

# *The Magic of Meta-Programs*

*by L. Michael Hall Ph.D.*

There is *magic* in knowing, detecting, pacing, and using meta-programs. What is the magic? It is the magic of seeing the hidden structure in a person's matrix of frames. It is the magic of being able to respond to that structure and to work with these hidden processes. It is the magic of obtaining *insider knowledge* of ourselves and others. When we can do that, then we can also experience the magic of being able to enter into another person's Matrix of frames with ease and grace.<sup>1</sup>

Because meta-programs describe one of the hidden processes or dynamic structures in how we attend things, focus our perceptions and filter the lenses of our mental sight-detecting, recognizing and using meta-programs offers a yellow-brick road into human reality. Otherwise, people seem mysterious, strange, weird, unfathomable and stubborn. Knowing how to work with meta-programs enables us to create rapport at a higher or meta level, and to gain trust and credibility with more elegance and speed.

- What is the magic of meta-programs?
- How can we learn this magic and use it effectively and appropriately?

## *The Magic of Structure*

While it may sound strange at first, it is *structure* that puts into our hands the power of what we would otherwise call "magic." It is knowing and being able to work with the *structure* of electricity that enables us to command its power. It is the ability to recognize the structural form and processes of aerodynamics, physics, language, and a thousand other things that actually empowers us to take charge of these domains and put the principles of structure to new usages.

In terms of meta-programs, recognizing the inner hidden processes and dynamic structures behind our perceptual styles is what enables us to recognize them for what they are and to pace them.

When I recognize that the person who makes life a living hell for me is just using the *mis-matching* meta-program, I can stop personalizing the problem and demonizing the person. Then I can even work with the mis-matching in a way that takes the bite out of it. I can ask and invite the person to mis-match and enjoy the person in spite of his or her verbal behavior.

Any meta-program that a person uses in a wrong context will work against the person or against being able to achieve some objective.

When that happens it becomes unecological. The “magic” of transformation occurs when someone recognizes the structure involved and hones in on that leverage point of change. It is also the very flexibility of consciousness between the poles on any meta-program continuum that creates the magic of wholeness. By synthesizing both sides, we are empowered so that we can take our performances to the next level.

## ***The Magic of Meta-Stating***

Our meta-programs arise from the meta-stating process as noted in last month's article. We meta-state our meta-programs into existence by *bringing* a state of “detail,” “matching,” “options” or whatever and *applying* it to our everyday states. *Applying* a style or way of thinking, perceiving, noticing, attending to ourselves and our states and doing so repeatedly and eventually this will lead to habituating that meta-state. Over time, the meta-state “gets into our eyes” as our perceptual glasses or meta-programs. Do that with matching or mismatching and you will create one or the other as your meta-program. Do both in a balanced way, and you will have the ability to choose which meta-program to use at any given time.

This explains why there are, and can be, so many meta-programs. In the book *Figuring Out People* (1997), 51 meta-programs are identified to create an encyclopedia of meta-programs. Years before Wyatt Woodsmall had listed hundreds of possible meta-programs in a training manual. At that time 51 were the most crucial ones. In the newest edition of *Figuring Out People* some were dropped and some added into the new list of 60 meta-programs.\*2

Is it important to have that many? Why bother with so many? Why an entire encyclopedia of

meta-programs? Mostly because in different contexts, professions, domains whether it be coaching, therapy, management, intimate relationships, modeling, sports, wealth building, leadership, etc. *different perceptual filters will be needed.* The traditional NLP list of 14 meta-programs is nice, but quite inadequate as a description of the hidden structures governing the way people perceive in many arenas of life.

Any thinking pattern as a structured way of thinking or perceiving can become a meta-program. All a person has to do is think that way long enough and it will become a meta-program. As we reflexively bring that kind of awareness to ourselves, it will become our perceptual filter. Take the childish thinking of entitlement (“It’s mine; you owe me; I deserve whatever I want.”), repeat that often enough and eventually even that could become a person’s meta-program. Do you know anyone who walks through life with that way of perceiving things? In *Figuring Out People* (1997) this one is called the under-responsible filter.

This suggests an important distinction for every modeler. The ability to detect such patterns of thinking and perceiving, hence meta-programs, must extend beyond the traditional list of 14. Who knows what new and dynamic meta-programs will be discovered in the coming years that will accelerate learning and skill development in various areas? Who knows what new meta-program thinking/perceiving patterns will facilitate our development of expertise and excellence beyond today’s experts? What’s been considered “magic” in those experts may be the special meta-programs that they meta-stated to their way of seeing the world.

