

— WRITING SAMPLE —

(trades reporting)

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Uptime, Downtime: Marilyn Atkinson and NLP

by Stephen Arthur, Vancouver, 1984

I'm taking part in a fascinating training exercise. It's designed to develop rapport. The students practicing this exercise are studying a newly developed method of communication called *Neuro-Linguistic Programming* (NLP). In this exercise, they practice literally mimicking each other's natural postures and seeing how it feels—being sensitive to discern any new subtle, personal point of view evoked by adopting the other person's posture. The result is uncanny.

Leona stands facing Dianne, carefully regarding Dianne and mimicking Dianne's posture. I observe them both from the side. I tell Leona: "The right knee is bent more."

Leona bends her knee to match Dianne's, meditates on that for a moment, then says, "I feel like I'm ready to run away."

"Hmm... you're right," says Dianne, musing it over, "that's how I feel comfortable."

Now I mimic Leona, hunching my shoulders forward a little. "I feel kind of like ... protecting myself."

That strikes a chord with Leona. Now Dianne mimics me. I see she's rocking back on her heels.

"I feel like I should be confident," she says, "but I'm not. I feel I have to be right."

I start to see what she means, "Oh yeah... I'm trying to be objective, you see, like a scientist."

These students are taking an orientation course in NLP. The teacher is Marilyn Atkinson, a Vancouver psychotherapist whose warm enthusiasm complements a keen perception and power. Marilyn is a catalyst. She teaches a practice that distills the Human Potential movement into concrete observations and actions that lead to sensitivity, responsiveness—and getting what you want. NLP works by a kind of expanded understanding of hypnosis. "The greatest

hypnosis," says Marilyn, "is the human personality."

Marilyn is a twenty-year veteran explorer of anything that promises to help "de-hypnotize" us. In 1967, with an M.A. from the University of Saskatchewan, Marilyn became a registered psychologist and began practicing in Vancouver. She continued to pursue gestalt therapy with Fritz Perls at Esalin; primal therapy with Arthur Janow in Los Angeles; Sufism with the Mevlevi Dervishes in Vancouver; and hypnotherapy at the Milton Erickson Institute. When NLP was developed in the late 1970s Marilyn saw its potential for producing quick changes in behavior. In 1981 she became certified as a Master Practitioner by the creators of NLP in San Francisco.

The creators of NLP started by observing the behavior of exceptional managers and hypnotherapists—such as Milton Erickson—to find out what, exactly, they do that works so well. They discovered that problems in communication and psychotherapy often have nothing to do with the content—the subject we want to deal with—but rather with the way we organize our experience—its *structure*. In a nutshell, here's how NLP works:

Downtime is our internal "trance" state of conceptualizing and judging our experience. To do this we represent it to ourselves in either a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic sense. Each of us has our own particular system of doing this. Changing the mental structure of representation—from a visual to a kinesthetic one, for example—can make a negative experience become positive. Communication breaks down because my downtime, my own interpretation of the words and body language we exchange, does not match yours.

Uptime on the other hand, is a focus on immediate perception of the other person. Communication is the response you get—a behavioral clue. To communicate an idea, your attention should be on the other person, not on yourself, attuned to physical clues you can "read" to discern something about how the other person is processing their experience. You can then directly manipulate the structure of the other person's experience by flexibly varying your own behavior until you get the desired response.

To be effectively practiced, this deliberate, intimate analyzing must be entrained to become automatic and intuitive. Marilyn's classes are vibrant and interactive, offering a wide spectrum of exercises to practice... and practice. It's best to go through all of the course modules to learn the variety of possible approaches—the keys to mastering uptime—and find out what works best for you. NLP is like learning a musical instrument; it takes lots of practice to become a virtuoso.

These workshops now take priority over Marilyn's private psychotherapy sessions because she believes that to have people developing their own skills instead of relying on a therapist will contribute more to the next generation. One of Marilyn's regular students, for example, had been clinically depressed. Learning NLP helped her so much that she now practices NLP to help children with learning problems.

Marilyn's Modules Course is the only comprehensive orientation offered in North America for those who consider taking the full certification program itself, which can be daunting. Certification is offered in Dallas, San Francisco, New York, and now Vancouver. The Vancouver NLP community, as yet small and not formally organized, may be part of the early networking of a potential revolution, and Marilyn Atkinson feels privileged to have gotten in at the start.

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