Chapter **1**

Getting to Know Neuro-linguistic Programming

Here's a little Sufi tale about a man and a tiger.

A man being followed by a hungry tiger, turned in desperation to face it and cried, "Why don't you leave me alone?" The tiger answered, "Why don't you stop being so appetizing?"

In any communication between two people, or in this case between human and beast, more than one perspective always exists. Sometimes people just can't grasp that fact because they don't know they need to change their behavior to communicate in a way that gets them what they want.

Neuro–linguistic programming (NLP) is one of the most sophisticated and effective methodologies currently available to help you communicate effectively.

NLP centers on communication and change. NLP teaches about sensory awareness (more about this in Chapter 5), which, put simply, is paying attention to the cues people display when they communicate with you, such as a raised eyebrow, a sudden pause, or a change in voice tone. Communication isn't just about what you say; it's also about how others respond. By noticing those responses, you can adapt in the moment and build stronger connections. You also become more aware of your own habits and responses, which means you can focus on what helps you succeed and let go of what holds you back. In today's climate of rapid change, flexibility is essential. It gives you more choices in how you respond to people and situations, which in turn enables you to exert greater influence over the outcomes you create (see Chapter 2 for more on presuppositions and flexibility).

So welcome to the start of the journey. We start by giving you a quick taster of the key NLP themes in this chapter.

Introducing NLP

All able-bodied humans are born with the same basic neurological system.

Your *neurological system* transmits the information you receive from your environment through your senses to your brain. Your *environment*, in this context, is everything external to you but also includes your organs, such as your eyes, ears, skin, stomach, and lungs. Your brain processes the information and transmits messages back to your organs. In response, your eyes, for example, may blink. The information can also create emotions, and you may cry or laugh. In short, your thought processes make you behave in a certain way.

Your ability to do anything in life — whether swimming the length of a pool, cooking a meal, or reading this book — depends on how you respond to the stimuli on your nervous system. Therefore, much of NLP is devoted to discovering how to think and communicate more effectively within yourself and with others.

The term *neuro-linguistic programming* breaks down as follows:

>> **Neuro** concerns your neurological system. NLP is based on the idea that you experience the world through your senses and translate sensory information into thought processes, both conscious and unconscious. Thought processes activate the neurological system, which affects your physiology, emotions, and behavior.

>> **Linguistic** refers to the way you use language to make sense of the world, capture, and conceptualize experience and communicate that experience to

others. In NLP, linguistics is the study of how the words you speak and your body language influence your experience.

>> **Programming** draws heavily from learning theory and addresses how you code or mentally represent your experiences. Your personal programming consists of your internal processes and strategies (thinking patterns) that you use to make decisions, solve problems, learn, evaluate, and get results. NLP shows you how to recode your experiences and organize your internal programming so that you can get the outcomes you want.

TRY THIS

To see this process in action, begin to notice how you think. Imagine a hot summer day. You're standing in your kitchen and holding a lemon you've taken from the fridge. Look at the outside of it — its yellow, waxy skin with green marks at the ends. Feel how cold it is in your hand. Raise it to your nose and smell it. Mmmm. Press it gently and notice the weight of the lemon in the palm of your hand. Now take a knife and cut it in half. Hear the juices start to run and notice that the smell is stronger now. Bite deeply into the lemon and allow the juice to swirl around in your mouth.

REMEMBER

Words have the power to trigger your salivary glands. Hear the word *lemon*, and your brain kicks into action. The word tells your brain that you have a lemon in your hand. You may think that words only describe meanings, but in fact, they create your reality — a concept we explore throughout this book.

Providing a few quick definitions

NLP can be described in various ways. The formal definition is that NLP is "the study of the structure of your subjective experience." Here are a few more ways of answering the elusive question of "What is NLP?"

