The background of the cover is a dark, almost black, space filled with vibrant, glowing light streaks. These streaks are primarily in shades of blue and purple, with some lighter, almost white, highlights. They appear to be moving or flowing across the frame, creating a sense of dynamic energy and depth. The overall effect is reminiscent of a nebula or a high-speed light trail.

The Art of Letting Go

Anna Margolina, Ph.D

THE ART OF LETTING GO

**A PERSON WHO STUTTER'S GUIDE TO UNBLOCKING YOUR SPEECH
AND YOUR LIFE TOWARDS FREEDOM AND FLOW**

By Anna Margolina, Ph.D.

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***"A MIND THAT IS STRETCHED BY A NEW EXPERIENCE
CAN NEVER GO BACK TO ITS OLD DIMENSIONS."***

Oliver Wendell Holmes

PREFACE

“No, I just cannot watch it!”

My friend was looking at me with her eyes swimming in tears and anxiety. It seemed she was serious, even though the source of her anguish remained a mystery to me: “What was she worrying about?”

“Come on, it’s just a video, and it is only seven minutes long,” I said, attempting to sound as reassuring as possible.

“Don’t pretend you are so stupid! It is not *just* a video. It is a video of *me!* *Me!! Giving a speech!!* I simply can’t watch it!”

Logically, I could understand what she was saying, but I still felt bewildered. What was she worried about? Her speech was normal. In fact, she was a good speaker. Yet, for some obscure reason, she found herself unable to watch her recorded speech.

This was something that bothered me ever since I was a child: “Why do they feel so tense? Why do they hesitate to make a phone call or ask a question? Why can’t they approach this person across the room? Why are they so nervous if *there is nothing wrong with their speech?*”

To me there was only one thing that could send a person’s heart into an abyss of terror: stuttering. And, according to my logic, anyone without a stutter had no right to be afraid of speaking.

My stuttering was my monster. While other kids had monsters in their closets, I had a monster in my throat. Any time I wanted to say something, the monster would grasp my throat with its cruel claws, blocking my breath. I would give anything to have fluent, unobstructed speech. I knew that if someone somehow took away my stutter there would be no stopping me (“Oh! I would be so eloquent, so daring, so witty and charming!”)

And I kept asking myself, “Why can’t they enjoy their miracle of free speech? What could possibly be holding *them* back?”

Looking at my friend, tormented by her mysterious struggle, I wanted to say, “*Why don’t you just let it go?*”

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to imagine you know the solution to other people’s problem? Today I know that the same barriers that prevented my friends from fully enjoying their gift of fluent speech also affected me.

This is a book about holding back and letting go. If you are a person who stutters, you will find valuable insights to help you on your journey. However, if you never stuttered, you may discover by following this process of unblocking that you will be able to let go of stress and struggle and find more freedom, fluency and fun in many areas of your life.

Today I know that letting go is an essential component of any performance - whether it is public speaking or acting or improvisation. It is also an essential component in healthy relationship including your most important relationship - with yourself. It helps in all areas of your life where you can use more freedom, fluency and fun. The process is the same. The applications are infinite.

I also know that the more you consciously push forward, the more you hold back. The more you try, the less you do. The art of letting go is the art of effortless change.

However, letting go is not about being passive. It is about fully engaging in the flow of life and moving in the direction of more vibrancy and fun.

It is not about your past, it is about doing something here and now. It is a journey of self-discovery and self-empowerment.

On my journey, I used knowledge gathered from books and scientific studies, hypnosis and neuro-linguistic programming, insights from my experiences with Toastmasters, clowning and improvisation, as well as my own pathway of trial and error.

What came out of all this is a process that can be followed by anyone who is looking to expand their realm of possibilities, to open new doors and to discover new powers within us.

This book is for you if you are tired of watching life pass you by. It is for you if you are tired of being afraid, feeling inferior, comparing yourself to other people, performing below your expectations and feeling stuck whenever you try to push forward.

Whether you stutter or not, this is about unblocking your flow and unlocking your magic. As you will discover, this flow has been always right there within you. It is only a matter of letting it go.

Ce livre ayant été traduit en français, cliquez [ICI](#) pour la traduction française.

CHAPTER 1

GETTING UNSTUCK

I was sitting in the office of my speech therapist. Have you ever felt frustrated and miserable? That is where I was emotionally. I had been battling my monster since I was a child. That monster was stuttering.

Now, after nearly 40 years of continuous effort, my speech was worse than ever.

I CANNOT SPEAK

When I say “stuttering”, what pops into your mind? If you are a person who stutters, the image of stuttering you have in your head depends on your experience with stuttering and your stutter will be different from my stutter.

However, if you don’t stutter, you may imagine something funny or cartoonish, like a speech by Porky Pig. Or you may think of something your teenage daughter does when she says, “Bbbbut, Mom!” Finally, the movie, “The King’s Speech” (so brilliantly portraying the plight of severe stuturer) might nudge your memory.

My stutter was of the “King’s Speech” variety: tense, severe, and often hopelessly blocked. And when that happened, when the flow of speech was completely blocked, I believed my only option was to push with greater force. I grimaced. I clasped my hands. My eyes looked up and down, darting desperately around, as if looking for an escape, summoning help, or begging for mercy.

Sometimes I felt I might get stuck forever, permanently freezing into a statue with a hideously contorted face. Even now, when I type these words, I feel a cold shiver going up my spine.

These frightening episodes are still fresh in my memory.

I can imagine how puzzled and perplexed a fluent speaker would feel as he watched this struggle. After all, speaking is what nearly everyone does without so much as a thought (all one has to do is open his mouth and let it flow). This was something that remained an impossible dream for me for many years.

THERE IS SOMETHING TERRIBLY WRONG WITH ME

I grew up in the Soviet Union, in the Communist state. This meant socialized medicine, free for all. I remember one time my mother brought me to see a speech doctor, a nice looking lady with gleaming red hair. After listening to my struggling, effortful speech, this lady said: “Oh, poor girl! Such a pretty face and such an awful stutter! We must help her, otherwise she may never get married!”

Needless to say, these comments (coupled with almost constant bullying), made me painfully aware of my deficiency. I couldn’t speak. I was weird. And there was nothing I could do about it.

Imagine growing up as a child who feels less than other kids, who repeatedly fails trying to do something as simple as speaking, especially when you suspect the mindset of the listener is something like “If this person can’t even speak well, how can she possibly be intelligent?”

My mom told me about a conversation she had with one of my doctors in which the doctor said: “Frankly, I am surprised. Her IQ turned out to be very high! According to her tests, she should be a genius. I always thought she was a bit retarded.”

GETTING UNSTUCK

If you ever felt this anguish, you know what I am talking about.

YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT???

My speech therapist actually was a very bright and kind lady. It wasn't her fault that her arsenal of stuttering-busting weapons proved to be useless, at least in my case. Yet, she kept searching for different approaches, until she found something that changed my life.

One day: "Anna, do you know what happens when you block?" she asked. I answered: "I have no idea. It just happens. It's beyond my control!"

She paused and then asked: "What if you try to stutter on purpose?"

If you can imagine yourself in my place (being so desperate to speak just like everyone else), how would you react to this idea? Right! That is exactly what I did. I said, " *What?* No way!" (Raise that sound a few decibels in your imagination while also picturing a starkly horrified face.)

Being the persistent lady she was, she kept nagging me about this for a few more sessions. But I was adamant. This was the stupidest idea ever and I wasn't going to do it.

Then one day, I got stuck. It was one of those horrible blocks that felt as if I was going to freeze in that position forever. I felt my face turning blue. I heard ringing in my ears. I was out of breath. And I decided, with my last spark of intelligence, as a drowning man clutching at straws, to *stutter on purpose*.

Instead of trying to push my words out, I made an honest effort to keep them in. And something strange happened: My block was gone and my speech started flowing freely.

It was just one moment of freedom, but this moment changed my life. I found a point of resistance. All my life I had no idea what I was struggling against. I had no idea how to fight my monster. I had no idea that all my life I was desperately *pushing* at a door that said, "*Pull.*"

And then it occurred to me: *Is it possible that it was my effort to avoid stuttering that created the struggle? If so, what would happen if I just let it go?*

Looking back, I must admit that the problem I was facing turned out to be a little more complicated than I had anticipated. As I started dismantling all those barriers I had spent years erecting (between me and my fluent speech), I found the barriers consisted of much more than just fear of stuttering.

Still, without finding this point of resistance, without realizing how much of my struggle was self-inflicted, I would never have taken the next step.

EXERCISES

1. Sit back, relax, close your eyes and start breathing in and out in a slow and relaxed way. As you continue breathing in and out, allow your body to relax. First, your eyelids, then muscles around your mouth, then allow the flow of relaxation go down your body, arms, legs.

After getting yourself into a state of physical relaxation, imagine yourself in the future, when you no longer struggle. (For example, if you fear speaking, you can imagine giving a brilliant dynamic speech. If you stutter, you can imagine speaking fluently and confidently. If you are a shy person, you can imagine chatting with strangers at a party you just crashed.)

Make this vision bright, colorful and in 3D. How does it feel? Now imagine flying right into the picture and becoming a part of it. How does it feel?

GETTING UNSTUCK

Return to the present time and space. What is the difference? Take a deep breath and emerge from the relaxed state. Reflect on this exercise. Continue visualizing yourself in the future. Make sure you have the brightest, biggest and most vibrant picture possible.

2. Think of two situations. In one, you speak without any difficulties and in the other, you struggle. How are your emotions and attitudes different in each case?

3. Begin to stutter on purpose. Even if you do not stutter, you may find it enlightening.

Chapter 2

EATING YOUR MONSTER - ONE BITE AT A TIME

Where do you go to find answers? I go to Google. This is what I did after my first experience with stuttering on purpose. In the course of this search, I stumbled across a very unusual book: “*Redefining Stuttering*,” written by John Harrison.

JOHN’S JOURNEY

Let me assure you that since my teenage years I have read many books about stuttering. Most of them were in Russian and had optimistic names like “Stuttering - a Curable Illness” Usually they were a disappointment, because they contained nothing new, certainly nothing I didn’t already know from my own experience with stuttering therapy. But this book was different, because it promised something I longed for since I was a child: natural and effortless fluency.

John Harrison started stuttering at the age of three after his mother returned from a six week trip. When little Johnny took his mommy into the garden, he pointed to some flowers, and said “Mommy, look... look... look... look... at... at... at... the flowers.”

Apparently his speech went downhill from there. Throughout his school years, he constantly worried about being accepted, about pleasing others and about their reactions to him. And the blocking in his speech extended into his 20s.

Up to this moment John's life had been quite safe and predictable. He lived in New York in familiar surroundings and worked at his father's advertising agency. We don't know how his life would have unfolded had he followed a preordained life and career path. But one day at the age of 25 John abruptly made a plane reservation and three weeks later moved to San Francisco.

If you think of San Francisco in 1960s, you will realize that John placed himself right in the center of the self-actualization movement. John Harrison tried it all. He jumped out of airplanes. He studied general semantics and other developing disciplines. And he immersed himself in personal transformation activities including psychoanalysis, encounter groups, gestalt therapy, psychodrama, EST and Lifespring training, even an LSD trip - until his internal landscape changed so significantly it couldn't support his old way of seeing his world. All this had a profound impact on him. He started making it okay to express who he really was.

Oh, and as a by-product, he stopped holding back and blocking.

Eventually, John joined the newly formed National Stuttering Project (now called the National Stuttering Association) and spent over 27 years helping to develop programs for the stuttering community.

Today John Harrison is an accomplished public speaker, speech coach and a creator of one of the most original and provocative theories on stuttering.

THE HEXAGON

The most important thing that Harrison suggests in his book is that stuttering is not some solid, one-piece pathological phenomenon: it is a system and should be addressed as such.

First of all, he suggested avoiding using the word “stuttering” because he believed it obscured the real problem. Instead, he focused on a physical component of stuttering: blocking behavior (such as tightening of vocal cords or clenching the jaws.)

EATING YOUR MONSTER – ONE BITE AT A TIME

According to Harrison this behavior appears because of intertwined influences of our beliefs (such as “stuttering is unacceptable and should be avoided at all cost”); perceptions (“people judge my speech”); emotions (shame, anger etc.); divided intentions (to speak or not to speak); and physiological components (such as susceptibility to stress, nervous excitability etc.).

Those six components - Behavior, Beliefs, Perceptions, Intentions, Emotions and Physiological Reactions - can be represented as a Stuttering Hexagon, in which all parts maintain dynamic interaction and reinforce each other.



This was an entirely new approach. Instead of fighting stuttering as a single rock- solid phenomenon, Harrison suggested dismantling the stuttering system piece by piece. Another novel idea was that stuttering as such was only a part of the much broader problem with the experience of communication, with our relation to other people, the surrounding world, and ourselves.

TAKING IT APART

Stuttering was my monster. But now I could see that it was made up of diverse but quite manageable problems for which solutions already existed.

As I realize now, many problems become much more manageable and less overwhelming when you stop looking at them as “things” and start seeing all the different components they are made of. Even fear of speaking can be made from many separate fears, such as fear of failure, fear of making a mistake, fear of rejection, fear of coming on too strong, fear of being different, etc. When all you see in your mind is a huge monster of a problem, all you can do is to feel helpless and out of control. When you start breaking it into smaller chunks, you can unfreeze yourself and start moving forward. I don’t especially like this old joke about eating an elephant (I do not eat animals), but in case of big problems this approach works: If you decide to eat them, do it one bite at a time.

EXERCISES:

1. Draw John Harrison’s Hexagon. Think of a situation in which speaking is easy for you. Write down the different parts of the hexagon. Draw another Hexagon and think of a situation in which speaking is a struggle. Write down all parts of the hexagon for this situation. Notice the difference.

EATING YOUR MONSTER – ONE BITE AT A TIME

2. Think of your “difficult” situation. Now imagine approaching it with your “easy” hexagon. How do you think it will affect your performance?

3. Below is John Harrison’s own hexagon before and after he “dissolved” his stutter (from A keynote speech by John C. Harrison to the Annual Meeting of the British Stammering Association London, September 8, 2002, How I Recovered from Stuttering). Compare this with your “easy” and “difficult” hexagons.

John, age 15

BELIEFS

I have no worth (low self-esteem)

I must be nice at all costs.

What I have to say is unimportant.

I have to please everybody.

People are focused on me.

The world wants me to be good.

Expressing feelings is bad.

World has to meet my mother’s standard.

My needs always come second.

PERCEPTIONS

People are judging me.

I’m not measuring up.

I’m being aggressive.

The other person is speaking the “truth.”

INTENTIONS

My intentions to speak and not speak are fighting each other.

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES

I am sensitive and quick to react.

PHYSICAL BEHAVIORS

I tighten my lips and vocal chords and hold my breath when I’m worried about speaking.

EMOTIONS

I hold back.

John, age 35

BELIEFS

I am worthy (good self-esteem)

I must be genuinely me.

What I have to say is important.

I have to please myself.

People are focused on themselves.

The world wants me to be me.

Expressing feelings is desirable.

The world is perfect the way it is.

I can decide when my needs have priority.

PERCEPTIONS

I’m the one who’s judging me.

I’m doing the best I can.

I’m being assertive.

The other person *may be* speaking the truth (and maybe not.)

INTENTIONS

My intentions are in alignment. I’m clear when I want to speak, and it’s okay to speak.

PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES

I am sensitive and quick to react.

PHYSICAL BEHAVIORS

I keep everything loose and supple.

EMOTIONS

I let go.

***"PLAN FOR THE FUTURE BUT LIVE IN THE PRESENT
MOMENT. IT'S THE ONLY LIFE YOU HAVE. SUCCESS IS A
JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION, ENJOY THE TRIP! IT IS
ALWAYS TOO EARLY TO ABANDON HOPE."***

Mary Manin Morrissey

FINDING YOUR BIG PILE OF HAY

Chapter 3

FINDING YOUR BIG PILE OF HAY

November 2009: A cold, rainy Seattle morning. My whole life is flashing before my eyes. Yes, that's right. I was giving a *speech!*

YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST SPEECH

If you are unfamiliar with an organization called Toastmasters, an ice-breaker speech is the first speech you give in the club. Even the name sounds cold: *ice-breaker*. Now add to that a feeling of fear: knee-shaking, heart-pounding, throat-tightening fear.

I stuttered severely - red faced, miserable, unable to look people in the eye. Do you have any idea how long four to six minutes seems when you have to push words out of your mouth and when you feel you are torturing your audience?

November 10th, 2012: Just three years later. I was standing on a big stage with a microphone, looking at the big full room of people eating, drinking, having a good time, waiting for a show. And *I* was the show! (Well, *part* of it anyway.) I was about to deliver a humorous speech at the District Humorous Speech Contest. And you know what? I won! Not only that, but my speech was effortless, funny and flowing. How did I get there from this knee-shaking fear?

SO YOU THINK YOU CAN CHANGE

When you decide to change a behavior that has plagued you for decades, there are a few things to consider. First, whatever you were doing until then was your strategy that worked. Yes, it caused you pain, but you were getting by. You survived your childhood, you progressed through your adult years and you built some relationships.

Whatever new behavior you want to develop is "terra incognita". You have no experience doing it. You have no maps in your mind for this way of living. And you may expect to bump into many sharp corners as you wander in the dark. Your friends and family, even though they wish you well, may be overprotective and try to talk you out of investing your effort in something that may not work. They may comment on peculiarities of your new behavior. They may make jokes without realizing that they hurt. And they may unconsciously create the environment in which your old behavior would flourish. Be ready.

Also, since old habits usually die hard and new habits may take time to master, you may expect to fall on your face. A lot. And no matter how many times you may tell yourself that you are ready for this, it hurts. A lot. Learning to fly while battling family inertia and suffering from a bruised ego may be too much for one individual. This is why it is vitally important to find your big pile of hay. If you fall on your face and discover that it hurts, it is time to start searching for a soft landing place. For those who struggle to unblock their speech I would suggest Toastmasters.

WHY TOASTMASTERS?

There are many reasons why Toastmasters clubs are so helpful when you start building new speaking habits. First of all, they are not your family and they do not have deeply ingrained beliefs about you. You, on the other hand, do not exhibit habitual behaviors around them. Toastmasters, as a rule, are friendly and forgiving people. They love to watch a new member blossom and for many seasoned Toastmasters, listening to a shaky and trembling beginner is much more rewarding than

FINDING YOUR BIG PILE OF HAY

witnessing a polished professionally delivered speech. Unfortunately, a trembling beginner finds this difficult to believe.

