

# **Choice Building: Changing Synesthesias Through Choice Building**

**by Tim Hallbom**

I would like to share with you a useful set of NLP patterns that I have assembled over time. These patterns are easy to do, and they almost always work to increase a person's flexibility and unconscious choices within a specific problem context. These patterns are especially great for working with your children, because they don't require the child to come up with any complex resources (but are equally effective with adults).

These techniques have been developed through our work in the NLP domain of strategies. As you may already know, strategies are the sequence of internal representations (sounds/words, feelings, smell and taste) that lead to an outcome. Simply stated, they're our learned thinking patterns.

## **Same Old Same Old**

Once you've learned something well, whether it's useful or not, your brain will automatically repeat the same sensory sequence in your thinking patterns. Thus you will think, behave and typically produce similar kinds of results. This goes hand in hand with the NLP presupposition: If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten. When you repeatedly do something well, it's because you are thinking about it in the same way each time, when you do something poorly, it's for the same reason. When we are "stuck" and are not being resourceful in some context, we are generally non-resourceful in the same way each time. When you watch people's eye accessing cues and listen to their predicates, you see and hear the same patterns each time they access the non-resourceful context.

## **Eye Accessing Cues**

The patterns that follow add more sensory representations into a situation where you've been stuck in some way. Frequently, when we're "stuck" in a recurring situation, we glob our internal representations into a single representation, rather than moving our eyes to various eye accessing cue positions sequentially. (If you are unfamiliar with eye accessing cues, see the book *Heart of the Mind*, by Steve and Connirae Andreas, pg. 254). This multiple representation is called a synesthesia. Your pictures, feeling and sounds are locked up in a single, confusing representation.

## **What is it?**

I first recognized a synesthesia in someone at a time when I had very little NLP training. Years ago, I was working part time at a place called the Family Counseling Center. A man brought his wife in because she refused to hug him or be hugged by him. He was going to divorce her if she didn't change her behavior. I asked her, "What is it like when he hugs you?" She looked way up left and said in a frightened voice, "It feels awful." I then asked her, "What do you see when you move your eyes up here?" (Pointing to where she had looked moments earlier. She screamed, "My father tried to kill me!" Then the memories associated with the experience began to flood into her conscious awareness.

It turned out that her father didn't really try to kill her, but he did frighten her. She was 4-years old and visiting the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. If you've ever been to the North Rim, you know that there is a trail along the edge of the canyon, and the only thing separating the trail from a 1,500 foot drop off is a little rock wall. Apparently, the little girl was running down the trail and her father became worried about her safety. To "protect" her and teach her a lesson, he held her tightly with his hands around her waist and lifted her over the 1,500-foot drop off saying, "See how far down you can fall?" She repressed the scary memory from her conscious mind. But her unconscious mind never forgot what it is like to be suspended over a 1,500 foot drop off. From that day on she refused to be hugged or held tightly.

This story is an example of a synesthesia. The woman's frightened picture of looking into the depths of the canyon was mixed in with a feeling (a fear of terror). At the beginning of the session, I noticed that she was looking up, where a person typically makes pictures, but she reported experiencing an intense feeling in conjunction with her internal picture. Luckily, in her case, just remembering the experience in a conscious way altered how she felt about being hugged. At the end of the session, when her husband came to pick her up, she gave him a big warm and loving bear hug. This woman had successfully separated her feelings from her picture, which allowed her to create a new and resourceful response. I must note here that just remembering is not always everything a person needs to do. Often, you'll need to apply other NLP processes such as the ones described later in this article, to really reorganize your resources.

This woman was looking up and getting a feeling before she resolved her problem, thus creating a multiple representation (synesthesia). I have noticed that it is much more common for a person to look down and try to make a picture when "stuck." When a person is looking down when thinking about an issue, the picture will typically be dim, and the person will mainly notice his or her feelings. Keep in mind, however, that everyone's brain is different, and so each person sorts information differently.

### **Repeating the Same Strategy**

One of the often misunderstood NLP presuppositions is "Communication is Redundant." This doesn't necessarily mean that we say the same thing over and over. What this means is that postures, eye movements, internal processing, process words, gestures, voice tone and tempo, physiology such as skin color, muscle tension, etc., all communicate the same sensory representations throughout the brain. These physiological communicative patterns affect how we perceive reality both internally and externally. When we get "stuck" in a particular situation or context, we will represent the same non-resourceful strategy (neurology) every time. We'll display the same posture, eye accessing cues, submodalities, muscle tension, voice tone/tempo, etc.

### **Repatterning**

To help someone repattern his or her neurology and increase flexibility, you need to notice his or her non-resourceful patterns. A summary of the sensory system indicators follows:

Visual

People communicate that they're in the visual channel by looking up; gesturing up with their hand or pointing up or out; lifting up their head; standing erect with their shoulders more or less straight across; their voice is usually higher and faster; they have less color in their face and they use visual process words.

### Auditory

People communicate that they're in the auditory channel by cocking their head as if they were on the telephone; pointing to their ear; gesturing to their side; drumming their fingers or toes; moving their eyes from side to side or down to their left and holding their shoulders back.

### Kinesthetic

When people access their kinesthetic (feeling/body sense) system, they'll look down to the right or usually have more skin color. They generally have a lower, slower voice tone; gesture down by their middle or stomach; point to their heart or put their hand over their heart; and they breathe low and deep in the abdomen.