>> The art and science of communication

>> The key to learning

>> The way to understand what makes you and other people tick

>> The route to getting the results you want in all areas of your life

>> The way to influence others with integrity

>> The manual for your brain

>> The secret of successful people

>> The method of creating your own future

>> The way to help people make sense of their reality

>> The toolkit for personal and organizational change

Considering where NLP started and where it's going

NLP began in California in the early 1970s at the University of Santa Cruz. Richard Bandler, a master's level student of information sciences and mathematics, and Dr. John Grinder, a professor of linguistics, studied people who they considered to be excellent communicators and brilliant at helping their clients change. They were fascinated by how some people defied the odds to get through to so-called difficult or very ill people where others failed miserably to connect.

Thus, NLP has its roots in a therapeutic setting thanks to three world-renowned psychotherapists studied by Bandler and Grinder: Virginia Satir (developer of Conjoint Family Therapy), Fritz Perls (the founder of gestalt psychology), and Milton H. Erickson (largely responsible for the advancement of clinical hypnotherapy). In their work, Bandler and Grinder also drew upon the skills of linguists Alfred Korzybski and Noam Chomsky, social anthropologist Gregory Bateson, and psychotherapist Paul Watzlawick. Bandler and Grinder's work was happening at the time as their computer science contemporaries Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak were setting up Apple Inc., so programming concepts were gaining people's awareness.

In the 1980s, Grinder became dissatisfied with some early coding work done in collaboration with Bandler, which he now refers to as Classic Code. Together with Judith DeLozier, Grinder initiated some new models known as New Code (documented in his book *Whispering in the Wind* [J&C Enterprises, 2001]) and he continues this work today with his partner Carmen Bostic St. Clair.

Since those early days 50 years ago, the field of NLP has exploded to encompass many disciplines in many countries around the world. New great teachers and practitioners in NLP are still emerging today to build on the work of the founders. Established teachers are collaborating with colleagues in other disciplines, such as neuroscience, education, and medicine to further the application of their work.

So what's next for NLP? The discipline has certainly traveled a long way from Santa Cruz in the 1970s, and since we wrote the first edition of this book, the interest in NLP shows no sign of waning. Some of the early pioneers of NLP, such as Robert Dilts, are now celebrating 50 years of working to transform the lives of with thousands of people worldwide. New neuroscientific knowledge offers some scientific explanation for many ideas that NLP practitioners have developed more intuitively. In particular, the world of coaching is heavily influenced by NLP. Today, NLP applications are being used by doctors, nurses, taxi drivers, salespeople, therapists, coaches, accountants, teachers, animal trainers, parents, workers, retired people, and teenagers alike. In Chapter 21, we list just a few such practical applications.

Each generation takes current ideas, sifts through and refines them, adds knowledge discovered through its own experiences, and communicates it in its own way. Information about NLP is now shared across social media platforms and apps such as LinkedIn, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook — channels that were unheard of in the 1970s and are constantly evolving. The explosion of artificial intelligence (AI) will no doubt bring change to NLP that we cannot yet envisage.

Much of the development of NLP today focuses on the applications rather than the core models; people who are experts in one field incorporate NLP tools and take them into their own field. Collaboration is key to generating new ideas and applications. Given that NLP encourages new thinking and new choices and acknowledges the positive intention underlying all action, all we can say is the future remains bright with possibilities. The rest is up to you.

Offering a note on integrity and evidence

You may hear the words pseudoscience, integrity, and manipulation associated with NLP, and so we want to put the record straight now. NLP has never purported to be a scientific discipline. Human change is a highly subjective area that depends on many fluctuating variables, from the state of the person to the skill of the practitioner that they work with. Many practitioners have reported success using NLP techniques to help individuals overcome challenges, including trauma. Clients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have found NLP interventions extremely helpful. The proof of NLP in education, health, and industry programs lies in the lasting change it creates for the client, working as it does from the inside thinking to the outward behavior.

NLP offers tools and techniques, which, like hammers and chisels, can be used for good or ill. The way that the overwhelming majority of practitioners and coaches use NLP is in service of their clients to achieve positive outcomes. You influence others all the time. When you do so consciously to get what you want, the question of integrity arises. Are you manipulating others to get what you want at their expense? Are you using NLP for good or just for personal gain?