As you may already know, it is impossible to talk yourself out of fear of speaking. You can't just say, "Don't be silly, there is nothing to be afraid of." However, if you train yourself to see your Toastmasters meeting as a big pile of hay (which won't *stop* your fall, but will certainly make the fall less painful), you will find it easier to immerse yourself in those experiences, and those experiences will slowly reprogram your brain.

The key is to remember that nothing really bad can happen: You won't die. You won't be fired. And there is a good chance that whatever mistakes you make, in two or three weeks no one will even remember.

OH, IT'S JUST A SNAKE!

I remember, when I was small, my mother and I were strolling along a lake in Russia. Suddenly, my mother screamed, "Snake!" Then she grabbed my hand and we ran. For a very long time I was very afraid of snakes. If I saw anything slithering in the grass, I would scream and run.

Then I moved to America, to western Washington. A good thing about our area is that there are no poisonous snakes. At first, the sight of a snake still stressed me out, but eventually this reaction subsided. Now when I see a snake my first thought is: "Snake! I'd better grab the camera!" Being in a safe environment reprogrammed my brain and cured me from my snake phobia.

When you decide to make changes in your life, find an environment that is nourishing and supportive. If you can, join Toastmasters. If not, find a support group or an online forum. Reach out. Surround yourself with positive, warm and enthusiastic people. Temporarily sever relationships with those who have negative and judgmental attitudes.

And make sure to forgive your family and friends for making it a bit more difficult for you than you would like. Trust me, even though today you may find it hard to believe, one day you will realize that this deeply ingrained fear that you experienced each time you had to speak, has been transformed into something wonderful: excitement and fun.

Exercises

1. Check if there is a Toastmasters club in your area. If yes, join immediately. If you can, join two or three clubs. It will give you more opportunities to speak and you will be able to give the same speech more than once. Make sure you let your new Toastmasters friends know what problem you are working on. This will make it easier for them to give you feedback and it will make it less stressful for you to experiment.
2. What else you can do? Is there an improvisation class? Clowning class? Why do you need it? Wait for Chapter 5 to find out.
3. Consider joining a supportive online forum or a support group. Make sure they accept the possibility of change. If not, find another.
4. Have an honest talk with your friends and family. Explain to them what you are working on. Ask for their support.
5. Learn to talk to yourself in a positive and supportive way. Every time you catch yourself commenting on your performance in a negative, unkind way, stop, take a deep breath and find at

FINDING YOUR BIG PILE OF HAY

least three reasons why you should be proud of yourself. Here is a good one: “You did it!” I like a phrase I heard from a brilliant speaker: “Done is better than perfect.”

"THE MOST GLORIOUS MOMENTS IN YOUR LIFE ARE NOT THE SO-CALLED DAYS OF SUCCESS, BUT RATHER THOSE DAYS WHEN, OUT OF DEJECTION AND DESPAIR, YOU FEEL RISING IN YOU A CHALLENGE TO LIFE AND THE PROMISE OF FUTURE ACCOMPLISHMENTS."

Gustave Flaubert

Chapter 4

THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY

Have you ever noticed how emotional reactions defy logical reasoning? You know perfectly well that there is no reason to be afraid of giving this speech in front of a friendly audience. You know there is no reason to get upset if somebody criticized your performance. You know there is no reason to doubt your abilities. And yet, you do.

FALLING INTO OLD TRAPS

This is what I discovered while battling stuttering and learning how to let go. Even though logically I understood that the only way to produce fluent speech was to relax my throat, my jaw and my diaphragm, I kept doing just the opposite.

Even though I knew and understood the mechanics of the stuttering hexagon, I kept falling into the same old traps, creating more and more blocking. Have you noticed that understanding your problem is not enough? There are many people who have become experts on their conditions and yet continue doing more of the same thing.

In John Harrison's book he mentioned something called General Semantics and then something called the Neuro-Linguistic Programming or NLP. In fact, he included multiple stories of people who were able to successfully overcome their stuttering. Some of them mentioned NLP as a methodology that helped them to gain fluency. One of the most impressive stories was one of Linda Rounds who regained her fluency after NLP sessions with a therapist named Bob Bodenhamer. I first joined his web forum and finally gathered courage to set up an appointment.

BOB BODENHAMER

Bob Bodenhamer became famous and infamous at the same time. Famous because of his work with people who stutter and the book he wrote, which initially went under the title: "MASTERING BLOCKING AND STUTTERING." (It is now titled "I HAVE A VOICE"). This book was also infamous, because a majority of therapists believe that stuttering is a speech problem with a probable genetic cause, in which case stuttering could not be treated by "mind techniques". These people somehow ignore the fact that that it is impossible to speak without using your mind and that a majority of people who stutter have some situations in which they speak without difficulty.

When I first began talking to Bob, I was battling severe blocks and anxiety. At first it seemed we were just talking and playing some imaginary games. But then during our third session I was telling him a story from my childhood. I was in a summer camp. We were just kids, sitting around a fire, telling scary stories. I had a wild imagination. I knew I could create a good story. I knew my story would make their skin crawl. But when I started speaking, the kids, one by one, began talking to each other. Soon no one was listening. I don't remember myself stuttering, but I remember that feeling of abandonment and rejection at what I perceived to be the truth: "*They didn't want to listen!*"

"Okay," Bob Bodenhamer said: "Step into this experience. Feel this feeling. And now drop down through it and tell me what you find underneath..."

Don't you agree that was a weird request? How can you drop down through a feeling? But it turned out that if you drop down through the feeling, you find another feeling. And another. And then all I could see was an enormous dark sky, dotted with silent stars. And the next thing I knew,

what seemed like a huge concrete block lodged in my mind suddenly moved, and my blocked speech started flowing.

Even though my speech still wasn't perfect and it took more sessions before I was satisfied with the result, I will never forget this moment of sudden, almost miraculous change. Since this moment, my most severe, incapacitating blocks became a thing of the past and never came back. With my stuttering greatly reduced, I was able to plunge into public speaking, acting, improvisation and many other activities that further expanded my comfort zone and enriched my life.

If you are like me, you may now start wondering whether this miraculous change I experienced was due to a placebo effect or whether I indeed stumbled across a modality that had a potential for eliminating stuttering. This question led me into many years of study, which resulted in eventually becoming an NLP practitioner and hypnotherapist.

The next few pages may contain a little bit more information than you want to digest. However, I encourage you to read it and give it some serious thought. Today I believe that Hypnosis and NLP both have great potential in removing speech blocks and that using this knowledge can change your speech, even if you are not ready for formal NLP therapy.

MODELING THE BEST

As you know, you have more chances to stumble across something new if you wander away from the beaten path. In 1970s, a young graduate student named Richard Bandler became interested in psychology. However, instead of wondering what caused various problems in human behavior, as other psychologists did, and adding one more theory to those already existing, he began to study therapists who consistently produced miraculous changes in their patients.

You might agree it was an unusual approach. He also studied those patients who were able to overcome their problem without any help. For example, he studied hundreds of people who were able to get rid of phobias.

At that time there were three "wizards": Milton Erickson, Virginia Satir and Fritz Perls. Milton Erickson was the first American psychiatrist to use hypnosis in his medical practice (he nearly lost his medical license, since the medical establishment didn't believe in hypnosis). Virginia Satir was a pioneer of family therapy (which she had to practice secretly, because of animosity from the medical establishment). And Fritz Perls was the father of gestalt therapy (also not recognized by the medical establishment).

These three therapists were very different, but they had something in common: Their patients experienced profound changes after just a few sessions, which was unheard of in the field of psychology. This placed them in a category of quacks or geniuses, so nobody bothered to study their methods.

Richard Bandler had a rather unusual approach. He wasn't interested in "why" It worked. The question was how to distill this methodology so others could reproduce these results. He called this approach "modeling."

Finally, together with a linguist, John Grinder, he developed a revolutionary methodology for rapid change: Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).

As you may have guessed, "*Neuro*" refers to neurology, *Linguistic* refers to language and *Programming* refers to a process of changing deeply ingrained behavioral patterns (programs).

If you are really curious how mere words can change people's behavior, emotions and attitudes, you may want to learn about someone named Alfred Korzybski.

THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY

In 1933 Alfred Korzybski wrote a massive book "SCIENCE AND SANITY", which frankly, is nearly impossible to read without falling asleep. It took a while for this book to find readers, but its impact was immense. Korzybski started with the observation that everything we see, hear, feel, smell or taste is the end result of interaction between an external (or internal) stimulus and our nervous system. It seems obvious that there is no way we can avoid involving our nervous system, when trying to make sense of our reality, but somehow this idea is very difficult to grasp.

Korzybski concluded that our knowledge of reality is limited by our neurology. For example, you cannot see infrared radiation, but you can feel it (as heat). You cannot see or feel radio waves. You do not hear or feel ultrasound. Even when we use various devices, we need our nervous system to read the measurements. In addition, we have words to name objects, feelings, events and in a way we create these objects.

You will see an oddly twisted piece of pipe differently if it is called "modern art." I drive my bird-watching friend crazy by calling every bird that swims a "duck" ("Anna, it is not a duck, it is a pied-billed Grebe.") Not only does she label it differently, she sees it differently too.

With words, we can even create something that does not exist. There is an old kid's joke:

"What is green and eats rocks?"

"I have no idea."

"It's a green rock eater."

Have you already imagined this elusive creature "A green rock eater"? Dr. Seuss was especially good at producing a vast number of fictional, oddly real creatures in his book "The Cat in the Hat."

Korzybski then proceeded to propose that our "reality" is merely a collection of our internal representations of reality - our maps of reality. However, just like the map is not the territory, our internal representations of reality are not reality. Representations are always simpler, smaller and contain numerous distortions of reality. At this point you may exclaim, "Not me, I know what is real." But just bear with me.

EVERY MAP INCLUDES DELETIONS

Imagine a regular map - the one you may use when you go on a hike. If you wanted to create a map that is as accurate and detailed as the real territory, you would have to draw a map as large as the territory itself. For example, a 100% accurate map of Seattle would be the size of Seattle and include every street, every house, every tree and every hole in the pavement. But do you really need this? Not really. Such a map would be useless. What you really need is something that would represent the territory, allowing you to find your way with ease.

This means you have to delete (ignore) some information.

The same happens when your brain creates your internal maps of reality. You do not need a truckload of sensory information jamming your neural circuits. You want your brain to be selective. And it obliges, doing its best to filter out everything that is not important.

The same friend who objects to my calling a Grebe a “duck”, once showed me the difference between looking and seeing. As we walked in one of our gorgeous parks, my eyes casually glided over an enormous tree without stopping.

“Do you see it? She exclaimed excitedly.

I looked again, “Oh, there is a heron on a tree!” I said.

“A heron? Anna, look, there are *dozens* of them!”

My friend was right. Now I could see that this tree harboured a colony of nesting herons. How could I not see them at first? They are very large birds. But I might have walked right past this tree without giving it a second glance if not for my friend’s comment, because I wasn’t expecting to see anything unusual.

EVERY MAP INCLUDES GENERALIZATIONS

You also have to clump some bits of information together. Do you really need to draw each road differently? No. You can just indicate that some of them are highways and some are arterial or residential roads. In reality one residential road may be comfortably wide and another barely wide enough for two cars to pass each other. Yet, on your map they may look exactly the same.

To a frightened speaker, all audiences may be equally scary, even those that are enthusiastically supportive. To a person with spider phobia, all spiders, even the itsy-bitsy ones, are terrifying monsters, ready to pounce.

EVERY MAP INCLUDES DISTORTIONS

And finally, objects on maps don’t even have to look like real objects. They are distorted. For example, the house on a map will be two-dimensional, while the real house is three-dimensional. Your maps of reality are also distorted. For example, what you *think* your listener hears may be very different from what is actually heard by your listener.

If you still insist that *your* reality is the real one, take comfort in knowing that yes, some maps of reality are more accurate than others. Yet, all maps include deletions, generalizations and distortions, simply because otherwise we would go crazy.

Sometimes distortion is useful and allows us to pay attention to what is really important and sometimes our grossly distorted maps cause us unnecessary pain. Just like Dr. Seuss’ mind created “The Cat in the Hat”, your mind is able to create illusionary barriers that disrupt your speech.

IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER

“When I stutter, everybody thinks I am stupid” is one short sentence that includes deletion, generalization and distortion at the same time. It deletes (ignores) all information that contradicts this idea. It generalizes, because it implies that everybody thinks the same thing. And it distorts reality by adding an element of mind reading.

If this seems too confusing, imagine just one sense, such as eyesight. When you look around, you see all objects outside of your head. (This is where they really are, unless you are hallucinating.) Yet, in order for you to see this outside world, your eyes receive the signal and transmit it to your brain, which translates it into a picture. What you actually see is this picture created in your brain. If your eyes could detect infrared light, the picture in your brain would be very different.

The same is true for other senses. Your nerves detect signals and transmit them to your brain, which makes more or less accurate interpretations.

The Universe you perceive is inside your head.

THE UNIVERSE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

According to a German scientist, Alfred Zimmerman, our senses pick up over 300 million bits of information per second, while our brain can process only 11 million bits per second. From all this ocean of sensory information, your attention can pick up only 40 bits of information per second. Since your brain cannot consciously pay attention to every little bit of information in your environment, each of us has a mechanism for selecting the most important bits of information. Unfortunately, they are not the same bits for everybody. This is why some people may have such strange beliefs that make you to shrug, shake your head, and ask: "How can anyone believe something like that?"

Since the Universe you perceive is inside your head, it is ultimately much smaller and simpler than the Universe that exists independently of your ideas and perceptions (this one wouldn't fit inside your head). Similarly, your ideas and perceptions of yourself are much smaller and simpler than the real you. *This means that you can change how you perceive yourself and ultimately how you behave and relate to the universe, other people and yourself by learning to pay attention to different bits of sensory information available to you at any given moment.*

The problem is that it is very difficult to do consciously, because the way we relate to ourselves, other people and the universe is programmed into our brain by the most powerful programmer of all times: our own life experience.

REVISING OLD MAPS

If your maps are programmed into your brain by your experience, you have to use experience to reprogram your brain.

For example if you start venturing out of your comfort zone, you mind eventually will have to adjust its maps. Before I started my journey, I would never believe I could win a speech competition. Now, after winning a few, I revised my maps.

There is also another option. It has been observed that our mind is really not that good at distinguishing vividly imagined events from something that really happened. You can think yourself into worry, you can think yourself into sickness, you can think yourself into anger and you can think yourself into feeling fantastic.

There are multibillion-dollar industries selling feelings. You can watch a thriller and make yourself very afraid. You can watch an action movie and feel your muscles twitch and your adrenaline rush through you veins. Or you can pick up a salacious magazine and make yourself feel sexually aroused. NLP and hypnosis are tools that employ this ability of your mind.

THE MAP IS THE TERRITORY

It took the genius of Korzybski to say that the map is not the territory. It took the genius of Richard Bandler to say that the map is the territory. Confused? Even though our ideas about reality are not reality, they affect our behavior, relationship with others and even our physiology. If you are in love you may perceive the world as a wonderful place. You also may look and feel better too.

If you believe you are ugly it will show in your body language and facial expression, affecting how others relate to you. If you believe you have no control over your life, you may let others control you. If you believe your problem cannot be solved, it most likely won't be. In a way, we create our reality.

NLP and other modalities that involve language and imagination (such as hypnosis, Time Line Therapy and others) change our internal representations of reality and as a result they transform our emotions, perceptions and beliefs... As you may remember, emotions, perception and beliefs are three points in John Harrison's Hexagon.

If you are interested in NLP techniques, you can find an NLP coach or just explore a vast array of books on this topic. But for now, here are some ideas that you can start using right away.

1. Whatever is going on in your head is not what is really going on. The map is not the territory.
2. When you change what's going on in your head, you change what is going on in your life. The map is the territory.
3. Whenever you do something new and challenging, you expand your reality. The best way to revise your maps is through experience.
4. Whenever you do not like where your life is going, check your maps. They probably need updating.

EXERCISES

1. Imagine yourself giving a speech. How do you feel? Now imagine that your audience consists of dogs (if dogs seem scary, imagine kittens or bunnies). How does it change your feelings?
2. Imagine yourself speaking with confidence. Make the image twice as big. And double it again. Double it again. Now step inside of this image and imagine growing into it until you become just as big as your imaginary body. How does it feel?
3. Do you have someone with whom speaking is especially difficult? Imagine yourself speaking to this person now. How do you feel? Now imagine this person has a clown nose. How do you feel now? Imagine yourself very big, while this person becomes really tiny. How does it feel?
4. Think of yourself speaking in front of an audience. How close is the image? Make it smaller and push it away. How does it feel? Notice how you can change your feelings by modifying your internal representation of an event.

CHAPTER 5

GETTING OUT OF YOUR HEAD

It was summer of 2010 and I already had a few Toastmasters speeches under my belt. Thanks to a number of NLP sessions, I enjoyed fluency to such a degree that sometimes I would simply forget to stutter. Yet, I was taunted after these periods of unobstructed fluency by stuttering relapses. Even though my speech never regressed to severe blocking, for someone who had a taste of free flowing speech, even this reduced level of stuttering was unacceptable. I also was afraid I would eventually slide all the way back and this perspective was frightening.

CLOWNING AROUND

When you fluctuate between recovery and relapse, what are your choices? You can stop kicking and just succumb to your old plight, or you can double your efforts. Maybe if my stutter hadn't been so severe initially, I would have chosen the first option. However, even the thought of going back to those crippling severe blockages were out of the question.

Imagine Houdini, dangling in chains over a pool of hungry alligators. There are situations in which giving up is not an option.

I had already tried all other therapeutic options. I had finally found the one that worked. And I wasn't going to let occasional setbacks throw me off course. As I discovered, when you are ready for change and refuse to give up, the Universe will give you all the resources you need. You will experience the serendipity of meeting teachers, mentors and friends who will help you to move forward.

That summer, my two teenage daughters made a thrilling discovery: Somewhere in Seattle there was a school of circus art. Even though Russian circus schools accepted only very young kids, this school, SANCA, welcomed everyone who wanted to learn and have fun.

As I was browsing through the pages of the SANCA catalog, I stumbled across a class that caught my attention: "Funny bones with Arne Zaslove. Start Clowning around and learn how to be comfortable in your own skin." I immediately enrolled.

GET OUT OF YOUR HEAD

Why did I do this? It wasn't that I was so fond of oversized shoes, crazy wigs or a red nose, but I was always fascinated with clowns. They were so confident! They could approach anyone in the audience and they weren't afraid to look different. To me this was always a problem. I remember in high school I wore very uncomfortable high platform shoes, just because all the other girls were wearing those shoes. I also wondered "is it really possible to learn how to be comfortable in my own skin and carry a sense of comfort with me wherever I go?" This sounded like a fantasy.

