferences.

We introduce a framework called Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) originally developed from an academic study of high-achieving professionals. The flexibility of these professionals in using language proved to be a key determinant of their success.

Linguistic flexibility is an essential complement to the flexibility in body language and voice explored in Chapter 7 *Building rapport*

Specifically we look at:

- **how do we adjust the words we use to share ideas in a way that others will find more acceptable?**
- **how do the kinds of words other people use help us to understand how they think?**

Why some professionals succeed more

In the early 1970s two academics at the University of Santa Cruz began a study of different professionals who were outstandingly successful in their chosen careers – salespeople, lawyers, and therapists. John Grinder, a linguistics professor, and Richard Bandler, an undergraduate specialising in computer programming, were interested in what made these professionals truly excellent. Their question was, “Why, with the same qualifications and experience as their peers, did some professionals achieve significantly better results – greater sales, higher acquittals, more ‘cures’?”

Bandler and Grinder interviewed and videotaped their subjects. The research established that they used – unconsciously or consciously – a number of the techniques discussed elsewhere in this book. For example, they were good at building rapport through body language and voice. But for these individuals to be as successful as they were, there had to be some *additional* level of skill.

Eventually the researchers identified the additional skill from a detailed linguistic analysis of video transcripts they made of their subjects in action. Their subjects didn’t only match the *body language* and *voice* of the person they successfully influenced, they also changed their own *spoken language* to match as well. It was this *extra* factor that made the difference. From this initial discovery Bandler and Grinder developed a body of work now called Neuro Linguistic Programming¹ (NLP).

¹ **Neuro** refers to the idea that the way we gather and interpret information is a function of neurological (brain) processes – taste, touch, smell, feeling, sight, and hearing. Although everyone uses all of these to some degree, most people have a clear ‘hardwired’ preference for one or two.

Linguistic refers to the fact that our language – the frequency with which we use specific kinds of words and phrases – gives a clue to the preferences we have for this neurological processing. By listening carefully to the kind of language someone uses you can gain an insight into the way they think.

Programming is the idea that although individual *brain preferences* are hardwired, we *can* adapt. These adaptations are like mini-additions to the programs in the brain’s bio computer. (Imagine you have a computer with PowerPoint but not

Put simply, NLP tells you that by paying attention to the words a person uses, you can gain essential information on how to best communicate with – and so influence – them.

For us as consultants NLP is a key tool we use in coaching fundraisers in high-level asks. We also use it specifically to improve the impact of case statements. (See Appendix 3: *Translating your case* for a worked example.)

Speaking the same language – sensory systems

Bandler and Grinder's work established that individuals tend to use language that reveals their preference for how their brain is gathering and processing information. These preferences are referred to in NLP jargon as *sensory systems* or *sensory modalities*.

Let's try an experiment to establish your preference – or preferences for different sensory systems. Take a minute to think about a meal in a restaurant you've had that you really enjoyed. Pause to recall a real situation for a moment and notice what comes to mind:

- is it a picture of the beautifully presented food, the sparkling glasses and cutlery, and the different coloured tea lights on each table?

or

- is it the smell and taste of the food, the feel of the crisp ironed tablecloths, and the pleasure of being in great company?

or

- is it the curious choice of muzak, the odd restaurant-language used on the menu, and the clatter of pots and pans as the kitchen door swings open?

You *may* have recalled all three with equal intensity. But more likely you remember one sensory experience much more strongly than the others. The strength of that recall provides an insight into your preferences. (Even if they all appeared to be equal the *sequence* they came in can help reveal your preference.)

Word. To read the Word document you need to upload the right program. So having different preferences to your donor needn't mean you can't communicate successfully with them – you simply need to 'upload' their preferences.)

Essentially there seem to be three main choices in how people take in, organise and express information – as pictures, feelings or sounds. In NLP-speak these three primary sensory systems are called:

- **Visual:** perceiving and expressing ideas primarily in pictures, images, colours and shapes. Such a person might ask for “Some clarification on what your organisation’s strategic focus is.”
- **Auditory:** perceiving and expressing ideas primarily through sounds and words. Such a person might ask for “The chance to spell out what the organisational objectives say about your strategy.”
- **Kinaesthetic:** perceiving and expressing ideas primarily through feelings, touch, taste and smell. Such a person might ask for “The chance to get a handle on what you’re keen to push ahead on strategically.”