REMEMBER

To make sure you behave with integrity, ask yourself a simple question: what is my positive intention for the other person in this interaction? If your intention is to benefit the other party (perhaps in a sales situation), you have integrity — a win-win situation. If your intention is to benefit yourself alone, you're manipulating the other person. When you head for win-win outcomes in your dealings with other people and organizations, you're on track for success. And always bear in mind that what goes around comes around!

Professional bodies such as the Association for Neuro-linguistic Programming (ANLP) work tirelessly to set and uphold international standards and undertake due diligence on the qualifications of their members. Always check out the training and bona fide qualifications for any professional for any organization that you engage with.

Encountering the Pillars of NLP: Straight Up and Straightforward

NLP is based on four pillars (check out Figure 1-1). These four foundations of the subject can be described as follows:

» **Rapport:** How to build a relationship with yourself and others is probably the most important gift that NLP gives you. Given the pace at which most humans live and work, one big lesson in rapport is how you can say no to all the requests for your time and still retain friendships or maintain professional relationships. To find out more about rapport — how to build it and when to break it off — head to Chapter 6.

» **Sensory awareness:** Have you noticed how when you walk into someone else's home, the colors, sounds, and smells are subtly different from yours? Or that a colleague looks worried when he talks about his job. Maybe you notice the color of a night sky or the fresh green leaves as spring unfolds. Like the famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, you begin to notice that your world is so much richer when you pay attention to all your senses. Chapter 5 describes the power of your sensory perceptions and how you can use your natural sight, sound, touch, feelings, taste, and smell to your benefit.

» **Outcome thinking:** We use the word *outcome* a lot throughout this book. This term relates to thinking about what you want instead of getting stuck in a negative problem mode of thinking. The principles of an outcome approach can help you make the best decisions and choices to set you up for the future — whether those decisions are about what you're going to do on the weekend, how you're going to run an important project at work, or in discovering the true purpose of your life. Head to Chapter 4 for tools that will enable you to get the results you deserve.

» **Behavioral flexibility:** This term means discovering how to do something different when what you're currently doing isn't working. Being flexible is key to practicing NLP, and you can find related tools and ideas in every chapter. We help you find fresh perspectives and build these into your repertoire. Information, exercises, and examples on how you can maximize your own flexibility can be found throughout the book.
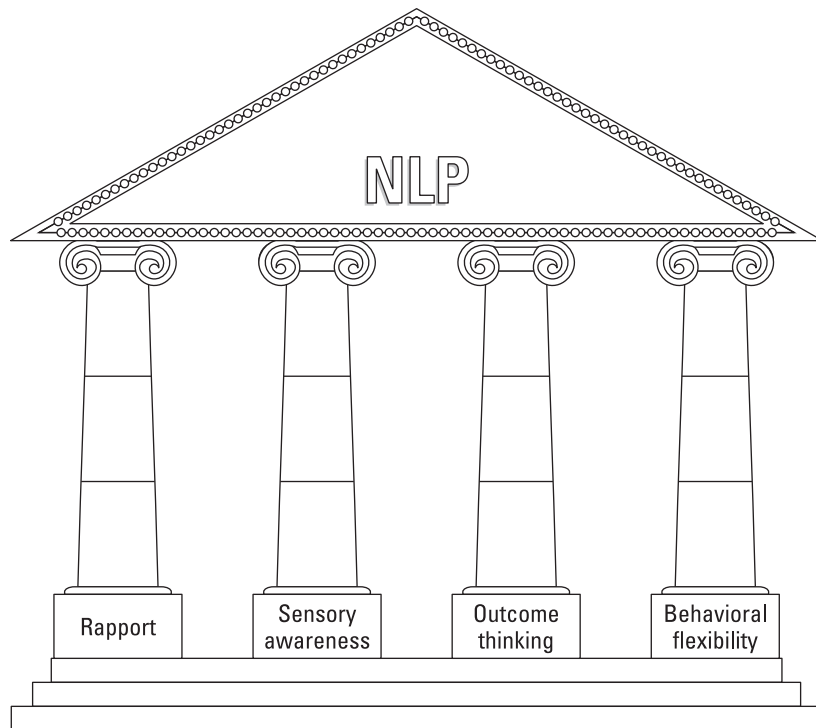
FIGURE 1-1:
The four
pillars of NLP.

