

It's More than a Model

More than Patterns

It's an Attitude and Style

THE NEURO-SEMANTIC APPROACH

L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

with Michelle Duval, CEO *Equilibrio*

In previous articles I have written about Neuro-Semantics as a model, a field of study, a set of patterns, and even as a business and community. Now I want to write about another facet of neuro-semantic, what we have designated as *the neuro-semantic approach*. Why? Because it is *the neuro-semantic approach* that gives Neuro-Semantics its power, dynamic, magic, and appeal. In this, neuro-semantic is *an attitude, style, an approach* and has its own *M.O. — modus operandi*.

Do you know what the Neuro-Semantic approach is?

What distinguishes the Neuro-Semantic M.O.?

What are its qualities and features?

How does one learn or adopt this *modus operandi*?

Why would one want to? What are its values and benefits?

The Birth of *the Neuro-Semantic Approach*

First there was *Meta-States* as a model and a set of patterns. That later gave birth to Neuro-Semantics and a wide range of applications. When we first introduced Meta-States as a third meta-domain of NLP (1994) we didn't know that there would soon be an explosion of creativity in its applications. Yet as that happened and as the way of presenting Meta-States and Neuro-Semantics evolved, it began taking on its own style and feel. It is that which has given birth to the idea of a *neuro-semantic style*.

Of course, this was inevitable because of the different kind of thinking involved in Meta-States. In contrast to NLP which is mostly a linear model, Meta-States involves thinking in circles, looping around the spiraling of the mind, fluid levels, and reflexivity. Ah, *reflexivity*—what a very different kind of thinking-and-feeling that is! How mind-and-emotion-and-body loops back onto itself to create matrices and funnels and eddies in the mind. Reflexivity, the central mechanism in Meta-States, refers to *reflecting* back onto ourselves, our experiences, our states, our thinking, our emoting, etc. And it is reflexivity that enables us to keep *stepping back* from ourselves. And that, in turn, allows us a more reflective mode, a more apply-to-self attitude, a broader perspective, a more ecological concern, and the ability to quality control our states and experiences.

This began the neuro-semantic approach. Soon after constructing the Meta-States model several of us began reflecting on the “downside of NLP” and commenting on how to hold ourselves to a higher standard. Others, including NLP trainers, quickly began saying things like Meta-States would be “the model that ate NLP.” They saw that the self-reflective nature of Meta-States would not only enable us to transcend and include NLP within higher frames, but that as we kept stepping back, we would not get caught up in the P.R. of over-promising results. They recognized that there would be a greater passion and care for the long-term consequences of what we're doing.

Then the day came when Bob and I began reflecting on what we would make the vision and mission of Neuro-Semantics. That not only led to the first vision statements, but led me to writing about “*The Neuro-Semantic Difference*,” and how it differed from traditional NLP. (If you're interested, you can still find these articles on the website.)

More recently, Michelle Duval and I co-created the Meta-Coaching trainings and materials and presenting the first certification trainings. It was then that the very way Michelle used the Well-Formed Outcome pattern and other patterns caught the attention of many. While they had seen and heard and experienced those basic patterns—they found that in her hands these patterns seemed different, more alive, more dynamic. There was a difference. But what?

When I first interviewed and modeled Michelle's Life Coaching business plan at Meta-Coaching, people sensed that there was also something very new and different about how she does business. It wasn't the content, it was something else. But what?

It was the attitude and the approach. Michelle described some of the criticisms that she first received when she started her coaching business, *Equilibrio* and explained how she would run the coaching practice and sell a process coaching program. Business people, coaches, and NLP people repeatedly told her that she could not run a coaching business that way. "No one does it that way!" "It won't work." "Nobody will buy a 12 week coaching program."

Yet it did work. She did, and does, sell 12-week programs. Within six months she had a full coaching practice with a three-month waiting list. She even has a 90% closing rate from her free Introduction sessions, *and* she has three of her associate coaches at *Equilibrio* who has a similar closing ratio. How that is possible is, in part, *the Neuro-Semantic approach*. If this establishes the importance of the neuro-semantic approach, then what is the *neuro-semantic approach*?