I remember our first class: A large room with mirrored walls. A group of people in different states of bewilderment ("What am I doing here?") And here he was - our teacher, Arne Zaslove, who looked like Albert Einstein with a head full of disheveled gray hair and a wild gleam in his bulging eyes.

I was a bit nervous. I wasn't sure if I would like having pies thrown in my face. Fortunately it wasn't like this. Before we could start anything else, we had to play a game. As Arne told us, this game would reveal our true personalities.

GETTING OUT OF YOUR HEAD

Now if you use your imagination, I will do my best to put you in the game. So imagine standing in a circle. Each person is assigned a number. Number 1 stands in the center. There are two balls. One is always in the center and another is in the circle. A person in the center throws a ball to someone in the circle, while someone in the circle simultaneously throws another ball to a person in the center. Ok, pause and form a picture in your mind. Imagine two balls flying smoothly back and forth, maintaining a nice steady rhythm. Well, at least this is how it was supposed to be.

You see, there were rules that made this game a bit more complicated. The number in the center was allowed to catch the ball only TWO times, after which he or she had to let go and step back, so the NEXT number could jump in and catch the ball. This meant that at any given moment we had to: 1) watch for the balls, 2) watch for the moment when we had to jump in the center and catch the ball, and 3) watch where we threw the ball “Make eye contact, then throw.”)

Now, imagine a group of adults who are supposed to know how to count to two, having a major hard time with this game. Oops, an elderly psychologist forgot his turn. Oops! A young lady got smacked by a ball (“I told you to watch where you throw!”) Oops, what? Oh, was it my turn? Sorry, apparently I got lost in my thoughts. We would start over and over and no matter how hard we tried, the game kept tripping us up. I remember thinking, “Oh, I think I am getting the hang of this game” when suddenly, *Smack!* (Yes, I forgot to watch for the ball.)

As we learned later, the only way to play this game was to pay attention, stay in the present moment and *stop thinking*.

YOUR PERSONAL TORTURE CHAMBER

As you know, we humans are endowed with a marvellous brain. This brain occupies the place inside of our skull and technically is a part of our body. Yet, so often we keep all our attention inside our head with just a tiny bit left for the outside world.

As a person who spent most of my life with a severe stutter, I was certainly guilty of being too much in my head.

When you stutter, you often experience very unpleasant feelings in your body: tension, struggle, fear, embarrassment, guilt, anger. Even as a child, you learn it doesn't pay to stay connected with your body. So you learn to escape inside your head. And yet, there are many reasons why it is not a good place to be.

First, when you listen to incessant chatter of your thoughts it becomes very difficult to pay attention to other people. You tend to interpret and distort everything you hear, creating a world that has nothing to do with reality.

Second, it keeps you disconnected from your emotions, draining color out of your speech and your life. If you frequently experience boredom, depression and emptiness, you may be disconnected from your true feelings. Of course, very often it means that your feelings are hurt and in this case you may want to explore it with the help of NLP and hypnosis.

Third, when you spend too much time inside your head, you may find yourself locked up in your personal torture chamber.

Take for example, fear of public speaking. Do you have a feeling that your audience judges you, that what you say will be forever imprinted into your audience's heads, that you look ridiculous, that your voice sounds funny, that you are about to say something stupid?... While you

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imagine a judgmental, critical, scary audience in your mind, you disconnect from the real and often quite nice and friendly people who give you their attention. You suffer and you do not have fun.

THE MUSIC OF EMOTIONS

In a book “A General Theory of Love” by T. Lewis and others, there is a great quote. In fact, the book is full of great quotes, but I selected two for this chapter.

“Emotions possess the evanescence of a musical note. When a pianist strikes a key, a hammer collides with the matching string inside his instrument and sets it to vibrating at its characteristic frequency. As amplitude of vibrations decline, the sound falls off and dies away.”

“...people tend to think about emotionally arousing occasions afterwards, recirculating the experience and stimulating the consequent emotion just as if the inciting event had actually re-occurred. The human penchant for this post hoc cognition can magnify the philosophical impact of an emotion many times.”

According to modern neuroscience, emotions by themselves are fleeting. But when we send them reverberating through the neural network, by giving them meaning, connecting them to our past memories and tying them to our self-esteem, they torment us over and over creating unnecessary pain and suffering.

STOP TAKING YOURSELF SO SERIOUSLY

Okay, but how can we stop thinking? After all, it is important to wonder what others think of us, how they perceive us, what impression we make on others, are we smart, are we strong, are we important? “They are laughing at me!” “They think I am dumb”. “They see me as a loser!” “What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I catch this ball?”

Well, there is one good recipe for this problem: stop taking yourself too seriously. To me clowning around, learning how to laugh at my problems and my flaws, how to fail on purpose and present myself as the clumsiest and dumbest person ever, turned out to be wonderfully liberating.

You may think, “Oh, but I do not want others to see me as a clown! I must be conscious of my mistakes and flaws!”

OUR PANTS FELL DOWN!

I once was listening to a talk by a legendary speaker, Les Brown. In his usual warm and light-hearted manner he told us how he once had every speaker’s worst nightmare - his pants fell down.

He lost some weight and his pants were a wee too big for him. To his horror he discovered that he forgot his belt. There was only one solution - to try and hold his pants making this fact as inconspicuous as possible. Of course, while making an elaborate hand gesture, he forgot about his pants and they fell to his knees! He was standing in front of a big audience in his Mickey Mouse boxers!

Now, how would you react if your pants fell down during your speech? To those with high sensitivity, wounded self-esteem and history of speech problems, even a slight stumble in their speech can be devastating. What Les Brown did - he stayed in the moment, connected with the audience, while embarrassment rolled through his mind. Then he let it go. After someone from the audience gave him a belt, he continued his speech.

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If he tried to block his embarrassment and then retreated inside his head to think about all the things his audience could think, he would send the rest of his performance down the drain. His audience would feel uncomfortable and most likely wouldn't even hear the rest of his speech. When he let it go, they did too.

LET THEM FLOW

When you allow your feelings to roll freely through your body instead of blocking unpleasant emotions, it will not only add energy to your performance, it will also make you more real to your audience. Your audience will like you more and they will be more forgiving. As I discovered, it is very difficult to connect to people when you keep blocking your emotions and when you escape inside your head at every opportunity. I like an advice from a 2001 Champion of Public Speaking Darren LaCroix, "Don't be perfect, be present."

When I learned to allow emotions to flow and stopped analyzing, interpreting and judging them, I started experiencing more pleasure. I started feeling alive. As a bonus, it had a very positive effect on my speech. Now, whenever I feel the old blocking feeling coming on, I make sure I reconnect with my body, my sensations and surrounding reality.

If you can, take a few classes of physical comedy or an acting class. If not, read a good book about emotions such as "A General Theory of Love" by T. Lewis or "Emotions Revealed" by Paul Ekman.

Watch a few old comedies, such as those with Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Max Brothers, Abbot and Costello etc. Notice their immersion in the moment, playfulness and willingness to look like a fool. Ask yourself a question, "If I approached my performance with the same attitude, how would this affect my speech?"

If you still think, "I must think what others think about me. I must control my speech. I do not want to look like a fool," wait for the next chapter.

Exercises

1) Close your eyes. Take a deep breath through your mouth, hold it, and slowly let it out through your nose. Repeat a few times. As you feel your body relaxing, think of a pleasant memory. It could be a recent occurrence or something from your past. What do you see, hear and feel? Is there any smell? Now, if you look at this memory as an observer, step into the picture. Now you should start feeling the feeling. Without labeling it, just notice where in your body you feel it. What kind of sensation is it? Is it light or heavy? Is it localized or spread over the large area? Does it move or stand still? Go through a few memories to practice this.

2) Find a simple episode from your life that you can vividly imagine. Associate into it. Locate the feeling. Make sure you can imagine what happened. Now start telling a story about this episode while maintaining the visual image and feeling. Allow your body to respond to your story. Practice it until your gestures, voice and facial expression will be fully aligned with your internal state. Give this speech in your Toastmasters club. Make sure you start with a simple story with action and visual images. From now on, stop writing your speeches. Start with a memory, associate into it and create a story from there. After this you can transcribe your story and polish if you wish. Every time you deliver a speech, stay in the memory, while feeling emotions and seeing images. (Some people believe they are not visual. It is ok. You do not have to see a clear picture. But the more you do it, the better your imagination will work).

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- 3) When talking to a friend or a stranger, pay attention to details of your environment, the other person's facial expression and tone of voice. If you have an urge to compose your answer before the other person finishes speaking, stop immediately. Return to attentive listening and observation.
- 4) Think of an embarrassing episode from your life. Imagine it as a comedy sketch. What you can exaggerate? Where can you embellish it a bit? Put clown noses on yourself and others in your imaginary scene. How does it feel now?
- 5) Practice letting go every time you block during the speech, say "um" and "ah," make a mistake or go blank. Stay in the moment, stay connected, and avoid going inside your head. See what will happen.
- 6) Remember everything worth having requires practice. Joining an acting class or a clown class would be an ideal option, however, if you practice these skills consistently on your own, you will definitely see results.

***"THE PAST IS ALMOST AS MUCH THE WORK OF THE
IMAGINATION AS THE FUTURE."***

Anonymous

GOING WITH THE FLOW

Chapter 6

GOING WITH THE FLOW

You probably have already noticed that life is full of paradoxes. The more you try to avoid stuttering, the more stuttering and blocking you create. The more you try to avoid embarrassment when speaking in public, the more embarrassment you experience. The harder you try to block your emotions, the harder it is to manage them.

Now it is time for our next paradox. The more you try to appear confident, witty and funny, the harder it is to be confident, witty and funny.

The harder the push, the bigger the block.

JUST TRY HARDER!

You probably didn't learn "The harder the push, the bigger the block" when you were growing up. This is certainly not what I learned. Since I was a child, I knew that pushing hard and trying hard is what life is all about. Remember, I grew up in the Soviet Union. Life was a constant struggle there.

I knew I should work hard: Trying to get good grades, trying to fit in, trying to speak well...

Have you ever heard an adult say to a child, "Think harder!" Or "Try to remember!" Or "Try to be nice to Aunt Jamie!" Have you *been* this child? Have you *been* this adult?

But what if someone told you, "I try to love you"? Or "I try to be honest." Or "I try to stay sober?" Would you immediately suspect that this person doesn't love you or is dishonest or is an alcoholic?

"Try" is a tricky word.

When I started learning NLP and hypnosis, I discovered that the word "try" in hypnosis had a secret meaning, which is "fail".

"Try to keep your eyes open." "Try to lower your arm." "Try to bring this old feeling back." Yes, as the practice of hypnosis confirms: "Try=Fail" to your unconscious mind.

Now think how often in your everyday life you set yourself up for failure by thinking what you *must*, *should*, *ought* and *have* to do.

IMPROV MAGIC

Have you ever watched an improvisation show, such as "Whose Line is it Anyway?" Have you ever wondered how they do it?

You see a couple of actors on the stage. The audience gives them a suggestion ("You are two spies whose cover is blown" or "You work in a 'burger joint' and your boss is a jerk") and they just do it. On the spot, out of nothing, they create a sketch with a dialogue, conflict, wit and humor. How do they do it?

The year was 2011. I had walked a year in clown shoes and felt confident about my speech. Thanks to my clown experience, I now had high tolerance for failure, wasn't afraid to look like a fool and most of the time enjoyed myself while speaking. At that time I ran into a new problem. Often I would start a conversation and then run out of things to say. It seemed like my mind would

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suddenly forget all topics and just freeze. What was going on? I was fluent (most of the time anyway), but it seemed my speech ran so fast my mind couldn't catch up.

At this point the Universe sent me another resource. One day I was browsing through a catalog of Continuing Education Classes of a local community college and saw that they offered acting and improvisation classes. Well, I certainly was having problems with improvisation, so I enrolled.

Now, if you were there with me, attending a beginner level improvisation class, you would immediately see how very different it was from "Whose Line Is It Anyway". You would certainly notice a lot of shuffling, uncomfortable laughter and "ums" going on.

So how do they take people from there (mere mortals) to a state when they can jump into a scene without a moments delay (demigods)?

The answer: they first teach people how to stop thinking. Then they teach them how to think differently.

We already talked about the value of not thinking. In this chapter you will learn that not thinking doesn't mean not using your brain. It means using it smartly. It means delegating a lion's share of responsibility to another part of your brain - a part so powerful it will make your usual way of thinking look like walking with a crutch.

SPEECH IS A RIVER

I found one of the best explanations of the above concept in a book named 'SPEECH IS A RIVER' by Ruth Mead. Before you move on, go to my website www.changinglifelnlp.com, find the section *Free Resources*, and download the book. I promise you will love it.

You know how some books immediately draw us in from the very first pages? This is what happened when John Harrison sent me a file that contained a book written by a person named Ruth Mead. At this point I was reading four or five books simultaneously and was unsure if I wanted to delve into a new one. But if John Harrison said it was something extraordinary, I had to read it. I didn't regret it.

According to her book, Ruth Mead stuttered just as severely as I did, and reading her vivid descriptions reminded me of my own struggle. But that wasn't what glued me to her book. From the very first pages she stated something that I already suspected from my own experience with NLP, clowning and improvisation:

"There are two main paths through stuttering: the natural spontaneous flowing no- think, no-try path...and the effortful, full-of-thought-and-effort conscious pathway. The no-try path is natural, spontaneous and free. It is vibrant, joyful and edgy. The old path was planned, rigid, reactive and goal-oriented. It was fearful, defensive and ossified (with work, practice, planning, techniques, effort and willpower as priorities to push me over the top.)"

Exactly! By this time I had already determined to find my "no-try" path. I am not going to attempt to recount Ruth's book there. She said it much better than I could. But to me it was really interesting how she came to the realization that speech is like a river and what she did to unlock her river.

TALKING TO THE UNCONSCIOUS

Below is a remarkable account from Ruth's book. So remarkable, she admits that she dislikes this part of the book, because to some it may seem too religious or "kooky":

"I had been playing in the ocean with the kids but came back to our umbrella to get out of the sun for a while. I began doodling in the sand with my finger, wiping out the images, doodling, then erasing, when I heard myself mumble something like: "Well, here I am, still here, still watching myself stutter."

I jumped when I realized someone might have heard me. No one was in sight. "What do you mean? Whatever do you mean you are watching me stutter? Who are you anyway? Some kind of schizo?"

No answer.

"Aw, c'mon now. You were the one who started this. Now you've made me curious. Who are you?"

(Still no answer.)

I was accustomed to asking questions no one answered, so I went back to doodling in the sand. But just in case this Thing had something else to say, I reached for a pencil and got out one of the notebooks I had filled nearly full of Rants.

I opened the notebook and began scribbling a picture of a cartoonish character on a psychiatrist's couch. Before I finished I felt a strange nudge and a knowing (but not in words): "I am the one who knows you. I am always watching you. I know how many hairs you have on your head."

I remember when I was reading this part it didn't seem so strange to me, but now I know that with my European mind I easily accepted something that is often very hard for a pragmatic American mind: Ruth's conversation with her Alter Ego or unconscious.

Now, after studying with some of the best hypnotists in the U.S. (such as Dr. Richard Bandler - a co-creator of NLP), I know that people know much more about their own problems than they can imagine. To me it seems that Ruth entered a spontaneous trance state, not at all uncommon, by the way. Have you ever daydreamed? What was uncommon for an American (when not guided by a hypnotherapist) was to pay attention, rather than dismissing the information.

In a lengthy conversation that followed, there is a part that resonated with me in a strong way:

"You have made speech conscious and therefore you stutter. Do you see a connection?"

"What other choice do I have?"

"When you stop trusting your conscious mind to produce speech, then nature steps in and does its stuff naturally and spontaneously before your head figures it out. That's the way it works ..."

I hope you will take time and study Ruth's book, but for now, she kindly sent me a fragment from her new book (work in progress) that vividly describes the process of her recovery.

IN RUTH'S WORDS

“No matter that I had managed to work through many of my old rigid beliefs about stuttering during the previous two and a half months... still my speech hadn't dramatically improved and I was keenly disappointed with my progress and frantic regarding my stuttering. It was already late August and I took my writing to the balcony that overlooked the forest.

Not a leaf was stirring and it was extremely hot by Munich standards. I had been re-reading Abraham Maslow, in which he proposed: 'every problem is firmly rooted in a faulty view of reality.' So I wrote those words at the top of the page...and then continued to 'doodle' as I do when I'm knee deep in understanding something complex, waiting for clarity.

Then I noticed something. My random scribbles seemed to be creating a pattern of some sort. I had drawn six or more wavy lines across the page, stacked one above the other, and in the margin I had drawn what appeared to be two or more cupped hands (shaped like parenthesis)...as if the hands were pushing the wavy lines. I I had no idea what any of this meant until I absently wrote beneath the squiggling lines:

Speech is a river. Don't push the river.

And then POW ... all hell broke loose: I got it!! I absolutely got it!! The meaning of those words came alive and blew my old way of thinking to smithereens in a mega-moment.

*I ran into the living room from the balcony and back again, caught up in a frenzy of delight, grabbing a small umbrella holder, dizzily dancing it around and around the room, all the time squealing 'Speech is a river! It flows by itself. It happens on its own! No need to think about it! Or manufacture it! Or will it! Or work at it. Speech is a river! Life is a river. **I am a river.**' And nothing could stop my celebration.*

*I had been given a powerful metaphor that pushed back against both everything I had been taught and what I had come to believe. Along with this new clarity came a state of inner calmness in which **I was finally able to trust the incredibly complex and competent ability of my brain and body to do its stuff without my conscious interference.***

When I returned to the States, I started a car company. This required me to talk on the phone almost constantly and was a thrilling earth-shattering experience for me. Some of us get our thrills from public speaking. Personally I, who had never made a phone call before the age of 30, literally got goose bumps from being able to speak on the phone fluently.

Now when I tell you 'I was cured', I mean 'I never thought of the mechanics of speech again.' Maybe my speech wasn't perfect but who was keeping score? Certainly not me. I was having the time of my life."

I have found in conversations with Ruth that she strongly identifies her experience with much of what I have learned in NLP, especially things I have learned about metaphor. Metaphor is seen as a powerful tool used in hypnotherapy. Milton Erickson, M.D (one of the three therapists modeled by Bandler) was especially skilled at it. As the practice of hypnosis shows (and I experienced this myself), the right kind of metaphor appearing at the right moment can miraculously transform a person's life (just as a new metaphor was able to erase Ruth's "faulty view of reality" in a "mega-moment" and replace it with a much more realistic view of what really happens when we speak.)