Bandler and Grinder’s research showed that the ‘added extra’ their exceptional professionals had was *the ability to unconsciously identify and match another person’s language preference*. Moreover these high achievers were able to switch into another’s language style quickly and easily, and it was this ability that was largely responsible for their exceptional level of influencing success.²

It’s important to stress, however, that while most people have a *preference* for one of these systems when they’re communicating, everyone can *access* all of them.

How specifically can NLP help you fundraise?

NLP has developed over the years with many extraordinary claims made for it, especially concerning personal development. We’re not going to explore those. More relevant to fundraisers is that the essential benefits are simple:

- It shows you how to *build rapport* through *language* with very different or even difficult donors quickly and easily. It helps you to do this genuinely and authentically through

² Sometimes the system we favour is influenced by what we’re doing or when we’re doing it. For example, we’re more likely to experience a painting *visually* in the first instance. But our response – or the way we *recapture* or *recall* that experience later – may reflect less about what was illustrated on the canvas and more about how it made us ‘feel’ or what the artist was ‘trying to say’

curiosity

- It gives you an understanding of *why donors and even colleagues use words differently* to you and why these differences may create objections to your fundraising proposition.
- It also shows you how to deal with these concerns, if they do arise, in a systematic and practical way.
- It allows you to understand how *best to express your case* – adapting your language and even presentation style to ensure the fundraising or other message you transmit arrives effectively and as you intended.

Let's consider the three systems in a little more detail.

The visual person

If you primarily use the visual system you notice first what you *see*. You organise and remember your thoughts in images or *pictures*. As you talk you explain that you *see* challenges ahead, you plan to *focus on* priorities, and you want to *look at* the *big picture*.

At a work meeting you might notice the shape of the room, the mark a coffee mug has left on the table, and the curiously shaped earrings of the woman chairing the meeting. Afterwards you can picture where people were sitting and how they were sitting – leaning away from or into the group – and the diagram someone drew on the white board.

In a fundraising context you may need to sketch out the priorities for the donor, help them to get an overview of your organisation, look through some different options for future support, and show them photographs of the new building being used by beneficiaries that their donation has helped to open. Notice here how the references are to interaction through *pictures and images*.

The auditory person

If your primary system is auditory you first take in and organise information by what you *hear*. You might find yourself replaying arguments or speeches in your head, rehearsing your responses to difficult donor questions, and generally talking things over with

yourself. When you explain things to someone you may finish by saying “Does that *sound* right?’

At a work meeting you might find the office noise outside the room makes it hard to concentrate, and wondering on where the person with the unusual accent is from, you only half hear the chair’s summary of agreed action. Remembering the meeting, you may recall parts of the conversation verbatim and the tone of heavy sarcasm in the voice of one of your colleagues when they were asked to take a lead summing up the situation.

In a fundraising setting you might offer to spell out the organisational priorities, to explain the case without using gobbledegook or jargon, to talk through different options for future support, and to share written case studies where beneficiaries explain how they’ve gained from your help. Notice here how the references are to interaction through *sounds and words*.

The kinaesthetic person

If your preference is the kinaesthetic – or feeling – system, you’re likely to notice physical sensations when you first enter a room such as the temperature and the smell – of air freshener, if it’s used, or paper, or leather furniture. You may also be attuned to the emotional content of any situation. When you explain things, you talk about tackling the *tough issues first*, to *ironing out* the poor bits of a presentation, *working hard* to get on with someone.

At the work meeting you might notice how warm the room is and how uncomfortable the chairs are. Remembering the meeting you may recall how frosty the discussion got at a particular point and how it made you feel on edge. But the pastries, you recall, tasted delicious...³

With a donor you’ll stress that you know you’re asking for a challenging gift, and that

³ Note: smell – *olfactory*, and taste – *gustatory*, are often included within the kinaesthetic system because they are both strong experiences that produce strong feelings. For instance, is there a smell from your childhood – such as your mother’s perfume – that even just a whiff of today would still bring back strong emotions for you?

your cause has recently made some tough choices, and that beneficiaries responded warmly to the help the donor's generous donation provided. Notice here how the references are to interaction through *feelings and images*.

Working with language in a fundraising case

Later in this chapter we deal with the issue of working with donors 'live' in a conversation or in a presentation. But to improve your skills in switching systems you'll probably find it easier if you practice working on a written case – a formal explanation of your cause and need for money. (See Chapter 4 *Making your case for the structure and purpose of a case*.)

