

Solution States



A Course in Solving Problems in Business with the Power of NLP

Sid Jacobson

“Take any problem you like into *Solution States*, and you will find Sid simply there beside you, as a helping hand, a gentle voice in your ear, pointing you in the right direction and allowing you to expand your imagination.”

—Diana Beaver, author and trainer.

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Introduction

For the Reader, Evolving

Does Solution States fit?

I recently had the opportunity to hear a brilliant anthropologist named Jennifer James warning a large group of training and development specialists against practicing 'management by best-seller'. Probably no need to worry with this book. Also, there is no need to worry that this book will run counter to whichever paradigm you are currently operating in (or pretending to). Whether you are aiming for 'Excellence', TQM (Total Quality Management), CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement), a learning organization, a total process re-engineering (probably to get one of the others), or the next new management development framework, what you have in your hands will help and support you.

All business and management paradigms have one inescapable thing in common: reliance on a particular piece of equipment. Your brain. Business will never be something you can do totally by the numbers, no matter who says so (aren't you tired of 'The three sure-fire ways to close every sale ...' or 'Four quick steps to solve any problem ...' or 'If you only do this one thing, everything in your life will change completely, overnight, as if by magic so you can have wealth beyond your dreams and a Winnebago for your wife and kids ...'). Unfortunately, we will have to be able to *think* to do a good job, at least in the foreseeable future. When that changes, I'll let you know.

Cracking the Code

I remember growing up loving spy movies. My favorites always had some guy with a microfilm plan of the latest weapon, reduced to a dot the size of the head of a pin. Looking under the microscope it looked like hieroglyphics from some lost civilization. The guys in the lab always promised to 'crack the code' and catch the villains. They usually did. In NLP we've cracked a lot of codes. They have

to do with how people think and learn. The nice thing about cracking a code is not only what you find the *first time*, but that you can do it over and over, *anytime* you need to. That is what this book is about. Not a quick fix for your problems. Not a list that says 'turn to page seventeen for the answer if your problem involves three idiots, a computer and a mule'. It's about cracking the code to your own thought processes so that you can use those processes the way they were designed.

There are a lot of questions you'll need to answer for yourself along the way. Remember that this is much more than solving a current problem, though that is certainly one goal. Once you crack the code to your own thought processes, what you find will be there for you to use for a lifetime, in solving problems, thinking creatively and more.

Also, I don't intend this to be the final word on this subject. It is one phase in the evolution of this system of thought, about thinking. We have enough knowledge now to compile some of it in a useful form that makes sense in a book (there is much more that I think is best learned in a class, a seminar or under the guidance of a consultant). It may seem complicated to you if this is your first exposure to this field of knowledge. Just remember, a few years from now, it will seem overly simplistic, even childish, the way most things you learn do as you evolve. That's the goal.

Though all of us in the field of NLP know that these things work, we would never ask you to take that on faith. When we learn something, we constantly test our findings and results—including on ourselves. If something works for us, we pass it on and see how many others it will work for. In the process we usually discover some people or things it won't work for, as well, then we refine it. I've been using the processes you're about to discover for years. This book is your invitation to join me in this continual process of discovery, refinement and evolution.

Chapter One

Self

The first thing that is important in solving any problem, in business or anywhere else, is in knowing who you are as a person, what we call identity, and your role in the problem. Without a clear idea of your relative position in any situation, you can't be sure that any plan you implement will actually fit. There is no wrong way to take a look at your role, other than not to do it at all. So, the question becomes, 'Where do I start?' Well, there are specific things to think about, especially in terms of your beliefs and values, that I know will help you begin this process in an organized fashion.

First, do you believe you can make a difference? Obviously, if you don't think you have any control over coming to a solution, you won't be very effective. In fact, if you don't believe you can do anything about it, why bother? Of course you may believe that you can do what needs to be done, only to be undercut by others who may be involved (maliciously or not). That kind of thinking won't help much either. In fact any 'negative' thinking will probably get in your way sooner or later. Best to get it out of the way first.

Basic Presuppositions

One great place to start in exploring anything is to look at its underlying assumptions, or *presuppositions*. In NLP, we have a useful way of thinking about people, their problems, communication, needs and values. In fact everything we do in NLP stems from these basic beliefs. It is not necessary that you agree with all of them; they are simply the ones, we believe, that allow us to be effective. Perhaps looking them over will get you thinking about your own basic assumptions, and how they might be at the root of this problem, or others you run into. Spend a little time on the questions and, if you can, take notes. They'll help.

Presupposition 1: The map *is not* the territory.

This is a very old way of saying that our beliefs and ideas about how people, life and the world work aren't necessarily accurate. They are just a guide, or map, of how things work. In this world, people don't act on things because of the way those things actually are. Rather, they act on their own personal *maps* of how they are. It may be that you have been following some old rules or guides in your work (an out-of-date map) that are actually getting in your way, rather than helping you. Maybe it's time for a new map.