JUST LIKE RIDING A BICYCLE

Do you remember how you learned to ride a bicycle? If not, you can probably imagine how challenging it is at first to keep in balance...you don't feel very comfortable. Then suddenly something clicks and all of a sudden you realize: "My body knows how to do it!" You are able to let go and have fun.

The same happened when you learned how to drive. At first, you were overwhelmed with all the tasks you had to perform simultaneously - you had to watch pedestrians and dogs, you had to notice traffic lights, you had to pay attention to other cars - all the while trying to figure out how to press the brakes or accelerator, how to keep the wheel steady and how to stay within the speed limit. Now you may be one of those people who is able to manage drinking coffee, applying makeup and paying your bills online while driving. At any rate, you have probably reached a state when your body effortlessly does everything it is required to do so you can relax and think about something unrelated to your current activity of driving.

What happens in both cases: at some point you stop using your conscious mind and delegate the task to your other mind - your unconscious mind. And there is enough evidence that your unconscious mind is simply better equipped to handle complex tasks.

WHO IS DRIVING?

I once was driving on a highway doing 70 miles per hour. As usual, my mind was occupied. Maybe I was rehearsing my Toastmasters speech. If sapient beings from another planet were watching me at this moment, they certainly had a hard time understanding how a squishy human trapped inside a piece of fragile metal going 70 miles per hour can think of anything other than staying alive, but there I was.

All of a sudden, I switched lanes. Then, in slow motion, I was able to see what happened:

There was a little blue Beetle with an elderly Asian lady inside. Apparently, she decided to change lanes and, as many new drivers do, slowed down, almost stopped - right in front of me. If I didn't switch lanes in the blink of an eye, I would smack into her car at 70 miles per hour. In which case, my stuttering problem would get a sudden and terminal solution.

Now, I am not a good driver. I am overly cautious and usually it takes me a while to switch lanes. But at this moment I wasn't even thinking about driving. Yet, somehow my mind was able to notice the lady in the blue Beetle, register the danger, make a decision and execute it - all in a split second.

Some tasks are too complicated and happen too fast for your conscious mind to handle. Speech is one of them.

IT IS A MIRACLE WE CAN SPEAK

Do you know that in order for you to carry on a simple conversation, your brain has to perform a multitude of intricately complicated tasks at incredible speed?

First of all, there are four main centers that control speech in your brain. Broca's area in the left temporal neo-cortex translates your stream of thoughts into grammatically correct sentences. Wernicke's area in the same left temporal neo-cortex gives meaning to the stream of sound you hear.

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Next, there are two areas in the right hemispheres that deal with emotions. One area adds emotional melody to your speech, while another allows you to distinguish emotions in other people's speech.

As you see, there are already 4 brain areas located in both hemispheres that have to work simultaneously to produce coherent and emotional speech, while at the same time enabling you to understand meaning and emotions in someone else's speech (for more information, pick up "A GENERAL THEORY OF LOVE" by T. Lewis).

Now, add to this at least 20 muscles involved in speech production - some located in your throat, some in your tongue, some in your lips and some in your chest and diaphragm.

That is not all. Recently scientists discovered that brain areas responsible for understanding and producing action words such as "run", "jump" and "kick" are actually located in the same areas that are responsible for corresponding muscular activity. When you say, "I will kick you", your brain has to retrieve the words from the area responsible for moving your legs. This, by the way, sheds some light on how hypnosis and guided relaxation work. When you say, "Your arms are relaxed" your brain actually goes to the motor areas that control your arms.

Now imagine your brain performing all of the above tasks, while also retrieving information (for example, if you are being interviewed for a job or are taking a test), accessing personal memories, thinking about what another person just said and crafting sentences that are intelligent and politically correct. Now throw into that mix trying to appear confident and worrying that you may fail at this task. Then add trying to hide fear. Also add thinking that other people think you are stupid. And do not forget trying to sound cool, smart, important, educated, professional, strong, powerful, fluent etc. etc.

It is a miracle we can speak at all . It is even a bigger miracle that so many people manage to produce a smooth and uninterrupted flow of speech, which means that all of the above processes happen simultaneously in a very orderly manner. If you really want to help your mind when it is busy producing speech - stop interfering with it. Let go, step aside and let it flow.

DO YOU CHOKE?

I was able to gain more insights about this process from a book "Choke: The Secret to Performing Under Pressure", By Sian Beilock.

Imagine you are an athlete training for the Olympics. You and your trainer worked hard, you both made sacrifices and your days for the past months were made from pain and sweat. You feel you are ready, because once during your training you beat the Olympic record. Now is your big day. Let's say, you have to jump. Ready, set, go... Oh, no! You can't even *look* at your trainer. You let him down. Someone else will take home the Gold.

This is one example of "choke": an inexplicable failure to deliver when it matters the most.

Sian Beilock, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Chicago, explains that there are two main reasons people 'choke'. First is "paralysis by analysis" - allowing conscious thoughts to interfere with an automatic process. When put under pressure athletes often feel a need to take control of their honed-to-perfection automatic skills. The result is disastrous. For example, when Beilock asked golfers right before they took a shot how exactly they held their elbow, their performance inevitably worsened. Second, there is what is known as "information jam", when worry and anxiety overload the prefrontal cortex - the area in our brain that holds our working

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memory. This accounts for inability to remember important pieces of information when you need it the most.

For example, Sian explains why in the U.S. bright and ambitious girls often under-perform on math and science tests. Many girls grow up with a belief that “girls cannot do math” and, as she notices, “being stereotyped negatively is enough to drive down performance”. When a girl doesn’t care about her performance or doesn’t worry about being stereotyped, her performance is not affected.

Of course there are people who don’t crumble under pressure, but actually perform better than usual. As many athletes know, in order to accomplish this, they need to be in the Zone (often called “The Flow”.) Being in the flow requires a combination of competence (skills) and an ability to let go of conscious thought.

IF YOU HAVE TO FAIL, FAIL MAGNIFICENTLY

Now, let’s go back to our aspiring improvisers. What exactly can they do in order to break out of the habit of trying too hard?

One of my favorite speakers, Patricia Fripp, said, “Habits are like train tracks. They take a while to get into place. Then they will take you wherever you want to go.” I add to it that: unhelpful habits are *also* like train tracks. It is important to stay away from them.

As we discussed in chapter 4, the brain is reprogrammed by experience. All the books in the world won’t be able to remove your fear or unblock your speech, unless you start doing something to establish a new pattern. There is a difference between wanting your toy train to go in a different direction and actually reassembling the tracks. A great deal of training in “Improv” consists of exercises, which are funny and entertaining enough to keep student interested (maybe our schools could adapt this approach?).

In one of the exercises we had to pretend that our index finger is a poisoned samurai sword. Then we fight each other in slow motion, trying to divert the “sword”. Whoever got poked with a finger, had to “die” in a slow and spectacular way.

At first we played this game very safely. We all wanted to be “the last man standing”. After we finished the game, our teacher said “You did fine. But if you had an audience do you think it would be fun to watch? I don’t think so. Now what if you do it again? But this time take as much risk as you can. If you fail, fail magnificently.” This time, the game was very different. Yes, it ended rather quickly with all “samurais” spread on the floor, but we giggled ourselves silly. We had FUN.

Remember: the point is not to be safe, the point is to make it interesting. “If you fail, fail magnificently.”

As the training progresses, improvisation students learn how to add structure to their sketches, how to play different characters, how to support their playmates, how to actively listen to what is happening on the stage, and ultimately how to make their creations funny and entertaining. However, it all starts with removing barriers to the flow.

It is very similar to communication. Going with the flow doesn’t mean refusing to craft your speeches or becoming rude and obnoxious. However, before you can start crafting your speech or polishing your communication style, you have to unblock your flow.

WHY DO WE RELAPSE?

Looking back, it is no wonder my brain seemed to freeze when I spoke. Even though my stuttering diminished significantly, I still tried to consciously control the mechanics of my speech, because this was what all speech therapists kept telling me to do. Now I see that by putting my conscious mind in charge of speech, I was jamming my brain circuits. There were just way too many tasks needing to be processed simultaneously, easy for the unconscious to do, but my conscious mind simply couldn't keep up.

Now I believe this explains why I kept relapsing after each course of speech therapy. It is one thing to think about your breathing and mechanics of speech in a controlled environment where everyone is so supportive of each other. When you are immersed in social interactions, the information load on your conscious brain skyrockets.

Just face it, in the controlled environment of a speech clinic you don't have to worry how not to offend Aunt Jamie who is as sensitive as a flower. You do not have to think how not to forget an essential piece of information when presenting to Senior Management or what intonation is appropriate at a funeral. You do not have to deal with your parents, your teenagers, your wife or husband, your unfriendly boss or a bossy friend.

If on top of this you have issues like fear of failure, worries, anxiety, perfectionism, high sensitivity, fear of rejection, fear of coming on too strong, etc., your artificial fluency will soon start crumbling. All it takes is an occasional block: a snigger from a busboy... a comment from a friend... and soon you are back to where you were before therapy began.

If this keeps happening to you, do not blame yourself: The problem is that what you are asking from your mind is impossible. It is as if someone asked you to recite poetry, juggle flaming torches and cook a 12-person dinner at the same time.

I LOVE IMPROV!

I continue taking classes in "Improv". Now I study with Seattle Improvisation Theater, The Unexpected Productions. At least four times I performed in a student showcase on a real stage in a real theater!

I love the thrill of performance, when I stand in a spotlight, looking into the darkness, feeling the energy of the audience, basking in their laughter and knowing that my flow will be there when I need it.

My love of improvisation helped me realize that even if someone told me that I could achieve 100% fluency by using one of the methods of controlling my speech, I would not take it. To me being in the flow, experiencing it in every fiber of my body is an experience of being whole in mind, body and spirit. It is an experience of being fully alive.

I agree with Anders Piper, the author of "*Shortcut to Flow*": "After each flow episode a person will grow to an even more unique individual with new and, until now, unknown skills. When the flow event is over, you feel more whole than before, not just internally, but also in relation to other people and the world in general. The self becomes more complex by experiencing flow and the complexity contributes to new growth."

What if (instead of trying to avoid pain and embarrassment) you decided to immerse yourselves fully into every experience, take risks, live life to its fullest, embrace spontaneity and welcome every challenge as a unique opportunity to grow and expand yourself?

GOING WITH THE FLOW

Exercises

1. Take in a deep breath, imagining that every time you inhale, you inflate a balloon in the middle of our body. Every time you exhale, imagine this balloon deflating *on its own*. Don't do anything to deflate your balloon, just let the air come out. Do it a few times. Then start vocalizing as you exhale. Notice how your voice sounds. Then as you keep vocalizing every time you exhale, try to tense different muscles in your body. Notice how any tension in your body changes your voice. Now, as you exhale and vocalize, start forcing the air out. Notice how it affects your voice.
2. If you can, join an "improve" class. If this is impossible, pick up a book or an iPhone app with a collection of improvisation warm-up games. Play them with your friends or in a support group.
3. Pick a simple topic that you do not care about. Create a speech for your Toastmasters club (or any other safe environment). As you deliver this speech, make sure you make big and bold choices such as acting out the situations in the speech, speaking in a loud voice, interacting with the audience. Make it OK to fail. If you fail - fail gloriously. Don't strive for perfection - be real. Notice episodes of flow. Cherish them.
4. Dedicate some part of your day to spontaneous writing (no stopping and no self-editing) and spontaneous speaking (no stopping and no self-editing). Notice how it feels. Do you tend to evaluate yourself even though it doesn't matter? Let it go.
5. Chose an exercise buddy and take turns talking in gibberish. Make it sound like a meaningful conversation using your intonations. How does it feel? Make sure it is fun. Remember. If you fail - fail magnificently.
6. Think of any activity that you do automatically. Do you play tennis? Do you play music? Do you dance? Imagine yourself doing it now. Step into the memory and allow yourself to experience it fully in your body. How does it feel? Touch your index finger to your thumb briefly (this is called anchoring). Now think about something neutral. Then imagine yourself speaking. Touch your index finger to your thumb and keep it there until you start feeling the same feeling you had in the first memory. Imagine yourself speaking with the same mindset you have when you are fully immersed in some activity. Now imagine yourself growing bigger... and bigger... and even bigger... How does it feel?

***"THE GREAT THING IN THE WORLD IS NOT SO MUCH
WHERE WE STAND, AS IN WHAT DIRECTION WE ARE
MOVING."***

Oliver Wendell Holmes

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

CHAPTER 7

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Have you noticed that sometimes our biggest victories are not the ones that other people notice? In 2012 I became the District 2 Toastmasters Humorous Speech Champion. Yet, it was not the trophy that made me absolutely thrilled. It was the fact that for the first time in my life I was able to turn the tide and fly from fear and frustration into freedom and flow.

AND THE WINNER IS ...

I started competing in speech contests a few months after joining Toastmasters in 2009. My first competition was a Humorous speech contest that usually takes place in August. This was a glorious victory... Well, that time I lost, I didn't even place, but my heart was filled with joy and pride.

I, a person who stuttered, a non-native speaker of English, competed in a humorous speech contest and even got a few laughs. To me it was a victory.

On September 5th, 2012, I returned from a magical Hawaiian vacation with only a week left to prepare my speech if I wanted to compete. I thought, "Maybe I'll sit out this one. There's no time to create something special." Then one day I sat down at my computer and typed: "My husband never lies. I didn't know about it until we got married... and then it was too late." As I was sitting at my desk giggling, I felt a warm flow of inspiration rising from inside.

I entered the club "Humorous Speech Contest" with a speech about my husband who always tells the truth even when I ask him, "Does this dress make me look fat?"

I won!

Next was an area contest, which is a competition between the winners from 4 clubs.

I won!!!

Then there was a division contest, which is the competition between the winners from 5-6 areas.

I WON!!!!!!!

This meant I had to compete at the District level, which is a competition between the winners of 10 divisions.

THAT LITTLE VOICE

You can imagine that The District Contest is a big deal. This is the first time the contestants have to speak on a real stage with a microphone and face a large audience in a conference hall. Many speakers try to get to the District level for years. When people see you on this stage, they know that you are one of the best speakers in the District. Do you feel the pressure? I certainly did!

I decided to go also to the conference that preceded the contest. This meant getting up at 7 am, being at the conference at 9 am and sitting through numerous educational sessions through the day until the time of the contest: 7 PM. If you've sat through a long conference before, you can imagine that by 5 P.M. I felt like a squeezed lemon. And my old monster picked this time to make a comeback.

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“Oh, no... What if I start stuttering?” “What will all those people think of me when I step on this stage, presenting myself as the best of the best and ...BLOCK!” “They won’t even listen to my humorous speech.” Or “They will wonder what I am doing on this stage if I cannot speak.”

If you ever have had such conversations with yourself, you know how it makes you feel. But to me it meant more than a bad feeling. To me it was an indication that I was starting down a slippery slope leading to blocking and stuttering. I knew I had to do something.

FLYING INTO FLOW

Now, all this happened before I got my NLP training, before I learned mind techniques that could put me back on a fluent track. Yet, from both John Harrison’s and Ruth Mead’s books and from my experience with clowning and improvisation, I knew I had to break this circle of negative thoughts as soon as possible. So I asked a few of my friends to skip the next educational session and play some improvisation games with me. In a half of hour I had my blood going and my stiffness gradually melted away.

Next, I imagined myself standing on a stage, speaking fluently and confidently, looking at the audience and feeling their attention as a warm flow of energy. I thought what a wonderful opportunity I had to brighten their lives with a funny speech. Then I turned my attention to everything “here and now”: the murmur of the audience, their faces, their eyes, their smiles, the sensations inside my body, the lights, the laughter, the pulsation of energy in the room.

Finally, I felt the flow of energy rolling through my body. My heart was pounding, my head was spinning and I had zero thoughts on my mind. When I stepped on that stage, my flow was there.

Even if I didn’t place, I would be blown away by this experience. I was heading for a disaster. *I felt I was going to fail.* Instead, I delivered a fluent speech and became the District 2 Champion.

THE BIG PICTURE

As a scientist I feel thrilled when my random observations, musings, scientific data and facts of life start clicking together into a bigger picture. And this is exactly what happened when I attended a training “Coaching from a Gestalt Perspective” with Tunde Horvarth in 2014. As I sat in class, listening to Tunde, I felt wheels in my head starting to turn, pulling together everything I learned about the experience of speech flow. Now I knew exactly why I was able to fly into flow back in 2012 when I was competing in the Humorous Contest. I knew it wasn’t a coincidence.

Gestalt is a modality developed by Fritz Perls. As you may remember, Perls was one of the “wizards” modeled by Dr. Richard Bandler. Perls was deeply dissatisfied with current psychotherapy, because he felt that it was too focused on finding out what was wrong with people, without establishing a clear picture of what a healthy, whole and happy individual may look like.

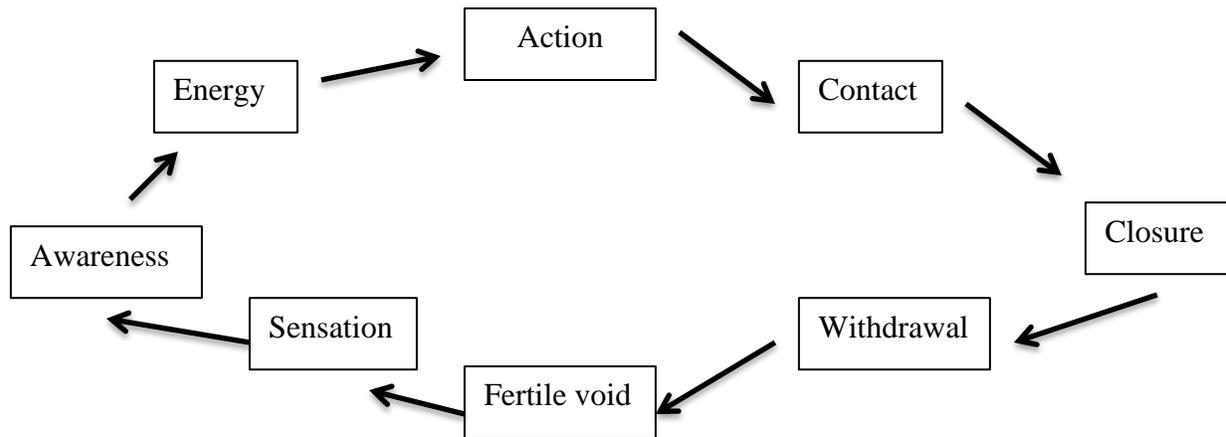
Now, I will not delve deep into philosophy of the Gestalt theory here, since I am not an expert in it. But there was something that resonated deeply with me due to my biological education: The Gestalt circle of experience.