The Neuro-Semantic Approach

1) *Frames*. One of the most important and critical processes that we know and work with in Neuro-Semantics is frames— identifying the frame, detecting it, deframing, setting new frames, entering the matrix of frames, working with the fluid "logical levels" of frames, and outframing.

That's one of the big secrets in Michelle's Intro. Coaching Session. *She sets the frame*. She sets the frame about what Neuro-Semantic coaching is and how it differs from other forms of coaching, consulting, mentoring, counseling, and training. To this day, she continues to set the frames every week with every new client regarding what *coaching* is, how it works, the way she coaches, expectations, etc. And the wonderful thing is that "whoever sets the frame controls the game." So, people naturally and easily buy it. It is in this way that she makes it happen. That's because they recognize that it serves *them*.

2) *Relationships*. Does that sound "manipulative" or "controlling?" It would be if it wasn't for another facet of the neuro-semantic approach. Relationship. The critical importance of rapport and caring for people and making sure it is ecological for the person makes it powerfully influential, but not manipulative. For in setting her frames with clients, she works uniquely with each client to deliver exactly what *they* really need, and more. In that, the ego is completely out of the way because "it's all about *the client*." In doing so, Michelle follows that client's energy. She follows their lead and adapts her processes to fit *them*. Rather than manipulating or controlling the client to fit her models and patterns, she follows the client's energies, passions, values, and visions.

The neuro-semantic way recognizes that to work effectively and successfully with any client, business, corporation, audience, friend, colleague, etc., we have to accept the other on the other's terms. After all, each person, group, and business comes from his or her own unique Matrix of frames. Respecting this, honoring this, and acknowledging this is the first step. That's why part of the Neuro-Semantic way involves *non-judgmental awareness and acceptance*. It involves respectfully getting permission to work with another. It involves spending the time and effort to earn trust.

3) *Walking the talk.* The Neuro-Semantic approach fully *applies to self* the basic premises that people are not broken and don't need fixed, that resistance is a meaningful communication, and that operates from abundance, faith in others, and cooperatively as a fallible human being. In other words, the Neuro-Semantic modus operandi is *living* the vision statement. Our M.O. is to walk the talk, close the gap between what we know and what we do, and always first *apply to self*.

The Neuro-Semantic Approach for "Trainings"

Because Neuro-Semantics developed from those of us in the field of psychology, training, consulting, coaching, educating, etc., the primary expressions of Neuro-Semantics is working with people one-on-one or in groups. Yet what we have been discovering in the past year or so is that the Neuro-Semantic way is inviting us to shift our "trainings" so that they take on some new and different features.

What's driving this? Again, the basic premises of this field.

People don't need fixing, they rather need *a self-reflexive exploration of their Matrix* of frames which facilitates them finding and creating their own resources and solutions. The client does the work, not the coach, consultant, or trainer.

People don't get better by having things done to them, they get better and tap their own hidden potentials when *they are empowered to take charge* of their own minds and lives.

People don't need to be taught, instructed, or lectured as much as challenged and teased and provoked to recognize that all of their mapping frames are *their mapping frames* and that they have plenty of *power to change and be transformed*.

People's internal communications create their framed realities —they are the architect of their own Matrix.

People experience the greatest magic of them all in the power of applying-to-self. That's how they make it their own, close the knowing-doing gap, and become life implementers.

What is emerging from this awareness? Where is this taking us? How is "therapy," "coaching," "consulting, and "training" shifting and changing with Neuro-Semantics? AT this moment we don't have the full answer, yet we do see some hints of the future beginning to appear. Our sense is this, that in the near future, the self-organizing frames that we have set and that we are *applying-to-self* with more and more success will result in some new emergent properties that will revolutionize these professions.