Here's an example of what these four pillars may mean to you in an everyday event. Suppose you order a software package for storing the names, addresses and phone numbers of friends or clients. You load it onto your computer, use it a few times and then it mysteriously stops working. A bug is in the system, but you've already invested many hours in installing it and entering contacts' details. You phone the supplier and the customer service people are unhelpful to the point of rudeness.

You need to employ all your *rapport*-building skills with the customer service manager before anyone listens to your complaint. You need to *engage your senses* — particularly your ears as you listen carefully to what the supplier says — and notice how to control your feelings and decide on your best response. You need to be very clear about your desired *outcome* — what do you want to happen after you make your complaint? For example, do you want a full refund or replacement software? And, finally, you may need to be *flexible in your behavior* and consider different options if you don't achieve what you want the first time.

Discovering Models and Modeling

As we describe in the earlier section "Considering where NLP started and where it's going," NLP began as a model of how people communicate and grew out of studies of some great communicators. The concept of models and modeling is thus at the heart of NLP.

The NLP premise begins as follows: If you can find someone who's good at something, you can then model how that person does that thing and learn from him. You can discover how to model anyone you admire — top business leaders or sports personalities, the waitress at your favorite restaurant, or your hugely energetic personal fitness trainer. You can find out more about modelling in Chapter 19.

Employing the NLP communication model

The NLP model describes how you process the information that comes at you from the outside. According to NLP, you move through life not by responding to the world around you, but by responding to your model or map of that world. The model is explained with examples in Chapter 8.

A fundamental assumption of NLP is that "the map is not the territory" and that each individual has different maps of how the world operates. This insight means that you and another person may experience the same event and yet do so differently.

Imagine that you go to a party — you have a good time, meet lots of friendly people, enjoy good food and drink, and perhaps do a bit of dancing. If we ask you and another guest to recount what happened at the party, however, you'd each tell a different story. That's because your internal representations of that outside event are different from the event itself: "The map is not the territory."

Alternatively, picture being suddenly transported to a country with a completely different culture on the other side of the world. The thoughts and assumptions that your new-found neighbors construct regarding how life operates will be very different to your own. NLP encourages collaboration between diverse groups of people to generate new thinking. You'll experience the power and possibilities of many different perspectives at any live NLP training program or conference with a broad mix of delegates.

REMEMBER

NLP doesn't change the world — it simply helps you change the way that you observe, perceive, and react to both the world around you and the inner workings of your own mind. NLP allows you to create a clearer, more detailed map of your internal experience — helping you understand the *how* and *why* behind your thoughts and behaviors so you can become more effective at what you want to

achieve. It gives you an understanding of patterns of behavior so that you can consciously stop doing what gets in your way and begin doing more of what helps you achieve your goals and desires.

John, an architect, rents expensive office space in a city center. He used to moan that the offices weren't cleaned to a high enough standard, the staff were lazy, and the office manager wouldn't address the problem. When we met John in his office, we discovered that he worked in chaos; every available surface was covered in paperwork, and he clearly never tidied things up. He frequently worked late and was grumpy if interrupted, so the cleaners came and went without daring to disturb him.

Through coaching, John came to recognize that he hadn't considered anyone else's point of view or noticed what a difficult task the cleaners faced trying to clean his office around him. His map of reality was completely different from that of the office manager and the cleaners. He subsequently built a new map that incorporated the reality of what life in the office was like for his colleagues, and he became more considerate towards them. By changing this one map of his experience, other aspects of his life also improved, and he grew more aware of the effect of his general untidiness on others. For example, he now feels more comfortable inviting girlfriends to his neater flat.