My interpretation of it may be different from that of a gestalt therapist. Yet, I believe that the concept is universal, flows nicely with what we know from biology, and its applications are not limited to gestalt therapy.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

THE GESTALT CIRCLE OF EXPERIENCE

Imagine a biological system (for example an amoeba or a mouse) that moves aimlessly through its environment as it suddenly senses something. All of a sudden a part of the environment looks very interesting, well worth exploring. “Can I eat this or can it eat me?” This diagram can represent the natural flow of this interaction:



Sensations (I am feeling something) - Awareness (This something looks interesting, maybe I can explore) – Energy mobilization (Excitement or Fear) – Action (Go for it) – Contact (Yes, I am eating it and it tastes good) - Closure (Mmm, it was good.) - Withdrawal (I am moving away) - Fertile void (I am comfortable and waiting for a new sensation).

According to Gestalt, contact is a process during which a system opens its boundaries, lowers its guards and gets changed by the experience of interacting with another system. When amoeba is eating bacteria, they both are changed by the experience of contact: Amoeba gets nourished and bacteria gets eaten.

The beauty of this concept is that it can be also applied to more complex biological systems and more complex forms of contact.

For example, a toddler who just discovered a new toy experiences Sensation (seeing a toy), Awareness (What is it? Oh, it looks interesting!), Energy Mobilization (excitement or fear), Action (moving toward it and grabbing it), Contact (putting it into the mouth, banging against the floor, attempting to break, playing etc.), Closure (satisfaction and learning), Withdrawal (something that upsets parents who feel that kids get tired of new toys way too fast), and Fertile Void (Waiting for a new toy).

Let’s now move to even more complex interactions.

ROMEO, OH, ROMEO

Let’s imagine a romantic couple. Our hero (let’s call him Romeo) looks at his Juliet and feels pleasant sensations in his body. Yes, once again, here is the stage one: Sensations. (If you are waiting for me to resume talking about speech, just bear with me).

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

After stage one, if you still remember, there is the stage two: Awareness, which in this case includes internal dialogue that gives meaning to the experience – “Oh, I am so in love with this girl.”

If everything goes well, our Romeo will move to the Energy Mobilization stage - the desire becomes stronger, he feels excitement and finally - he does something to make it happen. He approaches the girl; he says something to her, their lips touch... and Action!

The interaction that follows of course is hidden and intimate, but we know that in order to engage in this pleasant activity they both have to lower their guards and open their boundaries.

If the contact is meaningful, they are both in some way changed by the experience. They both are nourished by it.

When an intimate interaction is over, there is time for closure. Maybe they will talk about this. Maybe they will just silently hug and kiss each other reflecting on their experience. Finally, they physically and mentally separate, withdraw, after which they may enter the stage of fertile void. Maybe they will fall asleep.

Now, as you may well know, this pleasant and naturally flowing process is often disrupted with disastrous consequences.

HOW THE FLOW IS INTERRUPTED

Notice, I am still talking about romantic interaction, so if you have any rigid ideas about speech, please put them aside for now.

So, let's imagine our Romeo looking at his Juliet feeling various sensations in his body. Now, as he turns his attention to these sensations he has to give them meaning. This is what people usually do. Very few of us are capable of experiencing body sensations without immediately attaching a label to them.

“I think I am in love with this girl. How she will react if I make a move? (I hope she won't react like that girl in high school. I still can hear her laughter. It was so embarrassing. Oh, no! I hope this time I will be able to do it.”)

Now, what do you think will happen at the energy mobilization stage? Right. His excitement is now laced with fear (“Oh, no. I feel so nervous. Probably I will look like a fool. I have to do something about it. I have to relax. I have to appear confident. I will try to act like a macho man.”)

Did you notice what just happened? Yes, instead of flowing into action, he plunges into self-talk. And this is exactly the kind of self-talk that usually brings fear with it.

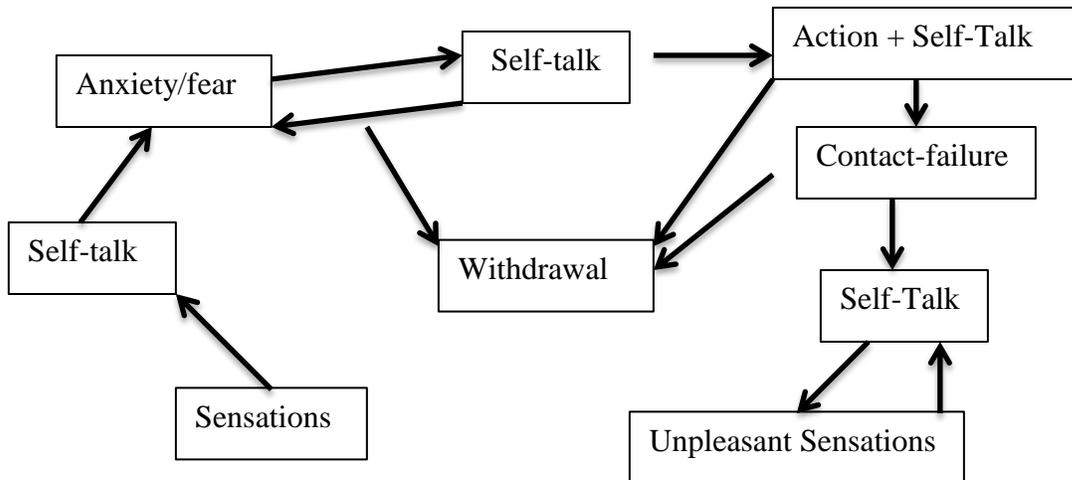
“I am nervous. I will fail. I am such a *loser*. Why can't I be more like those macho guys?”

Now, even if you do not know anything about biology or psychology, you know that all living creatures want to avoid pain. This means that at this point another program will be initiated - the one that will try to withdraw from this potentially painful experience. No wonder our hero, torn between his conscious desire to initiate contact and unconscious desire to withdraw, fails miserably.

What about closure? Unfortunately, even at this stage we humans can mess things up, because we learned something called rumination. As you know, going over and over an unpleasant experience in your mind, does a good job at keeping it alive, multiplying the pain.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Let's look what happens to our circle:



Are you ready to return to talking about speech now?

TO SPEAK OR NOT TO SPEAK

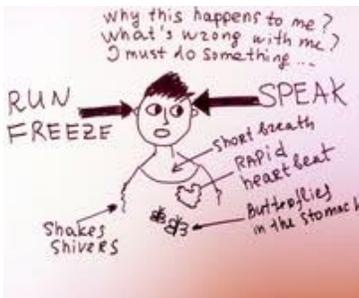
As you may have already noticed, the easiest way to put yourself on a slippery slope toward disaster is to insert thinking/self-talk where it does not belong.

You may notice that in a natural flow circle, there are only *two* places where reflection/thinking/self-talk can safely happen - right after the sensations and right after the contact. This is understandable. You do not want to jump into action without giving it some thought. The key is to do it before the start of energy mobilization. Every time you insert self-talk between energy mobilization and action, you disrupt the flow.

Sian Beilock writes about this in her book *CHOKE*, recalling an event where a gymnast was pulled aside right before she was ready to start her beam routine. When she was finally permitted to start, she fell from the beam and it cost her team the gold medal. Thinking things over before jumping into action sends performance down the drain. This is true for romantic interaction, for athletic performance and for speech as well.

If you remember, John Harrison has been talking about it in his Hexagon theory. When we have opposing intentions (to speak and not to speak) we create blocking and struggling.

What is even more important is to realize that divided intentions prevent us from engaging in a meaningful contact.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

KEEPING EYE CONTACT

How do you know that a speaker has a good connection with the audience? Usually, you see him or her keeping eye contact the whole time. It is amazing how a good speaker can create an impression that he/she speaks directly to you - from her heart to your heart. You also may notice the speaker coming close to the audience (even leaning toward the audience a bit) when he/she delivers the message.

The same is true for someone who is considered a good communicator. Their body language is open (they do not cross their arms or clasp their hands), they keep good eye contact and they often lean toward you a bit when listening.

Now, what do you notice about speakers who have intense fear of speaking? What do you notice about yourself, when you stand in front of an audience feeling blocked?

What I noticed about myself when I blocked was how difficult it was for me to keep eye contact. I remember when I started speaking in Toastmasters, I asked John Harrison what to do if I cannot look people in the eye. He gave me brilliant advice, "Just look at their noses. Nobody will notice". It took me a while to work my way up from the noses to the eyes.

When you have two opposing intentions fighting inside your mind (to speak and not to speak) you not only disrupt the flow of your speech, you also rob yourself of the nourishment that comes from a meaningful contact.

RESTORING THE FLOW

From everything that has been said, there is a strategy for restoring the flow.

1. Sensations - Desensitization, practice in a safe environment and visualization techniques to reduce sensations that can trigger panic reaction. When you panic, the withdrawal program starts even before your awareness.
2. Awareness - Learning to give yourself an encouraging self-talk. Reframing - giving another meaning to the experience. Visualization techniques that will shift the balance of the energy mobilization stage from fear to excitement.
3. Energy mobilization - Going with the flow. Staying in touch with your environment and your feelings, allowing them to freely flow through your body, developing trust, letting go of control, and not pushing the river.
4. Action - Staying out of your head. Being in the here and now.
5. Contact - Focusing on achieving meaningful interaction. Accepting the fact that every contact is risky, knowing that without opening yourself there is no real contact. Knowing that you would rather fail gloriously than shy away from the experience.
6. Closure - making sure you make every experience a learning experience. As one of the principles of NLP state "There are no failures, only feedbacks and approaches that didn't work."
7. Withdrawal - Letting go of rumination. When there is nothing more to learn from the experience, let it go.
8. Fertile void - meditation, self-hypnosis and celebration of life.

In the next chapter we will discuss some NLP techniques that can be useful in restoring your flow.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

EXERCISES

1. Take 8 pieces of paper. Write one stage of the Gestalt circle on each piece of paper. Put them on the floor. Now, as you remember some of your recent conversations, start slowly walking from one piece of paper to another, noticing what you are doing. Do you tend to insert self-talk where it doesn't belong? Do you find it difficult to stop rumination? Now think about an experience where you had the flow and everything just clicked into place. How was it different? Make sure you actually walk the floor to separate yourself spatially from each stage. Now imagine a conversation or a speech that flows with the gestalt circle. Walk the floor as you imagine it. How does it feel?
2. Re-read chapter 2 about John Harrison's Hexagon. What kind hexagon would allow you to let go of self-talk when it is not needed? How it would affect your speech? What kind of self-talk on awareness and closure stages would help you to make your contact more meaningful? What will prevent you from having divided intentions?
3. Think of Ruth Mead's book "Speech is a River." Walk your Gestalt circle again, imagining your speech as a river that flows by itself. What if there was no need to control it? What would happen on each stage if you stopped controlling your river? Is there any place on the circle where your "control imp" screams in your ear: "NOOOOO, it's too risky!" What will happen if you let go anyway? What won't happen if you let go? What will happen if you don't let go? Play different scenarios in your imagination. What did you observe?
4. Observe great communicators and speakers - how they make sure they have strong connection to the audience? What stops you from doing the same?
5. What would happen if you started entering every interaction with a strong intention to achieve the most meaningful contact (except from times when you gave it some thought and realized you *really* do not want *any* contact with this person)? What would happen if you entered every interaction with an intention to have the most fulfilling, interesting and enriching life experience?

***"THE TRICK IS WHAT ONE EMPHASIZES.
WE EITHER MAKE OURSELVES MISERABLE
OR WE MAKE OURSELVES STRONG.
THE AMOUNT OF WORK IS THE SAME."***

Carlos Casteneda

LEARNING TO DRIVE YOUR BUS

CHAPTER 8

LEARNING TO DRIVE YOUR BUS

Imagine you are a passenger on a bus. After experiencing a few bumps on the road, you decide to peek inside the driver's cabin to see what is going on. To your horror you discover that the driver, who looks like a decent fellow and an intelligent human being, doesn't drive the bus exclusively. From time to time he checks out, takes a nap or admires the view, while other drivers take over.

What's more, the assistant drivers are not even human: You see a monkey, a computer and even... a reptile! Further observation reveals that:

- 1) The human driver has no idea that someone else is driving the bus. This is why the poor fellow so often looks completely bewildered and has a tendency to cry, "Why me?" and "Why does this keep happening to me?"
- 2) The monkey is strong enough to hijack the entire bus and take it on a wild ride. Every time it happens the human driver cries "Why me? Why does this keep happening to me?"
- 3) Most of the time the computer controls the bus. This would be a good thing except for the fact that some of its maps are hopelessly outdated. Every time the computer drives the bus off the road, the human driver cries, "Why me? Why does this keep happening to me?"
- 4) The reptile cannot speak or think; yet it is entrusted with the most important task. It keeps the bus running. If the reptile checks out, the bus will stop...forever. Every time the engine starts sputtering, the human driver cries, "Why me? Why does this keep happening to me?" If you think this is one crazy ride, you are right. And this is a very accurate analogy of what is actually going on inside your head.

THE REPTILE

Most of the following ideas about the brain structure are from a book "A GENERAL THEORY OF LOVE" by T. Lewis, M.D., F. Amini, M.D., and R. Lannon, M.D. I recount them in a very condensed and grossly oversimplified form, so if you are curious, read the book.

It seems that our brain is a result of a rather chaotic and messy evolutionary process. If you believe in Creationism, then it is a chaotic and messy creation process. It seems that the force in charge of creation (whatever it was) followed one simple rule, "If it 'ain't' broke, don't fix it."

I remember learning this concept in my days at the Russian State Medical University and trying to wrap my mind around the idea that in the course of evolution, rather than continuously improving our brain, nature simply placed new brain structures over the more primitive ones. Imagine buying a modern house with every bell and whistle, only to learn that it was built over a medieval dungeon with skeletons still chained to the walls.

The most ancient structure in your mind is the reptilian brain - the enlarged continuation of your spinal cord or brain stem. This brain doesn't think, yet it ensures that you breathe, your hearts beats, chemicals are properly balanced, and that other systems and organs function properly. It also

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is responsible for swallowing and startle reflexes. If a person is truly brain-dead, the reptilian brain is the only one that is active. Any trauma to this portion of your brain is fatal.

THE MONKEY

Now, I don't know if you are aware of this, but you are 96% chimpanzee. What makes you human is only a 4% difference in the genetic code. As Frans de Waal, a primate scientist at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia said, "We are apes in every way, from our long arms and tailless bodies to our habits and temperament."

What we inherited from our primate ancestors is the limbic brain. This is a collection of brain structures that is unique to mammals. Reptiles or amphibians do not have it. Scientists believe the limbic system is the heart of your brain - its emotional engine.

It is rather pointless to kiss a frog - he won't understand you. Yet, if you kiss your dog who, like you, is endowed with the limbic brain, he not only will get it, but will often respond enthusiastically (do not try it with strange dogs).

When you see a monkey momma hugging and kissing her monkey baby you understand what is going on, because your limbic system speaks the same language. The limbic brain enables you to fall in love, care about other people and animals, play, enjoy life, feel fear and feel emotional pain.

A monkey with a damaged limbic brain loses its maternal instincts and can step on another monkey, totally oblivious to its existence, showing no compassion or affection. Some people become like this when they manage to block signals from their limbic brain. Severe abuse or special training (which often includes severe abuse) can disrupt limbic communication and turn a human into a walking reptile.

You may think that the monkey brain (as a more primitive brain structure) is fully subordinate to your thinking brain but this is not true. In fact, your limbic brain has enormous power because its job is to keep you alive. This is why the same structure that enables you to fall in love or feel compassion can also make you fly into uncontrollable primate rage or mindless panic, hijacking your entire body and shutting down your logical faculty.

THE ACCOUNTANT AND THE ARTIST

Finally, behold the crowning jewel of evolution: the neo-cortex. This is the most recent structure that covers all other brain structures like an enormous wrinkled blanket, stuffed inside your skull. The neo-cortex is what comes to mind when we think of a human brain with its deep groves and furrows.

Thanks to the neo-cortex we can speak, write, read, make logical reasoning, compose music and poetry, paint, make conscious movements, be aware, pay attention, lie, recognize faces of other people, remember, learn, dream about the future, have self-image, self-doubts, self-loathing and self-acceptance.

As it turns out, even this brain can be divided into two different brains - the left brain and the right brain. Your left brain is your Accountant (the reasoning, symbol making, logical, speaking, reading and writing brain.) And the right brain is your Artist (the creative, emotional, visual, feeling, spontaneous, intuitive and insightful brain). You can see how complicated everything is.

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THE COMPUTER

Are you curious how all these different brain structures communicate and work together? This is a mystery that science still tries to solve. But what is already known is that a significant portion of your brain activity is automated. You do not have to consciously think about breathing or making your heart pump blood. You do not consciously balance chemicals in your blood.

When you decide to stand up and stretch, you do not have to think about every muscles and every movement. When something big and fast moving pounces at you from behind the bushes, you scream and run (before your thinking brain can register what is going on.) When you enter a dark room in your house, you flip the light switch automatically. In my house I have a light switch downstairs near the closet, which in fact turns on the light upstairs (the previous owners wired the house in a very unusual way). I cannot tell you how many times I flipped that switch before opening the closet. Logically I know that this switch does not turn on the light in the closet, yet, my automatic reflexes act for me.

Some programs are built-in, such as a baby's fascination with a human face, a need to be close to her mother or a caregiver, a need to be touched and hugged, a need to listen to adults and imitate their speech, a desire to explore, to expand her range of movements - crawl, stand up, grab objects, walk and run. All babies do this approximately in the same order and approximately at the same age. Other programs are created as we grow up and go through our childhood experiences. These programs shape our personality, behavior and self-image.

Some programs are created through repetitious learning (at this point we can remember Pavlov's dog, able to associate the sound of a bell with food, salivating every time the bell rings). Yet, the human mind also has an ability to do one-time learning or imprinting, when a single experience makes an indelible expression. This most readily happens between birth and the age of 7.

As we move through life, our perfect computer runs a multitude of automated processes simultaneously. It determines our posture balancing tension in different muscles. It runs most of our everyday activities such as brushing teeth, eating, washing dishes, driving etc. It shapes our communication with others. It determines what we are afraid of and what makes us angry, etc.

