

Getting into Kilter: Vestibular Representational System

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The information in this article will be presented in greater depth by the authors at the 5th Annual NANLP Conference to be held April 22-24, 1988 (in Chicago).

WHAT IS IT?

We have the ability to be oriented in many ways; internally shifting our position, changing perspectives, hearing multiple meanings. Biologically it is our oldest sense organ, the Vestibular System which mediates all these activities. The Vestibular System, sometimes called the inner ear, consists of the semi-circular canals and two chambers of the vestibule. We take this system for granted as it regulates our balance and coordinates our sensory input. We find it most noticeable when we are out of kilter, dizzy or disoriented.

WHERE DOES IT FIT INTO NLP?

To know the role of the vestibular system it is necessary to redefine the distinctions made within the Kinesthetic Representational System. Originally K was the catch-all category which covered actions, emotions and touch. Further distinctions have been made since then, but many of those do not relate to the underlying physiology. Here are the distinctions we suggest are relevant.

Tactile Sense- Skin sensations and internal visceral sensations (from epithelial tissue) record information such as pressure, temperature, location, frequency, etc. Internal surfaces are included in the area formerly limited to skin senses.

Proprioceptive Sense- This is the ability of the body to know how parts of the body are specifically related to one another. Where is your left foot in relation to your right elbow? The primary source of this information is sensation from tendons and joints.

Mid-line sense or Vagus Nerve Sense- This includes survival impulses, emotions and general environmental sense. We put forth that Meta K, the term commonly used for this category, is a misnomer as there

is a specific physiological explanation for general sensations including emotions. The Vagus Nerve, the cranial nerve which extends down the midline of the body, registers three types of sensation: 1) the proper functioning of organs, 2) subtle variations in environmental vibrations (technically called "vibes"), and 3) the tension levels of fascia; the connective tissue which relates internal body parts to each other. The Vagus Nerve sensation is developmentally available before some of the other more refined senses and we affectionately call it the "Vague Us" Sense.

Vestibular Sense- This is the ability to know how the whole body, particularly the head, relates to gravity. In addition to balance, it also includes the sensations of acceleration and torque. The last two are changes of movement and direction over time. It is the loss of this orienting system which happens in space travel. The Vestibular Sense is also the mediator of the integration of all senses (VAK) which relate to orientation in time and space.

HOW ARE DIFFERENT PEOPLE AFFECTED?

People experience a general sense of orientation or disorientation. Periods of transition are best referred to as reorientation. The other distinction which is integral to understanding the Vestibular Sense is the concept of multiple orientation vs. single orientation. Severe problems in these areas can be noticed with people with learning disabilities, chronic broad-based phobias (such as agoraphobia) and state dependent dissociation often connected with abuse and/or incest. They experience their multiple orientations as disorienting. Single and multiple disorientation occurs in milder forms in all of us. Creativity and genius are useful extensions of multiple orientation.

HOW DO YOU RECOGNIZE VESTIBULAR DISORIENTATION?

Given that the Vestibular System refers to balance, it's interesting that disturbed people are often called unstable. Also common are phrases like, off the wall, going in circles, at sea, edge of disaster and all wound up. A universal analogue grammar for "crazy" behavior is a broad circling motion pointed directly in front of the ear at the exact location of the Vestibular System.

In addition to language clues; off balance posture, physical clumsiness, bumping into things and holding the head may be indications of vestibular difficulties. Rigid body holding may reveal over-compensation in trying to stabilize the balance system.

Since the Vestibular System is the matrix for integrating other sensory input, notice comments which indicate general sensory flooding or sensory overload. Interesting in NLP terms is the person who has deleted awareness of a whole system, V, A, or K, in an attempt to limit contradictory multiple orientations. Notice two point loops where the third system is missing entirely. An example of deletion is a woman whose eyes and body gave her two contradictory sets of coordinates for where her body was in space. In response, she deleted awareness of her kinesthetic input. She could walk but only using her eyes to navigate. As it became more difficult to do tasks this way she developed tunnel vision. Although this deletion was a creative adaptation to the underlying Vestibular difficulty, it had many limiting side effects.

WHAT DO YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Acquaint yourself with simultaneous multiple orientations. Some may have already started this investigation in the 60's. You may find you get the most useful integration if you use your own altered states. Prints by Escher (visual), fugues by Bach (auditory) and structures by Buckminster Fuller (kinesthetic) can be useful departure points. As experiences rather than intellectual exercises, we also recommend Einstein's Theory of Relativity and quantum physics. Explore the submodalities of orientation including our cultural assumptions about time, space and attention.

One quick practical application: when someone says to you that they are all wound up, ask them in which direction? Then gently rotate them in the opposite direction until they report equilibrium. This one works if you're feeling wound up at the end of a day too!

OPTIMAL USE OF THE VESTIBULAR SYSTEM

The Vestibular System underlies and mediates our entire orientation. optimal use includes the choice to be easily multiply oriented or easily singly oriented and the flexibility to move between those states. Understanding, experiencing and utilizing Vestibular knowledge adds to the profound tools already available through NLP.

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