Soon (perhaps this very year) it will be said that when you come to a Neuro-Semantics event you will *not* just experience a training, or a workshop, or a discussion, or a life-changing transformation. There will be parts of it that will remind you of a training for new skills. Parts of it will remind you of coaching to enhance and refine those skills.

Parts of it will seem like a keynote presentation that offers inspiring ideas, or a presentation that offers some theory or framing. And yet it will *not* be that. It will be something different. People will begin to say, “No, no, it’s not a training or a workshop or a seminar or a conference, *it’s Neuro-Semantics*.”

A Hint of What’s Emerging

Perhaps the *Axes of Change model* that we developed in 2003 can offer some insight into what may be emerging now and the changes that seem to be forming in a womb and soon to be delivered. The Axes of Change maps out the *change* process and, like Meta-States, is non-linear in that the *change dance* moves back and forth between 7 different roles or experiences. Sometimes it feels like an awakening, sometimes like a challenge that can be even threatening or very unpleasant. Sometimes it can feel reflective and probing for understanding while at other times it can feel provocative, teasing, and pushing. Sometimes it can feel creative and insightful and like an interior decoration, while at other times the giving birth to a new way of acting or relating, and celebrating the emergence of new life, and sometimes testing as in being put to the test to see if it passes muster.

What a dance all of that can be! What vitality arises! And perhaps it is easier to say what it is *not* than what it is. It is not living comfortably in one’s Comfort Zone. The Drone Zone of too much comfort, too much familiarity, too much predictability— it is *not* that. Nor is it the Panic Zone, the Anxiety Zone. It is much more the Flow Zone of just the right amount of challenge to make us feel uncomfortable and just the right amount of competency and skill to feel excited, hopeful, celebrative, and anticipating.

In trainings, coachings, consultancies, workshops, etc. this means *the Neuro-Semantic approach* goes for the Challenge—Awakening dance first, then the Reflective Probing—Provoking dance second, then the Co-Creating and Actualizing, then Testing dance third. Expect the Neuro-Semantist to say,

“You’re uncomfortable? Great! Discomfort means that the frames of your old Matrix are loosening up and you’re about ready to embark on an adventure to a new World! Good on you, mate!”

“You’re scared about the unknown? Great! Hey, everybody, John’s about to embrace a new dose of ambiguity, let’s hear it for John! Hip, hip, porah!”

“It’s too hard, too involved, too complex, demands you think too much, etc.? Really? These are just silly excuses that you’ve used to excuse yourself from excellence, aren’t they? Are you going to sell your soul to them again? You are? Okay, then I want you to wallow in your complaints for 10 more years before you make this change! You have to. You’re not allowed to be transformed yet. You want to? No, you don’t! You do? Nah, you’re just saying that!”

What has passed for “training” or “coaching” is going to give way to a *neuro-semantic methodology* which may mean being more real and authentic with people, more passionate and compassionate, more ready to identify the governing frame and getting to the heart of things and persistently honing in than we ever imagined possible.

The neuro-semantic approach will challenge the non-sense and myth that there is some singular and simple “magic bullet” that will solve all problems, cure all illnesses, win all sales, and defeat all interferences. etc. Recognizing that the person is never the problem, but that the frame is always the problem—we will forthrightly face the illusion that “things ought to be simple.” In an interactive system of many, many interactive parts (like the mind-body-emotion system), things are not simple. *People are not simple.* We cannot categorize them into 4 types. Nor even 19 types. We will confront and challenge people to *think systemically*, to follow the system loops, and to not only “run their own brains,” but use them above ninth grade reading level.

Do people not want “theory?” That’s funny. Why? Because everybody in every training and every coaching session already has a theory about things in his or her head. We don’t have a choice about whether we think about theory or not since *theory*—our presuppositional frames and beliefs is already what we have mapped out about ourselves others, business, relationships, etc. It’s our theories (frames), in fact, that are often what creates our problems.