A person who decides to go on a diet only to find herself opening her refrigerator and stuffing cake in her mouth in the middle of the night does not need to feel guilty. It is a very human ability to go on autopilot and succumb to habits. (Remember that habits are like train tracks.)

Another feature of your internal computer is binary logic. When you think in terms of "good or bad", "right or wrong", "black or white", "smart or stupid", "winner or loser", you ignore all complexities of the real world and operate using simple programs. One example is: IF MY SPEECH WASN'T PERFECT -> go to -> I FAILED ,-> go to -> I AM LESS THAN OTHER PEOPLE -> execute -> FEEL BAD FOR THE REST OF THE DAY.

Now, here is where NLP comes into play: As Richard Bandler observed, every experience and every emotional reaction is coded in our mind as a set of images, sounds, body sensations etc. Since not all parts of our brain speak human language or understand human logic, our internal computer uses its own coding to ensure that all parts of our brain are on the same page.

Now, imagine what if we could learn how to use this code to reprogram our inner computer? Imagine that!

IMAGINE THAT

Maxwell Maltz, the author of Psycho-cybernetics was probably the first to compare the human brain to a computer. He also said that we can program our brain computer by using imagination:

“For imagination sets the goal picture which our automatic mechanism works on. We act, or fail to act, not because of will, as is so commonly believed, but because of imagination.”

He was also the first (to my knowledge) to propose that our self-image and our beliefs about our abilities greatly determine what we can and cannot achieve. “The 'self-image' is the key to human personality and human behavior. Change the self-image and you change the personality and the behavior.”

Richard Bandler took it even further actually developing a set of techniques and a whole philosophy of change that uses imagination as our most powerful self- programming tool.

Now, here is where I stop referring to neuroscience and turn to a practical approach of NLP. One reason why scientists and medical professional frown on NLP is that its techniques aren't based on scientific theories - only on keen observation and daring experimentation. NLP methodology does not aim to prove any scientific hypothesis, but to elicit rapid changes.

As I said previously, understanding your problem is not enough. When you understand something on an intellectual level - congratulations, you convinced your Accountant.

But your behavior and emotional reactions won't change much unless you communicate this understanding to The Artist, The Monkey, The Computer and The Reptile. And the best way to do it, it seems, is to use the same universal language our brain uses - through manipulation of images and sounds inside our head.

As Bandler says in his book “The Ultimate introduction to NLP” (page 47):

“Inside your head, pictures have to have a place, they have to have a distance, they have to have a size; they're either in black in white or they're in color, they are a movie or they're a slide. Sounds have to come from the right and/or from the left; they sound either like they are going in or like they're going out. These, to me, seem to be the important distinctions that we have to make about things. That should be in our owner's manual. Unfortunately we don't come with one, so we have to create our own.”

Below I review some simple techniques, which do not require any specific training and can be safely used by anyone. If you become interested and want to delve deeper, you can either explore NLP therapy or take an NLP training course from a reputable trainer.

STEP OUT OF THIS PICTURE

The following is a quote from “The Ultimate introduction to NLP” by Richard Bandler, Alessio Roberti and Owen Fitzpatrick (page 46):

“When I started out being an information scientist, I went about things differently than everyone else. I went and put an ad in the newspaper, asking for people who used to have phobias and got rid of them. I had about 100 people come in and I said to each one, ‘OK, you had a phobia. How you did get rid of it?’ And they all told me basically the same story. It went something like: ‘Well, after years and years, I got so fed up with it I said, ‘That's it. I cannot take it anymore. That was the last straw that broke the camel's back.’ And then

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they all stopped, slapped their forehead and said, 'At this moment, I looked at myself and saw how stupid it was to be afraid.'

And I wrote the following:

- 1. Slap forehead (probably optional)*
- 2. Disassociate - that is, see yourself in the image.*
- 3. Watch yourself doing it from a dissociated point of view."*

After this, Bandler started trying this approach on people who still had phobias (this is what I call daring experimentation, as opposed to a properly designed scientific experiment). Eventually he developed a technique called Fast Phobia Cure (now we don't use this name because of legal implications) that included dissociation (stepping out of the picture), watching your behavior on a movie screen from a safe distance and then rewinding the movie backward many times.

Now, I am not going to review the whole technique here, but let's do something very simple. What I would like you to do is to think of some steamy romantic moment in your life. It could be something you experienced or something you imagine. See it in an associated view - that is, see it through your eyes as if reliving it again. Now step out of this picture and see yourself in it. Start moving away from the picture until it is very distant. Notice that the level of emotions is just not the same.

Now, if you are afraid of public speaking, see yourself speaking in front of an audience. Look at the audience through your own eyes; be there in a fully associated view. Now, how close is the image of an audience? You probably see it very close and it is rather big. Now, move it away, while making it smaller. How do your feelings change? Now, step out of this picture and see yourself speaking in front of an audience. Make the image smaller, turn it black and white and push it away. How do your feelings change?

What if every time you prepare to speak in public, instead of imagining yourself failing and feeling afraid, you dissociate from the image, make it smaller, black and white and pushed it away? What if you could then imagine yourself speaking with confidence, make it bigger and brighter and then associate into the picture?

TURN IT DOWN

The same mind trick can be done with sounds, namely with various voices in your head. For example, as you read this book you may hear a voice that says, "Why waste your time? You will never get rid of this fear. It is hopeless. Just crawl under the rock and feel miserable." Now, notice where the voice comes from. Notice the volume, the pitch, the pace. Now, think of your favorite cartoon character who has a very funny and silly voice. Imagine this voice speaking to you, coming from the same place, saying the same words, but in a cartoonish voice. How does it feel now?

You also can imagine a volume control and turn it down. Just because it is your mind, it doesn't mean you have to listen to everything it says. You can adjust the settings.

SPIN THIS FEELING

Another easy-to-use technique may seem like magic, and in a way it is. Just like other Bandler techniques it was discovered both through observation and daring experimentation.

Think of something that makes you feel good. Associate into the memory, so you can really experience the feelings as sensations in your body. Now notice where in your body this feeling is

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located. Notice if it moves or stay still. If it is a vibrantly good feeling, you will feel it moving in a certain direction. Imagine this movement as a flow of energy. Using your hand, start actually spinning the feeling in the same direction it naturally moves until it starts growing stronger. Yes, I told you, NLP is all about using your imagination in unusual ways. Keep spinning until the feeling spreads all over your body and makes you feel really good.

Now, imagine yourself spinning good feelings inside yourself right before you have to engage in a difficult conversation or give a speech. What if you could saturate your body with good feelings every time you are about to do something you previously were reluctant or afraid to do?

NLP IS NOT A MIRACLE ... IT ONLY FEELS LIKE IT

What I discovered from my own experience is that NLP is not a miracle. You may achieve a very rapid and impressive change in a few sessions, yet the effect may start wearing off if you then resume using your mind in the old way. What really makes a difference is adapting NLP as an attitude and get into the habit of using it consistently in everyday life. The following is from Richard Bandler: *“You begin with your thoughts, then thoughts become actions, actions become habits, and habits become part of who you truly are. So, now it is time to turn new thoughts into new behaviors, into trying new things.”* (“The Ultimate introduction to NLP,” page 109)

I also discovered that when you establish healthy communication between your Accountant, Artist, Monkey, Computer and Reptile, not only your speech, but your life becomes easier, more vibrant, exciting and fulfilling.

When we live inside our head, listening mostly to our Accountant, we miss out on the fun, craziness and wonderment of our artistic side and we miss out on the vitality and body sensations of our animal part (animal and animated comes from the same root). And when we forget to update our internal software and move through life using obsolete maps, we often suffer unnecessary pain and engage in unnecessary struggle.

Even our reptile brain is affected by this miscommunication as we suffer from strange pains, breathing disturbance and blood pressure fluctuation.

Let me leave you with another story from Richard Bandler that I heard from him while attending one of his seminars in 2014.

He once encountered an audience member who had a very confrontational attitude. This person asked Dr. Bandler if he could use his magic to make him go through a wall. Bandler asked him to come on stage and told him that he would hypnotize him and make him go through a wall. When the guy tried to pass through a wall, he just smacked full-body into it. “Sorry about this, let me try this again, see if this time it will work.” The same outcome. When the person grew sufficiently agitated, Dr. Bandler said, “Well, this one didn’t work out. How about just using the DOOR?” Come to think about it, how often we make things overly complicated trying to walk through the wall instead of simply opening the door? NLP is all about finding the doors while others keep smacking into the walls.

EXERCISES

1. Practice seeing yourself in an associated or dissociated position in different memories. Think of some future event that makes you apprehensive. See yourself in a dissociated view. Make it a habit to dissociate from frightening or unpleasant memories *when it is appropriate*. Remember that some fears are there for a reason: they keep you alive.

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2. Practice changing the size of the mental pictures as well as the distance. Make it a habit to distance from unpleasant feelings that you know do not do you any good. Again, use your common sense. People who do not have any unpleasant feelings as they interact with people are called sociopaths.
3. Start noticing who is driving your bus now. Notice moments when you just fly into a rage like a primate. How about times when you simply need a hug? Notice when you think “black or white” and run automatic programs like a computer. Notice when you use your artistic intuition and creativity. Then do something for your artistic side (draw, paint, engage in something creative). Do something for your monkey - for example hug someone or allow yourself to feel compassionate. Do something for your reptile - do some breathing meditation or get a massage. Make it a habit to stay in the present and be in your body.
4. Practice spinning feelings. When you are sure you know how to do it, start using it every time you want to feel good. As Bandler likes to say, “Good feelings lead to good decisions.”
5. Think how you can start applying this knowledge to everything you learned in the previous chapters.

***"BEING MYSELF INCLUDES TAKING RISKS WITH
MYSELF, TAKING RISKS ON NEW BEHAVIOUR,
TRYING NEW WAYS OF BEING MYSELF,
SO THAT I CAN SEE HOW IT IS I WANT TO BE."***

Hugh Prather

LEARNING FROM YOUR OTHER MIND

CHAPTER 9

LEARNING FROM YOUR OTHER MIND

On the morning of December 10th, 1996, Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, a neuroscientist, awoke to a pounding pain behind her left eye. As she progressed through her morning routine, getting up, showering, burning some calories on an exercise machine, her symptoms grew from alarming to bizarre, indicating a massive stroke in her left hemisphere. As her left hemisphere started shutting down, Dr. Taylor entered the enchanted world of her right brain consciousness.

A STROKE OF INSIGHT

In the previous chapter you were introduced to a concept in neurobiology. According to that concept, we do not have one unified brain, but rather an assembly of different brains. You also learned that each of these brains has its own intelligence, its own agenda, as well as its own way of “thinking”, functioning, communicating and processing information.

However, it is one thing to read about something like this and another thing to actually see what happens when the most familiar part of your brain - your left brain or “thinking brain” - checks out, leaving you in the “terra incognita” of your other consciousness. Dr. Taylor had a unique opportunity, as a neuroscientist, to witness what happened inside her own brain as the stroke claimed more and more of her left brain consciousness. Her TED talk, “A stroke of insight” gives a gripping account of her experience.

ANOTHER REALITY

One familiar thing we experience every day is our sense of self. We perceive ourselves as separate entities and we know where we end and where the outside world begins. For example, when we speak in public, it feels very different than just talking to ourselves. We feel the great divide. But when Jill Taylor looked at her arm on the morning of her stroke, she could no longer make this distinction. It was as if the molecules of her arm suddenly became indistinguishable from the molecules of the wall. No longer could she recognize where the familiar boundaries of her body ended - she became an extended limitless being in the quantum reality of the Universe.

Another familiar part of our existence is a continuous internal monologue that provides running commentary on all our actions. It is this little voice that constantly darts between our past and future, weaving the fabric of our present. But on the morning of the stroke, her left hemisphere went absolutely silent.

Imagine how it would feel not having this familiar chatter of thoughts that fills up your mind from your waking hour to your nightly repose. As Jill marvelled at the enormity of her new consciousness, she realized that she felt totally disconnected from relationships and stresses in her life. She says, “Imagine what it would feel like to lose 37 years of emotional baggage.”

As her left-brain intelligence kept shutting down, she lost an ability to write, speak and understand spoken language. In her mind she knew what she wanted to say; however, she couldn't articulate it. Yet, in the silence of her left hemisphere she found something she didn't expect - another reality.

“It was beautiful out there,” Jill exclaims recalling her cosmic view of herself.

YOUR OTHER MIND

I remember when I was a child, I was fascinated to learn that the moon, which is so clearly visible in the sky during the night, doesn't go anywhere during the day, it just becomes obscured by the blazing sun. If you pay attention you can often see a faint outline of the moon in the clear blue sky on a sunny day.

Just like we start seeing the moon when the sun goes down, Jill Taylor started seeing the light of her right brain consciousness only when her left hemisphere grew dark. It was not an illusion; it was something that was there all along outside her awareness.

We now live in fascinating times, when neuroscience finally starts to turn its attention to this moonscape of our mind: our unconscious. Unlike the real moon, it has a light of its own. As you will discover in this chapter, opening the door into another consciousness can be another powerful tool in your journey of letting go. The best news, you do not have to experience a stroke to meet your other mind. It can be done safely in a relaxed, pleasant setting.

NO, NOT THAT SUBCONSCIOUS!

At this point you may start thinking, "Is she talking about the subconscious? Isn't it something that Freud spoke about?" So let me be absolutely clear, "Not THAT subconscious!"

I am so glad I do not live in times when Freud's ideas reigned in the mind of scientists and general public alike. I cannot imagine how someone could look at a baby boy happily clinging to his mother's breast, basking in a sense of security and nurturing love, and interpret this scene in terms of an innocent child harboring murderous intentions toward his father. Fortunately, just like vampires burst into flames when exposed to sunlight, Freud's ideas started falling apart in the light of modern discoveries.

Today we know that our subconscious is not a dark basement in our mental house populated with monsters. It is simply everything in our mind that usually remains outside our awareness. At any given moment your brain absorbs millions of bits of sensory information, which are processed and deposited somewhere inside your mind without your conscious awareness. There is an ocean of memory inside your head; yet, you never get access to more than a few drops.

For example, if I ask you, "Do you remember your first love?" you may experience a flashback of memory - you may see a face, you may recall a name or even feel some warm sensation from the past. But just a moment ago you weren't thinking about it, it was not in your awareness.

You can imagine a large warehouse - like Costco. Now imagine a night guard with his tiny flashlight walking slowly down the aisles. At any moment his flashlight illuminates some objects, yet, the vastness of the warehouse and its treasure remain hidden in the darkness. This is how your conscious mind works. Imagine gaining access to the entire warehouse.

You can also think about it as a house with many rooms. You inhabit only a few rooms and you can see only one room at a time. However, this doesn't mean that the rest of the house does not exist. You just do not have access to it. Now imagine if you get a magical key.

Yes, there is a key that opens the door to another dimension of your mind - it is a special state of mind called a hypnotic trance.

IT DIDN'T WORK!

At this point you may be tempted to skip the next few pages, muttering, "Hypnosis! Everybody knows it doesn't work. Next thing you will make me cluck like a chicken!"

Just bear with me here. You see, a while ago I had the same notion about hypnosis.

Soon after I started having sessions with Bob Bodenhamer, someone asked a question on his online forum, "What do you think about hypnosis? Can it help get rid of stuttering?" On which I answered, "Sorry to disappoint you, but for me it didn't work." I had a good reason to give such an answer.

I was hypnotized for the first time when I was 12 years old and still lived in Russia. At that time I kept going to various intensive stuttering treatments, which sometimes lasted several weeks or even months. One in particular was at a large reputable live-in clinic that even had its own school. The kids would go to class and then spend the rest of the day having speech therapy, doing breathing exercises and other activities. The culmination of this course that lasted several weeks was a hypnotic session with a famous Russian hypnotherapist, Boris Drapkin.

I remember how we were lined against a white wall that had some soft padding. There was even an audience: other doctors, friends, relatives and parents. The great Dr. Drapkin entered the room, briefly addressed the audience, and then started walking along the line stopping in front of each of us for a few minutes.

Finally it was my turn. He stopped in front of me, cradled my head in his big soft palms and looked into my eyes - his eyes were large, light grey, and had a strange foggy expression. Then he suddenly pushed my head back (this is why they had all this padding on the walls!)

I wasn't asleep. In fact I could see everything. But then he took out long needles and started sticking them into my forearms! This was the weirdest thing ever. I could see those long needles, slowly swaying above my skin, like blades of tall grass, but there was no blood and no pain.

You would agree this was an impressive performance. After the session we were told not to speak for the next 24 hours and you can imagine how anxious I was to see the result. That 24-hour-wait seemed to take forever. You also can imagine how disappointed I was to finally open my mouth only to discover that my stutter was still there.

Today, a certified hypnotherapist myself, I know that what I experienced was an early form of hypnosis, which was used by pioneers of hypnosis and was all about mind control.

NOW, LOOK INTO MY EYES!

In order to put a patient into a hypnotic trance, a hypnotist from the earlier days would ask him or her to stare fixedly at some shiny object; it could be the tip of a pen, a pocket watch, or even a hypnotist's unblinking eyes. In highly hypnotizable subjects this technique produced a trance state, in which they became extremely suggestible and would demonstrate some interesting phenomena such as arm levitation (an ability to hold their arm in the air without any effort), amnesia (for example, inability to recall their name or remember what transpired during the session), or anesthesia (just like the one I experienced with needles.)

This is a type of hypnosis that is still used in stage shows and is usually portrayed in movies. You would see people obeying every command of a hypnotist and doing silly or embarrassing things on stage. No wonder so many people are afraid of hypnosis.

LEARNING FROM YOUR OTHER MIND

To produce desirable changes in a person, a hypnotist would give them direct commands or suggestions in the most authoritarian voice. For example, he might say, "You will be unable to enjoy a cigarette. Every time you bring it to your mouth, you will feel disgust and repulsion."

The problem with this kind of hypnosis was that it worked only for some people and very often the result didn't last.

It was the genius of Dr. Milton Erickson M.D., which brought us another kind of hypnosis.

MILTON ERICKSON, M.D.

Milton Erickson grew up as a farm boy, who sincerely planned on staying on the farm. This dream was destroyed when at the age 17 he contacted poliomyelitis and became completely paralyzed.

During the long months he was lying in bed unable to move any part of his body except his eyes, he entertained himself by observing facial expression and body language of people around him. This ability to listen and observe attentively, while remaining fully relaxed and noticing every slight change in body language later helped him to become an exceptional psychiatrist.