In our work with clients we've used this NLP language model to tailor donor-specific cases – or fundraising propositions – specially written to match the sensory preferences of an individual. The payoff is they're instantly more understandable and more acceptable to that individual.

It's as important and as respectful to translate your case into different system preferences as it is to translate your case into Spanish or Chinese for non-English speaking donors.

When you're writing a *general* case aimed at a range of donors you need to write it in a 'rich' way that uses *all* the modalities. You can use this approach in other influence settings. Imagine a speech by a CEO to her colleagues:

"We've had some challenging returns against budget for the last fiscal period. And these have created some medium-term challenges for our services – especially with regard to service programmes. Please be aware of the implications of these constraints on our cash flow and ultimately on the financial viability of the helpline service. Take appropriate action to avoid unnecessary expenditure or to minimise it where practical."

Now imagine the same speech using the principles of richer communication:

"I have to tell you we've made a significant loss in the last three months with income well below our fundraising projection. Those red numbers you can see at the bottom of the

budget mean we're all going to have to tighten our belts in the next 3-6 months. Let me say it really clearly. Everything you buy has to be paid for. If we can't sign the cheques to keep things going, that could mean phones ringing unanswered on the helpline. Whenever you can, don't spend money – beg or borrow, or at least ask colleagues if there's a cheaper way to do it.”

Which of these speeches conveys the information more clearly?

Unequal preferences

Not all the NLP language preferences are evenly distributed. Recent research suggests that:

- 35-45% of people have a predominantly *visual* preference
- 25-35% of people have a predominately *kinesthetic* preferences
- 5-15% of people have a predominately *auditory* preference

Other interesting data includes:

- There are no significant cultural differences worldwide – so these distributions above seem to hold in places as different as Africa and America.⁴
- There are no differences in gender – so women are not, as you might imagine, more kinaesthetic than men
- Some professions have higher densities of the styles – there are more auditory people in IT and finance

How to notice a donor's preference

Most people, including donors, don't communicate *exclusively* in one preference – what we're looking at (or talking about, or getting a feel for...) is *frequency* of language.

Below we've started a list of typical words and phrases that could provide you with cues for when someone is using each system. You should be able to add to it. But notice that you will probably find it easier to add to one or two of the columns because of your own preferences.

⁴ We've used NLP in our influence and fundraising training in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Germany, France, Holland Sweden, Italy Thailand and Malaysia. It seems to work everywhere and our own experience reinforces the general distribution data above.

<p>Visual system: typical words</p> <p>look; picture; focus imagine; visualise; reflect perspective; clarify; hazy; dim; colour</p>	<p>Auditory system: typical words</p> <p>say; accent; ring; clear; discuss; remark; silence; tell; volume; sound; resonate; articulate</p>	<p>Kinaesthetic system: typical words</p> <p>touch; handle; contact; rough; sensitive; stress; touch; grasp; bitter; smell; taste; impact</p>
<p>Visual: typical phrases</p> <p>we see eye to eye I see what you mean you have a blind spot at first glance looks pretty good to me showing the way forward future looks brighter</p>	<p>Auditory: typical phrases</p> <p>on the same wavelength that rings a bell with me listen to yourself talk a quick chat through music to my ears calling the tune talking up the future</p>	<p>Kinaesthetic: typical phrases</p> <p>really connected that fits with my feeling you're stuck on that idea scratch the surface control yourself sweet smell of success feeling good about the future</p>

Remember everyone uses a mix from all the systems⁵ – what you're looking for is a *preference*. So an auditory donor will simply say more words or phrases from that cluster – giving you a clue to their preference.

Chris at cross purposes

Chris is a very successful fundraiser. He is also very kinaesthetic. So he cares passionately about his cause and tends to work off a gut response with donors, sensing how they feel. His primary concern is to relax the donor and then work through any challenges. He hates going to prospect meetings with Jan. Jan is way too auditory. She always wants to rehearse their arguments beforehand. And she insists they divide up who will answer which question if the donor asks it. She takes lots of documentation with

⁵ Some words and phrases don't really fit into this model either because they don't have a preference attached to them, or you can't identify one. Such language is called *digital*. Examples would be words like analyse, answer, communicate, remember, system, use. Also some phrases are simply clichés and don't reflect a real sensory choice. Examples might include "I hear what you say" or "Back to basics."

her, determined to have access to all the facts in response to any quibble.