## ***The Magic of Meaning-Making***

*Meaning* itself is a very special and “magical” thing. What is “meaning?” The origin of the word suggests that it is whatever we “hold in

mind.” So how and what do we “hold in mind?” It is *not* the ever-changing movies that play across the screen of our mind. Our primary state movies come and go.<sup>3</sup> They come and go according to what we are seeing, hearing, and feeling in the external world and what regularly trigger them.

What we truly “hold in mind” are all of our meta-level understandings, beliefs, values, decisions, intentions, etc. Again, we meta-state these mental phenomena into the frames of our mind and so create our matrix of frames. This points to the way we construct meaning, the levels of meaning-making that we invent as we build up our “model of the world.”

We not only “hold in mind” various movies and use our own style in the way we edit them with various cinematic features (traditionally known as “sub-modalities” in NLP), but we “hold these in mind” by classifying them, categorizing them, building understandings, generalizations, beliefs, etc. about them. This creates the frames-embedded-in-frames structure of our mental matrix (or model of the world) which makes up the world of meaning that we live in.

What does anything *mean* to a person? It depends on how the person represents it, cinematically encodes the representations, classifies it, evaluates it, associates emotions to it, metaphors it, etc. These are some of the levels of meaning in our Meaning Matrix. Also, there are all of the thinking/perception patterns (or meta-programs) that we use to create meaning. This understanding now enables us to see how meta-programs make up part of our Meaning Matrix and why shifting a meta-program can sometimes have magic-like effects on the whole system.

Recently in presenting at a training around the subject of wealth, Larry said that he loved all of the information, but that he felt stuck. How did he

feel stuck? He didn’t like the details. “Too many details,” he told me.

“I’m a global person. I get the big idea. I see the vision and then I just hire people to do the details for me.”

“So does that mean you are stuck in the global meta-program and cannot detail down to the specific actions, processes, and distinctions? Is that what you mean?”

“Well, I wouldn’t put it that way. I don’t like the idea of being ‘stuck’ in being global.”

“When you see a great opportunity, do you never need to be more specific about how, when, who, which, where, and all of the other indexing of specifics?”

“Well, no. Sometimes I do find it really hard to even explain myself when I’m trying to get someone else to do a job.”

“Sounds like you’re stuck at the general or global level and that you don’t have the resource, skills, or freedom to ‘meta-detail’ the specifics to actualize the opportunity. How does it feel to realize that?”

“I don’t like that at all.”

“Would you like to change it so that you at least have the option of meta-detailing when you want to?”

“Sure.”

It was at that point that I began working with Larry as I coached him through the process for changing meta-programs. Fifteen minutes later he felt a new level of freedom and choice and power that he had never had before. He felt rich inside about trans-

lating the opportunities that he could *see* into opportunities that he could actually *seize* in action. At that moment, he felt that something magical had happened. That's the magic of shifting the way we construct meaning and the perceptual filters we use in our engagement with reality. And when we change meaning, we change the semantic meanings that get into our body, freeing or limiting us.

## **Summary**

- There is “magic” in knowing, detecting, and using meta-programs in a conscious and mindful way. The magic is in the structure and in knowing how to work with that dynamic structure. It truly gives us insider knowledge that we can use to communicate, relate, and persuade more effectively.
- The list of meta-programs is a good beginning, but definitely limiting for modeling excellence and understanding many experiences. In this we need a more extensive list to cover the many other options that experts use in the thinking and perceiving that creates their expertise.
- Meta-Programs describes one of the ways that we create meaning within our mind-body-emotion system-and how we hold meaning in our mind.

### **About the Author**

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### **End Notes**

1. The word “matrix” refers to a womb and so refers to a place where something is given birth. In humans, our subjective experiences are given birth from and in our mental-and-emotional *frames*.

The Matrix model refers to a systemic template from cognitive and developmental psychologies for understanding and working with our matrix of frames.

2. Look for the new edition of *Figuring Out People* in 2005.
3. The movies in our mind refers to what NLPers call the VAK (visual, auditory, kinesthetic representational systems).

### **References**

Hall, L. Michael; Bodenhamer, Bob. (1997). *Figuring Out People: Design Engineering with Meta-Programs*. Wales, UK: Crown House Publications. Hall, L. Michael. (2004). *The Meta-Detective Game*. Clifton, CO. Neuro-Semantic Publications.