Since “the higher frames govern everything” —when a training, skill, process, pattern, etc. does not work or generates lots of resistance, the resistance is always a function of some frame. It’s always a function of some theory-frame in a person’s head. For the Neuro-Semanticist this is where the fun begins! This is where we get to be an explorer of the other’s Matrix as we empower others to tap their own potentials for mastering their own Matrix.

A *seduction* typically occurs whenever people show up to a training or coaching session or consultation and operate from “The Quick Fix” frame so that they want us to tell them what to do, or they want us to “just hypnotize them” and make the problem go away or make them extraordinarily successful. Will you take the bait and play the game of “I’m the Expert, I’ll fix everything!”? Or will you recognize the frames (theories) that inform that game—the frames that undermine that person’s success?

If we truly believe in people's ability to rise up, think in terms of structure (the structure of their frames and matrix), and to set new frames that will self-organize in new ways, then we will *not* take the bait. We will play the Facilitator Game— the Explorer Game. This is the neuro-semantic attitude.

The neuro-semantic approach means that we recognize that *the power within* has to be identified, accessed, and tapped into. We do not truly help people when we solve their problems. We are the provokers and teasers and challengers and testers who push and probe to get people to step into their own power zones, take the initiative, accept ownership, and from that create the gestalts of responsibility and proactivity.

Empowering another means dancing with the change processes that facilitates the transformation desired by that other person.

This basic neuro-semantic principle that each of us is always and only responsible for ourselves is the only foundation for self-mastery. Every Neuro-Semantic training, presentation, and session focuses on seducing people to take ownership for their own response-able-ness in their areas of responsibility. That's the key to any and every success.

It's not the coach's job or the trainer's job to do the work *for* the client or audience. Only the person can wake up to his or her own power matrix. This is the key to learning, to sustaining learnings, and to applying oneself fully as an adult learner. Anyone who would take ownership for them to get their outcomes only plays into the sick frames that encourages victim-hood. This is precisely why business is inundated and sick of the "fad of the month" programs that keep promising some magical solution.

Finally, the neuro-semantic approach to leadership is that when everybody says "It can't be done!" we follow our own visions and values and the principles that we believe in to set the pace, to lead and pioneer the solutions, and to go first in exploring the pathways that allows it to be done. If a client or a group want us to take responsibility for them getting their outcomes, as a neuro-semantic leader, we refuse. A true leader never betrays the principles for money or approval or conformity. The attitude and style is to live the principles even if it means embracing confusion and ambiguity, facing rejection and criticism, and persisting through the challenges.

What then is *the neuro-semantic attitude, style, and approach?*

It's recognizing and dealing with frames as the heart and center of human experience. The person is never the problem, the frame is.

The Matrix is self-created and must be self-re-created for change, transformation, resources, and life enhancement.

Facilitating another's change and excellence is what we do. We don't fix anyone, we don't do anything *to* another person—we explore and facilitate.

Relationship is the context for facilitating change and transformation.

For the power of congruency and intuition we first apply to self. We become the master of our own matrix which paradoxically gets our ego out of the way.

Non-judgmental awareness and relation slays dragons and gives us a yellow brick road into the Matrix of others.

Playing and having fun accelerates learning and gives us a child-like flexibility so that we stay current and relevant.

Authenticity is fearful *and* fun and the human way that leads to effectiveness and success with self and others.

It's an exploration and always will be. We don't know it all and never will.

Summary

Neuro-Semantics not only refers to a model, a set of patterns, a field, a business, a community, but also to an attitude and approach. What the *neuro-semantic approach* fully is and will become, we can't yet say. It's still developing. New emergent qualities are even now being given birth. I hope in this new year to keep revising this article and updating our definitions as we discover more fully what *the neuro-semantic approach and modus operandi* is. And I hope that as you experience it in various forms, you too will walk away knowing that while it is similar to coaching or training, yet it more, it is *neuro-semantic in nature and style*. And may you be a part of the adventure of giving more precision to it.

Authors: L. Michael Hall, Ph.D. and Michelle Duval co-created Meta-Coaching and the Axes of Change model and are key players in the field of Neuro-Semantics.