One day they both have a dreadful meeting with a donor, Alan, who insists they clarify their budget and show him the difference his gift could make. He can't see how he fits in to the organisational picture. (Alan prefers visual.)

Alan, Chris and Jan probably don't have any fundamental disagreements. They probably all want to achieve the same thing. But they are struggling to even *begin* to communicate because each is working exclusively in their own sensory preference and not being very flexible.

How to *quickly* assess a donor's preference

You may be concerned that you'll find it hard to pick up a donor's preference. Or at least that you'll find it hard to assess their preference *and* concentrate on the content of your message at the same time.

Fear not. The answer is to focus on discovering their preference *before* you get to the *important* part of the discussion. Use the 'ice breaking' time at the start of any meeting or phone call to good effect. Classic conversation openers like "How are you?" "How was your journey?" "Did you have a good holiday?" and so on are not simply idle chatter. For the excellent influencer, it's a critical time for gathering key information about the donor.

For example, visiting someone in their house and being shown into their study you can start a conversation by remarking "This is a great study!" Notice that their response will often take one of three forms:

- *"Thank you... I love the view of the garden from here and I find I can bring real clarity to my thought."* (visual)
- *"Thank you... it's quiet here with the garden and no traffic – so I can hear myself think."* (auditory)
- *"Thank you... I get the scent of the flowers when it's warm, and when I want a break the garden helps me to relax and sort out what's really important for me to get to grips with."* (kinaesthetic)

Even before you step into someone's office or home, you can pick up valuable information. Read an email they've written giving you instructions on how to find them. Again, you'll notice some differences in the way people give directions:

- “We're opposite the bank on the corner. There's a car park entrance on the left, though you may have to look hard for a parking space. As soon as you walk back out of the car park you'll see our bright red 'Big Co' sign.” (visual)
- “We're near a very noisy bar. Ask the parking attendant to tell you where there's a parking space if you have to. The words 'Big Co' are on the wall in red nearby – they caused a lot of comment when they were put up – that's where we are.” (auditory)
- “It's not an easy place to find – and sometimes the car park is crowded. But everyone knows our offices and the red 'Big Co' sign is a sure way to guide you through the confusion.” (kinaesthetic)

Other clues to language preferences

Apart from the words that people use, there are other clues to a person's preferences you can look for. For example:

- people who are *visual* tend to speak quickly, use a lot of gestures and breathe shallowly and in the upper part of their body
- people who are *auditory* often have very even or melodious voices and breathe evenly with few gestures – though they often 'tap' in rhythm as they speak
- people who are *kinaesthetic* are likely to speak more slowly, with pauses between ideas. They look down a lot as they speak and breathe from the bottom of their stomach

For more on these clues an especially how eye movement can help you, see Appendix 1 *Eye accessing cues*.

Curiosity and flexibility

It's easy to think of NLP as merely a way to analyze people and make quick judgments about them. But to be really skillful in using it, and to build rapport generally, you need to be genuinely *curious* about people. This involves not only noticing their preferences but also how and when (and in what circumstances) they change their preference. It's only then that you can begin to build *language rapport* with them, to balance your body

language and voice rapport (see Chapter Six *Building Rapport*).

Being curious also helps you to take the time to check out that your idea or proposition has arrived with the prospective donor in the way you intended, and that they fully understand it.

Three key skills

A curious person is one who's openly and constantly searching for information about others. If you're a truly curious person, you'll begin by being curious about *yourself*: "Why did I do that?" "How do I know that?" "Why do I think that?" And you'll begin to notice why you have certain kinds of preferences and how these affect the way you work, think and make decisions. It's then easier to be curious about others.

Apart from general curiosity, you need access to *three key skills* to be successful in building language rapport:

- *diagnosis*: this is the ability to *accurately* understand and analyse another person's preferred way of thinking and communicating – their 'style'. Remember this is not the same in every situation – so you need to notice changes.
- *flexibility*: it's not enough just to know what someone's style is. You've got to be flexible enough to change and adapt your own style and approach to match theirs. And you have to be able to do it skilfully.
- *outcome*: you need to know what you want as an end result in any given situation – a donation, a new perspective, an agreement to a change. The more specific the outcome the more easily you can direct your language.

To be a really successful fundraising influencer, you need to develop your flexibility with the systems that are outside your own preference, and be able to use them in 'live' situations. This is much the same as a top tennis player practicing on different surfaces in order to adapt their game more readily to play on grass or clay. The secret, as always, is practice!

