

Michael Breen

Behavioural Patterning is part of the essence of NLP

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

Having trained with Bandler, Grinder and many other NLP creators and early developers, Michael Breen runs NLP trainings (for people becoming NLP professionals as well as businesses) and offers consultancy and coaching.

I did a couple of days' Behavioural Patterning training with him earlier this year to deepen my understanding of the Meta Model. It was illuminating in terms of helping me address several areas of my work and life.

'Behavioural Patterning is part of the essence of NLP,' says Michael. 'It's right there in the method and it's how the method came about. The ability to model by paying attention to the sequence and putting things in different contexts to allow you to duplicate or build an alternative or create something from that.'

'It's an excellent way to avoid the story when you work with people who are very good at what they do. Particularly for someone who's achieved mastery, they're long past the stage where they're reflecting on it.'

He cited Virginia Satir's work, long held up as one of the inspirations for NLP. 'Her own descriptions were her stories about what she did, not necessarily what she did. Richard Bandler and John Grinder, when they were uncovering her process, were not aware or interested in presupposition and predicate calculus and all the things that we study. She was a family therapist who worked with her gut. If you want to learn from that you need to work out what she actually did. She had a superb intuitive grasp of presupposition, syntax, grammar and language at a level Milton Erickson had.'

'With the NLP method, if you're willing to do the work, you're able, if in the presence of someone who has tremendous skill, to cut through the story. This happens, then that happens and you get the result.'

When I'd done his training, I'd looked at my unconscious consumption of crisps. While I didn't do the 'eat three then pause for 30 seconds and eat as many as you want' he prescribed, I realised that I'd been using them as a substitute for alcohol (I quit drinking in 2001). I made other changes such as eating a small bowl of them later on in the day when I'd finished work and to turn off the telly and really enjoy them. This has, for the most part, really helped me cut down (on occasion, I've thought, 'It's been long enough, I can eat them in front of the telly' and typically then end up eating more that evening) and the fact that it came from simply looking, in detail, about what I'd been doing still astonishes me.

“If you do the work, you're able to cut through the story and get the result”

'This is fantastic,' he said encouragingly, when I told him. 'Behavioural Patterning brought you back to reality. In that workshop, in the work we do, it sits in the first third of the model. We went around the narrative, purely to the level of what are you doing, not why you were doing it. We tracked it down and that's what Behavioural Patterning is about. We are tracking what is actually going on, not what we imagine is going on. Not what we assume is going on. Not some philosophy about it.'

'What's important here is applying it to a process of change, without going deep into your background, without talking about mummy and daddy and toilet training. We were able to do processes. In terms of the workshop, we looked for the least variable part of the pattern. In older NLP speak, we reintroduced conscious purpose into an unconscious process and that is the fundamental of change. You get in the way of the habit. You get between the habit and the trigger and you add something that doesn't quite work.'

'We weren't trying to force the behaviour stop. No intent to make you do anything at all. Because you had an interest and purpose in mind [cutting down so they remain a daily treat but not the overindulgence they'd become], three at a time, putting in a break.'

'It makes it possible to make a better decision. You also learn a lot about yourself in terms of the stories you tell. We do a lot of things in order to try to adapt and survive this insane situation that we call life. Certain types of behaviour become criminalised. Some models give people a new problem! When people accept the model is so, they try to fit themselves into the model. They end up using material intended to help people change to accuse, blame people.'

'My life is built around having recognised early on that I was not going to be able to pursue the one job for life. My brother followed the career but I was interested in the pursuit of cool, around human behaviour, human spirit. As an organisational consultant, I get to see how people actually think. It's equally amusing and horrifying. I chose to take interesting paths rather than the one that my father would have preferred. I've had a varied life that's taken me all over the world, working with large organisations, small organisations, royalty, celebrities, regular people like me and you. I organise my life around projects.'



“Get between the habit and the trigger and you add something that doesn't quite work”





One such project was writing a screenplay. 'In July 2013, I got a call from Murray Lachlan Young, known in the 1990s as the "million pound poet" because he'd signed a one million pound contract with EMI. He's written plays, musicals and screenplays and had just got a call from Kevin Allen (Keith's brother and Lily's uncle) saying he's doing a new version with Rhys Ifan of *Under Milk Wood*. He was interviewing for writers and said he wouldn't do it without me. I said, "What? Are you mad? What do you want me for? This is your domain, poetry, worldviews, the esoteric, spiritual, all of that", but I went to a flat in west London, had a meeting, we got on like a house on fire, and decided to take a look.

'Thomas wrote for radio and previous adaptations tried to illustrate those words. It's highly episodic and a difficult piece to put on stage or screen. We wanted Thomas's words to be heard on film so this version of *Under Milk Wood* is a dream. We were asked to write a visual screenplay and the images and storyline hung together as a dream. It was shocking to see the images that came out of my imagination.

'I've known Murray since the 1990s. In the late 1990s, I helped him out with how his work flowed, helping him with his strategies. Take the patterns and the strategies that you elicit, pick a goal that is similar to the person you're working with and you apply it to that. I came back to him saying, "Here's a poem I wrote." He read it and said, "This is amazing." So we started doing some workshops on creativity and using some of those strategies.

“If they've read something on the internet, people think they know it”

'The NLP model is not a thing that I sell to clients, I use them as an operating system. No matter what training you go on, the time you spend in that classroom, is when you are introduced to the ideas but then you absolutely must create the opportunities for yourself to practice.

'If they've read something on the internet, people think they know it but any kind of goal worth achieving requires work. Behavioural Patterning condenses the learning curve right down. Behavioural patterning is how you go about modelling."

He told me about a company where three people were outperforming everyone else. 'You look at the organisation, the systems, the structures in place.' The three people were in different locations but two of them had been trained by the third. 'He was old school and had the most extraordinary client contacts I've ever seen. He'd go through them when he had time, thousands of business cards, and think about his customers. He took skills he'd learned in the 1950s and taught them to the people he trained. With Behavioural Patterning and modelling technology, he was able to capture exactly what could be transferred with relative ease.

'The process of development and growing is not about knowing everything up front, but going into the world and finding out.' ■