One day as he was lying in bed, he recalled one particularly vivid childhood memory from the times when he was still able to move freely. Suddenly, he felt one of his paralyzed muscles twitch. How could it be? He wasn't able to move his muscles with his willpower, and yet, here he was, responding to the images in his mind, focusing on imagining his immobile limbs moving. It took a while, but eventually (to the disbelief of everyone) he was able to walk again.

As you can see, the mind-body connection was not an abstract concept to Milton Erickson. He knew how language and thought could be translated into body sensations by our powerful imagination. He knew how words powered by imagination could produce real changes in body functions and behavior.

Finally, Milton Erickson developed his unique system of hypnosis that used vivid mental imagery, metaphors and a patient's own memories to produce change. He believed that people had problems because of self-imposed limitations. His way of dealing with it was first to deal with the patient's mental chatter and over-thinking and then use the patient's own resources from the enormous repository of the unconscious mind, to find a solution.

Today, Milton's method has evolved significantly and there are many schools of thought that continue developing hypnosis. In my practice I mostly use Milton's approach with a touch of Dr. Bandler's magic. It is simple and it is beautiful.

Unlike early authoritarian hypnosis, where a client was viewed as a weak-minded and dysfunctional person who needed suggestions from a hypnotist (who of course knew what suggestions a client needed), Milton envisions every person as a hero on a journey - a journey that requires courage, curiosity and a spirit of adventure. Usually, not only the unwanted behavior, but many other areas in that person's life, become magically transformed.

MIND, ENCHANTED

I recently read a book by Stephen Gilligan "Generative trance". Stephen Gilligan studied with Milton Erickson and also spent some time volunteering as a human guinea pig at Stanford University in Hilgard's hypnotic studies. He recalls how trances with Erickson were like magical adventures - never the same, always exciting and inspiring - while trances induced by standard induction methods in a laboratory setting were rather dull. It is not easy to define "trance" and it is

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not easy to fit it into a sterile environment of a scientific laboratory. However, as far as scientific studies go, we know that during a hypnotic trance the electric activity of the brain indeed shifts to the right hemisphere, even though the left hemisphere never completely checks out (so a hypnotic client may not necessarily experience the same cosmic state as Jill Taylor did).

JUST RELAX!

Let's see what actually happens during a typical hypnotic induction. As you will notice, it has many elements that help distract, confuse and overload the left hemisphere, while inviting, enticing and engaging the right hemisphere.

For example, you may be asked to take a deep breath, hold it, and then let it out. This immediately takes your attention from your internal dialogue (left hemisphere) and into your body sensations (right hemisphere). Then your attention may be directed to different parts of your body, as you are given suggestions to relax muscles first around your eyes, then around your mouth, then in your body: in your arms and legs.

As you continue to relax and focus on your body, a hypnotist will use special hypnotic language: words and phrases that evoke images, memories and body sensations, taking you deeper and deeper into the realm of your right hemisphere.

To increase this dissociation between two hemispheres, you may be asked to perform some simple tasks such as counting backward while continuing some imaginary activity. This is to distract and overload your left-brain and prevent it from interfering.

TALKING TO THE RIGHT

Have you ever wondered how some words touch your heart and stir your feelings, while other words just bounce off your mind without making an impact?

When words and sentences are processed by your left-brain, you understand the dictionary meaning, the logical connections, intellectual concepts and math. However, they never touch you emotionally. It is very different when your right brain gets involved.

Your right brain connects words to images, sensation and memories, so they become alive. For example, if I say, "Imagine grandmother's apple pie" your reaction will depend on whether you had a grandmother; if she indeed baked apple pies; and whether you like or dislike apple pie.

Using verbal pictures and summoning your past experience, hypnosis taps into your right hemisphere, directing your attention inward, leading you from one memory to another, until you drift away into the magic world of your unconscious mind.

THE MANY FACES OF TRANCE

There are many types of hypnotic inductions and of course it also depends on the particular method your hypnotherapist is using. If done right, however, a hypnotic trance can feel like a journey into an enchanted land. Your mental chatter quiets down, your imagination runs wild and your carefully constructed maps of reality become fuzzy and fade away.

Some trances are very light and you may not notice a change in how you feel until you emerge from the trance and realize that you are not quite yourself. Some trances feel like a dream and some feel like sleep, where you completely check out and cannot remember anything that was said or done. Usually I let each client decide how deeply he/she wants to go.

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Regardless of its depth, the trance state has certain characteristics:

- Physical relaxation, quieting of mental chatter
- Activation of imagination - daydreaming
- Time travel - you may be regressed to an earlier memory and it will seem to you as if you are re-living it now. It also will be easier for you to imagine yourself in the future with all the qualities you want to develop.
- Time distortion - you may feel you have been in trance a few seconds while actually an hour passed or you may feel you were gone for a few hours, while it has been only 30 minutes.
- Lowering of analytical, logical functioning - a trance state makes it easier to accept changes in your view of reality.

WHAT IF I CANNOT BE HYPNOTIZED?

Some clients are concerned that they cannot be hypnotized. So I usually ask them: “Do you dream? Do you have memories from your past? Do you go into your future with your imagination?” If you are able to use your imagination, you will go into trance just fine.

It is not essential to go very deep. In most situations light trance will do just as well as a deep one. However, for very left-brained, highly analytical people with very persistent mental chatter, it may not be easy to let go and switch from thinking to imagining. In this case a person may need to spend some time learning how to go into a trance.

Once a person learns how to get into this special state, they usually love it. As Albert Einstein put it, *“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.”* Not all trances are like this. However, when experienced by a strong and courageous person, who is ready for a change with a gentle and knowledgeable hypnoterapist for a guide, a hypnotic trance may be a life changing experience, during which your consciousness embraces the entire world, connecting you to the source of your deep wisdom, your true self.

ANOTHER MEMORY LANE

It once was believed that if a person recalls a repressed memory, his or her problems would magically disappear. Now we know that the memory doesn't work like this. More often our persistent behaviors and beliefs are linked not to one particular memory, but rather to a series of related experiences, linked together by invisible bonds created by a separate memory system - our implicit memory.

It was a real shock to scientists to discover that the human brain has two memory systems, working independently from one another.

Your explicit memory records events as they are. It records your father's voice, the sunset above your old house and the smell of your grandmother's apple pie. However, alongside with this memory process, another works silently and secretly, sorting through events in your life, putting them together, noticing similarities, making sense, detecting patterns and extracting hidden rules.

This is the system that figures out how to coordinate your muscles when you learn to ride your bike. Remember that moment when you finally “got it”? And you found you never forgot how to ride your bike.

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It makes sense out of a complex structure of spoken language, enabling you to use it confidently long before you learn the grammatical rules.

This memory also allows little Johnny to use just the right amount of whine in his voice to get what he wants from his Auntie.

This system is fully functional when you are born and it never fades away. A child is not capable of logical reasoning for the first few years of life, yet from birth the child's brain works hard trying to figure out how things work in this universe. It is because this system starts functioning long before you become capable of analyzing and evaluating your experience that it can get you into trouble.

“Encountering an early series of consistent instances can implant an erroneous generality in a child's mind. The mental machinery distills and does not evaluate; it cannot detect whether the larger world runs in accordance with the scheme it has drawn forth from the emotional microcosm of a family.” (“A GENERAL THEORY OF LOVE” T. Lewis, et al.)

Since implicit memories are formed outside of our consciousness, they feel like “truth”. You didn't consciously make these connections, so it seems like they exist independently of your mind. They simply are. They cannot be affected by reasoning or understanding. However, hypnosis allows you to go back to the source with your adult resources and re-pattern them, forming new beliefs and creating new updated maps of reality.

LIFTING THE COURSE OF IDENTITY

Each of us has something we call “identity”, which is a set of ideas and beliefs about ourselves. This sense of identity, this knowledge of who we are, is very useful, because it allows us to function in this world, interact with other people and more or less predict our own behavior. Yet, because this sense of identity is so important, our internal “identity police” may make us feel very uncomfortable when we try to deviate from our habitual behavior.

When I started speaking with a new degree of fluency, all of a sudden I became overwhelmed with feelings of anxiety and fear. It was not fear of something in particular; it was just a looming sense of impending peril. Every time I had a relapse, I felt it as a relief.

Dr. Richard Bandler, a co-creator of NLP, once wrote a very unusual book titled “The Adventures of Anybody”. This is a fable about a Prince who had a problem - he felt that everything around him was old and nothing new was ever happening. The King, a concerned father, finally sent for a wizard who lived in a far-away land. When the wizard came, he told the astonished King that he could not help the Prince, because there was no Prince and they were all part of a dream someone else was dreaming. The next morning the Prince awakened, having no idea who he was, so he had to go on a journey to find his new identity.

Imagine what it would be like to forget who you are, forget your emotional baggage, your ideas of yourself and just embrace the new you - with new beliefs, behaviors and emotional reactions. Unfortunately in real life your old identity may prove to be very resistant to new beliefs and behaviors. No matter how well you understand “Old maps of reality do not serve me anymore”, it still feels very unsafe to leave familiar territory, going boldly where no man has gone before.

Hypnotic trance allows you to temporarily step outside your reality maps, silence your busy left hemisphere, and experience a state of expanded consciousness. The more time you spend in this enchanted land, the easier it is to let go of old beliefs and an outdated self-image.

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THE SOURCE OF CREATIVITY

Another reason to become curious about your unconscious mind is that it is the home of creativity, intuition and insight - all unconscious processes. It doesn't matter how hard you try, you cannot force creativity, you cannot cause yourself to be intuitive or reason your way into insight. Poets describe inspiration as flashes or flow - something that comes to them.

Very often discoveries and inventions first manifest themselves to the consciousness as images or dreams. For example, a German chemist Friedrich Kekule, while trying to come up with a structural formula of benzene, saw in his dream a snake biting its tail. In a flash, he realized that the structure of benzene should contain a six- membered ring of carbon atoms. A Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev, after failing all conscious attempts to solve this problem, saw in his dream how all chemical elements could be organized in the Periodic Table.

Aldous Huxley, the author of "The Brave New World" was known to regularly enter a special state that he called the Deep Reflections, in which his body was completely relaxed and his attention drawn within himself. This self-induced trance-like state allowed him to tap into creative resources of his mind and unlock the flow of inspiration.

I believe that not only people who have problems, but nearly everyone would benefit from regular encounters with their creative consciousness. When you silence mental chatter, relax physical tension and allow your other mind to step forward, wonderful things start happening.

EXPLORING TRANCE

If you can, I highly recommend you to invest in a professional hypnotic session. Even if you then decide to proceed with self-hypnosis or hypnotic tapes, it is better to first enter your enchanted land with an experienced guide to ensure the best experience.

Be sure to check the therapist's credentials though. Unfortunately, hypnotherapy is that gray area in which there are no strict rules, so some hypnotherapists start practicing after completing a few hours of an online course. The industry standard is 100 hours, which should include at least 50 hours of practice. People who really care for their clients usually strive to exceed these requirements. Look for membership in professional associations - they require certain level of expertise in order to join and they require proof of continuing education every year.

Do not expect hypnosis to cure your fear of speaking or stuttering in one session. Instead, re-read chapter 2 about John Harrison's Hexagon and think what feelings, fears, beliefs and perceptions interfere with your ability to let it go.

Remember, it is not about an instant cure, it is about learning to communicate with your other mind, using your imagination. Think about it as going to the University. The more time you spend in trance, being connected to your universal consciousness, the more wonderful changes you will experience in your real life.

If professional hypnosis is not what you want to do, you can use audio recording of hypnotic inductions or self-hypnosis.

SELF-HYPNOSIS

There are many techniques for self-hypnosis. Here is one that I believe is easy to follow.

First, create your affirmation. For example, it may be, "I let my speech go. My speech is a river. I trust myself. I let it go." As you say it, imagine what you are saying. If you cannot imagine it, revise the words until you can form an image and feel sensations in your body.

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Then find a comfortable position and start observing your breathing as you breathe slowly and deeply in and out.

Next switch your attention to different parts of your body from head to toe. As you do so, repeat some simple mantra such as “Just relax”, or “Relaxing now”, or even “Blue”. If you choose “blue” make sure you imagine calming blue light surrounding you as you say the word.

Then start counting very slowly from 100 to 1 and when you reach 95, repeat your affirmation (within your mind) a few times. Then continue counting down, allowing yourself to skip numbers until you simply float away and you will descend into a sleep- like state.

You may either set up an alarm clock or simply tell yourself to get out of the trance after a certain period of time, such as 10 or 20 minutes. You will be amazed to see how your mind can wake you up exactly as you request.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Albert Einstein also said, *“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.”*

I recently re-read John Harrison’s book Redefining Stuttering (see chapter 2) and was amazed how many concepts I simply couldn’t grasp because they lay too far outside my reality maps. I couldn’t really imagine how it was possible to trust myself with my speech. I couldn’t imagine how it was possible to stay connected with my emotions. And above all, his descriptions of Zen archers effortlessly sending arrows in the sky and hitting the target without trying just flew right above my head.

Through using NLP, my experiences in Toastmasters, clowning, acting and improvisation classes, I was able to slowly change my reality maps and adapt a new expanded self-image. Yet, I sometimes try to imagine what my journey would be like if from the very beginning I could combine all these approaches with exploration of my other consciousness.

You have this chance. Even though hypnosis is not a magical cure, it is a wonderful way to realize that you are bigger than your thinking, you are bigger than your self-image and you are certainly much bigger than your fears. Deep inside you already have everything you need to find your flow and to become the confident, powerful and complete person you were meant to be.

EXERCISES

1. Practice self-hypnosis described in the chapter. Notice how it makes you feel.
2. Write a letter to your right hemisphere describing the experience you would like to have when you speak. Remember - it should be written in a vivid language that evokes images, memories and body sensations. Read it aloud, allowing yourself to feel sensations and see images. How do you feel?
3. Go on YouTube and find a hypnotic induction. See how it makes you feel.
4. If you can, set up an appointment with a professional hypnotherapist. Make sure the person uses a client-oriented approach and makes you feel like a hero on a journey. You should feel absolutely comfortable, safe and in control at all times, otherwise start looking for an exit.

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5. Create a metaphor to communicate the idea of letting go to your brain. One great example is Ruth Mead's "Speech is a river. It flows by itself." Find a metaphor that resonates with you. Start reflecting on your metaphor as you practice self-hypnosis. What experience of letting go looks like, feels like, sounds like to you? Pick up a book, "The tall lady with the iceberg" by Anne Miller, which further explains power of metaphors and how to create them.
6. Watch "Stroke of insight" a TED talk by Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor on YouTube. If you experienced this state of expanded consciousness, how would it change your relationship with your speech and yourself?

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CHAPTER 10

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“Now think about this spider...What do you feel?”

“I... I don't feel anything. It's just a spider. Wow!”

This is the most rewarding part of my work: actually getting to observe people let go of old fears, as well as getting to observe people revising unhelpful beliefs and attitudes. The girl I was working with had such an intense fear of spiders that she was unable to walk into a room if she suspected there might be a spider close by. She couldn't look at pictures of spiders and couldn't even imagine spiders without an intense fear response. All it took was one 60-minute NLP/hypnosis session and she was free. I later heard from her friend that her response to spiders indeed changed dramatically.

Unfortunately problems that involve speaking and communication are more complicated and take much longer.

This is what I often hear from my clients at the beginning of our work together: “I started speaking and at first I was totally in the flow, no problems at all. I felt so confident. And then I started thinking I might block, lost my flow, and couldn't get it back.”

So why is it possible to take care of the fear of spiders in one session; yet it may take from six to ten (or even more) NLP/hypnosis sessions before stable and lasting results are achieved for those who stutter or are afraid of speaking.

Before we address this question, let me introduce you to my good friend and a role model, Alan Badmington.

ALAN BADMINGTON

Imagine yourself as a fly on a courtroom wall. With your green multifaceted eyes you scan the room, the people in the audience, the bench of magistrates, until finally, you switch your attention to the witness box. There you see a young police officer, good looking, fresh-faced, who puts his left hand on the Bible, raises his right hand and opens his mouth as if preparing to speak. Then a strange spasm contorts his handsome features and all he is able to say is, “I sssssssssssssssssssssss...”

The young officer's name was Alan Badmington. As you probably have guessed, he stuttered. Now, you may start wondering how he was even able to perform his duties in the police force. Well, he had a secret weapon: Alan knew what letters could give him trouble so he developed the ability to quickly substitute any word that started with a troublesome letter with a suitable synonym.

As Alan puts it: “I became a walking thesaurus.”

However, on that wretched day in court, he was mercilessly stripped of his armor. No matter how good he was at word substitution, he couldn't change the words of the oath; the oath had to start with, “I swear...” He, of course, couldn't change dates, names or places in his witness statement. He had no choice but to struggle...and struggle...and struggle.

After this incident his superior officer wrote in Alan's personal file: “When this officer gives evidence in court he is an embarrassment to all.”

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Alan eventually was transferred to office duties, where he was safely tucked away from any interaction with the general public.

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

If you stutter, you can probably relate to Alan's story. But if you do not stutter but have fear of public speaking, let me ask you, "Exactly, what are you afraid of?"

Some of the reasons I have heard from fluent speakers were: "What if I forget my speech?" "What if my voice fails me?" "What if my pants fall down?" In other words, you are afraid because you do not trust yourself, your memory, your voice or even your wardrobe.

Worst of all: you learned to do it so well that you stopped noticing the strangeness of it. You do not ask yourself why you expect your memory to fail when you speak from behind the lectern, but not when you tell your story at the bar. You do not wonder why you maintain this distrust even though you thoroughly rehearsed your presentation, drank enough water to ensure suppleness of your vocal cords and tightened your belt to prevent your pants from falling down.

Alan's problem may seem different, but it boils down to the same issue of trust. He distrusted his ability to say all words that started with "difficult" letters. He also distrusted his ability to speak in some situations, such as when he was the center of attention, just like on that day in court.

Now, if you believe that stuttering is a genetic condition that is caused by damage to the brain, you may exclaim triumphantly, "But it was not just about trust! He really couldn't say those letters. He probably had some damage in brain areas, where all those difficult letters were located!"

The reason I can't agree with such explanation is that today Alan can say every one of those letters just fine. Moreover, from my own experience I can say that those tricky letters demonstrate fascinating fluidity. They do not always stay the same.

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

One of the letters Alan couldn't say was the first letter of his last name: "B."

I, on the other hand always struggled with the first letter of my first name: "A". To avoid blocking, I would take a deep breath (as I was taught in therapy). Then, I would start letting my breath out and then let the letter "A" glide out of my mouth with the air flow: "HhhhhhhhhhhAnna".