Questions:

1. Do you run your business affairs (or your life) from some rigid set of rules? Where did they come from? Is it possible that, though they were effective back then, they aren't as valid now?
2. When was the last time you realized that something you believed was *incorrect*? How did you handle it, and change your thinking?
3. Can you remember a time when you *expected* something to occur, and something very *different* happened instead? How did you adjust to this difference between expectations and actuality?
4. Have you ever found yourself disagreeing, or even arguing, with a co-worker or business acquaintance about some theoretical issue you had little or no *direct* experience of? Were you able to 'catch' yourself and admit that your ideas were just that, only ideas? Did you interrupt the argument and agree that the two (or more) of you simply had different viewpoints, each of which could enrich you?
5. Do you find changing your beliefs and expectations easy? How have you managed these changes when you've done them really well?

Presupposition 2: All behavior has some 'positive' intention. People make the best choices they perceive are available to them.

No matter how weird you think other people's (or your own) behavior is, there is some good reason behind everything that they (or you) do. Sometimes you have to do a great deal of questioning and thinking to get it to make sense, but with patience and perseverance it will. Maybe you get stuck at certain times in your work

The Seven C's

Determining how you get in your own way—what internal interferences you set up—is one way to analyze how you go about deleting, distorting and generalizing; and making thought viruses. Robert Dilts has a set of organizing principles called 'The Seven C's Model'. You can think of the Seven C's as the Seven Conundrums, or problems, that you need to *overcome* to have real mental clarity and focus on achieving your goals. This is also an excellent troubleshooting guide for checking yourself on how you are thinking about, or coding, your problem space. Each of these seven processes is a tried and true method for screwing up.

1. **Confusion.** As obvious as the first of the Seven C's sounds, we don't always know that we are confused about something, or what exactly is confusing us. This lack of clarity, or inability to focus, can make a mess of our well thought out plans. It may be, in fact, that our well-formed outcome isn't so well-formed in reality. It is important to have a clear mental image, or even written criteria for knowing we've gotten what we want, in the ways that I described in Chapter 2.

The problem of *smoke screens* is familiar to most of us. We can have our judgment clouded for lots of reasons, and in lots of ways. We often get vague and general when we need to be specific. We can blank out important details, ideas or other information, simply deleting these things from our awareness. We can fool ourselves in a variety of ways to avoid getting in touch with bad feelings we may have about what we need to do. Avoidance usually breeds more problems, which can lead to further avoidance and a descending spiral into a smoky cloud of problems we don't know how to face. Often, when we look back later on the mess we've made, we can clearly see how we fooled ourselves.

Questions:

1. What images do you have in your mind when you think about this problem or situation? Are these images actually clear pictures in your mind?
2. What do you say to yourself, or others, about this problem or situation?

3. How do you feel, when you think about this?
4. Have you had the experience of thinking about this or related problems or situations, and later finding that your perceptions, ideas or worries were inaccurate?
5. How accurate do you believe the images, things you say, and feelings you have about this situation or problem actually are? Do you have *evidence* to know if you are accurate in your thinking?

2. **Content.** It is always possible to have improper information or materials at hand while you are trying to achieve your goals. The old computer programming maxim ‘garbage in—garbage out’ comes to mind. One of the most common difficulties we manufacture, in this sense, is *red herrings*: truly unimportant or irrelevant details. Chasing these is really a very simple way we can unconsciously fool ourselves and mess up our sense of direction. Knowing which pursuits take us directly toward our desired outcomes is the key to avoiding this trap. We’re looking for consistency here; making sure there are no missing links in our chain of information and action.

In a related manner, many of us fall into the trap of spending 80% of our time on the least important 20% of what we need to focus on. Sometimes we know it, but that doesn’t really help much unless we *do something about it*. This, again, comes down to consistently facing, and doing, the most important things, no matter how painful, when we need to.

There is an old saying from anthropology and information sciences, generally attributed to anthropologist Gregory Bateson, that says: ‘information is the difference that makes a difference.’ But only if it is good information.

Questions:

1. What concrete information do you have about this situation or problem? Is it reliable?
2. How would you know if the information you had was worthwhile or not? Do you have some system in place to double-check what you have? Could you be missing something?
3. Are you sure that what you are focusing on is truly relevant, or the most relevant? Are you consistently spending time on aspects of this that aren’t important enough to make a difference?

CHANGING YOUR STORY

Metaphors—stories—are an integral part of life. From a very young age we hear and become a part of the stories we see and hear. And they become a part of us. We learn from them, are enriched and challenged by them, and change as a result of them. This process of taking in and connecting what we hear about others to our own lives is as natural as taking in food as nourishment. We relate to others through our shared stories as much as our shared experiences.