Modeling excellence

Modeling excellence is a theme much discussed in this book because so much of NLP is future focused and applied to creating change for the better — whether that's a better-qualified individual, a better quality of life, or a better world for the next generation.

The NLP approach is that you learn best by finding someone else who already excels at whatever you want to learn. By modeling other people, you can break your discovering into its component parts. This perspective is empowering, and it's an encouragement to convert large, overwhelming projects into lots of small ones and discover people who've already been there and can show you the way. More of this in Chapter 19.

Using NLP to Greater Effect

As you discover throughout this book, NLP is about increasing your options instead of being restricted by your experience and saying, "This is the way I do things, and this is how it has to be." To benefit from NLP, you need to be open to

questioning and challenging your norms, as well as allowing others to question and challenge you about your beliefs and patterns of thinking and behavior. Being challenged on your beliefs and patterns can feel uncomfortable, but you have a choice for how you handle it: Set your ego aside, reflect on what's being offered, and choose to adapt or dismiss it. This section provides a few tips on how to adopt this mindset.

Understanding that attitude comes first

Essentially, NLP is about developing a positive attitude to life and its possibilities rather than dwelling on problems (although being curious about problems and obstacles is part of the learning journey). NLP provides the necessary tools and support to help you change anything about your life that doesn't reflect who you want to be today. So much more is possible when you have the mindset and attitude to support your success; you tap into your natural human resourcefulness. If your attitude doesn't support you in living a richly rewarding life, then consider changing it. Changing your mindset and attitude really does change your life.

REMEMBER

Many people spend a lot of time looking at the negatives in their lives — how they hate their jobs or don't want to smoke or be fat. By conditioning yourself to concentrate on what you *do* want, positive results can be achieved very quickly.

Being curious and confused are good for you

Here are two helpful attributes to bring with you: *curiosity* — accepting that you don't know all the answers — and a *willingness to be confused* because, as the great hypnotherapist Milton H. Erickson said, "enlightenment is always preceded by confusion."

TIP

If you find that ideas in this book make you feel confused, thank your unconscious mind because confusion is the first step to understanding. Take the sense of confusion as a sign that you're processing information to enable you to find the way forward, and that you intuitively know more than you realize consciously.

Changing is up to you

Gone are the days when you needed to stay stuck in a downward spiral of repetitive behaviors and responses that were tedious and ineffective. Today, NLP is all about producing measurable results that enhance the quality of people's lives without a lengthy and painful journey into the past.

As you read the chapters in this book, you discover the experiential nature of NLP. It's about trying things out — giving things a go. Test out the ideas for yourself — don't take our word for it.

The responsibility for change lies with you, and this book is the facilitator. If you aren't open to change, you aren't going to get the most from the book. So we encourage you to do the exercises, note your new processes, and share them with others — explaining something to someone else means that you learn it twice and thus really absorb it. By the time you complete the book, you may be surprised at how much you've already changed.

The post-pandemic world, marked by uncertainty, is creating growing mental health challenges, many people — from children to adults — are struggling to cope. But within every challenge lies an opportunity. In these pages, we share how NLP tools and techniques can help you not only manage your own stress but also support others in navigating theirs. The aim is to transform stress into a catalyst for growth, resilience, and connection — and to move toward greater hope, community, and love.

REMEMBER

The neural network that makes up your brain has an amazing capacity to change and forge new connections (see Chapter 3 for more on the structure of the brain). You can change at any age thanks to this neuroplasticity — what an encouraging thought!

Having fun on the way!

When Clint Eastwood was interviewed on TV by journalist Michael Parkinson, he offered sound advice: "Let's take the work seriously, and not ourselves seriously." NLP involves much fun and laughter. If you set yourself up to become perfect, you put enormous and unrealistic pressure on yourself. So pack a sense of your own playfulness as you travel and try to make sense of a changing world: Learning is serious work that's serious fun.