In the Russian language the letter "a" is pronounced as [ah]. When I came to the U.S., I soon discovered that every time I introduced myself, people heard my name as "Hanna". "No, no", I would insist, "It is not Hanna, it is HHHHanna, but without the H." This exchange resulted in some weird looks from others.

In desperation, I decided to switch to American pronunciation. But (would you believe it?) even though the sound at the beginning was now different, my block remained the same. I actually heard a theory that our brain uses separate brain areas to produce the sounds of foreign languages. If this is true, why did I continue to get stuck on this damned first letter?

When my husband and I were deciding on the name of our son, I insisted that it should *not* start with "A"; no Alex, no Andrew. Finally, we agreed on Michael, because I had no trouble with "M". And of course, within weeks after my son's birth, I started blocking on "M". All it took was a thought, "What if I block when someone asks me my son's name?" And indeed, I did.

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CAN YOU HEAR ME?

In 1977, Alan Badmington procured a device called the Edinburgh Masker. This strange contraption produced a loud buzzing sound in his ears every time he spoke, drowning the sound of his voice. Interestingly, when Alan couldn't hear his voice, he stuttered far less. Alan writes about his experience: "It was simply horrific - just imagine a uniformed police officer wearing a throat microphone and a set of ear molds, connected to a control box by lengths of wires and tubing concealed beneath his clothing and hair." He wore this device for 10-14 hours a day for more than 20 years. Sometimes the masker would let him down by malfunctioning in the most crucial moments and then Alan's speech would revert to severe blocking.

In 2000, Alan was in his 50's. He retired early; he no longer wore his masker; he just endured his misery. When his wife suggested he should try something called the McGuire Program, he adamantly refused. Enough disappointments already! However, as you may know, some wives can be pretty persistent. Finally he gave in and begrudgingly enrolled. Within three days he was walking on air, enjoying a degree of fluency he could not even imagine. End of the story? Not quite.

NOT A SPEECH PROBLEM

The reason I never wanted to try The McGuire Program was that it reminded me very much of all the fluency shaping trainings that I had back in Russia. Even though I know there are people whose lives were transformed by this program, from my experience in Russia I knew three things. First, to me it was not fun to speak while constantly controlling my air flow. I really hated this. Second, within weeks after graduating from any of those programs, my stutter would find its way around any technique and I would resume blocking. Third, I still felt inadequate, different and weird when I was using those artificial techniques. I was still anxious.

The reason I am so impressed by Alan's story is that he not only gained fluency, but eventually abandoned his special technique and found his natural flow. Just like me, Alan came across John Harrison's Hexagon concept and realized that stuttering wasn't simply a speech problem. He decided to reshape his beliefs, perceptions and emotional reactions around speaking.

THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

Alan started his incredible journey by spending many hours a day talking on a phone with current and past McGuire graduates - many of these people were complete strangers. He also made phone calls to businesses from the Yellow Pages - setting up and then cancelling the reservations, inquiring about prices, etc.

Soon after graduating from McGuire, he traveled to the U.S. to help start the McGuire Program here. During this visit he contacted numerous TV stations, newspaper offices and radio-stations. (He also met John Harrison and they spent many hours talking non-stop.)

Just a while ago he couldn't make a phone call or ask a question in the store. Now he was making cold calls (often in public areas where others could hear him), approaching strangers on the street and barging into TV studios, radio stations and newspaper offices, demanding attention. Not many fluent people are capable of this.

When he came back home from his U.S. trip, he joined three speaking clubs and started speaking every week. In addition he explored acting and improvisation classes, as well as undertaking many other activities that created challenges of speaking in front of total strangers. As

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Alan recalls, at first he kept hearing this little voice saying, “Alan, why don’t you stutter, you should stutter.” But eventually this voice grew silent.

Since the year 2000, Alan became an inspirational speaker, who presented hundreds of speeches to various organizations. Recently, he traveled to the U.S. to give an hour-long speech at ASHA Convention (American Speech Language Hearing Association). His speech is available on YouTube. I also recommend that you read many articles that he published and which are freely available online.

It is my belief that one of the main reasons Alan was able to switch from the artificial fluency technique to naturally flowing speech is that he took great effort to develop trust in his ability to speak fluently in all situations.

Interestingly, as scientific studies show, the need for trust is embedded into our speaking machinery.

HOW THE BRAIN LETS GO

In 2011, I came across a fascinating article by Tasko S.M. and Guenther F.H. (J. Fluency Disorders, 2010), from which I learned that there are two main modes of speech production. One is the feedback mode, in which the brain constantly monitors every sound as we speak, trying to catch mistakes. Another mode is the feed-forward mode, in which the brain sends well-learned commands to the articulating muscles and just *trusts* them to produce the right result.

The authors created a computer model of speech production and demonstrated that when this system produced a phrase “good dog” in predominantly feed-forward mode, it had no problems. However, when they made the feedback mode dominant, the system said, “g-g-good dog.” (Yes, they made a machine stutter. This is just the kind of things scientists like to do).

As they explained it, the feedback mode is too slow. It makes speech unstable. Of course the machine couldn’t tell the researchers how it felt. But as we speak, it is easy to notice that every time we are too focused on avoiding mistakes, our speech becomes unstable. It feels differently. It is no fun. But when we lose our fears, stop listening to every word we say and trust our mind to take care of our speech, it feels like flow. It feels like letting go.

If you want your mind to let go, trust is a must.

HOW TRUST IS LOST

You may ask, “Why do we even need the feedback mode if it makes our speech unstable?”

It turns out this mode is crucial for language development. A baby starts learning the language by first listening to speech (even before birth), building a sound database in the brain. Then the baby starts babbling, producing a wide range of sounds. Every time a sound is uttered, it is compared to a corresponding sound in the brain database. If an error is detected, the position of articulators is corrected and a new sound is matched to the “correct answer”.

Such error-based monitoring allows a baby to adjust movements of the tongue, jaws and lips to the point when they can produce the correct sound. The best part: babies do this unconsciously and effortlessly. This is learning without studying, because it is carried on by implicit memory (see the previous chapter). It just goes on day by day as a baby babbles and gurgles and giggles. I wish I could learn English this way!

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Finally, the brain decides, “I got it” and starts transition to the “letting go” mode. From now on there is no need to listen to every sound. Instead the brain just keeps sending a steady flow of commands expecting them to be executed exactly as needed. The brain learns how to trust. Only sometimes it doesn't.

If you imagine a sensitive child with good imagination and a tendency for perfectionism (the traits often found in people who stutter and those who have intense fear of public speaking) trying to build trust in his or her ability to speak without conscious control, you will realize how modern life presents all kinds of challenges to this task. It could be an overzealous parent who corrects every mistake a child makes. It could be a speech therapist who insists that a child who has early childhood stuttering must control her speech. It could be some incident that makes a child believe that letting go is a dangerous thing to do. The scenarios are endless.

I believe that the best prevention of adult stuttering is helping a child to build and maintain trust in her ability to speak. David Seidler - the screenwriter for the movie “The King's Speech” once said that the only therapy he administered to his two daughters when they started stuttering was loving and attentive listening. It worked wonders.

By the way, the feedback/feed-forward theory explains why the Edinburgh Masker helped Alan speak fluently. When auditory feedback is not possible, the system has to switch to the “letting go” mode. It now has no choice, but to trust.

THE FLOW MODE

I believe that the feed-forward, “letting go” mode is the ultimate flow mode and is not restricted to speech. It is the same system that allows athletes to perform automatically, without delay. Think of a gymnast somersaulting on a beam. Clearly, there is no time for her to think or watch for mistakes; she has to trust her body. So the mind keeps sending well-learned commands, while trusting that they will be performed well. Of course, before a gymnast can do that, she has to put many hours of practice into developing the skill. When the trust is built, an athlete can let go.

In short, the flow state in speaking is not that different from that of an athlete who relies on automatic, well-learned movements. If a gymnast falls from the beam, and the next time starts thinking “Oh, I fell down during the last performance, what if I fall again today,” it will be a disaster. Trust has to be restored before the mind can let go again.

To people who stutter or those with severe fear of speaking, building this kind of trust after decades of pain and embarrassment is not easy. However, if Alan Badmington, John Harrison and Ruth Mead (as well as many other people who found their natural flow) were able to do this, you can do it too. The best part, you do not have to learn how to speak. If you can speak well in one situation, you can speak well in all situations. The skills are there. What is lacking is trust.

FLOW VS FLAWLESS FLUENCY

The very first step in developing trust is an understanding that when we say “flow” it does not mean “100% fluency” or “100% absence of flaws”. In fact, the more you focus on achieving fluency or 100% flawless speech, the less likely you are to establish trust and to achieve flow.

As you know from previous chapters, when your mind needs to understand something on a deep level, it has to translate words into images, sensations or memories. So when we say "fluency" what does it mean?

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If you are a person who stutters, you most likely see fluency as an absence of stuttering. However, our mind cannot process "absence". It doesn't compute on the emotional level. Instead, it latches onto something it can understand, something it knows very well, which is of course stuttering. This means when you focus on fluency, your mind thinks "stuttering" and feels obliged to watch for anything that sounds, feels and looks like stuttering. The only way it can be done is to switch to the feedback mode. As you remember, this makes flow impossible.

This is why I suggest you let go of expectations. Instead, make it a clear intention to be in the flow. When you imagine what it feels like to be in the flow, there are many images to choose from. Your mind can imagine the river, or it can bring up the image of the Zen archer, or it may remember one of those times when everything just clicked together. A curious thing is that you can be in the flow, yet not 100% fluent. You can be 100% fluent, but not feel the flow. Letting go of expectations and focusing on the experience itself, being in the moment and having fun allows you to enjoy your speaking experience despite occasional drawbacks.

It also helps to develop trust.

In a while you may start thinking: "I stumbled a few times, but it didn't affect the overall result. I still had fun and I still was able to touch my audience. Maybe perfection is overrated." Then you will be firmly on your way to freedom.

MASTERING YOUR GAME

As I am writing this chapter, I am taking another mask class with my old teacher Arne Zaslove. Over the years I have taken 5 or 6 classes with him including clowning, expression masks, neutral mask, Commedia Dell' Arte. There is something he talks about in each of his classes, "Every performer has to be The Artist, The Animal and The Athlete."

According to Arne, the Artist is our ability to improvise and to adapt to changing environment. It is our free will and our intuition.

The Animal is our ability to be in our body, in the moment, with no hesitation and doubt. "The cat who wants to jump on the fence never hesitates. You never see a cat preparing to jump on the fence and going over it or bumping into it. It is one precise movement." Arne's impression of a cat going over the fence always gets a laugh from his audience.

Being an animal means trusting your natural automatic mechanisms.

Who is the Athlete? Now we go into an unpopular area. The Athlete is someone who invests many hours into practice until he or she becomes really good at it and can finally let it go. If you want to be confident, funny and entertaining on stage - you have to develop skills. And this is something people who stutter and who are afraid of public speaking often forget. I am not talking about mechanics of speaking - you do not have to learn this. I am talking about skills, which make the difference between a jaw-breaking boring presentation and a presentation that make you sit on the edge of your seat, hanging onto every word the speaker utters.

When I suffered from severe stuttering, I thought the moment I got rid of it, I would be funny and eloquent and mesmerizing. When I reached the point where I could deliver a speech without blocking or fainting from fear, I seriously thought I could win the World Championship (Oh, my story was so compelling!). I took second place at the Division level, which wasn't that bad. However, I had to face the harsh truth - I wasn't such a good speaker after all. I had a lot to learn. Since then I embarked on a journey learning everything about public speaking I could, putting many

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hours into practice. It is because of this, not because of my fluency or absence of fear that I became the District Humorous Champion.

The same was true about my social skills. After decades of severe stuttering I found I lacked elementary skills necessary to maintain a good conversation. I didn't know how to listen. I kept interrupting people. I would speak too fast or too much, leaving my listeners exhausted. The reason I decided to take my first NLP training was not because I wanted to be a therapist. I wanted to learn how to communicate.

Learning what it takes to develop connection to the audience, how to appear confident, how to organize and present your ideas so people can digest them, how to listen, how to speak from your audience's perspective, how to use your voice more effectively, how to move your body, etc., may seem too much bother for you now. But take it one skill at a time and see what it'll do for your confidence and comfort during speaking. You will be amazed how much it will increase your confidence and how much it will help you to establish trust.

One thing to keep in mind though: There is a very important difference between training and performance. When you learn a new skill, it may feel you are more clumsy or slow or tense. It is important that you be willing to go there, experience this pain and accept the possibility of failure. As Alan likes to say, "Setbacks are stepping stones to success." However, when the skill is learned, it is equally important to let go of conscious control.

IF YOU CAN SEE IT, YOU CAN BE IT

One consequence of having a human mind is that you are not marooned on a small island of the present moment. Your mind constantly zooms to the past and into the future. This means that every time you are about to perform a task, your mind goes into your past and reviews all experiences that are similar to what you are about to experience. Then it goes into your future and creates a movie about a possible outcome.

If you lived through decades of painful and embarrassing speaking experiences, you can imagine what a horror movie your mind creates every time you are about to speak.

One way to deal with it is by visualizing your desired outcome. However, one problem with this is that for many people it is not easy to imagine themselves speaking with confidence and power if they've never done it before. This is where an NLP technique called The New Behavior Generator comes in handy.

You start with achieving a good state of relaxation using a self-hypnosis technique described in the previous chapter. Then you imagine yourself walking into a private movie theater - just for you. As you settle down, you see the screen and on that screen you see a movie about your next speaking situation in which you want to perform better. However, instead of you, your role is played by a person who performs this task extremely well. It could be a movie star, a famous speaker, or even a super hero. As you watch the movie, you notice everything your role model does. Then you make the screen blank again.

Next, you see the same movie, but this time you see yourself on the screen; you are playing your own role. However, you do everything exactly as your role model just did. Then you make the screen blank again.

Finally, you imagine yourself flying right into the screen and becoming you in the movie. You see everything through your eyes, you experience everything in your body, and you hear everything

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as you say it. See what it feels like to be in this experience and behave in this new way. Play this a few times as fast as you can.

As with all NLP techniques, they are much more effective when performed by a professional who uses special language patterns (and who relieves you of responsibility to remember the steps.) However, if you do not want to invest in professional sessions, this visualization is very useful. The more you do it, the more your mind will accept this new behavior. The easier it will be to trust your skills and your ability to let go.

TRUSTING “IT”

My 5-year old son leaps into my arms with an excited squeal. He knows I will hold him so he doesn't have to worry. When on a playground he glances at me from time to time, especially when feeling unsure. He believes I am keeping him safe. Who is keeping you safe now?

This is an interesting question. When you drive your car on a highway with a thin yellow line dividing two opposite lanes, what makes you believe that none of the drivers going in the opposite direction will switch into your lane and smash into your car? When you drive over the bridge, what makes you believe that you won't lose control and fall over the edge? Some people actually have phobia of bridges, because they lost this trust. When you stand on the edge of the cliff how do you know that your body won't suddenly lose its balance?

There should be something that gives you this feeling of confidence, feeling of trust. There should be some unseen force to which you unconsciously entrust your safety, just like a child leaping into his mother's arms.

As someone who grew up in the Soviet Union, I never considered myself religious. As a scientist, I had a hard time believing in the spiritual world. Yet, as I journeyed through stuttering, I learned that in order to fully let go, I have to entrust my speech and my personal safety during the conversation to “It”. You may call it The Universe or The Creative Unconscious or The Universal Conscious - it doesn't matter. So it would be unfair to you, my loyal reader, not to mention this very powerful source of trust.

When I look back, I see how seemingly accidental encounters became important parts of my recovery. I see teachers, mentors and books that helped me find essential pieces of knowledge, which was instrumental in my success. It all seems like a well-told fairy tale in which a magic tool can be found to overcome every obstacle. It all comes together. It seems easier to just relax and accept that I do not know everything about the world and that it makes more sense to simply trust my journey.

This also applies to speech. I became aware that I couldn't control everything in my life or my speech. It is easier to entrust it to something bigger than I and accept that I do not have to think about everything or know everything. I can accept life as a wonderful adventure. I can let it go. This way of living is much more fun, exciting and rewarding than my old controlled and cautious existence.

This is why I added spiritual hypnosis and elements of the generative trance developed by Stephen Gilligan to my toolbox of healing tools. This is not for everybody, but it seems essential to me to get in touch with that part of our unconscious mind, which craves spiritual connection, which wants to extend into the Universe.

You may find that if you have strong religious beliefs or if you feel connected to the spiritual world or the Universal Consciousness (whatever term resonates with you), it makes it easier to trust

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and let go. On the other hand, if you, like me, were raised in a left-brained, pragmatic family, I encourage you to start exploring the terra incognita of your spirituality.

It seems that to experience the flow, we need to be willing to open up, lower our shield and be fully present in our mind, body and spirit. Sometimes it means we need to discover our spirit first.

THE CLOSING REMARKS

People often ask me, “How long did it take you to find your flow?” I must admit: I have no idea. When I just started my journey I certainly didn’t expect it to extend to five years. I hope that my experience will help you save quite a bit of time. But if you find yourself on a monumental journey of self-discovery, I would say, “Good luck, it is totally worth it!”

As John Harrison said while responding to one of the posts on the Internet forum, *“The truly heroic people are those who keep pressing ahead, even if they hit a downslide. Like an explorer in the jungle who’s looking for the cache of jewels in the hidden temple, you have to be willing to venture into new and dark corners and find pleasure and meaning in the discovery process.”*

My journey transformed me, made me stronger. It helped me to discover myself and get in touch with my emotions. I laugh more freely and I often find myself crying when listening to a soulful medieval ballade or watch a touching moment in cinema. At the same time I feel more grounded, more complete as a person, more open and spontaneous.

What is even more important, everything that I have done to achieve the flow infused my life with a sense of purpose and adventure. It made my life fun. And if I had not undertaken it, I wouldn’t have discovered my life’s passion: the mind magic of hypnotherapy and NLP.

I still get drunk on my flow. It never loses its mesmerizing quality to me. Whenever I speak in front of an audience, or answer the phone without a second thought or do a hypnotic induction for my clients, I still feel a pleasant tingle inside. It still feels fresh and alluring. I am afraid I sometimes talk too much. I am not alone in this. When I talk with Alan Badmington over the phone, I hear in his voice the same joy of living, the same wonderment and excitement, “There is so much to do! There is so much to experience!”

I hope that by following in my footsteps you will make the same amazing discovery that I did:

You do not have to go far in search for your flow - it has been always within you, it is yours to have. All you have to do is to let it go.

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Edited by Ruth Mead. Formatting by Richard Parent, September 2014.