You can develop your flexibility in a number of ways:

- Listen to the radio or the TV carefully and with curiosity. Notice who speaks in one of the systems almost exclusively and who swaps between them. Often people speaking

'off the cuff' – that is, taking part in live reporting or impromptu interviews where the interviewee is not choosing their words very carefully – can display a preference very strongly. Notice how quickly you can spot changes.

- Set yourself the exercise of translating the same speech with the same message to three people in an audience who each uses one system exclusively. Imagine each is a commercial sponsor and you need to explain the benefits of supporting your charity concert. How might you share a benefit like brand awareness in each of the three systems? (“Can’t you just see your company name up there in lights?” “Won’t you feel proud at the connection of your company’s logo with a joyful evening?” “Can you hear the applause and people talking about what a great company you are?”)
- Choose an object such as a car, or a flower – or a fundraising technique such as a bequest or a direct mail. Without mentioning exactly what it is, describe its characteristics in one sensory system to someone, while they try to guess what it is. How difficult is it if you’re not using *your own* preferred system? Was it easier for them to guess what it was when you used *their* preferred system?

Over time you’ll find that switching ‘live’ between systems becomes easier – but, as we’ve said, it takes practice.

How do we communicate with lots of people at once?

The discovery that people have preferences for different systems has implications for all one-to-one fundraising and influencing. But how do you deal with a big crowd – such as a conference, or a pitch to a corporate board – where there are lots of people all with their own preferences? You obviously don’t have time to go round asking each of them questions and responding in their preferred modality.

The answer is you have to learn to use all three systems at once.

Many inspiring communicators do this naturally. Martin Luther King Jr. understood *unconsciously* how to communicate his message to every one of the 250,000 civil rights protestors. It was 1963 – well before Bandler and Grinder’s research.

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self evident; that all men are created equal. (auditory

– Dr King is consciously quoting from the Declaration of Independence)

“I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. (visual)

“I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.” (kinaesthetic)⁶

Martin Luther King’s speech ensures that every sense is stimulated. It:

- paints pictures and draws images
- asks us to hear the voices of others
- appeals to our sense of smell and of taste and to our feelings

Dr King made sure he communicated with – influenced – *everyone* in the crowd.

This skill goes even further back. Consider the following quotation from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. It’s the untried boy king’s rallying cry on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt. He has to inspire *all* the troops to follow him against an exceptionally strong enemy. And to do that, he has to engage all the sensory systems, and deliver his rallying cry in a way that touches and engages all the troops.

“This day is called the Feast of Crispian. (auditory)

He that outlives this day and comes safe home (kinaesthetic)

Will stand a-tiptoe when this day is named

And rouse him at the name of Crispian. (kinaesthetic + auditory)

He that shall see this day and live t’old age

Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours (visual + kinaesthetic)

And say, “Tomorrow is Saint Crispian.” (auditory)

Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars (visual)

And say, ‘These wounds I had on Crispin’s day.’” (auditory)

You have probably notice that great writers and orators through the ages have used this

technique unconsciously. The great news is that, thanks to NLP, we can now use it – maybe not as skilfully, but still with purpose.

Summary

Research has demonstrated that high achievers in many fields partly owe their results to the quality of their communications skills. This research has been codified in a framework called Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP.)

This framework suggests that the pattern of words you use offers an insight into how the brain, your bio-computer, is processing and storing information.

This NLP framework establishes that there are three main language preferences or sensory system that individuals use to communicate. These are:

- visual – mostly pictures and images
- kinaesthetic – mostly feelings and touch
- auditory – mostly sounds and words

Everyone has access to all three systems, but most people have a preference for one or two.

As a fundraiser and influencer you have to be *curious* to be effective – first noticing other people’s linguistic preferences and then being flexible enough to match them. By swapping between these you can communicate with all kinds of donors and colleagues. And if you communicate more effectively you’re more likely to be able to influence.

Any fundraising proposition or case for support is most likely to be written – initially – in the system or modality preferred by the writer. The person who has to receive and act on the information – for example, the donor – may not share the same preferences. So for a case to be successful with the widest possible audience it needs to be ‘translated’.

- If you’re going to be with a specific individual you’d like to influence, you need to make sure your message is targeted in a way that directly appeals to them.

- If you're going to present your ideas to a number of individuals you'd like to influence, you need to make sure your message is created in all three systems to achieve maximum reach.

Great authors have always done this, so we can learn from them. But for mere mortal fundraisers, the secret is *practice*.