It's important to see and hear these kinds of cues in the person's physiology when doing NLP. In the processes that follow, you'll learn how to add choices in a quick and elegant way to those limiting contexts where you've developed a limiting synesthesia. The following patterns will help to reorganize internal representations into more flexible ways of thinking and into new sequences of representations. Test your "stuck" contexts and look for different eye accessing cues and physiology.

## **Choice Building**

This is a two-person process which calls for an "explorer" who experiences the process, and a "guide" to help him/her through the steps.

### Goals:

To add behavioral choices to "stuck" contexts by creating new patterns of thinking.

To increase personal flexibility.

To add basic resources quickly and easily by adding various neurological traits to existing synesthesia.

### Steps:

#### Stage One-Resolving the Issue

An Explorer identifies a problem context. (This set of patterns requires that you find a specific person, time and/or place where the problem behavior occurs. The Explorer accesses "stuck" situation. Anchoring that state to a space one step in front of the Explorer. Calibrate physiology, eye accessing cues, voice tone, etc.

#### Change state

The Explorer identifies a resourceful state. Calibrate physiology.

#### Change state

Have Explorer reaccess problem context and associate into it. Exaggerate physiology (physical molding) while holding the content of the situation in his/her mind—Guide helps Explorer to remold physiology (including eye movements) to that of a resourceful state. Make sure the Explorer holds the content of the problem situation in his/her mind throughout the movement from a non-resourceful physiology to a resourceful physiology. (The initial ideas for this process were given to me years ago by Don Aspromonte, who is an NLP trainer living in Denver, Colorado.)

### Stage Two-Repatterning Thinking: Adding Thinking Options

Add an auditory digital/visual construct (Ad/Vc) synesthesia by having the Explorer tap left foot, touch finger to chin and look up right to visual construct. Then have the explorer say, "Mmmmm...." As they do this, have the Explorer step onto the "content space." Think through that content while holding the Ad/Vc physiology for a few moments.

Note: You will recognize the physiology associated with this Ad/Vc synesthesia as one that people use when they're being creative. By adding these multiple representations (creating a synesthesia), a new set of resourceful choices becomes available for the person.

Break up the synesthesias by having the Explorer step into the context and while the Explorer thinks about the context, have the Explorer move his/her eyes through all eye accessing positions in a figure 8 pattern, then reverse the direction.

Note: This will move the content through different neurology, thus creating more options and will actually produce a significant change of state.

In 1987, my colleague (Charles Faulkner) and I began to experiment with this Choice Building process with a woman who did not like her present profession, but wasn't sure what to do. When asked about what she wanted to do, she would move her eyes sort of up and feel confused. She had a vague sense of a fuzzy picture and a feeling of confusion. We had her move this picture to each eye accessing position, and added an auditory tone. We saw something shift in her physiology, and the next day she reported that she had gained a more clear understanding on what to do about her situation.

When someone has a physical symptom, you can often ask, "what's causing your (cancer, migraine headaches, stomach problems, etc...)" They will usually answer, "I don't know," but they'll move their eyes to some spot. Have them hold the feeling that they're having. When they do, have them move their eyes by pointing to each of the six eye accessing constraints, as described above, in a figure 8. Often the information about their issue will come to mind.

Connirae Andreas independently developed a similar and very thorough process. NLP Comprehensive is reportedly making a video of it and that should be very useful. She got the idea from a therapist on the West Coast who uses a variation of this theme to help people resolve traumas. She has a person move their eyes back and forth from Ac-Ar several times while holding a picture of what their phobia is about. We've tried it and it works well to break up traumas locked into synesthesias.

Access a k/v synesthesia. Have the Explorer step into the problem context space, and as he/she steps in, lift his/her hand up, directly in front, and above eye level. As they move their

hand up, have them look above their hand, way up in the air, at about center, while holding the content. This takes the content from K (stepping out) to V (looking up). Have the Explorer step with his/her dominant foot. (The one they'd kick a ball with) and lift the other hand (i.e., right foot-left hand, left foot-right hand). This often will produce a state of, "Go for it!" and will certainly anchor the problem content to a more resourceful state of action.

Note: We originally created the process where the person stood statue-like. Bob Spencer, a Feldenkrais teacher that we shared this process with, suggested that the Explorer begin to access the problem content, and make strong movement at the same time. This creates a more flexible response because it involves movement. After a movement, have the Explorer step out of the context space. Return to a neutral state. Access a resourceful breathing pattern, one that is markedly different from the one calibrated when the Explorer accessed the non-resourceful state in a problem context. (See the summary of representation systems for how to add different sensory systems by shifting breathing rates). If you just make sure the person is breathing in a full way, he/she will be more resourceful and will be utilizing new neurology. After a few moments, step out and change state.

You have now helped the person "rethink" his or her problem context using more of his or her brain. You'll find a significant difference in the person's response to the problem situation. Test the change by having the Explorer step into the "problem context space." You'll typically see the person's eyes and body move quickly with micro-movements through the original neurology, the resource state neurology and the choice. Future pace to appropriate contexts via rehearsal.

I would enjoy hearing from people who use this pattern. It almost always results in some important changes. You can reach Tim at [request@nlpca.com](mailto:request@nlpca.com)

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