We also use these stories to understand ourselves, just as we use them to understand the world around us. We talk to ourselves inside just about all the time. It helps us to make sense and order in what happens to us and in how we respond to these events. Most of us, in understanding some important event, will make a number of interpretations and conclusions about it. These serve to solidify our understanding of it and to put it into a framework that explains it in the context of our lives. They become our stories.

Story telling is as natural as living. The problem with the process, however, is that our stories tend to become ‘written in stone’ in our minds. They become rigid and limiting. They satisfy our need to have things organized and simple, but limit our flexibility and creativity, often when we most need them.

Being willing to pay close attention to the ‘story’ we tell about whatever problem we are having can help us see how we may have ‘written ourselves into a corner.’ This makes sense if you think about times in the past when you have solved an important problem. We almost always end up telling a different story about it after we’ve successfully tackled it. And that new story becomes the basis for the new beliefs or conclusions we make about the situation in hindsight. Why wait? Maybe if we just rewrite the story while we’re having the problem, we can overcome it by changing the way we believe it is structured. Change the story to change the problem. The change can work in either direction.

Developing Effective Relationships Gaining and Maintaining Rapport

Relationships are obviously very important to all of us, whether at home or at work. For many of us, they influence most of what we do. Just as we can have strategies for approaching others, asking for help or feedback about something, or solving problems with others, we can have states in which we are better at all of these things. These may include being able to take the point of view of another person or even the way they understand something. It may include a willingness to look at our own behavior, listen to criticism, or control or better express real feelings. Some-times it takes an understanding of the natural changes and progressions that relationships go through in their evolution. Other times we need to notice, somehow see and hear, that roles have changed in some way (or that they haven't, but should).

There is, of course, no limit to the skills involved in having good relationships with others. All of them start with willingness and a belief that they are worthwhile and important. Then, the right state for understanding, appreciating, accepting, or communicating with others is what will make our living and working with them fruitful. If we are in a state of rapport with those we have to deal with, we can always develop the relationship into what we want and need. Without good rapport, we're stuck hoping the other person will go along with what we want, but with no way to work together toward our common interests.

Being Healthy

Often people don't take as much time to consider their physical well-being as they should. If you are one of those people, on some level you probably know it. Are there times when you take really good care of yourself? Other times when you don't? What is the difference? How much of that difference is due to outside factors, and how much is strictly your own responsibility (be honest, now)? What states do you get into that automatically drive you toward taking the best care of your health that you can? What can you do to optimize those?

If you don't already know it, you'd be surprised how much of our thinking is governed by our diet, exercise, rest and sleep and general health. All of the states we get into are affected by these things. It is up to us to be aware of them and take good care of ourselves. In fact, there is no excuse any more for not taking the responsibility to be as healthy as possible. There is just too much good information and help available.

Finishing

Finally, for our list, we have the notion of *finishing*. Some people never quite feel they have accomplished something. Or they can't let go of a task, problem or project. Sometimes they can't let go of a relationship or a goal either. There is something almost mystical about the letting go process. I know writers who are never finished (we all know people like that). Others finish their work but never send it to anyone, or let anyone know they've completed what they set out to do.

Sometimes the problem is that all the excitement is in the work itself. This is great for motivation, lousy for a sense of accomplishment or completion. For some people more of a problem is moving on to something new. They may have enjoyed, or felt secure in what they were doing, to the point that they don't want to stop. Sometimes finishing means no longer working in a place (or with certain people) that makes us feel good and successful.

There are no easy answers to any of these things. All of us, though, have accomplished things, said good-bye to people and places—and moved on. We've all left jobs, school and projects when we were done. That means we all have the memories and experiences we need to get the states that have been useful to us. They can ease the pain, help us adjust, and move us in new and more profitable directions if we simply use them.

Undoubtedly you could come up with lots of other kinds of states you would like to have in addition to the ones I've described here. Hopefully, you're thinking about your own work, and life, and how to make it better. There is almost no limit to the ways we can use our memories, experiences and abilities to make us better at everything we do. It is our responsibility as adults to do so. The next two chapters will teach you how.

The first book to apply NLP techniques comprehensively to problem solving in business, ***Solution States*** utilizes effective NLP strategies that will enable you to achieve your career goals. Taking you through a process of understanding the ‘problem space’ and then developing a ‘solution state,’ this book will enable you to create workable, effective and ecological solutions to business problems.

“A useful addition to the kit bag of anyone working as a consultant in any of the soft areas of business (and probably some of the hard ones as well).”

—*Rapport Magazine*



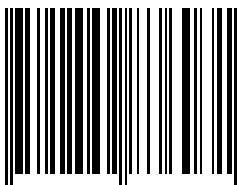
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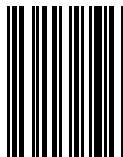
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